ODFW Field Reports

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission
December 6, 2013

NORTHEAST REGION

Bruce Eddy, Region Manager

ANGLER CAUGHT HATCHERY STEELHEAD FOR BROODSTOCK

The Wallowa Fish District recruited volunteer anglers to collect hatchery steelhead for broodstock from the lower Grande Ronde River during the third week of October. Results from a similar fall collection effort conducted from 2003-06, indicated that direct offspring from those angler-caught broodstock were harvested in the fall fishery at rates up to10 times higher than offspring from broodstock collected at Wallowa Hatchery in the spring. These fish also returned to Lower Granite Dam about 3 weeks sooner than the conventional Wallowa stock. While the project was initially successful at promoting early arrival to the Grande Ronde and increasing catch rates, we found these traits have become less apparent in following generations.

In response to the drop off in earlier run timing, the Wallowa District decided to refresh the broodstock with angler caught fish. Forty-nine volunteers from six states drove more than 23,000 miles, angled 625 angler hours, and collected 22 adult hatchery steelhead. While the fishing was somewhat slow, the volunteer effort and hard time spent on the water alongside thirteen employees from the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Oregon State University, and ODFW was incredible. This effort presented a unique outreach opportunity for ODFW staff to interact with the angling public over the course of a week on a project with tangible benefits to the angler. While the goal of collecting 50 hatchery steelhead was not met, the fish collected will make a meaningful contribution to maintain run-timing and fisheries benefits on the lower Grande Ronde River. The district is planning to continue the 'refreshing' project for at least one more year and keep increasing the fall brood component of the Wallowa stock to comprise half of the total smolt release.

COUGAR KILL RATES AND PREY SELECTION IN NORTHEAST OREGON

As part of the ODFW wildlife research team in Northeastern Oregon, Darren Clark, will soon complete his Ph.D. requirements with research focused on cougar ecology and population dynamics in the Mt. Emily unit. Elk populations throughout much of northeast Oregon have declined in the past 10-20 years, and declines appear to be associated with chronically low calf recruitment. Cougars are thought to be the primary factor contributing to ongoing elk population declines in much of northeast Oregon. Despite this assumption, little was known about prey use, survival, and population dynamics of cougars in northeast Oregon. One of the five manuscripts describing the research results provides estimated kill rates and prey selection of cougars in a multiple prey system.

- On average, a cougar kills approximately 1.0 ungulate/week. However, cougars killed 1.6 times more frequently during summer than during winter in response to the high rate of predation on small, juvenile ungulates. Furthermore, kill rates were influenced by gender and reproductive status of females (i.e., kittens present). Diets of cougars also varied according to gender.
- Cougars selected for calves in summer and fawns during winter.
- The selective predation of cougars on juvenile ungulates may be a mechanism by which cougars limit population growth or slow recovery of ungulate populations when at a high predator to prey ratio.
- Altering the demographic structure (i.e., sex ratios and reproductive rates) or abundance of cougar populations could have important implications for ungulate populations.

Elk population dynamics are influenced by a suite of factors such as environmental variability and management actions on predator and prey species; the relative influence of each of these factors is not well understood at this time. Additional research highlights were contrasting survival rates of radio collared cougars under different hunting regulations; estimating cougar densities in northeast Oregon using conservation detection dogs; population growth rates and simulated responses of cougar populations to density reduction under variable immigration and emigration; and influence of cougar predation, female harvest, and climate on dynamics of elk populations in northeast Oregon. The results from the research clarified the role of cougar predation on elk populations and will help guide cougar and elk management in northeast Oregon.

HIGH DESERT REGION

Chip Dale, Region Manager

DESCHUTES RIVER FISHERIES

The phenomenal fall Chinook return to the lower Deschutes River is winding down, as spawning is currently peaking throughout the lower 100 miles. District staff is currently conducting spawning surveys and carcass recovery efforts needed to complete the fall Chinook run reconstruction.

The return is expected to exceed the previous peak return which numbered 20,811 fish. With the Chinook season closing on October 31st, preliminary harvest data from several sites on the river reflect the strong run to the Deschutes. Anglers harvested over 1,700 adults off the mouth of the river, while the previous high adult harvest since inception of the creel in 1980 was 660 adults. At the popular Sherars Falls fishery, sport anglers harvested 1,076 adults, where since 1970 the previous high sport catch was 611 adults. Raw catch at the Sherars Falls Trap also reflected the strong return, where over 1,100 fish were tagged, compared to the previous high of 1,041 that was recorded in 1978.

Steelhead returns to the Deschutes did not follow the abundant Chinook returns, as Deschutes steelhead creels and raw Sherars Falls Trap catch revealed a more average run to date.

HIGHWAY 97 WILDLIFE CROSSINGS

The four mile section of US 97 between Lava Butte and South Century Drive was doubled in capacity when the existing two lane highway was converted into four lanes separated by a large median. For the first time in Oregon, the project included wildlife protection features consisting of two wildlife underpasses (one dedicated wildlife underpass and one shared underpass with minimal vehicle use), fencing on both sides of the highway to guide animals to the underpasses, electromats across highway access ramps where the fences were open, and specially designed areas called "jumpouts" to allow deer and other animals to safely return to the outside of the fence from the highway side.

ODOT has funded a camera monitoring study and is working with researchers from Utah State University and Portland State University to determine how many and which wildlife species are using the passage structures. An important component of the study is determination of how wildlife species interact with the structures. For example, are the animals accepting of or "afraid" of the underpasses and are the deer using the jumpouts to return to the safe side of the fence?

An analysis of photographs from January 1st to July 31st 2013 has shown success on all fronts. As expected, the wildlife only underpass has recorded more use than the underpass that shares space with seasonal traffic, but it is also receiving substantial use. To date 219 mule deer and 6 elk have successfully used the underpasses. Other species that have been documented using the structures include badger, coyote, raccoon, skunk, weasel bear, marmots, rabbits, and various squirrel species. Deer/vehicle collisions have been reduced by 84% over pre-construction conditions. ODOT's cost benefit analysis shows that over a 20 year period, the wildlife passage components of the project are expected to realize $2.94 in savings for every $1.00 spent. This estimate translates to a savings of almost $9,000,000 over twenty years.

SOUTHWEST REGION

Russ Stauff, Rogue Watershed Manager

RINGTAIL SURVEY IN SW OREGON

The Rogue Watershed District initiated a project in Jackson County to develop a survey protocol for ringtails in SW Oregon. Baited trail cameras were randomly deployed near Lost Creek Reservoir, and 2 ringtails were detected, radio-collared, and monitored weekly, both day and night, to estimate home range size. Through November, both collared ringtails remained within overlapping areas $\leq$ 1 mi², often sharing the same dens, thus we believe these two animals may be mother and daughter. Systematic surveys around the reservoir were initiated in October, with baited trail cameras placed 2/mi², and left in place for $\geq$ 2 weeks. An additional 11 ringtails have been detected.

NORTHWEST REGION

Bruce McIntosh, Acting Region Manager

Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program Celebrates Third Anniversary – The Bonneville Power Administration, ODFW and the City of Salem hosted an event in Salem celebrating the third anniversary of the Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program, with Director Elicker and Lori Bodi, BPA VP for Fish and Wildlife Programs the keynote speakers. To date, the program has acquired about 3,000 acres of property in the Willamette Valley, with about 10% of the sites providing dual benefits to both listed fish and wildlife species. Key acquisitions include the 100 acre Flights End Property on Sauvie Island and 300 acre Coyote Creek property adjacent to Fern Ridge Wildlife Area, which are owned and managed by ODFW. Management plans are in development for both properties.

By the end of 2014, we anticipate an additional 1,881 acres will be acquired bringing the total to 4,868 acres, approximately 1/3 of the total acreage obligation under the mitigation agreement by year four of the 15 year program.

Lower Columbia Chum Reintroduction Sees First Returns – Adult chum salmon are returning to Big Creek this year from the initial efforts begun in 2010 to reintroduce chum salmon into Oregon tributaries on the lower Columbia River. Through November 22, twenty-eight (28) tagged chum salmon have returned to Big Creek Hatchery. These age-3 adults are the first returns from the initial release of chum salmon fry into Big Creek in the spring of 2011. The tagged adults returning this year are being transferred to Graham Creek (Westport Slough) and Stewart Creek (Clatskanie River basin) to spawn and start the next generation.

Staff is also again working with WDFW to collect chum salmon broodstock from the Grays River to

secure eggs for the reintroduction effort. Washington provides chum salmon eggs for incubation and initial rearing at Big Creek Hatchery, with the intent of establishing a broodstock at Big Creek that can be used to support reintroduction in Oregon tributaries. Broodstock collection goals were met for the early part of the run, but a large flood during the week of November 14th resulted in limited collection of the last remaining chum. Despite the weather, 85% of the egg take goal was collected and will be transferred to Big Creek.

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

Roger Fuhrman, Program Administrator

Mobile Friendly Web Content

Some of the most popular content on the ODFW website is now available in a mobile friendly format. The Weekly Recreation Report and Fishing Regulation Updates have been reformatted to be easier to view on Smartphones and tablets. In addition, links are provided to web pages for the fish stocking schedule, license sales locations, hunting seasons, and information on workshops and Hunter Education courses. Those pages are formatted to be viewable on mobile devices. Mobile users can access the information by viewing the homepage for the ODFW website on their smart phone, clicking on the "mobile" button at the center of the top row of the site and bookmarking the site for future reference.

Demand for mobile friendly material continues to grow. According to the Fall 2013 Internet Usage Statistics report, 75% of the United States population now has internet access and 56% of American adults own a Smartphone and 33% of American adults own a tablet. These numbers are also reflected in ODFW website statistics. While use of the ODFW website continues to grow (to more than 4.2-million visits in 2013), mobile use has significantly increased. In 2010, only about 100,000 visitors viewed the ODFW website using a mobile device. By 2013, more than 1.2-million visits were via Smartphone or tablet. Mobile use increased by nearly 80% between 2012 and 2013.

The demand for mobile friendly content will continue to increase, putting additional pressure on the Department to make more information available to customers when they want it and in multiple formats. The Department has taken some steps to meet that demand by providing text alerts on fishing regulation changes and notifications when new information is posted on the website on selected topics. A flipbook version of the big game regulations is also available on the department website. In 2014, the Department will step up efforts to collect email addresses from hunters and anglers so it can more easily contact them.

Oregon Shooting Ranges

Recreational shooters can now find information on nearly 100 indoor and outdoor shooting ranges on the Oregon Hunting Map. The map includes details on location, contact information, range hours and a description of facilities, opportunities and services available at the range. Links are provided to websites for details on competitions, classes and events at the range and membership information. Interested shooters can search the map for specific ranges or by type of shooting available (such as skeet, trap, 3-D archery), maximum shooting distance available, indoor and outdoor facilities, competitions, services and programs available like rentals, repairs, youth programs and hunter education classes.

OCEAN SALMON AND COLUMBIA RIVER PROGRAM

Tom Rien, Columbia River Coordination Program Manager

2014 AMENDMENT OF THE NORTHWEST POWER AND CONSERVATION COUNCIL'S COLUMBIA BASIN FISH AND WILDLIFE PROGRAM

Background

In March 2013, the Northwest Power and Conservation Council (Council) opened up its Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program (Program) for amendment. As part of the amendment process, the Council solicited recommendations from Columbia Basin fish and wildlife managers and the public. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife worked with the Oregon Governor's Office and natural resource agencies to develop and submit a set of state recommendations.

Experimental Spill Management

A key component of Oregon's recommendations is a measure that calls for an experimental evaluation of the effects of increased spill operations on survival of salmon and steelhead. Recent scientific information clearly demonstrates the survival benefits of increasing voluntary spill above levels currently being implemented under an order by the U.S. District Court.

The proposed evaluation would:

- Increase spill during the spring-time fish migration period to 125% of total dissolved gas (TDG) level or biological constraints for a period of ten years.
- Increase spill at eight Snake and Columbia River projects – Lower Granite, Little Goose, Lower

Monumental, Ice Harbor, McNary, John Day, The Dalles and Bonneville dams.
- Use the existing Comparative Survival Study's PIT-tag monitoring framework to monitor smolt-to-adult salmon and steelhead survival rates.
- Incorporate sideboards or "off-ramps" to ensure hydropower system viability as well as "on-ramps" for non-hydro renewable energy sources to offset impacts from increased spill levels.

Oregon also included this experimental evaluation of increased spill operations in its comments on the 2013 Draft Supplemental Biological Opinion for the Federal Columbia River Power System.

Other Amendment Recommendations

- The Program should retain basin-wide objectives, as recommended by Oregon and the region's fish and wildlife managers, to increase salmon and steelhead runs to 5 million fish by 2025 and to achieve smolt-to-adult return rates of 2 to 6 percent for listed fish.
- The Program should adopt the ESA delisting goals and broad-sense recovery goals of the Upper Willamette River Conservation and Recovery Plan for Chinook, salmon, and steelhead.
- The Program should continue to fund the Select Area Fisheries Enhancement program (SAFE) beyond its current sunset date of 2017 and at a level sufficient to achieve its management goals.
- The Program should continue to fund wildlife habitat projects at levels sufficient to maintain the base level of habitat and credits accomplished to date, and provide additional funding for wildlife monitoring, data management, and reporting.
- The Program should define an "in-lieu funding" policy that defines in-lieu and subjects in-lieu funding decisions by the Bonneville Power Administration to review by the Council through a public process.
- The Program should commit the Council to work more directly with states and Tribes when planning and implementing measures in the Program.

Next Steps

The Council will release a draft Program for public review in February 2014. In July, 2014 the Council intends to adopt a revised Program, contingent on completion of "findings" by its legal staff.

OREGON STATE POLICE

Captain Jeff Samuels, Division Director

Trooper Herman (Astoria), Sr. Trooper Stanton (Astoria A&H), and OSP Volunteer Corky Herman conducted a Wildlife Enforcement Decoy (WED) on a state logging road in the Clatsop State Forest off of Hwy 26. The troopers set a spike-elk WED to monitor tag compliance within the Saddle Mountain controlled hunt area which is a 3-point or better unit. A vehicle stopped at the decoy and the driver immediately started firing multiple rounds at the WED out of the driver's side window. The passenger (the driver's 19 year old daughter) then got out of the truck and started firing multiple rounds at the WED as well. Trooper Herman contacted the subjects and immediately noticed blood on the driver's hands. Trooper Herman also noticed a beer can sitting on the dashboard that had smoke rising from it. The can had been recently used to smoke marijuana. Trooper Herman observed two 12 year old boys in the back seat of the truck, and the driver's and passenger's rifle barrels were pointing at the boys' faces. Trooper Herman questioned the two subjects, and investigation revealed that neither the driver nor passenger had any elk tags at all. Trooper Herman then questioned the driver about the blood on his hands, and gained consent to search the truck. In the back of the truck, Trooper Herman found a fresh 4-point buck deer head, and a backpack full of fresh deer meat. The daughter admitted to shooting the buck earlier that morning. The father cut off the back straps and part of the legs, the head, and left the rest to waste. Trooper Herman's investigation found that in addition to the father having an open container of beer in the vehicle, his driving privileges were suspended and he was a convicted felon. The father was arrested and lodged at the Clatsop County Jail on charges of **Unlawful Taking of Spike Elk, Aiding in a Wildlife Offense, Felon in Possession of Firearm, Hunting from a Motor Vehicle, and Reckless Endangering.** The daughter was cited and released for **Unlawful Taking of Spike Elk, Unlawful Taking of Deer Closed Season, and Shooting from a Roadway.** The father was also cited for **PCS less than 1oz of Marijuana**. The deer, marijuana and rifles were seized as evidence.

END OF FIELD REPORTS FOR December 6, 2013