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Now Playing: Recreational shooting returns, Christmas bird count nears

By JIM HUCKABAY outdoors columnist
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Winter fun

The new Light Rifle Class from the Kittitas Valley Rifle and Pistol Club begins soon. For .22 caliber rifle or .17 or larger air rifle shooting at regulation 10-bull NRA targets within all skill levels. Rediscover the pleasure of safe recreational shooting. Call Mel Goudge at 925-4285 or Hal Mason at 962-3002.

Christmas tree permits are \$5. They're available at the Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce office and Cle Elum at the Ranger Station (509-852-1100, ext. 1), Intermountain Radio Shack, Pioneer Coffee and Mac A Bees. Sportland Shell Mini Mart south of Roslyn and the Ellensburg Chamber of Commerce on North Main. Go play.

Plenty of cross-country ski action. Check out the latest area hot spots and activities at www.turns-all-year.com/ and go play. Glenn Bandy is always available for coaching or current information at 925-1700.

Wildlife and family fun

Christmas Bird Counts are about here. Between Dec. 14-Jan. 1, 50,000 bird watchers in the 112th nationwide count will tally birds in a 15-mile diameter during a 24-hour period. Info and a chance for your family to play at www.audubon.org/Bird/cbc/.

The Kittitas Audubon Society's 33rd Annual Christmas Bird Count will happen on Dec. 17. Count birds at your feeders, or within a 15-mile diameter circle centered on the west freeway interchange. Info on our Ellensburg count from Gloria Baldi at baldi@kvalley.com. Be part of a team, with a Players' Potluck at dusk.

Info for Cle Elum's count may be available from Michael Hobbs, birdmarymoor@verizon.net or (425) 301-1032.

Just down the road, the bighorn sheep are in the rut. May see the California bighorn rams in the Canyon butting heads for mating dominance. No guarantees, but check out cliffs on the west side of the river south of mile 18. Particularly above the mouths of Umtanum and Roza Creeks and above the river just south of Roza Dam. Use binoculars/spotting scopes and get off the roadway.

Calamari, anyone? Squid are still spawning in the Sound. Fish at night from piers, with artificial light. Access at the Les Davis Pier in Tacoma, the Des Moines Dock, the Seattle Pier on Elliott Bay or the Edmonds Pier. Check with local sports shops for gear and techniques.

Fishing

Lunker and other rainbows have been dropped into North Fiorito and Mattoon over the past few weeks. Many are still there, waiting for your favorite bait. Go fish.

Things to think about now

Start collecting your wildlife, fish or nature photos (and your kids' too) for the contest. Winners honored (and great prizes given) at the Central Washington Sportsmen Show. Find details at www.shuylerproductions.com. This is sponsored by the Kittitas County Field and Stream Club.

Huckabay's annual outdoor adventure writing contest is coming, too. Five hundred choice words could get you tickets to any one of the early 2012 sportsmen's shows.

Hunting

Info on Yakama Reservation pheasants or waterfowl hunting at 509-865-5121, ext. 6309 (Tracy).

Last pheasant releases of the year are now underway. Check sites listed in Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program booklet, available at the Yakima regional office or on the DFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/pheasant/eastern/>.

More winter fun

Scenic state parks cabins and wildlife are abundant at great sites during fall and winter. Check out www.parks.wa.gov/reservations or www.parks.wa.gov/rentalplaces.

Most state agencies have terrific gift goodies, including DNR's digital orthophotos, forest maps public land maps and recreation guides. Some maps can be printed right at your own computer.

Other state agencies offer great gift goodies, too. Check out the Washington State Department of Printing at www.prt.wa.gov/ click the "My Fulfillment" link at the right, pick an agency for terrific state centered gift ideas and start shopping.

Snow, cold or anything else, make it an outdoor weekend. Take the family, leftover turkey sandwiches and optics, and someone who doesn't get out enough. Go cut a Christmas tree or find wildlife and breathe the best air in the West.

JLH

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