



2020 HINDSIGHT

2020 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OREGON HUNTERS ASSOCIATION

2020: A year few laws would pass; what now?

By Al Elkins, OHA Lobbyist
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There are many words that could be used to describe the year 2020, but none of them would be positive. The highlights for covering state government this year are almost non-existent. While the year began normally with a “short” legislative session starting in early February with hearings being held and bills being passed, it all ended later that month as both the Senate and House Republicans walked out and never returned. The Session ended officially shortly thereafter.

In March, OHA joined forces with NRA in opposing gun initiatives that had been filed. These initiatives included: locked gun storage requirements, regulating of semi-automatic guns and large-capacity magazines, transfer restrictions on the sale of certain automatic weapons and restrictions on firearm magazine size. The deadline to submit signatures for these November ballot initiatives came and went due in large part to COVID-19 restrictions.

As the months of the new year rolled on, it became apparent to all involved in state government that nothing in 2020 would be business as usual. While ODFW staff at the April Commission meeting announced their legislative priorities for the 2021 Legislative Session, they let the Commission know that it was apparent that Oregon was facing a huge budget crisis for the current biennium and cuts to current programs would have to be made.

In May, OHA received an invitation from the administrator of the House Com-



A silver lining of COVID-19 was that gathering restrictions greatly hindered signature gathering for three gun-control initiatives in Oregon.

mittee on Natural Resources to testify on how the pandemic was affecting our organization and our mission. We testified that pandemic impacts to OHA included canceled banquets, which caused a loss of revenue of over a half million dollars. This revenue loss meant a great reduction in statewide wildlife and habitat projects and services to our mission, and that spring and summer youth events also were canceled.

June brought the state budget crisis into focus as general revenue shortfall was estimated to be around \$664 million by June 30, 2021. Consequently, state agencies were asked to submit budget cuts for the current 2019-2021 biennium. ODFW proposed the elimination of some of the \$3.7 million in general fund dollars that it received during the 2019 legislative session for the anti-poaching program. The Oregon State Police (OSP) also received cuts to the game enforcement division.

OHA spent the next few months battling these cuts before the Commission

and the legislature. The anti-poaching campaign OHA fought for came out of Special Session 2 with a reduced budget. The program took a one-time reduction in services and supplies for the anti-poaching informational campaign portion of the program, but funding was continued for the campaign coordinator position.

As the management of the budget crisis continued, other issues also came and went. At a Commission meeting in September, ODFW staff proposed the use of crossbows for any-legal weapon big game seasons. OHA stated to the Commission that we were “cautiously supportive of this change but we were firmly opposed to having crossbows used in any archery season in Oregon.” After hearing public testimony, the Commissioners voted not to adopt the ODFW staff proposal.

In November, the OHA Legislative Committee and OHA Board set the OHA Legislative priorities for the 2021 Legislative Session. The two groups took into consideration the recent cuts across the board for the funding of OSP game enforcement troopers and the cuts to the newly established anti-poaching campaign program.

What issues will 2021 bring forth during the Legislative Session? Considering the COVID-19 epidemic we currently face and the recent wildfires in Oregon, OHA recognizes that there will be numerous issues concerning wildlife and habitat that we will be challenged with during the 2021 Legislative Session.

Maybe the highlights for 2021 will be more positive. We can only hope.

Conservation issues didn't slow down in 2020

By Jim Akenson, OHA Sr. Conservation Director
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The OHA conservation staff and board members from OHA's Wildlife-Lands Committee have continued some long-term efforts on hunting regulation revisions, and 2020 was dominated by proposed changes to 2021 archery seasons. Other key topics addressed in 2020 involved elk redistribution on both sides of the state, staying engaged with all game bird regulations, maintaining engagement with predator management issues wherever possible, combatting a proposed ban on beaver trapping on public lands, mitigation for mule deer migration across Highway 97 and other busy routes using underpasses and fencing, developing a Conservation Easement with a private landowner on critical winter range, and seeking funding opportunities through grants provided by the Oregon Conservation Recreation Fund and the PEW Charitable Trust.

We are also key members in two larger sport group collaborations, both on the beaver trapping issue and with the Owyhee land designation solution. It has been a busy year, with all occurring amid the restrictions caused from both the Covid-19 pandemic and a summer of massive wildfires in Oregon and the West.

Archery Regulation Proposals

ODFW has undertaken a massive review of the big game regulations, and the first area of change has been with the deer and elk archery hunts on the east side of the state. During 2020, OHA was involved in every deliberation and input opportunity.

Changes proposed for mule deer hunting differed from elk in that mule deer are in a dire situation in many units of eastern Oregon. The move to make all mule deer archery hunts controlled was supported by OHA, given the biological situation.

OHA's 2020 Investments in Our Mission

Projects benefiting Oregon's wildlife & sportsmen:	\$318,868
Publications, information & education:	\$247,136
Defending hunting rights/Advocating for wildlife:	\$114,442
Fighting poaching in Oregon:	\$30,713
Volunteer hours donated by OHA members:	30,678

Conversely, the proposal for all east-side elk units going controlled was more based on issues of crowding, elk distribution, and equity with firearm hunts. The resolution was to postpone implementation of controlled hunts to have more time to better assess controlled hunts in terms of tag numbers and effect on the preference point system. OHA will re-engage on this topic once ODFW is ready to discuss the option details.

Owyhee Lands Bill

During 2020, Senate bill 2828 began making its way through Congress. This bill has a big objective – to protect the most important wildlife and fish habitat in Malheur County, including the Owyhee Canyonlands, while also protecting the rural way of life. Incredibly, this bill has the support of many locals, ranchers, conservation and sportsmen groups, truly unlikely allies coming together to find compromise.

OHA, along with a half dozen other sportsmen's groups, felt that this bill, also known as the "Malheur Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Act," deserved the support of Oregon's elected officials. Our sportsmen's coalition has strongly urged Senators Wyden and Merkley, plus Representative Walden, to work together to pass this bill, which now hopefully will see congressional attention early in 2021.

Predator Management

OHA continues to maintain a pulse on population increases described by ODFW for both cougars and wolves. Our strategy is to expand the tools available to manage these species in consideration of ungulate numbers.

For cougars, we have continued efforts to revisit opportunities for expanded use of target areas.

For wolves, the recent federal delisting proposal will help expand management capabilities on a statewide basis and hopefully allow the establishment of controlled hunts where wolf numbers are suppressing deer and elk populations and causing continuous livestock depredation.

As ODFW revises the Mule Deer Plan, one of our goals will be to address the impact of cougars, wolves, bears, and coyotes on mule deer population dynamics.

New Conservation Staff

With key financial support from our chapters, OHA expanded our conservation staff capability in 2020 by hiring new Conservation Director Mike Totey and creating a Conservation Coordinator position filled by Tyler Dungannon. These two bring very complementary skill sets of resource management and biological/scientific knowledge that will serve OHA very well looking into 2021 and beyond.



Wildlife migration, elk management were big in 2020

Conservation easement to serve wildlife in Jefferson County is in the works for 2021

By Mike Totey, OHA Conservation Director
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For the first time in OHA's existence, we have an opportunity to hold a conservation easement. Late in 2019, David and Pamela Potter contacted OHA with a proposal to grant our organization a conservation easement on their property in Jefferson County near Wychus Creek.

Conservation easements enable landowners and organizations like OHA to permanently conserve the property.

Conservation easements are a way for landowners and conservation-minded organizations like OHA to permanently conserve the property, in this case for mule deer habitat.

This is a new opportunity for OHA, so we are proceeding carefully and methodically through the process.

The end product, an easement, will be filed with the county and attached to the deed for the property and will likely be completed in early 2021. A management plan will then be completed and implemented to provide oversight and direction on the property to maintain and enhance the forage and cover for mule deer.

For OHA, this will be a permanent contribution to mule deer habitat in an area that is critical to the Metolius herd. It could also provide many opportunities for local chapters and members across the state to engage in "on-the-ground" work to benefit the mule deer as well as potential educational and hunting opportunities.



JIM WARD

OHA is working to keep elk on public land and away from private land where they do damage.

OHA is all-in for safe wildlife migration

The Oregon Action Team on Ungulate Migration (OAT) is a collaborative group of conservation organizations, including OHA, focused on improving ungulate habitat connectivity, ecosystem structure and function, and human/wildlife safety.

Some of the early work of the group has been addressing barriers to migration, such as highways and roads, and advancing measures to restore degraded and fragmented habitat.

The Gilchrist underpass on Highway 97 is an example of work that can come from these collaborative efforts.

A critical migration crossing was identified, and coordination came together between ODOT, ODFW, USFS and multiple conservation organizations to make this happen.

At the October Commission meeting, the group presented information to the Commission about its work and future goals. The most prominent goal is promoting the development of a "wildlife migration policy" for the state with an associated habitat designation for migration routes and important stopover areas, similar to how ODFW already designates winter range for ungulates.

The conversation with the Commission is ongoing and will continue into 2021.

OHA works for solutions for northeast Oregon elk

The Gurdane working group, consisting of agency staff, landowners, and conservation groups, continues to tackle the tough issue of managing elk winter range.

The Gurdane area serves as elk winter range for Rocky Mountain elk from at least four different wildlife units. In years with heavy winter snowpack, as many as 5,000 elk can use this area. The challenge is that nearly all of this is on private property.

Now, with information from more than 200 elk with GPS tracking collars, we are learning more about where the elk move for summer range. Unfortunately for some of the landowners, a portion of the elk have taken up permanent residence on their property instead of returning to summer range, causing damage to their property.

Public land management on federal land and state wildlife management areas can contribute to better elk winter range that could keep more of the elk on public lands, instead of nearby private lands.

ODFW addresses the issue by working to improve elk winter range capacity on wildlife management areas like Bridge Creek (where Redmond OHA improves habitat), the use of damage hunts and hazing where appropriate, and an ongoing effort to gather more information to inform management decisions into the future.

CENTRAL OREGON SKYLINE/DUANE DUNGANNON

OHA advocated for sensible bird regulations in 2020

By Tyler Dungannon, Conservation Coordinator
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OHA urged the Commission to continue hunting sage-grouse due to the indispensable biological data that it yields, in addition to the recreational opportunity that it provides hunters who are fortunate enough to draw permits. Sage-grouse hunters provide biological data by sending hundreds of harvested wings each year to ODFW for analysis of demographic rates, such as nest success, sex ratio and age structure.

Hunters are at the front lines of conservation for the species, and it is imperative that sage-grouse maintain their gamebird status in order to receive support from hunting organizations, which substantially contribute to sage-grouse conservation. The future of sage-grouse hunting is uncertain, but OHA will continue to support the scientific evidence that legal harvest of sage grouse aids management and does not limit populations in Oregon.

OHA supported changes to turkey season dates, lifting of tag quotas and closing the fall turkey season for White River Wildlife Management Area to allow greater opportunity for hunters during the spring. OHA also applauded the ODFW



OHA supported continued sage grouse hunting and a fall turkey season lasting until Jan. 31.

proposal to add a small bag limit for mountain quail in eastern Oregon, as well as the agency's support for expanded hunting opportunities on National Wildlife Refuges.

OHA-supported OCRF bears fruit for wildlife

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission recently approved 8 projects funded by the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (OCRF) – including two supported by OHA. Sportsmen have demonstrated once again that hunters and anglers are our state's premier conservationists, as the largest portion of revenue has been raised by hunters and anglers. The Gilchrist Wildlife Underpass Fencing Project received \$10,000 – the maximum amount that could be awarded to any one

project this year. This project aims to reduce deer and elk mortality on Highway 97, and OHA has pledged over \$114,000 to the effort.

OHA also endorsed the Ochoco Trails Project where recreationists can enjoy unique scenery, while minimizing disturbance to wildlife. This project received \$7,500 to create a trail network on the Crooked River National Grasslands. Project planners have been conscious of wildlife displacement issues, and this project aims to minimize human-instigated ungulate movement from public to private lands. Involvement in this project has allowed OHA to contribute to a project outside of the realm of our typical dealings, while investigating the possibility of upland gamebird hunting opportunities along the trail system.

OHA recently submitted an OCRF grant application to protect and restore habitat for mule deer and all wildlife along Smoke Creek. This area is located on Ecotrust Forest Management land southwest of Fort Rock and lies between Highway 97 and Route 31. This project requested \$9,000 of OCRF funds with aspiration for matching funds from the Oregon general fund.

OHA helped stop trap ban, continued outreach efforts

By Amy Patrick, OHA Outreach Coordinator
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What began as a request to ban beaver trapping on a single national forest grew into a rule-making petition to ban both recreational and commercial beaver trapping on all federal lands in the state.

The Fish and Wildlife Commission heard the initial requests regarding beaver trapping at the June Commission meeting, at which time they decided instead to create a workgroup to begin researching the issue. While those workgroups were being formed, the environmental groups who brought the initial requests and were invited to participate in the workgroup process decided they were not happy with that outcome.

In September, those groups submitted a petition to the Commission to change the regulatory rules to ban beaver trapping on all federal lands.

The Commission addressed this topic again at the November meeting, where

it failed to pass by a 3-3 vote. Accepting the petition would have opened the rule-making process with the intent to review the scientific basis of the request, while denying the petition effectively closed the door on any immediate changes to the beaver trapping regulations.

OHA continues to work with a broad coalition of other sportsmen's groups and natural resource organizations to fight this ban and promote science-based wildlife management.

Outreach meets social distancing

OHA's outreach plan for 2020 started off promisingly with great public outreach at the Pacific Northwest Sportsman's Show in February. In March, we secured participation in the Oregon Zoo's Twilight Tuesdays – summertime events that draw a large urban population, creating a new audience for OHA's conservation message.

In April, we realized that things were not going to continue as anticipated, and

instead we learned to use Zoom.

Embracing virtual meetings became the focus of outreach with the creation of Monday Meet-Ups to increase communication with chapter leadership. It became apparent that the virtual platform would be the new norm for the foreseeable future, not only for association communication, but also for agency and legislative arenas.

To assist the membership in participating in these opportunities, several staff members put together a presentation on providing effective testimony with an emphasis on the new virtual formats.

As we move into 2021, the focus will remain on increasing our use of virtual meetings and the incorporation of hybrid meetings to combine small, in-person meetings with a broader virtual audience. While person-to-person interaction is the goal for our outreach plans, we remain flexible and adaptable to the current constraints while we continue to bring the OHA message to new audiences.