



ODFW Field Reports

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission
February 3, 2012

NORTHEAST REGION

Bruce Eddy, Region Manager

Northeast Region Cougar Target Areas

Northeast Region recently completed our second full calendar year implementing two cougar target areas. Administrative removal of cougars in the Wenaha and Ukiah target areas began in the winter of 2009/2010 in an effort to improve elk recruitment in two units that are well below elk population management objectives.

The Wenaha target area goal was set at administrative removal of 20 cougars per calendar year for three years. In 2011, the number of volunteer agents increased to eight resulting in 19 cougars taken and five additional cougars killed by hunters. This compares to 11 cougars removed by two volunteer agents and three hunter kills in 2010.

Administrative removal quota for the Ukiah target area was 35 per calendar year. In 2011 we used ODFW district personnel, two ODFW temporary employees, three volunteer agents and a contract with Wildlife Services to remove 30 cougars in addition to five killed by hunters. This compares to 30 removals and 12 hunter kills in 2010.

In 2011, ODFW spent \$21,450 on implementation of these target areas.

Both target areas have had slightly more females taken than males during the administrative removal activities. While it is still too early to evaluate the full effects of target area removal, we are seeing some indications of a positive effect on elk recruitment.

36th Annual Union County Christmas Bird Count

2011 was the 112th Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) and the 36th year that Union County Oregon has participated. The Union County count circle of 15 miles diameter is centered on a point just northwest of the town of Union and includes all of the Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area. The Union County count was held December 17, 2011 with about 25 participants covering the circle.



This year saw a record for the number of species detected at 88, just barely breaking the record of 87 set in 2010. Other records set included the first Bonaparte's Gull (a single bird) and the first Greater Sage Grouse (4 birds) ever recorded on a Union County CBC. Both Ferruginous Hawk and Northern Saw-whet Owl were observed for just the second time on a Union County CBC.

Participants found more Ruby-crowned Kinglets (17, pictured above), White-crowned Sparrows (273) and American Goldfinch (419) than had previously been recorded. Most numerous species were Mallard (3136), European Starlings (2546), House Sparrow (430), American Goldfinch and California Quail (366).

Other highlights included Tundra Swan, Wood Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, Northern Goshawk, Marsh Wren, Lincoln's Sparrow, Harris's Sparrow, Lesser Goldfinch and Common Redpoll.

The portion of the circle contained on Ladd Marsh yielded 32 species and a total of 1,004 individual birds counted. Most numerous were Mallards (350) and Red-winged Blackbirds (323). Four Virginia Rails were detected on the wildlife area offering more evidence that they over-winter in small numbers here; they have been recorded on the CBC 11 out of 36 years. A Swamp Sparrow was found the day before and the day after the count but could not be located on count day, probably due to high, gusty winds.

HIGH DESERT REGION

Chip Dale, Region Manager

Winter Conditions

Winter conditions in the Klamath Watershed District have been very mild, with unseasonably high temperatures. Snow accumulation in late October and early November moved most big game species to winter range. From mid-November through mid-January periods of unseasonably high temperatures allowed most animals to disperse away from winter range and move to ranges up to 6500 feet in elevation. Due to the mild weather over winter survival is expected to be very good.

Winter conditions in the Malheur Watershed have been extremely mild and dry. Adequate precipitation occurred in October and early November to produce some fall green-up and big game species appeared to enter winter in excellent condition. Weather from mid-November through mid-January has been unseasonably warm and dry resulting in much lower than normal snow pack. Big game are still widely scattered over winter and transition ranges and over winter survival is expected to be excellent. Wildlife damage complaints are down significantly compared to past years.

Winter conditions on the south end of the Deschutes Watershed have been very mild with below average snow levels. Persistent snow cover has been present only at the higher elevations, generally on National Forest lands in each unit. Conditions through December have been normal temperatures with little to no moisture resulting in very little or no snow on the winter ranges. Most deer and pronghorn winter ranges are now snow free and animals are in good condition. Elk are generally finding forage away from private land haystacks and fields resulting in few damage complaints.

With no fall green-up on winter ranges, fawn survival is a concern because of the low fawn ratios observed at the start of the winter.

In the north end of the Deschutes Watershed the winter range is generally in good shape, even though there was little green-up until late December. Current conditions are generally snow free, with the exception of the northern portions of the district where there is still a small amount of snow covered with a sheet of ice. Except for a couple of minor elk issues, very few damage complaints have been received.

Bird Seasons

Even with the mild temperatures and excellent access in the Klamath Watershed, chukar hunter success in

Lake County has been lower than years past. This was expected due to reduced nesting success caused by persistent spring rains through June of 2011. The snow pack of 2010/2011, and persistent rains filled most of the Warner Valley lakes and other lakes and ponds in the county. Mild fall temperatures kept most wetlands open and more birds in the Klamath and Lake county wetlands longer than normal. Waterfowl hunters have had higher hunter success and extended opportunity due to these conditions.

Early season chukar hunting success was good in the Malheur Watershed with hunters reporting large coveys with good numbers of young birds. Success appears to have dropped off somewhat towards the end of the season as birds have become more wary and remain widely scattered due to lack of snow. Chukar hunter participation appears to be higher than in recent years. Malheur Lake filled and provided a waterfowl hunting opportunity for the first time since 2006. Hunter success was very good from the beginning of the season till mid-November when the lake began to freeze over.

Upland bird seasons at the south end of the Deschutes watershed have been typical, with very few birds available, and mostly on private land. At the south end, recent cold temperatures resulted in farm ponds and many of the smaller rivers being iced up. Early hunting was good on the local reservoirs, while late season has been slow as a result of most birds leaving the area once water bodies iced over.

Upland game bird hunting at the north end of the Deschutes Watershed has been generally good this season, with most hunters reporting better success and more birds than they have had over the past few years. Participation in turn also appears higher this year. Waterfowl numbers in the northern part of the Deschutes watershed have been very low this year, with most local waterfowl hunters reporting extremely low success. Winter waterfowl surveys showed numbers to be low, with total overall waterfowl numbers being two thirds of the five year average. In the Ochoco District, waterfowl opportunity has been good with numerous birds feeding in fields. Pressure appears very light and is limited by private lands.

Klamath Redband Trout Investigations

Williamson River redband trout are currently returning to the spawning areas to fulfill their life history needs. Observations of the returning mature trout indicate that this population of wild redband trout remains strong. Efforts to better quantify escapement numbers

returning to the tributary streams of Upper Klamath Lake are being investigated by ODFW research staff.

The use of both redds counts and video counting apparatus as tools to monitor the trout population is under investigation. Results from the research project should provide District staff with a more accurate method of estimating escapement in order to better manage this important wild trout resource.



SOUTHWEST REGION

Larry Cooper, Region Manager

January storms, Elk Creek Restoration and Elk River Hatchery

The Corps of Engineers notched the partially completed Elk Creek Dam in 2008. Additional restoration work is occurring upstream of the dam site.

Large woody debris was placed in West Branch Elk Creek in summer 2011. One structure was placed below a perched culvert to help keep the culvert from scouring a larger jump for fish over time (downstream view below).

Recent storms resulted in average high flows in most of the Rogue watershed. The high water in Elk Creek should move and sort bedload at the structures and improve habitat.

On January 4 Rogue District staff surveyed West Branch Elk Creek and observed actively spawning coho salmon and redds. The majority of fish and redds were found above the culvert in the photo. These fish are spawning naturally upstream of the notched dam.



As a side note, Elk River Hatchery received 18.31 inches of rain between 8:00 am Tuesday, January 17

and 5:00 pm Thursday January 19, but experienced no flooding. The last significant flood at the hatchery occurred in November of 1996 when the hatchery received nearly 15 inches of rain in one day and over 20 inches in a 24 hour period (the 24 hour period was not in the same calendar day).

Turkey Trap and Transplant:

Since 1992, an average of 230 turkeys per year have been trapped from the Roseburg area and transplanted into other areas of the state.

Trapping and transplanting provides an opportunity to effectively alleviate damage issues in urban zones while enhancing turkey populations in more remote natural areas.

During the first 24 days of January, 146 turkeys were trapped and moved to other areas in Oregon. The majority of these turkeys were transplanted to a site in the Hines wildlife district and two sites in the Klamath wildlife district.

In addition, 32 turkeys were moved to more remote sites near Roseburg. Most of these turkeys were scheduled to go to the Prineville wildlife district, but recent storms prevented transport vehicles from accessing the site.



NORTHWEST REGION

Chris Wheaton, Region Manager

Mid-Winter Wildlife Surveys

The number of birds counted during this year's Mid-Winter Waterfowl Survey (13,679) was more than twice as many as last year (5,866), with geese making up the majority of the difference. Duck numbers declined slightly, with dabbling species predominating. Local weather conditions may have played a factor in the number and composition of waterfowl species observed. Gorge winds were very strong during the survey with a wind-chill dropping to below freezing.

Some smaller and shallower water bodies were frozen over, and water levels were unseasonably low. In addition to waterfowl surveys, staff also completed Winter Bald Eagle surveys with the help of an OSP operated boat, recording 63 individual birds on the Columbia River from Scappoose Bay to Wauna. This is a slight decline from the 77 eagles observed during the 2010 survey.

January Flooding

Heavy rain created major flooding in parts of the region in mid-January. The Siuslaw river peaked at 28 feet, which has been exceeded only once in the last 30 years. Numerous slides were reported in all areas. These floods may have beneficial effects on fish habitat in the long run. However, in the short term they will impact production from an excellent year for spawning Chinook and may also impact yearling coho in tributary streams.

Many ODFW facilities experienced high water and lost power during the storm. At Alsea Hatchery the heavy rain and snow melt caused considerable flooding and debris clogging of the intake screens. The crew kept the water barely flowing to the hatchery with constant screen brushing on Wednesday night, January 18, and Thursday morning. The river level appeared to exceed levels witnessed in 1990's floods, as it was flowing over the top of the improved grizzly and retaining wall.



Alsea Hatchery intake

At Roaring River Hatchery melting snow and over four inches of rain in less than 24 hours created some of the highest flows we have seen. The flooding caused bank erosion at the head box and a loss of some of the large rock protecting the bank in this spot. Along with constant intake cleaning and hatch house filter cleaning, the heavy run-off required several incubator cleanings due to silt loads. About half of the nearby town of Scio required evacuation due to flooding.

Black-tailed Deer Initiative Research

Biologists met with Research staff to discuss spring 2012 efforts to place radio collars on 30 deer each in the Alsea, Indigo, and Dixon Wildlife Management

Units. We will be capturing and collaring deer from helicopters in February and March. Additional deer will be captured and collared on the ground. Telemetry monitoring of locations and mortality is expected to last for five years. The Dixon Unit is the control/comparison unit for the Indigo, and the Alsea Unit is a control/comparison unit to the Trask, which already has radio-collared black-tails.

Nehalem Steelhead Telemetry

Recent rain brought a substantial number of hatchery winter steelhead into the North Fork Nehalem River, with anglers reporting very good catches. Radio telemetry work continues with over 25 fish tagged to date. Two of these fish have been caught by anglers, who returned the tag for us to use again. Several of the radio-tagged fish have entered the hatchery trap and have been processed by hatchery personnel. We have also radio-tagged recycled hatchery fish and are monitoring their behavior after they were released downstream.

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

Roger Fuhrman, Program Administrator

Masters of the Night: The True Story of Bats

ODFW is a partner in a new, traveling exhibit at the World Forestry Center in Portland. *Masters of the Night: The True Story of Bats* is a 2,500 square foot touring exhibit that describes the importance of bats in the ecosystem and tries to address common myths about bats. ODFW was asked to participate in the exhibit after organizers found the *Batty for Bats* brochure on the ODFW website. ODFW helped develop four display panels about the 15 species of bats found in Oregon and what the public can do to help protect Oregon bats.

ODFW is also providing 20,000 copies of the *Batty for Bats* brochure for distribution. The brochure is one of three on Oregon's native wildlife. The most recent brochure was released in early January and focuses on Oregon's 14 species of owls. *Whooooo Am I?* was featured in several news reports and ODFW has received numerous requests from teachers for copies to use in the classroom.

The World Forestry Center also plans to host nearly a dozen "Bat Chats" as part of the exhibit. The speaker series includes presentations on bat biology, the role of bats in the ecosystem, risks to bat populations and tips for living with bats. On February 18, ODFW biologist Susan Barnes will present *Oregon Bats: Facts and Myths*. ODFW staff will also be on hand to provide information on the Oregon Conservation Strategy.

The *Masters of the Night: The True Story of Bats* exhibit runs through May.

ODFW Outdoors on Facebook

The ODFW Outdoors Facebook page is the latest addition to the department's social media offerings. The Facebook page offers tips and tools for getting outdoors and provides a fun and friendly environment to keep fans engaged in fishing, hunting and wildlife viewing. The ODFW Outdoors Facebook page also provides information on nearly 70 workshops and family fishing events throughout the state. The Facebook page can be found at www.facebook.com/odfwoutdoors or through a link from the ODFW website. The department has two other Facebook pages – [The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife](#) and [Oregon Wildlife Viewing](#) – a Twitter feed and a YouTube channel which includes how-to videos and information about Oregon's fish and wildlife.

CONSERVATION STRATEGY

Holly Michael, Conservation Policy Coordinator

BLM Use of States' Mapping and Data Layers

The Western Governors' Association (WGA) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have entered into an agreement to use State and West-wide data and maps to help identify wildlife corridors and crucial habitat for future land-use planning and management efforts across the West. The maps will be available for the BLM to use as a result of the Western Wildlife Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool, known as "CHAT", an initiative of the WGA.

The CHAT regional viewer will provide access to spatial mapping of data on wildlife and habitats, and additional layers for agencies, industries, other stakeholders, and the public. For example, the BLM's National Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy will utilize the CHAT and the underlying individual State Decision Support Systems (DSS) as they are developed, including Oregon's. ODFW is on track to complete our state DSS in 2013.

BLM's Deputy Director Mike Pool provided a memorandum to his agency instructing land managers to use prioritized wildlife and habitat information and data developed through state DSSs and the regional CHAT as a principal source to inform land use planning, as well as related natural resource decisions on public lands.

NOAA and States' Collaboration on Climate Science

In June 2011, the WGA and NOAA entered into an MOU to collaborate in developing and sharing weather and climate information in order to reduce disaster risk and improve adaptive management. The first regional forum under this MOU will be held in the Pacific Northwest in April 2012. The primary topics to be addressed at this forum are water resources and coastal management, with additional discussion of terrestrial habitats and risks. We anticipate that this forum will increase awareness of the diversity of projects in the region and will help to shape and strengthen future efforts to adapt to climate among the states, tribes, and their federal partners. ODFW is working with our adjacent states, WGA and NOAA in identifying States' climate research and modeling needs, finding capacity to do the work and in development of the regional forum.

MARINE RESOURCES PROGRAM

Caren Braby, Program Manager

Commercial Dungeness Crab Fishery: 2011-12 Season Update

The commercial Dungeness crab season is in full swing and has had a unique season start. In late October and mid November, fishery managers from the tri-state region (Washington, Oregon, California) conducted the first and second rounds of pre-season testing. The tests showed that the majority of test areas did not meet minimum quality criteria (percentage of meat, by total weight). In line with tri-state testing protocols, fishery managers implemented a season delay until December 15, to allow for an improvement in crab quality. A third round of pre-season testing was conducted in late November and early December. In response to continued low quality for crab in the Brookings and Northern California areas, fishery managers determined the coast would be split into two areas, with the dividing line located just north of Gold Beach, Oregon (42°26'00" N. Lat.). As a result, the 2011-12 crab season opened December 15 in Oregon, from the Washington border south to Rogue Reef. The crab season opened January 15 for the remainder of the coast, from Rogue Reef south to the California border.

Preliminary landing reports estimate that 9 million pounds of crab have been landed into Oregon ports with an ex-vessel value of \$23.4 million dollars. Early landings are similar to those seen in the 2006-07, 2007-08 and 2008-09 seasons, during which a total of 12-15 million pounds were landed each year. In comparison, the 20-year average for total annual landings is 15.4 million pounds. The season opened December 15 with

a negotiated price of \$2.30/lb, locked in for the first 22 days of the season. This was \$0.30 higher than any negotiated price on record and was locked in for a significantly longer period than usual. The southern area opened with an informally negotiated price of \$3.00/lb on January 15.

Lastly, the Oregon commercial Dungeness crab fishery was certified as sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) in December 2010, a 5-year certification that was pursued collaboratively by the Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission (ODCC), industry and Marine Resources Program staff. The MSC certification is a science-based environmental standard that offers fisheries a way to confirm sustainability, using a credible, independent, third-party assessment process. In December 2011, the fishery passed its first annual audit, having made significant progress on several of the conditions that were placed on the fishery when it was initially certified. In response to many of the MSC conditions, ODFW staff developed a preliminary outline of a research plan for the crab program and conducted an analysis of the potential use of crab logbooks for deriving catch per unit effort (CPUE) estimates as a future management tool. ODFW will continue work on both of these fronts to help maintain the fishery's MSC certification. It is hoped that MSC certification of Oregon's Dungeness crab will increase demand for this sustainable seafood product and increase the price per pound for Oregon's fishermen.



Landing of Dungeness crab in Newport, OR, during the first week of the 2011-12 crabbing season.

OREGON STATE POLICE FISH AND WILDLIFE DIVISION

Captain Jeff Samuels, Division Director

Fisheries

Portland area Troopers conducted a foot patrol at night on Swan Island along the Willamette River. The Troopers located three subjects fishing for sturgeon at approximately 8:00 pm. Under the cover of darkness, Troopers were able to approach the subjects and observe one of them attempt to hide a 43 inch sturgeon

in the bushes as well as observing five rods with lines in the water. As a group, the Troopers contacted the three subjects. A gear inspection revealed they were all using barbed hooks. A consent search revealed a second sturgeon in one of the subject's vehicles. All five fishing rods and two sturgeon were seized. All three subjects were issued multiple criminal citations to include Unlawful possession of sturgeon, Angling Prohibited Hours, Angling Prohibited Method (barbed hooks), and Angling with More than One Rod.

Wildlife

On January 18, 2012 Trooper Reel (Portland) received an anonymous tip that a hunter had shot a 6x7 Bull Elk prior to the opening of the Cascade Bull Elk season. Trooper's Reel and Mark Schoenborn (Portland) contacted the suspect at his residence in Estacada. Upon investigation, the suspect admitted to shooting a 6x7 Bull Elk on October 7, 2011, eight days before the opening of the season. The suspect was also a convicted felon prohibited from possessing a firearm. Items seized were a 6x7 European mount, three rifles and approximately 100 pounds of elk meat. The subject was charged with Felon in Possession of a Firearm (3 counts) and Unlawful Possession of a Bull Elk.

General Law

Recently, Senior Trooper Niehus (Klamath Falls) assisted a female that had her purse with iPhone, driver's license, debit card and a \$50 Visa card stolen from her work. Niehus learned that the phone had been set up with the FIND MY IPHONE feature. Niehus sent a lock command to the phone which caused the phone to be remotely locked the next time it was turned on. Eventually the phone was turned on and Niehus was able to obtain a location. Niehus directed multiple Klamath Falls police officers to a vehicle parked at the local hospital. The individuals inside the vehicle were contacted by police and Niehus then sent an alert sound to the phone, which officers heard coming from under the driver's seat of the suspect car. When the suspect went to reach for the phone, the officers stopped him and placed him and the female passenger into custody. They found a stolen gun where the suspect had been reaching, next to the phone. They also found a 1/4 ounce of Methamphetamine and a notebook which assisted them in clearing up six burglaries. Officers' searched the suspects' residence and found more Methamphetamine, eight stolen guns, a counterfeiting operation and several other stolen items.

**END OF FIELD REPORTS FOR
February 3, 2012**