EAST REGION
Bruce Eddy, Region Manager

Lower Deschutes Fire Restoration
The invasion of non-native, annual grasses has led to extensive loss of wildlife habitat. Cheatgrass is the most prolific, and now dominates between 50-70 million acres of habitat throughout the Western United States. In the Columbia Basin, cheatgrass has affected up to 3 million acres; which accounts for 50-75% of the remaining shrub-steppe habitat type. The ecological impacts of these annual grasses are wide-ranging, but competition with native vegetation and more frequent, higher intensity fires are the most prominent.

Oregon’s Deschutes River Basin has certainly experienced the effects of the latter. Two large fires in 2018 burned a total of 111,000 acres in Sherman and Wasco counties, including 18,000 acres that make up the Lower Deschutes Wildlife Area (LDWA). To reduce the threat of future catastrophic fires and combat the ongoing invasion, ODFW staff collaborated with several land management agencies, private landowners, and conservation groups, most notably the Oregon Foundation of North American Wild Sheep (OR-FNAWS) and Oregon Wildlife Foundation (OWF). Together, these partners are undertaking a grassland restoration project on nearly 40,000 acres of private, state, and federal lands in the lower Deschutes Basin.

The restoration project is occurring in multiple phases. The first phase of treatment involves aerial application of herbicide that specifically targets annual grasses. Surveys on the treated acres inform the next step, subsequent reseeding of native vegetation. Private lands within the Deschutes River canyon were sprayed fall of 2018, with reseeding scheduled for 2019. State and federally managed lands were treated this fall and will be surveyed for reseeding in spring 2020. Project managers are optimistic, especially in areas with strong residual native grasses, that this collaborative approach will lead towards sustained improvement in desired habitat conditions in the Deschutes Basin.

Baker Sage-grouse Local Implementation Team
Greater sage-grouse are a species of conservation concern in eight eastern Oregon counties, and population levels are particularly concerning in Baker County. Current data indicate that sage-grouse populations in this area have declined by approximately 75% since 2005. To address these declines, ODFW established Local Implementation Teams (LIT) in 2011 throughout the range of sage-grouse in the state, including Baker County. Membership on the Baker LIT is inclusive and diverse, including key personnel from local state and federal agencies, county government, non-governmental organizations, and private landowners.

The Baker LIT completed a Comprehensive Sage-grouse Threat Reduction Plan in 2017. This plan, along with broad partnership support, served as the underlying framework that secured a $6.1 million Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board
(OWEB) Focused Investment Partnership (FIP) grant. Over the next six years, the FIP grant will address three categories of actions: 1) vegetation and habitat management, including treating invasive plants; 2) education, engagement, and coordination; and 3) conducting research to understand threats to sage grouse. Through this comprehensive approach, these actions will target an increase in the quantity and quality of habitat and ultimately the sage-grouse population.

The majority of sage-grouse priority areas are on private lands, so voluntary actions by landowners will be essential to success. Project proposals will be accepted on October 15 and March 15 annually, and must be located in the FIP planning area and promote sage-grouse habitat. Projects will be funded based on their proximity to sage-grouse breeding areas (leks) and how they can expand previous treatment areas. To initiate a project on their property, landowners are encouraged to reach out to any of the FIP partner agencies.

**Miller Lake Lamprey**

Oregon has a rich heritage of unique native species, and the Miller Lake Lamprey is no exception. Occurring only in the Klamath Basin, the Miller Lake Lamprey is the smallest predatory species of lamprey in the world, averaging just three (3) to six (6) inches in length. However, early perceptions on the impacts of this lamprey largely outmatched its size. In the 1950s, resource managers became concerned that the native lamprey compromised fisheries in Miller Lake, because they parasitized (fed on) the introduced trout.

In 1958, the fishery managers applied the chemical toxaphene to Miller Lake to eradicate this species. The following year, a barrier was constructed in Miller Creek approximately one half mile downstream of the lake to prevent lamprey from moving back into the lake. Biologists assumed the eradication efforts were successful for several decades until the Miller Lake Lamprey was rediscovered in the Miller Creek, upper Williamson, and Sycan river drainages in the 1990s.

Following the rediscovery, the Miller Lake Lamprey was placed on the State of Oregon’s Sensitive Species List and it is a conservation strategy species. In 2005, ODFW adopted the Miller Lake Lamprey Conservation Plan, which led to the removal of the exclusion barrier in Miller Creek. Efforts to reintroduce Miller Lake Lamprey into Miller Lake and its tributaries have been ongoing since 2010.

Although Miller Lake Lamprey have yet to recolonize the lake, they are persisting in the tributaries into which they were reintroduced. Although the abundance of Miller Lake Lamprey in these tributaries remains low, the ultimate goal is that this unique native species will once again recolonize the lake and persist in the long term.

**Snake River Basin Chinook Salmon Surveys**

With all the technological advancements in fisheries science, sometimes the most valuable data is gathered by simply walking down a stream. The Grande Ronde and Imnaha Rivers, Oregon tributaries to the Snake River that remain connected to the ocean, once supported large runs of spring/summer run Chinook salmon. In the late 1950’s, estimates of spawning salmon exceeded 10,000. Early fisheries managers developed these estimates by walking down the streams where salmon spawn, counting the visible nests (called redds) where eggs are laid. The number of redds are directly correlated with the abundance of spawning salmon.
Several decades later new generations of biologists conduct the same surveys, continuing to generate an important long-term dataset. While the stream reaches and redd counts have not changed, several things have. Instead of just ODFW biologists, today’s surveys are a largely collaborative effort that also includes biologists from the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Nez Perce Tribe, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Forest Service, local watershed councils, and private landowners. Surveyors also collect biological samples that include scales for aging and tissue for genetic analysis, and scan for tags that tell an informative story about the journey of an individual salmon.

Like other Columbia River basin populations, Oregon’s Snake River basin salmon have fluctuated during the past several decades. After dropping from peak counts in the 1950’s to less than 2,000 returns in the mid-1990’s, population numbers rebounded to levels suitable for reopening sport fisheries in several tributaries between 2009 and 2016. However, during the past three years, Chinook salmon returns have declined once again. In 2019, biologists estimate that around 3,500 Chinook salmon returned to the Grande Ronde and Imnaha basins.

WEST REGION
Bernadette Graham-Hudson, Region Manager

Coquille Valley Restoration Project Update
The China Camp Creek Project (C3P) and Winter Lake Restoration Project (WLRP) were completed in 2017 and 2018, respectively. More restoration and remedial work was completed on these projects in recent weeks.

More surface rock was placed on 2,100 feet of the new berm on the China Creek canal due to erosion impacts from last winter and late spring. Another 3,700 feet of small channels have been installed on ODFW and China Camp Gun Club properties in Unit 2, further improving fish access to floodplain habitats and reducing ponding of water that might produce mosquitoes. Finally, three derelict steel pilings and two rotting culverts were removed from downstream of the C3P tidegates that were installed in 2017. These actions complete the earthmoving work on both the WLRP and C3P projects.

The C3P made critical improvements to infrastructure with tidegates, berms, and canals reconstructed to meet current fish passage criteria, while providing for improved water management that benefits both agriculture and fish and wildlife habitat. The WLRP focuses on conservation by restoring wetland functions and tidal flow to improve overwintering habitat for threatened coho salmon and migratory birds.

Riparian and wetland plantings accomplished in the fall of 2018 on the WLRP were surveyed this summer, and survival exceeded 70 percent overall. Follow-up plantings began in mid-October, and wrapped up recently.

Project monitoring includes fish and wildlife use, water quality, water elevations, vegetative cover and survival, and channel evolution/migration. This monitoring is scheduled to continue for at least the next five years.
Snakes Removed from Roseburg Residence
Umpqua Wildlife District staff responded to a request from OSP Fish and Wildlife Officer to remove 28 rattlesnakes and one king snake from a residence in Roseburg. The reptiles were discovered during a search for game law violations.

The resident did not have a wildlife holding permit for the rattlesnakes, and possessing king snakes is prohibited by law. The resident was cited for multiple game law violations and charges were also being considered for the illegal possession of the snakes.

The snakes were housed overnight in the Roseburg district’s shop and released the next day in the area where the resident said he originally collected the snakes.

Bee Diversity at Gail Achtermann Wildlife Area
Data on native bees collected at Gail Achtermann Wildlife Area (GAWA) was finalized for this year. Bees were curated and submitted to Oregon State University for final identification and verification.

GAWA is a Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program property near Salem.

Bee diversity was not as prolific as hoped, but in general was quite good given the weedy composition of the areas surveyed. As native forbs reestablish in areas opened up from invasive plant competition, we anticipate bee numbers to increase. Bees using resource on the area include small carpenter bees, metallic sweat bees, mason bees, leaf cutters, and long-horned bees.

Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program Updates
The Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program (WWMP) recently protected two important properties in the Willamette Basin. The Smithfield Oaks property is a fee title acquisition and will be held by the Polk Soil and Water Conservation District. This property is approximately 180 acres of oak savanna and oak woodland and is located near Baskett Slough National Wildlife Refuge. The Creswell Oaks property is protected with a conservation easement held by the Center for Natural Lands Management. This 1,600 acre property is a working lands project and provides habitat for the largest known population of Oregon Vesper Sparrow in the state.

Both of these projects came to the WWMP after initial restoration work through the US Fish and Wildlife Service’s Partners Program. The Partners Program engages in voluntary, non-regulatory habitat restoration on private and tribal lands. WWMP staff work closely with the Partners Program to identify potential opportunities, and have collaborated on numerous projects. We anticipate continued partnership with the Partners Program in 2020.
Beaver Relocation Could Help Oregon Spotted Frogs

Beavers causing damaging in one area of Jackson County were relocated in late October to Parsnip Lakes in the southeast corner of the county. The lakes are a series of old beaver ponds and dams void of the animals for about 10 years.

Those ponds may contain the only population of Oregon spotted frogs, an Oregon Conservation Strategy Species, in the Rogue Wildlife District. Southern Oregon University (SOU) biology Professor Michael Parker monitors these frogs and reports the population has been declining since beavers left the area. With the absence of beavers, the ponds are choked with vegetation, likely impacted the frogs’ ability to reproduce and thrive. Professor Parker, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and Jakob Shockey of Beaver State Wildlife Solutions approached Rogue wildlife staff with a proposal to relocate the damage causing beavers to Parsnip Lakes. Staff complied with agency beaver relocation rules, and ODFW veterinary staff examined the beavers and gave them a clean bill of health. Wildlife Division and the West Region Manager agreed to the proposal.

Shockey relocated the three male beavers – an adult, juvenile, and young of the year – and as of mid-November, the beavers have stayed in the area. Staff are hopeful that female beavers may also move into the area. Beaver relocation can be tricky as the animals are vulnerable to prey while on land, and it is not uncommon to disperse. Shockey and Professor Parker continue to monitor the area. If the beavers can re-establish a colony, staff is hopeful the Oregon spotted frogs will begin to rebound.

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

Roger Fuhrman, Information and Education Administrator

ODFW, Duck Club Join Forces For Waterfowl Workshops

On October 26 and 27, I&E staff delivered two sold-out Adult Duck Hunting workshops in partnership with a duck club in Turner, OR. Twenty-five students participated in a live morning hunt at the club followed by sessions on field
dressing, cooking, calling, gear, duck biology and behavior, and marsh ecology. Experienced local duck hunters volunteered as duck-blind mentors and Cameron King from US Fish and Wildlife Service lent a helping hand on all sessions Sunday. Participants had plenty of shots on ducks, bagged six birds, and got to taste freshly seared duck breast alongside a hot BBQ lunch. Both days ended with a round-table discussion where staff and students discussed highlights from the day, likely challenges for beginning duck hunters and sportsmanship in duck hunting. The workshop went really well. Landowner, hunters, and mentors all gave positive feedback on the day and we even got the students to wash off their own waders.

Looking For Customer Feedback about MyODFW.com
ODFW launched its new website, myodfw.com two years ago. Analysis of the original ODFW website, https://dfw.state.or.us/ showed that most people came to the site for information about hunting and angling opportunities, as opposed to other agency business. So, the new website was designed to offer easy access to information about recreational opportunities. We want to know if it is meeting customer needs, so we are conducting a user survey. The survey takes about four minutes and asks our customers what works and what does not. We ask what is easy to find, what is hard to find and what is missing from the site. Customers and ODFW staff received an email in mid-November, asking them to take the survey. Everyone may access the survey on the MyODFW.com home page.

ODFW Grows Archery in Schools Program
Education staff promoted the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) at a statewide conference in October for physical education teachers. Interest in the program continues to grow. At recent NASP certification trainings in Lebanon and Medford, the team trained 29 new instructors and brought 18 new schools into the program. They also reactivated a school, refreshed a lapsed instructor, and added a foster family activity group as a NASP participant.

Prior to 2016, NASP in Oregon was coordinated by volunteers. In 2016, there were four (4) schools certified and 16 certified instructors. This year, there are 62 certified schools and 122 active and certified instructors.

OREGON STATE POLICE
Captain Casey Thomas, Fish & Wildlife Division

Members of the Fish and Wildlife Division participated in a South Coast saturation on the evening of the last day of deer season. Seven subjects were cited on charges related to hunting after shooting hours and nine firearms were seized. Seven Troopers and two volunteers participated in the saturation. Two Wildlife Enforcement Decoy operations were conducted, and a Fish and Wildlife enforcement aircraft was utilized as part of the saturation.
Fish and Wildlife Troopers responded to a hunting trespass complaint in rural Stayton. The on-scene investigation revealed that a subject shot and killed a three (3) point buck deer from the roadway and on private property with the aid of artificial light. The suspect vehicle left the area, returned a short while later and drove out into a field in an attempt to retrieve the deer. A neighbor who obtained a partial license plate, vehicle and suspect description, confronted the suspects. A search warrant was obtained for a vehicle and a residence in Salem; resulting in numerous firearms, flashlights, a spotlight, shell casings, and ammunition being seized, including a short barreled semi-automatic rifle. One suspect was cited and released for Take/Possession of Buck Deer, Waste of a Game Mammal, Criminal Trespass II and for Possession of a Short Barreled Rifle. Another suspect was interviewed and cited for Criminal Trespass II.

The deer was seized and taken to the Union Gospel Mission in Salem where it was donated as charity.

A Fish and Wildlife Sergeant gave a presentation to the first grade class at Haines Elementary School. The Sergeant spoke about his job as a Fish and Wildlife Officer and about big game mammals and furbearers. The Sergeant brought lots of hides and skulls for the students to view and ask questions about.

CONSERVATION PROGRAM
Andrea Hanson, Oregon Conservation Strategy Coordinator

Habitat Enhancement for Native Turtles in Salem
In October, ODFW partnered with the City of Salem to remove a dead-end asphalt trail that cut through the middle of important habitat for Western pond and Western painted turtles at Minto-Brown Island Park. The project was conducted to increase nesting opportunities for both of these native turtle species which are considered State Sensitive-critical and are Strategy Species in Oregon.

ODFW, park volunteers, the Salem Audubon Society, and the City of Salem have been collaborating to monitor the turtles and enhance habitat at Minto-Brown Island Park as part of a Competitive State Wildlife Grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Oregon Wildlife Foundation provided matching funds for the habitat restoration.
The trail removal area will be reseeded with native plant species and a fence was built to protect the area from disturbance. A new plant hedgerow will help discourage park visitors from entering the area.

Other actions that have improved conditions for native turtles at Minto-Brown this past year include placement of additional basking structures, nesting area enhancements, and removal of non-native invasive red-eared sliders. It is hoped that with these efforts, numbers of both turtles will increase in the park, and the public will continue to have many opportunities to view and appreciate Oregon’s two native freshwater turtle species.

**Mid-Columbia Wildlife District Western Pond Turtle Work**
Within the Mid-Columbia wildlife district, Western pond turtles inhabit many ponds in Mosier. District Staff has been studying these turtles and their movements since 2015 through VHF telemetry and scute marking to gather basic life history information and population dynamics. Staff switched to marking with passive integrated transponder (PIT) tags in 2018 to streamline the process and reduce human error.

Upon capture, turtles are scanned for presence of PIT tags to determine whether it is an initial capture or 2018 recapture. On initial capture, PIT tags are injected into the turtle’s left bicep, and any scute markings indicating the turtle had been captured prior to 2018 are noted. In previous years of study, biologists gave each captured turtle unique notches on select areas of the shell or scute marks. The first mark designated the pond where the turtle was first captured followed by a unique second and/or third marking. Because the pattern on each turtle’s plastron is unique, photographs can serve as an additional method of identification.

For the 2019 trapping season, a new pond was added to the six that have been previously sampled. Staff completed 75 trap nights with 75 total captures, 35 new PIT tagged individual turtles, 40 PIT tag recaptures, and 56 scute mark recaptures. Western pond turtles in the Mosier area appear to be stable over the last few years, however with climate change and rural residential development, staff will continue trapping and monitoring.
Port Blakely’s Molalla Demonstration Site
North Willamette and Conservation staff participated in a tour of Port Blakely’s Molalla Demonstration Site to see conservation measures proposed in their draft Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and Stewardship Agreement (SA). Staff was very impressed by the conservation measures being implemented.

For example, small non-fish bearing perennial streams are being protected with a 50-foot long buffer along the entire stream length (20-foot no-harvest zone and 30-foot managed zone, plus no disturbance of associated wetland, seeps or unstable soils). In contrast, current Oregon Forest Practices Act regulations for this steam classification has no requirement for a tree-basal area retention buffer, only understory vegetation retention is required with a 30-foot Equipment Limitation Zone.

Fisher Research in Southern Oregon
ODFW staff are researching fishers in partnership with Oregon State University researchers who have been sampling 100 sites in Northern California and Southern Oregon. ODFW staff are sampling 63 additional sites in the Applegate Wildlife Management Unit. Staff began the fisher research in 2017 using Pittman-Robertson funds. In 2018, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service awarded a new three–year grant (through State Wildlife Grants) to expand the research objectives and project funding.

The study’s goal is to estimate fisher density and document distribution in Southern Oregon, and to understand fisher response to wildfire and forest management. Results will provide a scientific basis for management decisions on fisher in Southern Oregon.

Density estimates are obtained through genetic capture-recapture. Sites consist of a small box containing bait, a track plate and a hair sampling device. Sites are checked weekly for six weeks during September and November and collected hair samples are sent to the National Genomics Center for Wildlife and Fish Conservation for DNA extraction and species identification, plus individual fisher identification. DNA allows researchers to document fishers that return again to the site(s). Sampling methods also allow presence information to be documented on other non-target forest carnivores.
While the study is ongoing, 2017 results provide a glimpse into research results. From 95 hair samples collected, 38 were fisher that represented 14 individual fishers – 10 males and four females. This capture-recapture analysis of the hair samples shows a population estimate of 27 fishers in the 222 square kilometer study area, and density estimate of 12 fisher per 100 square kilometers.

Fisher are an Oregon Conservation Strategy Species found in forests and riparian corridors and known for preying on porcupines. Fisher range throughout North America, and in Oregon is found in the Klamath, Coast and Cascade Ranges. The Coast Range population is native while the Cascade Range population is from reintroductions done in the 1960s and 1980s from British Columbia and Minnesota. Fisher in this study are native to the Klamath Range of Southern Oregon and Northern California.

ODFW Art Contest and Show a Success
ODFW’s annual art show at Duck Pond Cellars was attended by about 250 visitors including several artists who submitted their work for the Habitat Conservation, Upland Game Bird, and Waterfowl Stamp art contests.

Last year’s Habitat Conservation Stamp winner, Medford artist Karin Wares, took first again this year with her oil painting of canary rockfish, an Oregon Conservation Strategy Species. John Conner’s painting of greater sage-grouse won the Upland Game Bird contest, while contest newcomer, Jeffrey Klinefelter took first in Waterfowl with his painting of redhead ducks.

Duck Pond Cellars released their Conservation Cuvee Lot 7 featuring the 2019 winning artwork of Franklin’s bumble by Wares. Duck Pond donates $5 for every bottle sold to ODFW’s Conservation Program. For the first time, two entries tied for the People’s Choice Award: Leach’s storm-petrel by Kip Richmond and black oystercatcher by Terri Neal.

OCEAN SALMON AND COLUMBIA RIVER PROGRAM
Tucker Jones, Ocean Salmon and Columbia River Program Manager

Northern Pikeminnow Management Program

The Northern Pikeminnow Management Program (NPMP), first implemented in 1991, is a collaborative effort between the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the National Marine Fisheries Service. The program aims to increase the population of pikeminnow in the Columbia River Basin to reduce impacts on salmon and steelhead populations. As of 2021, the program has made significant progress in restoring populations, with several key milestones achieved in the past decade.
The goal of the program is to help mitigate for the impacts of the Columbia River hydropower system by reducing predation on out-migrating juvenile salmon and steelhead. This is achieved by annually removing approximately 15% of mature Northern Pikeminnow from the population via a sport reward angling fishery, as Northern Pikeminnow are known to prey heavily on juvenile salmonids.

As part of its evaluation of the NPMP, each year ODFW staff collect diet samples from piscivorous fishes, including Smallmouth Bass, Walleye, and Northern Pikeminnow. Over the last three years, project staff have examined the stomach contents of over 5,500 individual fish to identify prey items, in particular looking for the presence of salmonid bones. Stomach samples are obtained via boat electrofishing at various locations throughout the reservoirs of the Columbia and Snake rivers and by subsampling the catch of the angling fisheries at The Dalles and John Day dams. During sample processing, in addition to salmonids, lampreys are frequently identified as prey fish. Lampreys are a group of fishes of regional concern and the draft Oregon conservation plan for lampreys identifies predation by other species as a limiting factor toward achieving desired status.

While the majority of lampreys observed in the diet of Northern Pikeminnow are juveniles, all life stages of lampreys; including larval and adult, have been found. Results show that 9% of all Northern Pikeminnow stomach samples from John Day Dam contained lampreys in 2018. In comparison, 17% of Northern Pikeminnow diet samples obtained in 2018 from electrofishing in the reservoir downstream of John Day Dam contained lampreys and 9% of Walleye samples contained lampreys from the same downstream locations. Over the last four years, we have noted a seasonal shift in the diet composition of Northern Pikeminnow removed at both dams. When comparing diet information with available fish passage data, it appears that Northern Pikeminnow are generalist predators that consume the most seasonally abundant prey items. Interestingly, the presence of lampreys in the diets of Northern Pikeminnow has declined in recent years.

In conclusion, the NPMP appears to have auxiliary benefits in reducing predation on lampreys as well as salmonids through removals of Northern Pikeminnow. Our research is providing new information and filling data gaps for lampreys, a poorly understood group that are both ecologically and culturally important to the state of Oregon. Although funding constraints will prohibit extensive data collection in the future, we hope to further explore this topic as we analyze results from our recently completed 2019 field and laboratory seasons.