Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission
February 14, 2025

East Region

Nick Myatt, Region Manager

Golden eagle research in northeast

District wildlife staff in Wallowa County, in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Nature Conservancy, began a pilot project to study the survival, movement, and reproductive success of golden eagles. During the pilot phase, ODFW staff tested methods of capture as well as telemetry units to determine feasibility for a longer-term study.

Golden eagle fitted with a GPS unit, Dec. 2024. Staff captured the bird at a remote location but transported it to a covered area to process it. ODFW photo.

The first capture event during this pilot project took place in mid-December 2024.

Golden eagle captured as part of ongoing research project, Dec. 2024. ODFW photo.

USFWS provided four GPS units for this pilot year. The data from golden eagles captured in northeast Oregon during this pilot phase will go toward a larger West-wide study led by USFWS. If funding is secured staff intend to put many more units on birds in northeast Oregon for more localized research.

Very few people in the U.S. have the certification and experience necessary to handle eagles. Luckily, Matt Stuber, a biologist with the USFWS in Oregon volunteered his time and expertise to lead the capture and handling of these birds. In addition to ODFW staff, several other USFWS employees came out to help as well as a FS biologist and staff from The Nature Conservancy. Two of our capture sites were on Nature Conservancy lands, they have been key partners for this pilot year, offering places to trap and local expertise.

McKay Creek fish passage update

During 2020, fisheries co-managers, ODFW and Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR), met to discuss the possibility of starting to work toward fish passage at McKay Creek Reservoir Dam. These efforts included an evaluation of the lower six miles of habitat below the McKay Creek Reservoir Dam. A plan was made to lower the adult weir at the mouth of McKay Creek in September 2023, to allow anadromous fish their first access the lower six miles of habitat since 1995.

Since the weir was lowered in 2023 there have been a total of 117 redds counted in the six miles of habitat in McKay Creek below the dam. Of the 117 redds, 103 were counted in the fall from fall Chinook and Coho spawning and 14 were from steelhead spawning. CTUIR also radio tagged 50 spring Chinook at the mouth of the Umatilla River to determine how many would migrate into McKay Creek prior to the adult weir being raised. Of the 41 that made it to the mouth, three entered McKay Creek for a portion of time prior to exiting and migrating further upstream. Fisheries managers will be repeating the spring Chinook radio tag surveys for two more years, as well as performing releases of PIT tagged hatchery steelhead below the dam in the lower six miles to perform comparative survival estimates with other hatchery steelhead releases.

Steelhead radio tag operations on McKay Creek. Photo by CTUIR.

Fisheries managers plan to continue to work with the BOR on possible fish passage at the McKay Creek Reservoir Dam and are conducting other studies both upstream and downstream of McKay Creek Reservoir Dam.

CWD surveillance and monitoring

The 2024-25 season for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) surveillance and monitoring runs from July 1, 2024, to June 31, 2025. Major accomplishments to date include hiring six temporary field staff through general funds, standardizing sample collection protocols by the addition of a Survey123 form and barcoded collection kits and beginning contract work with Cornell University to perform risk assessment and sample optimization modeling. Total samples collected as of January 16, 2025 (n=3991) have already surpassed that of the prior year (n=3472) with 6 months remaining in the sampling season.

Ashley Reeder, Statewide CWD Coordinator collects a tissue sample from a deer. ODFW photo.

The increase in sample collection during this season can be attributed to multiple factors. ODFW has 47 taxidermists and meat processors in the state collecting and submitting CWD samples for testing, with a compensation of $10 per sample. Sample collection has also benefitted from increased relationships with the Oregon Department of Transportation, county and city public works departments, and APHIS Wildlife Services staff for the collection of non-salvaged

roadkill. During this time, staff also placed two additional drop-off containers for deer and elk heads, bringing the total number of drop-off locations to 21 (19 ODFW offices, 2 tribal natural resource offices). Major check stations in central and eastern Oregon were also operational for one weekend each during deer and elk season, respectively. While check station locations for the deer season remained the same as the previous year (Prineville, The Dalles, Elgin, and Baker City), an additional check station in Ukiah was added for the elk season. Overall, check station performance surpassed that of the prior year, with a total of 905 samples collected compared to 638 samples collected in the 2023-24 season.

CWD Drop-off stations are now available at many field offices. ODFW photo.

Education and outreach for CWD also increased during the 2024-25 season with more than $62,000 spent on paid outreach methods. Items produced through this spend included digital ads served on mobile apps and browsers, digital ads served within streaming audio, display ads on websites, targeted emails to Oregon individuals that used certain keywords to research CWD online, radio spots, and print advertising in ODFW's hunting regulations. The paid outreach efforts also helped to secure a series of public service announcements, news stories, and live television coverage for the 2024 campaign. Additionally, staff continue to provide educational talks to various audiences including Oregon State Police, university classes, local Oregon Hunters Association chapters, tribal partners, and local sportsman shows.

West Region

Chris Kern, Region Manager

Fisher research in southern Oregon

Fisher are a Species of Greatest Conservaion Need in Oregon's State Wildlife Action Plan, and ODFW is actively conducting research to understand fisher occupancy and distribution east of I-5, as well as that of their competitors and predators.

Wildlife Research staff maintained 30 baited camera traps in the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument and Southern Cascades. The cameras were deployed in mid-September on U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands in areas with proposed habitat management efforts. The goal is to evaluate how these land alterations influence changes in mesocarnivore occupancy, distribution, and space use.

Fishers were detected at seven of these sites, and a hair snare box was deployed at each in attempts to obtain an opportunistic genetic sample.

If successful, DNA from the hairs will be analyzed to determine the evolutionary lineage of fishers in that area. With a reintroduced fisher population (founding animals originated from Canadian and Northern Minnesota) to the north and a native fisher population to the west, ODFW is interested to see if there is genetic mixing occurring in this area. This information can help to explain how fishers are dispersing and expanding across their historic range.

Wildlife Research staff also began fisher and gray fox trapping and continued radio-collaring efforts. With this effort, ODFW aims to better understand how these species might overlap and partition/compete-for resources on the landcsape.

To capture fishers and gray foxes, ODFW has deployed and maintains about 15 live traps in the Applegate. So far, ODFW has successfully radio-marked 10 gray fox and eight fisher, five of which were collar replacements for animals marked in 2024. Current trapping efforts will continue until March.

Crew members monitor individuals for survival, remote data downloads, and den site selection. Understanding the space use of fisher in an area where they persist will help guide land and habitat management recommendations as well as inform potential future translocation efforts to connect metapopulations of fisher in the future.

Biologists sedated this fisher to radio collar it and take standard biological samples along with age, sex, weight, and length.

Biologists bait all traps (live box traps and hair snare boxes) with a chicken drum and cat food.

Proactive measures will help reduce wolf conflict at Butte Falls ranch

In response to an increase in the Grouse Ridge wolf pack presence on a ranch near Butte Falls and the start of calving on the ranch, the owner agreed to set up non-lethal fladry around his calving pasture. Working in collaboration with APHIS Wildlife Services, an installation plan was devised and put into motion Jan. 14, 2025. Non-lethal fladry materials that were purchased by the Jackson County wolf compensation committee were used as well as fox deterrent lights around the approximately one-mile perimeter of the pasture.

Fiberglass rods and tee posts were placed three feet from the existing field fence while brush trees were cleared so the fladry could be strung without coming into contact with foreign objects and risk being shorted out. The ranch owner and Wildlife Services will maintain the fladry until calving is complete and the calves become less vulnerable.

This fence will help reduce conflict issues with the Grouse Ridge Pack that was involved with confirmed depredation events in this area in 2024.

Fladry was installed and brush cleared along the perimeter of a Butte Falls ranch calving pasture to help reduce conflicts with Grouse Ridge Pack.

Coquille River flooding tests tidal restoration projects

Early January rainfall elevated Coquille River waters to flood stage. While this is a common event every few winters, flooding tested several new tidal restoration projects where tide gates have been installed in the past two years.

Charleston staff worked in coordination with the local watershed councils and the Soil and Water Conservation District to review both the performance and resilience of the construction actions to heavy outflow and overflow. ODFW staff have been closely following floodwater impacts to a yet unvegetated, earthen berm at the Coaledo Tidegate, which may need some minor repairs.

The floodwaters allowed for over 100 acres of floodplain swales to water up in the North Fork and East Fork Coquille River subbasins. ODFW staff worked with Coquille Watershed Association staff to seine and tag juvenile coho in one location near the East Fork Coquille River. Based on recapture of marked fish, it was estimated that about 500+ juvenile coho were

rearing in a one-and-a-half-acre floodplain pasture location.

Staff worked with Coquille Watershed Association staff to seine and tag juvenile coho in one location near the East Fork Coquille River.

More than 100 acres of floodplain swales watered up the East Fork Coquille River subbasin in January.

Little North Fork of the Nehalem River Large Wood Restoration Project

A restoration project on the Little North Fork of the Nehalem River successfully improved critical habitat for coho. A section of stream that lacked instream habitat complexity received a boost this summer thanks to the Nehalem Bay Watershed Council, Weyerhaeuser timber company, and guidance of ODFW's Fish Habitat Restoration Biologist in Tillamook. This section of stream is crucial for coho during certain times of the year ("Anchor Habitat").

Project partners installed nine large woody debris (LWD) structures with an excavator and conducted tree felling at an additional nine locations over nearly one mile of stream to increase channel complexity, streambed scour and pool development, gravel sorting, and floodplain connectivity. This project was funded by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) with in-kind match funding provided by Weyerhaeuser and ODFW and additional funds supplied by Wild Salmon Center.

A site visit was conducted by the Tillamook Fish Habitat Restoration Biologist (Western Oregon Stream Restoration Program) this winter after several high flow events to evaluate the LWD project and observations showed substantial progress in meeting project goals. All structures remained stable and increases in streambed scour, pool development, and evidence of high water extending onto the floodplain were noted at numerous structure locations. Additionally, evidence of coho spawning was observed in gravel accumulations near several structures. The highlight of the site visit was the observation of a beaver dam that was built on a felled red alder tree in the upper portion of the project. The beaver pond associated with the dam extended nearly 100 ft upstream and was providing substantial low-velocity habitat, a critical need for high survival of coho juveniles during the winter.

Additional coho anchor habitats exist in the Little North Fork of the Nehalem River downstream of the project area and discussions are planned to evaluate future restoration opportunities. To learn more about habitat restoration on the North Coast and in other areas of western Oregon, see the Western Oregon Stream Restoration (WOSRP) project website.

Little North Fork of the Nehalem River Large Wood Restoration Project. Top to bottom: beaver dam built on felled red alder, impoundment upstream of beaver dam, machine-placed LWD structure.

2024 coho runs strong in Clackamas and Willamette Rivers

Clackamas

Coho had another successful year in the Clackamas River. The early-run component of natural-origin coho wrapped up with a total of 12,481 fish back to Portland General Electric's (PGE) North Fork adult fish collection facility. This is the second highest return on record (2023 was the record) and 198% of the ten-year average. The late run coho return is also strong, with 1,864 fish back to the adult collection facility through December. The ten-year average return for wild late run coho is 1,347. Downstream fish passage was impressive with over 410,000 juvenile salmon and steelhead passing through PGE's downstream bypass system in November. This was the third highest monthly total since counts began in 1958, only behind November and December 2023.

From 2000 to 2015, an average of 5,235 adult unmarked (presumed wild) salmon and steelhead passed PGE's adult fish collection facility on the Clackamas River annually. The 2024 total of 22,229 was slightly lower than the 2023 return, but still remarkable. It included the third-highest return of unmarked winter steelhead, the fourth-highest return of unmarked spring Chinook, and the second-highest return of unmarked coho since counts began in 1958.

Willamette

The Willamette coho run broke records in 2024 with more than 53,000 adults passing Willamette Falls through the end of December. The 2023 return of coho to the Upper Willamette, based on counts at Willamette Falls, set a record for adult (29,000) and jack (11,000) coho. The previous records were 25,000 adults in 2009 and 7,100 jacks in 1972. Given the high jack count in 2023, a large adult return was expected for 2024, but actual return far exceeded expectations. Of the more than 53,000 returning adults, only about 700 of these were fin-clipped hatchery fish, with the rest being naturally produced fish spawned in tributaries upstream of the falls.

Telemetry studies have shown that most Upper Willamette coho migrate to a few tributaries, primarily those entering on the west side of the Willamette Basin, with the Tualatin and Yamhill being the most common destinations. Good numbers of coho are also observed in the Santiam basin. In 2023, ODFW observed over 50 coho ascending the fish ladder at Leaburg Dam on the McKenzie River, the first time coho were documented at this location.
Given the predicted run size of coho at Willamette Falls in 2024, staff anticipated a larger number at Leaburg Dam in 2024, however, only one coho was observed. Although coho were not documented by ODFW at any other locations in the upper Willamette Basin, anglers reported catching a few in the lower McKenzie River and the Willamette River near Eugene.

The Oregon Fish Commission and later, ODFW, stocked hatchery coho in the Willamette River until the program ended in the 1990s. Returns from these stockings were variable, with an average of 3,400 fish from 1971 to 1990 and a high of 17,000 in 1971. Before 2009, no adult return exceeded 20,000 adults.

Since the cessation of the stocking program, several factors affecting coho survival have changed. A major factor is the large reduction in cumulative harvest rates on this stock because of actions to protect and recover ESA-listed coho stocks. ODFW staff also believe there is a large amount of suitable coho habitat in some of the west-side Willamette tributaries like the Tualatin and Yamhill. Additionally, the parent year that produced the 2024 adult return, which returned in 2021 at an abundance of 21,000 fish (the second highest observed at that time), may have led to high numbers of offspring produced. This, coupled with favorable ocean conditions, likely resulted in the very large 2024 return.

Harvest data for the 2024 Willamette coho season is not yet available, but early reports suggest that while some anglers reported difficulty catching these fish, overall harvest was significantly higher than in previous years. Emergency rules also expanded harvest opportunity areas in the fall of 2024.

Coho passing Willamette Falls in October 2024.

ODFW hosts Willamette Valley Oak and Prairie Cooperative Summit

At the end of November 2024 ODFW hosted the Willamette Valley Oak and Prairie Cooperative Summit at Headquarters in Salem. The agenda included insightful panels, featured talks, and flash talks covering a wide range of topics such as oak habitat conservation, wildfire risk mitigation, and the impact of invasive species throughout the valley. Additionally, breakout group discussions provided a platform for collaborative dialogue on critical issues like climate adaptation, prescribed fire, and private landowner engagement. Approximately 130 in-person and ~20 virtual attendees representing various agencies, tribes, organizations, private landowners, and university researchers, including students and early professionals, participated in this free event.

Oregon State Police

Captain Casey Thomas, Fish & Wildlife Division

Team effort rescues Barn Owl from power line.

An Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Trooper received multiple complaints about an owl hanging from a power line. The barn owl

had become tangled in fishing line, which was hanging from a power line, about 20 yards from a bridge that crosses the Lost River. A local raptor rehabilitator told the Trooper that unlike eagles, Owls can't swim. A local Pacific Power employee had a boom truck and offered to help. Using the Troopers net, he was able to safely cut the owl down. The owl received some treatment at a local wildlife rehabilitation center and was released on the same day.

Legal angler checked by OSP on the Necanicum River.

Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Troopers conducted a float patrol on the Necanicum River. Multiple steelhead angler checks and non-motorized boat inspections were conducted. One citation was issued for No Combined Angling Harvest Card. The photo above is one example of the Fish and Wildlife Division's ability to contact individuals angling on Oregon's waterways utilizing Department watercraft. It should be noted the gentleman photographed complied and appreciated OSP's presence on the river.

Legal anglers checked on the Columbia River.

Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Troopers in performed a joint boat patrol on the Columbia River with the Hood River County Sheriff's Office Marine Deputy checking sturgeon anglers and performing boat safety inspections. The Columbia River was extremely busy with boaters and sturgeon anglers. The boat basins and popular fishing locations were packed to capacity and beyond in some locations. During the patrol only a small section of river was covered to sift through the crowds of boats and perform checks mainly just west and east of the Hood River bridge. In total 21 boats and 69 anglers were checked. Two citations were issued to anglers for failing to immediately validate their harvest cards. The Hood River County Marine Deputy issued three warnings for failing to renew boat registrations and issued one citation for no fire extinguisher. It should be noted the anglers photographed above were complying.

K9 "Scout" and his handler in Sunriver, Oregon.

An Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Trooper, Lieutenant, and Conservation K9 "Scout" attended the Oregon Outdoors Recreation Summit in Sunriver at the request of ODFW. The Trooper spoke about the role of OSP Fish and Wildlife Troopers and then K9 "Scout" gave search demonstrations for happy dog lovers.

Oregon State Police Recruit Troopers conducting a training scenario.

Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Division members from around the state showed up at Oregon's Department of Public Safety and Standards training facility to conduct Fish and Wildlife Scenario training for Oregon State Police Recruit Troopers. Both sworn and non-sworn Fish and Wildlife Division members assisted, along with ODFW employees to make the day a success. Multiple stations were set up, with some utilizing real wildlife. Oregon State Police Recruit Troopers, regardless of Division assignment, attend this training as part of their academy training.

OCEAN SALMON AND COLUMBIA RIVER PROGRAM

Tucker Jones, Ocean Salmon and Columbia River Program Manager

Summary of 2024 Fisheries and Outlook for 2025 Fisheries

The Columbia River Management section of OSCRP has posted a document to the ODFW website (https://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/OSCRP/CRM/returns_and_expectations/docs/2024_Results_2025_Expectations.pdf) with preliminary estimates of 2024 salmon returns and fishery results, 2025 run forecasts for spring Chinook, summer Chinook, and sockeye salmon, as well as a list of currently-known key dates for 2025 fisheries planning milestones. This document is prepared jointly by the ODFW and WDFW Columbia River fishery management staffs each year. This useful document has a table of salmonid returns/forecasts that will be updated on our website (https://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/OSCRP/CRM/docs/2025/2025%20Spring-Summer%20Forecasts.pdf) throughout the next few weeks and months as forecasts for fall Chinook, coho, and summer steelhead are completed.

The 2025 upriver spring Chinook run (i.e., Chinook destined to pass upstream of Bonneville Dam) is expected to be 122,500 adult fish which is like the 2024 forecast but would be slightly higher than the estimated 2024 return (it is still well below the 10-year average). The 2024 upriver summer Chinook return came in below last year's forecast, and the 2025 forecasted abundance of 38,000 is probably not high enough to allow for target summer Chinook fisheries in the mainstem Columbia downstream of Priest Rapids Dam in 2025.

The 2024 sockeye return to the upper Columbia River Basin of an estimated 761,682 fish was the highest sockeye return since the construction of Bonneville Dam in 1938. The forecasted 2025 sockeye return of 350,200 fish would be the fourth highest return in the last 10 years.

Run reconstructions are not complete, but preliminary information indicates that the total 2024 adult fall Chinook return was higher than the preseason forecast of 554,000 fish. The 2024 fall Chinook jack returns also appear higher than forecast indicating the 2025 forecast should be similar or higher than the 2024 return.

Although the 2024 coho salmon run reconstruction won't be completed until mid- to late-February; Bonneville Dam jack counts were the third highest since 1977, and preliminary adult returns are already higher than the 2024 forecast.

The upriver summer steelhead return was somewhat improved over the extremely poor returns observed since 2016; however, it was still well below average returns seen prior to that year.

Recreational salmonid fisheries were a popular activity again in 2024. Overall salmon and steelhead angler trips in the Columbia River totaled approximately 381,000 in 2024, the highest since 2016.

Non-tribal commercial fisheries landed approximately 75,300 Chinook and 70,600 coho salmon in combined 2024 Select Area, mainstem, and seine fisheries. Commercial landings of Chinook and coho were 118% and 103% of the respective 10-year averages for those species and were predominately driven by fall catches.

End of field reports for
February 14, 2025