

OREGON HUNTER

JULY-AUGUST
2025

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BIG GAME
OUTLOOK**

**Heartbreak
Archery Bull**

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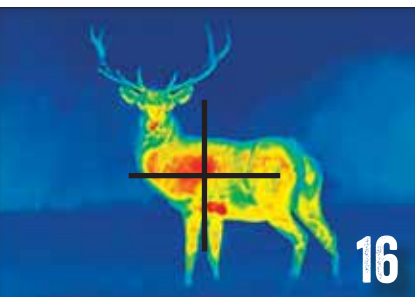
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10

OREGON AFIELD

The bears of summer, a smidgen of pigeon, and a case of disappearing bighorns



16

BOWHUNTING

Turning up the heat on thermal imaging devices that are illegal for hunting in Oregon



18

'25 BIG GAME OUTLOOK

This fall looks a bit like a potluck, but who's bringing the elk steaks?



24

HEARTBREAK BULL

Tag stew is a staple in elk camp, but that doesn't make it any easier to swallow



30

HOT AUGUST ANTELOPE

Hunting Oregon's fastest land mammal with a short-range weapon



40 & 49

PHOTO CONTESTS

See the latest winners and give us your best shots for a chance to win some great prizes!



VOL. 43, NO. 4

FEATURES

16 Turning up the Heat on Thermals

By Jim Yuskavitch

Oregon is seeing an increase in illegal use of thermal imaging devices.

18 Oregon Big Game Outlook

By Jim Yuskavitch

This fall is looking like a pot luck. Here's the straight scoop.

24 Heartbreak Bull

By Richy Harrod

Tag stew is a staple in Oregon bowhunting camps, but it's always a bit bitter.

30 Hot August Antelope

By Richy Harrod

Hunt Oregon's fastest land mammal with a short-range weapon? Piece of steak.

OREGON AFIELD

10 **BEAR:** Why wait? Get your hunting season bruin' on Aug. 1.

10 **ROCK DOVES:** Summer bird hunting without limits.

11 **BIGHORNS:** The case of the disappearing wild sheep herd.

DEPARTMENTS

6 FINDING DIRECTION

OHA goes to bat for hunters

8 OREGON HUNTING QUIZ

Know Oregon? Win a Work Sharp!

8 HUNTING CALENDAR

Leftover tags go on sale July 1

12 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Oregon hunters see a mixed bag

14 BOWHUNTING

Hard lessons can make you better

34 TRADITIONS

Patience pays for silver grays

36 FIELD TO TABLE

Stage Coach Chili & Molasses Bread

38 SHARING THE HERITAGE

How the West was won - 1 kid at a time

40 TRAIL CAM CONTEST

Enter to win a prize from Tactacam

42 OHA NEWS & VIEWS

Mule deer hunting changes on horizon

44 OHA CHAPTER NEWS

Chapters head for the hills for projects

48 ASK ODFW

So you didn't draw a tag? Cheer up!

49 NOSLER PHOTO CONTEST

Your best shot could win a Nosler rifle!

54 PARTING SHOTS

Stage Frights

Cover: Cascade elk photographed by Randy Shipley, wrshipley.zenfolio.com

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OHA goes to bat for our mission

The Oregon Hunters Association continuously states our case for wildlife, habitat and hunters. Every year, OHA engages on and submits comments on a variety of projects, management plans and rulemaking in support of our mission. Having an active voice in these processes and conversations are critical to ensure that our perspective is both heard and considered. Here are a few very recent examples.

- **Fuels maintenance treatments, Deschutes NF** - OHA staff and board members submitted comments on the 153,000-acre fuels maintenance treatments project planned for the Deschutes National Forest. Earlier comments submitted by OHA on the project helped set the stage for a project that considers impacts to mule deer and elk, while trying to make the forest more resilient and protect communities from wildfire.

- **Steeple Rock Rigdon Project, Willamette NF** - OHA staff provided comments for the Steeple Rock Rigdon Project draft environmental assessment on the Willamette National Forest. This project specifically identifies hunting in the proposed action, stating "Implementation of the proposed action alternative would improve hunting opportunities in the area." Further, the proposed action has some specific actions to promote habitat for both deer and elk.

- **McDermitt Lithium Drilling** - OHA encouraged BLM to adjust drill site selection to avoid degrading intact sagebrush habitat crucial to sage-grouse and avoid mule deer and pronghorn migration corridors entirely. OHA requested that BLM focus on drill locations sites that are currently infested with high densities of invasive annual grasses.

- **Northwest Forest Plan Amendment** - OHA has submitted multiple sets of comments throughout the process to update/amend the Northwest Forest Plan, which essentially governs forest management on all of the western Oregon and Cascade area national forests. OHA emphasized the needs of all wildlife, specifically game mammals, that have been overlooked in forest service planning and management for decades.

- **Upper Canyon & Calloway projects on the Willamette National Forest**

- **Paradise Restoration, Buck/Indian Fence, and Bly Mountain Restoration projects on the Fremont-Winema National Forest**

- **Elliott State Research Forest** - OHA offered comments to the Department of State Lands on the final Environmental Impact Statement advocating for active management that will benefit elk and deer.

- **State Forest Annual Operations Plans** - OHA submitted comments to the Oregon Department of Forestry on the proposed annual plans supporting hunting and management activities that will benefit game species.

- **Upland Game Bird Regulations** - OHA supported efforts to use hunters to address turkey damage complaints rather than using administrative removal.

- **Waterfowl Regulations** - OHA staff provided both written comments and oral testimony to the Fish and Wildlife Commission to support the proposal to increase the daily bag limit for northern pintail from one to three and most of the other proposed seasonal regulations. OHA encouraged ODFW staff and the Commission to maintain the current Northwest Permit Goose bag limit and implement a Minima Cackling goose sublimit of 2 birds per day, but ODFW and USFWS were steadfast in reducing the limit in its entirety as a result of declining cacklers and Taverner's Canada geese. OHA will continue to work with ODFW and the Commission to increase our Canada goose hunting opportunity as we wait for next year's flyway surveys.

- **Updated Sage-Grouse Rules** - OHA submitted comments to the Land Conservation and Development Commission in support of the updated sage-grouse maps and rules that were previously approved by the Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Other types of comments provided by OHA staff to this point in 2025 include comments to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department in support of hunting, letters of support for multiple projects and grant funding opportunities.

OREGON HUNTER

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WORK SHARP OREGON HUNTING QUIZ

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1. Most Oregon antelope seasons are held in:

- a) August c) October
- b) September d) November

2. Which is found on Hart Mountain?

- a) blue grouse c) sage grouse
- b) ruffed grouse d) sharptail grouse

3. Which wildlife area in Oregon is managed by local tribes?

- a) Wenaha c) Umatilla
- b) Klamath d) Wanaket

4. Which of these is a puddle duck?

- a) canvasback c) teal
- b) redhead d) ring-necked duck

5. Your odds of drawing a bighorn ram tag are:

- a) less than 3% c) 5-10 %
- b) 3-5 % d) 10-20%

6. The Starkey Experimental Forest is in what region of Oregon?

- a) northwest c) northeast
- b) southwest d) southeast

7. Spring bear hunts are held in all regions of Oregon except:

- a) northwest c) northeast
- b) southwest d) southeast

8. Which sheep lives in Oregon?

- a) desert bighorn c) Stone
- b) Dall d) California bighorn

9. Which unit borders Idaho and Nevada?

- a) Owyhee c) Beatys Butte
- b) Whitehorse d) Interstate

10. Which unit leads in turkey harvest?

- a) Rogue c) Willamette
- b) McKenzie d) Melrose



WHERE IN OREGON WAS THIS PHOTO TAKEN?

Identify this bustling international airport popular for fly-in antelope hunts, be drawn from all correct entries, and win a Work Sharp Original Knife and Tool Sharpener! Send your guess to Oregon Hunting Quiz, OHA, P.O. Box 1706, Medford, OR 97501, or submit your guess at oregonhunters.org, where a larger version of the photo appears. One entry per OHA member.

ENTRY DEADLINE: JULY 15, 2025



LAST ISSUE'S WINNER:

John Bambe, Bend

John's name was drawn from among the OHA members who recognized the Imnaha River canyon.



JUNE 27-29

All Hands All Brands for Public Lands,
Ochoco National Forest, 541-647-0424

JULY 1

Leftover tags go on sale

JULY 19

OHA Emerald Valley Family Fundraiser,
Cascadian Bowman, 541-729-0877

AUGUST 1

Fall bear season opens;
Elk damage general season opens

AUGUST 9

OHA Malheur County Chapter Youth
Sporting Clays Shoot, 208-573-5556

AUGUST 16

OHA Yamhill Chapter Youth
Shotgun Shoot, 503-737-9483

AUGUST 22

OHA Klamath Chapter's Gerber
Reservoir youth antelope
hunt BBQ, 541-281-6518

AUGUST 23-24

OHA Ochoco Chapter Youth & Family Day,
541-408-4816

AUGUST 29

Bow tag sale deadline

AUGUST 30

General archery and most
controlled bow seasons open

SEPTEMBER 1

Seasons open for mourning dove, forest
grouse, western Oregon quail & fall turkey

ANSWERS: 1-a; 2-c; 3-d; 4-c; 5-a; 6-c; 7-d; 8-d; 9-b; 10-d

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OREGON AFIELD

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The Bears of Summer

I recently told my daughter that summer is my least favorite time of year. For many reasons, I despise the hot, sweaty and uncomfortable dog days of summer. However, I always do look forward to early August, when fall bear season opens across Oregon. It signals the beginning of approaching fall seasons and gives me a great excuse to get out into the mountains.

Bear season gives me a good reason to check trail cameras and scout for deer and elk while roaming around the woods picking fresh blackberries and huckleberries.

Usually, I make a trip to our family camp spots just to see how things are looking and make sure there are no repairs needed to the fire pit, meat poles and lean-to frames. Of course, we are always on the lookout for bears while doing our end-of-summer chores.



JEFF RICH

Bear season offers Oregon's first general big game hunt of the fall, and there are many great reasons to head for the hills, especially in areas you plan to hunt deer and elk.

It's a great time to glass berry patches and hillsides for feeding bears, which often frequent swampy creek bottoms where fresh food and water can be found. There are always good reasons to get out in the woods and away from the summer grind. Bears are on the lookout for fawns and calves during late summer, and I have even had some luck calling them with distress calls this time of year. One year, we were able to harvest a good bear in early August from a reprod/clearcut drainage. The meat

was ground into Italian sausage, and we took the berries we had picked and made a syrup to incorporate with the meat, onions and fresh herbs. Add some blackberry pie for dinner, and it's simply perfect.

There are many reasons to be afield hunting bears, such as checking the landscape after a recent fire, looking for new places to explore, and finding new options for the coming big game seasons. No matter what your reason might be, get out there and see what's bruin. —TROY RODAKOWSKI

Summer bird hunting? Try a smidgen of pigeon



BILL HERRICK

Loki poses with the raw material for hobo chili. Some dogs take in a vista like this one and imagine chukar. Other dogs think ledge pecker.

Way out in Steens, up in Athena, in Hardman and other unincorporated communities, you can find pigeons in the barns, up in cliffs and under bridges. They make a living around granaries, feed lots and alfalfa plots.

An interesting note about feral pigeons is they have evolved to poop black if you have a white truck and can plop white if you have a black truck. Since there is no closed season, they are great shotgun quarry any time of year, including summer scouting trips.

On opening weekend of chukar season, we wore ourselves out going up and down and up and down until we and the dogs reached our limit (which is not the same as limiting out). The next day we found a bonus flock of rock doves.

My friend Bill Herrick said it was 'actly what he was looking for, a spot with

chukar, quail and a flock of purple-throated flappers in the rimrock. A conversation with the landowner revealed the family owned both white and black trucks and would move them around every day to keep the local ledge peckers off their game. Bill was invited back to keep the birds in check.

Pigeon hunting success varies spot to spot. Sometimes one flock can provide hours of shooting if the hunters rotate from blind to blind.

How are they on the table? With the right application of cream cheese, jalapeno and bacon, pigeon is good fare. Or cook a batch of hobo chili, which has been popular at railroad sidings since the 1930s.

Back before I learned some of the tricks of the kitchen, I fed a pigeon to my family of five. We had leftovers, proving a smidgen of pigeon can go a long way.

—GARY LEWIS

The Case of the Disappearing Bighorns

Bighorn sheep make a run for their new digs in the Klamath River Canyon in December 2014. A decade after the 20 California bighorns were transplanted from Grant County, the sheep have disappeared.



The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife released 20 California bighorn sheep into the Klamath River Canyon in December 2014 on Bureau of Land Management land, where bighorns had been extirpated since the 1940s.

But the last time a sheep from that transplant was spotted was in March 2023 – a lone ewe. ODFW speculates that there may be one or two still out there. But probably not. Unlike most bighorn sheep reintroductions, there was a twist to this one that may explain why they vanished.

ODFW released 20 California bighorn sheep to Branson Creek, near the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument, in December 2010, sourced from herds in the John Day and lower Deschutes River areas. But some of the bighorns were seen mingling with domestic sheep. With the threat of contracting *Microplasma Ovid Pneumonia* (MOV) and its deadly consequences for wild sheep, action needed to be taken. ODFW was able to identify the bighorns that interacted with the domestic sheep, and the bighorns were euthanized. With the risk of more encounters with domestic sheep, the remaining 15 sheep were captured and moved into the Klamath Canyon, along with additional sheep taken from the Deschutes River herd.

They all tested negative for MOV before they were released with GPS collars for monitoring. When sheep died, ODFW conducted necropsies, all of which were negative. But the possibility that some of them could have made contact with MOV-infected domestic or wild sheep at Branson Creek, and carried an undetected infection, loomed over the herd. Because of that, ODFW decided not to add more sheep to increase the population.

“Despite some natural reproduction,” said Klamath District wildlife biologist Mike Moore, “the herd wasn’t big enough to sustain itself and it just winked out.”

See the video of the release at:
<https://tinyurl.com/yc39dv7z>

—JIM YUSKAVITCH



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Hunters see mixed bag in legislative outcomes

By Amy Patrick, OHA Policy Director

Amy@oregonhunters.org

As the 2025 Oregon legislative session entered the June stretch run, hunters saw mixed outcomes on bills affecting Oregon's wildlife, habitat and hunting heritage.

The Good:

A few important policy bills have passed through the legislature and moved on to the Governor's desk.

HB 2978, the bill that increases communication and collaboration between ODOT and ODFW regarding wildlife crossing structure design, location, and implementation, was passed out of the legislature on May 1. Just a week later, the Governor signed the bill into law. OHA has worked with a broad group of stakeholders over the last three legislative sessions to pass this bill.

SB 812 removes the sunset clause on the Landowner Preference Program. The bill moved out of the legislature on May 15 and was signed by the Governor on May 22. With the sunset clause removed, the department does not need to come back to the legislature every few years for permission to continue the program. Any necessary changes to the established program may be made through the rule-making process by the ODFW Commission. Landowners and sportsmen came together to support this bill as it moved through the legislative process.

SB 777, the bill that assigns a multiplied factor for livestock and guard dog compensation due to wolf depredation, moved through the House and Senate and is now headed to the Governor's desk for signature. OHA joined the Oregon Cattlemen's Association and Oregon Farm Bureau in supporting this move toward more accurate compensation for livestock producers.

The Bad:

HB 3932, the bill to ban beaver trapping on public land specific to impaired waterways, has passed both the House and Senate and is headed to the Governor's desk for signature. OHA opposed this bill on multiple levels, including the lack of data indicating trapping as a limiting factor for beavers and the precedent of removing wildlife management decisions from the purview of ODFW and the Fish & Wildlife Commission.

SB 243, the Firearms Omnibus bill, originally included four concepts: a mandatory 72-hour wait period, a ban on rapid-fire trigger mechanisms, the ability for local municipalities to determine CHL restrictions for public spaces, and a ban on firearms possession for those under 21. OHA worked successfully to get the age restriction component removed from the final version of the bill, as well as the 72-hour wait period. The final version to move forward includes the ban on rapid fire trigger mechanisms and a narrowed concept for restriction of CHL carry in public spaces. The bill has passed both the House and Senate and will be headed to the Governor's desk.

The Undecided:

Many bills with a fiscal impact remain in Ways & Means and await the final decision of whether they will receive funding.

HB 2167 is the bill allocating additional funding to the Oregon Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory at OSU for continued work on zoonotic disease and chronic wasting disease. This has been one of OHA's highest priorities for funding during this legislative session.

HB 3596 is an OHA-drafted bill that

allocates additional funding to ODFW for continuation of an on-going mule deer survivability study with a third sector specific to the Steens Mountain area. OHA supports funding this bill for continued population data that can be used for future management decisions.

HB 3075, the Measure 114 bill, would institute the bulk of Measure 114 with slight modifications and additions. The bill has a very large fiscal impact statement of \$14.6 million from the General Fund in the first biennium. The bill is currently in Ways & Means awaiting the final decision on funding.

HB 3076, the State Regulation of FFLs bill, would build out a new sector of the Department of Justice to build and implement a state-level regulatory structure for firearms dealers in addition to the federal requirements. This bill also has a large fiscal impact of \$5.8 million in the first biennium and has joined HB 3075 in Ways & Means.

HB 2342, the fee increase bill for hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses, is paired with **HB 5009**, the ODFW agency budget bill. Both of these bills remain in Ways & Means and await the final funding votes. The revised agency budget restores important funding for anti-poaching work, OSP enforcement personnel, and predator management through USDA/APHIS Wildlife Services. The restoration of these programs through General Fund dollars has been OHA's primary funding request for the session.

OHA works to support legislation protecting Oregon's wildlife, habitat, and hunting heritage, while actively opposing concepts that threaten those tenets.

*Two key gun
bills with big
price tags
await their
fate in ways
& means.*

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Your tax-deductible* donation to the Oregon Hunters Association Hunters' Victory Fund will be dedicated for fighting legal and legislative battles to protect hunting rights in Oregon. Petitioners are gathering signatures to place a ban on hunting, trapping and fishing on Oregon's ballot! In the coming months we face legislative challenges where we must fight to protect your right to hunt, trap and own firearms!



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OHA GUZZLER/JERRY HOLBROOK

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A Bowhunter's Burden: Hard Lessons Learned

We've all read many articles about success in bowhunting: big bulls, massive muleys, and everything in between. But what about when you walk away empty-handed? After six years of bowhunting elk, I only had one spike bull to show for it despite multiple opportunities. I've watched arrows hit branches, miss elk completely, and even hit elk all resulting in no success.

There are countless challenges in killing a bull elk with a bow. Even with all the hardships, those times when it doesn't go as planned are often when we learn the most.

Sometimes we can't get out of a headspace of frustration, guilt, and what-ifs when things don't go as planned, but these experiences can make us better hunters.

This past season, I had a few things working against me, including being in my first trimester of pregnancy and having a broken finger from a UTV door accident. On top of these things, the elk in our area of the Fossil Unit seemed to be in the rut after dark, but weren't as hot during the day. Even spikes and smaller branch bulls were being overly cautious, which we weren't used to seeing so late in the season. We ran into elk on every hunt for almost a week straight, and each time there was a new obstacle – swirling winds, smoky Oregon skies, lack of coverage in some areas, and lack of shooting lanes in others. And then, of course, we had the cows. Just as we've all experienced, they managed to see us or smell us before we even had a chance to lay eyes on the bugling bull.

Each time we returned to camp, we spoke of skinning parties and fresh backstraps at the fire, thinking we'd be sure to get an elk down with all the action we had.

It was the second-to-last day of the season, and I hadn't drawn my bow once. We started out again to our favorite location, and right away spotted a branch bull feeding all by himself at about 700 yards.

My dad started calling, and the bull looked up and quickly returned to grazing. After a few more calls, he was on a dead sprint toward us. In no time, he was on top of us at 20 yards. When his body finally emerged, I was ready. Suddenly, he jumped back and walked away from us, pushing the yardage to 45.

After a cow call, he turned broadside and stopped. I had been at full draw for a while and my exhausted body and broken finger had had enough; I rushed the shot. He ran off with my arrow in

PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR



When you feel like giving it up, remind yourself why you do it. It's not just about the kill. Focus on what matters most, and hunting will always be close to your heart.

him and blood trickling from his side, but he had no trouble traversing a steep mountain and disappearing behind the timberline. We waited a few hours before going after him and I felt sick to my stomach. I'd never injured a bull before, and I was distraught. We tracked small blood drops for hours finally concluding he'd followed the herd way up into the timber; it was over.

I replayed the shot in my head hundreds of times, wishing I had just set my sight a little lower. We've all done it – tortured ourselves over a bad shot. The worst part was I felt like I had disappointed my dad because he'd worked so hard calling, making plans, and even gave up his own season to help me bag a bull.

After almost a week had passed, I finally decided to forgive myself and move on. Sometimes we can't get out of a headspace of frustration, guilt, and what-ifs when things don't go as planned, but these experiences can make us incredibly resilient and better hunters. I know I took away a lot from this hunt. I learned the importance of practicing shooting at random ranges and holding your bow at full draw for longer. It's critical to take your time with a shot even if that means you don't have success; tagging no elk is better than an injured elk. But most of all, I learned that torturing yourself over a poor shot never changes the result. When you feel like giving it up, remind yourself why you do it. It's not just about the kill; it's about spending time with people you love and with God's incredible creation. Focus on what matters most, and hunting will always be close to your heart. A missed opportunity can feel like such a tremendous tragedy, but the lessons learned are more life-changing than the outcome.



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TURNING UP THE HEAT ON THERMALS

Oregon is seeing a rise in illegal use of thermal imaging devices.

By Jim Yuskavitch

The bust went down just a week before last Christmas, when officers from the Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Division, search warrants in hand, descended on nine residences in Clackamas County, resulting in criminal wildlife charges for 13 individuals.

As is often the case, this successful arrest was the result of an investigation that began months earlier, assisted by tips from local residents. But what made this one different, and significant, was the evidence collected at the residences. In addition to a rifle and four deer, OSP officers also confiscated 14 thermal imaging devices, a technology that is being increasingly used for both legal and illegal hunting across the country, including Oregon.

Thermal imaging devices work differently than night vision gear, such as night vision goggles. While both can detect infrared wavelength of heat-emitting objects in the dark, night vision devices can only “see” in the visible and near-infrared light wave spectrum, producing a less-than-crisp green image. Thermal imaging equipment is much more sensitive to infrared radiation.

Thermal energy is transmitted in wavelengths in the infrared range of 1 to 100 microns. Infrared imaging devices can capture those infrared wavelengths emitted by a warm object and convert them into data that can be processed into light wavelengths visible to the human eye via a light spectrum video display. This technology allows people to clearly see heat-emitting objects in complete darkness and even through obstructions such as heavy vegetation. Unlike the green-glowing images of the technologically simpler night vision



***OHA paid a
TIP reward
this month
in a thermal
imaging case.***

OSP confiscated a rifle, 4 sets of antlers and 14 thermal imaging devices in a recent investigation.

goggles, images produced by thermal imaging devices stand out starkly against the cooler background.

This technology is used extensively by the military to detect enemy threats and targets at night.

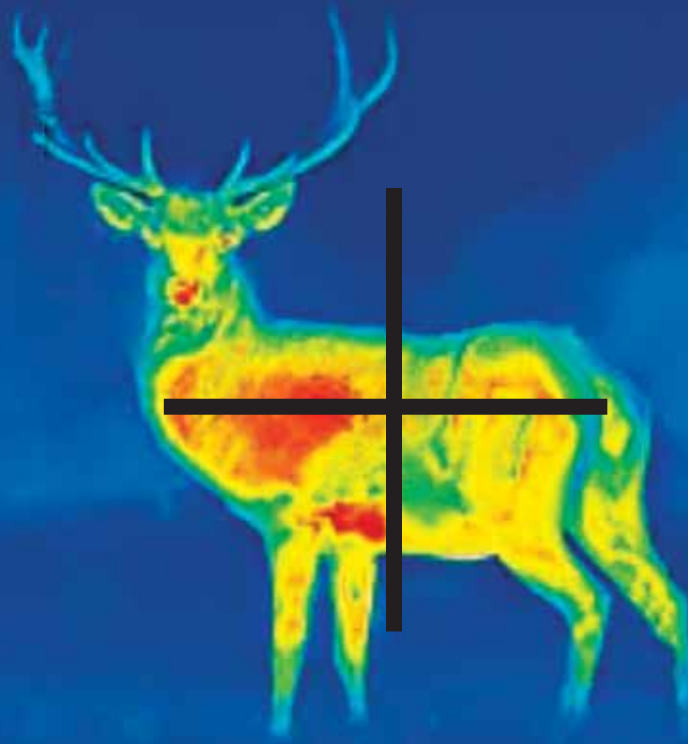
The thermal imaging devices confiscated from the alleged Clackamas County poachers were a particular kind of high-tech imaging device called Forward Looking Infrared or FLIR. This refers to FLIR devices that are angled forward to “see” what is directly in front of them, such as those used on aircraft and tanks. In addition to detecting enemy positions, this technology is also used for navigating in the dark, and by thermally guided missiles to find their targets. Ground troops also use handheld thermal infrared imaging devices for short-range surveillance and detection.

It’s a powerful technology that is beginning to be promoted and used for hunting. Thermal imaging products specifically

designed for hunting, such as monoculars and scopes, are readily available on the market and are relatively affordably priced. For example, a thermal imaging riflescope will run around \$650, and about \$500 for monoculars. They are touted as tools to locate, identify and accurately target animals in complete darkness, see through brush and similar obstructions, reduce the amount of time needed for scouting and allow hunters to more safely travel through rough terrain at night.

In terms of their legality across the states as hunting tools, the situation is mixed. FLIR devices are legal for night hunting in a majority of states, although most also place certain restrictions on their use. Typically, this is a limitation on what species of animals can be hunted, such as feral hogs, coyotes, raccoons and opossums. However, some states have an expanded list of FLIR-legal game animals that variously includes red and gray fox,

It is unlawful to: Hunt, locate, or scout for the purpose of hunting any wildlife with infrared or other night vision sight or equipment except trail cameras.



'Oregon law prohibits the use of thermal and infrared devices to hunt, locate, or scout for wildlife, because the heat-sensing technology undermines an animal's natural ability to hide or conceal itself.'

Thermal devices allow users to view the heat signatures of animals in thick cover they otherwise would have no ability to see.

bobcat, striped skunk, mink, beavers and badgers. States may have additional restrictions and conditions such as night/FLIR hunting permitted only with dogs, prohibiting thermal devices that emit light or night hunting only between certain dates.

However, six states, Georgia, New Hampshire, New Jersey North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Texas, have no restrictions. Alabama takes it a step further by encouraging night hunting for feral hogs and coyotes utilizing thermal imaging devices with a special license. Hunting with FLIR gear is illegal in Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Nevada, New Mexico and Oregon.

As defined in the 2025 Oregon Big Game Hunting Regulations booklet, "It is unlawful to: Hunt, locate, or scout for the purpose of hunting any wildlife with infrared or other night vision sight or equipment except trail cameras."

Explained Lauren Mulligan, Administrator for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Information and Education Division, "Oregon law prohibits the use of thermal and infrared devices to hunt, locate, or scout for wildlife, because the heat-sensing technology undermines an animal's natural ability to hide or conceal itself."

ODFW's position is that hunting with thermal and infrared devices gives an unfair advantage, is not ethical chase, and reduces wildlife populations through increased harvest that can decrease overall hunting opportunities.

While making it legal to use thermal devices for certain species may sound like a good idea, especially for invasive species like feral hogs, it does increase opportunities for poaching. Someone with a thermal imaging device may claim to be legally hunting hogs or coyotes, but may really be looking for a nice big buck deer or bull elk. And a poacher is much less likely to get caught illegally hunting at night.

In Oregon, it is clearly a growing issue. The number of complaints from the public about people hunting with the assistance of these devices has been increasing, including complaints from Clackamas County that contributed to the arrest of the 13 suspects.

"The Oregon State Police has received and investigated more tips involving the use of thermals to hunt, scout or locate wildlife for the purpose of hunting than in years past," says Lieutenant Clint Galusha, one of the OSP officers involved in the Clackamas County case. "This seems to correlate with the price of thermal devices

dropping and being more accessible to the public."

Galusha noted that while using a thermal device at night optimizes its capabilities, most of Oregon's investigated cases have been in daylight hours. This is due to multiple factors, Galusha explained, including staffing and the ability to see the individuals.

"These devices are still very effective in the daytime, depending on temperatures and direct sunlight," Galusha added, "and for the most part, the individuals appear to be hunting lawfully to the untrained eye. Thermal devices allow hunters to see through brush and pick out the heat signature of a deer or elk in thick cover they otherwise would have no ability to see. This ability is still very available in daylight hours and is highly effective."

While the Clackamas County case is still ongoing, state officials are planning to eventually file criminal wildlife charges with the Clackamas County District Attorney's office for all 13 people suspected of using thermal imaging while hunting or scouting for big game animals.

OSP Fish and wildlife officers fully expect to investigate and cite more people for the illegal use of thermal imaging in the future.



2025 Oregon BIG GAME OUTLOOK

***This fall looks a bit like a potluck.
But who's bringing the elk steaks?***

BY JIM YUSKAVITCH

COAST ELK/JEFF RICH



This year's big game outlook resembles a potluck dinner. A little bit of everything, with some dishes tasting better than others, but overall making for a pretty good meal. Deer, both black-tailed and mule deer, are up in some areas and down in others. The same with elk. As always, habitat, weather, predation and impacts from human activities all play a role. But despite some declines here and there, the upcoming big game seasons look like they will be offering decent, and even pretty good in some places, hunting opportunities. Here's a sampling of what Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife field biologists had to say about the current state of the big game populations they are managing.

Deer

For a long period of time, Oregon's black-tailed deer were believed to be struggling throughout their range from the west slope of the Cascade Mountains to the Coast Range for several reasons, including habitat, predation and disease. More recently, the tide seems to be turning as data collected by ODFW utilizing newer population modeling techniques show a more stable current population, including possible increases in some wildlife management units.

North Coast black-tailed deer numbers have proven this over the past few years. "Black-tailed deer are looking pretty steady, and we haven't had much of a change in numbers from year to year," said Austin Reeder, ODFW assistant district wildlife biologist based in Tillamook. He reported that there was good overwinter survival and – despite a short freezing spell – an overall mild winter. In addition, this year's spring green-up produced good forage for the animals as they came out of winter conditions.

Blacktails are faring well in both the central Cascades and Coast Range, according to district wildlife biologist Chris Yee, who is based out of ODFW's Springfield office.

"Deer are about the same as the previous year," he said. He also reported a good spring green-up that is feeding both adults and fawns coming out of winter and will hopefully continue long enough for them to go into the coming winter in good physical condition.

But there is one alarming complication that Yee is seeing throughout his district, which is also becoming a serious problem for deer and other big game survival in other parts of Oregon – the increasing illegal use of thermal imaging devices for hunting.

These are small, hand-held devices that are extremely sensitive to low levels of infrared light and enable the user to see bright, crisp images of heat-emitting objects, like deer and elk, in virtual total darkness or even in cover.

Yee reports that hunters are increasingly reporting encountering poachers using these devices, and local taxidermists are telling him they have been seeing suspiciously high numbers of trophy-class animals brought to them over the past couple of years.

Thermal imaging devices are illegal to use for hunting, but it's difficult to catch someone in the act, and currently, it's not illegal to have such a device in possession while hunting.

"It's really hammering our deer population," said Yee. (See related article on Page 16.)

Along the west slope Cascades and into the Coast Range in southeast Oregon, Roseburg-based assistant district wildlife biologist Bill Cannaday reported, "We have pretty good deer numbers and a stable overall population." Good habitat conditions and food availability have played an important role. That has included abundant forage in valley floor areas, along with early seral stage vegetation growth from past wildfires in the mountains.

On the negative side, deer populations are hampered by loss of connectivity – travel and migration corridors – blocked by roads and other human development. This is an issue around the state, and there are efforts in the works by the Oregon Hunters Association and other groups to construct wildlife passageways over or under highways.

On the east side of the Cascades, the mule deer population continues its slow overall decline, as is happening throughout the West. However, the state of specific mule deer populations can vary from place to place and year to year.

"Mule deer are hard to pin down," explained Katrina Lopez, assistant district wildlife biologist who works out of the ODFW Enterprise office in northeast Oregon. "Depending on the area, our data show them holding steady or slightly decreasing. But we still have pretty good hunting success rates of more than 30 percent over the last five years."

She also noted that they had good adult overwinter survival. Fawn survival was a little less than they had expected, perhaps due to periods of hard winter conditions.

In the High Desert region, Hines-based district wildlife biologist Lee Foster observed, "There is a slight decline in mule deer numbers in the Silvies, Juniper and Malheur River wildlife

Mule deer population continues its slow overall decline, as is happening throughout the West.





DESCHUTES COUNTY/TERRY SMITH

ODFW biologists reported seeing little winter kill among mule deer.

management units, but the Steens population is pretty stable.”

He reported they did not see much winter kill, although fawns went into winter in lower numbers than what was hoped for. But the good spring green-up helped keep survival rates high.

Elk

Generally speaking, Roosevelt elk in western Oregon have tended to struggle in recent years, while on the east side of the Cascades, Rocky Mountain elk have been doing well, and even prospering in some instances. Recent population estimates show that Rocky Mountain elk populations

are at more than 110 percent of management objective, while Roosevelt elk are slightly below 70 percent of objective. But, as with deer, that can also vary depending on time and place.

Reeder reported that Roosevelt elk bull and calf ratios are at management objective throughout his district on the North Coast. Unfortunately, ODFW biologists had less than optimal conditions during early spring aerial elk surveys. Hot, sunny weather drove the animals into the timber to keep cool, making it more difficult to find them for a complete count. Nevertheless, Reeder predicted good hunting opportunities for the fall.

For Roosevelt elk, the rule of thumb has been decreasing populations on national forest lands in the Cascade Mountains due to less logging that produces forage habitat, and a movement onto private industrial timberlands where logging continues. But Yee has been observing a definite movement onto agricultural lands, which produce a steadier food source for the animals. This isn’t an especially good trend as it increases elk damage issues and limits public hunting access.

Further south, Cannaday confirmed that the rule of thumb still holds in his

district, with more elk on industrial timberland than on public forest. He said there continue to be good numbers of elk on industrial forest lands, which are generally open to public hunting. He also predicted that public forest lands will again become more attractive to elk as they seek out areas burned in recent wildfires that are beginning to produce more early seral stage habitat.

Elk numbers continue to be strong in northeast Oregon, according to Lopez. “Harvest has been steady for the past 10 years,” she explained. “They are spending more time in valley areas than in timber lately, which could be because of habitat or predation.” The one exception is the Snake River Unit, which has fewer bulls this year. Otherwise, elk hunting prospects look good for the 2025 season.

“Elk have been struggling in the Silvies, North Malheur River and High Desert units,” said Lee Foster. “We are having low bull ratios and hunter success.” But there are indications that the North Malheur Unit may be improving, as they have been seeing some better bull ratios and increased harvest.

The effect of expanding wolf packs on Oregon elk herds is largely unknown

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Oregon has a solid pronghorn population estimated at 16,000 to 19,000 animals.

HARNEY COUNTY/TERRY SMITH

High Desert pronghorns are reported to be down this year, but hunters with tags should see bucks.

at this point, but with wolf numbers reaching a new high every year, that impact is likely increasing. OHA is asking ODFW to prioritize improving our understanding of wolf impacts on ungulates in Oregon. OHA worked to ensure that the Oregon Wolf Management Plan encompasses strategies to implement controlled take of wolves in areas where wild ungulate populations are not meeting established management objectives or herd management goals. Therefore, we cannot implement such action if

we do not first understand to what extent Oregon wolves are negatively impacting ungulate populations.

Pronghorn

While Oregon has a solid pronghorn population estimated at 16,000 to 19,000 animals that is generally stable, they are sensitive to environmental and weather conditions, which can make their numbers fluctuate from year to year.

This year, Foster said that High Desert pronghorns are down from last year,

but, true to form, should respond well to the good spring moisture conditions that boosted forage green-up and water sources. Regardless of population specifics, pronghorn hunters typically have an excellent success rate in excess of 50 percent.

Bighorn Sheep

Lopez reported that Rocky Mountain bighorns in northeast Oregon are mostly faring all right. "We did have some pneumonia in the Wenaha and Mountain View herds, and some ewe and lamb mortality," she noted. But hunter success is often at 100 percent, and ODFW staff is happy to give advice to tag winners.

High Desert bighorn herds are mostly managing to avoid disease issues this year, and according to Foster, "We have been producing some pretty good hunts."

Rocky Mountain Goat

Rocky Mountain goats are well established in Oregon, and unlike bighorns, not as susceptible to disease, making their numbers typically stable. That remains true this year, as well. The total Oregon population estimate is 1,100 to 1,300. Most are located in the Elkhorn and Wallowa mountains. Other notable populations include the Strawberry Mountains, and Mount Jefferson and Three-Fingered Jack areas in the Cascades.



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HEARTBREAK BULL

TAG STEW IS A STAPLE IN ELK CAMP,
BUT IT'S NOT EASY TO SWALLOW.

BY RICHY J. HARROD

It's not unusual to be unsuccessful bowhunting, especially for elk. The average success rate for archers is 10-12 percent in most Western states. This average includes all bowhunters, regardless of the number of days hunted, so that a hunter who only was able to hunt weekends is averaged with hunters who hunted 10 or more days. My guess is that the success rate goes up the more time a hunter spends chasing elk as my brother and I do; we hunt 16-21 days every season. I'm lucky to boast a 62-percent success rate in 34 years of bowhunting elk, while my little brother Ron is closer to 70 percent.

No matter the numbers, not notching a tag is a normal part of bowhunting, but it can be heartbreaking.

Ron and I arrived at our annual elk camp in Grant County in late August. Summer conditions were milder than many years previous with good feed and water in places not seen in years. The current weather, however, felt like the typical hot, dry summer weather we have become accustomed to over the past decade. Hot weather or not, it was time to go elk hunting.

The first morning plan was to hunt an isolated system of ridges and draws where we have enjoyed success in past years. My hike led up a broad drainage to the ridgetop at its headwaters. The hunt would start on the back side of the mountain at first light.

The hike, easy at first, became more difficult to navigate the steep slope in the last quarter mile. Cresting the ridge, the orange glow of morning light was appearing in the eastern sky. No need for the headlamp. A game trail leading to the backside of the mountain seemed like a good path, so I stumbled along slowly until my eyes adjusted. Shooting light came 30 minutes later in a place where elk frequented. Elk sign was scarce, but there was more ground



On day 10, the author's brother Ron called a spike within bow range and connected.

to cover. A new route was needed, so I opened my phone map and rested for a minute or two.

A CLOSE ENCOUNTER

The noise was uncertain at first. Cattle were scattered in this area. Something was coming my way quickly, and cattle typically don't move that fast. The wind was drifting downhill, so I needed to move down quickly, or the elk would get my scent. Moving down 60-70 yards, I kneeled in a spot with multiple shooting lanes.

Suddenly, a cow and calf appeared 40 yards above me. "Nowhere to shoot!" The cow spooked as she caught my scent from the spot where I previously stood. Below me, two cows and a spike moved suddenly in the dense juniper and mahogany trees. Even a couple of my cow calls wouldn't stop their jog on a mission to unknown parts.

When I thought the encounter was over, high-pitched cow calls above me sent

me back to one knee. A calf elk appeared out of the dense trees and trotted my way. Other elk were moving away rapidly, and it seemed he wanted to catch up. He paused for a moment about 20 yards above me, and then to my surprise turned straight for me. I was facing uphill on one knee with an arrow nocked on the string. The calf was oblivious to my presence. He walked by so close that I had to move the tip of my arrow to the right about 12 inches so he wouldn't impale himself, and he nearly brushed me as he passed! I've never been so close to an elk.

My spirits were high after this close encounter, but this confidence was short-lived, as day after day passed with no elk seen. The weather became even hotter. Finally, on day 10, Ron called a spike within bow range and made his shot count. We were feeling grateful given the challenging hunting conditions. My brother went home two days later, and with six more unsuccessful hunts, I too returned to work for a few days. I had hiked over 200 miles in 16 days, an all-out physical effort not experienced in years, and yet, not a single shooting chance. There would be four more days of hunting at the end of the season, and I hoped not to become a statistic of the unsuccessful.

ANOTHER CHANCE

The weather had changed significantly by the time I returned to eastern Oregon. It was cool and rainy, perfect for rutting bulls. With improved weather, my plan was to hike into a large roadless area, accessible only by what we call the "hill of pain." This long, steep hill has kicked our butts for years, and this morning was no different. The orange sunrise was visible after the strenuous one-hour hike that left sweat rolling down my face. "There's got to be a bull in here." I reminisced about the many elk quarters we packed down

'This is why I hunt. The emotional ups and downs, the all-out physical effort, the chance to be where elk are, and the hope to fill the freezer with the best meat on earth.'



PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

The author contemplates his next move after a close encounter with a Grant County elk.

the hill of pain and these memories gave me confidence. Hiking from ridge to ridge, through draw after draw, no elk were seen anywhere. The hill of pain challenged me for the next two days, but each hunt was unsuccessful. It was time for a Hail Mary. The last day was spent where the hunt started three weeks ago.

My heavy breath drifted in the headlamp light hiking up the cold, dark draw bottom. After about a mile, I hiked up the left-hand side of the drainage until a large meadow appeared. The meadow extended to the ridgetop and then transitioned to a thick stand of pine, fir, and mahogany. Another large meadow on the far side of the mountain was my destination. Elk tracks were sparse but increasing in number emerging from the dense forest.

I bugled loudly into my grunt tube, disturbing the quiet, calm morning air. A commanding view in the dim morning light was perfect for glassing elk in the distance. Birds, squirrels, and chipmunks greeted the dawn. Another bugle, and a bull answered

immediately. My heart started pounding; he wasn't far. The route led downhill along the timbered edge of the meadow, across the bottom of the main draw, and up the other side onto a dry juniper and mahogany slope. He continued to bugle on his own and I worked in as close as I dared without being seen.

I knelt by small conifers on the edge of an opening and cow called. The legs of an elk were soon visible through the mahogany thicket. Was the bull coming my way? A couple of tense moments passed, but then it became obvious he was walking away. "What? No way he could smell me, the wind is blowing downhill," I muttered to myself. These thoughts were quickly interrupted by another bugle behind in the timber on the other side below the meadow I had just left! "Well, I guess I'll go after him!"

Hustling back down through the mahogany, I stopped on the edge of a grassy clearing in the draw bottom and listened for any noise that might indicate his whereabouts. Unmistakable sounds of antlers raking a tree were heard in a dense stand of young trees 80 yards uphill with deadfall everywhere. No way to sneak into that mess!

Maybe this bull would respond to a cow call. But after a couple of soft mews, he stopped bugling and sounds of fast-moving hooves could be heard across the hillside. He bugled further up the drainage, and I couldn't keep up. Unbelievably though, his distant bugle sparked yet another bull to chime in. And of course, he was on the mahogany side of the draw, so I went down the hill and up the other side.

It was like being a pinball on an emotional roller coaster.

Hiking up 300-400 yards, I paused, hoping to pinpoint this new bull. After a few minutes, I made a couple cow whines that roused a bugle that sounded further away. A rocky rim nearby seemed like a better place to listen. After a few steps, suddenly he bugled loudly right below the rocky rim.


I moved up another 10 yards, and knocked an arrow. His antlers appeared as he passed through a small gap in the rocks. A forked mahogany tree was my only cover as I came to full draw. It was a tall 6-point bull now 20 yards away.

I thought, "this is it, come on Rich, make the shot!" He abruptly stopped broadside, pegging my location, but his vitals were completely covered by a small mahogany. "No way! Come on, take another step!" His neck and guts were clear, but his vitals were covered. "Maybe when he turns, I can slip a good shot into his chest," as my mind churned options at lightning speed. He instantly turned running back over the rocky rim. I ran up to find another shooting lane, cow calling as I went. He disappeared into the mahogany thicket below and was gone. My heart sank.

The first shot opportunity of the season was taken away by a six-inch diameter mahogany that was now my backrest as I sat contemplating the encounter. It was the most exciting moment and the most disappointing moment all at once. Not much more could have been done. It was over.

REFLECTION

This is why I hunt. The emotional ups and downs, the all-out physical effort, the chance to be where elk are, and the hope to fill the freezer with the best meat on earth. The hunting lifestyle, particularly bowhunting, has become what defines me as a person, woven into the fabric of my being. After 20 days, my senses were heightened, and I felt I had become a part of the daily rhythms of mountain life. Consequently, leaving these special mountains is always emotional, like parting from a beloved family member. Nonetheless, the long journey home would start the following morning.

It was a hunting season to remember. Although it ended in heartbreak, the memory drives me back to the elk woods each year to immerse myself in mountain life and the chance to notch that tag. 



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BE RELENTLESS

Hot August Antelope

By Richy Harrod

The three of us wondered how long to endure the sweltering sun now fully blazing on our position behind the boulder. A group of antelope spotted at first light led us to the edge of a small gully with only a three-foot-tall boulder for cover. We could go no further, and it was too far for my good friend, Justin Herold, to shoot his muzzleloader rifle.

Justin had drawn an antelope tag for the East Beatys hunt in southeast Oregon. He invited his life-long friend Nic Wagner and I along to provide moral support and hopefully, help pack some meat from this sunbaked landscape.

A move on our part, at this point, and the antelope would be gone in a flash. The work to get to this stifling spot was preceded by considerable effort in planning the trip, e-scouting, and of course, Justin's diligence in obtaining the tag.

Oregon offers an average of about 140 muzzleloader-only antelope tags distributed among five units each year. Some units require an average of eight or more points to draw, so Justin acquired points for several years to draw the East Beatys tag (this hunt no longer exists; muzzleloader hunters now apply for the Steens tag in this area). With not many options, he chose to apply for this unit because of abundant public land and information suggesting the best odds of harvest with a muzzleloader. A phone call

to a wildlife biologist and studying some digital maps helped determine where to start scouting. Armed with a coveted tag and basic knowledge, we traveled south the day before the season.

The first scouting spot was in a broad, flat sagebrush basin, but no antelope sign was found. However, we received a tip from a BLM range manager about a better location not far away. After a short drive, we rode a side-by-side up a dusty, two-track road to a prominent point overlooking a high cheatgrass basin surrounded by rocky ridges. Immediately we spotted a herd of antelope.

"This is awesome!" Justin said with excitement. "Let's leave them be and go find a place to camp."

Finding a camp spot turned out to be harder than expected. As wildland firefighters, we worried about driving down roads with tall, dry vegetation for fear of starting a fire. Not willing to risk it, we settled on a bare dirt turnout about 100 yards off the highway. Justin's cargo trailer and pop-up shade tent provided minimal shade. The camp situated in a small saddle caused the wind to swirl dust into the trailer and under the shade tent like a scene from Ben-Hur. In the evenings, we found scorpions crawling

in our headlamps, so we dubbed it "scorpion camp." Crowding the cook stove and chairs into the shade, we welcomed the setting sun.

Nic wandered out of camp in the waning light to scan the basin and hills near camp.

"There's some antelope," Nic said with some urgency that sent Justin and I scrambling for our binoculars and spotting scope. About 2 miles away, several antelope were feeding at the base of a sweeping, cheatgrass covered hill. A spring was found lower in the basin, too.

"I think we should hunt out of camp in the morning," Justin said decisively. And with that, we watched the antelope and studied the surrounding landscape until dark.

The next morning, we donned packs and started our hike with only a glow in the eastern sky. A narrow draw about a mile away would provide a place to hide until we could see through binoculars. Finding them again wasn't the issue; the challenge was getting close enough for a shot with a muzzleloader. We knew that antelope tend to stay within 1 to 2 miles of water and often travel the same routes. They are exceptionally wary animals, so by using the draws and dry creek bottoms, we intended to close the distance once a buck was spotted.

*The sun
scorched
us, the wind
sand-blasted
us, and in the
evenings, we
found scorpions
crawling in our
headlamps.*

Hunting Oregon's fastest land mammal with a short-range weapon? Piece of steak.

The rising sun cast an orange glow, making the antelope visible about 600 yards across the opposite side of the basin. A buck was part of the herd, but they started moving with the rising sun before we could plan a stalk. Following the herd led us to the boulder in the small gully, and it became obvious why this spot was their destination. A spring flowing into a trough sat in the center of the flat.

The two hours behind the boulder were miserable. We lost hope of a buck coming within muzzleloader range. Eventually, the herd dispersed with some does climbing up a steep hill and bedding on the wide open, black rocks. We marveled at their ability to withstand the midday sun, but of course, they don't choose these areas for comfort but for safety, as danger could be seen approaching for a mile or more. It was time to make our way back to scorpion camp to rest in the small shade patch.

We returned to the flat near the boulder for a short evening hunt.

"That flat is just about as wide open as it gets," Justin said with disappointment.

"No kidding," I said, quietly laughing. "The only thing I see is another small boulder a few yards below the trough, and I don't know about you, but I've had enough of boulders."

"What if we pack some juniper branches up there and build a blind?" Justin suggested



LAKE COUNTY/JOHN MCFARLAND III

with a sudden realization of a morning plan. Several junipers were near the bottom of the draw about 500 yards away. It could work!

The next morning, we left camp in the dark to build the juniper blind. Branches were strapped to our packs to haul uphill to the small boulder. Turns out it takes more branches than three guys can carry to build a sufficient blind to hide said guys. With shooting light minutes away, we opted to lay flat on our stomachs behind the inadequate blind, feeling hopelessly exposed on three sides. Dried Bur Buttercup seeds stabbed our hands and poked through our shirts. There was no time to rid our temporary beds of the nuisance; mule deer and antelope does were already en route to the trough.

A three-point mule deer buck followed by several antelope does kept us hugging the dirt. Justin peered through a small hole in the blind, watching and hoping a buck would appear. Time passed quickly, observing antelope does that walked close to inspect the two-dimensional buck decoy placed in front of our blind. Antelope are naturally curious, and bucks may come in close to aggressively chase away the



PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

Antelope could be seen, but so could the hunters pursuing them. Would a blind level the field?

competition the decoy poses.

"Looks like the decoy is working," Nic whispered.

"Now we just need a buck," Justin replied.

Nearly three hours passed while we squirmed and admired the close-up antelope, but then suddenly the does left the water and Justin became hyper focused.

Rising to his knees, Justin muttered, "there's a buck," while maneuvering his rifle up to rest on shooting sticks. There

was a slight pause to settle his rifle, and then "BOOM!" followed by a black powder smoke cloud obscuring our view. We anxiously watched as the smoke cleared. The buck sprinted away and then slowed to a wobble. We stood in time to watch the buck fall into the tall, golden dry grass.

"You got him!" Nic yelled, followed by high fives and sideways "bro hugs."

"I can't believe it!" Justin exclaimed as we walked toward his prize.

It was a beautiful buck, and much bigger than we anticipated, with horns nearly 16 inches in length. "Where'd this buck come from?" Nic wondered. "We would have spotted him right away yesterday." Justin replied with a smile, "He just seemed to appear out of nowhere, and boy am I glad he did!" We celebrated the success, recounted the details of the hunt, and posed for pictures to remember the day. The temperature soared again, so it was time to quarter and cape Justin's monster buck.

Back at scorpion camp, the meat was placed on ice, and we rested in our dab of shade. Justin reflected on the hunt.

"Sharing time with you Rich, and Nic, my life-long hunting partner, it's really priceless. I mean you can't ask for any better experience."

Nic nodded his head, "the best part of hunting is getting together with family and friends, for sure."

Later, we climbed to the top of a low knob near camp, taking in the high desert beauty one more time. Below, the brushy blind was a small dot in an otherwise expansive landscape, but that prickly, unpleasant, small blind will always be the site of fond memories about time with friends and big antelope bucks.



Justin and Nick enjoy the moment after Justin connected on his blackpowder buck.

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TRADITIONS

By GARY LEWIS

PATIENCE PAYS FOR SILVER-GRAYS

Just out of Talent. That was a great way to describe the two of us on a deer hunt in the Siskiyou. James tied his tag on a forked horn Greensprings blacktail with big muley ears, then we moved camp down out of the mountains and up the other side – a few miles out of Talent. And the first thing we wanted to do was get camp meat.

We tucked ourselves in against a fence and waited and listened, and about the middle of the afternoon, we heard squirrels down by the creek. Rather than walk to them, we skirted a hedgerow and approached from upstream down along the edge of the trees.

James eased on past where the squirrel was working, and when it skittered back around the tree trunk, I put the front blade of the old Remington behind its ear and shot it.

We fried the squirrel that evening in bacon grease and served it with gravy. It was the kind of meal that helped preserve life in the Siskiyou as long as there have been hunters in these hills.

What a person needs to remember is it takes patience, not talent, to kill a squirrel. Silver-grays are big and make a lot of noise. They break branches and cut pinecones and chatter and leap from branch to branch. And if you can sit still on a frosty morning, or back up against a tree for 15 minutes on a sunny afternoon, you can figure out where the squirrels are working and shinny around for a shot.

Of all the critters you can read about in the Oregon Big Game Regulations, the western gray squirrel offers the most generous bag limits and the longest seasons,

and no special tag is required to hunt them.

The western gray squirrel is hunted in some parts of central and southern Oregon, but the numbers are highest west of the Cascades. Turn to the small game hunting section of the big game regs for the latest regulations.

In North and Central Oregon, the season runs Sept. 15 to Oct. 31 with a daily bag limit of three and six in possession. In the remainder of the state, the season runs Sept. 1 to Nov. 15 with a daily bag of five squirrels and 15 in possession. There is no limit or closed season in the Rogue Unit south of the Rogue River and the South Fork Rogue and north of Highway 140.

The liberal regulations were designed to reduce squirrel populations and ease damage to private Ponderosa pine plantations. When squirrels begin girdling trees, they can destroy whole stands of young timber.

Now pay attention, because I'm going to give you a reason to go out and buy a new or new-to-you critter gitter. There's a lot of satisfaction in carrying the old guns – levers, pumps, side-by-sides, even muzzleloaders like the .32-caliber squirrel rifles.

There's a lot of satisfaction in carrying the old guns – levers, pumps, side-by-sides, even muzzleloaders like the .32-caliber squirrel rifles.



PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

Generous regs for silver-grays provide ample opportunity for hunters to make meat and memories.

rifles. On the hunt near Talent, I used a 1906 vintage Remington pump-action with an octagon barrel and a peep sight on the tang. But you could get the same satisfaction with a lever-action Henry, Winchester or Marlin. Or even call shotgun and bring a side-by-side 20 gauge or a 410 coach gun. They call them coach guns because the guy next to the driver carried one to guard against road agents, and they were short enough to carry inside the stagecoach as well. Next time you call shotgun, bring the shotgun.

The classic hunt for silver-grays is down in that Rogue River country, but by the Greensprings Road and Highway 140 and in the Rogue River canyon.

Look for a mixed forest of firs, oaks, madrone and downed timber. Sit down and listen. And when you move, move slowly. I may be low on talent, but I know patience is what it takes to kill a silver-gray.



To contact Gary Lewis, visit www.GaryLewisOutdoors.com

An advertisement for the OHA Hunting GPS App. It features a background image of a hunter in a field. The text reads: "OH X HUNT THE HUNTING GPS APP", "USE PROMO CODE OHA25 TO GET 20% OFF YOUR ONX SUBSCRIPTION AND ONX WILL DONATE TO OHA." The text is in a mix of green and red colors, with "ONX" in red and "USE PROMO CODE OHA25" and "ONX WILL DONATE TO OHA." in green.



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STAGECOACH CHILI & MOLASSES BREAD

GARY LEWIS



Black-tailed deer was one of the main ingredients a stage station chef would have had to work with, and molasses bread was a pioneer staple.

Nothing is easier to put down than a bowl of stagecoach chili with a loaf of molasses bread. Daily stagecoach service between Sacramento and Portland began in 1860, when the California Stage Company linked California and Oregon with a 710-mile route. And it was no picnic.

Figure 35 days to make the run from Portland to Sacramento. And dude, you would be well advised to bring a revolver. If a stagecoach was overloaded with passengers, mail and gold, it was a tempting target. It was pretty easy to step into a road and hold up a stage as the six-horse team struggled up a mountain pass. Masked road agents such as Charles E. Boles (Black Bart), Thomas Hunt and lanky Bob Oliver made short careers out of robbing the stagecoaches and passengers.

All of that adventure can work up an appetite. At roadhouses on the route, there would be a hot meal waiting for the stage.

Black-tailed deer was one of the main ingredients a roadhouse chef would have had to work with. And molasses was on everyone's grocery list when they went for supplies.

The stagecoach runs officially ended in 1887 when the railroads began to be linked up, but a bowl of chili and a loaf of bread are still hunting camp staples in the Siskiyou's. Here is how we do it with a Camp Chef Dutch oven.

STAGECOACH CHILI

- 2 lbs stew meat or burger (deer, elk, beef or burro)
- 1 can drained black beans
- 1/2 sweet onion
- 1 can stewed tomatoes
- 4 yellow/red sweet peppers
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- 1 box (1 pt 1 oz) organic beef bone broth
- 1 tbsp chili pepper
- 1 tsp cumin
- 2 garlic cloves
- 1 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 tbsp Tapatio hot sauce

Saute the onions and peppers in olive oil. Slow-cook the meat with the onions. Cut meat into bite-size pieces and season with cumin, sugar, cloves and chili pepper.

Combine the remaining ingredients in a large pot or Dutch oven and simmer for 45 to 60 minutes. Garnish with avocado, grated cheese and sprouts. Serves 4 to 6.

With its delicate crisp crust and sweet taste, a loaf of molasses brown bread is an authentic stagecoach road complement to a bowl of chili.

MOLASSES BROWN BREAD

- 1/2 cup molasses
- 2 cups warm water
- 2 tbsp cocoa powder
- 1 package of yeast
- 1/3 cup honey
- 2 tsp kosher salt
- 1/2 cup melted butter
- 3 tbsp oil (try coconut oil)
- 3 cups flour
- 3 cups wheat flour

Beat ingredients to consistency of cake batter. Grease the pan. Let rise for 1-1/2 hours. Bake at 350 degrees for 45-55 minutes.

**Put a Dutch oven
in the boot if
you're hunting
blacktails this
season, and cook
up a batch of chili
for the crew.**



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HOW THE WEST WAS WON — ONE KID AT A TIME

We pulled up on the edge of the small western town and parked the digital camo F-150, sitting in our bucket seat saddles outside of city limits. Nothing moved in the deserted street. I took out my toothpick and looked at it before I threw it down.

Nine-year-old Johnny pulled his hat low and squinted in the afternoon light.

"I thought you said this was a thrivin' town."

"It was, but when the silver run out, the thrivin' run out with it."

To tell the truth, it wasn't much of a town, but the people must have loved it.

"They left it in good shape," I told Johnny. "Closed all the doors when they rode out of here. To keep the coyotes out, I expect."

Johnny said, "I reckon so."

On the left, a kitchen, solidly built. Over to the right, a sheriff's office and the jail. And up the street to the left, a bunkhouse, a general store, a blacksmith shop, a hitching rail and a barn. All built in the style that was in vogue in 1880. At the end of the street, a corral. Under each of the buildings and under the boardwalk there were rabbit runways, bunny tunnels weakening the structures. And over there, a California grey digger mound.

This was worse than I thought. With the toe of my boot, I eased the kitchen door open. Pictures of the family on the wall. Of happier times before the varmints took over.

"Any food here?" Johnny wanted to know.

"Just a piece of hard-rock candy. But it's not for eatin' it's for lookin' through."

I pulled back the curtains and peered



One killer rabbit stew comin' up! Young gun Johnny West gunned down his first rabbit with a lever action rifle in a western ghost town not far from a boomtown known to locals as Madras.

out over the hills to the west. That was a place called Madras over there, named after a blue bolt of cloth. And beyond that, the mountains and the sun still five fingers above the horizon.

"We got about an hour, Johnny, before the rabbits come out. If they come out. Then you can whistle Dixie or you can go to shooting."

It was easy to see where the rabbits had been. Digging under the buildings and weakening the foundations of the jail and the blacksmith shop. Little trails ran out to the flowerbeds and over to the neighbor's.

It was the boy's first rabbit hunt. And this was an honest-to-Josey Wales real western town. The feller that built it must have been our kind of folks, but he had passed away and left it to his family and they had given us permission to see if we could help do something about the varmints.

We had one lever-gun between us, befitting this mentored hunt, an American-made walnut stock youth model Henry .22 topped with Warne Scope Mounts and a Burris scope. We had practiced a few days earlier, getting the crosshairs steady, easing back the hammer, pressing the trigger.

For the next 45 minutes, we walked quietly around the buildings and practiced throwing axes and checked the angle of the sun. Finally, I led Johnny up to the sheriff's office where we sat on the porch and loaded the gun, dropping seven rounds down the tube.

"Load on Sunday, shoot all week long," I whispered.

Moments later, a rabbit came out of some ivy and parked itself next to the tractor where it began munching on clover.

"I reckon we don't have much of a shot," I said. The cottontail eyeballed us and worked around the tractor munching all the clover within six inches of each tire. Finally it hopped across the driveway toward the saloon and past a couple of old wagon wheels.

I wanted the boy to make the decisions and tell me what he was thinking.

"I think I could rest the gun on the tractor and get a good shot," he offered. That sounded good to me. The shot would be about 20 yards at most. A good distance for the CCI Quiet-22 ammunition we had loaded in the Henry.

Johnny tipped the hat back on his head. I levered a round and made sure the hammer was set on half-cock.

Johnny sneaked over to the tractor and slid up on the fender, where he could cast an eyeball on the rabbit, and then he eased into the scope and eared back the hammer. The Henry cracked and the rabbit flopped over.

We waited a few minutes to see if any other rabbits would come out. And then darkness fell on the small western town.

"You can't get 'em all, Johnny."

"That's a fact, grandpa. But do we get to come back and do it again?"

"Reckon we will. Because I cain't think of nothin' I'd rather do."



To contact Gary Lewis, visit www.garylewisoutdoors.com

GARY LEWIS

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Hines OHA member Matthew Cawlfeld is the winner of a Tactacam Reveal Trail Camera for his Harney County photo of an impromptu kick boxing class of cow elk.

HONORABLE MENTION:

We experienced some technical difficulties with our website this spring, so if you entered a photo between March 15 and May 15 but don't see it here, please re-enter!



OHA member Dave Boyd of Albany lands Honorable Mention and an OHA hat for a Linn County bobcat.



Prineville OHA member Roger Stanley captures Honorable Mention and an OHA hat for his feral horse photos in the Ochoco National Forest this past spring.

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OHA NEWS & VIEWS

WALLOWAS/BRYAN COOK

Oregon wolves up 15 percent over last year

Population model, data on ungulate impact needed

By Mike Totey, Conservation Director
mtotey@oregonhunters.org



Oregon's minimum wolf count rose 15 percent to 204 in 2024, according to the annual wolf report shared at the April Fish and Wildlife Commission meeting.

Most of ODFW's report covered the three main factors that were prioritized at a wolf workshop in 2023: illegal take of wolves, reducing depredation (specifically in NE Oregon), and improving population monitoring, including the development of a population model.

Wolves continue to expand their range as juvenile wolves disperse into new territory, and as wolves expand into new areas of Oregon, conflict follows.

There is still no population estimate for the total number of wolves in Oregon, which leaves only the "minimum wolf count" for reference to a population, which is essentially useless for overall management of the species.

Missing in the report is any reference to the predation effects on ungulates. Data are nearly impossible to find, and currently we know very little about the impact predation by wolves is causing on their prey populations.

Wolves are managed by the Oregon wolf management plan, and also under the Endangered Species Act in the western two-thirds of the state.

To view ODFW's 2024 wolf report, visit <http://tiny.cc/ttgh001>



UNION COUNTY/ODFW

OHA is asking ODFW to collect data on wolf impacts to Oregon's deer and elk herds, which is unknown.

Federal cuts affect some OHA projects

By Mike Totey, Conservation Director
mtotey@oregonhunters.org

There's been a lot of news lately on reductions of staff and funding for federal agencies, and OHA continues to track the potential impacts on our mission.

Many of our projects take place on public lands. Some agencies in those areas where we have ongoing projects have seen significant reductions. This caused OHA to hit the pause button on a couple of projects that we hope to start up again in 2026. Projects on state lands that don't rely on federal funding have largely been unaffected.

But not everything federal has stopped. In early May, OHA staff and board members submitted comments on the 153,000-acre fuels maintenance treatments project planned for the Deschutes National Forest. Earlier comments submitted by OHA on the project helped set the stage for a project that considers impacts to mule deer and elk, while trying to make the forest more resilient and protect communities from wildfire.

On the Willamette National Forest, OHA staff are drafting comments for the Steeple Rock Rigdon Project draft environmental assessment. This project specifically identifies hunting in the proposed action, stating "Implementation of the proposed action alternative would improve hunting opportunities in the area."

These are the types of projects we need to support and see implemented.

New Gun Calendar winners announced

The latest winners in OHA's 2025 Gun Calendar Raffle have been announced, and the 2026 OHA Gun Raffle Calendar is on sale now! Call 541-772-7313 or visit <https://oregonhunters.org/shop/#raffles>

See weekly winners on OHA's website or download our app, which you can also use to enter OHA contests and get timely notifications.

★ **Winchester XPR 7mm-08 Rem**
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★ **Weatherby Badlands .25-06**
David Hampton, OHA Capitol Chapter
★ **Sig Sauer P320 M18**
Dan Cook, Curry Chapter



More about new deer hunt areas; comment at July ODFW meetings

By Tyler Dungannon, Conservation Coordinator
TD@oregonhunters.org

Proposed mule deer hunts and tag numbers for the 2026 season will be available in July 2025 and will be presented at ODFW big game public meetings. OHA has worked with ODFW for the past 6 months to ensure these proposals are not set in stone.

Oregon hunters need to be informed and ready to make their voices heard at these upcoming meetings.

This year, the big game public meetings will largely focus on a proposed massive shift in mule deer monitoring and harvest management. In short, ODFW is quickly moving toward monitoring and harvesting mule deer at the herd range scale rather than the historical wildlife management unit scale. As proposed, the following will occur for the 2026 hunting season in eastern Oregon:

👉 **New hunt naming system:** Deer Hunt Areas will use a new alphanumeric system to identify hunt areas within herd ranges. For example, hunt area #1 within the Northeast herd range would be NE-01.

👉 **Larger hunt areas and different hunt boundaries:** Expect new hunting areas that are different and often larger than traditional WMUs. These larger hunt areas will be less affected by emergency closures and allow hunters more flexibility in response to wildfire or hunting pressure.

👉 **Tag adjustments:** In the short term, there may be slight tag changes (likely fewer tags overall) to manage hunter pressure. Adjustments could fluctuate over the next few years as hunters and ODFW adapt to these new hunt areas.

👉 **Some separation of white-tailed deer and mule deer hunts.** Areas with substantial white-tailed deer populations and harvest will see separate hunts for each species (both remain in the 100 series).



MYODFW.COM

Hunter participation at these meetings has dwindled and has opened the door for animal rights activist organizations to grip the tone of these meetings in certain areas. If you have an opinion, please share it and participate in the public meetings. July meeting links will be available shortly. Visit myodfw.com and sign up for ODFW press releases.

For more, scan the QR code or visit <https://tinyurl.com/54tyd2t>

ODFW July Virtual Meetings

- NW - July 10, 6:30-7:30 p.m.
- SW - July 10, 6-7:30 p.m.
- East - July 16, 6-8 p.m.
- NE - July 10, 6-7:30 p.m.



OHA pays \$6,700 in TIP rewards in 9 poaching cases

In the last two months, OHA issued 11 reward checks to informants in 9 cases totaling \$6,700 from our Turn In Poachers (TIP) reward fund.

Charges included: Criminal trespass II, take/possession of game bird closed season, unlawful take of a 7x7 non-typical mule deer, unlawful take of trophy 4x4 mule deer, exceeding daily bag limit of trout by 18, no resident angling license, exceeding daily bag limit of 2 turkeys in one day, unlawful take and waste of bull elk, hunting prohibited method – use of thermal imaging device, unlawful take/possession of bull elk – inserting arrow in a bullet hole, trespassing on private land, unlawful take and waste of bull elk, unlawful harvest of bull elk – caught on their own game cam.

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legacysports.com

Magview
magviewgear.com

Nosler, Inc.
nosler.com

SILVER

Bass Pro Shops & Cabela's
 Outdoor Fund
Basspro.com

OnX
onxmaps.com

BRONZE

Cascade Lakes Brewing
cascadelakes.com

Pronto Print
goprnto.com

Giustina Resources
giustinareources.com

Sunset Lodging
sunriverlodging.com

Christensen Arms
christensenarms.com

CHAPTER NEWS

HART MT. PROJECT/C. HAMMOND

Chapters head for the hills for habitat projects

BAKER

CHARLIE BRINTON 541-403-0402

Chapter Meetings: 2nd Wednesday, 5:30 p.m., Oregon Trail Restaurant.

BEND

REX PARKS 541-480-0230

oregonhunters.org/bend-chapter

Chapter Meetings: 2nd Wednesday, 6 p.m., VFW Post 1643, 1503 NE 4th St., Bend.

Update: All Hands, All Brands for Public Lands will be June 27-29 on the Ochoco National Forest; call 541-647-0424. The Bend Chapter Youth & Family Day was held May 31 at Cyrus Ranch. We recently repaired the fence that funnels wildlife safely under Highway 97.

BLUE MOUNTAIN

KEVIN MARTIN 541-969-6744

ohabluemountainchapter@gmail.com

Chapter Meetings: 4th Tuesday, The Saddle, 2200 Court St., Pendleton, 5:30 p.m. meeting, dinner and drinks available.

Update: The Blue Mountain Chapter Pub Night event on May 14 at Backfire Restaurant was a great success again this year.

CAPITOL

DANNY SOUTH 503-577-6033

<https://oregonhunters.org/capitol-chapter/>

Chapter Meetings: See the monthly newsletter for date and time of meetings.

Update: Congratulations to our newly elected VP, Heath King, and chapter board members Adam Rodakowski and Jerry Tabler.

CLATSOP COUNTY

TROY LAWS 503-738-6962

ClatsopCountyOHA@pacifier.com

Chapter Meetings: 3rd Thursday, 5:30 p.m.



ERIC BROWN

Bend OHA member Roger Points uses an electric pole saw recently donated by Bend Lowes to clear a fallen tree from the Lava Butte wildlife crossing fence. Chapter members in April worked to repair damage to Lava Butte and Gilchrist wildlife fences that funnel wildlife safely under Highway 97.

no-host dinner, 6:30 p.m. meeting, Hong Kong Restaurant, Astoria.

COLUMBIA COUNTY

CODY HUMBLE 360-901-2201

Chapter Meetings: 2nd Tuesday, 7 p.m., Elks Lodge, 350 Belton Rd., St. Helens.

Update: Congratulations to our new president, Cody Humble, and new treasurer, Nate Oliver.

CURRY

JAMIE BADGER 541-499-2245

Badgergirls3@gmail.com

Chapter Meetings: 1st Wednesday, Double D's Cafe, Gold Beach, 6:30 p.m.

Update: We held a very successful banquet again this year on April 16 thanks to our sponsors and volunteers.

EMERALD VALLEY

RON MARTIN 541-954-5459

EmeraldOHA@live.com

Chapter Meetings: 2nd Wednesday, 7 p.m., Sizzler, 1010 Postal Way, Springfield.

2025 Fundraiser: July 19, Cascadian Bowmen, 91714 Poole Creek Rd., Noti.

Update: The Emerald Valley Chapter Family Day will offer the whole family a day of games, raffles, auction and food.

HOODVIEW

LEVI BARRERA 503-863-4495

oregonhunters.org/hoodview-chapter

Facebook: Hoodview OHA

Chapter Meetings: Please check our web-

site for our chapter meeting schedule.

Update: We held our annual White River Project Day, June 6-8, White River Wildlife Area at Smock Reservoir.

JOSEPHINE COUNTY

DAVID DOWNS 541-821-1511

ddowns2646@gmail.com

<https://ohajoco.mailchimpsites.com/>

Chapter Meetings: 3rd Thursday, 6:30 p.m., dinner 6 p.m., Black Bear Diner, Grants Pass.

Update: Our annual chapter youth day was held June 7 at JoCo Sportsman Association Range. Our first chapter Pint Night was held at Growler Guys Taphouse. It went down smooth.

KLAMATH

DENNIS WIARD 541-891-3549

dtwiard@charter.net

<https://oregonhunters.org/klamath-chapter>

Chapter Meetings: 2nd Thursday, 7 p.m., Shasta View Community Center.

Update: Thank you to everyone who joined us for our annual banquet on April 26, the Hart Mountain project on May 17, and the Green Diamond cleanup project day on June 7. Stay tuned for our next habitat project day. We will host the annual Gerber Reservoir Youth Antelope Hunt BBQ on Aug. 22.

LAKE COUNTY

LARRY LUCAS 541-417-2983

Chapter Meetings: 1st Tuesday, 5 p.m., VFW Hall, Lakeview.

Update: Our annual youth event will be held June 28 at Juniper Reservoir; call 541-417-0042.

LINCOLN COUNTY

CHELSEA DIOSDADO 970-779-2817

chelsea.diosdado@gmail.com

Chapter Meetings: Quarterly Meetings, 6 p.m. meeting, dinner 5:30, Rogue Brewing Public House on the Bayfront, Newport.

Update: Thank you to our recent guest speaker at the chapter meeting, Skyler Gerity, ODFW Assistant Wildlife Biologist, who offered a great presentation for us.

MALHEUR COUNTY

BRUCE HUNTER 208-573-5556

Chapter Meetings: 3rd Thursday, 6 p.m., no host dinner 5:30, location TBA in the chapter newsletter.

Update: Mark your calendars for our annual Youth Sporting Clays Shoot on Aug. 9.

OREGON HUNTER, July/August 2025

MID-COLUMBIA

TONY WHITE 541-490-2980

Quarterly Chapter Meetings: at 6 p.m., ODFW's screen print shop on Klindt Drive, The Dalles.

MID-WILLAMETTE

KEN MCCALL 541-753-8588

kenemccall@gmail.com

<https://www.facebook.com/midwillamettechapteroregonhuntersassociation>

Chapter Meetings: 2nd Thursday, odd numbered months, board meets at 6 p.m., general meeting, 7 p.m., Old Armory, Albany.
Update: Our thanks go out to our new treasurer and board members for stepping up and making the chapter such a success. Join us at our July chapter meeting where we will hear from OSP Wildlife Enforcement Troopers.

OCHOCO

JAMES COX 541-408-4816

Chapter Meetings: 1st Tuesday, 7 p.m., COCC Open Campus Room 119.

Updates: Save the date, Aug. 23-24 for our 1st Annual Celebrate the Outdoors event in memory of Gary Prah! at the beautiful Crooked River Park. The event is funded in part by a grant from Cabela's Bass Pro Outdoor Fund.

PIONEER

BRIAN ANDREWS 971-221-8827

oregonhunters.org/pioneer-chapter

Chapter Meetings: 1st Wednesday, 7 p.m., early for dinner, Canby Rod & Gun Club.
Update: We hosted our youth day event at the Canby Rod & Gun Club on April 26. Be sure to stop by our booth at the Molalla Buckaroo and the Clackamas County Fair.

REDMOND

K. C. THRASHER 541-419-7215

OHA line 541-383-1099

oregonhunters.org/redmond-chapter

Chapter Meetings: 3rd Tuesday, VFW Hall. Dinner, 5 p.m., member meeting at 6 p.m., board meeting follows.
Update: The Priest Hole Recreation Site, where we conduct an annual habitat project, has reopened with many upgrades.

ROGUE VALLEY

RICKY CLARK 503-905-1186

rickywclark90@gmail.com

Chapter Meetings: Eagles, 2nd Thursday, 6 p.m. social/dinner, 7 p.m. presentation.



BROOKE SNAVELY, CENTRAL OREGON DAILY NEWS

Youngsters enjoyed sharpening their outdoor skills and learning new ones at OHA youth events held around the state this spring. OHA's Malheur County and Yamhill County chapters will host youth shotgun clinics in August aimed at getting kids ready for fall bird seasons and youth hunts.

TILLAMOOK

JOHN PUTMAN 503-842-7733

Chapter Meetings: 3rd Monday, 7 p.m., ODFW Tillamook Office.

Update: Our May 3 banquet was a big success, and we auctioned an Oregon Access & Habitat Statewide Elk Tag for \$84,000. Our youth trap shoot was held May 17.

TIOGA

MARCEY FULLERTON 541-294-7912

Chapter Meetings: 4th Tuesday, 6 p.m., Corner Bar & Grill, Coquille.

Update: Our chapter hosted another successful Chapter Youth Day Event on May 3. Thanks go to all our volunteers.

TUALATIN VALLEY

SHELLEY KIND 503-290-6143

oregonhunters.org/tualatin-valley-chapter
Chapter Meetings: 3rd Tuesday, dinner 6 p.m., meeting 7, Prime Time Restaurant & Sports Bar, Forest Grove.

Update: Tualatin Valley Youth Day was held June 7-8 at Henry Hagg Lake. We partnered again this year with I'm Hooked and our young people had a great time learning skills and enjoying the outdoors.

UMPQUA

TADD MOORE 541-580-5660

<https://www.umpquaoha.org>

Chapter Meetings: 3rd Tuesday, 6 p.m. Backside Brewery.

Update: Thank you to our recent guest speaker Nick Leonetti from ODFW Douglas District for speaking at our monthly meeting about wolf depredation.

UNION/WALLOWA COUNTY

MORGAN OLSON 541-786-1283

Chapter Meetings: La Grande Library, next date TBA.

Update: Our annual women's pheasant hunt will be held Oct. 18.

YAMHILL COUNTY

ANDY BODEEN 503-490-2489

ohayamhill.com

Chapter Meetings: 2nd Thursday, 7 p.m. meeting, 6 p.m. dinner, American Legion Hall, McMinnville.

Update: Join us at our Youth Shotgun Shoot on Aug. 16 at Newberg Rod & Gun Club. Let us know if you would like to help with our 2026 event, as we are in need of a coordinator.

OHA Convention Another Solid Hit

Sale of \$170,000 Oregon Access & Habitat Statewide Deer Tag highlights stellar auctions & raffle drawings

Nearly 500 OHA members hit the beach the weekend of May 3 for OHA's 42nd State Convention at Chinook Winds Casino Resort, where the tone was set early in the evening when an Oregon Access & Habitat Statewide Deer Tag was auctioned for an all-time record \$170,000.

Guests were treated to live and silent auctions totaling more than 100 items and raffles wherein over 100 great items were given away, including more than 70 firearms from donors such as Legacy Sports International, Sig Sauer, Coastal Farm & Ranch, Nosler, G4 Outdoors, Centerfire Gunworks, and Hi-Mountain Foods.

Three winners were drawn for guided deer and elk hunts on the famous Zumwalt Prairie Preserve donated by The Nature Conservancy.

Guests claimed premium optics donated by OHA Platinum Sponsors Leupold & Stevens and Sig Electro Optics.

Donations were too many to list, but included great gear from OnX, Silencer Central, Benchmade, KUIU, Coast, Kudu-Point, Born & Raised Outdoors, Langer's



The G4 Bowhunters Bownanza raffle featured a Hoyt VTM PRO 34 with Battle Worn finish.



Guests were bullish on the Guns & Roses Raffle for a Glock G43 9mm Apollo Custom Cow Cerakote.

PHOTOS BY DEBBIE BRAMBLETT

ONGOING RAFFLE WINNERS

Zumwalt Prairie Elk Hunt Raffle #1:
Richard Pendergrass, Tigard

Zumwalt Prairie Elk Hunt Raffle #2:
Josh DeLong, Boise

Zumwalt Prairie Deer Hunt Raffle:
Eric Strecker, Portland

Pacific Northwest Sports Show Raffle:
Austin Carson, Sandy

OHA Habitat Raffle:
Steve Hess, Molalla

Family Entertainment Center, Vortex, G4 Outdoors, Ukiah and many others.

Auctioneer George Tavera sold awesome trips donated by Broken Arrow Outfitters, Cross Hollow Outfitters, S2 Outfitters, Troy Rodakowski, Jody Smith Guide Service, Ladies Hunting Camp, Here Fishy Fishy Guide Service, Sunriver Lodging, Hammerhead Guide Service, Chinook Winds, Patriot Guide Service, Seven Feathers, Giustina Resources, Sabudawn Safaris of South Africa and TGB Outfitters in Argentina.

Longtime OHA member Shirley Pritchett donated another amazing afghan, while Joy & Leroy Miller donated quilts, fine jewelry and an array of other items.

Auctions featured stunning artwork donated by Tom Derbyshire and Capper's Framing, Ken McCall and Oregon artist Jane Vanderzanden. State Vice President Cindy Rooney, and longtime supporters Howard Kem, Tammy Cook and Cris Benitez of Acme Construction Supply each contributed several silent auction items.

While several hundred individuals contributed to making the night a success, special thanks go to Leupold & Stevens



Lucky winners of the Sig Raffle took home a Sig Cross Sawtooth 7 PRC.

Foundation, Waldron's Outdoor Sports, Valley Web Printing, Pronto Print, and Enthusiast Media Group.

OHA salutes our 2025 Convention VIP Joe Chenoweth, Herd Bulls Steven & Shelby Scott; David Hale; Derek Hamill – Vision Diesel & Powersports, Kraig Mitchell and Cris Benitez – and Benefactors David Foreman, Douglas Shepherd – Douglas Martin Shepherd Dirt Work, Ruth Payne, Stephen Shepherd, Byron Collman, Ryan Scroggins, Howard Kem, Dennis Gibson, Michael & Andrea Carlson, Ryan Snider, Robert Majors, and Jesse Coefield – Vantage Point Guide Service LLC.

Near evening's end, guests donated thousands more in a paddle raise to protect Oregon's hunting heritage.

Make plans now to join us in sunny southern Oregon for OHA's 2026 Convention on May 16 at Seven Feathers Casino Resort in Canyonville!





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ASK ODFW:

Didn't draw a tag? Explore other options:

Most hunters say the number one reason they hunt is to spend time with friends and family in the outdoors. If you didn't draw a tag, there are still plenty of ways to get out and do that.

Snag a leftover tag

Dust off your archery gear or borrow a friend's and try something new. Since archery hunting in eastern Oregon went controlled, more leftover bow tags are available after the draw (there are usually some rifle and muzzleloader tags too). Check MyODFW.com in late June for a list. Remember: hunters can purchase leftover tags without using their points but are still limited to one tag per series. Leftover tags go on sale online July 1 at 10 a.m. to hunters who didn't draw a tag and open to everyone, including those wanting to exchange a tag, July 2 at 10 a.m.

Hunt general season deer or elk

It's an over-the-counter tag and you can plan a trip very similar to the one you wanted, with a whole month to hunt for deer. So go on the weekend hunting trip you had planned – just go somewhere new. Last year, deer hunters harvested more than 23,000 deer during general ALW season in Western Oregon. One key to hunting public land during the general seasons is to be willing to walk and bushwhack. As you get farther away from roads and established trails, you'll run into more game and fewer hunters.

Go with someone who did draw a tag

You can help glass for game, mentor a new hunter, keep the campfire going (if the fire danger is low enough, of course), try out your new Dutch oven and generally scout for where the game is during the hunting season. Summer scouting doesn't necessarily tell you where the animals are in October/November. There are worse ways to spend vacation days. Reminder, you can't hunt cougar or bear when many controlled ALW seasons are open, unless you have a deer or elk tag for the area and time period.

Go upland bird hunting

If you were planning to take a week off to go big game hunting, take the week off and hunt birds instead. There are probably forest grouse in the same woods you've hunted for deer and elk. Or take a week to really explore, whether pheasant and quail hunting in the Columbia Basin wildlife areas or chukar hunting in the John Day and Owyhee River canyons.

Many of Oregon's upland bird populations have flourished in recent years, particularly chukar and quail in southern and eastern Oregon. The last few years have seen heavier precipitation in eastern Oregon and much of the region is considered drought free as of spring 2025. Counts for the 2025 season aren't available yet but it's likely to be another good year. Turkeys are another great choice for big game hunters as they are frequently encountered in the same spots where you can find deer and elk.

Kids: Get a "First Time" tag

Young hunters age 12-17 can take advantage of a special program when they don't draw a tag. Those who applied for a 100, 200 or 600 series tag, failed to draw and have never drawn in the series can get a guaranteed tag. The application period opens July 1 and tags are limited to hunts with a minimum number of tags (at least 201 buck deer tags, 51 elk tags and 51 antlerless deer tags). Apply online through a youth's account.



Keep the fire going for friends who have a tag.

NOSLER®

2025 PHOTO CONTEST

FINALIST PRIZES

Prizes will be awarded in general and youth categories.

1ST PRIZE: Nosler Model 21 rifle

2ND PRIZE: Case (10 boxes) of Nosler Trophy Grade Ammo

3RD PRIZE: Leupold Scope

4TH PRIZE: Danner Alsea Hunting Boots

5TH PRIZE: Benchmade Altitude Hunting Knife

Each finalist will receive an OHA-engraved Coast knife, and entrants whose photos are selected to appear in Oregon Hunter will receive a Nosler hat.

Two finalists in each category will be chosen and published in each issue of Oregon Hunter, beginning with the March-April issue and ending with the November-December issue. From the 10 finalists in each category, five finalist prize winners will be chosen. These will be announced in the January-February issue of Oregon Hunter. Photos received after the entry deadline will be judged for the next issue.

ENTRY INSTRUCTIONS

Go to **OHA's website at www.oregonhunters.org** Click on **OHA CONTESTS**. Read the rules, and fill in the required fields. Click **CHOOSE FILE** and attach your photo. Click **SUBMIT**. That's it! You will be entered for a chance to win more great prizes courtesy of Nosler, proud sponsor and OHA supporter for more than a quarter century!

PHOTO CATEGORIES

GENERAL: Any aspect of hunting, including but not limited to preparation, camping, hunting situations, game and packing.

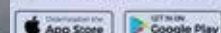
YOUTH: Same as above, except photos must feature a person who was 18 or younger at the time the photo was taken.

Current year contest prizes will be delivered the following year.



**ENTERING IS EASY
WITH OHA'S APP!**

DOWNLOAD IT NOW!



SCAN



NOSLER® PHOTO CONTEST

GENERAL CATEGORY FINALISTS

Matthew Cawfield, an OHA member from Hines, lands a spot in the 2025 Nosler Photo Contest and an OHA Coast knife for his 2023 Harney County bull elk taken with his Straight Walling .45-70.



OHA member Justin Hilger from Beavercreek is a finalist in the 2025 Nosler Photo Contest and wins an OHA Coast knife for his 2024 photo of a western Oregon Columbia blacktail.

NOSLER® PHOTO CONTEST

YOUTH CATEGORY FINALISTS



Rogue Valley OHA member Aryis Duer lands a finalist spot in the 2025 Nosler Photo Contest and an OHA Coast knife for his photo of himself and a Jackson County turkey taken with a 20 gauge this past May.

**ENTERING IS EASY
WITH OHA'S APP!**



OHA member Avery Orlow of White City bagged a Rogue Unit turkey, a spot in the 2025 Nosler Photo Contest finals, and an OHA Coast knife for this photo of a successful hunt last April.

NOSLER® PHOTO CONTEST

HONORABLE MENTION



Hillsboro OHA member Shawn Lindsay is an Honorable Mention and Nosler hat recipient for his Beulah Unit buck this past October.



OHA member Austin Garcia lands two Honorable Mentions and a Nosler hat for photos of his German Wirehaired Pointer on successful duck and pheasant hunts at Denman Wildlife Area in November 2024.



We experienced some technical difficulties with our website this spring, so if you entered a photo between March 15 and May 15 but don't see it here, please re-enter!



OHA member John Collette grabs a Nosler hat and Honorable Mention for his photo of himself and granddaughter Ellie on their successful April 2025 turkey double east of Myrtle Creek.



Grants Pass OHA member Travis Snyder catches Honorable Mention and a Nosler hat for his photo of himself and son Everett on a successful Applegate turkey hunt this past April.



OHA member Joel Maiden from West Linn snags a Nosler hat and Honorable Mention for his photo of Ranger on the Lower Columbia River in November of 2023.



Brooke Smith, an OHA member from Prineville, wins a Nosler hat and receives Honorable Mention for this pack-out photo in Garden Valley, Idaho in April.



STAGE FRIGHTS

Nervous people gonna get nervous.

Few people appreciate the contribution the American pickup truck has made to hunting in Oregon. But what would today's hunters do without their F-150s and Chevy Silverados and Ram trucks?

Imagine stalwart turkey talkers, sheep stalkers and chukar chasers making their way to the forests and mountains in cars like the 1974 Ford LTD Country Squire or the '67 Caprice Wagon. In fact, that's just what we did before Detroit discovered they could put a backseat behind a front seat in a pickup. And before station wagons, Oregon hunters went to the fields in '55 Bel Airs and '56 Fairlanes and Model A's.

Long before the internal combustion engine, there was the stagecoach. Pulled by two horses or four or six or eight, it was the ultimate side-by-side all-terrain vehicle.

Stagecoach roads crisscrossed our fair state from Yamhill to Tillamook, Prineville to The Dalles and out to Baker City and beyond. Every 20 miles or so there was a stagecoach stop where the teams would be replaced and weary drivers could get some rest and the passengers a hot meal.

Consider if you will that if you are seated in a public conveyance on a public road, it is likely other members of the public (gross) will be seated alongside you. If you are traveling from Grass Valley to Wasco, well, that might not be too bad, but if you buy a ticket from Stumptown to the land of Levi's and the gold rush, that's a 35-day trip.

A system of rules came into being, suggestions really, because it's a free country, right? One of the rules posted inside some stagecoach stops was "Spit on the leeward side of the coach." Leeward is one of those useful terms that can be made an adjective, an adverb or noun. But basically, it means if there is a fellow named Lee in the coach, or the driver is named Lee, you spit in his direction.

Another suggestion bandied about by station keepers was you should provide your own stimulants. In fact, this was where the term *stimulant check* first came into common use. The driver, after running the team for about 10 miles, would bring the horses to a halt usually at the bottom of a hill and then he would wander back to do a stimulant check whereupon he would have a pull at one of the passenger's flasks or smoke one of their cigars.

Another rule was *take care not to lop on your fellow passenger*. One of the favorite ways to pass the time inside a stagecoach was by sleeping. But this was dangerous, too; if you happened to lop over onto your neighbor and drool upon him and your neighbor happened to be Clay Allison or Doc Holliday, your goose was as



good as cooked. If, on the other hand, you were a young, blushing thing with hair smelling of homemade soap and lavender and you lopped onto your neighbor, it was usually forgiven.

Another way to pass the time inside of a stagecoach was to fondle one's handguns. This was only dangerous, of course, when one carried pistols with cartridges in the chamber. These were the days when Colt's Peacemaker was much in vogue.

Handling and cocking of the weapon makes nervous people nervous. That was how the stagecoach company put it, almost apologetically. Picture a young Billy the Kid spinning nickel plated Colts, this way then that. After a couple of days of practice in the confines of a coach, a feller could get pretty good at handling a gun, practicing fancy moves like the border shift or the road agent spin. Which brings us to another piece of advice that remains relevant even today when riding in pickup trucks: *Don't discuss politics or religion, nor point out places on the road where horrible murders have been committed, if delicate women are among the passengers.*

Let's try to picture a scene from Bonanza, wherein Adam, caught in a dust storm, stops at a stage station, where he finds an aging stationmaster who has got the morbs (meaning he is depressed) and his beautiful granddaughter, a real basket of oranges named Rose.

Rose yearns to escape from her life with her beloved but overprotective grandpa and has set her attentions on Luke, a gambler on the run from a posse. Adam sits down to a meal of sauerkraut and bowwow mutton, while Luke watches the window and fondles his forty-five.

A stagecoach arrives with a banker wearing a green visor on his fly rink. Rose and Adam climb in the stage with Luke who falls asleep and lops over onto the banker whereupon the banker whacks Luke on the head with a heavy bottle and knocks him out cold.

Then Adam points out to Rose where a horrible murder occurred in the road only last week. And Adam says, "What's that in the road? A head?" Which is an old joke, but is not meant for delicate women.

Then the banker swings the bottle and knocks Adam out cold.

Rose takes the bottle from the banker and flutters her eyelashes and says, "Isn't this whiskey?"

To which the banker says, "Yes, it's whisky, but it's not as wisky as tewwing stowies in fwont of dewicate women."



To contact the author, visit www.GaryLewisOutdoors.com

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