

The Basics of Hunting Access in Washington



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**Washington Department
of Fish and Wildlife**
Wildlife Program
Hunter Education Division
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It is your responsibility to know where you are.

Don't trespass.

Be responsible.

Know before you go.

Refer to this helpful guide to understand the acronyms used in the booklet.

Acronym	Definition
WDFW	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
WDNR	Washington Department of Natural Resources
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
USFS	United States Forest Service
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
NPS	National Park Service
BOR	Bureau of Reclamation
RCW	Revised Code of Washington
RCO	Washington Recreation and Conservation Office

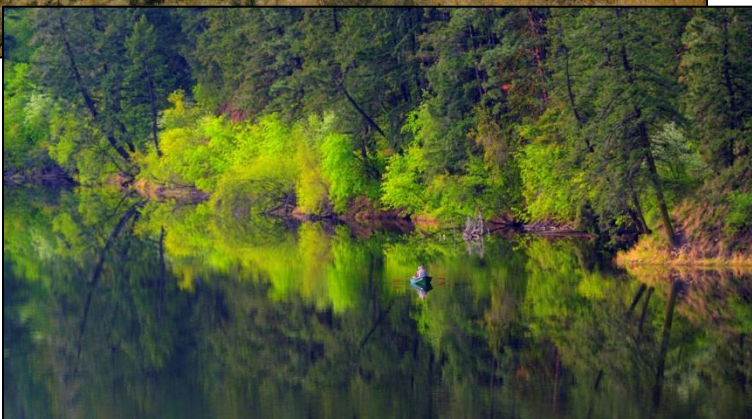
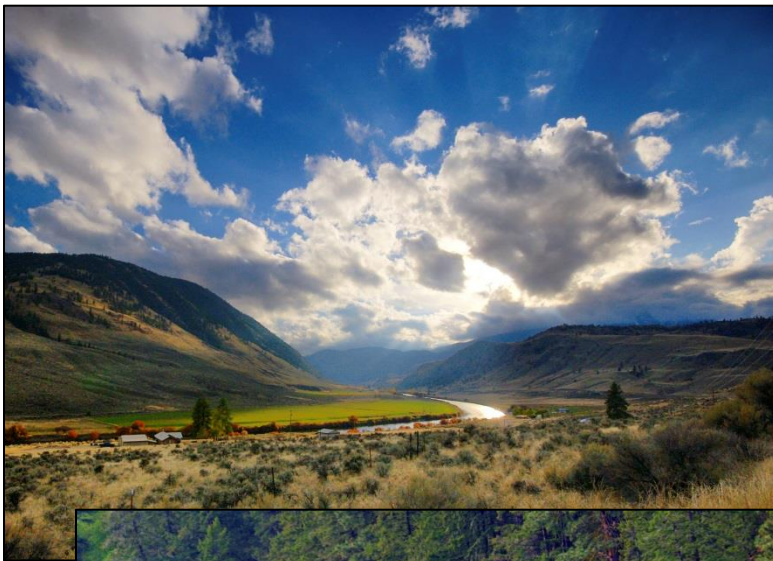
Introduction

This booklet will help you find access to public and private lands in Washington State for hunting purposes.

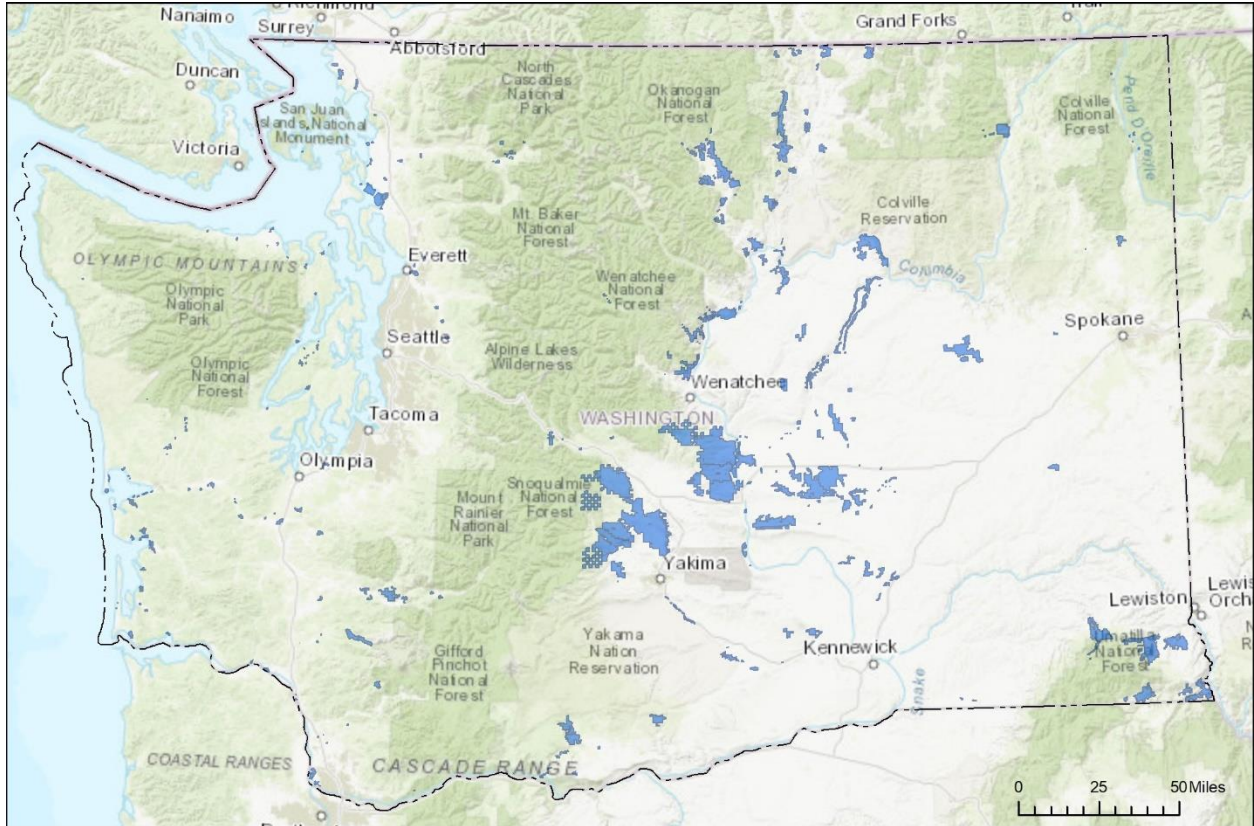
Hunting access is one of the biggest concerns for hunters. In Washington, about 50% of the land is publicly owned and open to hunters and recreationists. These lands are managed by state or federal entities. State owned lands open to hunting are managed by WDFW and WDNR.

Washington State Parks also owns public lands, however hunting is not allowed in state parks. Federally owned lands are managed by BLM, USFWS, NPS, USFS, BOR, etc. State and federal lands all have different land management mandates that affect when and where hunting is permitted. WDFW owns and manages 33 wildlife areas throughout the state, totaling approximately one million acres. WDNR manages nearly 5.6 million acres. Public lands are great places to hunt, watch birds, hike, and enjoy the outdoors.

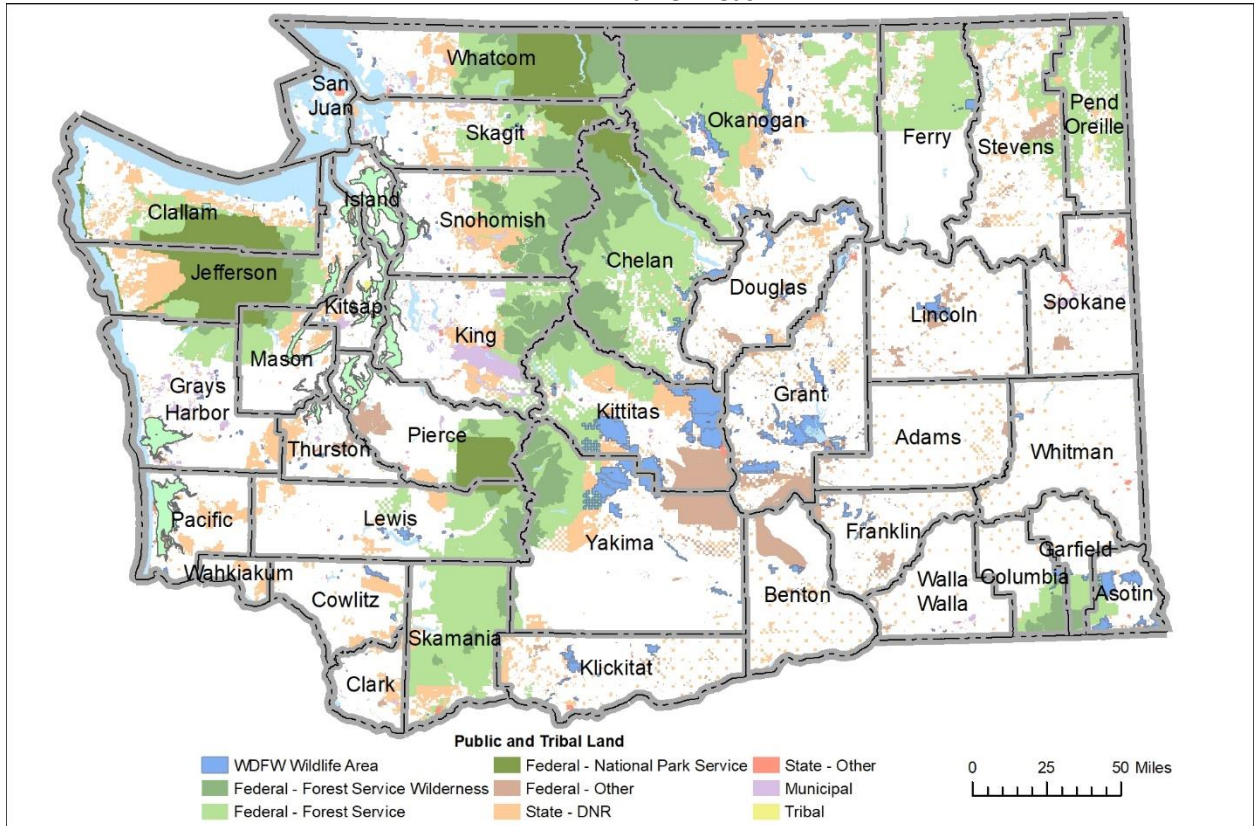
In addition to public land, more than 600 private landowners allow public access on over one million acres of property for various outdoor recreation opportunities.



Photos by WDFW



WDFW Wildlife Areas



Public/Tribal lands

Types of Lands

Public Lands

Public lands are open to all members of the public. This is great news for outdoor enthusiasts in Washington because it guarantees that there will always be land open for outdoor recreation. These lands are typically owned by state or federal government agencies, but some are owned by cities and counties. Check the regulations for the different agencies to learn what their rules and regulations are, as some may not allow hunting or other activities based on the agencies' missions. Some agencies may also require an access or parking pass.

Private Lands

Private lands are not publicly owned. These lands are generally off limits to the public, as private landowners have the right to prohibit access to their property. Hunters can contact the county assessor's office for information on landownership for each land parcel in the county. Please note that some parcels have a Limited Liability Company (LLC) or other entities listed as the owner, in which case ownership may be difficult to determine.

Current state laws under RCW 84.34 provide a lower tax rate for private forest land that is designated for timber production. However, the law does not state that public access is a requirement. The best source of information for hunters is the private forest landowner who manages the property of interest.

Tribal Lands

Some tribal lands allow public hunting, and there are generally additional fees or permits required to access the property. Many of the open tribal lands are managed to provide additional hunting access for users. The best source of information for hunters is the tribal entity managing the property of interest.

Access Passes

WDFW Vehicle Access Pass

This pass covers most day use fees on WDFW lands **ONLY**. The pass allows the driver and any passengers in a private vehicle the use of the recreational areas. Additional fees may be charged at camp sites or other developed recreation sites. The Vehicle Access Pass is interchangeable between two vehicles. To be displayed, the pass must be visible from outside of the vehicle (placed on dash, hung from rear view mirror, etc.) so Enforcement personnel can verify that the vehicle is legally parked on lands managed by WDFW. For a list of locations requiring the Vehicle Access Pass, visit the WDFW web pages listed below:

WDFW Wildlife Areas – wdfw.wa.gov/places-to-go/wildlife-areas

WDFW Water Access Sites – wdfw.wa.gov/places-to-go/water-access-sites

Washington Discover Pass

This pass covers most day use fees on WDFW, WDNR, and Parks lands. The pass allows the driver and any passengers in a private vehicle the use of these recreational areas. Additional fees may be charged at camp sites or other developed recreation sites. The Discover Pass is interchangeable between two vehicles. To be displayed, the pass must be visible from outside of the vehicle (placed on dash, hung from rear view mirror, etc.) so Enforcement personnel can verify that the vehicle is legally parked on lands managed by WDFW, WDNR, and Parks. For a list of locations requiring the Discover Pass, visit the Discover Pass website at www.discoverpass.wa.gov.

USFS Northwest Forest Pass

This pass covers most day use fees on National Forest lands in Washington and Oregon. The pass allows the driver and any passengers in a private vehicle the use of USFS recreational facilities. Additional fees may be charged at camp sites or other developed recreation sites. The Northwest Forest Pass is interchangeable between vehicles in the same household. To be displayed, the pass must be hung from the rear-view mirror of the vehicle. For more information on the Northwest Forest Pass, visit the USFS web page at www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r6/passes-permits/recreation/?cid=fsbdev2_027010.

USFS Interagency Pass

This pass covers the purchaser nationwide at all USFS, BLM, BOR, NPS, and USFWS sites that charge entrance or standard amenity fees. The pass has a signature line for two individuals who are then considered pass holders. The pass will admit pass holders and accompanying passengers in a private non-commercial vehicle. Please check with the agencies to determine how to display the pass. For more information on the Interagency Pass, visit the USFS web page at www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r6/passes-permits/recreation/?cid=fsbdev2_027020.

Finding Access

Access can be very confusing and difficult if you don't know where to look. Some of the largest landowners in the state are WDFW, WDNR, and USFS. USFWS also has some locations that allow public hunting throughout the state. WDNR has printed maps available for purchase, which are great resources for finding publicly owned properties throughout Washington. For more information about WDNR's maps, see the web page at <http://www.dnr.wa.gov/programs-and-services/buy-maps-aerial-photos-or-survey-data>.

For more information on public lands access, refer to these agency websites:

- WDFW – <http://wdfw.wa.gov/>
- WDNR – <http://www.dnr.wa.gov/>
- USFS – <http://www.fs.fed.us/>
- USFWS – <http://www.fws.gov/>
- BLM – <http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en.html>
- NPS – <http://www.nps.gov/index.htm>
- BOR – <http://www.usbr.gov/>
- RCO Public Lands Inventory – <http://publiclandsinventory.wa.gov/#Map>

WDFW Places to Go Hunting Web Page

The WDFW Places to go hunting web page has helpful information regarding hunting access. You can also find information on:

- Hunting on private lands
- Hunting prospects
- WDFW owned wildlife areas
- Hunting Regulations webmap
- Game Management Units (GMUs)
- Hunting and wildlife viewing blinds
- Several other valuable resources

Visit the Places to go hunting page at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/locations>.

Hunting Regulations Webmap

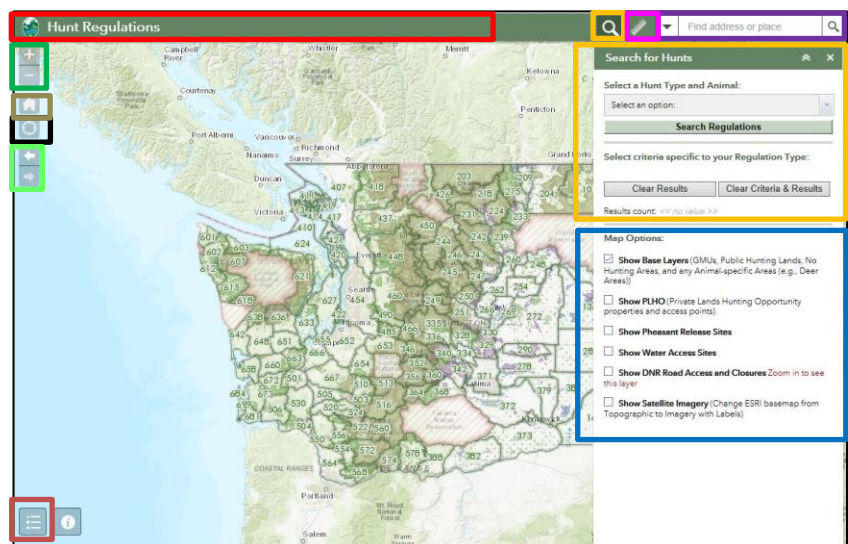
The Hunting Regulations Webmap provides users with a different way to review the hunting regulations. Users can explore regulations data by either selecting criteria for a search or clicking on the map to find out what hunts are available for their selected hunt type. In addition, it has the capabilities to look at public/private ownership, show private lands hunting opportunities, map water access sites, and display satellite imagery. The data shown in this webmap are an extension of the printed PDF pamphlet. For complete rules, see the current WDFW hunting regulations. This tool is also available for use on smart phones.

You can access the webmap at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations>.

Navigating the Webmap

To start using the webmap tool, you must first become familiar with the controls. The webmap has several sections that control how the map displays information to the user. These sections are:

- **Header and Helpful Links**
- **Zoom In/Zoom Out**
- **Default View**
- **Current Location**
- **Previously viewed information**
- **Legend**
- **Search for Hunts**
- **Measurement Tool**
- **Location Search**
- **Map Options**



Header and Helpful Links

The Header and Helpful Links section may display as text or as just the WDFW Logo on the top of the application. If no text is displayed, select the WDFW logo to expand the menu. The display depends on the internet browser.

The menu has eight options:

1. WDFW Home – Opens the WDFW home page
2. WDFW WLAs – Opens the WDFW Wildlife areas (WLAs) webpage
3. Regulations – Opens the WDFW hunting regulations webpage
4. Help – Opens a PDF help document
5. Tutorial – Opens a video walkthrough tutorial of the webmap with no sound
6. WACs – Opens the Washington Administrative Code for hunting seasons
7. Feedback – Opens a feedback survey on SurveyMonkey.com
8. Report Issue – Emails the development team at DigitalHuntingRegs@dfw.wa.gov

Zoom In/Zoom Out

To zoom in or out, you can do one of two things.

1. Select the + or – in the top left hand of the map
2. Use the scroll wheel on your mouse

Default View

The default view button looks like a house. It returns the user to the entire state view. It does not remove any of the options you may have selected.

Current Location

The current location button will, if given permission by your internet browser, zoom into your computers location. This may help with locating areas very near your house that you might be able to hunt.

Previously viewed information

The previous viewed information button will send the screen back to the last time you manipulated the map. It will not clear any changes to the map options.

Legend

The legend describes the identifying marks on the map. For example, it notes a blue dot as a water access site.

Search for Hunts

This is the primary tool for exploring the hunting regulations data. If the Search for Hunts window is closed at some point, you can select the magnifying glass to reopen the search for hunts menu.

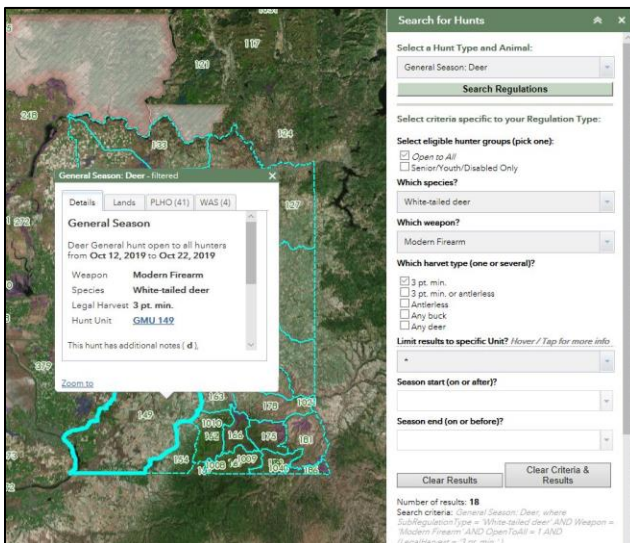
To search the regulations, select a hunt type and species. Two hunt types are available for big game species and turkeys (small game is an option):

- General Season
- Permit Hunt

Making this selection will add additional search options and change the drop down menu color to green. Select additional search options to narrow the search. Depending on the field type, you will select from either a drop-down menu, a date-picker, or checkboxes. If you do not want to use a field as a search parameter, either reset the drop-down menu to the asterisk (*) or delete the date you entered in the date-picker. Select “Search Regulations” to run your search. The number of results and your search criteria specific to your Regulation Type will display at the bottom of the Search for Hunts window. The map will draw your results and, if needed, zoom into the location on the map.

The screenshot shows the 'Search for Hunts' interface. At the top, there's a title bar with a magnifying glass icon and a close button. Below it, a dropdown menu is set to 'General Season: Deer'. A green 'Search Regulations' button is prominent. Underneath, there are 'Clear Results' and 'Clear Criteria & Results' buttons. A 'Results count' field shows '<< no value >>'. The 'Map Options' section includes several checkboxes: 'Show Base Layers' (checked), 'Show PLHO' (unchecked), 'Show Pheasant Release Sites' (unchecked), 'Show Water Access Sites' (unchecked), 'Show DNR Road Access and Closures' (unchecked), and 'Show Satellite Imagery' (checked).

NOTE: If no regulations exist with your parameters, the bottom of the panel will display “Results count: 0, Query is too narrow, broaden your search parameters.”



Once the map draws the search parameters, click on a teal-dashed-outline to see more information about the regulations in the specific GMU. The information lists some or all of the below items:

- Hunt details (weapon, date range, etc.)
- Public hunting/non-public land distributions
- Descriptions of specific hunt notes for the selected hunt (where applicable)
- Private Lands Hunting Opportunities (in applicable units)
- List of Water Access Sites

There are always at least two tabs in the popup, Details and Lands. The Details tab specifies the conditions of a particular hunt along with links to additional restrictions (where applicable). The Lands tab lists land ownership information and a pie chart of the percentage of land in the selected unit. Sometimes public landownership in some areas is so low the owner may not appear on the chart. You can drag the popup window around if it is in your way.

If the selected unit has Private Lands Hunting Opportunities (PLHO), the opportunities are listed in the PLHO tab. The PLHO tab holds a table of all available private lands hunting opportunities that intersect the selected unit. Each opportunity has a link to their specific page on the WDFW webpage. If you would like to display the PLHO polygons on the map, select the “Show PLHO” check box in the “Map Options” section.

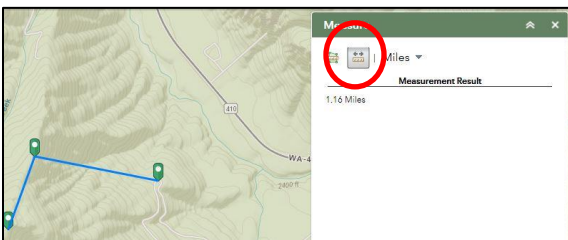
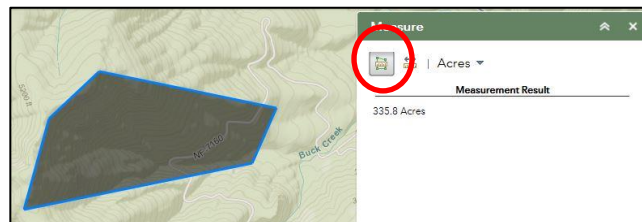
NOTE: Multiple results may exist in a selected unit! When this occurs, the Page buttons will appear at the top of the popup and it will show the total number of query results [Query Results (# of #)]. Click the Page buttons to cycle through results.

To clear your search parameters, click the “Clear Criteria & Results” button at the bottom of the Search for Hunts window. This will remove the results from the map and the map will reset to the starting display. Closing the “Search for Hunts” window will also clear your results.

Measurement Tool

Selecting the ruler icon will measure the area of a selected portion of the map or the distances between points on the map. The map can calculate area and distance in several different ways. To select a unit of measurement, select “Acres” at the top the measurement section.

To select an area of the map to determine its area, select the Area tool on the measurements section. Select three or more points on the map to determine the area on the map to measure.



To measure the distance between at least two points, select the Distance icon on the measurement section. Click on the starting point for the measurement and then click on the point you would like to measure. If there are multiple points in the route, you can click multiple times and the distance will measure accordingly.

Location Search

You can search for locations like an address or city such as Ellensburg. However, the search tool may search locations outside of Washington. The site does not recognize GMUs, lakes (unless part of a town name like Lake Stevens), or other geographic names.

Map Options

The webmap has several different layers/options that can be displayed at any one time. The bottom of the “Search for Hunts” tool has the six map options:

- Show Base Layers (GMUs, Public Hunting Lands, No Hunting Areas, and any Animal-specific Areas (e.g., Deer Areas))
- Show PLHO (Private Lands Hunting Opportunity properties and access points)
- Show Pheasant Release Sites
- Show Water Access Sites
- Show DNR Road Access and Closures Zoom in to see this layer
- Show Satellite Imagery (Change ESRI basemap from Topographic to Imagery with Labels)

Some of the layers are not visible until you are sufficiently zoomed into the map.

WDFW Private Lands Access Programs

Since 1948, WDFW has worked with private landowners across the state to provide public access through negotiated agreements. To mitigate some of the impacts of more limited and restricted access throughout the state, WDFW has been working to increase recreational opportunities on private lands by securing grant funds, increasing private lands staff, and increasing public outreach. Through these efforts, WDFW has enrolled roughly one million acres of privately owned property for public access. WDFW currently has five types of private lands access programs, described below. To find properties for the programs below, visit the WDFW website at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/locations/private-lands>.

Feel Free to Hunt

Private lands in this program are open to hunting. Hunters are not required to gain additional permission for hunting lands that have a Feel Free to Hunt sign posted.

Register to Hunt

Access to private lands in this program are regulated by registration. Hunters are required to sign in and sign out to hunt on properties that have a Register to Hunt sign posted. These properties may also have some other restrictions, which are detailed online.

Hunt by Written Permission

These properties are private lands where hunters must contact the landowner to obtain “written permission” before hunting. WDFW provides signs and permission slips to landowners who make their lands available through this program. A landowner name and contact telephone number are placed on the hunt by written permission signs so hunters can contact the appropriate landowner for permission. In some cases, contacting the local Private Lands Biologist may be necessary.

Hunters are required to carry their half of the permission slip on their person at all times while they are hunting on the property. Landowners enrolled in this program are also required to submit all of their permission slips to the local private lands biologist at the end of the hunting season. Huntible species, overall access and other restrictions will vary and are at the discretion of the landowner.

When talking to the landowners, be sure to be courteous and respectful. The landowners are not required to give permission to all those seeking it because they control the hunting pressure on their property. To increase the chances of gaining access, seek permission well before the season starts. For fall hunts, July or August are good times to contact landowners. Even if they do refuse access, make sure to thank them for their time. Be sure to respect the landowner's wishes and their property restrictions.

Hunt by Reservation

These private lands require hunters to have a reservation permit issued by WDFW prior to hunting. In some cases, landowner contact may also be required. All rules of the WDFW Hunt by Reservation program must be followed, in addition to any special rules set by the individual property, including those posted at the site.

The Hunt by Reservation system requires hunters to sign up for an account using their WILD ID and password. You will use your WILD ID as the sign in name. Your WILD ID is a unique identification number for the Washington Interactive Licensing Database (WILD) and can be found near the top of your hunting/fishing license, just above the barcode. The sign-up page can be found on the WDFW website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/hunting_access/private_lands/myreservations.php.

Once logged into the system, select the "Find Hunts to Reserve" button. This will open a page listing properties by County, Hunt Type, and GMU. This is a great feature because if you know you want to hunt Adams County, it makes those easier to find. If you want to hunt GMU 101 because of season and legal animal restrictions, it will distinguish hunts by GMU as well. To distinguish "Hunt by Reservation" properties only, select the "Hunt Type" tab and go to the "Hunt by Reservation" section.

Once you have found a property, select the name from the list and read the information about the property's restrictions. If you agree to the restrictions, you can select the general hunt time frame that is open and select the "Hunt Details" button. Note that there is a bit of text below the button that will give you the status of the property: if the property is full, reservations have not yet started, or reservations are being accepted for that property. When you're in the hunt details, you will want to select the available "Hunt Dates" drop down menu and select the dates you wish to hunt. After selecting those dates, read the terms and conditions, check the box agreeing to those terms and conditions, and then select "Reserve Hunt Date."

Once a reservation is made, it will be listed in your "Active Reservations" list in the Private Lands Reservation System. You can view/edit the reservation, print the permit, and/or cancel your reservation from this page. Permits are required to be printed and clearly displayed on the dashboard of your vehicle in order to access the property.

Landowner Hunting Permits

In order to hunt on a property enrolled in the WDFW Landowner Hunting Permit (LHP) program, hunters must either be selected in a special permit drawing held by WDFW or the Landowner or contact the Landowner directly. Landowner name is included on signs posted on property boundaries. In addition to a hunting permit from WDFW, hunters must contact the landowner prior to hunting and obtain a written permission slip that must remain with them while hunting on the property. LHP properties may be listed under the Hunt by Reservation program.

Asking for Private Lands Access

Another option to get onto private lands for hunting is by contacting landowners to ask permission. If hunters want to gain access to private property, they should do preseason scouting of their desired area and locate the lands they might want to hunt. Once a hunter has located properties to hunt, landowner contact information can be obtained from the county tax assessor's office. Look on the county assessor's web page. The local phone book, the white pages, and 411 can assist in locating landowner information as well. Private companies hunting applications can assist with some information and are great to have on your smartphone. Asking for landowner permission should be done several weeks prior to hunting season if possible.

Landowners may refuse to grant permission. If they do refuse access, make sure to thank them for their time. Hunters who are persistent in their search will most likely gain access to some lightly hunted areas and make new friends along the way. Other options include hunt clubs and hiring a guide who has access to private farms and ranches. In all instances, respect the landowner's wishes and their property restrictions. By being respectful, you are doing your part to help ensure future access to their lands. It only takes one bad experience to taint a landowner's view of the hunting public.

Keep these following guidelines in mind:

- Leave gates the way you find them.
- Do not litter, and if you find litter, pick it up and carry it out.
- Ask if there is anything you can do to help with the operation (e.g. repair fences, plant trees, remove old fences, paint buildings, etc.)
- Be respectful and polite when seeking permission.
- Be conscious of time when calling and do not become a nuisance (4am calls are not viewed favorably).
- Seek permission early and do not wait until opening day.
- Wear street clothes when approaching landowners.

The next page features a landowner contact form that WDFW has come to adopt. This form can be used by hunters for contact information on the landowner and to show proof of permission to be on the property. Hunters can remove the portion above the dotted line to give to the landowner for their records.

Landowner Communication Form

Hunter Contact Information

- Name: _____
- Phone #(s): _____
- Vehicle Description & Plate #: _____
- Home Address: _____

Landowner Information

- Name: _____
- Address: _____
- Phone #(s): _____
- Preferred Contact Method: _____

Sample Questions to ask the Landowner

Permission

- Am I allowed to camp on your land? If so, are campfires allowed?
- Do you anticipate that anyone would be upset if I park my RV or camp near the area?

Safety

- Is there anything on your property or near your home I should know about?
 - soft ground
 - animals (dogs, livestock, etc.)
 - drainage/erosion issues
 - vehicles/structures out of site
 - neighbors that may not approve of hunting
 - special or sensitive vegetation
 - Other?

Is there anything I can do to help out?

- Buck hay, clean windows, mend fence, repair equipment, other?
- Would you like any part of the animal(s) I harvest?
- Hunters could make an effort to pick up trash on or around the property. This effort is always appreciated and helps out even if the landowner doesn't ask for any help.

Courtesy

- What are your family's/neighbor's normal quiet hours? I do not wish to disturb you.
- Is there anything you would like me to report to you if I see it?
- Am I allowed to hunt your entire property?

Navigation

- Where do you wish me to park my vehicle(s)?
- Which gates should remain open/closed? *In general leave gate(s) the way you found them.*

Hunting

- Are there any game species you wish me to or to NOT harvest on your property?
- Is it ok to field dress game on the property?

Hunter Education Training

When purchasing a hunting license, all individuals born after January 1, 1972 must show proof that they have completed a Hunter Education course. Students have the choice of taking a traditional class, usually held over several evenings, or completing an online course and field skills evaluation. The traditional course has in-person teaching from a group of Hunter Education Instructors. The online course allows the students to complete the class on their own time. Once the student has passed the online test, they have to demonstrate safe firearms handling in various hunting situations. Students can enroll in a Washington Hunter Education course by visiting the website at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/requirements/education/basic>.

Becoming a Hunter Education Instructor

Hunter Education instructors are volunteers who devote personal time and effort to ensuring our hunting heritage is passed on to the next generation of safe, ethical hunters. Certified by the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), Hunter Education instructors are authorized to teach public classes consistent with curriculum and policies established by WDFW. Instructors must be at least 21 years of age, keenly interested in promoting safety, wildlife conservation, and responsible outdoor behavior, and be willing to teach or assist in at least one class per year. If you are interested in becoming an instructor, please see the How to become a hunter education instructor web page at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/requirements/education/how-to-become-instructor>.

Master Hunter Permit Program

Master Hunters are ambassadors of safe, ethical, responsible, and legal hunting in Washington State and should conduct themselves as role models for the rest of the hunting community. These members give back to the resource through their volunteer work and help promote safe and ethical hunting. They also assist the department in resolving certain human/wildlife conflict situations. The Master Hunter Permit Program is always looking for good applicants who are willing to help create goodwill between the department and landowners by volunteering to help mend fences, clear brush, and haze wildlife from agricultural fields. If you are interested in becoming a Master Hunter, please see the Master Hunter web page at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/requirements/master-hunter>.

Ten Basic Safety Rules

1. Always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction and under control.
2. Treat every firearm as if it were loaded.
3. Keep your finger off the trigger until ready to fire. Use your safety, but remember that safeties sometimes fail.
4. Be sure of your target and what lies beyond before firing.
5. Never place or carry a loaded firearm in a motor vehicle.
6. Never use a firearm unless you are familiar with how it works. If you need an owner's manual, write to the manufacturer.
7. Never cross a fence, climb a tree, cross a stream or jump a ditch with a loaded firearm.
8. Never point at anything you do not want to shoot.
9. Unload firearms when not in use. Store firearms and ammunition separately.
10. Never use alcohol (or drugs) before or during shooting.

Learn More about WDFW's Hunter Education Program

Website

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/huntered/>

Email

huntered@dfw.wa.gov

Regional Offices

Region 1 Spokane Office: (509) 892-1001
Region 2 Ephrata Office: (509) 754-4624
Region 3 Yakima Office: (509) 575-2740
Region 4 Mill Creek Office: (425) 775-1311
Region 5 Vancouver Office: (360) 696-6211
Region 6 Montesano Office: (360) 239-4628
Headquarters Olympia Office: (360) 902-8111

More Information

For more information about the Hunter Education Program, contact our staff in Olympia at (360) 902-8111.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Headquarters
1111 Washington St SE
Olympia WA 98501
wdfw.wa.gov

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) receives federal assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and provides equal access to its programs, services, activities, and facilities under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968.

The U.S. Department of the Interior and WDFW prohibit discrimination on the bases of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, mental or physical disability, reprisal, sexual orientation, status as a parent, and genetic information. If you believe you have been discriminated against, please contact the WDFW ADA Program Manager, PO Box 43139, Olympia, WA 98504 within 45 calendar days of the alleged incident before filing a formal complaint, or write to: Chief, Public Civil Rights Division, Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street NW, Washington DC 20240.

If you need further assistance or information, please contact the Olympia office of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife: (360) 902-2349, or Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD), (360) 902-2207.