ODFW Field Reports

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission
March 14, 2025

East Region

Nick Myatt, Region Manager

Warner Basin Aquatic Habitat Partnership successes

The Warner Basin Aquatic Habitat Initiative is an OWEB Focused Investment Partnership (FIP) project led by the Lake County Umbrella Watershed Council; ODFW is an active partner in this effort. The OWEB FIP program invests in restoration actions in areas around that state that have been identified as ecological priorities such as Warner Basin.

The goal of the Warner Basin Aquatic Habitat Initiative is focused on restoring tributary and lake habitat for the Warner Sucker and Warner Lakes Redband Trout. The Warner Basin Partnership collaborates with the local community, landowners, and water users to address existing factors that limit important habitat and to aid in recovery of these fish species.

To date $5.8 million has been spent or obligated to complete six fish passage projects, three screen installations, 12 irrigation infrastructure reviews and three riparian enhancement projects. Through the implementation of these projects, Warner Sucker, Redband Trout and other native fishes have access to 97 miles of suitable habitat and are protected from screened irrigation ditches.

Looking downstream on Deep Creek at the O'Keefe diversion and fish ladder.

In the next two years, the partnership will restore fish passage and provide screening at five more diversion barriers on Deep and Honey Creeks. This will benefit the agricultural community by increasing irrigation efficiencies in an ever-drying climate as well as allow native fish populations to complete their life histories. Effectiveness monitoring at these completed fish passage projects for Warner Sucker and Redband Trout have provided managers with useful information on restoration techniques that will be applied elsewhere.

Looking upstream on Deep Creek at the Starveout Diversion. Two roughened riffles and sluiceway.

Once the FIP is completed, this partnership will follow the Warner Basin Strategic Action Plan to continue improving habitat conditions and reducing threats for these fishes to continue towards an eventual ESA delisting of the Warner Sucker. The goal is to restore stable, self-sustaining metapopulations of Warner Sucker in Deep, Twentymile and Honey Creeks and this FIP has been monumental in working towards these goals.

Bighorn sheep disease monitoring and research project updates; various locations

East and West Region wildlife staff, volunteers from the Wild Sheep Foundation, and partner agencies conducted captures and disease monitoring from January to February as part of ongoing efforts to protect and manage bighorns in various locations around the state.

This multi-year, collaborative effort is in response to Mycoplasma Ovipneumoniae (M.ovi) outbreaks that have been impacting bighorn sheep herds throughout the West for more than a decade. Given that there is no cure for M.ovi, ODFW and partners have applied a novel approach, "Test and Remove," to managing the disease in bighorn herds in Oregon.

"Test and Remove" is a process whereby ODFW looks for carriers of M.ovi among captured and marked sheep. If tissue samples from marked sheep are found positive for M. ovi, the Department returns at a later date – prior to the next lambing season – to remove those individuals from the population.

ODFW staff release a bighorn ewe along the John Day River Canyon in January 2025. ODFW photo.

Lower Owyhee Test and Remove

The Lower Owyhee test and remove capture took place from Jan. 3 to 5, marking the second year of captures for this herd. The capture operations were very successful with 38 bighorns captured. Disease samples tested at Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (WADDL) confirmed that seven were positive with M.ovi and need to be removed prior to the start of lambing season in April. This capture brings the number of bighorns sampled to 80 individuals from the estimated population of 92.

Ten Mile and Rattlesnake Test and Remove

The Ten Mile/Rattlesnake test and remove capture was conducted on Jan. 6. This is the fourth year of test and remove with a total of 15 sheep sampled this year. For the Ten Mile herd, two consecutive years of good lamb recruitment were observed, and three lambs were sampled. All three lambs were positive for M. ovi. This is a significant setback, and conversations are in progress on what actions to consider moving forward.

The Rattlesnake Canyon portion captured two more adult ewes and ten yearlings. Both adult ewes were not positive for M.ovi while a majority of the yearlings were positive for M.ovi. The combined total samples for Ten Mile and Rattlesnake include 98 bighorns with an estimated adult population of 105. This is a cooperative project with Nevada Dept. of Wildlife (NDOW) where test and remove work is also being done in the Santa Rosa Mountains with documented interchange between the states. NDOW has captured a comparable number of bighorns as well.

Other bighorn sheep capture efforts:

Hart Mountain with USFWS

The Hart Mountain capture which focused on herd monitoring took place from Jan. 7 to 8 adding 23 bighorns to the list of active collars. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the Hart-Sheldon Refuge issued a news release with photos of the capture: https://www.fws.gov/refuge/hart-mountain-national-antelope/news


ODFW Veterinarian Julia Burco measures the body condition of a bighorn sheep in January 2025. USFWS photo.

Deschutes Translocation to Nevada
The Deschutes River Canyon translocation to Nevada took place from Jan. 20 to 21 with NDOW. A total of 40 sheep were captured, transported and released in the Capital Mountain herd in northwest Nevada. Nasal swabs were sent to WADDL to make sure they were clear of M.ovi and all samples came back negative, as expected for the Deschutes herd.

John Day Research
The John Day Canyon capture with researchers from the University of Idaho took place from Jan. 22 to 23. This was the second year of a project being conducted by graduate students focusing on lamb recruitment and vegetation surveys to evaluate resource selection. For this capture 40 bighorn were sampled and collared including 38 ewes and two rams, additional ram collars will be deployed later this spring. A short video ODFW's Information and Education staff about the John Day project can be found here: https://youtu.be/XN6pt_Fe9MM


During the John Day capture (Jan. 2025), Heppner District staff invited a group of 4H Club children to participate and learn about ODFW's field work. ODFW photo.

Hells Canyon Initiative
The Hells Canyon capture took place from Feb. 8 to 10 with capture sites along the Imnaha and Snake Rivers. A total of 41 bighorn ewes were sampled and collared with some of the sheep being re-captured to replace collars that were no longer functioning. This capture was part of the 30-year ongoing collaborative Hells Canyon Bighorn Sheep Restoration Initiative with Idaho Fish and Game, Wash. Dept. of Fish and Wildlife and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla and the Nez Perce Tribe.

Blue Mountains elk capture and research

The East Region Wildlife Research Program oversaw efforts to capture 220 cow elk in the Blue Mountains in January. This effort was a follow-up to previous capture efforts in eastern Oregon. In total, 800 cow elk have been captured and equipped with a GPS collar since 2015.

Cow elk with GPS collar, ODFW photo.

The primary objective of this project is to use movement data to delineate population boundaries which will allow better estimation of elk populations and allocation of harvest. Elk location data will also be used to identify timing of migration, migration corridors, barriers to movement, and priority areas for highway crossing structures. The collaring effort will also allow estimation of survival rates and cause-specific mortality of elk throughout eastern Oregon. All the data collected as part of this project is critical for development of integrated population models that will improve and modernize elk monitoring and management in Oregon.

Capture crew and helicopter work a cow elk. ODFW photo.

The collection of GPS location and survival data will also lead to a better understanding of elk habitat use throughout eastern Oregon. Understanding how elk habitat use varies in space and time is critical for effective habitat management and for predicting the effects of climate change on elk populations.

West Region

Chris Kern, Region Manager

Central Point screen shop updates screens in Obrien, Fort Klamath

Two gravity fed ditches used for irrigation and stock water were replaced last summer by the Central Point Screens Shop.

The **Sun Creek screen** in a bull trout reintroduction section of Sun Creek (in Fort Klamath) was replaced last summer. This is a gravity fed ditch used for irrigation and stock water and takes 15 cubic feet per second (cfs).

The irrigation ditch had a horizontal fish screen that meets current criteria but did not function correctly due to large sediment loads in Sun Creek. The screen was replaced with a vertical flat panel fish screen that is cleaned with a traveling brush powered by a paddle wheel. The screen has five screens measuring five feet long by three feet tall.

This project was funded in cooperation with Trout Unlimited.

Large sediment loads in Sun Creek did not allow the fish screen to work properly.

The new vertical flat panel screen is cleaned by a rotating brush powered by a paddle wheel.

The **Obrien screen** on the West Fork of the Illinois River is a gravity-fed ditch used for irrigation and stock water and takes 6.86 cfs. The irrigation ditch had an old paddle wheel driven rotary drum fish screen installed in 1972 that did not meet current criteria.

The screen was replaced with new dual bay paddle wheel driven rotary drum fish screens. One screen is 4' long, the other is 5' long, both are 30" in diameter within the same concrete structure. The bypass was also updated from a four-inch pipe to a 10-inch pipe that meets current criteria.

These projects were fully funded by ODFW with PCSRF funds, General Fund, and Fish Screens Program funds.

The old screen on the West Fork Illinois River was replaced in 2024.


The new fish screen has a dual bay paddle wheel driven rotary drum.

Bull elk rescued at Arch Cape

On Wednesday evening, Feb. 12 staff from ODFW, Oregon State Police, Cannon Beach Fire District, Cannon Beach Police Department and the Mist-Birkenfeld Rural Fire Protection District's Large Animal Rescue Team worked together to dart a bull elk, remove rope and buoy tangled in its antlers and relocate it from the beach at Arch Cape.

The agencies conducted a pre-operation and safety briefing. Once resources were in place on the beach, ODFW successfully darted and secured the elk. Mist-Birkenfeld and Cannon Beach Fire assisted ODFW and OSP staff to load and transport the elk off the beach and into an ODFW trailer. The elk was transported and successfully released in the Coast Range of Clatsop County.

ODFW and OSP monitored the elk daily during the week, and the necessary resources and conditions for a safe operation aligned on Wednesday afternoon. ODFW would like to thank all the agencies involved for their assistance in making this operation a success.

ODFW social media posts and responses to media inquiries emphasized that wildlife capture and immobilization involve various risks and each situation is unique. ODFW biologists are highly trained in these procedures and carefully consider the risks in their decision-making.

The rope and buoy in the elk's antlers likely came from yard decorations. One of the main causes of elk and deer entanglement is items that come from yards. Holiday lights are particularly problematic along with hammocks, dog lines, tomato cages, volleyball/soccer nets, and items like ropes/buoys used for decoration. ODFW messaging also encouraged people to put away unused items to help prevent wildlife entanglement and keep the danger to wildlife in mind when selecting yard decor.


ODFW staff work to disentangle the elk.

Assistance from several partners made this operation a success.

Annual derby raises funds for fish related projects in the Umpqua Basin

Umpqua Fish district staff participated in the annual Umpqua Fisheries Enhancement Derby that ran from Jan. 29 – Feb. 1. Staff helped with planning and executing events including Student Day, Kids Day, guide meetings, banquet, and the winter steel fishing competition.

At Student Day, 42 high school students and several educators from four area schools attended discussions on fish biology, habitat restoration, wildlife monitoring, and timber practices in the Archie Creek Fire landscape, law enforcement, and habitat monitoring.

During Kids Day, 5th grade students from Eastwood Elementary School were treated to angling at Cooper Creek Reservoir. ODFW stocked fish immediately before the event and guides participating in the Derby helped the students catch fish. The students also rode in several jet boats piloted by local anglers.

More than 750 people attended the much-anticipated annual Friday night banquet. Well over $100,000 was raised through a silent auction, raffle, and oral auction. A large amount was raised for kids' fishing events and a Willie drift boat was sold for $35,000.

Proceeds from the Derby are gifted through grants for fisheries enhancement projects. ODFW has received funds for many projects over the years, including essentials for the South Umpqua Hatchery Winter Steelhead Program such as water, sewer, and electricity with some infrastructure improvements.

High school students and teachers learned about natural resource management within the Archie Creek Fire landscape.

Oregon State Police

Captain Casey Thomas, Fish & Wildlife Division

ODFW and OSP worked together to remove crab line from elk antlers.

Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Troopers and Sergeant assisted ODFW biologists with the removal of an elk in Arch Cape who had gotten its antlers wrapped in a crab buoy and buoy line. ODFW tranquilized the elk, and it was transported to a safe location where the line was removed from its antlers, and it was released back to the wild.

Oregon investigation led to evidence seized in two states.

An Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Sergeant continued following up on Idaho False Application case. In addition to the trophy bighorn sheep and trophy mule deer unlawfully taken by the Idaho resident on falsely applied for Oregon resident tags in 2024, evidence was discovered of an antlerless elk also unlawfully taken on a falsely applied for tag in 2023 and the suspect's wife reported that she harvested a trophy mule deer on what appears to be a falsely applied for Oregon resident tag in 2022. The investigation is still ongoing.

OSP helps free deer stuck underneath truck.

Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife members responded to the report of a deer stuck under a parked truck. They arrived and found a yearling doe wedged above the drive line under the truck. The Troopers and truck owner worked together to free the deer by climbing under the truck, dropping a skid plate to free it's front left leg, then raised the rear of the truck allowing the deer to have more wiggle room. Once the deer was free it wandered towards a field.

Marine Resources Program

Justin Ainsworth, Marine Resources Program Manager

ODFW represented on new U.S. West Coast Take Reduction Team

Based on Section 118 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act, NOAA Fisheries is establishing a U.S. West Coast Take Reduction Team (TRT) as part of a settlement agreement resulting from Center of Biological Diversity v. Raimondo (3:22–cv–00117–JD). Once convened, the TRT will be fast tracked to reach agreement on plans to reduce marine life entanglement in several commercial fisheries.

Kelly Corbett, ODFW's commercial Dungeness crab project leader for nearly 15 years, has accepted a special assignment to represent ODFW on the TRT. Kelly will lead ODFW's policy and management measure development, negotiations, and communications related to the TRT. Marine life entanglement, commercial groundfish and data shop staff along with the MRP management team will support Kelly through this process.

The preliminary scope of the TRT includes addressing entanglements of three strategic marine mammal stocks (Central America/Southern Mexico humpback whales, Mainland Mexico humpback whales, and Eastern North Pacific blue whales) in five commercial fisheries. These fisheries are the federal sablefish pot, California, Oregon, and Washington Dungeness crab pot fisheries, and the California spot prawn pot fisheries.

The TRT will consist of representatives from the fishing industry, Pacific Fishery Management Council, state and federal resource management agencies, the scientific community, and conservation organizations. It is charged with reaching consensus on a Take Reduction Plan to reduce take of the marine mammal stocks within six months of convening.

Due to the broad scope and accelerated timeline, this process is anticipated to be highly charged and challenging throughout and a heavy workload for many within MRP. There are currently four TRT meetings scheduled between early June and mid-November 2025, however that could change depending on the ongoing issues with federal budgets and resources.

ODFW staff plans to regularly engage with Oregon's Entanglement Advisory Committee, Dungeness Crab Advisory Committee and Oregon's participants in the federal sablefish pot fishery throughout the TRT process to get input on proposed measures that have the potential to impact Oregon's main fixed-gear fisheries.

Dungeness crab is Oregon's most valuable fishery. Addressing marine life entanglements in this and several other fisheries in California and Washington is the scope of work for the Take Reduction Team being established by NOAA Fisheries.

Two teams reorganized into the new Nearshore Ecology Program

Recently, the Marine Resources Program (MRP) reorganized the Marine Reserves and Marine Habitat teams into the Nearshore Ecology Program. The new organization culminates the long-term MRP vision to bring efforts focused on marine conservation and habitat characterization under one roof. It will strengthen collaborations, techniques, and teamwork around these two teams historically focused on marine conservation science.

Combining four Marine Habitat and eight Marine Reserves positions better facilitates sharing technical expertise, widens collaborative abilities, and improves teamwork critical to retention and institutional knowledge. The Marine Reserves team conducts ecological monitoring at the reserves and control sites, social science research to understand how people use, relate to and value Oregon's Marine Reserves, and communication and outreach. The Marine Habitat team focuses on understanding nearshore habitats and seafloor communities and contributes to policy development that supports sustainability and conservation.

The Nearshore Ecology Program is interdisciplinary. Though ecological study is central, the program also features a social scientist, an outreach and engagement specialist, and an economist. These three additional arms of the program enable the science to address a wide range of concerns and be understood across diverse audiences.

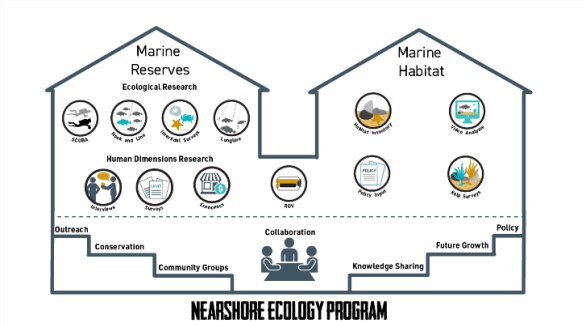
The new program provides a larger umbrella for conservation, expands scientific capacity for future marine conservation needs, and improves collaboration between two key projects using similar research tools and overlapping goals of maintaining marine reserves and monitoring marine gardens and conservation areas. It increases capacity for new conservation items such as community groups supporting marine protected areas and marine conservation areas. And it improves guidance and administrative support for the Marine Habitat team.

Marine Habitat work:

- Conducts field research on nearshore species-habitat relationships that support fisheries, largely through visual surveys (Remotely Operated Vehicle – ROV – underwater video surveys and kelp aerial photo surveys), often securing external funding for these large-scale projects.
- Inventories data on marine habitats.
- Maintains and operates ROV for habitat and Marine Reserves research.
- Reviews and coordinates with other state agencies on shoreline and seafloor development projects, responds to spills, dredging, other issues adjacent to conservation.
- Represents Oregon on the Pacific Fisheries Management Council's (PFMC) Habitat Committee in support of Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act mandates that require the PFMC to identify essential

fish habitat (EFH) of federally managed species and address the effects of fishing and non-fishing actions on EFH.
- Works collaboratively with academics and agencies to understand effect of bottom trawl fishing and spatial closed areas such as Nehalem Bank Essential Fish Habitat Conservation Area and Heceta Bank Rockfish Conservation Area.

Marine Reserves work:
- Monitors fish, invertebrates, kelp, and habitat in the marine reserves and comparison areas with survey tools of volunteer-based hook-and-line fishing, scientific SCUBA diving (performed by the Oregon Coast Aquarium and Oregon State University), ROV surveys (led by the Marine Habitat team).
- Collects oceanographic data in the five reserves to explain species dynamics over time.
- Analyzes human dimension data (e.g., interviews, surveys, focus groups, economic modeling, census information) to track changes in attitudes, knowledge and awareness of marine reserves, and how human communities on the Oregon coast are changing.
- Collaborates with academic and NGO partners to expand capacity for scientific studies and publications such as the resilience of reserves to climate change.
- Provides multiple volunteer opportunities in marine reserves surveys for public outreach and engagement – this two-way-street also allows the efficient surveying of the reserves.



Thanks to Amanda Gannon, Marine Reserves Sea Grant Fellow for this infographic.

Brookings field office moves to the Port of Brookings Harbor

The ODFW MRP Brookings field office welcomes everyone to stop into our new location at 16333 Lower Harbor Road in the Port of Brookings Harbor. Our staff are very pleased with the new office centralized in the port with our commercial and recreational workstations at the foot of our doorstep. The building we are now renting was fully remodeled from a vacation home to an office space that includes a lobby waiting area. Previously, ODFW rented an office in a shopping center for the last 24 years.

Today, the Brookings field office staff is a small group of one Port Biologist, one Port Biologist Assistant, two to three seasonal ORBS (Ocean Recreational Boat Survey) samplers, and one permanent ORFS (Ocean Recreational Fisheries Survey) sampler. Staff sample the catch from commercial and recreational fisheries in Brookings, Gold Beach and Port Orford. Data gathered is used for in-season fisheries management and contributes to long-term datasets used in stock assessments. In addition, the Brookings office sells commercial licenses and permits, and answer questions and phone calls from this location.

The Port of Brookings Harbor is located at the mouth of the Chetco River on the Southern Oregon coast. It is said to have one of the safest bars on the west coast. The port's economy is driven from a large recreational fishing community and year-around residents. The commercial fleet has significantly reduced operations in recent years as the local fish plant operations have decreased production. The ports

of Gold Beach and Port Orford continue to host robust Fixed Gear Fisheries including the Nearshore Live Fish Fishery.

The new Brookings field office is just across the lot from the Port of Brookings Harbor office.

A former vacation home was remodeled for office space for the Brookings staff.

Valerie Stephens (South Coast Port Biologist), Trinity Bartel (PSMFC ORFS), and Trinity Sylvester (South Coast Port Biologist Assistant.)

End of field reports for March 14, 2025