

ODFW Field Reports

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission September 13, 2024

East Region

Nick Myatt, Region Manager

Wildfire impacts in eastern Oregon

In July and early-August, high heat and dry conditions in East Region led to widespread wildfires. By August 10, more than 1.4 million acres had burned in Oregon with most of that acreage in East Region. The widespread fires have been very impactful to Oregon's working lands, the producers that depend on them, and surrounding communities.

ODFW lands and operations have not been immune to the impact either. The greatest impact so far this fire season was to White River Wildlife Area with 7,511 acres burned in the Larch Creek Fire, causing the evacuation of the headquarters office and staff housing.



Postage Stamp Butte on the White River Wildlife Area burns during a wildfire, July 2024. ODFW photo

Other wildlife area impacts include a 280-acre fire on the Minam River Wildlife Area, a level 2 evacuation of Wenaha Wildlife Area, and public closures of Bridge Creek and Phillip W. Schnieder Wildlife Areas due to adjacent fires. and staff housing being evacuated for more than four days, Oak Springs Hatchery under a level 2 evacuation notice, and the Imnaha River weir and staff housing were evacuated.



A wildfire seen at night from the Shadybrook tract at White River. ODFW photo

As many of the early, landscape scale fires become contained, we are working on understanding habitat impacts and restoration resources. Across the region staff are coordinating with federal land managers conducting burn severity mapping on public land and with the Natural Resources Conservation Service in assessing private lands. Collaborative efforts are coming together to prioritize resources and provide assistance to impacted working lands.

Large fires also continue to impact hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing recreation due to large public land closures. Early season hunts, primarily pronghorn hunts, have been impacted the most to date. Hunters in those impacted areas have been offered refunds and having their preference points reinstated. Wildlife Division and region staff will continue to monitor public land closures and impacts to hunting opportunity as the high-use seasons approach.

ODFW's East Region hatchery system was impacted as well, with Round Butte Hatchery

Bend to Suttle Lake Wildlife Passage Initiative starts Phase Two

ODFW's Wildlife Connectivity Coordinator and coalition partners recently completed a corridor feasibility study as part of the first phase of the Bend to Suttle Lake Wildlife Passage Initiative, which began in 2022. This important step in the process identified 11 potential wildlife crossing locations along Highway 20 and selected a sequence of four sites as the top priority for construction. Selection of the four priority wildlife crossing sites was based on specific factors including adjacent publicly owned lands, high wildlife-vehicle collision densities, and high value to migrating wildlife.



Map showing wildlife collision density along Hwy 20 from Bend to Suttle Lake.

The coalition plans to construct wildlife overcrossings at the four top priority sites to be located at mile posts 94.6, 94, 92, and 90. The other seven locations identified in the study will be addressed as funding and other opportunities arise.

The region provides critical habitat for many species and is an important linkage between the Cascade forests and the sagebrush grasslands. Along the stretch of Hwy 20 between Suttle Lake and Bend, upwards of 600 mule deer and elk are killed each year by vehicle strikes. The feasibility study was funded by the Roundhouse Foundation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, ODFW, and the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (OCRF). Phase two of the B2S Initiative will include finalizing engineering and design work for the top four priority crossing locations and engage local communities. The coalition will need to raise \$560,000 through state and private sources to apply for federal funds, which require a non-federal match.

The B2S coalition includes ODFW, ODOT, USFS, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Oregon Wildlife Foundation (fiscal sponsor), Central Oregon LandWatch, Oregon Hunters Association, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, Wildlands Network, Pew Charitable Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Deschutes Land Trust, Protect Animal Migration & Movement, Black Butte Conservancy and Ranch, and Oregon State University.

Rocky Mountain goat aerial survey and new research

Deschutes wildlife staff conducted Rocky Mountain goat aerial surveys in the central Cascades in coordination with the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. 128 goats were observed during the flights, with good billy and kid ratios. The population of mountain goats in the central Cascades appears to be stable to growing, with their distribution ranging from south of Santiam Pass on Mt. Washington north to Olallie Butte. Many goats are enjoying the lush green vegetation in the fire scar of the Lionshead fire that burned around the north side of Mt. Jefferson in 2020.



Rocky Mountain goats on the west side of Three Fingered Jack, July 2024. ODFW photo.

Rocky Mountain goats were likely extirpated from Oregon prior to or during European settlement in the late 19th century. The present statewide Rocky Mountain goat population is estimated to be 800, the result of capture and relocation efforts that have been used to help reestablish populations in historic habitat.

Aerial surveys are part of an ongoing collaboration with the Warm Springs Tribe to restore and monitor the Rocky Mountain Goat population in the Cascades. ODFW staff have proposed opening a limited hunt opportunity for one tag in the Central Cascades, beginning in 2025.



Rocky Mountain goat nannie and kid seen near Mt. Jefferson, July 2024. ODFW photo.

Recent research led by Deschutes wildlife staff and a biometrician from Heron Ecological LLC studied mountain goat post-translocation movement patterns and habitat selection utilizing GPS collar location information in central Oregon. Preliminary results showed that after translocating and releasing mountain goats, individuals took nearly a year (334.4 days) on average to reduce movements away from the release site. Preliminary results from year-round resource selection function (RSF) models showed that variables representing topography, vegetation and human disturbance drove home range selection within the landscape. On average, mountain goats strongly selected for locations at high elevations, near escape terrain, near streams, and on steeper slopes. There was general avoidance of paved roads, hiking trails, and open canopy cover.

These results were used to generate predictive surfaces of suitable habitat across the study area in the central Cascades. This research marks the first in Oregon to utilize mountain goat GPS collar data to study movement patterns and to characterize resource selection. These results are important to improve our understanding of mountain goat behavior and resource requirements in this region, and to predict presence of suitable habitat throughout the state.

West Region

Chris Kern, Region Manager

Two-day fishing event at Oregon State Penitentiary

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) STEP program recently partnered with the Oregon State Penitentiary staff to bring the joy of fishing to an unexpected setting—inside the walls of a maximum-security prison. In a special two-day event held in the Oregon State Penitentiary visiting yard, incarcerated fathers and their families had the chance to connect through the experience of fishing, thanks to this unique collaboration.

The event featured a 1,500-gallon pond stocked with 240 live bluegill, creating a fun and engaging fishing environment right on the prison grounds. The pond, along with all necessary fishing equipment including poles, tackle, and bait, was rented and set up by the Association of Northwest Steelheaders (Mid-Valley Chapter), who played a key role in making this unique event possible.

Reed Fischer, ODFW's STEP Biologist in the mid-Willamette ensured the event occurred by trapping and transporting bluegill to the event when prison staff were unable to locate a fish supplier.

Throughout the event, STEP awarded "First Fish" certificates to over 80 children, marking a milestone in their lives as they caught their very first fish. The children were not only excited to fish but also enjoyed other STEP activities including interacting with the aquatic environment by holding tadpoles, meeting "Crayman" the Crayfish, and engaging in various educational activities like fish printing and backyard bass casting games.

A picnic lunch, family photos, and a plethora of fish-themed prizes further enhanced the day's experience, making it a memorable occasion for the 100 family members who attended. As a special touch, each child was gifted a brand-new fishing pole, courtesy of Oregon State Penitentiary, ensuring they could continue their newfound hobby beyond the prison walls.

The event was a resounding success, offering a rare and valuable opportunity for incarcerated individuals to bond with their families through a shared outdoor activity.



Families participate in fishing and fish printing.

NW region summer intern highlights

The ODFW wildlife intern program provides valuable training experiences to college students entering the field of wildlife management, while assisting with a variety of agency activities. This year's summer interns have accomplished a wide variety of projects across the northwest region.

Sophie Reid (Newport) worked on an early successional habitat acoustic bat monitoring project. She patrolled the Alsea/Stott Mountain Travel Management Area (TMA) to maintain signage, kiosks, and traffic monitors, and monitored black oystercatcher nest survey areas.

Trevor Thomson (Corvallis) has been trapping and marking western pond turtles, deploying acoustic detectors for bats, doing beaver habitat surveys, assisting with hunter harvest check-ins, helping administer the TMA, putting out grouse wing collection barrels, deploying and checking trail cameras, and helping respond to injured or diseased animals.

Lyssa Lini (Tillamook) performed visual surveys at potential turtle habitats and set traps to determine where turtles may be present. Additionally, she participated in western pond turtle conservation efforts at Muddy Valley Habitat Reserve and assisted with multiple bird surveys including band-tailed pigeon surveys, tufted puffin surveys, and marbled murrelet surveys. Currently, she is deploying acoustic monitors, contributing data to the NABat Program.

Calder Smith (Sauvie Island) had the chance to get some wildlife capture and handling experience by trapping and banding mourning doves and ducks and participated in the statewide wildlife capture and immobilization course. He conducted annual wildlife surveys for species such as band-tailed pigeons and deployed bat monitoring equipment as part of a larger regional effort to monitor bat species across the PNW. Calder also had plenty of opportunity to gain experience collecting biological samples from hunter harvested or potentially sick wildlife.



From top L-R: Lyssa Lini with snapping turtle; Trevor Smith with juvenile crow; Calder Smith with mourning dove; Sophie Reed working on acoustic bat monitoring; interns and Institute for Applied Ecology staff documenting NW pond turtle at Herbert Farm.

Conservation Program interns Lilly White and Travis Schlaht participated in western pond turtle conservation efforts at Muddy Valley Habitat Reserve and checked/deployed turtle traps, entered turtle data, wrote summary reports and responded to turtle sighting reports. They also dissected and analyzed gut contents from bullfrogs as part of a capture/gut contents pilot project and helped respond to an assortment of wildlife calls.

Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program interns Sophia Tate and Lilia Chapman conducted habitat monitoring at numerous WWMP properties throughout the Willamette Valley and analyzed drone imagery of northwestern pond turtles to assess the feasibility of using drones for population surveys.

The NW interns also participated in a two-day bio-blitz within the Gales Creek Beaver Emphasis Area in July along with ODFW staff from several districts.

Interpretive events partnership with Jackson County

Earlier this year, the Rogue Watershed District partnered with Jackson County Parks to create a series of interpretive events. The events are an educational opportunity for the public that also highlight some of the outstanding skills and knowledge of our local ODFW biologists.

Running from July 20 through August 24, an event is held each Saturday at one of the local Jackson County Park campgrounds. Event topics included hands-on pelt kit demonstrations, angler education, aquatic invasive species awareness, and the crowd favorite, Northwest Pond Turtles.

These interpretive events are a chance to showcase our ODFW biologists and provide an excellent opportunity for our wildlife interns to gain valuable experience presenting their newfound knowledge to the public. Since the interpretive series just launched this year, we have learned some valuable lessons in addition to the successes-i.e., extreme heat or wildfire smoke can derail an event quickly, and of course the critical business motto "location, location, location." However, the challenges have only generated more ideas to make these events even more successful in the future. Our partnership with Jackson County Parks continues to grow and we're already excited about planning 2025.



The Rogue District and Jackson County partnered on interpretive events at county park campgrounds.

Rogue River Bay e-creel for fall Chinook fishery

After hearing some concerns from the public about harvest and fishing effort in the Rogue Bay, the Gold Beach Fish District implemented a creel survey to estimate harvest for the Rogue Bay fall Chinook salmon fishery. The survey started in mid-July and is expected to continue through October.

Based on data collected through the Electronic License System (ELS), "e-creels" are used to monitor several fall Chinook and coho fisheries in Oregon. The e-creel methodology was pioneered by ODFW's Coastal Chinook Research and Monitoring Program and is both cost efficient and effective at estimating harvest. The e-creel estimates harvest using data from ELS harvest records and ratios of anglers using electronic tagging vs. paper tagging.

An e-creel design is an ideal option over traditional creel techniques when staff time and budgets are limited, as is the case for the Rogue fishery. Although collection of fishing effort data is not required for e-creel, staff are collecting boat counts and additional angler information to better understand the fishery.



Rogue Bay creel surveyor interviews anglers in the Port of Gold Beach fish cleaning station.

Oregon State Police

Captain Casey Thomas, Fish & Wildlife Division



Poachers caught hunting bear over bait.

Fish and Wildlife Division members patrolled the Metolius Unit, contacting two subjects in a vehicle. Only one of the two subjects had a bear tag and apples were observed in the bed of the pickup. The truck was later located parked at a location know to have a good population of bear. The following day, a Fish and Wildlife Sergeant was able to locate a ladder stand overlooking a trail camera. Apples were present in front of the trail camera. Later in the evening, a side by side was located parked in the area and a predator call was being actively used. The two subjects from the prior day were located in the tree stand with two rifles. Both subjects were cited for Hunting Bear with use of Bait. One subject was additionally cited for No Bear Tag. Another Trooper arrived to assist and help dismantle and pack out the ladder stand.



Trooper assists with Hunter Education in John Day.

A Fish and Wildlife Trooper assisted with a Hunter Education class and field day in John Day. There were 11 students in attendance. During the classroom portion, the Trooper completed an OSP fish and game presentation in which the role of the State Police was explained, and each student was given questions to look up in the regulations to get them accustomed to using the Big Game regulations. During the field day the students completed their live fire portion along with a hunter's trail in which the students are presented with legal, ethical, and shoot/no shoot scenarios. The Trooper also demonstrated what to expect during a typical license/tag check.



Wild trout poached on North Santiam River.

A Fish and Wildlife Trooper observed an angler actively fishing above the Mill City angling deadline on the North Santiam River. Upon contact, the Trooper observed a fish stringer in the water next to where the angler was standing. Two wild rainbow trout were later discovered on the end of the stringer. On this stretch of river, anglers are prohibited from retaining wild trout. The angler admitted to catching both wild trout above the posted angling deadline. The angler was issued a citation for Angling Closed Area – Above Posted Angling Deadline and Take/Possession of Non-Adipose Fin-Clipped Trout and warned for Take/Possession of Fish Closed Area – Above Posted Angling Deadline.

OCEAN SALMON AND COLUMBIA RIVER PROGRAM

Tucker Jones, Ocean Salmon and Columbia River Program Manager

Field summary of Columbia River Investigations 2024 field activities in the Columbia River

White sturgeon stock assessment activities in Bonneville Reservoir.

This program is a collaboration between ODFW, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), and the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC), which has operated on an annual basis since 1986. We rotate between Bonneville, The Dalles, and John Day reservoirs on a three-year basis, and in 2024, we are assessing white sturgeon in Bonneville Reservoir. Last winter, CRITFC marked and released 2,418 white sturgeon. For the recapture portion of the project, ODFW and WDFW complete two passes of the reservoir, once each in June and August. During the first pass, we caught 1,644 white sturgeon, some of which were recaptures. As of this writing, the crew have one week left and have captured 1,761 white sturgeon during the second pass. These data will be used to estimate the stock, growth rates, and survival later this year.

White sturgeon stock assessment activities in the lower Columbia River.

The lower river assessment, which includes parts of the Columbia River Estuary and the Willamette River, occurs on an annual basis. ODFW, in collaboration with contracted commercial fishers, does a marking pass in the spring. This year, we marked and released 3,831 white sturgeon in May and June. Our first recapture pass in July resulted in 1,198 captured white sturgeon. Staff will complete the second pass in September.



Figure 1. Sturgeon crew help Mike Harrington, Fish Division Administrator, scan the PIT tag of a freshly marked white sturgeon.

Northern Pikeminnow Management Program evaluation activities in the Columbia River.

The Northern Pikeminnow Management Program (NPMP) biological monitoring and evaluation, conducted by ODFW, is tasked with monitoring the effectiveness of the Sport Reward Fishery and to evaluate the predator fish community for signs of responses and other ecological changes due to the removal of northern pikeminnow from the Columbia and Snake rivers. The NPMP is a multi-agency collaboration, funded by the Bonneville Power Administration to mitigate for increased mortality of juvenile salmon associated with the construction and ongoing operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System. During the 2024 season, we tagged and released northern pikeminnow in two areas, the Bonneville Reservoir (n = 229) and in the lower Columbia River downstream of Bonneville Dam (n = 604). Through early July, a total of 101 northern pikeminnow have been recovered

through the Sport Reward Fishery, for an exploitation rate of approximately 7.5% to date. The Sport Reward Fishery is scheduled to run through September. Final exploitation rates won't be known until after the season ends.

Our primary biological monitoring efforts in 2024 also occurred in the Bonneville Reservoir and in the lower Columbia River downstream of Bonneville Dam. We completed more than 140, 15-minute electrofishing runs from May 7 through May 24 (see Figure 2) to collect the data and samples necessary for fishery independent indices of abundance for northern pikeminnow, smallmouth bass, and walleye as well as their associated consumption and predation indices for juvenile salmon and steelhead. Through those monitoring efforts we captured nearly 700 fishes from the one native (northern pikeminnow) and two non-native (smallmouth bass and walleye) species we monitor. In Bonneville Reservoir we sampled 135 northern pikeminnow, 334 smallmouth bass, and 36 walleye. In the lower Columbia River, we sampled 71 northern pikeminnow, 98 smallmouth bass, and 17 walleye. Consumption and Predation index information will be available later this winter.



Figure 2. Electrofishing around the powerhouse tailrace of The Dalles Dam while tagging northern pikeminnow.

End of field reports for September 13, 2024