



CHECKING OUR BACKTRAIL

2024 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OREGON HUNTERS ASSOCIATION

OHA won big for CWD, remained vigilant on M114 & IP28

OHA successful in short 2024 legislative session

The 2024 legislative session was a mere five weeks long, but yielded continued success for OHA's interests. Within this tight timeframe, OHA lobbied for increased state funding to establish an in-state testing facility for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) at the Oregon State University's Oregon Veterinary Diagnostics Laboratory, as well as increased capacity at ODFW to expand detection protocols. While the original bill containing these funding requests died, the funds were included in the end-of-session funding bill and secured \$2.7 million toward the CWD efforts.

OHA successfully lobbied for funding to fight CWD, saved wildlife and habitat funds, and preserved oversight of energy development that could affect habitat.

OHA was part of a small and diverse group of conservation organizations who worked on one of the largest bills of the session, refining the outcomes to be more specific toward wildlife and habitat restoration and conservation. The Monsanto bill, which created the framework for how the historic \$700 million settlement from the State's lawsuit against Monsanto would be distributed, proved to be a big undertaking. However, the small band of conservation groups were able to effectively alter the original direction of the bill and return its intent to the original settlement language and the goal of restoring wildlife and habitat.

OHA was part of a small and diverse group of conservation organizations, OHA opposed a bill that would remove state oversight on certain solar energy sitings. Concerned that this removal of regulation would endanger wildlife and important habitat, OHA opposed the bill and worked to educate legislators about our concerns. The bill eventually died in committee, but energy siting is an issue that will continue to be at the forefront in each legislative cycle.

IP28, formerly IP3, looks to the 2026 Ballot

IP28 proponents have gathered more than 30,000 new signatures since shifting their sights to the 2026 ballot. As in the previous iterations, IP28 would criminalize hunting, fishing, and trapping, as well as criminalize wildlife management efforts,

OHA's 2024 Investments in Our Mission

Projects benefiting Oregon's wildlife & sportsmen:	\$274,414
Publications, information & education:	\$379,454
Defending hunting rights/Advocating for wildlife:	\$158,412
Fighting poaching in Oregon:	\$36,200
Volunteer hours donated by OHA members:	30,678

education and research with animals, and even trapping vermin such as mice and gophers. It would also effectively end farming, ranching, and eating Oregon-grown animal products such as meat, dairy and seafood.

As outrageous as the concept may sound, the reality is that they continue to build upon their previous signature gathering work and continue to receive large donations to fund further collection efforts. With an early start on the 2026 effort, the proponents have until July 2026 to collect the necessary signatures, approximately 117,000, to make the ballot.

OHA continues to lead the opposition to this initiative.

Measure 114 litigation continues

Two distinct lawsuits against Measure 114 continue to play out in the courts two years after the gun control measure was narrowly passed in the 2022 election.

In the federal courts, the lawsuit in which OHA filed two supporting amicus briefs remains in a holding pattern of appeals. In June 2023, a federal judge in Portland ruled the measure did not violate the U.S. Constitution, prompting an appeal that has the potential to reach the U.S. Supreme Court.

The lawsuit filed in the Oregon court system has provided relief to Oregon firearms owners since the Harney County judge stayed the effects of the measure and eventually ruled it unconstitutional. That ruling has been appealed by the State and is currently awaiting the opinion of the Oregon Court of Appeals.

To donate to OHA's Victory Fund, see Page 13, call 541-772-7313, or visit <https://oregonhunters.org/donate>



OHA made hay for Oregon's wildlife, habitat & hunters in '24

OHA's Conservation Team had another busy year in 2024. There were numerous big accomplishments working on the ground for habitat restoration and enhancement and influencing important wildlife and land management decisions. OHA focused on conservation priorities across the state in various arenas.

Conducting OHA Regional Wildlife Habitat Projects

Nine OHA chapters came together and installed 2 miles of wildlife-friendly fencing around the Willow Prairie on USFS land near Butte Falls, and just west of the Sky Lakes Wilderness on June 15 and 16. OHA has now protected two of the three large meadow systems under the umbrella of our 3-year Southwest Cascades Meadow Protection Project.

OHA is on schedule to complete the third leg of this project when we fence Short Creek Prairie in June 2025. OHA Conservation staff are currently working with USFS and ODFW to lay the groundwork for more events in 2025. OHA's regional project concept has been a great success, and we will continue to bring OHA chapters together for large projects that offer a substantial benefit to wildlife.

Updating Oregon's Mule Deer Management Plan

OHA worked throughout the first half of 2024 to provide our perspectives and influence the revision of the Mule Deer Management Plan for the benefit of mule deer in Oregon and hunters. This important update, which culminated at the June Fish and Wildlife Commission meeting, sets the stage for improving mule deer herd numbers and habitat throughout their range in eastern Oregon.

Species plans are essential, but implementing the plan on the ground for the benefit of mule deer is now the focus of



OHA's Conservation Team of staff, committee members and volunteers has continued to work hard to restore and reclaim recognition that sportsmen and women are our state's premier conservationists.

OHA members fenced a rejuvenating aspen stand at the annual White River project. To donate to OHA's Wildlife Fund, see Page 13, call 541-772-7313 or visit <https://oregonhunters.org/donate>

OHA. Even before the plan was approved, OHA began working on ways to implement the plan. This new plan catalyzed the establishment of the new OHA Mule Deer Fund that will be used to help get projects done on the ground to improve mule deer habitat.

Creating Mule Deer Fund

The Goal of OHA's new Mule Deer Fund is to raise \$50,000 annually to collectively fund large habitat projects that are specifically implemented to improve conditions for mule deer. OHA chapters are largely funding this effort and OHA's Deer Subcommittee will work with OHA Conservation Staff to allocate funds to worthy landscape-scale projects aimed at improving conditions for mule deer.

This effort seeks to 1) benefit mule deer herd ranges of extreme, very high, and high management concern, 2) fund projects that will leverage OHA funds as match to attain additional state, federal and partner funding and 3) address herd range priority action items that OHA helped integrate into the Mule Deer Management Plan.

OHA will select and fund quality projects in February 2025.

Supporting the Blue Mountains Elk Initiative

State OHA and OHA chapters around the state have committed to funding projects aimed to benefit deer and elk in the Blue Mountains. OHA contributed \$15,000 to the Damon Aspen Project that will fence aspen stands, thin conifer, and improve elk

security on the Malheur National Forest. This project has thinned 11,700 acres of conifer, burned 900 acres to improve elk forage, and restored 240 acres of aspen to date. OHA funding will allow for 300 additional acres of aspen stand restoration and 100 additional acres of aspen fencing.

OHA also gave \$10,000 to the Sunflower Juniper Removal Project on the Ochoco National Forest. Juniper encroachment is a major concern for deer and elk, because it results in reduced forage for these species. OHA funding will help forest managers methodically cut 150 acres of juniper, which will restore perennial grass and bitterbrush communities in the area.

State OHA and OHA's Union-Wallowa Chapter applied for and received an LOP deer tag on The Nature Conservancy's Zumwalt Prairie to raffle with proceeds (\$22,000) funding the Sheep Creek Thinning Project to benefit deer and elk in the Starkey Unit. OHA funds will aid the thinning and slash reduction of 1,062 acres on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

OHA contributed \$10,000 to an Oregon State University research project in northeast Oregon quantifying benefits of thinning treatments, and elk density on pollinators and flower abundance. Initial analyses show elk herbivory is good for flower abundance and diversity, which benefits pollinators and species of conservation concern. Additionally, thinning treatments that open the forest canopy have led to a shift in flowering plant composition, which benefits species dependent on early seral habitat. All wildlife are important, and we will need all of our early seral obligate species to right the ship of forest management in Oregon.



Fighting CWD Spread

CWD continued to make news across the west in 2024. This dreadful, always fatal disease has now been confirmed in Idaho, California and Washington. OHA continued to work on programs to detect and prevent the spread of CWD to Oregon. OHA was successful in securing \$1.9 million in state funding to add capacity to the state's program and initiate an in-state testing facility at Oregon State University. OHA also encouraged the ODFW Commission to continue their effort to increase CWD funding and awareness. OHA staff assisted at a CWD check-station.

The future support of the Commission and our partners is vital in preventing and ultimately reducing prevalence of the disease. OHA is doing its part to incentivize hunters to have their deer or elk sampled for CWD by offering drawings for rifle prizes.

Tracking Renewable Energy Development, Impacts on Wildlife

With Oregon's aggressive clean energy goals looming in the near future, an immense amount of effort is being put into development of clean, renewable energy in our state. This led to policy discussions in the legislature, local governments and state agencies. OHA was active in nearly all of these processes to safeguard against critical habitat losses and negative impacts to wildlife.

Even in the short session, legislation was introduced around solar energy development in the legislature that kept OHA Policy Director Amy Patrick busy. OHA staff also served on a Rule Advisory Committee for the Department of Land Conservation and Development that was focused on eastern Oregon solar siting, as well as a natural resources workgroup for the Oregon Department of Energy for the development of the Oregon Energy Strategy.

Testifying on Key Public Land Plans and Projects

In 2024, the BLM continued working on the regional BLM "Western Solar Plan" that sets the stage for potential solar farm



OHA protected a Cascade forage meadow with wildlife-friendly fencing last spring.

development on public lands. OHA and its partners worked hard to ensure that any potential development would minimize impacts to important wildlife habitat and our ability to hunt.

The Northwest Forest Plan amendment process stumbled its way through 2024. This contentious process is of great concern to OHA, because it affects seven National Forests in Oregon and will provide the future direction of these forests. Of particular importance to OHA is the need for providing habitat for all indigenous wildlife, not just those that depend on old forests.

The past year also saw the launch of a major process for the three National Forests in northeast Oregon, the Umatilla, Malheur, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests, to update their forest plans. OHA has provided initial comments, and will continue to track this planning process.

Defending Spring Bear, Sage Grouse Hunting

OHA testified at nearly every ODFW Commission meeting and flagged several wildlife management issues that we will continue to work on into the foreseeable future. OHA was the only organization to testify on game bird regulations at April's ODFW Commission meeting. OHA supported continued controlled sage-grouse hunting that yields critical population information for wildlife managers and

thanked ODFW for using hunters to mitigate turkey damage.

At the big game regulations Commission meeting, OHA summarized comments and provided in-person testimony that helped save spring bear hunting, and stressed the need to invest resources in moose management in Oregon.

Habitat Connectivity Wildlife Migration Work

OHA worked tirelessly to improve habitat connectivity and reduce wildlife vehicle collisions. Conservation staff have been involved in wildlife crossing projects across the state including projects planned on Interstate 5 and state highways 20, 97 and 82. This work accomplishes multiple goals, such as reducing wildlife mortality, lessening damage to vehicles, and conserving migration corridors for big game. Nearly all of OHA staff's time on this work is funded through a partnership with Pew Charitable Trusts.

Launching OHA Women's Network, First Projects

Women of OHA launched in January of 2024 and quickly grew a large following. The group held a virtual meet & greet early in the year, followed by participation at the Pacific Northwest Sportsmen's Show in Portland, and culminating in the first annual Women's Weekend Away event in October. The October event was attended by 30 women who took part in a bitterbrush planting project followed by a day of chukar hunting. (See Page 46.)

The level of interest and participation ensure continued growth and investment in the Women of OHA program. With women as the fastest-growing demographic in both hunting and sport shooting, the program is timely for bringing new members to OHA and the hunting community, as a whole.

The program is supported by funding from the Leupold & Stevens Foundation and other generous donors.

