



CHECKING OUR BACKTRAIL

2019 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OREGON HUNTERS ASSOCIATION

Wolves and elk were hot issues for OHA in '19

By Jim Akenson, OHA Sr. Conservation Director
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Several drawn-out issues OHA worked on tirelessly finally reached closure in 2019, including approval of the revised Wolf Plan, the Ochoco Summit Trails lawsuit, and the big game regulations review and changes. OHA was constantly involved in these processes, attending every possible meeting and testimony opportunity. Our fundamental intent was always protecting the best interest of hunter opportunities and the wildlife resource.

Wolf Plan Approval:

In June the Commission voted to adopt the new and revised Wolf Management Plan.

OHA actively participated in five stakeholder meetings and gave public testimony at every opportunity over the past three years. We always emphasized that wolf population growth needs to be monitored very closely, and with ever-increasing consideration for game populations and livestock interests.

The wording about the use of hunting and trapping as future management tools was kept intact for this plan revision. We encouraged ODFW to make wolf population monitoring a key priority, while at the same time looking closely at deer and elk population stability in units with established wolf packs. Looking ahead, we will need to stay on top of the Wolf Plan implementation – regularly providing input from our observations in the field.

Regulation Review and Changes:

In September, the Commission voted to adopt the large package of regulation changes proposed by ODFW. Most of these changes will go into effect beginning in 2020. The three biggest issues presented by OHA representatives were about the new regulations for black-tailed deer, the dire situation with mule deer populations in eastern Oregon, and the scale and process of the proposed general cow elk hunts.

New for blacktails in western Oregon will be the bag limit allowing for spike harvest with the new definition of “one buck with a visible antler.” Spike bucks now will be illegal to harvest during controlled antlerless hunts. Our main recommendation here was for a gradual test implementation to see how it goes prior to applying this regulation across the full range for blacktails in Oregon. Many OHA members and leaders have concerns about excessive vulnerability of spike blacktail bucks in a 35-day season with unlimited tags.

The cow elk damage tag is a change for areas of the state with high elk damage and will replace 19 controlled hunts and the need to provide damage tags to landowners. Again, the geographic extent of these changes brought us concern, and additionally, hunters taking advantage of this new opportunity would still need permission to hunt on private land to use the tag and it would be their only elk hunting opportunity.



WENHHA/ODFW

OHA helped keep hunting and trapping as future tools in the revised Oregon Wolf Plan.

OHA’s concern for mule deer centered around some new late buck hunts occurring in units where the total number of mature bucks (counted) did not seem robust enough for new opportunities as proposed. A positive result of OHA’s meeting testimony was that the Commission directed the development of deer advisory committees for both blacktail and mule deer. OHA will play a key role in this meeting input process as it develops.

Ochoco National Forest Lawsuit:

In June the Federal DOJ dropped its appeal of OHA’s Ochoco lawsuit, resulting in victory to stop developing the High Summit OHV Trail. This was a long journey to success for OHA, on both chapter and state levels, giving science-based stakeholder input. A lot of our success related to hiring an effective attorney in Scott Jaeger. Besides our internal coordination, we also partnered with RMEF and others to protect extremely critical elk habitat.

BAKER COUNTY BULLS/DUANE DUNGANNON



Oregon gun owners dodged bullets again in '19

By Al Elkins, OHA Lobbyist
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The year 2019 was a very busy one on the legislative front, with the session beginning in January. OHA tracked close to 1,000 bills that affected hunting, habitat and wildlife. Here is a summary of 2019 from the legislative perspective.

Bills That Passed

Anti-Poaching Campaign Funded

A big victory for OHA this session was the funding of a new anti-poaching campaign that OHA, ODFW, OSP, Oregon Department of Justice and members of the legislature worked on developing for over two years. The new \$3.7 million General Fund appropriation was allocated in part to OSP for the hiring of an additional five troopers, DOJ for the hiring of a “circuit rider” and support staff to work with prosecutors around the state on prosecuting poachers, and to ODFW for development of a “poaching awareness” campaign.

Elk Damage Bill Compromise

There were many elk damage related bills introduced this session. After hearings on the bills, a work group was established to find a compromise between legislators, landowners and hunters on elk damage to ranches and farms. A compromise proposal penned by ODFW staff was agreed to by all parties involved.

Ban on Commercial Urine Products

The bill originally required that the urine product be free of CWD. Finding that there was no test to determine if a urine product is CWD free, the legislature banned all urine-based hunting products in Oregon.

Leftover and Non-resident Tags

A bill introduced by ODFW that eliminated the requirement that allows ODFW to restrict leftover tags to hunters who didn't draw a tag for that species in the controlled hunt drawing passed, as did a bill that increased the percentage of non-resident tags issued for hunting of black bear, cougar, and antelope.

Bills That Failed

Firestorm of Gun Bills

There were some 30 gun bills that OHA tracked during the legislative session. OHA

worked with other pro-gun organizations to stop these bills. Our actions, plus those enacted by the Senate Republicans' first walk-out, helped prevent any anti-gun legislation from being passed. Here are the types of issues we're facing through the gun bills – the good, and the mostly bad and the ugly:

- firearms safety training in schools
- ban on exploding targets/tracer ammo on public lands during high fire danger
- registration of “assault” firearms with OSP
- definition of “assault” rifles and limits on sale/possession
- minimum age to purchase “assault” rifle or handguns
- background check bills to tighten restrictions, delay purchases
- storage/locking bills to require guns be kept or transported under lock
- endangering minor by allowing access to firearms (new crime)
- theft reporting bills with liability for failure to report
- prohibitions on large capacity magazines (over 10 rounds) includes handguns
- regulation of gun ranges
- tax credits for gun safes
- illegal discharge within 500 ft. of dwelling, exceptions
- voluntary “do not sell” lists
- reporting of unlawful firearms transfers
- concealed carry permits and fees

Cougar Bills

All the cougar bills failed to pass. One bill received a late-night hearing but was then assigned to the House Committee on Rules where it died.

OHA's 2019 Investments in Our Mission

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| Projects benefiting Oregon's wildlife & sportsmen: | \$236,482 |
| Publications, information & education: | \$239,151 |
| Defending hunting rights/Advocating for wildlife: | \$134,514 |
| Fighting poaching in Oregon: | \$42,561 |
| Volunteer hours donated by OHA members: | 32,369 |

Coyote Hunting Contest Ban Bill

A bill that would have made it illegal to have coyote hunting contests in Oregon died after passing the Senate. It had one hearing in the House Committee on Rules and died in that committee.

Oregon Conservation & Recreation Fund

In 2020 OHA, along with other groups, will work with ODFW on the implementation of a bill that passed last session that created the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund. This fund will be used to carry out activities that serve to protect, maintain or enhance fish and wildlife in Oregon.

Initiative filed to restrict gun storage, impose liability

An initiative petition is on the horizon for the November ballot in 2020. The proposed ballot measure includes these provisions:

- A person who owns or possesses a firearm shall, at all times that the firearm is not carried by or under the control of the person or an authorized person, secure the firearm:
- With an engaged trigger lock or cable lock...
- In a locked container, equipped with a tamper-resistant lock...

The measure also requires reporting lost and stolen guns and makes the owner responsible for actions taken with a stolen firearm, but includes no additional penalties for those who actually steal them and use them in crimes.

OHA and NRA have challenged the ballot title wording in court.



OHA put all hands on public lands

OHA works on key land-use issues important to hunting in our state. We're on the front lines with both staff and volunteers, working with key agencies and partners to improve wildlife habitat and build long-term, collaborative partnerships. Our efforts include working to keep public lands public, protect and improve habitat, and redistribute big game animals to public land from nearby private land where they are doing damage.

SE Oregon Resource Management Plan:

OHA took part in the Draft SEORMP process. As proposed, the BLM is advocating for a no-action alternative management plan (the BLM 2002 Resource Management Plan), covering over 4.5 million acres, mostly in Malheur County. OHA is advocating for an alternative to the 2002 RMP, seeking improvements to landscape scale wildlife habitat.

HB 2834, Ungulate Migration, and OHA Pledges to Help Wildlife:

This year, with bipartisan support, the Legislature unanimously passed HB 2834, which directs ODOT and ODFW to share data on wildlife migration and reduce barriers to that migration. Working with our partners at the Oregon Wildlife Foundation, a proposed new license plate was designed and will help with funding wildlife movements. (See Page 17.) OHA has pledged over \$110,000 to install and maintain 10 miles of funnel-fencing near Gilchrist on Highway 97, starting in 2020.

All Hands, All Brands, for Public Lands:

OHA's rendezvous-style work party drew more than 100 volunteers from many OHA chapters and 12 different conservation groups. Working closely with our partners on the Ochoco National Forest, three separate aspen stands were fenced off from domestic cattle.

Ochoco Trails Strategy Group:

OHA has been a part of facilitated meetings for a year with multiple stakeholders in the Ochoco National Forest. We are working to ensure that the placement for a potential network of hiker, biker and equestrian trails avoids impacts to wildlife.

Central Cascades Wilderness Permits:

OHA wrote objections and met multiple times with the Forest Service, opposing limited entry permits to access public land, in three central Cascade Wildernesses. Along with other like-minded conservation groups, we fought and were heard, thus exempting hunters from the permit requirements, during the High Cascade rifle and general archery deer and elk seasons, which fall in the limited entry period – Memorial Day through the last Friday in September. —*KARL FINDLING*

OHA worked on outreach in 2019

By Amy Patrick, OHA Outreach Coordinator
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In 2019, OHA expanded staff capacity to focus on membership outreach. The opportunity for an additional staff member, initially funded through grant money, also created the ability to cover more important issues for our membership.

Recruitment, Retention, Reactivation

Outreach to potential members, especially in under-represented communities, is a priority for OHA, and inspired the decision to create the part-time Outreach Coordinator staff position. Production of an outreach plan, promotional flyers, and revisions to the organizational Strategic Plan have laid a strong foundation for membership outreach.

Marten Trapping Ban

At the October ODFW Commission meeting, OHA, along with representation from trappers and landowners, gave testimony in opposition to the proposed marten trapping ban brought forth by several environmental activist groups. Despite our efforts, the commission approved the petition on a 4-3 vote, signaling a broader concern for all trapping in Oregon.

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

OHA members located on the north coast alerted staff to concerns regarding the potential loss of hunting access on lands acquired with OWEB funds. OHA provided a letter and public comment outlining our concerns of a net-loss in hunting access across public lands and remains engaged on the issue.

OHA grants fund major projects

OHA's State Board of Directors in 2019 approved three wildlife project grants from OHA's Wildlife Superfund, supported by a 5 percent contribution from chapter banquet proceeds and donations from individual members. The board voted to grant funding for:

- GPS transmitters for an Oregon State University/ODFW study of sage grouse habitat and population recovery following the recent devastating fires in the Trout Creek Mountains. Studies will add to the knowledge of habitat and species recovery.
- A winter forage grant for black-tailed deer and elk winter range habitat improvements by removing conifers and other competing vegetation species to promote early seral forage on Forest Service lands in the Butte Falls area northeast of Medford.
- Winter range forage improvements and protection of year-round water sources near Fort Rock. This project is directly linked to OHA's efforts to improve wildlife passage between winter and summer range currently affected by deer/vehicle collisions on Highway 97 south of Bend.

Our 2018 grants are a work in progress with implementation this year. Those projects are:

- Forage creation on Hancock Forest Managements lands near Newport, to include seeding and fertilizing of powerline, harvest unit and created meadows.
- Outreach to hunters and motorists through written and social media outlets promoting barrier-free wildlife migration and driver safety on our highways. Outreach is associated with our upcoming Gilchrist wildlife underpasses, allowing more deer and elk to safely migrate between historic seasonal habitat areas.
- Winter big game forage improvements on BLM lands near Butte Falls; this is an expansion of past and ongoing efforts of local partners and area chapters.

All OHA grant projects have participation of partners for work and funds, plus opportunities and needs for local or statewide chapter participation to create success on the ground. —*KEN MCCALL*

