

Oregon's Access & Habitat Board News

Winter 2010



The Oregon Legislature established the Access and Habitat Program in 1993, funded primarily through a surcharge on hunting licenses and proceeds derived from deer and elk auction and raffle tags. The A&H Board, composed of members of the public, identifies and recommends funding for projects that improve wildlife habitat and facilitate public hunting access on private lands.

A&H funds water conservation project at Summer Lake Wildlife Area

Water is the lifeblood of Summer Lake Wildlife Area, an 18,677-acre tract of wetland and upland habitat in south central Oregon owned and managed by ODFW, especially for waterfowl habitat and hunting.

To help provide high quality habitat for a variety of waterfowl, shorebirds, and other species, the Access and Habitat Program recently provided a \$75,000 grant to replace 1.3 miles of open earthen irrigation canal with a pipeline to reduce the amount of water lost through seepage into the ground. The canal provides water to about 3,000 acres on the west side of the wildlife area.

Summer Lake Wildlife Area is essentially a large marsh with some upland and agricultural lands located at the town of Summer Lake. Fifteen species of waterfowl and 9 species of shorebirds nest and raise their broods there. Almost half the world's population of Tule Lake white-fronted geese and 20% of the Wrangel Island population of snow geese, along with numerous other species of songbirds, eagles, and hawks also use the area.

The wildlife area, along with adjacent privately-owned meadows, tallies more than 9 million use days each year for waterfowl and 1 million use days for shorebirds.

To provide the wetland habitat needed by these bird populations, the area is flooded seasonally via a series of irrigation canals. Flooding begins on May 1 each year and continues throughout the summer.

The result of this effort is extremely high quality waterfowl habitat. For exam-

ple, the western side of the wildlife area is intensively managed for duck production, resulting in nest densities of up to four per acre and producing as many as 10,000 ducks each year.

These management practices make Summer Lake Wildlife Area a birding hot spot and a top waterfowl hunting destination. About 12,000 acres of the wildlife area are open for hunting every day during legal hunting seasons.

However, the canal that currently diverts water from Ana Reservoir loses 10 to 20% of the water it carries through seepage in its upper 1.3 mile reach. This represents a considerable loss of water that would otherwise contribute to about 1,700 acres on the west side of the wildlife area and 1,300 acres of adjacent private wetlands. Private lands account for a significant portion of wildlife habitat in the Summer Lake basin.

Project excavation work began in mid-February and is on the fast track for completion.

"It's imperative that we get this done by May 1 when the irrigation season starts because it's at the top end of the irrigation system," said wildlife area manager Marty St. Louis.

In addition to the A&H Program funds, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement



Summer Lake Wildlife Area provides thousands of acres of wetland habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, and other species.



Gadwalls are one of the 15 species of waterfowl that nest on the wildlife area.

Board and Lake County Soil & Water Conservation District are contributing \$754,122, Ducks Unlimited is contributing \$225,000 through the North American Wetland Conservation Act, and the Summer Lake Irrigation District is providing \$22,400.

"The wildlife area will be greatly enhanced by this project," said St. Louis. "It's been a less than ideal situation with the decreased water delivery."



Robert Jaeger and Alan Christensen appointed to Access and Habitat Board

Condon farmer Robert Jaeger was re-appointed a Landowner Representative and Portland resident Alan G. Christensen was appointed a Hunter Representative on ODFW's Access and Habitat Board.

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission appointed Jaeger to a second four-year term in the position at their meeting on Jan. 8 and selected Christensen during a meeting Dec. 10.

Jaeger has served on the A&H Board as a Landowner Representative and Vice Chairman since January 2006. He is involved in the Oregon Wheat League and has participated in the ODFW Upland Cooperative Access Program and a number of other conservation projects.

Christensen is a retired wildlife biologist who has worked for a variety of state and federal agencies including a term as the Assistant Director for Natural Resources with the U.S. Forest Service in Portland. He also served as chair of the International Grizzly and Wolf Working Group and is a recipient of the Chuck Yeager Conservation Award presented by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Additionally, Christensen has held leadership positions with various hunting and conservation organizations such as the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.

Christensen replaced Duane Bernard of Rainier, whose term expired at the end of 2009.

A&H contributes more than \$20,000 for 2009 fire seeding projects

The A&H Program provided \$20,483 to three landowners for emergency fire seeding projects in 2009. This included \$6,283 to seed 287 acres burned in the Siskiyou/Deer Ridge fire in Jackson County and \$14,200 to two Union County landowners to seed 198 acres burned in the Phys Point fire.



Re-seeding after a wildfire can speed habitat recovery.

Wildfires can destroy wildlife habitat and create conditions for erosion and the invasion of non-native, noxious plants. To help minimize wildfire-caused damage and encourage habitat recovery, the A&H Program provides emergency grants to private landowners for reseeded lands that have been burned.

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Calendar of Events

April 26 - 27

A&H Board Meeting,
Medford, 503-947-6087

June 4*

Oregon Fish and Wildlife
Commission Meeting, Salem,
503-947-6044

June 8

A&H Grant Applications Due
503-947-6087

July 20

A&H Board Meeting,
Salem, 503-947-6087

*Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission meetings where A&H business is being conducted.

Have an idea for an A&H project?

If you have an idea for a project that increases public hunting access to private lands and/or improves wildlife habitat, contact the A&H Regional Coordinator nearest you for advice and assistance on applying for an A&H grant.

Northwest Region

Dave Nuzum, Tillamook 503-842-2741
Jim Young, Corvallis 541-757-4186

Southwest Region

Vince Oredson, 541-826-8774
Central Point

High Desert Region

Larry Pecenka, Bend 541-388-6444
Meg Eden, Prineville 541-447-5111
Dan Gonzalez, Hines 541-573-6582

Northeast Region

Jon Paustian, La Grande 541-962-1838

A&H on the Web

www.dfw.state.or.us/AH



A&H continues its commitment to mule deer

With ODFW's Mule Deer Initiative now being implemented to help stem the decline of mule deer populations in Oregon, Access and Habitat projects that help mule deer are all the more important. Three projects recently approved by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission for A&H funding target habitat restoration for this important Oregon big game species.

In the **Murderers Creek** basin near Dayville, a \$50,000 grant will help pay for the cost of removing juniper that is encroaching on 1,135 acres of critical mule deer winter range.

This project is especially important because the Murderers Creek Wildlife Management Unit, which includes the Phillip W. Schneider Wildlife Area, is one of five units selected for various management actions to help mule deer as part of the Mule Deer Initiative strategy.

As many as 30,000 mule deer wintered in the Murderers Creek basin until the early 1930s, when a wildlife refuge was created in the area and hunting was prohibited. The deer population grew too large for the available forage and resulted in a major die off. Fire suppression, overgrazing by livestock, and topsoil loss resulted in the degradation of habitat as junipers encroached on the original bitterbrush, grass, and forb habitat.

Since 2000, the A&H Program has funded deer habitat improvement in the basin through a five-year native shrub planting project conducted by volunteers from the Oregon Hunters Association. These efforts, coupled with ongoing juniper removal efforts from local ODFW staff, are intended to eventually restore the original habitat to the basin, which provided more food value to deer and other wildlife than the current juniper-dominated landscape.

Two other recently-approved projects designed to benefit mule deer populations include the **Russell Canyon Water Enhancement** project where an \$18,625 grant to Malin rancher Gerald Scanlon will fund construction of two ephemeral ponds

and two 2,500 gallon water tanks. Water will be pumped from the ponds into the tanks during the spring, then back into the ponds during the summer to provide wildlife with water on a year-round basis.

About 1,500 mule deer winter in the area including on the Scanlon Ranch, which is designated as critical big game winter range. Availability of water during the summer months is a major limiting factor for wildlife in the area.

The other is the **Sundry/Rooster Rock Habitat Improvement** project, which is part of a large cooperative effort to clear more than 10,000 acres of western juniper on private and federal lands for the purpose of improving wildlife habitat. An A&H grant of \$50,000 will be used to remove juniper on 617 acres on the Sullivan Z Ranch, located in Hereford.

The project area maintains high populations of wintering mule deer and Rocky Mountain elk, along with healthy numbers of upland birds, including sage grouse and wild turkey.



Oregon mule deer populations are a major beneficiary of A&H-funded wildlife habitat improvement projects.

New projects to improve a variety of wildlife habitats

In addition to the projects designed specifically to benefit mule deer, other recently-approved projects will improve habitat for a variety of wildlife species. These include a \$100,000 grant to the **Blue Mountains Elk Initiative** (BMEI) to fund various elk habitat restoration projects in the Blue Mountains region such as noxious weed eradication, aspen restoration, juniper management, and riparian protection. BMEI is a federal, state, tribal, and private partnership that was created in 1990 to address elk management and habitat issues in the Blue Mountains, which harbor one of the world's largest populations of Rocky Mountain elk.

A \$25,000 grant was awarded to the **Western Rivers Conservancy** to restore wildlife habitat on the Murtha Ranch along the John Day River, which the organization purchased in 2008. Habitat improvements will include weed eradication,

water development, and native vegetation planting, with a long-term goal of restoring the property's shrub steppe and grassland habitats.

The **Rogue Meadows Enhancement** project was extended via a \$16,000 grant to reimburse six Jackson County landowners for the cost of 27 tons of fertilizer used to enhance their meadows that are grazed heavily by elk in competition with livestock. The additional hay crop will compensate for use by elk. The fertilizer will be applied each spring from 2010 to 2013 by ODFW staff, landowners, and volunteers from the Rogue Valley Chapter of the Oregon Hunters Association.

The **Summer Lake Wetland Enhancement** project was awarded a \$75,000 grant to replace 1.3 miles of irrigation canal with a pipe because it is now leaking up to 20 percent of its water. See the cover story for more information.

Access and Habitat Board
 Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
 3406 Cherry Avenue, N.E.
 Salem, OR 97303-4924



For information on applying for an Access and Habitat Program grant contact A&H Program Coordinator Matt Keenan at 3406 Cherry Avenue N.E., Salem, OR 97303-4924, 503-947-6087

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