



ODFW Field Reports - updated

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission
February 12, 2016

EAST REGION

Bruce Eddy, Region Manager

Blue Mountains Mule Deer Project

Earlier this month, 140 mule deer in the northern Blue Mountains were collared with GPS transmitters as part of ODFW's effort to gather more precise information on mule deer populations, their distribution, summer and winter ranges and migration corridors. Data from the GPS collared mule deer will replace an older population model and conventional wisdom about mule deer in the Blue Mountains. In the long run we hope this effort will eventually allow us to better align season and tag recommendations with actual mule deer distribution.



This a continuation of GPS collaring reported to you last March, when ODFW collared another 500 mule deer does between Prineville and Ontario. Collectively these collars will yield 1.5 million precise locations of mule deer over the next five years and allow the first monitoring of doe survival in much of the Blue Mountain Region.

The project complements other ODFW efforts to improve our understanding of Oregon mule deer, including a new quadrat survey method and enhancement projects implemented through the Mule Deer Initiative.

This project is being supported with federal Pittman-Robertson funds and Oregon hunter license dollars. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARnYxDF_fYw

Watershed Scale Habitat Restoration Evaluation

Each year, ODFW biologists count steelhead nests, or redds, in the Middle and South Forks of the John Day River. Both rivers are important spawning and rearing areas for federal ESA-listed (Threatened) Mid-Columbia Steelhead. These counts are used to estimate the number of steelhead spawning in each basin. These estimates, in turn, helps us evaluate the success of the extensive habitat restoration occurring on the Middle Fork John Day where millions of federal dollars have been spent to improve fish and wildlife habitat.

Steelhead redd counts during 2015 were the highest on record for the Middle Fork. We estimate of 3,800 adult steelhead spawned there last year. This is similar to the number spawning in the Middle Fork in 2014 and generally follows an increasing trend since 2008 when our study and much of the habitat restoration effort began. This general increasing trend holds even when we correct for Columbia River and ocean survival, and harvest rates. It suggests habitat restoration is improving the Middle Fork steelhead population.



Billions of dollars have been invested in stream restoration across the U.S. since 1990; the Pacific Northwest has some of the largest investments. At least 17 Intensively Monitored Watershed (IMW) projects,

like the Middle Fork John Day project, have been implemented in the Pacific Northwest to test the effectiveness of habitat restoration actions. This watershed-scale, IMW approach is an effective and reliable means of assessing population-level responses for the ESA-listed species inhabiting these waters. The John Day evaluation effort will continue through 2018.

WEST REGION

Steve Marx, Region Manager



WWMP funds new Willamette Valley acquisition –

The McKenzie River Trust, with funding from the Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program, acquired 294 acres of oak savannah in the Long Tom River watershed south of Eugene. The Andrew Reasoner Wildlife Preserve will have a conservation easement held by McKenzie River Trust and the Carnine family will continue to own the land and manage it for wildlife habitat, native plants, and recreational public trails.

The property includes several Oregon Conservation Strategy Habitat types – oak woodland, riparian, and grassland. Strategy Species include Acorn Woodpecker, Chipping Sparrow, Yellow-breasted Chat, Western Bluebird, Slender-billed Nuthatch, and Western gray squirrel.



Highway 42 slide update – A large landslide in December on Highway 42 sent about 300,000 cubic yards of mud, rock and other materials across the highway with a large amount entering the Middle Fork

Coquille River. Effects on fish aren't immediately known, however salmon eggs may have been covered or smothered and sediment can erode gill tissues and reduce the ability of juvenile and adult fish to feed.

ODOT has installed a settling pond for drainage on Panther Creek Road at the east end of the slide. Sediment control dams in the ditches and drainage ways also will help manage sediment.

Fish stocking and monitoring plan for Diamond Lake announced – Umpqua District Fisheries staff have been working with partners – Umpqua National Forest, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Douglas County – to discuss stocking and monitoring options this summer for Diamond Lake. Biologists agreed that stocking reproductively sterile tiger trout and stepping up monitoring will help them control tui chub to maintain water quality and angling.

Staff have applied for grants and the Umpqua Fisheries Enhancement Derby is holding a “fish frenzy” at their annual derby banquet and auction to fund the tiger trout stocking and monitoring. Pending funding, staff will purchase up to 20,000 three-inch and 5,000 eight-inch tiger trout and hire two seasonal technicians to conduct additional removal of tui chub and monitor the tiger trout population.

Rainbow trout will continue to be stocked in Diamond Lake and most likely, angling for tiger trout will be catch-and-release only to protect these fish and maintain their numbers.



INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

Rick Hargrave, Administrator

Information and Education team members, Robert Swingle and Tim Akimoff recently participated in a bighorn sheep capture and relocation operation. Their responsibilities were to accumulate photos, videos and interviews for the purpose of sharing the capture/relocation operation story via social media to ODFW followers and media.

The social media tool, Snapchat was used to post nine videos showing elements of the capture and animal care over the course of the whole day. Through

Snapchat, Tim was able to interact with hundreds of Oregonians who were curious about the process without giving away any crucial elements that might impede the operation. This type of engagement did what Facebook, Twitter and Instagram couldn't do because after 24 hours, all of the videos disappear, and people are not able to save them to their phones. It gave people who follow us on Snapchat a sneak peek at what we're doing. Call it exclusive access to ODFW. This will make the eventual press release, additional videos and photo releases on traditional social media platforms fresh.

We have more than 600 followers on Snapchat who love to see how ODFW works behind the scenes, and those nine videos of the capture operation had thousands of views over those 24 hours. It's a fantastic education tool for engaging with a younger audience who are tired of traditional media-heavy social platforms.

Soon we will post a short one minute, thirty second Facebook video. We will also update the photo gallery for the Wildlife Viewing site. There are several time lapses, 360-degree experience photos and Go-Pro up-close and personal videos to roll out with Bighorn news releases.

OCEAN SALMON AND COLUMBIA RIVER PROGRAM

Tucker Jones, Ocean Salmon and Columbia River Program Manager

Northern Pikeminnow Management Program – managing a native predator to benefit juvenile salmonids

The Northern Pikeminnow Management Program (NPMP), first implemented in 1991, is a collaborative effort between the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, with funding from the Bonneville Power Administration. The primary goal of the program is to reduce predation on juvenile salmon and steelhead emigrating through the Columbia and Snake rivers while maintaining a viable population of the native northern pikeminnow. Continued data collection and analyses indicate efforts to date have been successful.

Based on studies conducted in the 1980's, the NPMP is predicated on the concept that harvesting annually 10 to 20% of northern pikeminnow within the most highly piscivorous size-class (≥ 11 inches) will shift the population structure toward smaller fish that tend to consume fewer juvenile salmonids, over time reducing predation by up to 50 percent. Thus, success of the program depends on maintaining harvest rates within

the 10 to 20% range annually; a target that has been reached in 21 of the 25 years in which the evaluation has been conducted. The early studies also determined that at this harvest rate, populations of the native pikeminnow could effectively be restructured while remaining viable in the short and long terms.

Program Implementation

Because northern pikeminnow are not considered a game fish by anglers, fisheries managers provide an incentive to harvest them in the form of a sport-reward. Each year, from May- September, anglers are recruited to fish for northern pikeminnow. Registered anglers are paid a sum of money based on the number of large, older pikeminnow they harvest. The reward for the first 25 fish harvested by an angler is \$5 per fish. An angler who harvests between 26 and 200 fish will be paid at a rate of \$6 and all northern pikeminnow harvested beyond 200 are worth \$8 per fish. Also, because pikeminnow seasonally congregate near dams in the Columbia and Snake rivers, teams of personnel administered by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) are paid to fish for them from select dams.

To evaluate the program, field teams from ODFW annually tag and release northern pikeminnow greater than or equal to 9 inches throughout areas in the Columbia and Snake rivers. A proportion of these fish are recaptured by participating anglers and by WDFW personnel fishing from the dams. Participants are paid \$500 for each tagged fish they harvest, providing considerable incentive to return marked fish. This information allows ODFW staff to calculate harvest rates. These rates and other data are then used to estimate the percent reduction in predation relative to pre-program levels.

This approach assumes neither the remaining northern pikeminnow population nor other predators in the system are filling the "predatory gaps" resulting from the removal of northern pikeminnow.

Highlights from the 2015 Field Season

During 2015, ODFW field teams tagged and released 1,414 northern pikeminnow. Of these, 133 were recaptured, resulting in an estimated 17.2% exploitation rate and a predicted 32% reduction in predation by northern pikeminnow on juvenile salmon during 2016. Further, data collected during 2015 continue to indicate no obvious response to removals of northern pikeminnow from populations of other predatory fishes (i.e., smallmouth bass and walleye) or the remaining proportion of the northern pikeminnow population.

OREGON STATE POLICE

Captain Jeff Samuels, Fish & Wildlife Division

Oregon State Police Fish & Wildlife Troopers have been busy this winter enforcing a variety of regulations encompassing several different priorities. The following are a few examples of this work:

A Tillamook Fish & Wildlife Trooper responded to a complaint on Sand Lake where five subjects were reported retaining every crab they were catching. Upon arrival, the subjects were contacted with 70 Dungeness crab; of which 59 were undersized. One subject took responsibility for all the crab and was cited for **Take/Possession Undersized Dungeness Crab**.



Fish & Wildlife Troopers based out of Bend responded to a report of a bull elk apparently in distress due to deep snow levels. According to the reporting party, the bull elk had jumped a guardrail and somehow flipped over, causing the bull's antlers to penetrate and become lodged in the snow. Troopers arrived on scene and eventually were able to assist in freeing the six-point bull elk from the snow.

A St. Helens Fish & Wildlife Trooper received a report from an ODFW employee that two hunters shot a swan in the SIWA (Sauvie Island Wildlife Area). The Trooper contacted the suspected hunters as they were leaving the hunt unit and observed a rolled up jacket stuffed in the bottom of one of the hunter's decoy bags. The Trooper confronted the subjects about the unlawful kill and they immediately revealed the swan rolled up in the jacket. The hunters claimed they thought the swan was a goose initially and were not sure how to proceed once they identified it as a swan. One hunter was cited for **Unlawful Take/Possession of a Swan**. The second hunter was cited for **Aiding in a Wildlife Offense**.

An Astoria Fish & Wildlife Trooper conducted a dealer check at an Astoria fish dealer. Almost 7,000 pounds of Dungeness crab from a vessel's offload were checked for size and 251 pounds were found to be undersize although a large portion of the offload had already been processed by the fish dealer. The vessel captain was contacted and issued a citation for **Unlawful Take/Possession of Undersized Crab**

A Grants Pass Fish & Wildlife Trooper worked with a Josephine County Deputy to patrol the Rogue River. They checked one boat that had an undersized wild steelhead. The tag validation indicated that the fish was over 24" and that it was caught below Hog Creek. The fish was in fact less than 24" and they were above Hog Creek where they caught the fish. The angler was cited for **Unlawful Take of Undersized Wild Steelhead**.

Another check of a boat familiar to the Trooper was very interesting in that a substantial amount of blood was observed on a cooler within the vessel, and the operator seemed to be delayed in rowing to the shore. After finally arriving on shore the anglers were separated and questioned about the blood on the cooler and what was in the cooler. Both anglers initially denied catching any steelhead as they had no validations on their harvest tags. Further investigation revealed the anglers possessed pieces of five (5) steelhead. One of the anglers took responsibility for catching all 5. One angler was cited for **Mutilated Game Fish** and **Unlawful Take of Undersized Wild Steelhead**. The boat operator was cited for **Aiding in a Wildlife Violation**.

CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Andrea Hanson, Oregon Conservation Strategy Coordinator

In response to on-going concern that populations of Oregon's two native turtle species, the western painted turtle and western pond turtle, are on the decline, ODFW and turtle conservation partners continued targeted searches for both species within portions of their historical ranges. Turtle surveys in 2015 focused on Clackamas County, employing visual survey methods and dozens of trained citizen volunteers. A specific goal of the survey effort was to locate remnant populations of western pond turtle, a Federal Species of Concern currently undergoing status review by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for consideration for possible listing under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

Turtle surveys were funded in part by an Oregon Zoo Future for Wildlife grant, as well as a generous grant from Oregon Wildlife's Beulah Drake Grant Program. The 2015 survey effort was part of a comprehensive, on-going effort being undertaken by the Lower Willamette Chapter of the Oregon Native Turtle Working Group (ONTWG) to document current distribution of native turtles and better understand turtle demographics and population trends in the lower portion of the Willamette Valley Ecoregion. Portions of Multnomah, Columbia and Washington counties have been surveyed to date.

Turtle surveys in Clackamas County were initiated in

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2014, with about 40 sites surveyed. Surveys in 2015 were conducted at 38 distinct observation points, with each point being surveyed three times during optimal turtle viewing conditions. While at least one western painted turtle was observed at many of the selected sites during at least one of the three survey sessions, only one adult western pond turtle was verified on a single occasion. The western pond turtle was observed at Molalla River State Park in an oxbow pond near the Willamette River. Non-native, invasive red eared slider turtles were confirmed at numerous sites surveyed in 2015.

ODFW turtle conservation efforts extend beyond turtle surveys; much effort was recently put into collaborating with Oregon Native Turtle Working Group members to finalize and publish "*Guidance for Conserving Oregon's Native Turtles Including Best Management Practices.*" This valuable resource provides an overview of Oregon's native turtles including ecology, habitat requirements, and threats faced. The document also provides information on how to create and enhance turtle habitat, and recommended actions during project planning/design, implementation, and maintenance phases. Recommendations are aimed at helping project proponents, land managers and others avoid and minimize unintended harmful impacts to turtles and their habitats during various on-the-ground actions whether it be culvert replacement, vegetation management, or habitat restoration. There is much interest in this document with growing concern about our native turtles.

The ONTWG Lower Willamette Chapter is gearing up for the 2016 turtle survey season. Several Clackamas County sites not yet surveyed are targeted, though the majority of sites are within Washington County. Interested citizen volunteers are again welcome to participate in this important endeavor. Training in survey techniques and turtle identification is planned for March 2016.



Photo Credit: Patrick Birkle