Volunteers Needed for Special-Permit Elk Hunts Near Mount St. Helens

Local News

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OLYMPIA - The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is seeking volunteers to participate in a cooperative arrangement that has given hunters access to approximately 250,000 acres of private timberlands near Mount St. Helens in the last two years.

For the third year, Weyerhaeuser Company is prepared to give hunters holding special elk permits additional motorized access to miles of private logging roads on the St. Helens Tree Farm - provided that enough volunteers can be found to assure a safe and orderly hunt.

Key tasks for volunteers include orienting hunters, staffing access points and maintaining safety buffers between hunters and active Weyerhaeuser operations, said Sandra Jonker, regional wildlife manager for WDFW.

The program attracted 54 volunteers in 2007 and 61 volunteers last year, Jonker said.

"We hope the number of committed volunteers continues to rise every year as more people hear about the program," she said. "As before, the amount of timberland that will be opened to hunting will be in direct proportion to the number of volunteers that sign up."

To participate in the St. Helens Land Access Program, volunteers can sign up at:

WDFW’s website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/volunteer/sainthelens/
WDFW Region 5 Office, 2108 S.E. Grand Boulevard, Vancouver, Wash., (360-696-6211).
Bob’s Sporting Goods, 1111 Hudson Street, Longview.

Participants will be required to attend one of six orientation sessions, scheduled to begin at 6 p.m. on the dates and at the locations noted below:

Sept. 2, Sept. 30, Nov. 4 and Nov. 18 at the Cowlitz PUD, 961 12th Ave., Longview.
Sept. 23 at the Olympia Natural Resource Building, Room 172, 1111 Washington St. S.E., Olympia:
Oct. 1 at the Vancouver Regional Office, 2108 Grand Blvd., Vancouver, WA.

Volunteer organizations, led by the Southwest Washington Land Access Coalition, have secured funding to reimburse volunteers for mileage accrued as participants in the program.

Other partners in the program include Eyes In the Woods, Cowlitz Game & Anglers, Washington State Archer Association, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Yacolt Burn Sportsmen Club, Vancouver Wildlife League and the Washington State Bowhunters.

The partnership between WDFW, Weyerhaeuser and the volunteer organizations is designed to expand hunter access to portions of the St. Helens Tree Farm that lie within game management units (GMUs) 520 (Winston), 524 (Margaret), 550 (Coweeman) and 556 (Toutle).

Jonker said the access program - combined with the issuance of additional special hunting permits - has helped to increase harvest levels over the past two years throughout the Mount St. Helens elk herd. That is a key goal under the department’s management plan for the herd, the largest of ten elk herds in the state.

"The department’s management plan calls for reducing the herd’s size to about 10,000 animals over five years to bring the number of animals into balance with available habitat," Jonker said. "We want to thank Weyerhaeuser and all the volunteers participating in the St. Helens Land Access Program for their help in this joint effort."

The Mount St. Helens Elk Herd plan, adopted in 2006, is available on WDFW’s website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/game/elk/sthelens.htm .