ODFW Field Reports

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission
Feb 17, 2023

East Region

Nick Myatt, Region Manager

Intermountain West shorebird surveys

In 2022, ODFW staff collaborated with partners to plan and implement the pilot year of the Intermountain West Shorebird Survey. This project, led by Point Blue and the National Audubon Society, will conduct a comprehensive survey of shorebird sites throughout the region with a broad network of partners. Surveys in Oregon will occur in April and August this year.

Black-necked Stilt, an Oregon Conservation Strategy Species and a focal species of this survey effort, foraging in shallow water. iNaturalist photo © C. Ben Schwamb

Shorebird populations in Oregon, North America, and globally have declined sharply over the past 40 years and data is needed to inform collaborative conservation action. Migratory shorebirds rely on a vast network of aquatic habitats, including key sites in Oregon like Lake Abert and Summer Lake. Data collected through this effort will be compared to historic survey results to document the change in abundance and distribution over 30 years.

Department staff are currently working to identify funding opportunities to support the full implementation of the survey in Oregon, which will include a total of three fall and three spring surveys of each site during peak migratory windows. Survey outcomes include 1) to document the distribution and abundance of shorebirds throughout the Intermountain West, 2) quantify long-term trends in the distribution and abundance of shorebirds, and 3) identify key environmental and human-related factors that influence the distribution and abundance of shorebirds.

Data from these surveys will document which waterbodies are most critical for migrating birds and provide detail on the relationships between bird use and water availability to inform conservation planning. See 2022 project summary.

Trout Creek Working Group 30+ years

The Trout Creek Mountain Working Group (TCMWG) was organized out of conflict over natural resource use in 1988. ODFW staff have been actively participating in this group since its inception. Riparian vegetation and upland aspen stands were limited and contributed to poor stream habitat for Lahontan Cutthroat Trout (LCT, *Oncorhynchus clarkii henshawi*); a species listed as threatened by the Endangered Species Act. Litigation loomed for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) related to grazing on public land from both cattle rancher permittees and environmental organizations. Livelihoods of cattle operations hung in the balance on one side while the persistence of a listed fish species was on the other side. Was there a solution with benefits to both? Yes.

Doc and Connie Hatfield brought together ranchers, environmental organizations and

state and federal agency staff to discuss the issues beginning in 1988. It was contentious with people entrenched on both sides of the issue, but as they listened to each other's views, spent time on the ground and riding in vehicles together they forged working relationships that lead to the formation of the TCMWG in 1990. The goal of this group is to think about what is best for the mountain and how each member can use their resources to create conditions that work for them as well as the mountain and the animals that live there.

Malheur Watershed Assistant District Fish Biologist with a Lahontan Cutthroat Trout (LCT) captured while electrofishing Whitehorse Creek in 2020.

During the 1990s ODFW and BLM staff monitored riparian vegetation, stream temperatures and Lahontan Cutthroat Trout (LCT) populations as grazing management changes occurred. The focus for ODFW shifted to species recovery through the 2000s and early 2010s. The TCMWG provided support and cooperation for rotenone projects to remove non-native Rainbow Trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and Brook Trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*) from the McDermitt Creek watershed. Population monitoring, post-wildfire monitoring and continued focus on McDermitt Creek LCT recovery continued during the 2010s through today.

Malheur Watershed District Fish Biologist Dave Banks measuring habitat on Willow Creek during sampling in 2020.

Concerns for greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianu*) and their habitat needs prompted ODFW wildlife staff to join TCMWG meetings in the mid-2010s to provide updates and input for this group. ODFW continues to participate in the TCMWG by organizing meetings annually in the fall and maintaining relationships with ranchers and environmental organizations developed decades ago. The next chapter for the TCMWG, the mountain and the species living here will be responding to lithium mining development. ODFW and members of the TCMWG are actively participating in discussions surrounding this newest issue.

For more information about the Trout Creek Mountain Working Group visit:
"If the Mountain Could Speak" (15 mins.)
https://vimeo.com/118724288/583b1a43b1

"The Mountains Wisdom" (23 mins.)
https://vimeo.com/216716485/dcd50ebd86

California bighorn disease and population monitoring efforts in southeast continue

In the Ten Mile and Rattlesnake Canyon areas east of Steens Mountain, staff conducted a second year of disease testing for *M.ovi*. (*Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* bacteria) in California bighorn sheep herds in southern Malheur County. These efforts are part of a cooperative project among state and federal agencies, tribes, Oregon State University, and wild sheep nonprofits working together in the Idaho-Oregon-Nevada (ION) area.

Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) was the first partner in the working group to begin test and remove operations as *M.ovi* spilled over from infected herds in the Santa Rosa mountains. ODFW recently began similar operations. The goal of the ION initiative is to remove "chronic shedders" of the bacteria from a herd in order to increase lamb recruitment thus allowing the herds to grow. Information about the removal of chronic *M.ovi* carriers in an experimental study here.

ODFW and NDOW staff release a California bighorn ewe after being sampled for M.ovi. and collared, Jan. 2023. Photo by ODFW.

During the Jan. 2023 sheep capture, crews working in the Ten Mile area recaptured two sheep from the previous year which had indeterminant PCR and ELISA test results and were resampled. An additional six ewes and one ram were sampled and fitted with GPS or VHF collars in Ten Mile. All animals were released but test results could lead to removal of chronic shedders. In the Rattlesnake Canyon area, 16 ewes and 11 rams were sampled, collared, and released.

California bighorn ram is sampled for disease and then released by ODFW crew in Jan. 2023. Photo by ODFW.

The same crew also conducted capture work on Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge which is part of ongoing efforts with the Fish and Wildlife Service to increase the bighorn population there. A total of ten sheep were sampled and collared at Hart Mountain: six ewes and four rams. The ION initiative received $172,000 in grant funding from the National Wild Sheep Foundation to support ongoing work in the three states.

A Helicopter crew lowers bighorn sheep to a handling site during ODFW and USFWS disease testing and collaring on Hart Mountain, Jan. 2023. Photo by ODFW.

West Region

Chris Kern, Region Manager

Chinook tagged in ocean research program recovered in Sandy River

While collecting natural-origin spring Chinook broodstock in the upper Sandy River this fall, North Willamette Watershed fish staff caught and released a tagged fish. The external tag was placed in the fish in the ocean by Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) as part of a study focused on Chinook migration routes, behavior, and survival in marine habitats.

A Chinook tagged by Canada's DFO was found in the upper Sandy River.

Staff received a "thank you" letter from CFO, explaining that the study tagged 150 fish in the ocean during the 2022 field season. More than half of the fish were of Columbia River origin. There were also fish bound for systems throughout the Washington coast, Puget Sound, the Fraser River, Vancouver Island, and as far south as central California.

Kellogg Creek Restoration Project received $15 million.

NOAA Restoration Center awarded its largest grant in history to the Kellogg Creek Restoration and Community Enhancement Project: $15 million. The "Kellogg Project" will restore fish access to 15 miles of habitat in the Kellogg Creek-Mt. Scott watershed, modernize the Highway 99E bridge, and replace the 14-acre impoundment created by the dam with a restored natural area and stream.

Kellogg Dam was built in 1858 – prior to statehood – to power a flour mill that was abandoned in 1890. In 1934, the dam became part of the foundation for the Highway 99E bridge in the City of Milwaukie and has impeded fish passage and natural processes ever since. Kellogg Dam is on ODFW's list of high priority fish passage barriers.

North Willamette fish staff are part of the partnership working to help restore the watershed. Staff recommended project funding, provided letters of support, assisted in selecting contractors, and sit on the technical advisory committee and the design group. The project is led by American Rivers, the City of Milwaukie, the North Clackamas Watersheds Council, and the Oregon Department of Transportation.

Breaking records: high numbers of wild coho return to upper Clackamas River

Natural origin coho returns to the upper Clackamas River basin continue to break records. For the season, the return is now over 12,000 as of Jan. 13, 2023. The prior record was set in 2021 with just over 9,000 fish counted. Prior to 2021, the record high was 8,200 fish in 2014. Anglers targeting early winter steelhead report bright coho still being caught in the lower river.

Since fish passage at the North Fork Dam on the Clackamas River was repaired as part of

the Portland General Electric dam relicensing, wild coho returns to North Fork Dam continue to increase. Prior to dam repairs, the 10-year average for wild coho returns was 761 fish. PGE biologists collect any hatchery fish from the trap at the dam and transport them to the Clackamas Fish Hatchery while wild fish are passed upstream.

Collaborative mapping exercise helps identify priority habitat projects

The Regional Habitat Biologist and Umpqua District fish staff participated in a collaborative mapping exercise to identify priority areas for habitat restoration and improvement in the Umpqua Basin. Local knowledge and data was shared to help determine priority areas to restore or improve riparian habitat, fish passage, and beaver emphasis areas.

The meeting, coordinated by the Partnership for the Umpqua Rivers (PUR), brought together watershed councils, federal agencies, the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, and Soil and Water Conservation districts. PUR is using the mapping exercise to focus its projects and funding on conservation opportunities identified in the meeting.

Umpqua Oaks Partnership update

The Umpqua Oaks Partnership is a group focused on preserving and improving dwindling oak woodlands in the Umpqua Basin. The group of state and federal agencies, NGOs, watershed councils, OSU Extension Service, Soil and Water Conservation districts, and the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians identified priority areas to conduct oak restoration projects.

The Partnership intends to use ODFW's tax incentive programs for wildlife habitat conservation and riparian restoration to encourage more private landowners to participate in protecting oak woodlands. The PUR hosts public tours of oak woodlands that focus on the value of oak habitat, managing oak woodlands, and more. The next one is April 18 at a private ranch near Sutherlin to discuss oak restoration work on the property.

Information and Education

Roger Fuhrman, Information and Education Administrator

ODFW promotes licenses as holiday gifts

ODFW kicked off a holiday season ad campaign in December, aimed at encouraging people to buy fishing and hunting licenses as gifts for their friends and families. The multi-media campaign drove 1,365 clicks to the ODFW electronic licensing system (ELS), where licenses are sold. It is not currently possible to track their purchasing behavior beyond the ELS home page, although we are interested in doing this in the future.

The campaign began December 1 with a focus on holiday gift giving. As Christmas passed, the messaging pivoted to getting yourself ready for the new year by purchasing your own licenses and tags.

Strategies included radio and digital ads based on customer interest. The campaign also used geotargeting (sending people digital ads based on their location). Several sporting goods and

department stores were identified so that customers whose phones went into those stores received digital ads. Ads received by customers of one Bi-Mart store accounted for hundreds of clicks to ELS. Interestingly, that store is in Vancouver, WA. ODFW intends to look into why this store generated so much interest in Oregon licenses.

On the radio, 254 spots aired on three stations (KXL, KINK, and The Bull (KUPL-FM), accounting for 2,217,600 impressions. Digital ads had more than 300,000 impressions.

The campaign also used pay-per-click ads based on customer internet search terms. Relevant search terms trigger an ODFW ad to pop up on the person's device and the agency only pays if the customer clicks on the ad. The keywords and phrases resulting in the greatest number of clicks included fishing license, fishing in Oregon, Oregon hunting license. This part of the campaign resulted in 1,250 impressions generating a high click-through rate of 28.64%.

Although precise return on investment is impossible to calculate, the campaign certainly drove people to ELS, with the assumption that many of them purchased licenses for themselves and others. It is also assumed that some customers who did not immediately go to the ELS, returned later to make purchases.

Oregon State Police

Captain Casey Thomas, Fish & Wildlife Division

Fish and Wildlife (F/W) Trooper received trail camera pictures from a reporting party in Clackamas County. The three pictures were of an unknown subject walking with a rifle, then returning an hour later holding a bow and later dragging a deer with another unknown male. Another F/W Trooper arrived on scene and met the two subjects who had returned to their pickup with the buck deer.

The subject said he had not yet validated his Western Oregon Archery deer tag as he was having difficulties with the mobile ODFW application. During the investigation the subject admitted to shooting the deer with a .308 rifle on the last day of the late archery deer season. The subject admitted to leaving the area and coordinated with another subject who later assisted in the recovery of the deer. The deer was field dressed on scene and the subject's hunting rifle was seized as evidence. The subject was cited and released for *Take/Possession of Buck Deer and Hunting Prohibited Method: Hunting with Unauthorized Weapon.* The subject who knowingly assisted the hunter was cited and released for *Aiding/Counseling in a Wildlife Offense.*

Deer rescued by ODFW and OSP

Multiple Fish and Wildlife Troopers in the Central Oregon area responded to a reported deer stuck in a fence. It was discovered the doe had become entangled in some chicken wire style fencing and could not free herself from it. ODFW responded and assisted the Troopers. The wire was cut away and the doe was freed.

Three deer poached in 2021. Case made by OSP in 2022.

OSP Fish and Wildlife Division members contacted several subjects that were linked to a wildlife case from March 2021. During that incident, three blacktail bucks were shot at night and left to waste on the North Spit of Coos Bay. When interviewed, one subject admitted to shooting all three bucks in the headlights of his vehicle, with three other subjects riding with him at the time. After the bucks were killed, no one made any attempt to salvage the meat. The subject who shot the deer was criminally cited and released for *Take Game Mammal Closed Season (x3), Waste of a Game Mammal (x3), and Hunting with the aid of Artificial Light.* The .17 caliber rifle that was used during the incident was seized as evidence.

Conservation Program

Emily VanWyk, Acting Oregon Conservation Strategy Coordinator

ODFW's iNaturalist project update

Now in its second year, the Oregon Wildlife Conservation project on iNaturalist continues to collect observations of birds, mammals, amphibians, and reptiles found throughout the state. The project can be found here: https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/oregon-wildlife-conservation and on the iNaturalist mobile app.

Acorn woodpecker photo submitted to the Oregon Wildlife Conservation project on iNaturalist. Photo © Patricia.

To date, the project has more than 60,000 *research grade* observations of 587 species submitted by 242 people. The project is helping to provide more information on the distribution of wildlife in Oregon, with a particular interest in collecting data on Strategy Species, Data Gap Species, and contributing to the Oregon Connectivity Assessment and Mapping Project (OCAMP) Species. This project is also helping ODFW connect directly with different audiences interested in wildlife conservation in Oregon.

OCAMP identifies Priority Wildlife Connectivity Areas

ODFW has completed a collaborative, statewide effort, the Oregon Connectivity Assessment and Mapping Project (OCAMP), to map existing habitat connectivity for 54 of

Oregon's wildlife species. OCAMP species were selected to represent specific habitat associations and habitat structural characteristics across taxa. This project resulted in identification of an interconnected network of Priority Wildlife Connectivity Areas (PWCAs) representing the parts of the landscape with the highest overall value for facilitating wildlife movement. Priority Wildlife Connectivity Areas will be integrated into ODFW planning and operations and will be made available online later this year for partner and public use, helping to guide targeted conservation action to areas of the state that will have the greatest benefit for enhancing and protecting wildlife connectivity. Staff will provide an informational briefing on this to the Commission in March.

ODFW has also initiated work to draft the Wildlife Corridor Action Plan, a requirement of HB 2834, the Wildlife Corridors Act, passed during the 2019 state legislative session. The Plan is intended to provide guidance for all state agencies to develop benchmarks for the designation and protection of wildlife corridors in Oregon. Focal areas in the Plan will be based on the Priority Wildlife Connectivity Areas resulting from OCAMP.

Foothill yellow-legged frog in SW Oregon

The foothill yellow-legged frog (*Rana boylii*, FYLF) is a stream-dwelling amphibian native to the western United States. Declines in distribution and abundance have heightened the need for inventory and monitoring to support conservation and management of this species.

Recent foothill yellow-legged frog survey efforts funded by the Interagency Special Status/Sensitive Species Program between the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service have helped ODFW to document new populations of frogs in Southwestern Oregon using environmental DNA (eDNA) sampling protocols, which detect organismal DNA material in the stream water. From 2021-2022, data was collected at 374 survey sites in 14 watershed subbasins (HUC8s) across 7 counties, targeting streams with historical detections, or streams lacking detection data but possessing suitable frog habitat.

At each sampling location, staff filtered 5L of water directly from the stream using a battery-powered peristaltic pump. Samples were analyzed for FYLF by the National Genomics Center at the U.S. Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station, and final lab results were received by ODFW this December.

Sampling location and equipment used on FYLF research. Photo by Jade Keehn.

Frogs were detected at 52 (14%) of sites--because sampling primarily targeted locations with no recent detection of this species, these 52 sites are documenting new areas of occurrence, or areas where historically documented populations haven't been observed in recent years using traditional survey methods.

Staff are moving forward with a final project report and will be analyzing results to better understand how habitat characteristics, the presence of anthropogenic disturbances, and presence of native predators/competitors or invasive species (bullfrogs and crayfish) affect foothill yellow-legged frogs. Ultimately, the results of this project will provide ODFW with a better understanding of the current status and management needs of this unique stream-dwelling frog to inform conservation action.

Marine Resources Program

Caren Braby, Marine Resources Program Manager

Tillamook Bay Clam Advisory Committee update

The ODFW Shellfish Program continued to work with the Tillamook Bay Clam Advisory Committee (TBCAC) to explore several issues regarding recreational and commercial harvest of bay clams. At the most recent meeting, ODFW staff presented preliminary estimates of the biomass of bay clams that may be available for recreational and commercial harvest over the coming year.

Summer 2022 "megacoring" in Tillamook Bay as part of the SEACOR program's bay clam survey.

Staff also prepared and submitted a Legislative Report that provides background information about bay clam fisheries in Tillamook Bay. The report also presents a mid-term update regarding TBCAC activities and their preliminary recommendations (final recommendations are due to ODFW by the end of 2023).

Research grant proposals submitted

In December 2022, the department submitted several proposals to the Oregon Ocean Science Trust to seek financial support for new investigations in the marine environment.

Kelp forests are an important refugia for juvenile rockfish and a food source for sunflower sea stars.

The proposals address underwater mapping of new habitat areas in the nearshore region; characterization of the status of sea urchin and kelp communities at strategic sites; modeling the potential impacts of sea otter foraging activities; mapping the spatial extent and condition of eelgrass beds; and measuring the production and breakdown of organic material ("blue carbon budget") for eelgrass in Oregon bays and estuaries. Decisions regarding

selection of the proposed projects are expected by the end of January 2023.

A challenging commercial Dungeness crab season

Pending biotoxin results and meat fill, the earliest the commercial Dungeness crab season can open is Dec. 1. This year, domoic acid and low meat yield meant a partial season opener beginning Jan. 15, 2023 from Cape Falcon to Cape Arago. North of Cape Falcon opens Feb. 1., while uncertainty remains on the South Coast due to domoic acid being above or near thresholds in multiple areas south of Cape Arago.

To avoid increased risk of whale and marine life entanglements by shifting effort in the South Coast to later in the season, the department plans to open that area Feb. 1 or Feb. 4 depending on late January biotoxin test results. Elevated domoic acid could result in an evisceration order.

Commercial fisherman loading crab pots, Newport.

Staff worked hard to coordinate and accomplish pre-season testing, including going to sea on crab vessels to observe the crab sampling, at times in inclement weather and rough seas. The department works closely with the Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission, the Oregon Department of Agriculture and the crab fishing industry on testing and season openings. Staff also follow a Tri-State Protocol and coordinate with California and Washington to help create an orderly start to the season.

Commercial Nearshore Rockfish Fishery Update

During the 2022 nearshore rockfish season, in-season changes were successful in managing the harvest. The harvest came in under, but near the guidelines for most species.

Staff announced harvest guidelines and vessel limits for 2023 and are now updating tracking tools for harvest monitoring throughout the year. Fishery logbook data for upcoming groundfish stock assessments also are being prepared.

End of field reports for February 17, 2023