



CHECKING OUR BACKTRAIL

2022 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OREGON HUNTERS ASSOCIATION

OHA stepped up to defend our hunting heritage in 2022

Oregon sportsmen's partnership launches

The Oregon Sportsmen's Conservation Partnership (OSCP) was formed in 2022 to amplify the voices of sportsmen and women in Oregon. Created in response to the constant pressure of attacks by anti-hunting, animal rights, and environmental advocacy groups, the OSCP's goals are to increase the presence of sportsmen and women in the legislature and policy arenas, as well as encourage communication and collaboration among existing sports groups.

The OSCP held its inaugural meeting in January to establish its leadership, hear from agency staff on important topics, and review legislative topics arising in the 2022 legislative session. About 20 hunting, fishing, and trapping organizations were in attendance. The OSCP identified CWD detection funding and advocating for federal infrastructure funding for Oregon's natural resource agencies as its initial priorities, in addition to the ongoing fight against IP3.

2022 Legislative Session Wrap-up

The 2022 Legislative Session closed with several good bills receiving funding. Here's a brief recap of bills OHA engaged:

- HB 4130 requested \$5 million to fund wildlife crossing projects. The bill itself did not make it through the entire committee process, but the appropriate funding, at an increased amount of \$7 million, was included in the end-of-session bill.
- SB 1546 established the Elliott State Research Forest and passed with amendments. While the Elliott has been a contentious issue for years, OHA continues to advocate for access, a recreational focus, and an amount of managed forest to benefit both local economies and provide wildlife habitat.

IP3 gets ballot approval for 2024

Initiative Petition 3 (IP3), the initiative that aims to criminalize hunting, fishing, and trapping, along with farming and ranching, received certified ballot language as of June 2022. OHA submitted comments requesting additional changes to the ballot language and was successful on several points to further clarify the damage this initiative would do to all Oregonians. In addition to OHA, comments were submitted by Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Safari Club International, American Kennel Club, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Ducks Unlimited, National Wild Turkey Federation, and several farming and ranching

OHA's 2022 Investments in Our Mission

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| Projects benefiting Oregon's wildlife & sportsmen: | \$376,412 |
| Publications, information & education: | \$237,519 |
| Defending hunting rights/Advocating for wildlife: | \$162,663 |
| Fighting poaching in Oregon: | \$18,400 |
| Volunteer hours donated by OHA members: | 32,549 |

organizations.

With the certification of the ballot language, the proponents of IP3 have until July 2024 to gather the 112,020 signatures needed to qualify for the November 2024 ballot.

Measure 114 passes, OHA continues the fight

Measure 114, the gun control initiative, passed in the November election by a mere 1.5 percent margin. With this result, OHA will transition our fight into the arenas of litigation and legislation. While OHA will not be the lead organization on the lawsuits, we are working closely with our sportsmen's coalition partners and supporting those that are seeking litigation through financial contributions and strategic use of our legislative efforts.

Beaver Management Workgroup reaches endpoint

After almost a year of work, the Beaver Management Workgroup finalized its recommendation to the ODFW Commission. The workgroup was originally formed in June 2020 and sanctioned again in November 2020 as the result of a narrowly defeated petition to ban beaver trapping on all federally managed public lands. While the primary impetus of the petitioning groups was to ban all beaver trapping, the group ultimately formed management recommendations around habitat needs and expanded data collection relative to the current beaver population in the state.

The Commission accepted the document put forth by the workgroup and requested that staff support the recommendations and return to the Commission in August with actionable items related to increasing beaver habitat on federally managed lands. It was noted by the Commission that the focus of such actions should be on the landscape-level rather than simply restrictions on trapping.

OHA covered the conservation landscape in 2022

OHA's Conservation staff, committee members and volunteers saw another very busy year in 2022. Work ranged from supporting legislation in Salem to planning field work in south central Oregon to tracking wildfire impacts in northeast Oregon and drought effects in southeast Oregon.

To address some of the workload and expertise needed, OHA's Wildlife-Lands Committee formed two sub-committees in 2022. One was for mule deer to help provide input on and review the Oregon Mule Deer Management Plan update that was initiated in 2022. The other sub-committee was formed to provide input on the ongoing wolf-related challenges in Oregon, specifically livestock depredation and how hunting can be used as a tool to alleviate some of the damage associated with wolves.

OHA continued its work with partners from agencies and other organizations to plan for, fund, and implement safe wildlife crossings in Oregon. The long-awaited fencing project associated with the wildlife crossing at Gilchrist was finally completed in late 2022.

Not all of the news in 2022 was good news. In late 2021, Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) was discovered in Idaho, not far from Oregon's border. OHA has worked continuously to keep membership informed, track the situation in Idaho, and support a robust program in Oregon for detecting and preventing the disease.

Work to conserve and protect the places that provide valuable wildlife habitat and where we hunt continued in 2022 with OHA's involvement in the Owyhee Sportsmen Coalition, the Elliott and western Oregon State Forests planning, and the Oregon Parks and Recreation Lands to name just a few.

Much of the planning and policy work accomplished in 2022 lays the groundwork for implementation in 2023 and beyond.

OHA restores deer winter range

In response to wildfires that burned more than 500,000 acres in the Interstate Unit in 2021, OHA and partners recently planted thousands of sage and bitterbrush seedlings to help restore mule deer winter range. (See Page 46.)



GREG PEITSCH

OHA defended the science for spring bear hunting at the September Commission meeting.

OHA protects spring bear hunts

OHA had a strong presence with three representatives at the September Fish and Wildlife Commission meeting in Burns, where big game regulation proposals were ultimately approved. OHA was one of only two organizations to testify at this important meeting, and OHA's representatives were the only ones to testify on behalf of Oregon hunters in person. OHA staff expressed to the Commission that OHA should play an important role in the creation of the new Mule Deer Management Plan, and that one of our highest priorities is to bolster mule deer populations, while also optimizing hunting opportunity and quality. OHA's Mule Deer Sub-Committee is comprised of mule deer experts from Oregon, Idaho and Montana, and they are eager to help develop the new plan.

After a commissioner pressed concerns about the ethics of spring bear hunting, and Washington's recent ban on spring bear hunts, OHA stepped up in support of continued spring bear hunting in Oregon. Our bear population is strong and increasing, and ODFW does an excellent job of protecting sows with cubs and making use of the extensive data that are collected from harvested bears. ODFW has a mandatory check-in for bears, and the data collected inform population models. As a result of these data and others, Oregon's bear population estimate sits at 34,000 bears.

OHA champions youth archery

OHA also thanked ODFW for carrying out OHA's desire to create more youth archery elk hunting opportunity in light of archery regulation changes in eastern Oregon. OHA is confident that this will maintain and improve archery hunter recruitment.

OHA requests wolf damage hunt

The OHA Board of Directors sanctioned the formation of a wolf subcommittee that consists of wolf experts from around the region. Wolves have been in the headlines for years and continue to be a concern for both hunters and landowners. The subcommittee focused on pressing for implementation of the existing Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan that was updated in June 2019, particularly in the northeast portion of the state where wolves have been in Phase 3 (well established) for some time. This work will be critical for improving agency and landowner relations where they are currently strained and set the stage for an eventual update to the Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan.

OHA staff provided testimony during the Commission meeting addressing OHA's request to implement wolf damage hunts, which was submitted to the Commission in August, requesting the Commission develop hunts that could solve the chronic depredation issues ongoing in northeast Oregon. Damage hunts are well within the parameters of the current wolf management plan, thanks to OHA's relentless efforts to keep hunting and trapping in the most recent wolf plan revision.

OHA fights to defend trapping

In response to discussion of current trap check intervals by some ODFW commissioners, a workgroup was formed to address concerns of those commissioners and protectionist groups. OHA stood tall in this workgroup comprised at least initially of groups and individuals with anti-trapping bias. The workgroup met nine times, and each contentious meeting was minimally productive from the OHA perspective, and likely the same from the protectionist point of view. Ultimately, the group could not come to consensus on any interval, so the workgroup dissolved without a recommendation to the Commission. As a result of the workgroup, and OHA's efforts, ODFW staff recommended only one change: reducing the 30-day interval for lethal sets when damage is occurring to 14 days. OHA provided testimony in support of the staff recommendations.



The Commission was not satisfied with the staff recommendation, and instead approved reductions to two additional damage-related intervals. The new regulations put in place a 48-hour check time for all trap check intervals except the lethal sets for damage, which is the 14 days recommended by staff. The commission's decision was disappointing, as it was not based on staff recommendations or the best available science and did not take into account the financial hardship that livestock producers and land managers will incur.

OHA tackles conservation issues across the state's landscape

OHA conservation staff and volunteers constantly work to fulfill OHA's mission. The diversity of wildlife and conservation opportunities and challenges are vast, and seem to be never-ending. Examples in 2022 and on-going work include participating in the Mountain Lion Workshop and Black-Tailed Deer Summit; working on the Oregon Mule Deer Plan update; working to further implement the Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan; addressing elk distribution; monitoring and tracking wildlife disease outbreaks such as CWD, EHD and others; and facilitating on-the-ground projects to conserve and improve habitat. Other work continues with the Access and Habitat Program; working with the ODFW Commission; Southeast Oregon and Western Oregon BLM Resource Advisory Committees; and tracking landscape scale projects on public lands. Species that received attention in 2022: Columbian blacktails, mule deer, white-tailed deer, cougar, bighorn sheep, Rocky Mountain elk, Roosevelt elk, waterfowl and upland birds. Public lands that had our attention in 2022: Elliott State Research Forest, ODF State Forests; Mt. Hood, Willamette, Fremont-Winema, Umatilla, Umpqua and Ochoco National Forests, Crooked River National Grasslands, Hart Mountain NWR and Vale District BLM.

OHA works to prevent CWD

Since the discovery of Chronic Wasting Disease in Idaho, OHA has worked with ODFW and legislators to develop legislative concepts aimed at securing funds to maintain the in-state testing opportunity with Oregon State University, as well as added personnel specific to CWD research and sample collection. (See Page 42.)



LAVA BUTTE/ODOT

OHA has identified needs, funded and maintained fencing to funnel deer into safe wildlife crossings.

OHA works to reduce vehicle/wildlife collisions in Oregon

In an effort to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions on our highways via wildlife crossing structures, OHA has helped clear financial hurdles to implement safe passage infrastructure. OHA strongly supported and helped pass HB 4130-01 (Wildlife Crossing Investment Act), which has allocated \$7 million to the Oregon Department of Transportation to invest in wildlife crossings across the state. OHA has testified in support of this bill and has testified on multiple occasions in front of the Oregon Transportation Commission in support of allocating ODOT funds to wildlife crossings. In order to ensure Oregon is ready to compete for federal funds for impending wildlife crossing grants, OHA has dug deep and developed a priority list of wildlife crossing projects that are currently being constructed, near completion or undergoing initial consideration. OHA is currently advocating for wildlife crossings across the state from northeast Oregon on Interstate 84 to southwest Oregon on Interstate 5.

OHA enhances hunter reporting

OHA believes that Oregon hunters deserve access to harvest statistics at the wildlife management unit scale, and we maintain that hunters play a critical role in wildlife management by providing harvest data to wildlife management agencies. After many discussions between OHA and ODFW over the last six years on the topic, this year via mandatory hunter reporting surveys, ODFW is asking successful big game hunters whether they harvested their animal on public land, private land, or private lands that allow public hunting access (e.g., Access and Habitat properties).

If you have ever perused harvest stats for a unit before applying for a controlled hunt, you have probably wondered whether the harvest success stat for a given unit was

representative of the unit's public land for which you have access. For example, the Ochoco Unit's estimated harvest success for any legal weapon buck deer was 25 percent in 2021. Just 53 percent of the unit is public land, so what percentage of the harvest occurred on public land? These are questions that OHA believes hunters deserve to have answered, particularly because hunters are providing the data.

With ongoing ungulate distribution issues, and efforts underway to retain ungulates on public lands, this information will benefit ODFW and enhance the agency's ability to manage big game populations. The data provided by hunters should increase support for the Access and Habitat Program, and help hunters be better informed when planning hunts.

Learn to Hunt Program rolled out to chapters

OHA's Learn to Hunt Program (LTH) was rolled out to chapters in early February with opportunities for chapter representatives to become instructors and also join the Learn to Hunt Committee to help direct the future of the LTH Program.

The LTH Program has created a substantial catalog of online courses and carefully curated resources specific to hunting in Oregon. Since its inception in 2020, the program has taught almost 200 students who became OHA associate members and also added numerous full OHA members. The program continues to grow with the addition of new learning modules, increased membership responsiveness, and the creation of more in-person courses and field days.

MALHEUR COUNTY/DUANE DUNGANNON