ODFW Field Reports

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission
June 17, 2022

East Region

Nick Myatt, Region Manager

Mule Deer plan revision

Department staff have begun the formal process of revising Oregon's Mule Deer Management Plan (2003). This revision kicked off with a scoping process with department biologists and sport group leaders. Staff are compiling feedback received into a draft table of contents that will provide the framework for writing the plan. Although the formal update process is just beginning, department staff have been preparing for this rewrite for years.

Mule deer seen in Lake County, Nov. 2020. ODFW photo.

Mule deer in Oregon, and throughout the west, are facing increasing challenges from a multitude of issues including increasing human populations, development, wildfire, and invasive species. These issues are complicated by the impacts that drought and climate change have on habitats. As managers began discussing the need to update the plan it became apparent that a simple rewrite would not be sufficient to address these challenges and that more information was needed to craft an effective plan for managing mule deer into the future. As a result, department staff are wrapping up several multi-year projects that will help transform mule deer management in Oregon.

Some examples include radio-collaring mule deer across their eastern Oregon distribution to identify movements, migrations, seasonal ranges, and herd ranges. This information will better inform more rigorous population models and will direct statistically valid survey methodologies that require biological meaningful populations or herd range. These newly acquired data sets will enhance the department's ability to identify and protect essential habitats through the land use planning process. In addition, recent research by department staff at the Starkey Experimental Forest is highlighting the role of climate change on mule deer nutrition and the correlation to low recruitment and survival. This information will help biologist focus limited habitat enhancement resources in areas that will yield the most benefit.

The result of all this work is that the new mule deer plan will be built on more rigorous, Oregon-specific data than any previous plan. Staff look forward to sharing more on this effort with the Commission and constituents as this process moves forward.

Deschutes River Basin salmon and steelhead reintroduction update

Spring Chinook smolts are transported to the Whychus Creek acclimation site March 2022. ODFW photo.

As part of the reintroduction of salmon and steelhead in the upper Deschutes basin, department staff have been collaborating with multiple partners maintaining fish acclimation sites in the Metolius, Deschutes and Crooked River sub-basins. Acclimating juvenile salmon and steelhead provides time to imprint so when they return as adults, they return to these general areas which contain suitable habitats to successfully complete their life cycle.

Hatchery-raised spring Chinook salmon are transferred to these sites from Fall River hatchery while summer Steelhead are transferred from Wizard Falls hatchery. Both salmon and steelhead spend anywhere from nine to 21 days at acclimation sites prior to being released into the basin to begin their migration to the ocean.

Numerous habitat restoration projects have been completed in the upper Deschutes basin near these acclimation sites intended to improve essential spawning and rearing habitat for resident and anadromous fish species. ODFW continues to be involved with future habitat restoration planning and numerous monitoring and evaluation studies to evaluate the efficacy of the program to achieve the goal of establishing a self-sustaining, naturally reproducing population of salmon and steelhead in the upper Deschutes basin. Video by ODFW about the project is available here:
https://youtu.be/aEIJs-JeCMY

Upper Klamath Lake salmon study

To better understand how juvenile Chinook salmon may out migrate from tributaries of Upper Klamath Lake and through the lake, ODFW's Klamath and Deschutes staff and partners at National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries, the Klamath Tribes, University of California - Davis, Trout Unlimited, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife tagged and released 7,000 juvenile spring-run Chinook salmon into the Wood and Williamson Rivers in April 2022.

All fish received a Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tag, and a subsample were implanted with acoustic tags. Some fish were detected at the mouths of the tributaries and entered the lake within 24 hours of releasing


Fish surgery performed at Klamath Hatchery to insert acoustic tags. ODFW photo.

them. The results of this experimental release will help answer uncertainties about how salmon may navigate the current landscape of the upper Klamath Basin following the Klamath River dam removals.


Mark Hereford and Jen Luke (ODFW) discuss data collection at Klamath Hatchery while partners setup fish surgery stations. ODFW photo.

Sandhill Cranes Ladd Marsh

Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area staff and students from Texas Tech University (TTU) conducted capture efforts for Sandhill Cranes this Spring. The crew successfully banded and attached telemetry gear on four cranes (two pairs).


Sandhill crane 2022. ODFW photo.

These efforts are a long-term research and monitoring partnership that has provided information on the migratory patterns of this species across the western United States. None of this would be possible without the support of TTU and other sponsors like Friends of Ladd Marsh as both have supplied transmitters and time to the project.


Sandhill crane capture team at Ladd Marsh 2022. ODFW photo.

Some key takeaways from the data collected so far include information on migration routes-both to the central valley as well as a few birds that go over to the lower Colorado river. Migration dates seem to coincide both on the spring return (between February 16 to 20) and fall departure (October 1 to 4), but birds are observed passing through later in the fall if weather cooperates. Nest sites and viable habitat is very broad. A marked bird was located nesting the previous two years at a high elevation meadow in the Wallowa Mountains and another in Wallowa County in a stock pond in the mountains.

West Region

Chris Kern, Interim Region Manager

Response to the Medford fuel depot release

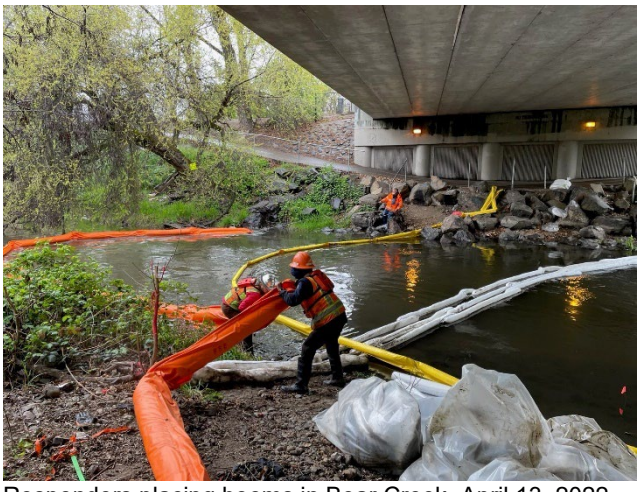
The Rogue Watershed District and West Region staff responded to an oil spill in Bear Creek, a tributary of the Rogue River. More than 20,000 gallons of various petroleum products, primarily lube oil, were released during an April 12 fire at the Pacific Pride Commercial Fuel Station in Medford.

The section of Bear Creek most impacted by the spill has an important patch of riparian forest. It provides a steppingstone for wildlife to get through Medford's urban area. Bear Creek also provides spawning grounds and nurseries for chinook salmon and steelhead and is a migration corridor for Endangered Species Act-listed coho salmon.

Fish and wildlife staff conducted intensive surveys of the impacted section of Bear Creek. Oiled birds, mostly Canada geese and mallards, were observed. Some had a light oil sheen and were still mobile. Birds more affected by the spill that could be captured were taken to an onsite trailer for care by an International Bird Rescue (IBR) team. Extensive outreach was needed to ask the public not to pick up injured wildlife and instead call the IBR reporting line.

Although the spill occurred at a time when Bear Creek had high abundance of various native fish species, no impacts to fish or redds were observed. A few days after the spill when the water was more clear and less turbid, biologists observed live fall chinook and winter steelhead fry.

An acute and immediate die-off of fish and wildlife was not seen. However, biologists are concerned about the potential of delayed long-term effects to fish and wildlife. Those impacts could affect the health and reproduction success of fish and wildlife in this area, and biologists will continue monitoring.


Responders placing booms in Bear Creek, April 13, 2022.

Rogue wildlife biologist Jade Keehn captures an oiled mallard along Bear Creek.

This poster was put at spots along Bear Creek to encourage the public to contact the wildlife response team.

Pond conversion to warmwater fisheries pond

North Willamette Watershed District staff recently met onsite with managers from the Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge and partners from Trout Unlimited. The group discussed the potential for converting a former Oregon Fishing Club Pond located on the refuge into a warmwater fisheries pond to provide angling opportunity for urban youth and constituents with limited mobility. This action would contribute to an important goal of the district, the refuge, and its partners to deliver increased outdoor experiences for traditionally underserved residents.

First fishing event at St. Louis Ponds since 2020

North Willamette Fish Staff held the first in-person Family Fishing Event in two years at St. Louis Ponds on Saturday, April 16. Turnout at this event has historically been high so a large number of trout (4,500) were stocked to ensure a positive experience for the families attending.

Despite the rainy weather, the event was highly successful with a peak of 200 participants and fish caught consistently throughout the day. One brand new angler and her mother showed persistence and ingenuity in the face of the storm, as depicted in photo.

A mother-daughter duo had a clever set up in the rain.

Sierra Nevada red fox project

Conservation Program staff will be working on a new project to map the distribution of Sierra Nevada Red Fox (SNRF) in Oregon. There are large gaps in the known range where additional data is needed to define SNRF distribution. Staff will be working with Washington State University to support this graduate-student led effort.

A female Sierra Nevada red fox was collared in 2017, a first for Oregon wildlife biologists researching this rare sub-species of red fox.

Information and Education

Roger Fuhrman, Information and Education Administrator

Mentored hunt helps new hunters gain confidence in skills

A dozen novice hunters will take to the woods this spring as part of ODFW's first-ever mentored turkey hunt. Although birds may be harvested, that is not the main point. The primary goal is to bridge the gap between taking a workshop and becoming an independent hunter.

All participants are first-time hunters who completed recent ODFW turkey hunting workshops. Out of 45 workshop students, 40 signed up for the random drawing which selected the lucky 12 hunters. None have ever hunted anything before.

The event will take place over three days on property owned by Oregon State University near the McDonald Dunn Research Forest north of Corvallis. Each day, four hunters and four mentors will take to the woods in search of longbeards. Mentors for this pilot program are ODFW staff, however, the vision is for trained volunteers to be mentors in the future. Another ODFW staff member will be standing by in case of health/safety issues or other concerns.

Mentors will provide advice and guidance for hunters on issues such as maximum effective shooting range; how to set up; where to set up; and when and how to call.

Many of the fundamentals are easier said than done until you have experienced field conditions. "One of the hardest things to learn about actual turkey hunting is how to make sure you don't move when they are coming in," said Antonio Salgado, ODFW R3 coordinator. R3 stands for recruit, retain and reactivate hunters and anglers.

"This pilot is based on national R3 research and information from the International Hunter Education Association about what new hunters need in order to take the next steps into the sport," Salgado said.

Mentors will keep a positive and encouraging attitude during the hunts. Salgado said it is important not to let the new hunters get disappointed or discouraged. All of the mentors will bring stories to share about mistakes they made as novice turkey hunters.

Salgado said ODFW hopes to continue building on current mentoring initiatives. For instance, the Trout 101 course features mentored navigation in a sporting goods store, as well as on the banks of the local trout lake. This helps build confidence in the entire experience of fishing, not just the use of rod and reel.

"In all of our mentoring activities, we are not doing the tricky parts for the participants. We are teaching them how to do it for themselves," Salgado said. "This gives the participants more satisfaction and the confidence they need to go out fishing and hunting themselves. And that is the goal of all of our efforts—getting people engaged in the outdoors on their own or with their friends and families."

Oregon State Police

Captain Casey Thomas, Fish & Wildlife Division

The Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Division presented its annual "Partner of the Year" Award to ODFW Manager Jack Vaughn, at the Phillip Schneider Wildlife Area (PSWA) east of Dayville, Oregon.

ODFW Manager Jack Vaughn receiving an award from OSP Sergeant Erich Timko

Vaughn is the John Day Watershed Wildlife Habitat Program Manager for ODFW who oversees the PSWA in addition to the Bridge Creek Wildlife Area and Willow Creek Wildlife Area. The East Central Fish and Wildlife Team has personally worked with Vaughn for the past three years, with a focused emphasis on reducing wildlife area violations that negatively affect the critical winter range and habitat found within the wildlife area. Vaughn has proven to be a dedicated and highly motivated team partner in joining with Oregon State Police (OSP) and area landowners to accomplish the goal of improved protection of this critical habitat.

Vaughn goes above and beyond in his partnership with OSP Fish and Wildlife Division members to protect the critical habitat within the wildlife areas he manages and goes out of his way to assist OSP in hosting training events and safe storage of OSP equipment. His dedicated action and support of OSP's mission is a testament to his commitment of our ongoing partnership and successful joint operations.

Congratulations Jack!

January 2021 case resolved through court proceedings

In January of 2021, Jackson County Sheriff's Office initiated a pursuit with a tan sedan. The fleeing vehicle wrecked, and the occupants fled on foot. A Jackson County Sheriff's Deputy discovered a dead buck deer in the trunk of the vehicle and requested OSP. The suspects ultimately evaded capture the night of the pursuit but were identified by the Jackson County Sheriff's Office. Troopers then began working on a search warrant for the phone and SD cards and referred charges to the Jackson County District Attorney.

In April of 2022, the court proceeding in this case occurred. The suspect had 12 warrants and was wanted on multiple other charges including Aggravated Theft I, Theft I, and Burglary II during the Almeda and Obenchain Fires, previous eludes, reckless driving, and drug charges. Evidence in the case included a trophy buck and hunting equipment likely from previous burglaries. A recovered cell phone and subsequent search warrant yielded picture and text evidence of wildlife crimes. As part of a plea deal in conjunction with other charges, the suspect pled guilty to two of the three charges, is serving 2.5 years in prison, 2 years of post-prison supervision, and has been ordered to pay restitution to ODFW along with a 5-year license suspension.

Fish and Wildlife Troopers assisting with Hunter Education

Fish and Wildlife Troopers assisted ODFW with a hunters education field day held at Hamilton Farms. The Troopers explained the role of the OSP Fish and Wildlife Division and provided valuable marksmanship instruction to approximately 20 aspiring hunters.

Conservation Program

Andrea Hanson, Oregon Conservation Strategy Coordinator

Northwestern pond turtle project update

East Region Conservation Wildlife Biologist Kaly Adkins deploys a trap for northwestern pond turtles in the Mosier area May 2022. ODFW photo.

The East Region Conservation Biologist and the Oregon Conservation Strategy (OCS) intern based in The Dalles field office this season continue to make progress on Mosier-area northwestern pond turtle research. This project is part of an ongoing mark and recapture study by the Mid-Columbia district to protect the eastern Cascade population turtles. Video by ODFW about the project is available here: https://youtu.be/mzQRcOffjCw

Ocean Salmon and Columbia River Program

Tucker Jones, Ocean Salmon and Columbia River Program Manager

Northern Pikeminnow Management Program – reward fishery and long-term tag returns

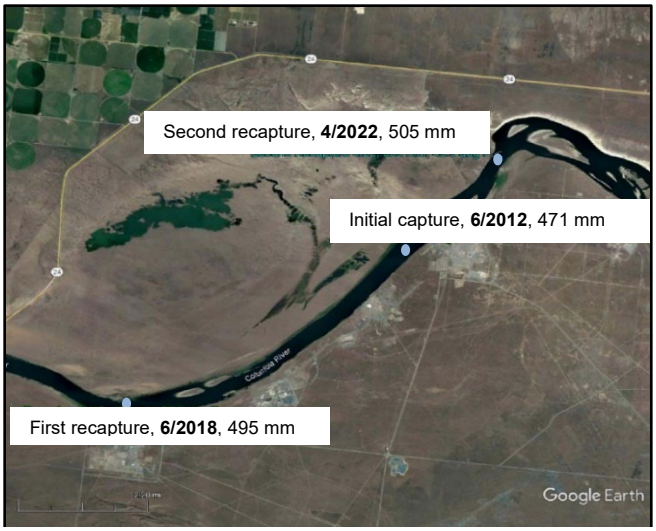
For three decades, agency staff and recreational anglers, with funding from the Bonneville Power Administration, have been collaboratively working to improve the survival of juvenile salmon and steelhead through the Columbia and Snake rivers. The Northern Pikeminnow Management Program (NPMP) was established to help mitigate for the impacts of the Columbia River hydropower system.

A native predator, Northern Pikeminnow (pikeminnow), are known to prey heavily on juvenile salmonids in the altered system. ODFW research supports that removing 10 – 20% of the mature pikeminnow population through sport-reward and dam angling fisheries can reduce juvenile salmonid predation by up to 40%. ODFW scientists have led the assessments into the efficacy of these removal efforts in collaboration with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Participation in the sport reward fishery is incentivized with a tiered reward system based on the number of pikeminnow caught by individual anglers per season. New for 2022 are increased per fish payouts which have not changed since 2015. Anglers participating in the sport reward fishery will earn $6 per fish (first 25 fish), $8 per fish (26 – 200 fish), $10 per fish (more than 200 fish), and a $500 reward for anglers that catch and return previously tagged pikeminnow.

ODFW tags pikeminnow as a means to incentivize the sport reward fishery and to track the level of pikeminnow exploitation using capture/recapture analytical techniques. Tag returns provide ODFW scientists information about patterns in pikeminnow movement and growth, which helps guide adaptive management of predation reduction on juvenile salmonids.

As an example, ODFW staff recaptured a tagged pikeminnow in April near the Hanford Reach. This fish was initially tagged in 2012, recaptured in 2018, and along the way, the fish grew a total of 34 mm.



Map of a Northern Pikeminnnow initially captured then recaptured twice by ODFW staff in the McNary reservoir near the Hanford in Washington State.

This project provides a rare opportunity to both positively engage the fishing public while also building a long-term data set about fish predator/prey interactions.

End of field reports for June 17, 2022