



ODFW Field Reports

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission
September 14, 2018

EAST REGION

Bruce Eddy, Region Manager

Greater Sage-Grouse Population Monitoring

Greater sage-grouse population size and distribution can be monitored relatively easily due to their lekking (communal breeding) behavior. Oregon has been counting sage-grouse on leks each spring since 1941. The first lek officially counted that year has been continuously occupied since then.

This spring biologists from ODFW, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Burns Paiute Tribe, and volunteers with ODFW's Adopt-a-Lek program completed 1,844 ground and aerial surveys at 820 individual leks. These surveys were supplemented with age and gender data determined from hunter-harvested sage-grouse wings to estimate the 2018 sage-grouse spring breeding population.



The 2018 statewide spring sage-grouse population was 10% lower than in 2017 (20,510 to 2018: 18,421). The 2018 sage-grouse population is about 60% of the 2003 estimate (approx. 30,000), 2003 is used as a baseline to assess annual sage-grouse counts.

The negative trend observed statewide was relatively consistent across BLM Districts, with the Baker, Burns, Lakeview, and Vale BLM Districts

all showing reduced numbers. Only the Prineville BLM District experienced an increase (6%).

These results are not unexpected, as sage-grouse reproductive success in 2017 was only one (1) chick/hen, below the long-term Oregon average of 1.5 chicks per hen. This year's population reduction appears to be drought related and consistent with the cyclical variations we typically see in game bird populations.

Oregon's sage-grouse population and demographic data is an important part of private, state, federal, and tribal conservation efforts. A number of organizations that evaluate sage-grouse habitat management and plan restoration efforts use the data. While the effort to conserve sage-grouse populations and habitat in Oregon has greatly expanded over the last ten years to include multiple agencies, organizations, and stakeholders, ODFW's population monitoring program remains the scientific foundation behind these efforts. A detailed report describing trends in survey effort and sage-grouse population size analyzed at the scale of individual Sage-Grouse Core Areas will be released in late August.

Resolving Big Game Agricultural Damage in the 30th Century?

The department, along with many others, is experimenting with the use of high tech cameras and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) to survey and manage natural resources. Use of UAVs for commercial and scientific purposes has increased dramatically over the last 10 years.

A recent effort at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport Unmanned Aerial Systems Range is evaluating the use of a sophisticated drone mounted Forward-Looking Infrared (FLIR) camera paired with image recognition software to identify livestock and big game. If the recognition software can be perfected, use of the drone to move livestock and/or wildlife will be evaluated. If

successful, this could be a tool addressing big game agriculture damage problems.



A number of test flights are being conducted this summer to evaluate camera and UAV platform combinations. Engineers are working with department staff to evaluate how image recognition software might work.

WEST REGION

Bernadette Graham- Hudson, Region Manager

Emergency angling closures, Umpqua Fish District

Two emergency angling restrictions were enacted this summer on the Umpqua and North Umpqua rivers to protect native salmon and steelhead due to high water temperatures and low flows.

July 26 – September 30, angling is prohibited within a 200 feet radius of all tributaries in the Umpqua River and in the tributaries themselves from Scottsburg Bridge to River Forks Boat Ramp. This closure protects salmon and steelhead that tend to keg up around the cooler tributary waters. This same emergency regulation was enacted in 2015.

A “hoot owl” angling restriction was enacted August 6 – September 30 prohibiting angling in the North Umpqua fly-fishing section after 2pm. According to the US Geological Service (USGS) gage at Winchester, it appears we hit the lowest recorded flow in July since records began in 1908. On August 3, the river was at 654 cfs while mean flow for this date is 1,050 cfs.

Both emergency restrictions were widely supported by the public, guides, and conservation groups.

Cole Rivers Hatchery prepared for evacuations due to fires

Cole Rivers Hatchery was put on Level 2 (get ready) evacuation notice on August 7 due to the Miles Fire. Staff worked hard to prepare the hatchery and fish for a possible Level 3 (go) evacuation.

The hatchery had 10,500 pounds of fall chinook and winter steelhead for out of basin stocking in addition to 134,920 pounds of Rogue basin spring Chinook, coho, and winter and summer steelhead. Staff worked with district biologists and the liberation coordinator to haul coastal fall chinook and move baby winter steelhead outside in case of back-up generator failure. Contingency plans were made for the remaining fish. Liberation trucks were fueled and prepped, and trucks from other hatcheries were reserved if needed.

Hatchery staff were commended for their professionalism and ability to stay one step ahead of all the efforts that needed to be done to prepare the hatchery for possible evacuation.



Smoky conditions at Cole Rivers Hatchery due to the nearby Miles Fire.

Aquatic Invasive Species program update

As of August 15, technicians inspected 21,944 watercraft and of those, seven had quagga or zebra mussels and 228 had other types of aquatic invasive bio-fouling. This exceeds last year’s total number of inspections (21,035), and a month remains for the traditional boating season.



In late August, technicians assisted Oregon Department of Agriculture with eradication efforts on a recently discovered population of flowering rush found on private property in Klamath County.

The new property owner noticed these invasive plants in their large pond and contacted Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA). The pond is located next to an irrigation canal, and if flowering rush ever got into the canal, it would spread rapidly. Working together to eradicate this invasive is a great example of the benefit of having a Early Detection and Rapid Response system in place to address aquatic invasive species.

Before this population of flowering rush was discovered, there have only been a few isolated populations found and eradicated near McNary Dam on the Columbia River.

Juvenile Chinook salmon confirmed in North Fork Gate Creek

Springfield fish staff conducted a habitat survey and fish sampling on North Fork Gate Creek in the McKenzie Basin. Previously undocumented juvenile Chinook salmon are confirmed to be present in the creek. It is unknown whether they migrated up from the mainstem or distributed downstream after adult Chinook spawned higher up in the system.

Staff also noted a plethora of rainbow trout fry, Paiute sculpin, torrent sculpin, longnose dace, and a few cutthroat trout. The cutthroat trout were clipped for genetic testing.

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

Roger Fuhrman, Information and Education Administrator

R3 Workshops

Fostering an R3 mindset is the goal of a series of workshops for fisheries staff around the state. The intent is to keep department efforts to recruit, retain, and reactivate anglers in mind when considering angling regulation changes, seasons, access and other actions. Protection of the fisheries resource always comes first. In some cases, though, those decisions can affect fishing participation or angler experience. The workshops, funded by a grant from the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF), focus on the importance of R3 efforts and the connection to funding for fish and wildlife management and conservation. While individual resource management decisions may not have a significant impact on participation in the short-term, the cumulative effect can be tremendous. A prime example is the complexity of regulations common to many states. Over time, the addition of new regulations can affect participation and angler experience. Reversing this trend can be difficult and even harder to sustain. The department's recent regulation simplification effort is a good example. A lot of time and energy was invested in standardizing and simplifying regulations. The benefit, though, will be short-lived unless R3 concepts are understood and considered in resource management decisions. Two workshops were held in August. Additional workshops will be held in September and early October. Results of this project, and another one funded by RBFF, will likely be presented at the RBFF State Marketing Workshop in December.

The second project focuses on establishing a network of fishing ambassadors around the state. The project builds upon the department's successful work with social media "influencers" to promote fishing and hunting. Many of these individuals began posting about fishing and hunting experiences because of their passion for the outdoors. In the process, some of them have built substantial social media followings. The project will help expand their reach by connecting them with local biologists, organizations, volunteers, retailers, and other resources. Not only will this effort increase awareness of fishing

opportunities, it should help retain anglers by connecting them with others who share their interest.

OREGON STATE POLICE

Captain Jeff Samuels, Fish & Wildlife Division

SW Region

The Roseburg Area Fish and wildlife Team completed a several month long investigation into the unlawful taking of black bears with the use of bait during the 2018 SW Oregon Spring Bear Season. Troopers received information of some suspicious activity in the Indigo Unit during the month of May. During the investigation, Troopers located two bear bait stations. During the course of the investigation, Troopers served two search warrants on trail cameras that were seized from the bear bait stations. Troopers were able to identify two subjects associated with the bear bait stations. On August 4th Troopers interviewed the two subjects and obtained confessions. The subjects were criminally cited for Unlawful Take of Black Bear x 2 (taking bear with the use of bait), Hunting Bear with the Use of Bait x 2 and Aiding/Counseling in a Wildlife Offense x 2. Troopers seized two black bear hides, black bear meat and a rifle as evidence.



NW Region

The Tillamook Office and members of the Marine Fisheries Team had been working the Cape Kiwanda area for several weeks in regards to a complaint of illegal fishing activity that had been occurring on a regular basis. A Tillamook Trooper was able to locate a pickup truck and boat trailer on the beach at Cape Kiwanda associated with a dory boat that had been allegedly poaching halibut. The boat was contacted with three male subjects on board and a routine check of catch, license, and tags was done. All three subjects were asked about

the catch and all revealed the same story about catching the one halibut and one ling cod this trip and how fishing was a little slow that day. The captain was informed by the Trooper that Oregon State Police had received a tip there were occasionally extra fish hidden in this boat. A consent search was requested and the captain stated very casually that he had nothing to hide and that fishing had been slow and to go ahead and search the boat. The Trooper checked the obvious coolers and compartments on the boat and then started searching the gas tank area in the stern of the boat. The Trooper noticed one of the three red marine gas tanks was not plumbed with fuel lines to the outboard motor. The whole top of the red steel tank slid off revealing a big stack of eight (8) fresh halibut fillets on ice sitting in a handmade plastic container with a plywood bottom. The captain was ultimately criminally cited for Exceeding the Bag Limit Halibut, Possession of Mutilated Fish, and Fail to Validate Harvest Card. The two crew members were each cited criminally for Aiding/Counseling in a Wildlife Offense. The gas tank and Halibut fillets were seized. The Halibut fillets were donated to the Tillamook County Justice Facility.



East Region

Two Troopers from The Dalles assisted with the Antelope and Big Horn Sheep hunts in the White Horse Unit in Southeast Oregon. Many contacts were made and several hunter harvests were checked. During the five (5) day patrol Troopers utilized their patrol vehicles and a utility vehicle (UTV) to cover very remote locations along the Idaho and Nevada borders. One (1) citation for shooting an Antelope within 50 yards of a motor

vehicle was issued and one (1) warning for hunting prohibited area – public roadway was given. They also called in a dry lightning fire near the Idaho/Oregon border along the Owyhee Canyon. BLM fire crews dispatched a helicopter with a wild land fire crew and a BLM fire crew member told the Troopers later that the fire was able to be contained to just over 700 acres because of the call. During the patrol, the Troopers also contacted a hunting party who had a hunter that was lucky enough to draw an East White Horse #1 Big Horn sheep hunt. The very happy 14-year-old hunter had just harvested his sheep in the remote Trout Creek Mountains. The party was pleased to see Troopers working the remote location, which was approximately 35 miles in from the nearest main road.



CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Andrea Hanson, Oregon Conservation Strategy Coordinator

Deschutes Basin Habitat Conservation Plan

Simon Wray, Conservation Biologist for the East Region, is assisting in the Deschutes Basin Habitat Conservation Plan (DBHCP).

An applicant develops a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) when their actions can cause take of a federally listed species or critical habitat. The HCP lays out the specific activities of the applicant and identifies remedial actions and modifications to their activities that will protect the listed species/habitat. The HCP also includes a list of very specific conservation (protective) measures the applicant is required to follow for the term of the HCP.

The DBHCP applicant is five irrigation districts. The plan will cover their water storage and water diversion actions in the Deschutes and Crooked Rivers, and they are seeking take coverage for several listed fish species and the Oregon Spotted Frog (OSF).

Simon has been involved since 2012. His efforts have included assisting the irrigation districts and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) with conducting OSF breeding surveys, working with the USFWS to assist the irrigation districts in developing the DBHCP (which is still in draft form), and participating in coordination meetings with multiple state and federal agencies and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs.

A final HCP decision (acceptance by the USFWS and issuance of an Incidental Take Statement) is scheduled for July 2019.

Invasive aquatic plant removal, Gail Achterman Wildlife Area

Willamette Riverkeeper is partnering with ODFW's Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program to control Ludwigia (water primrose) on the Gail Achterman Wildlife Area. Extremely aggressive, Ludwigia chokes channels and backwaters, making them impenetrable to fish, amphibians and other native species. It spreads rapidly and very simply by immediately rooting and starting new populations. Ludwigia is an emerging issue along the mainstem Willamette River.



This is the first year of a five-year contract to treat this aquatic invasive, which competes with native Wapato. Ludwigia is being treated by an aquatic pesticide applicator in concert with Willamette Riverkeeper's contractor. Funding comes from Bonneville Power Administration, Meyer Memorial Trust, and OWEB. Back channels and sloughs will be treated, some of which are 100 percent water primrose.

The Gail Achterman Wildlife Area is situated in a Conservation Opportunity Area with three primary Oregon Conservation Strategy Habitats: Flowing Water and Riparian; Wetland; and Forest Opening. Re-establishing and enhancing high-quality native floodplain plant communities will improve water quality and provide slow water refugia during flood events.

Alternative Funding update

The Recovering America's Wildlife (H.R. 4647, S. 3223) is bipartisan, federal legislation that would send \$1.3 billion in existing revenue from the development of energy and mineral resources on federal lands and waters to the Wildlife Conservation Restoration Program. This would result in approximately \$26 million annually for ODFW to implement the Oregon Conservation Strategy.

The bill now has 81 co-sponsors in the House, including Oregon's four Democrats. The Senate version was introduced on July 17 by Senators Risch (ID) and Manchin (WV). The sponsors are just beginning to recruit co-sponsors.

Western Pond Turtle Surveys

Agency staff completed twelve Western Pond Turtle surveys for the pilot year of the western Oregon-wide monitoring study. Western Pond Turtles were verified at three survey sites of the twelve.

MARINE RESOURCES PROGRAM

Caren Braby, Marine Resources Program Manager

Collaborating to monitor a hypoxia event

Starting in May 2018, the Department started receiving our usual seasonal calls of concern – dead crab were being observed here and there along the coast, washed up on the beach, and in crab pots. Some were molts, but some calls were reporting in fact dead crab. While we expect mortality in all of our fish and wildlife species each year, mortality in Dungeness crab has in recent years become a signal of hypoxia (low oxygen) events off the Oregon coast. Therefore, when the reports started this spring, Department staff communicated with researchers and industry to keep abreast of the evolving situation.

A central figure in this story is Dr. Francis Chan, researcher and faculty at Oregon State University. His recently awarded grant, with collaborators from ODFW staff, includes funding to deploy oxygen sensors on crab pots, in collaboration with the Dungeness crab fleet. Because the fleet patrols the waters every day during the season, they are naturally trained experts on making observations of seasonal patterns. They also have ready access to the ocean and can easily install the oxygen sensors on their gear, making their time at sea beneficial for the fishery and research, simultaneously.

Another central figure is Al Pazar, formerly a commercial Dungeness crab fisherman, who now conducts annual surveys for the International Pacific Halibut Commission, as well as other activities including serving on the Oregon Coordinating Council on Ocean Acidification and Hypoxia. At each halibut survey station, Al takes a reading of bottom oxygen, so that halibut abundance can be compared to environmental signals. This year, the survey regularly showed very low levels of oxygen.

Other notable and valuable assets we have in Oregon are the Newport Hydrographic Line (also known as the "Peterson Line" named for Bill Peterson who started the line over 20 years ago) and the Endurance Array, part of the national Ocean Observing Initiative.

These multiple sources of data were pulled together during the summer months by Department staff to confirm and track what was in fact a hypoxia event. In retrospect, it is likely that this event was the cause of pulses of dead crab washing up on shore, and flocking of crab into several of Oregon's estuaries, presumably on the search for oxygen-rich waters. The Department's work to understand these patterns is both fascinating and important, as we apply sustainability principles to our management. The 2018 event is the fourth year of unusual ocean conditions that are challenging our understanding of normal.

**END OF FIELD REPORTS FOR
September 14, 2018**