Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission
April 17, 2020

EAST REGION

Bruce Eddy, Region Manager

Mt. Hood Community College Fisheries Technology Program.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Fisheries Technology Program (Program) at Mt. Hood Community College (MHCC) has had a long and successful relationship. The department was involved at the inception of the Program and continue to be involved through an annual curriculum advisory committee. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife employs many MHCC graduates.

Stock Photo: Photo was taken prior to COVID-19 social distancing guidance being put in place during March 2020.

The Program provides a hands-on approach to learning fisheries biology, fieldwork, and husbandry required for a career with the department. It operates its own on-campus hatchery, providing students a unique hands-on classroom experience. Students can learn first-hand about egg incubation, fish rearing, water quality management, and fish pathology.

The relationship between the Program and the department goes back over 40 years. Students assist department hatcheries during spawning, egg work, and adult handling, serve in internships and participate in volunteer roles with local Salmon and Trout Enhancement Program (STEP) biologists.

The Program produces qualified, knowledgeable, and skilled hatchery technicians and biological science assistants, ready to leap in to the workforce.

Zumwalt Prairie Elk

The Zumwalt Prairie lies in the southcentral part of the Chesnimnus Wildlife Management Unit (CWMU). It is mostly private property managed for summer/fall livestock grazing and surrounded by the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. Chesnimnus elk historically utilized National Forest for both summer and winter ranges. The CWMU Management Objective (MO) is 3500 elk.

Our surveys found 5300 elk inhabiting the CWMU in 2011 with 3500 on the Zumwalt Prairie alone during spring months. As early as 2009, some landowners were becoming concerned about the shift of elk from National Forest to private land. We began working with landowners then to address their concerns; however, it was clear by 2011 that our efforts were not working. At that time, we upped our efforts by hiring hazers, issuing damage tags and instituting damage hunts to move elk off areas of concern.

Unfortunately, hazing proved unsuccessful and stopped in 2013.

We worked with Zumwalt landowners to provide more hunter access to private land in an effort to lower the CWMU elk population back to MO and encourage elk to stay on the National Forest.

Beginning in 2016, we established seven new Zumwalt private land antlerless hunts scattered throughout the fall. Each had 110 tags and focused on reducing hunter crowding and putting constant pressure on the elk using private land.

Recent surveys have found that CWMU elk numbers have dropped considerably and are back to MO with 600 to 800 on private land during summer. Elk still move onto Zumwalt private lands during early spring months but landowners find the lower number tolerable. Activity on the National Forest during fall does move some elk back onto private lands until weather forces them to move to canyon winter ranges.

Zumwalt landowners are still concerned about the number of elk that show up on private lands in early spring and fall, but are pleased with success of the program and lower elk numbers. With their agreement, we are proposing to reduce antlerless hunts and tag numbers in 2021.

2020 Ducks Unlimited Conservation Achievement Award Recipient

Longtime department employee and 33-year manager of Summer Lake Wildlife Area (SLWA), Marty St. Louis, has been awarded Ducks Unlimited Conservation Achievement Award during the 85th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference. The annual Award recognizes individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the conservation and restoration of North America's wetlands and waterfowl.

Photo taken prior to March 17th when social distancing protocols were put in place. Award recipient, Marty St. Louis pictured in the center.

Marty has worked with Ducks Unlimited (DU) staff numerous times over the years, completing nearly 7,500 acres of wetland conservation projects on SLWA. The award comes as a well-deserved capstone to a nearly 40-year career with the department. Marty will officially retire from the department March 31st, 2020. After retirement, Marty plans to remain in the Summer Lake area and serve as a resource for the next manager and conservation oriented constituents.

WEST REGION

Bernadette Graham Hudson, Region Manager

Elk Hoof Disease in Southern Oregon

A hunter killed an adult cow elk that was limping in the Indigo Unit east of Sutherlin and brought the hoof into the Douglas Wildlife District office. The elk hoof tested positive for Treponeme Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD). It is the first known elk to test positive for this disease in the district and is the southern-most location of a confirmed case in Oregon.

Another harvested elk from the same herd is being tested for the disease, and three others have been seen limping (calf, cow, bull). Efforts are underway to harvest these elk and collect biological samples for analysis.

A sample from another elk harvested near a ranch north of Oakland is also being tested for TAHD. Wildlife staff is working with landowners to try to remove any remaining limping elk and get hoof, blood, and fecal samples to the ODFW Wildlife Health Lab for analysis of TAHD.

Elk with TAHD can have deformed overgrown, broken, or sloughed hooves. These lesions can be painful and cause limping or lameness when walking. Elk that show these signs do not necessarily have TAHD as there are many other potential diseases or injuries that could cause similar abnormalities to elk hooves. Staff is asking the public to report elk observed limping or lame.

Twice returning steelhead female illustrates power of integrating brood stock

On the weekend of March 7, 2020, this healthy wild winter steelhead full of eggs was caught and released about 15 miles up the Sandy River. This is an example of the strength of this iconic fish species, and why fish biologists are excited about integrating the genetics of wild fish in hatchery programs.

First caught and donated by an angler in the lower Sandy River, a tag was inserted behind the dorsal fin in January 2019 at the Sandy Hatchery. The fish was held at the hatchery for two months until mature enough to spawn. Hatchery staff expressed the eggs out with air and released the fish unharmed into the lower Sandy to migrate downstream to the Columbia and out to the Pacific Ocean. This fish survived in the ocean for another year and matured again, making the journey back upstream to the Sandy River this spring.

The genetic aggressiveness to spawn, survive the ocean for another year, and return to spawn again is what biologists want to keep integrated into hatchery production by spawning wild fish with hatchery fish each year. This story shows how extreme care and handling of wild fish from the minute they are landed by anglers, placed in a live box, picked up by ODFW, transported to the hatchery, held for months until mature, live spawned, and then released back into the river still gives these fish a chance to come back heathy the next year.

Marine mammal team adjusts work to comply with COVID-19 protocols

Like many ODFW programs, the Marine Mammal Program crew is adjusting their activities to comply with COVID-19 safety protocols.

Due to challenging logistics involved in removing sea lions that are predating on listed salmon, steelhead and sturgeon at Bonneville Dam, removal activities at Bonneville have been suspended for the near future.

With restrictions on travel, restaurant, and campground closures, it is almost impossible to run traps without breaking social distancing rules. To a lesser extent, the same is true of efforts to remove California sea lions from the Willamette River to keep them from feeding on upper Willamette wild winter steelhead.

Fortunately, fewer sea lions are moving into the rivers this year, which is providing some relief to federally listed fish. During a boat survey conducted March 9 from Willamette falls down to the mouth of the river, staff observed only three California sea lions, which have since left the area. For the time being, the Willamette sea lion staff is taking a "wait and see" posture toward Willamette sea lion removal, depending on both the presence and/or absence of sea lions and guidance for COVID-19 responses.

Cormorants on the Astoria-Megler Bridge

During a meeting on March 5, the ODFW Avian Predation Coordinator shared potential management options for double-crested cormorants with Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) staff regarding federally mandated safety-related inspections of the Astoria-Megler Bridge this year. ODOT's permit from US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) only allows for take of 1,500 nests, though the colony supported about 3,500 nests last year. ODOT must either

conduct inspections in a manner that does not result in take of more nests than permitted, a potentially challenging and perhaps unlikely task, or systematically haze cormorants from the entire bridge before they have an opportunity to nest. The department strongly recommended the latter option, though the cost of this plan may be prohibitive for ODOT, and in any case, it may be too late in the season to setup an effective hazing plan from the ground up.

The ODOT inspections provide an opportunity to attract double-crested cormorants back to the federally managed colony site on East Sand Island, where many of the birds currently using the Astoria-Megler Bridge appear to have originated. The size of the bridge colony increased from 333 to 3,542 pairs during 2014-2019, coinciding with federal management of the double-crested cormorant colony on East Sand Island. A substantial body of information suggests federal management on East Sand Island likely contributed to dispersal of cormorants to the bridge, located 12 km upriver from the colony site on East Sand Island.

During a recent meeting, the department requested the federal agencies attempt to attract cormorants back to East Sand Island as ODOT performs the bridge inspection this year and bridge maintenance scheduled for 2021–2023. Similar requests have been repeatedly rejected by the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), the agency that administers East Sand Island. Further, the Corps has previously stated it has no authority to address the cormorant issue on the Astoria-Megler Bridge in general, and thus could not assist ODOT to attempt to push cormorants back to East Sand Island.

The available data suggest moving double-crested cormorants back to East Sand Island would appreciably reduce cormorant consumption of federal and state ESA-listed salmonids, the primary goal of the original federal management plan for East Sand Island. As a result of cormorant dispersal to the Astoria-Megler Bridge and other colony sites, ODFW estimates the original federal plan for the East Sand Island cormorant colony may have resulted in no change or even an increase in cormorant consumption of salmonids in the Columbia River estuary.

West Region wolf work

In the Douglas Wildlife District, staff attended the Douglas County Wolf Advisory Committee meeting to hear/share updates on wolves in the county by ODFW, USDA Wildlife Services, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Commissioner Tom Kress also discussed the status of the county's application for Oregon Department of Agriculture grant funds towards wolf depredation prevention and compensation. There was a good discussion on preventative measures landowners can implement now to deter wolf depredation on livestock. Much of that focused on removing and disposing of bone/carcass piles on their property.

In the North Willamette Watershed District, staff is now actively monitoring areas of the Cascade Mountain range for the presence of wolves, as biologists believe it is only a matter of time until they show up around Mt. Hood and Willamette Valley. With that prospect in mind, wildlife staff placed 10 to 20 trail cameras at various locations around the Mt. Hood National Forest in an effort to pick up early detections that would help determine how much time, energy and resources may be needed to effectively manage wolves around the northern Cascades. So far, the trail camera network, which has been in place since last October, has produced no wolf "hits", only deer, elk, bears, and other animals.

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

Roger Fuhrman, Information and Education Administrator

COVID-19 Response

During the month of March, the Information and Education Division (I&E) was busy helping the agency respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. We lent Michelle Dennehy, Fish and Wildlife Public Information Officer, to the statewide COVID-19 joint information center for the first week of the crisis. In addition, we have provided information resources to staff and customers through a variety of means.

For staff, we set up a quick reference page on the agency intranet to compile all the emails including support, advice, and directions given by the agency for employees. For our customers, we set up a COVID-19 closures and cancellations page on MyODFW.com. This page was instrumental in communicating about a variety of changes for customers including cancellation of workshops and classes, salmon and steelhead fishing closure on the Columbia River, closures of fish cleaning stations, and other facilities that may draw crowds. In a further effort to support social distancing, we removed the trout stocking schedule from the web. Field observers report that angler effort was more spread out as a result. We also put out a number of press releases and social media posts about our offices being closed to the public and changes to spring bear hunting. I&E also produced a variety of signs to be posted statewide in support of closures and social distancing.

To put an ODFW spin on this advice, we encourage anglers to "Sturgeon Distance" – remain the length of a mature sturgeon from each other—good advice from the "Sturgeon General."

As we move through this difficult time I&E will continue supporting our staff and customers as the virus changes how our agency operates.

ODFW hosted a successful NASP tournament in Albany on March 7

A total of 119 students attended the National Archery in the School Program event in Albany. First place overall female was awarded to Carli L. of Bend High School with a 286/300 and first place overall male went to Logan D.M. with a 283/300. Bend High School took home the "Sturgeon Award" for top overall school.

The event was covered by the local paper in a positive story, see it at https://democratherald.com/news/young-archers-on-target-at-state-contest/article_33801943-27b2-5fcd-aeaf-3678a4c89340.html?fbclid=IwAR36q6CL35-8rFV3ws-pTZscoew2meKDReA5EbiodL5uTgw6fb34KeJqpd0

The department would like to thank the vendors who attended including USA Archery, Scholastic 3D Archery, Oregon Hunters Association, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Hunter Education Laser Shot and Sportsman's Warehouse of Albany.

Podcast explores wildlife and disease
We're living through a global pandemic and coronavirus likely jumped to humans through contact with wildlife. To better understand this, ODFW's The Beaver State Podcast hosted state wildlife veterinarians Dr. Colin Gillin and Dr. Julia Burco to talk about zoonotic diseases that jump from animals to humans as well as the wildlife diseases they monitor here in Oregon. Listen at https://directory.libsyn.com/episode/index/show/beaverstatepodcast/id/13619591.

OREGON STATE POLICE

Captain Casey Thomas, Fish & Wildlife Division

Fish and Wildlife Troopers conducted a winter range patrol in the La Grande area. During the patrol, an OSP Pilot observed a subject actively using a spotlight. The subject was ultimately located and stopped for a traffic violation and suspicion of illegal hunting. The subject was found to be *Driving while Suspended- Misdemeanor* and a meth kit was observed in the vehicle. The subject was taken into custody and transported to the Union County Jail. The subject was issued violation citations for *Casting Artificial Light while Armed and Failure to Install IID*. Three firearms were seized from the vehicle.

A Fish and Wildlife Trooper was called in to assist with a crashed plane on the ocean shore, just north of Tenmile Creek. The pilot of a single-person Cessna 140A was on a return flight from Lakeside to North Bend, when the aircraft experienced engine failure. The pilot was unable to correct the issue while airborne, and was forced to perform an emergency landing. The pilot was uninjured and able to hike out of the area to call for assistance. Troopers responded to the scene on ATVs. The Douglas County Sheriff's Office also assisted at the scene. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) authorized movement of the aircraft. The Troopers utilized an ATV tow winch to right the plane. The aircraft was towed to harder-packed sand, and secured on scene for later daylight recovery.

A Fish and Wildlife Trooper in Grants Pass received a complaint on his day off of a possible illegal bear take. The reporting party sent a screenshot of small bear that he felt might be undersize/age. Follow up revealed that the size of the bear was not illegal, but the take was. By checking ELS, it was determined that the suspect had purchased a fall bear tag at 4:07 pm on the opening day of archery season. The electronic validation of the tag took place at 4:21 pm on the same day. This led to the belief that the bear was shot earlier in the day and the tag was purchased to cover the illegal harvest. During the interview, the suspect admitted to shooting the bear at approximately 11:00 am. The subject was cited for *Unlawful Take/Possession of black bear.* A shoulder mount and 26 packages of bear sausage were seized.

CONSERVATION PROGRAM
Andrea Hanson, Oregon Conservation Strategy Coordinator

Denman Herptile Coverboard Project & Walk
In late February, Southwest Regional Conservation Biologist Jade Keehn hosted a herptile walk at Denman Wildlife Area for the public. The goal of this event was to create new wildlife watching opportunities for non-game species, while also allowing staff to solicit future project volunteers from the attendee pool.

During the two-hour event, attendees saw and heard chorus frogs as well as a few long-toed salamanders. Ultimately, this event and associated news releases resulted in over 40 volunteer inquiries for our citizen science reptile and amphibian monitoring project.

Of the volunteer 40 inquiries, ODFW (in association with our WDFW project co-sponsor) was able to train twenty-six volunteers, generating over 100 hours of donated time. Volunteers will help to complete a citizen science project to monitor 152 herptile survey locations over two-week survey periods from March through April.

Monitoring efforts will provide baseline distribution and abundance information for reptile and amphibian populations on Denman Wildlife Area. So far this year, volunteers have documented sharp-tailed snakes (see belly photo below), alligator lizards, bullfrogs, chorus frogs, western skinks, western fence lizards, common garter snakes, and long-toed salamanders.

Photo credit: Marc Hayes, WDFW

Polk County site visits
Northwest Willamette Wildlife District (NWWD) with assistance from a South Willamette Wildlife District wildlife biologist conducted a site visit for a NWWD Wildlife Habitat Conservation and Management Program property in Polk County. This was the first time the property has been inspected in 16 years and it appeared to be actively

managed for wildlife habitat.

During the visit, staff noted multiple Oregon Conservation Strategy Species including Western meadowlark and acorn woodpecker. Staff will be working with the landowner to update the management plan and identify new habitat. With WWMP staff, biologists also conducted an amphibian egg mass survey at a WWMP property in Polk County (approved in FY21, in process). This baseline wildlife data will inform the future development of the habitat management plan. Northern red-legged frog, Northwestern salamander, and Pacific Tree frog egg masses were counted.

Coastal Marten Surveys

The taxonomy of Oregon's martens (*Martes* spp.) has changed drastically in recent years. What was once called the **American Marten** (*Martes americana*) in much of the western United States is now known to be a separate and distinct species: the **Pine Marten**, (*Martes caurina*). Until 2009, two subspecies of martens were documented in Oregon—*Martes caurina caurina* in the Coast Range and Cascade Mountains, and *Martes caurina vulpina* in the Blue Mountains of northeastern Oregon. However, further genetic analyses revealed that two subpopulations of martens in the Coast Range of southwestern Oregon are more closely related to the Humboldt Marten, (*Martes caurina humboldtensis*). The **Humbolt Marten** is represented by approx. 100 individuals in the California subpopulation, and is under consideration for listing as a threatened population under the ESA.

The departments' biologists are working to better define the distribution of Humboldt Martens within the Coast and Cascade Ranges. This information will be used to update management recommendations, and to provide more accurate information in the Oregon Conservation Strategy.

Recent game camera monitoring has not documented Humboldt Marten beyond the known distribution in Coos and Curry counties; however, staff have been documenting numerous flying squirrels, spotted skunks, and other small mammals and carnivores such as weasels, bears, bobcats, and mountain lions.

The Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (OCRF) Advisory Committee met virtually on March 23 for its first meeting. The agenda included introductions from the nine committee members, discussion of ODFW's role in conservation, overview of the Oregon Conservation Strategy, and fundraising plans to kickstart the Conservation and Recreation Fund. A recording of the meeting will be available soon.

OCEAN SALMON AND COLUMBIA RIVER PROGRAM

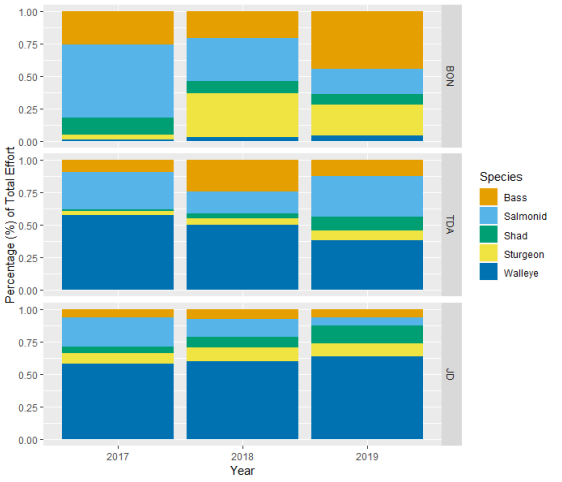
Tucker Jones, Ocean Salmon and Columbia River Program Manager

OSCRP's "Zone 6" Recreational Creel Survey captures warmwater fishery, too!

The department has been sampling the recreational fisheries in the impounded mainstem Columbia River upstream of Bonneville Dam to the Oregon/Washington state line (aka, "Zone 6") for the last four years. The survey focuses on salmon, steelhead, and white sturgeon; however, it also provides useful insight into warmwater sport fisheries, particularly the recreational walleye fishery.

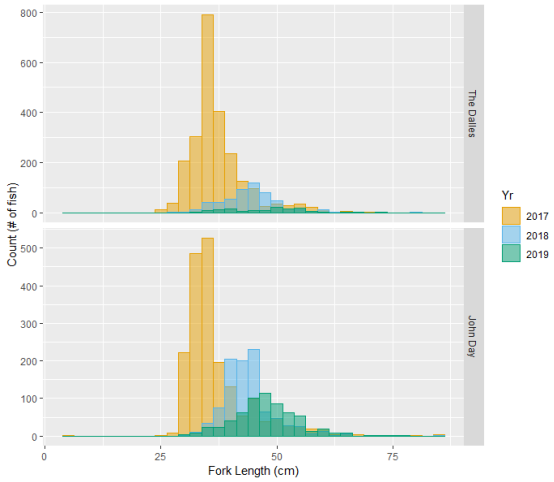
The survey encompasses the entire impounded lower Columbia River mainstem, and includes both sides of the river. The Zone 6 Fishery is broken into four reaches separated by federal hydropower dams with each reach representing its own distinct sampling unit. Since 2017, we have

been sampling the fishery using an access-access design. Each day creel clerks collect effort and catch data via angler interviews at a specific launch or bank angling location. Creel effort by location is approximately proportional to angler effort.



The figure in the lower left column below shows that the majority of angler effort in The Dalles and John Day pools over the last three years, has been expended targeting Walleye. In those two pools, more effort has been spent targeting Walleye than all other species combined. In 2019, anglers took an estimated 8,801 and 10,577 walleye trips in The Dalles and John Day pools, respectively.

Walleye catches in 2019 continued to be high though not matching the pace of 2017 or 2018. During 2019, anglers harvested ~8,829 and ~9,634 walleye in The Dalles and John Day pools, respectively. An estimated 18,463 walleye were harvested across both pools between April and December of 2019. These estimates of effort and catch represent a conservative view of the fishery since a productive late-winter/early spring fishery occurs prior to the start of our creel survey for anyone hardy enough to brave the weather.



Walleye length data taken from harvested fish indicates that the majority of these fish come from a strong 2015-year class. The figure above shows fish length distributions for The Dalles and John Day Reservoirs for 2017 -2019. The peaks show the 2015-year class moving through the fishery.

Our monitoring efforts have demonstrated the substantial value of the "Zone 6" Recreational Creel to provide insight into fisheries dynamics beyond salmon and steelhead fisheries.

END OF FIELD REPORTS FOR April 17, 2020