

Things to Remember While Hunting Around Artificial Water Sources



Years of drought have made life difficult for wildlife and for livestock in eastern Oregon. Many dedicated volunteers and natural resource agency personnel have installed hundreds of artificial water sources (or “guzzlers”) during the past 20 years, and these are frequently used by wildlife species. Hundreds of thousands of dollars (much of it donated by hunters) are used in maintaining these water sources each year.

Setting up a blind over or near a guzzler or other water source can be an effective way to hunt big game. But a few hunters are breaking the law by:

- Deliberately disabling or damaging other nearby guzzlers/water sources to force wildlife to a different water structure where the hunter has a better chance of success
- Cutting down trees that contain other hunters’ blinds, stealing tree stands, spiking trees
- Cutting fences to modify wildlife or livestock movement patterns
- Attempting to claim a particular site by leaving tree stands up longer than area regulations allow

“Aside from the destruction of government property and the displacement of wildlife species, this sabotage is very costly to fix,” explains Rick Vetter, a biologist with the Malheur National Forest. “Federal budgets are shrinking and we can’t afford these extra repair costs, not to mention how frustrated volunteers get as they are caught in the endless loop of repairing the same guzzlers for the same reasons year after year.” (For example, a 10,000 gallon tank costs about \$ 1,000 to refill, not to mention replacement parts, travel time and labor.)

In addition to illegal activities, a few hunters are participating in unethical behavior by verbally abusing or threatening violence to nearby hunters, or establishing a blind within a few feet of another person’s active stand. Unfortunately, this behavior gives all hunters a bad name.

ODFW and land managers would prefer to avoid more regulation and encourage ethical hunters to exert positive peer pressure. Help stop the abuse of artificial water sources and:

- Report hunters destroying property or breaking the law to TIP (1-800-452-7888), an Oregon State Police enforcement officer or the land manager (e.g. USFS or BLM).
- Avoid camping or hunting at waterholes, springs, guzzlers, and other water sources when your presence causes wildlife or livestock to avoid using the area
- Follow area regulations by removing tree stands, cameras and other personal property within correct time frame (usually 14 days)

If the problems cannot be corrected, restricting the use of ground blinds and tree stands around artificial water sources could be implemented.

Contact the appropriate land manager to find out about current or future regulations surrounding artificial water sources and hunting.

