Piscivorous Bird Hazing at John Day Dam:

May 2023 Monthly Report to USACE

United States Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
Wildlife Services

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Introduction:

An interagency agreement U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services (WS) was established at John Day Dam (JDA) for the purposes of reducing predation on juvenile salmonids through vigorous hazing of piscivorous birds.

Through that agreement, WS is to provide a monthly work activities statement to USACE detailing date and hours of piscivorous bird hazing, non-lethal dispersal numbers, and a summary of activities.

Wildlife Services Decision Model:

When identifying wildlife damage and evaluating management methods, each damage issue is afforded a systematic approach to decision making referred to as the WS Decision Model (WS Directive 2.105). The WS Decision Model contains the following steps:

I. Assess the Problem
II. Evaluate management methods.
III. Formulate a management strategy.
IV. Provide assistance.
V. Monitor and evaluate results.

May 2023 Summary:

WS continues to be understaffed per contract for the month of May. Hiring new specialists has been a problem for 2023 across all of Wildlife Services' piscivorous bird hazing projects across the Snake and Columbia Rivers.

WS employees at JDA are currently working 8-hour boat-hazing shifts, 7 days a week. All contracted shifts were covered at John Day for May except for unsafe weather days. Boat Hazing crews of two people combined to work 27 hazing days at 8 hours per day for a total of 216 boat hours (432 labor hours). May maintained favorable weather conditions, allowing a significant increase in hazing opportunities compared to the previous month. There were a total of 4 days WS employees were unable to haze (May 5th, 21st, 22nd, and 31st).

A variety of different hazing techniques are used in order to avoid habituation—exposing animals to the same non-lethal methods (i.e., using the same pyrotechnics) over time will eventually lead to ineffectiveness. Some of the different types of pyrotechnics used at JDA include: 15mm rounds (an assortment of bangers, screamers, silver comets, and comet screamers), cracker shells, and rockets. During the month of May, WS fired 4,317 rounds of pyrotechnics, hazing a total of 7,330 gulls and 24 cormorants.

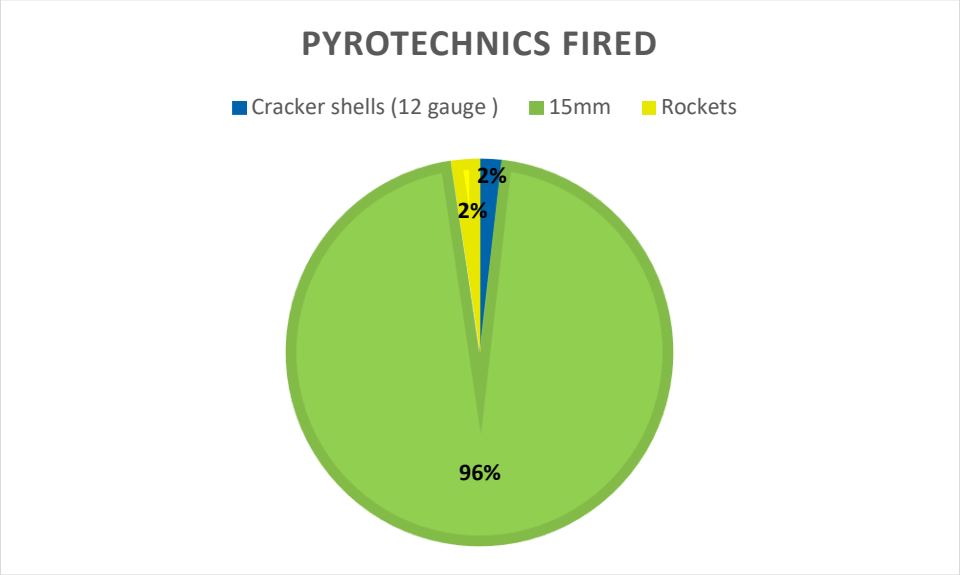


FIGURE 1. PYROTECHNICS USED BY TYPE.

Pyrotechnics	Quantity
15mm	4137
Rockets	102
Cracker shells (12 gauge)	78
Total	**4317**

FIGURE 2. PYROTECHNIC AMOUNTS.

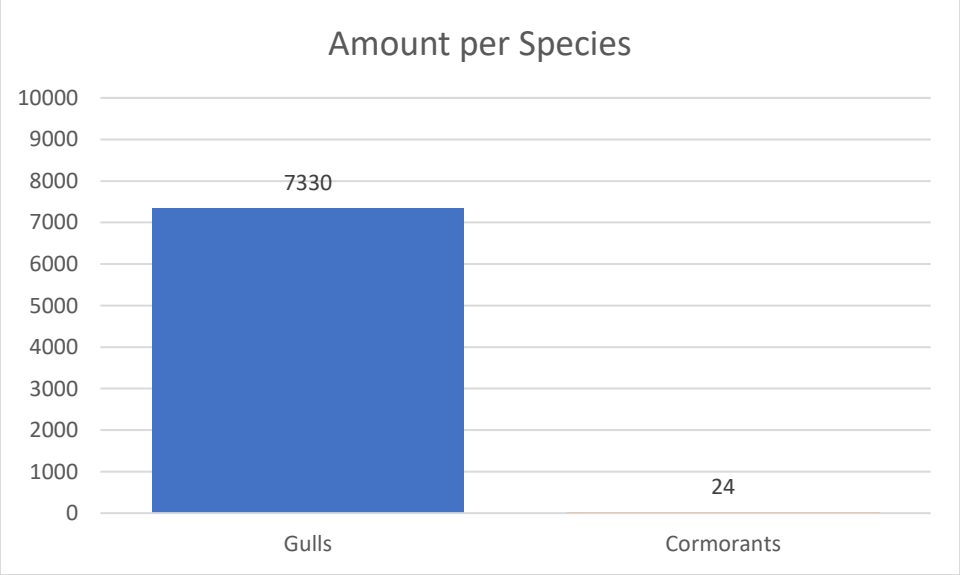
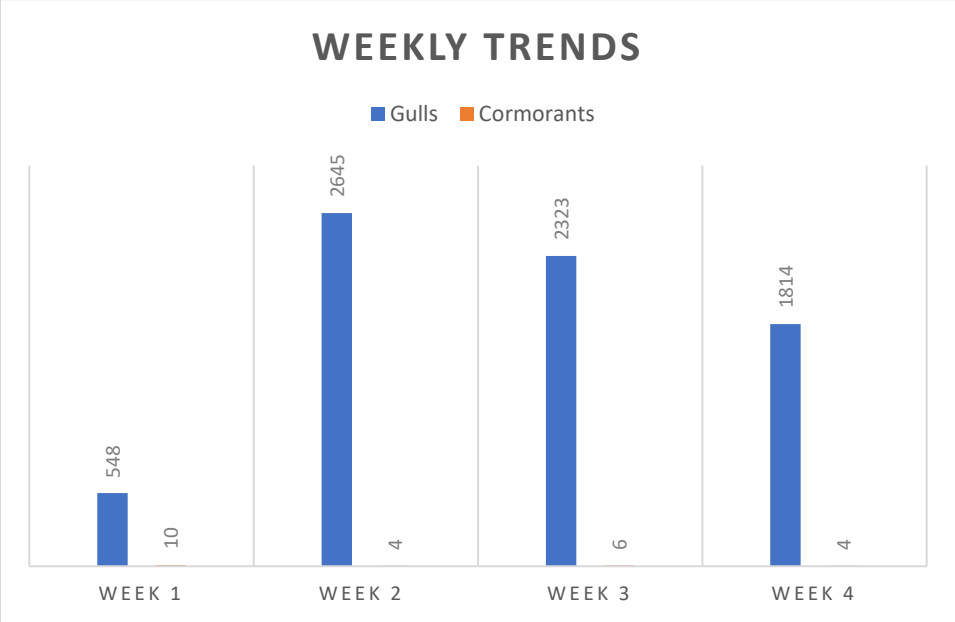


FIGURE 3. AMOUNT OF NON-LETHAL DISPERSALS BY SPECIES.

Observations/Discussion

WS employees noticed a significant increase in gull activity after the first week of May**.** Cormorant numbers remain low. Reported increase in pelican observations as well as a small observation of 13 non-foraging terns (May 13th). Cracker shells were added to JDA's pyrotechnic inventory this month as well to assist hazing efforts.

When looking at previous years' hazing totals within our MIS database, the May 2023 hazing totals were higher than any May dating back to 2016. The increased number of gulls, especially week two and three, may be a result of a few different factors. It's possible there may be more birds, with larger flocks influencing numbers. It is also possible that the hazing efforts are potentially more aggressive than in previous years, and changes to WS' data collection may attribute to such numbers.



Incident Reports.

There was one minor incident reported in May. On May 27th, WS employees noticed a small cloud of smoke coming from the top of the Navigation Lock Wall. They attempted to call JDA control, but number given to us was not in service. Employees then attempted to call on the radio, without a response. Unsure of what to do next, they contacted the project lead, and he was unable to contact control as well. Employees were advised to continue to monitor the area to make sure it was safe. The smoke dissipated shortly thereafter and were told to speak with the POC at the security gate.

It was determined that a pyrotechnic fired and drifted off-course, possibly due to wind, which caused the incident. It is imperative to establish a contingency plan as a secondary protocol if such incidents take place in the future.

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