ODFW Field Reports

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission
January 10, 2014

NORTHEAST REGION

Bruce Eddy, Region Manager

Meadow Creek Restoration

The Starkey Experimental Forest and Range (Starkey), located 28 miles southwest of La Grande, is known for research done there on deer, elk and forest management. Projects started there recently are on the cutting edge of evaluating fish habitat restoration in the Blue Mountains as well. Meadow Creek, a tributary of the Upper Grande Ronde River, is an important summer steelhead stream that runs through Starkey.

Over the last 100 years its habitat has been altered by a number of forest activities. These alterations have limited the production of federal ESA listed steelhead that spawn and rear here. It is being restored though a cooperative project funded by Bonneville Power Administration and the US Forest Service through the Grande Ronde Model Watershed. The research focus at Starkey provides an excellent opportunity to evaluate not only how Meadow Creek and its associated riparian area responds to engineered restoration efforts but also how cattle, deer and elk grazing influences recovery.

The restoration effort is focusing on improving summer steelhead habitat by enhancing the quality and quantity of pools, increasing cover, and increasing habitat complexity. In 2012 and 2013 trees, logs, and root wads were placed in Meadow Creek in combination with large boulders used as ballast to create habitat complexity. In 2013 and 2014 stream banks were planted with deciduous and conifer seedlings.

Columbia Basin Habitat Monitoring Project (CHaMP) techniques are being use by ODFW researchers evaluate how Meadow Creek habitat and steelhead change in response to restoration. CHaMP is a statistical scheme that has been adopted throughout the Columbia Basin to monitor habitat and salmon and steelhead population changes over time. To evaluate the influence of cattle, deer and elk grazing on vegetation and stream recovery Eastern Oregon Agriculture Research Center and USFS Pacific Northwest Research Station researchers are using a system of enclosures and controlled grazing trials.

End of an Era: Antelope Removed from Umatilla Chemical Depot

Antelope were brought to the Umatilla Chemical Depot (UMCD) in the late 1960's by then Umatilla Wildlife Biologist John Ely, father of former Northeast Region Manager Craig Ely. They served as a nursery population for supplementing antelope throughout Oregon and Nevada. The UMCD population peaked at more than 350 animals in 1986.

The 19,000-acre UMCD was the perfect place to keep this source population. Fencing required to keep the weapons there securely stored during the "cold war" was more than adequate to keep the antelope in. UMCD staff kept a watchful eye over both the antelope adults and fawns as well. They adopted

antelope as there mascot including a picture of an antelope in the UMCD logo.

Now that the UMCD is being decommissioned the fence is being removed and the antelope needed to be relocated so that they wouldn't become a problem for local agriculture. Staff of ODFW and Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation as well as several interested volunteers worked to catch and move the UMCD antelope to Malheur County. A helicopter was used to herd the pronghorn into a corral trap. After a brief health check the antelope were vaccinated and ear-tagged then put in a trailer and driven to Malheur County for an evening release on public land in the Beulah Wildlife Management Unit. Thirty-seven antelope were released (eight adult males, 22 adult females, and seven young). One was euthanized because of its poor condition.

HIGH DESERT REGION

Chip Dale, Region Manager

Sage Grouse Initiative Activities to Date

In July of 2011, ODFW entered into a cooperative agreement with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Pheasants Forever and The Intermountain West Joint Venture to implement the NRCS' new Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) program in Oregon. ODFW's contribution to the program was hiring two cooperatively funded, limited duration sage grouse habitat biologists to work with private landowners to improve sage grouse habitat on their deeded properties. The two positions are located in Lake and Malheur counties and there are similar NRCS positions in Harney and Deschutes counties.

In Lake County nearly 40 ranchers have enrolled in SGI, and 22 SGI contracts have been managed since November 2011. The number of acres of juniper removal was 3,435 for 2011 funds, 6,100 for 2012 funds, and 9,602 are scheduled for 2013 funds, for a total of 19,137 acres. Four landowners have installed wildlife escape ramps in 12 water troughs. Markers to reduce bird strikes have been installed on 31,649 feet of livestock fence. Five applications have been received for SGI projects during the 2014 fiscal year and we anticipate many more applications will come in this fall and early winter.

The SGI partnership position in Malheur County has been successful in increasing rangeland conservation projects on private land by providing cost share funding in excess of $650,000 through farm bill conservation programs for 2013 funds. Since October 2012, when the position was filled, there have been 14 conservation plans written. Contracts for juniper removal on 10,882 acres across 5 different ODFW Sage Grouse Action Areas have been approved. Average cost share for the 11 juniper removal contracts was $63.00 per acre. Landowner outreach and conservation plan development is ongoing with the goal of increasing on the ground projects in 2014.

Steens/Warner Cougar Target Areas

Cougar target areas to increase mule deer populations were run from January 2010 through December 2013 in Steens and Warner WMUs. In Steens, Wildlife Service Employees were used to administratively remove 60 cougars during the four years (20 in 2010, 18 in 2011, 15 in 2012, and seven in 2013). In Warner volunteer cougar/bear agents were used to administratively remove 28 cougars (nine in 2010, four in 2011, 12 in 2012, and three in 2013).

In both units the corresponding quadrat surveys performed during inventory indicate a slight increase in our current population estimate. However it will take more time for the impact of the cougar removal to truly express a change in the deer population. Quadrat population estimates will continue in the spring of 2014. Hunter success is also on the rise. Reports from our constituents are positive and hunters report seeing more deer and larger bucks overall. The reduction of cougars due to these target areas will hopefully have a positive impact in the coming years as the deer population responds.

SOUTHWEST REGION

Larry Cooper, Region Manager

Low Rainfall Amounts Affect Winter Fisheries and Spawning in the Coos-Coquille Basins

Winter steelhead angling conditions have been poor thus far this season due to low river conditions. Fish are holding in tidewater and large pools, and not moving throughout the basins, as would be typical with periodic rain events. Spawn timing for coho salmon is getting very late, and we are starting into winter steelhead spawn timing. Low water conditions have caused both coho and steelhead to "keg up" in large pools, waiting for rainfall and increased river flows. Low water conditions such as these can cause spawning distribution to be very compact rather than widespread. Spawning may occur more in mainstem rivers, rather than side tributaries. This can make the eggs and fry incubating in the gravel vulnerable to any high water/scouring conditions that may occur if heavy rainfall does arrive.

Compacted spawning distribution may also affect spawning survey estimates, as some surveys may have no spawners due to low water conditions. Low water conditions can also impede passage through fish

ladders and over natural falls in the area. Although fish distribution and angling conditions are affected, anglers and surveyors are reporting what appear to be significant numbers of coho and steelhead in holding areas.

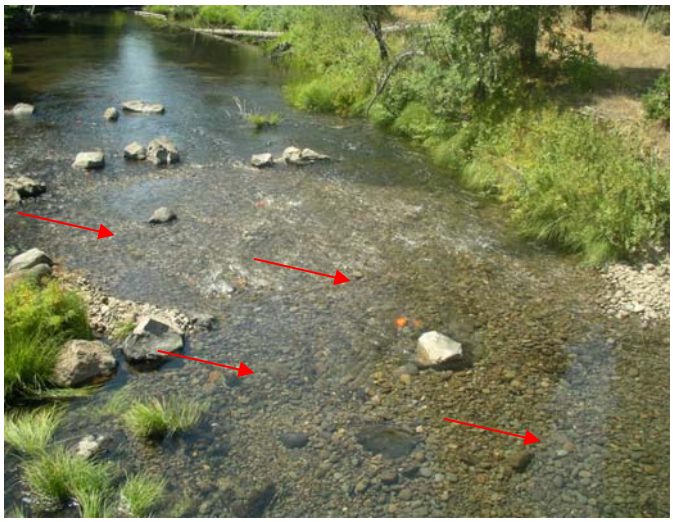
Gravel Augmentation for Rogue Spring Chinook: A Pilot Project on Big Butte Creek

Work continues on a pilot project aimed at recruiting more spawning gravel in Big Butte Creek, the only tributary of the Rogue River used consistently by spawning spring Chinook salmon. With funds from the Restoration and Enhancement Program (R&E), gravel was placed at a large wood project site in 2012. Approximately 150 cubic yards of gravel and some boulder clusters were added. In August 2013, an additional 100 yards of gravel was placed in Big Butte at the same location.

This year ODFW initiated a project to monitor gravel transport in Big Butte Creek to help evaluate the benefits of gravel augmentation in this unique subbasin. During spring and summer of 2013, PIT tags were inserted into Chinook-sized spawning gravels. Approximately 275 rocks were tagged in all.

These rocks were distributed at six different sites in Big Butte Creek, including the gravel placement site (see photos; arrows point to tagged rocks). Rocks were placed individually and in groups and a GPS waypoint was taken at each site. All sites where tagged rocks were placed are either sites where chinook are known to spawn or are areas that could be candidates for future gravel augmentation projects (pending access for equipment, etc).

In spring/summer 2014, ODFW will recover as many tagged rocks as possible and compare the location of the rocks from 2013 to 2014. This process will be repeated over the next several years. This project aims to provide a broader understanding of gravel movement and effectiveness of gravel augmentation in this system. This information will help determine whether future, larger scale gravel placement in Big Butte Creek will be cost effective.



NORTHWEST REGION

Bruce McIntosh, Acting Region Manager

Black-tailed Deer Initiative – Some of the first GPS collars affixed to black-tailed deer does in the summer of 2012 have begun to drop. The photo below shows a collar recently retrieved in the Mid-Willamette Wildlife District. Bucks are collared with standard VHF collars while does are collared with GPS collars that function for up to 17 months. Monitoring is occurring in three Wildlife Management Units in the Northwest Region with a target of 30 collared deer/unit on an ongoing basis for the anticipated 5-year study period. GPS fixes will be used to determine habitat use, home range size, and movement patterns. If a deer dies, the collar emits a mortality signal which triggers an investigation to retrieve the collar and help inform staff about the types and magnitude of the various mortality factors.

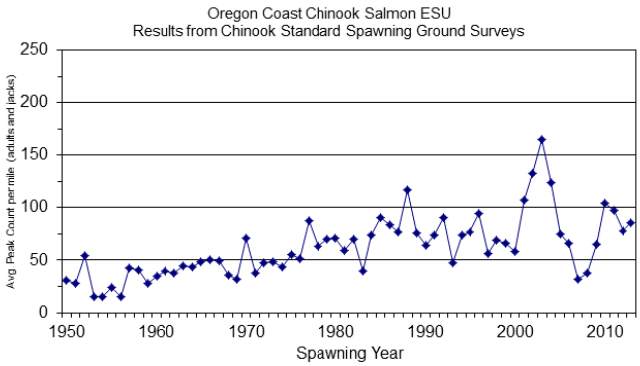
New Waterfowl Hunting Area at Sauvie Island – On New Year's Day, a new public waterfowl hunting

area was opened at the Sauvie Island Wildlife Area (SIWA). The Flight's End Unit was opened to the public January 1 and waterfowl hunters experienced relatively good success. This 100-acre former private duck hunting club was purchased by ODFW in September 2013 with funds provided by the Bonneville Power Administration through the ODFW Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program. Hunting at Flight's End is being managed through the SIWA Westside Permit Hunt Area program. The property provides habitat for a variety of species and offers important conservation benefits for fish and wildlife. The Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program and this acquisition are funded by the Bonneville Power Administration as part of its agreement to settle federal wildlife habitat mitigation obligations in the Willamette Basin.

Chinook Salmon Spawning Ground Surveys

Spawning season is winding down in most areas, except for the South Coast. Preliminary results for 2013 Oregon Coastal Chinook salmon ESU standard surveys are very similar to 2012, averaging 85 and 78 chinook per mile respectively. Live chinook observations on 2013 Oregon Coastal random coho surveys has generally been below the prior year's (1998 through 2012) average for most time periods, but has been steadily approaching average as the season progresses.

Abundance trends for Coastal Chinook populations appear to have resumed a pattern of steady improvement since 1950. Extreme swings in abundance were seen from the years 2001 to 2009. It is unclear if this was an anomaly or a clue that unusual patterns in abundance are the new norm. Oregon's active participation in Pacific Salmon Treaty management, including ongoing investment in research, helps support healthy returns to our coastal streams and rivers.



INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

Roger Fuhrman, Program Administrator

ODFW Outdoors Family Archery Workshop

More than 30 people were introduced to archery at the Family Archery Workshop held over the holidays. Attendees ranged in age from 10 to 60 years old and included several families, couples and singles. Participants learned how to safely handle and shoot bows and how to prepare for a bow hunt. They also had the opportunity to practice shooting at 3-D targets and to participate in archery games.

Some participants showed immediate improvement, including one 19-year old who had never shot a bow before. By the end of the workshop, the young man was consistently placing arrows in the head of the 3-D deer target at 30 yards. The workshop was held December 27th at The Hoop, an indoor basketball facility near the headquarters building.

The archery workshop was part of ODFW's ongoing effort to encourage families to hunt and fish. Two upcoming family oriented workshops – the Family Small Game Hunting workshop in January and the Family Introduction to Pheasant Hunting workshop in February – are already full. Participants in those workshops will receive basic safety training and hunting tips and have the opportunity to practice shooting before heading to the field for the hunt. In addition, they will learn how to clean and prepare their harvest. Two other beginner pheasant hunting workshops in January and February will cater to women and adults. Those workshops are nearly full.

MARINE RESOURCES PROGRAM

Caren Braby, Marine Resources Program

Rockfish Research – tagged fish "re-caught" in video

Image from baited lander video of tagged yelloweye rockfish T06 (with black tag on side). Other rockfish and an urchin also in view.

Yelloweye rockfish have been designated overfished by the Pacific Fisheries Management Council. As such, the Marine Resources Program has been conducting tagging studies for several years to measure effects of barotrauma on behavior and mortality associated with catch and release in this species, to improve our management of this species. In the summer of 2013, the Marine Resources Program research team tagged a number of yelloweye rockfish off the coast of Newport, at Stonewall Bank. While MRP research has studied barotrauma in this species in the nearshore, the 2013 study targeted deeper offshore waters where yelloweye rockfish are often encountered by halibut fishermen and where barotrauma mortality is expected to be greater. Researchers tagged fish with acoustic telemetry devices, which can be tracked within an array of acoustic receivers. The receivers generate very accurate positions for tagged fish, and allow us to map tagged fish movements. The receiver signals had shown that one particular fish (T06) was often in a particular area. The research team dropped a baited video lander in that area and successfully caught the animal on video. Several minutes of footage revealed that T06 was healthy and behaving normally 4 months after tagging. Even with the acoustic receiver information telling us the general location of the animal, catching live footage of a tagged fish is a notable and rare event that provided valuable information about the effects of barotrauma on this important marine species.

Marine Reserves – New Prohibitions in Place
After a lengthy stakeholder-based process, Ocean Policy Advisory Council recommendation, legislative mandate, commission action (in 2012), and extensive baseline study, Oregon has brought two marine reserves into active status, as of January 1, 2014. Cape Perpetua and Cascade Head marine reserves and the associated marine protected areas rules took effect at the new year, joining Redfish Rocks and Otter Rock marine reserves, which were Oregon's first two marine reserves (implemented in 2012). The new rules for Cascade Head and Cape Perpetua prohibit harvest activities, such as fishing and crabbing, within the boundaries of the marine reserves, and are similar to harvest restrictions already in effect at the Otter Rock and Redfish Rocks marine reserve sites.

MRP staff will be continuing coastwide socioeconomic studies, monitoring of the four marine reserves that are in place, and will initiate ecological baseline studies at the final marine reserve, Cape Falcon, during 2014. Cape Falcon is expected to join the other four marine reserves, effective January 1, 2016.

In anticipation of the new rules going in to place, MRP staff collaborated with the Oregon State Police and the Oregon Fishermen's Cable Committee to distribute boundary locations on electronic thumb drives during this season's crab hold inspections. The information will help commercial fisherman plot the marine reserve sites on their navigational systems. Additionally, fishermen can view and print a summary of the harvest rules, with maps and boundaries, for the marine reserve sites on the Oregon marine reserve website at www.oregonocean.info/marinereserves/rules as well as ODFW website. Similar information is also available in the recently released 2014 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations.

OREGON STATE POLICE

Captain Jeff Samuels, Division Director

January 10, 2014
Following the first season Coast Elk Season, Trooper Andrews (Albany) and Rct. Breen (Salem) began an investigation into the unlawful take of several bull elk. Trooper Andrews was assisted by Trooper Freitag (Salem), Trooper Stone (Roseburg) and Trooper Baimbridge (Roseburg). The troopers were able to determine multiple subjects trespassed on private property, both on foot and with the use of an ATV, to kill and retrieve a trophy class bull elk. In addition to the large bull, several smaller bulls were killed and either not tagged or tagged with other subjects' tags. Seven subjects were cited criminally in lieu of custody and one subject was lodged in jail on the following charges: **Unlawful Take/Posses Bull Elk (3 counts), Criminal Trespass II (4 counts), and Loaning/Borrowing of a Big Game Tag (4 counts).** Four sets of antlers and two rifles were seized.