



ODFW Field Reports

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission
April 18, 2025

East Region

Nick Myatt, Region Manager

Ochoco district conducts multi-agency wolf bio-blitz

Each winter, districts with current or historical wolf observations set out to assist the wolf program with their annual minimum count. Annual winter counts by ODFW staff began in 2009 and are typically conducted in the last week of December through the end of February. This count can be difficult for districts, such as the Ochoco district, who do not have many (if any) radio-marked wolves or known packs. Therefore, on February 20, Ochoco district wildlife staff put together a multi-district, multi-agency effort to look for wolves across the district during the 2024 wolf count period.



Recording tracks in the snow using Survey123, Feb. 2025. ODFW photo.

Over 30 participants participated in the efforts including US Forest Service (USFS) staff from the Deschutes, Ochoco, and Sisters Ranger Districts, Prineville Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services, The Dalles and Heppner ODFW offices, and two non-agency affiliated volunteers (Crook County compensation committee and one previous ODFW intern).



ODFW meeting at the Prineville office before the wolf bio-blitz on Feb. 20, 2025. ODFW photo.

The participants were split into eight groups, each assigned different survey areas, to cover as much potential wolf habitat as possible. Survey groups utilized snowmachines, snowshoes, and cross-country skis. Participants were instructed on how to identify wolf tracks and sign, in addition to other species to look for while out surveying. Survey123 and paper data sheets were used for data collection.



Bobcat track was identified during the bio-blitz, Feb. 2025. ODFW photo.

Unfortunately, no groups reported any wolf sign during the surveys, however, ten other species were identified: coyote, elk, deer, Snowshoe hare, American marten, turkey, bobcat, cougar, feral horses, woodpeckers (unknown species).

Roughly 120 miles were covered over the course of the day, despite less-than-ideal conditions (too little snow in some places, and too much snow in others). In the end, it was perfect timing to get federal partners out of the office and into the field on a blue-bird day.

Murderer’s Creek mule deer nutritional condition research

ODFW is conducting research on mule deer to determine the relative effects of weather, nutrition, habitat, and predation on mule deer populations in the Murderer’s Creek herd range. A key component of this research is to assess body fat levels of adult female mule deer entering and exiting winter. Body fat levels in deer is driven by the effects of weather and available habitat, with fat levels varying annually. Fat levels are a key determinant of pregnancy, twinning rates, fawn survival and adult survival.



ODFW research biologists collect body fat measurements on a mule deer in the Murderer’s Creek herd range.

Mule deer have been captured in the Murderer’s Creek herd range for three consecutive winters. Drought conditions experienced during the summer of 2024 led to poor forage resource availability for deer and resulted in deer having extremely low body fat levels entering the winter of 2024/25. On average, mule deer entered the winter with less than 8% body fat, which is similar to body fat levels of mule deer exiting winter in previous years. Mule deer in late winter

had depleted fat reserves to less than 6% exiting the winter of 2024/25, which indicates that malnutrition and starvation is imminent.



Captured mule deer slung by helicopter to a central processing site in the Murderer’s Creek herd range.

Additionally, six-month-old fawns were on average five pounds lighter entering winter than during the previous two years. The reduced nutritional condition of deer entering the winter of 2024/25 resulted in reduced survival rates compared to previous years. These results highlight how climate change is contributing to increased weather events, such as drought, that are altering forage availability and negatively affecting mule deer population performance and will inform the department’s management considerations into the future.

Central Oregon and Klamath Falls Sports Shows

ODFW staff participated in the two eastern Oregon Sports Shows during March 2025; Redmond and Klamath Falls. Both shows were well attended despite some snowy conditions in Klamath that closed the event early.



Redmond show booth, which was one part of the overall engagement activities new in 2025.

The new and improved booth at the Redmond show was popular for kids and adults and had a high-volume of foot traffic thanks to the ODFW Passport activity and associated prizes and raffle. This idea was rolled out for the Portland show in Feb. 2025 and for the Central Oregon show. The Klamath show this year did not have the same setup as Redmond or Portland but utilized the “paw and skull” kits for people to interact with staff. Similar to the Portland show, a hatchery truck with a large banner and video screen was on display outside the Deschutes County Fair and Expo center.

Sports show attendees asked ODFW staff a wide variety of questions ranging from cougar and wolf impacts on deer and elk, hunter and angler education opportunities, to questions about the transition from Wildlife Management Units to the new Deer Hunt Areas.

West Region

Chris Kern, Region Manager

Palensky Wildlife Crossing: Safe passage for Northern Red-Legged Frogs

The northern-red legged frog is a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Oregon, and one of the Top 5 priority species in the Willamette Valley Ecoregion. Every winter and spring, frogs need to travel back and forth between non-breeding upland habitat in cool, moist forested areas and breeding areas in ponds and wetlands, and this movement is critical to their breeding success. Outside of Portland, northern red-legged frogs must cross US Highway 30, a busy four-lane highway with a center median, to access their breeding grounds. Unsurprisingly, this highway is deadly for the frogs and thousands are killed each year along a five-mile stretch between Linnton and Scappoose.

The Palensky Wildlife Crossing is the first of its kind in Oregon, specifically designed to help northern red-legged frogs and other native amphibians pass safely under the highway. It has taken more than a decade to bring this project to fruition and has relied on the support of a diversity of partners. The biggest hurdle in implementing the project was funding—construction of the crossing cost \$3.6M. Oregon lacks a dedicated funding mechanism for wildlife

crossings, and most federal and state funding sources target motorist safety, so generating funding for projects benefitting smaller species is difficult. It took several years to secure the funds needed for construction. Funders include Bonneville Power Administration, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund, Metro, the Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program, and Oregon Wildlife Foundation.

Construction began in April 2024 and was completed in November 2024. The project was led by the Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce (CREST), in close collaboration with ODFW. The crossing is 132 feet long and passes under all four lanes of traffic on US Hwy 30. Many of the features were designed specifically for frogs and other amphibians, including special vertical tunnels to allow light and moisture to enter the crossing. Nearly 600 feet of channelizing walls help direct frogs and other wildlife to the crossing entrances on both sides of the highway. These walls were specially designed to prevent frogs from getting up onto the highway, while allowing any frogs that are on the road surface to escape into safe habitat on either side. The flat base of the crossing is covered in several inches of natural substrate—soils, bark, sticks and leaves—so that the transition from outside to inside the structure is seamless.

ODFW started monitoring the structure in late November 2024. Frog activity was low during cold weather in early and mid-winter but dozens of frogs have been documented passing through the structure on warmer, rainy nights throughout February and March, including gravid (egg-carrying) female frogs moving down to breeding wetlands and males and females moving back upland post-breeding. Other species have also been observed using the underpass, including Pacific treefrogs, northwestern salamanders, long-toed salamanders, Dunn’s salamanders, western red-backed salamanders, Townsend’s chipmunk, striped skunk, and several species of mice and voles.

ODFW will continue monitoring the structure over the next several years to assess use by northern red-legged frogs and other wildlife.

This information is expected to aid in the design and implementation of other passage structures intended to benefit frog movement, including nearby crossing efforts at Harborton Wetlands and Crabapple Creek.



Palensky Wildlife Crossing under Hwy 30, a busy four-lane highway outside of Portland. Photo by CREST.



The base of the crossing is covered in several inches of soils, bark, sticks and leaves. Photo by CREST.



A northern red-legged frog (gravid female) crosses through to lay eggs at Palensky Wildlife Area. This photo is the first confirmed use of the crossing by this species.

Historic flooding event

On March 16, Oregon was hit with an atmospheric river that caused severe flooding and landslides prompting Gov. Kotek to issue an emergency declaration for the five southwest counties along with a few others.

Several STEP hatcheries were hit hard in the southwest and mid-coast: Morgan Creek on the Coos River, Indian Creek near Gold Beach, Canyonville winter steelhead acclimation site in the Umpqua Basin, and Whittaker Creek fish trap in the Siuslaw Basin. All hands were on deck working hard under challenging conditions at these facilities – District fish staff, STEP volunteers, staff from the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians and staff from the Coquille Indian Tribe. ODFW sincerely thanks everyone that pulled together to address these issues. The cooperative efforts are a great example of effective partnerships supporting fish and wildlife in Oregon.

Indian Creek

The Indian Creek STEP facility suffered damage including a foot bridge that was washed away by high flows and debris. The bridge broke the water supply pipe to the hatch house, but thankfully the 100,000 fall Chinook fry had recently been moved to the raceways. Just a week later the main water supply line broke, so volunteers and staff rushed to move the fish to Elk River Hatchery temporarily while repairs are underway at Indian Creek.

STEP volunteers with Curry Anadromous Fishermen and Gold Beach ODFW staff worked – and continue to work – to repair and mitigate further damage to the facility.



The footbridge to the Indian Creek hatch house was washed away due to the creek flooding.



Downed trees and debris from the washed out bridge broke the water supply pipe at Indian Creek hatch house.



Areas along Indian Creek slide off and into the creek, adding to sediment washing into the fish ladder.

Morgan Creek

In Coos County, storm damage caused a tree to fall at the Morgan Creek STEP Hatchery

severing the water supply line to one raceway. Charleston ODFW staff and volunteers from South Coast Anglers STEP worked to repair the water line, but flows were interrupted again leading to the loss of an estimated 140,000 pre-smolt fall Chinook.

Immediately following the event, ODFW and the Coquille Indian Tribe began coordinating on ways to potentially backfill this loss. Plans are now in place to restore the lost fish at the Morgan Creek facility.



March 16 flooding at the Morgan Creek facility.



This large cedar tree fell at the Morgan Creek facility and severed a water supply line.

Canyonville

In the Umpqua Basin, high flows were of particular concern in Canyon Creek at the Canyonville winter steelhead acclimation site. The access bridge to the fish ladder which is used for broodstock collection was significantly

damaged by high flows and debris. There was also significant under-cutting of the entry road.

High flows required staff from the Cow Creek Tribe and Umpqua ODFW staff to release winter steelhead a few days early. Little loss of fish was documented from the release although some stranding was observed a few days after the release.



The Umpqua Fish District is working with agency engineers to evaluate the damage.

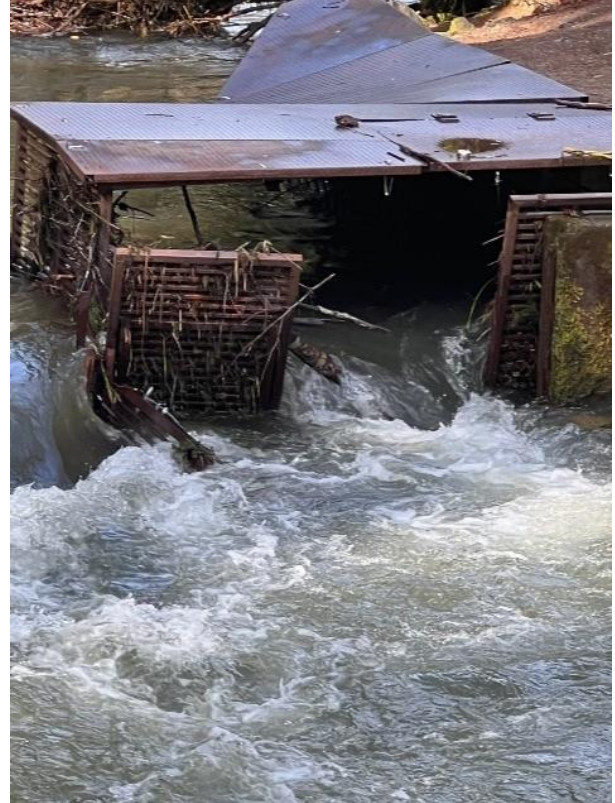


Some outer edges of the entry road are undercut and now have 12' vertical dirt sides.

Whittaker Creek

In the Siuslaw Basin, the Whittaker Creek fish trap was destroyed when the Siuslaw River reached 18 feet, surpassing flood stage and the historical maximum flow for mid-March by

more than 3.5 feet. This trap is used to collect broodstock for the Florence STEP winter steelhead program. Due to the damage winter steelhead no longer be collected for broodstock and spawning will end two weeks early. Thankfully, there are already enough eggs on hand to meet production goals.



The Siuslaw River passed flood stage and the historical maximum flow for mid-March, destroying the Whittaker Creek fish trap.

Discussions begin on North Illinois Valley Strategic Implementation Area

Rogue Fish District staff participated in a meeting to discuss the North Illinois Valley Strategic Implementation Area (SIA) sponsored by the Oregon Department of Agriculture. The SIA is a voluntary program to monitor water quality and identify areas for habitat improvement.

Much of the Deer Creek subbasin is included in the SIA. Deer Creek is a site of ongoing voluntary habitat restoration and is a Rogue District Beaver Emphasis Area. Salmon, steelhead, cutthroat trout, and other native fishes occupy Deer Creek.

Ultimately, SIA data should help identify potential water quality improvement opportunities to complement physical habitat improvement efforts already underway.

Strategic Implementation Areas

Oregon is taking a coordinated streamside management approach to address priority water quality concerns and improve streams for fish and wildlife. The Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) and other state agencies, local partners and stakeholders are coordinating expertise, funding, and resources to improve water quality throughout Oregon. ODA's Strategic Implementation Areas (SIA) initiative was selected to implement the coordinated approach. The SIA process includes:

- Evaluating conditions on agricultural lands.
- Engaging landowners to address water quality concerns on their land
- Monitoring to effectively evaluate outcomes.

Throughout the SIA process ODA ensures compliance with Oregon's Agricultural Water Quality Area Rules (Area Rules) by working with landowners where water quality concerns persist.

SIA's include four key components

- Compliance with Oregon's agricultural water quality program and regulations.
- Voluntary, incentive-based conservation.
- Monitoring to track water quality and land conditions.
- Collaborative partnerships.

What are the Area Rules for my Area?

Visit: <https://oda.direct/AgWaterQualityPlans>. Click on the administrative rules for your area.

Questions? Call ODA's Ag Water Quality Program at 503.986.4700

Strategic Implementation Areas 2014-20

■ Strategic Implementation Areas
— County Lines

12/2021

over **50** wildlife and angling crimes, including three felony unlawful takes of wildlife.

The suspect pled guilty to 2 felonies (unlawful take of bull elk and unlawful take of mule deer buck), 9 misdemeanor wildlife and angling crimes, and Probation Violation. East Central Team Troopers were present in the Grant County Circuit court when the judge sentenced the suspect to 95 days in jail; \$22,500 + (fines-restitution); forfeiture of a rifle, bow, spotlight and hunting calls; 260 hours community service; an additional lifetime revocation of hunting/angling rights, and 18 months' probation. Following sentencing, Fish and Wildlife Troopers lodged the suspect in the Grant County Jail.



Oregon State Police patrol Lookout Point Reservoir.

Oregon State Police

Captain Casey Thomas, Fish & Wildlife Division



Items pictured above are related to the OSP investigation in the following article.

Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Division members from the East Central Team received resolution to a case they worked for almost two years. The suspect ended up accepting a “global plea” for all the wildlife and angling charges from 2023-2024. In total, this investigation led to

Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Troopers conducted a boat patrol on Lookout Point Reservoir. 16 boats were contacted with approximately 32 people. 4 warnings were issued for angling violations.



Bald eagle taken in for evaluation after flying into vehicle.

An Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Trooper received a report regarding an eagle that

had flown into a moving vehicle on Hwy 202 near the community of Birkenfeld and was laying injured alongside the roadway. The eagle was able to be moved into a crate with the assistance of a Mist/Birkenfeld firefighter and then transported to The Wildlife Center of The North Coast for evaluation.



Fox taken to rehabilitation center by Oregon State Police.

An Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Trooper seized an injured fox being held at a residence by a concerned citizen. The fox was taken to a rehabilitation center and is expected to recover.

Ocean Salmon and Columbia River Program

Tucker Jones, Ocean Salmon and Columbia River Program Manager

2025 Columbia River Eulachon Smelt Update

The 2025 Eulachon smelt return to the Columbia River appears to be strong but has departed from what is typically seen with over 48,000 pounds landed in mainstem research level commercial fisheries and no fish caught in recreational tributary fisheries to date. Recreationally fisheries usually harvest the largest share, often in the Cowlitz River, but this year the run has been reluctant to enter tributaries until their recent entry into the Sandy River, allowing for a season to be set there for Thursday March 27.

Columbia River Eulachon return each year to spawn in the lower Columbia River mainstem and select tributaries. Eulachon can enter the Columbia River as early as December with

tributary abundances usually peaking in February or March. Columbia River Eulachon are part of the southern Distinct Population Segment, which was listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) by NOAA Fisheries in 2010. After listing, in-river abundance steadily increased from 2011 to 2014, reaching an abundance of 16.6 million pounds in 2014. After 2014, there followed a period of decline with a low abundance of 370,000 pounds in 2018. Since 2018, Eulachon abundances have again increased, with a peak abundance of 10.4 million pounds in 2022, and a 10-year average of 8.6 million pounds (which includes the low year of 2018).

Columbia River Eulachon are managed according to the [Washington and Oregon Eulachon Management Plan 2nd Edition](#), which uses pre-season abundance indicators to inform target harvest rates for commercial and recreational tributary fisheries – with tributary fisheries historically representing the larger fishery. The plan also includes in-season measures that allow for adaptive management depending on the apparent strength of the year's return. In 2025, the management plan suggests a combined target pre-season harvest rate of 2% based on indicators managers had on hand at the start of the fishery management season.

The commercial fishery provides an important historic index of run strength and that supplies freshwater abundance information necessary to set tributary recreational fisheries. The landings from the commercial fishery (pounds/landing) act as a necessary long-term in-season monitoring tool, that lets managers know if the run is of sufficient strength to support recreational harvest opportunity.

The 2025 cumulative commercial landings (49,687 lbs) and the per delivery average (1,840 lbs) both significantly above the 5- and 10-year averages (Table 1). Although several recreational fisheries have occurred in the Cowlitz River, none have landed any fish. Only the second recreational fishery in the Sandy River in the last ten years was set for March 27, 2025. Though there were some issues with compliance amongst the public, and enforcement caught several participants exceeding the legal limit, the fishery

was popular and well received, with nearly 8,000 anglers joining in the seven-hour opener.

Table 1. Eulachon smelt landings, 2015 – 2025, and five- and ten-year averages

Year	Cumulative Landings	Average Delivery
2015	16,546	435.4
2016	4,822	166.3
2017	5,019	167.3
2018	110	36.7
2019 ¹	--	--
2020	10,255	250.1
2021	10,997	323.4
2022	27,398	913.3
2023	1,726	345.2
2024	11,768	534.9
2025	49,6877	1,840.3
5-yr avg	12,429	473.4
10yr avg	9,849	352.5

¹ No commercial fishery occurred



Community members dipping for smelt at Glenn Otto Community Park, 2023.



Smelt running up the Sandy River, photo from 2023.

**End of field reports for
April 18, 2025**