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STEVEN VANGRUNSVEN

SETTING OUR SIGHTS

BY DR. TODD ADKINS, OHA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Historic alliance: Leupold answers call

Oregon hunters, we have just proven what happens when our community stands shoulder-to-shoulder against those who wish to destroy our way of life. I am incredibly proud to officially announce that Initiative Petition 28 is dead. The radical attempt to criminalize hunting, fishing, and sound wildlife management in Oregon failed to secure the necessary signatures to qualify for Oregon's November ballot, and it failed because of you. Through the hard work of our dedicated members and chapters, we held the line.

But holding the line on a case-by-case basis is no longer enough. Defeating IP 28 is a massive victory, but we must recognize it as the latest in a long, relentless line of attacks, from IP 13, IP 3, and now IP 28. And we know they'll come right back. The animal extremists are well-funded, persistent, and already planning their next ballot measures.

Playing defense every two years is an exhausting, losing strategy. As we have discussed extensively behind the scenes, OHA must develop a permanent solution to these recurring threats and attacks. We need a sustainable, bullet-proof, long-term fix that secures our future once and for all.

To build that kind of permanent defense, it takes real muscle. And that is why I am proud to announce that Leupold & Stevens has answered the call, stepping up as the official Title Sponsor of the Oregon Hunters Association.

This is far deeper than a standard corporate endorsement; it is a steadfast commitment to protect and promote our way of life. For generations, Leupold has manufactured their premier optics right here in Oregon. Their workforce consists of our neighbors, our friends, and the very sportsmen who hunt our ridges from Steens Mountain to the Tioga Unit. By anchoring their legendary "Gold Ring" to OHA as our Title Sponsor, Leupold is providing the backbone we need to outlast, out-prepare, and out-maneuver any threat to our heritage.

To mark this historic launch, we are rolling out our exclusive OHA Gold Ring Membership program. As you saw on the belly band wrapped around this issue, we have put together a unique opportunity for hunters who want to make a profound, lasting financial investment in Oregon's wildlife, habitat, and hunting heritage. And when you make the commitment to become a new Gold Ring Member, you will receive a legendary Leupold rifle scope included at no additional cost.

By stepping up to one of these premier levels, rest assured that your dues stay right here in Oregon to deliver on our mission. This means more habitat work, more wildlife projects, and more capital to fight the extremists and secure our hunting heritage for generations. This is a rare opportunity to secure premium optics, along with that legendary Leupold lifetime guarantee, while knowing that your membership dues stay right here to protect the things you cherish and believe in.

The defeat of IP 28 proved that OHA is the definitive shield for Oregon sportsmen. Now, with Leupold as our Title Sponsor and the launch of Gold Ring Memberships, we are building a united front that ensures nobody will ever push Oregon hunters around again. I encourage everyone to turn to the announcement on Page 34, look at the packages we've put together, and upgrade your commitment today.

Let's show the entire country how Oregon hunters protect their own.



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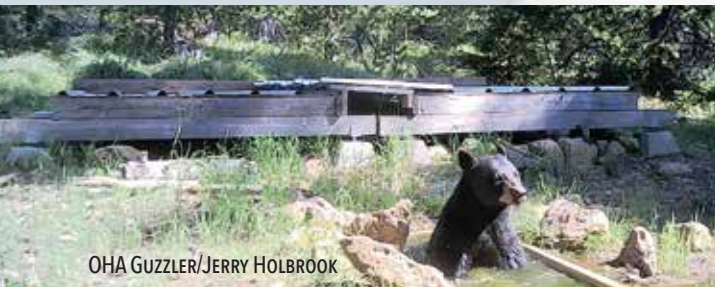
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Hunters' Victory Fund

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 2026 ballot!

In the coming months we face legislative challenges where we must fight to protect your right to hunt, trap and own firearms!



OHA GUZZLER/JERRY HOLBROOK

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Tax-deductible* donations to the Oregon Hunters Association's Wildlife Super Fund will be dedicated for critical projects and programs aimed at advocating for wildlife and enhancing habitat right here in Oregon where you live and hunt.

Members who contribute \$20 or more to OHA's Special Funds receive a Silver Edition OHA Supporting Member decal. Donors of \$100 or more receive a Gold Edition Sustaining Member decal.



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Tax-deductible* donations to OHA's Youth Heritage Fund help train tomorrow's hunters & conservationists who will carry on our proud hunting heritage.



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WORK SHARP OREGON HUNTING QUIZ

HELPING SHARP OREGON HUNTERS HOLD THEIR EDGE

KNOW OREGON? WIN A WORK SHARP!

1. Which of the following is not available at the Denman Wildlife Area?

- a) valley quail c) chukar
- b) pheasant d) dove

2. Visible headgear on which animal is made of the same material as hair?

- a) antelope c) mountain goat
- b) bighorn d) all of the above

3. Which unit is in central Oregon?

- a) Melrose c) Maury
- b) Minam d) all of the above

4. Where do special goose seasons last until March?

- a) High Desert c) Blue Mountains
- b) South Coast d) all of the above

5. Which bird migrates?

- a) dove c) crow
- b) brant d) all of the above

6. Which wilderness holds sage grouse?

- a) Steens Mountain c) Mountain Lakes
- b) Soda Mountain d) all of the above

7. Which area had the most '25 cougar harvest?

- a) NW Oregon c) NE Oregon
- b) SW Oregon d) SE Oregon

8. Preference points are not given for which of the following controlled hunts?

- a) antelope c) spring bear
- b) bighorn d) mule deer

9. Where are more elk unwelcome, according to ODFW management plans?

- a) Willamette c) Melrose
- b) Applegate d) all of the above

10. The NW Canada goose season was set up to protect which subspecies?

- a) Cackler c) Taverner
- b) Aleutian d) Dusky

WHERE
IN OREGON?



WHERE IN OREGON WAS THIS PHOTO TAKEN?

This is North America's longest exposed fault scarp at 30 miles long. Name it, be drawn from all correct entries, and win a Work Sharp!

Submit your guess on OHA's app or at www.oregonhunters.org, where a larger version of the photo appears.

One entry per OHA member.

ENTRY DEADLINE: SEPT. 15, 2026.



LAST ISSUE'S WINNER:

Rob Kronsberg, Terrebonne

Rob's name was drawn from among the OHA members who identified Malheur River.

OUTDOOR OUTLOOK

AUGUST 29

General archery and most controlled bow seasons open

SEPTEMBER 1

Openers forest grouse, mourning dove & W. Oregon quail

SEPTEMBER 12-13 & 19-20

OHA Pioneer Chapter Sight-In Days, Canby Rod & Gun Club, 503-710-1233

SEPTEMBER 26-27

OHA Mid-Willamette Chapter non-lead shoot 541-602-1819

SEPTEMBER 27

General archery and most controlled bow seasons end

OCTOBER 2

Deadline to buy tags for rifle deer, bear & cougar

OCTOBER 3

Any-legal-weapon deer season opens

OCTOBER 10

Opener for chukar, pheasant, E. Oregon quail & Hungarian partridge

OCTOBER 14

Eastside buck season ends

OCTOBER 17

OHA Bend Chapter youth bird hunt, 541-480-7323

OCTOBER 24

OHA Lake County Chapter Guzzler Project 541-417-2983

OCTOBER 24-25

OHA Klamath Chapter Youth Chukar Hunt 541-883-8326

OCTOBER 27

Deadline to buy tags for Rocky Mountain elk 1st season

OCTOBER 28

Rocky Mountain elk 1st season opens

WALLOWA COUNTY/CHAD DOTSON

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

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Hunt valley quail on public land

I can tell the story now. I took a young man to an ODFW state wildlife area. An athlete, he could shoot a shotgun, I guessed, although he never had. On the way, we talked over how the hunt would go. The dog would try to corral the birds and they would bust out of the sage brush. What I didn't know was the quail would go off like bombs, having been hunted earlier in the season.

Poor Chris was slow on the draw. But then he shot a California cockbird well (valley quail are also called California quail, but not in OREGON HUNTER), and it went down, feathers hanging like a halo in the air. We could not find it. Nor could the dog.

I took a bird out of my pack and dropped it. Then when I sent the dog back, she went right to it, picked it up and trotted

OHA recently helped provide forage seed for state wildlife areas.

Valley quail gravitate to agriculture, whether it takes place on private land or on state wildlife areas where managers cultivate crops that support upland birds.

past me to Chris and put it in his hand. A generous and thoughtful dog she was.

The state wildlife areas offer great quail hunting. Here is how to get started. Click on <https://myodfw.com/visit-odfw-wildlife-areas>

OHA recently coordinated a forage seed giveaway with Turf Merchants. Much of the seed went to state wildlife areas.

East of the Cascades, the state lists 14 wildlife areas; many are populated with valley quail. Run the cursor along the Columbia Basin options from The Dalles area east to Pendleton and south to Ladd Marsh and Bridge Creek. Scroll down and click on one for description and directions.

Rules vary, but a hunter needs to know: An ODFW wildlife area parking permit may be required (if you purchased a Sports Pac, you have a parking permit). Hunters may be required to obtain a daily entry permit and check out at the end of the day. Some areas will be posted as refuge, while other areas are open to hunting. Upland bird hunters may be required to use federally approved non-toxic shot.

Know before you go. Bring a map or download one on your phone. Pack a box of non-toxic shot and put your parking permit on the dash.

These are your public lands. These are your birds. —GARY LEWIS

Beat the brush for mountain quail

There was a time when mountain quail were trapped by the thousands in the foothills of the Willamette Valley and sold alive in Portland markets. The going price? Three dollars a dozen at a time when chicken eggs were 18 cents a dozen and ham was 12 cents a pound.

Mountain quail coveys are as coveted now as they were then.

It seemed there were a few more mountain quail in my favorite grouse hunting haunts last November. I had an old L.C. Smith side-by-side with double triggers, and when a covey of quail fed out of the blackberries, I took out my fall turkey loads and plunked in two No. 8s and closed the gun. The quail had not much experience with hunters.

When they flushed, I shot one on the right and swung back left to puff another. The two slate-grey birds fell close together.

In Oregon, mountain quail can be found up and down the Coast Range, down into the valleys of the Willamette, the

Umpqua and the Rogue and up again into the Cascades. Several spots out east are known to hold small populations of these largest of our quail. The season starts Sept. 1 on the west side of the Pacific Crest Trail, and the early part of the season is usually more productive.

When spooked, mountain quail like to run uphill where they look for a crest and fly off it. If any of that happens, the hunter doesn't have a chance. If a pointing or flushing dog has quail experience, it will circle up the hill from the quail and try to keep the birds scurrying this way and that, warning each other, "whit, whit, hit, hut, hut!"

Unlike some other quail and the collectivist-minded Hungarian partridge, which all seem to get off the ground at the same time and go roughly the same way, mountain quail go off in every direction and drop back into blackberry patches, ferns, slash piles and reprod. Good luck.

—GARY LEWIS

The coast and southwest Oregon hold quail on brushy slopes. The author took this double in the Alsea Unit during a late fall hunt.

Will ducks and hunters be high and dry this fall?

A mild winter and a dry spring aren't exactly ducky for Oregon resident waterfowl, and if water levels are too low this fall, migrating birds may simply pass us over, as we have seen east of the Cascades in recent years. Boat ramps short of the water and mudflats between shore and the water's edge could complicate matters for hunters.

According to Greg Roberts, forecaster for Rogue Weather in Medford, "The breeding conditions for waterfowl in Canada and Alaska were very good this past spring and summer for the most part." That's good news for Oregon hunters if the birds actually migrate through later in the season. The problem is we are high and dry, and our local nesting conditions were poor. Also, there will be a lack of water in lakes, ponds, and sloughs to start off the 2026 season.

"If you find water for the opener, you will likely have some luck on opening day this year," added Roberts, who is an avid hunter. However, once the shooting starts, local birds will wise up quickly and find new hidey holes to call home. With the dry summer, hunting may be very difficult until substantial rains arrive along with cool weather, driving fresh northern birds into the region.

Ducks Unlimited breeding population surveys have indicated that species like mallards, pintails, gadwalls, and American wigeon have shown varying trends in recent years, with some species increasing above their long-term averages and others remaining stable or slightly below.

The most consistent theme across 2026 field reports was a delayed spring. Survey crews pushed back their start dates in many areas to better match the biological window of the breeding season for 2026. Late springs mean later nesting, and late nesting can mean lower production when summer cuts short the growing season for ducklings.

For Oregon's fall waterfowl and upland game bird forecast, see Page 18.

—TROY RODAKOWSKI



Water levels will be low to start the season, and hunting access could be difficult in some places.

A blue-winged teal wanders in a mostly dry wetland in the Klamath Basin. Some hunters are concerned that this season could be like some recent years when migratory birds bypassed Oregon's dry side.

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JOIN/RENEW MEMBERSHIP

IP 28 fails to make ballot

The Oregon Secretary of State's office officially confirmed on July 24 that Initiative Petition 28 (IP28) fell short of the required signatures and will not appear on the November ballot. The state's final review verified 104,262 valid signatures, missing the 117,173 threshold needed to qualify by a wide margin. IP28 proponents may try to challenge the decision in court, but because they fell short by more than 13,000 signatures, it's extremely unlikely a court will intervene.

Like its predecessors IP13 and IP3, this egregious petition sought to criminalize hunting, fishing, trapping, livestock production, and common farming practices. Animal extremists continue to fund these attempts because their ideology demands that hunting be stripped from the landscape – a critical reminder that these radical efforts are being driven by a combination of well-funded national organizations and anti-hunting activists right here in Oregon.

OHA successfully went on a massive media blitz starting back in February, blanketed the airwaves, print, digital news, and podcasts to expose the true dangers of this petition. By aggressively educating the public, we completely shifted the conversation on the ground. As everyday Oregonians learned the destructive reality of the measure, signature gatherers faced overwhelming pushback on the street, making it increasingly difficult – and eventually impossible – for petitioners to advance.

While IP28 is dead for 2026, we know these extremists will be back. To break this cycle, OHA is pivoting from defense to a long-term strategy to permanently protect our hunting heritage. It's time we went on the offense to secure our heritage for present and future generations.

OHA to meet with DAs, encourage prosecution of wildlife offenses

For decades, the Oregon Hunters Association has stood as the frontline defense for our state's wildlife resources. Through our unwavering financial and promotional support of the Turn In Poachers (TIP) program, OHA members have stepped up time and again. We have put our own dollars on the line, funding cash rewards and generating the vital leads that allow Oregon State Police Fish & Wildlife Troopers to track down and arrest wildlife thieves.

For the latest outrageous poaching case news from Oregon, see Page 48.

But our commitment to conservation cannot end when the handcuffs come out.

Enforcement of existing law is not easy, and OSP troopers do the grueling work of catching poachers, with alert citizens providing the tips; yet we also know that cases languish or get downgraded when they reach the local courthouse. Overburdened county systems often treat wildlife crimes as minor property offenses rather than the serious, intentional thefts they truly are.

With all this in mind, OHA is launching a new initiative to guarantee that violators of our existing hunting statutes and regulations face the full weight of the law – that each prosecutor treats game law violators seriously and prioritizes these cases.

"To kick off this initiative, I will travel to counties across Oregon to meet with district attorneys and prosecutors," said



OHA annually pays over \$30,000 in TIP rewards. OHA is launching a new effort to ensure the courts are taking poaching cases seriously.

Todd Adkins, executive director of OHA. "We need to find out why these cases fall through the cracks and what we can do to help fix the process."

OHA's message to prosecutors is simple: wildlife crime is community crime. Poaching strips economic resources from law-abiding citizens, compromises public safety, and steals legal opportunities from sportsmen across the state.

"We do not need a notebook full of complicated restrictions on the books," Adkins continued. "We need relentless, unyielding prosecution of the criminals who are breaking our clear, existing game laws. This is our goal with the initiative."

OHA's strong support of the TIP program proves that the organization is willing to do the heavy lifting to clean up our woods. This new tour of our state's DA offices is the logical next step in that commitment.





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White Whale Muleys

My archery mule deer career didn't begin with smashing success. Quite the contrary. I had hundreds of hours invested in blown stalks, missed shots, frustration and heartbreak. I came to a crossroads: I either needed to switch back to rifle hunting, with which I had some limited success on mature bucks, or I needed to improve my skills dramatically. Plain and simple.

A mature velvet mule deer buck with my bow had become my white whale. I forged ahead.

Although the glory days of mule deer have long since passed in Oregon, finding mature bucks to hunt wasn't my biggest issue. That was just an equation of time and effort – variables I could control. Sneaking into archery range was something I was also fairly successful at, considering the obstacles one encounters on stalks. My achilles heel was I fell apart when it was time to lock in and execute a shot.

My plan started with getting more realistic reps. Standing in my yard in perfectly ideal conditions wasn't cutting it; those reps were marginally productive at best. I started packing my archery target with me everywhere I went. I would hike hills and shoot extreme angles, in extreme heat, in wind, and in rain. I would shoot kneeling and standing and leaning around bushes and peering over cliffs. I would shoot out of breath and with an elevated heart rate. I needed the most realistic reps possible, often pushing the boundaries past what I would ethically shoot at a living animal.

In addition, I actively pursued other archery opportunities whenever possible. I archery elk hunted every year. I hunted whitetail does, hogs, bears, turkeys, basically any offseason opportunity to archery hunt with something on the line, I took it. Now, it wasn't that I took these other hunting pursuits solely to try to kill a mule deer buck with my bow. I love hunting, no matter the situation, and appreciate each species I am hunting individually, but I knew I needed to dedicate myself to the craft of archery, because I simply hadn't been good enough up to that point in my career.

Fast forward. After spotting a pair of bedded bucks, I scooted down a wash in a little cut draw lying flat on my back. It was painfully slow. Slide the bow ahead, scoot the body to follow. There were no trees or bushes to hide my approach, only the contour of the bottom of the cut. Grating my back over sharp rocks while ants bit me was certainly not ideal. I pulled the hood on my lightweight merino over my face as far as it would go as I could feel my face burning from the unrelenting sun. The discomfort was largely background static, however, as I slipped into position 42 yards above the bedded bucks. Both were great bucks and they were bedded under the only bush in the draw.

The midday thermals were consistently pushing my scent uphill, and other than an occasional oven-hot gust, it was mostly calm conditions. The wind is the single-most important variable



PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

The author slipped in above this bedded buck, making sure the uphill thermals carried his scent away from the deer.

in archery hunting mule deer bucks. If there were 10 commandments for stalking mule deer, five of them would say, "Thou shalt not let them smell you." It's that important.

One of the bucks finally stood and walked around to the far side of the bush, offering no shot. After a good stretch and some scratching, he emerged back on the right side of the bush and proceeded to try to bully his buddy out of his bed. He kicked at the bedded buck, envious of his shady location. The bedded buck didn't budge. The bedded buck was hard-horned, while the standing deer was still in velvet, and I was trying to decide which of the two was bigger. It suddenly hit me that it didn't matter which of the two was bigger! I now had a great buck standing broadside well within range. All of the years of effort and heartbreak didn't enter my mind, but they had shaped me and led me to this moment.

I didn't feel nervous as I slowly sat up and drew my bow. I anchored and executed the perfect arrow, hitting the big-bodied deer exactly where I wanted. He bounded four or five big jumps down the hill and stopped to look for his buddy, then his head drooped and he fell over. I lay back down and stared at the sky, partly in disbelief and partly as if I expected this outcome the entire time. I thanked God. I had my white whale.

Since that first velvet buck, I have gone on to enjoy more success archery hunting mule deer. None of them came easy. There has still been some failure and heartbreak mixed in, but consistency is slowly starting to lean in my favor. Pursuing these bucks has taken me to some incredible places on many amazing adventures. If you're still searching for your white whale, just know that the effort required to overcome the obstacles makes success all that much sweeter.



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PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

MY SWEET 16

Editor's Note: This fascinating story reads like an Uncle Geddy humor column, but it's all true – from the Billy Idol song and the Oregon ax handles, to the Coral Castle and the sardines. Look it up. OK, the snipe shooting is pure conjecture and might be gilding the lily. But maybe not.

"I'll do anything for my sweet sixteen."

You might have heard Billy Idol sing that lyric, which was on the third single from his third studio album, *Whiplash Smile* (1986). Numerologists take note.

"Gave my heart an engagement ring."

The song was ode to a certain Edward Leedskalnin, born in Riga, Latvia, in 1887. We would not know much about Eddie except for his love for Agnes, who canceled the wedding one day before the ceremony.

"Built a moon for a rocking chair."

To try to forget, Eddie, who had become a stonemason, moved to New York to shed the memory of his one true love, and thence to Reedsport, probably for the grouse and the snipe shooting.

To make ends meet and (I imagine) to be able to afford ammunition, Eddie engaged in making ax handles, a popular commodity in rollicking Reedsport.

History hasn't told us what gauge of shotgun he preferred, but I'll bet he had a 16, which was just as popular as the 12 gauge in them days.

"Memories grow older as people can."

Ed Leedskalnin might have been what they called in those days a "lunger," (soft g). After allegedly developing tuberculosis, he moved to Florida, where he bought land with ax handle dollars and built the Coral Castle with huge stone doors that could be opened with a pinky finger and a rocking chair shaped like a moon to honor sweet Agnes.

"I understand the laws of weight and leverage and I know the secrets of the people who built the pyramids," he is reported to have said.



SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW – Before this turkey hunt with an old 16 gauge, the author patterned the first round out of the Western Arms Long Range gun he has decided to call Agnes, and noticed a tendency of the right barrel to print left. At 25 yards, 12 pellets struck in the vital area.

"Whatever." Agnes was not impressed.

I have a sweet 16 of my own, a side-by-side shotgun that came down to me from a friend of a friend.

Her stock is English walnut fitted sometime in the past with a recoil pad, the 30-inch barrels crafted of three-bar Damascus steel. She is a Remington made with twisted steel barrels.

If a person has a sweet 16, more of a good thing is a gooder thing as the editor of this magazine has reminded me. Over the last few years, four or five more sweet 16 gauge shotguns have found their way into my life.

"I'll do anything for my sweet sixteen"

For the care and feeding of my stable of sweet 16s I turned to friend Matthew McFarland, whose well-stocked loading room is complete with all the components, as well as a number of books on the subject.

Matthew consulted a book called *The Sixteen Gauge Manual*. The goal was to tailor a box of loads suitable for smoking wild turkey (or mallards or wild roosters) out to 30 yards from the twin tubes of my favorite guns.

Matthew opened a drawer marked Bismuth and pulled a bag of shot out of the better bismuth bureau.

We started with a pre-primed Ched-dite 2.75-inch 16-gauge hull, added 19 grains of Longshot and a CTPS-16 wad. I cut slits in the wad using a razor blade cutter. We weighed out 1-3/16 ounces of Bismuth then added 15 grains of Mix #47 buffer. As it turned out, we liked slightly less than the 1-3/16 ounce and subtracted

a few pellets for a perfect fit (500 grains) of shot and buffer. To mix the buffer, Matthew set each uncrimped load on top of his polisher. Other vibrating objects would work just as well.

I finished each load with a 6-point star crimp then burnished it on the OMV Smart machine. The assembled load is a smart looking charge that should inspire fear in any longbeard out to 30 yards.

On the hunt, I had an opportunity to shoot a big gobbler at what seemed to be 30 yards (actually 32 yards), held a couple of inches to the right and squeezed the trigger. The bird dropped in its tracks, a worthy trophy with a 9 3/4-inch beard and 3/4-inch spurs.

One of the hardest things about shooting vintage shotguns is finding ammo. And if the gun is a suitably preserved sweet 16 from someone else's youth, like my old Damascus twist Remington or the Western Arms Long Range (which I've started calling Agnes), then finding ammo is even harder. With the right components and good data like that found in *The Sixteen Gauge Manual*, a handloader can craft exactly the loads needed for any situation.

Ed Leedskalnin would have approved.

In his later days, Edward Leedskalnin was said to have lived on a diet of crackers and sardines. He was probably pining for those succulent lower Umpqua ruffed grouse and Reedsport mudflat snipe, but who can say?



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Bird's Eye View

The outlook for Oregon bird hunting this fall may depend on where you stand.

BY JIM YUSKAVITCH



The fortunes of both upland birds and waterfowl are foretold by the weather. Just the right amount of rain at the right time will determine the population size, along with hunting prospects for the year.

For upland birds, too little in early spring can suppress the growth of vegetation and insect hatches that serve as food for adults and chicks alike, while too much rain after

broods have hatched risks lethal cold for the young birds.

For waterfowl, it's all about nesting habitat, and as a rule of thumb, the wetter the better.

With a mild winter throughout the state, winter mortality was very low for adult birds, and they saw good carryover into the spring. But it was spring conditions that made all the difference. In some areas, especially west of

the Cascades, spring rains came at just the right time and at the right intensity, while in parts of eastern Oregon the opposite was true. A very dry year is being predicted for the east side that may hit waterfowl numbers especially hard.

Here's what a selection of ODFW biologists across the state had to say about gamebirds in their district and hunting prospects for the fall.



Forest Grouse

On the north coast, a mild winter along with good spring rains that brought a healthy green-up, followed by a sunny, drier summer, added up to a jackpot for upland birds in that part of the state. "This year, we've had the highest number of grouse counts per stop on our grouse surveys in recent years," reported Tillamook ODFW Assistant District Wildlife Biologist Austin Reeder. "It was that good

weather we had." Reeder also notes that the berry crop came off really well this year, offering birds an abundant additional food source.

In southwest Oregon, Roseburg-based District Wildlife Biologist Nick Leonetti reports that the combination of a mild winter and well-timed spring rains that brought good plant growth and insect numbers has been a boon for local forest grouse. He's expecting a good year for both sooty and ruffed grouse.

In the John Day region, a mild winter that facilitated high overwinter survival along with favorable spring conditions certainly helped grouse populations. But District Wildlife Biologist Ryan Torland did mention that their grouse wing turn-ins were down last year, which might indicate fewer birds. Nevertheless, said Torland, "Good winter survival and spring conditions this year could produce an upswing in numbers."



Ontario areas, along with scattered populations on and around Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.

Pheasant nests were likely washed out during last year's flooding that caused a significant drop in populations on the Malheur NWR. For this year, said Hines-based District Wildlife Biologist Lee Foster, "It was a mild winter, so I'm not expecting winter kill. But we had a very dry spring that affected brood numbers and survival."

Quail

If you are looking to hunt mountain quail this year, the northern Coast Range may be where you want to head. "It seems like we can't drive down a forest road this year without flushing a covey of mountain quail," said Reeder. The drier east slopes tend to have more birds than the wetter west side.

While there are healthy populations of valley quail in southwest Oregon, they are found mostly on private agricultural lands in the Rogue Valley, where permission to hunt can be difficult to obtain. (See public options on Page 10.) Most hunters go after mountain quail in the Cascades.

Valley quail were up 30% last year in SE Oregon, and were nesting early in NE Oregon this year.

"Our grouse numbers have been down a little over the past few years, especially sooty grouse," said Heppner-based District Wildlife Biologist Steve Cherry. Ruffed grouse are doing OK, even though their numbers are a little below average. He did report that he's noticed large broods this summer while driving in the forest.

Pheasant

Once a standout state for pheasants, especially in the Willamette Valley, human

development and changing agricultural practices have reduced Oregon hunting opportunities considerably over the decades.

The best western Oregon pheasant hunting now is through participation in ODFW's Fee Pheasant Hunts offered at Fern Ridge, Sauvie Island, Denman and E.E. Wilson wildlife areas in September and October.

However, there are still wild pheasants to hunt in the Heppner, Pendleton and

JEFF RICH



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Local biologist Nick Leonetti expects good mountain quail hunting this fall.

John Day-based Ryan Torland reports seeing valley quail broods a month earlier than typical, suggesting a successful breeding year and lots of time for re-nesting. He predicts good numbers of valley quail available for the fall.

Valley quail are doing better in the Heppner area, but Steve Cherry suggests that hunting success improves as you move toward Condon, where there is more of the brushy habitat the birds like.

In southeast Oregon, valley quail were up 30 percent last year above their 10-year average. But because of the dry spring the High Desert experienced this year, biologist Lee Foster expects stable numbers but not much in the way of increased populations.

Chukar

Although chukar numbers in the Heppner area are a little below average, they are still doing well, according to Steve Cherry. He notes that numbers and hunting opportunities are best along the John Day River. Overall, Cherry predicts that chukar hunting, as well as hunting for other upland bird species, will be at least average this year, based on the number and size of broods he observed.



HART MOUNTAIN/RANDY SHIPLEY

Field biologists are anticipating at least an average year for Oregon chukar hunting.

As with valley quail in the High Desert, chukar numbers are also 30 percent above their 10-year average, benefiting from the mild winter. Also tracking with quail, biologist Lee Foster predicts stable numbers of chukar but not much in the way of a population increase for this year.

In the John Day area, Ryan Torland added, "Chukar are doing fine. I'd say they are about average for what we have been seeing here for the past four or five years."

Some of the best chukar hunting areas in Oregon include the canyons of the Lower Deschutes, John Day, Snake, Malheur,

and Owyhee rivers, along with the rugged terrain of Steens Mountain, Hart Mountain and the Trout Creek Mountains.

Sage Grouse

In the High Desert Region of Harney County, sage grouse numbers have dropped after a number of years of increasing populations. Wildfires have played a significant role in the current sage grouse population status, with varying impacts. For example, sage grouse numbers in the Trout Creek Mountains have fully recovered from the nearly 470,000-acre Holloway Fire in 2012, while birds in the Juniper Unit

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KAMATH BASIN/RANDY SHIPLEY

Goose populations recently have been trending back toward their long-term averages.

are still struggling from wildfire-caused habitat damage – and the reason that unit is still closed to sage grouse hunting. “In some cases,” said Lee Foster, “it may take the birds 10 to 15 years to recover from wildfire, and some may not recover at all.”

Wild Turkey

In southwest Oregon, Nick Leonetti reports that wild turkeys are doing well, although he has been seeing smaller broods this year than he normally encounters. Still, wild turkey hunting in his district will be productive for the 2026 season.

Wild turkeys are also doing very well in the Heppner area, with continuing good populations.

Biologist Steve Cherry notes that he is not getting as many damage complaints as he has in the past, although that may be because, he speculated, “People are getting used to living with wild turkeys and don’t call as much.”

“Wild turkeys are doing fine,” reported Ryan Torland in the John Day area, and production for this nesting season has been good.

Mourning Dove & Band-tailed Pigeon

Mourning dove and band-tailed pigeon numbers tend to be stable from year to year lately. For mourning doves, hunters need to get out in the field during September before a cold front drives them south. Good places to find band-tailed pigeons include elderberry bushes, water sources and mineral springs.

Ducks & Geese

This year ODFW conducted its aerial resident breeding duck surveys in late April and early May. Mallard numbers were found to be stable, similar to the past five years. Gadwalls were abundant, although a collective count of all species including wigeons, northern shovelers and green-winged teal shows a decline in overall duck numbers.

However, that’s not cause for alarm, according to Brandon Reishus, ODFW migratory game bird coordinator. During the course of the survey, there were still migratory birds around, and they didn’t see a lot of birds in flight, which drives the survey numbers. Most of the birds they saw were sitting in the water, so this year’s count may actually reflect reality more accurately.

Information on habitat conditions in Canadian prairie provinces was not yet available, but there were reports of heavy spring rains and flooding in southern Alberta. This is potentially good news.

“That significant rainfall definitely will help the ducks spread into additional nesting areas and encourage re-nesting,” said Reishus.

Alaska’s waterfowl habitat is generally stable and the “Last Frontier” state sends lots of migrants to Oregon each fall. That is expected to hold true this year as well.

“One bright spot,” said Reishus, “is Canada geese numbers have been climbing back to previous levels.” Oregon’s Canada geese took a severe hit to its population in 2023 – some of the lowest numbers recorded. This was due largely to extensive drought in 2020 through 2022, combined with initial heavy mortality from avian influenza. “Now,” said Reishus, “goose numbers are back to their long-term average”

As has been the case for the past few years, no reports on snow goose production on Russia’s Wrangell Island have been received, due to ongoing political tensions. It’s unclear when, if ever, those reports might restart.



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WESTSIDE STORY

**No eastside deer tag this fall?
Welcome to the wild, wild west.**

By Gary Lewis





You might remember the Occupy movement back in 2011, when a lot of people tried camping for the first time. They lived in tents in cities and famously in Portland's South Park Blocks. I don't remember what they were all fired up about, but they really seemed to like camping. And to demonstrate their love for camping, they carried signs and said things like "We are the 99 percent."

I like camping, too, and this year I plan to camp more on the west side of the state. In case you missed it while you were on TikTok, ODFW reorganized the mule deer units and cut tag allocations by 9 percent this year. A lot of my friends did not draw their deer tags east of the Cascades, and we are not mad, and we certainly are not hunting mule deer, but we are going camping.

We are the 9 percent.

So you didn't draw a deer tag for the east side of the state. This year you are an east-sider going west. Or a west-sider that usually goes east but this time you are going to stay west and figure it out. Or it's your first season deer hunting. Or maybe you are from out of state and you know you can buy a deer tag over the counter. Where are you going to go?

Oregon, from the Pacific Crest Trail west to the Pacific Ocean, is still a Columbia blacktail powerhouse, but it can be difficult to sort out good deer country from marginal habitat. And it is harder than ever to find access. A few of the westside GMUs are predominately private land, while others offer national forests, state forests and Bureau of Land Management access. Let's sort it out.



As the rut approaches in late October and early November, big blacktails like this one taken by Rod Smith are more prone to show themselves in the daylight.

TOP PERFORMERS

Start the search at myodfw.com and click on the big game hunting harvest statistics. If you prefer shortcuts, just visit <https://tinyurl.com/2dwmsrmy>. Click on the 2025 any legal weapon buck deer harvest, scroll through the hunt and unit names, and watch the success percentage in the far right column. Go to the last two pages and look for general season patterns. An obvious takeaway is the southwest part of the state has a higher success rate. Top units include the Sixes (53 percent harvest success), Powers, Melrose (53 percent), Indigo, Evans Creek, Dixon and Chetco.

The Santiam and McKenzie in the northwest region top the list for harvest, but those are huge units with huge numbers of hunters. The northwest and southwest yielded virtually the same harvest with 12,000 bucks and change, but the southwest tallied that total with 14,000 fewer Danners in the dirt.

The next important statistic is the amount of public land. In southwest Oregon, the Melrose Unit (16 percent public) is the hardest one to find access, and the Sixes is difficult, too, with 29 percent public ground, while the Chetco Unit boasts 82 percent public lands.

One of the realities of the current state of Oregon's deer herd is that we are going to be in the 9 percent for a while, so it makes sense to establish a 5-year-plan for your deer hunts. Pick a good blacktail unit and learn it. Check to see if there are late-season archery or muzzleloader options to use deer preference points in. Scout it in the off-season and hunt predators. Shooting a few coyotes on a property can save the lives of a few deer fawns. And if a hunter can tag a cougar or a bear whose favorite flavor is fawn, that goes a long way toward maintaining a healthy deer herd in an area.

With a little luck, persistence and preparation, a hunter can find a blacktail buck

in any of the westside units. We should not turn a blind eye to the smaller units with lower totals or to units with lower harvest statistics. Some units are flat under-hunted compared to places within a two-hour drive of Portland. Maybe it is worth driving a few more miles and staying in the woods another two or three days.

The most important factor is windshield time. If you live in Prineville, are you willing to drive to Powers? If you reside in Milton-Freewater, are you prepared to roll your bad motor scooter all the way to the McKenzie?

Settle in on one or two units you are willing to drive to.

FIND ONE GOOD PLACE

Any of the harder-to-access westside units can be good bets if a hunter is able to find permission to a piece of deer property. Ask a landowner friend for the key to a few acres.

Or put together a group of like-minded friends and lease a piece of property, especially if the landowner will permit improvements like tree stands, ground blinds and food plots.

We should also examine how we hunt and be willing to adopt new methods. Back east, most hunting is done from tree stands or ground blinds.

In a tree stand, the game moves around you. Ground blinds help to control human scent and limit movement that frightens deer. Set up two or three stands and keep shooting lanes trimmed up.

A lot of western hunters grew up glassing clearcuts and walking down ridges, and we have to face it: those are lower-percentage plays. The person who learns to site a tree stand or a ground blind and can commit to hunting in one good place will tag more deer over a hunting career.



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ACTION ITEMS

Start a journal. Buy a unit map and tack it to the wall. Highlight pockets of public land that might be overlooked by other hunters. Blacktails have small core areas. A few acres of land is enough.

Take classes on blacktail hunting or attend a seminar. Take notes and ask questions. Read the blacktail books from Pacific Northwest authors like Haugen, Iverson, Hanes, Higley, Murphey, Isdahl, Dawson and others.

It doesn't take much habitat to hide deer, and many big blacktail bucks grow old without ever being seen by a hunter. Small sanctuaries provide both cover and food.

During the general rifle season, bucks may spend most of their time in an area of just a few acres.

To find such an animal, think small. A patch of blackberries between roads can hold a deer. A half-acre behind the barn may hold a buck. Deer swim out to islands and live in the lake. You may find such a spot anywhere in blacktail country.

Look at the calendar and plan four or five days to hunt in the last two weeks of the 2026 season. Focus on the goal, stay out all day, and hunt into the wind and rain.

To really enjoy the experience, find a good spot to put the tent. Dig a little ditch



Sit in one good place. Watch a feeding or bedding area from a high vantage point. Sitting still is hard. It's counter-intuitive. It's the opposite of what we want to do. It's exactly what we should do.

Mikayla Lewis waits for a shot while Lee Sandberg and Gary Lewis watch over her shoulder.

around it for the rivulets to wash into. Generations upon generations of Oregonians have lived in tents. Maybe you were conceived in one of those Occupy tents back in 2011. That would make you 14 right now. That's intense.

Maybe you're hunting western Oregon this year. Good for you. You are the 9 percent.



Gary Lewis is the host of the podcast Gary Lewis Outdoorsman. Tune in for weekly episodes on big game hunting around the west and around the world.



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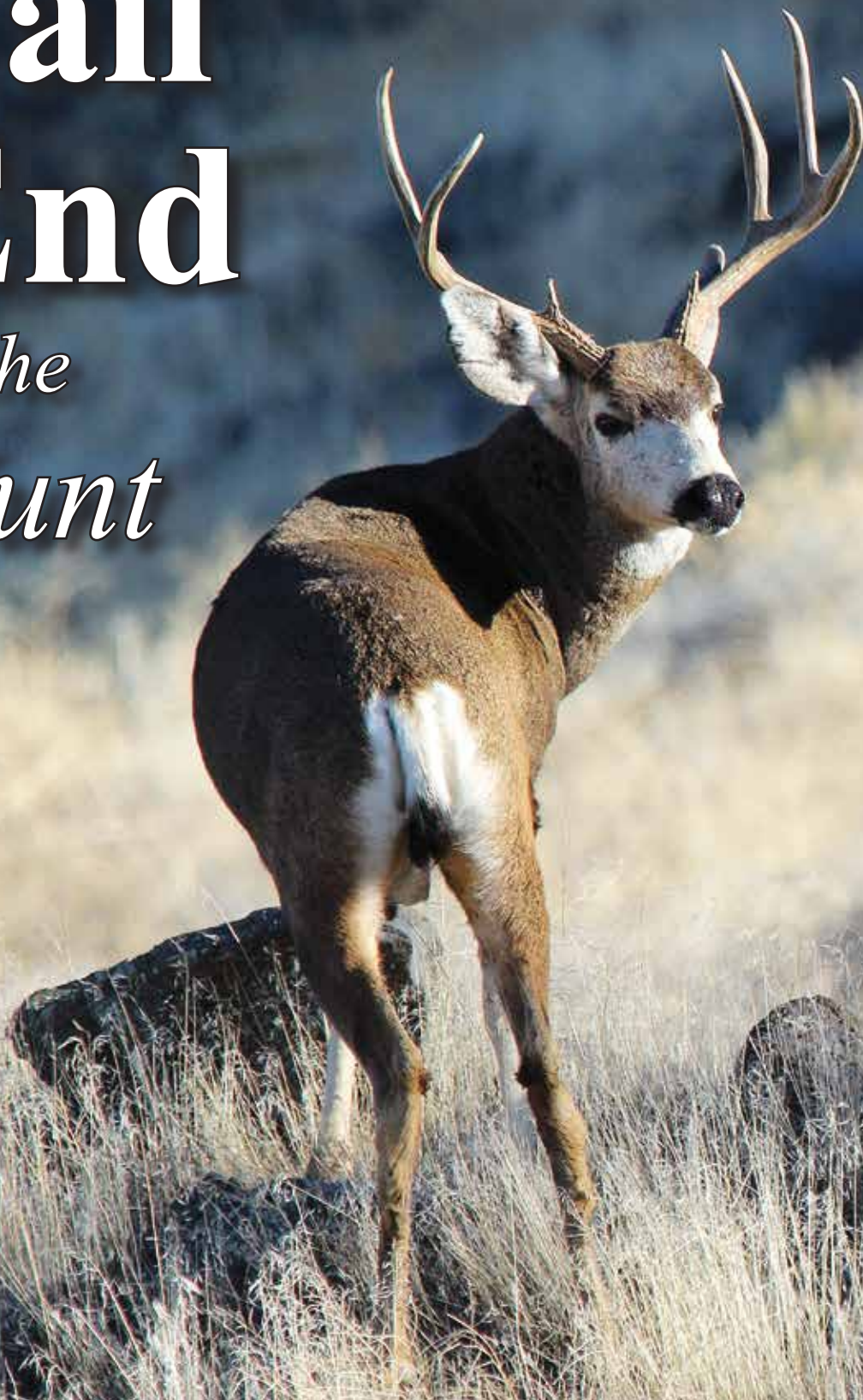
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KLAMATH BASIN/JOHN MCFARLAND III



If at first you don't succeed, the best part of Oregon's mule deer season is yet to come.

BY HANNAH MABBOTT

There's nothing like the element of surprise in hunting Oregon mule deer. When the sun rises on opening day of deer season, the bucks haven't been pressured hard, and the crack of a rifle hasn't been heard in some time. But don't abandon all hope if you don't fill your tag on opening weekend. You're not out of luck; you just need to adjust your tactics.

I tagged my biggest mule deer buck in the last few days of the season, and I have taken more than half my bucks in the latter half of the 12-day controlled season. Mature deer are smart and know how and when to hide, but there are ways to find them after the opening weekend fireworks have quieted.

If it's cold, keep your eye on the does. If a doe goes into estrus a bit early, you may be in luck.

This year's any-legal-weapon eastside buck hunt begins on Oct. 3. This time frame in eastern Oregon can produce wildly differing temperatures and weather patterns, depending on the year. I can remember deer seasons that had temperatures in the low 90s and others where there is frost on the ground until mid-day. You have to play the weather to your advantage.



PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

"Move along... nothing to see here... move along..."

Like you, deer will not want to wander around when it's scorching hot. When it's T-shirt weather during rifle season, focus on dense thickets and shaded areas, and bonus points if there is a water source nearby. Get within glassing range before first light and watch for movement, because deer will bed soon after the sun breaks over the horizon. Once this occurs, depending on where the buck beds, he will get up at some point within an hour or so to re-adjust. Animals don't like direct sun on their faces and backs, especially on a particularly hot day.

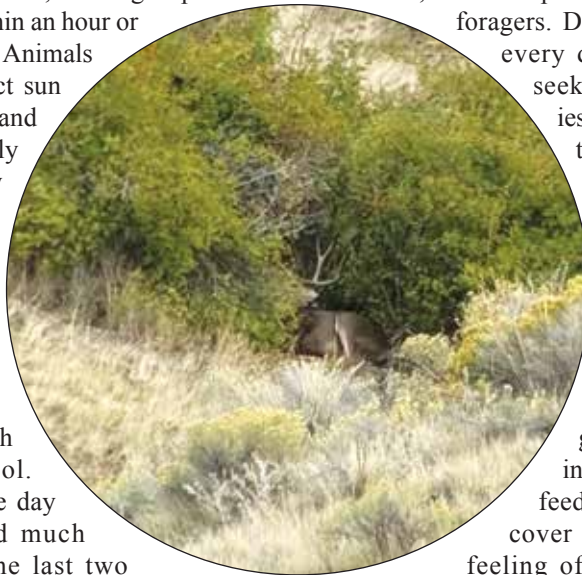
By this point, deer should have fat stored up, as it's pre-rut now and they would much rather stay cool. The heat of the day may not yield much change, but the last two hours of the day should find them up and moving again, especially if they haven't been bothered.

A cold October, on the other hand, can offer a very rewarding hunt if you're patient. While late October and early November span the bulk of the mule deer rut, I have seen – especially at higher elevations – does beginning an estrus cycle as early as Oct. 8 in years that were cooler. This is what we want to see, as the cagiest of bucks can be drawn out if there is a hot doe around. That's how I got the drop on a great buck a few seasons ago as he was doing a classic lip-curl, pushing a group

of does along the edge of a meadow. On that cool October evening, he instinctively had to follow his nose. Moral of the story is if it is cold, keep your eye on the does. If any of them go into an estrus cycle a bit early, you may be in luck.

Good food sources will hold good bucks, particularly in a dry year like this. If we don't see moisture by late summer, food will prove scarce for all foragers. Deer need to eat every day. They will seek green groceries, so you should, too, whether it's near a spring in the Owyhee or wilderness in the Wallowas, where the snow melt delayed the growth of greens until later in the year. Good feed, coupled with cover that offers the feeling of security, will entice and hold a mature buck.

Stretch your legs and go a bit farther from heavily traveled roads, even if it's just a few hundred yards. The recent uptick in traffic in the woods during hunting seasons is enough to convince a mature deer that it's not a safe place. This doesn't mean that they are going to travel several canyons away from the nearest road, but they will likely go at least a few hundred yards to where they no longer hear, smell, or see a vehicle. Use this to your advantage; hike until you don't hear people driving by, and that's a great starting point to find your buck.



The author made sure to leave enough cape for a shoulder mount on this trophy muley. Remember, it's a shoulder mount, so leave cape past the shoulder.

Trophy Taxidermy Tips

When you harvest your mature buck, a few factors can make or break how your taxidermy turns out. Make sure to leave plenty of hide to work with. There's no such thing as too much hide, but you need to take your cape at least past the base of the neck and the upper half of both front legs. It's called a shoulder mount, after all, so make sure you save cape all the way back of the shoulder. Leave more than you think you need, as it's better that they need to trim than to use a purchased cape, as you will likely have to fork over the money to cover that as well, and capes can be hundreds of dollars. If you choose a traditional European or skull mount on a mature buck, it's worth saving the cape and gifting it to a taxidermist. Some may even do a skull mount for you in exchange for a trophy cape.

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Pondering



Puddie Ducks

You don't need expensive decoy spreads on expansive waters to make a big splash.

BY RICHY J. HARROD



My brother and I crept through the tall grass on the banks of the dry streambed in Baker County. A cold November wind blew on our faces. At the base of the aging earthen dam, we stopped, checked our shotguns, and nodded at each other confirming readiness to shoot. A few slow steps upward gave us a clear view of the pond loaded with mallards. Ducking down, we giggled like little kids and whispered “ready” simultaneously as we rushed to the top. The ducks, which had been noisily feeding, went silent for a moment and then burst skyward at once. Six shots rang out in rapid succession while greenheads fell from flight, splashing back into the pond.

The half-acre pond on our family ranch held numerous ducks and sometimes geese for a week or two before freeze-up. Our passion for waterfowl hunting started in the early 1980s at this pond and other natural or constructed stock ponds in Baker County that became our favorite waterfowl hunting spots every fall. Sometimes we would jump-shoot them like the ranch pond, but mostly we set decoys and hid in the cattails or hugged a grassy bank. Returning later in life to these or other waterfowl haunts awakened fond memories from our youth.

The expense and storage requirements for a duck hunting setup can prevent many hunters from dabbling in duck hunting, but it needn't be so. Oregon's plentiful ponds offer great duck hunting that requires only a dozen decoys and a safe method to retrieve birds.

On a Golden Pond

My nephew Boone was 12 years old when he received his first hunting license. My brother Ron asked me to join them for a hunt over a small pond in the Wallowa Valley. We arrived at the pond before first light. Ron brought a one-man 9-foot pontoon boat so we could easily set decoys and retrieve ducks if needed. Boone was learning to train a young lab named Berkley. With Berkley leading the way, Boone and I carried our waterfowl bags loaded with shells, coffee, and snacks around to the far end of the pond. Ron rowed the pontoon with all the decoys.

Our usual decoy spread for a pond was minimal. We'd set no more than 2 dozen decoys so arriving ducks would have plenty of places to land. A few decoys were set close to our blind spot with two additional groups of decoys set left and right of the blind with a landing spot in our shooting lane. The spread resembled a few birds hiding away in a quiet setting.

The expense and storage for a duck hunting setup can deter hunters from dabbling in duck hunting, but it needn't be so.

JEFF RICH



Boone and Berkley work on retrieving technique.

We placed our blind in the nearly head-high reed canary grass. As in our youth, the blind utilized the natural cover along with a few branches.

Hunting waterfowl on small ponds is the kind of experience we seek. These places remind us of our formative years when we had nothing but time and a desire for local adventure.

Not much cover was needed. Tall cottonwoods surrounded the pond so birds would be in shotgun range as soon as they dropped in from the tree-tops. Boone was placed in the best shooting location, and we settled into our natural blind to wait for official shooting hours.

A group of teal surprised us by buzzing the pond minutes before legal shooting time. We wondered if we could have even gotten a shot off.

"I don't think the mallards will come from that direction," Ron said. "They should drop in over those smaller trees to our left." Ron's prophecy came true moments later.

A group of four mallards circled the pond, descended over the shorter trees and headed for our decoys. A few quick shots later and two greenheads hit the pond. "That's some tough shooting," Boone said laughing.

"They're dropping fast coming over those trees so you gotta lead below the birds," Ron instructed.

Over the next couple hours, pairs to half dozen groups of ducks swooped into the pond continuing to challenge our shooting skills. Ron even shot a pintail. Boone

worked with Berkley, encouraging her to find and retrieve birds on the water. Occasionally, Ron would pull the pontoon boat out of the brush to recover birds Berkley couldn't find. Our pile of birds in the blind was slowly growing, but as the sun rose above the mountains, the ducks seemed to stop flying.

We poured coffee and Boone raided the snack bag. The air was still so the pond was like a glass mirror. Tall trees reflected in the water were now golden in the morning sunlight. A muskrat intermittently swam out and sent a small wake across the pond. A rooster pheasant crowed in the distant brush behind our blind. It was serene.

No ducks had flown by for nearly two hours, so it was time to pack up. The faint honk of a Canada goose was heard while wading out to pick up decoys. Hustling back to our blind, shotguns were quickly reloaded and we hunkered in the grass with excitement at the thought of a flock of geese dropping into the pond. Turns out it was only one goose. A few cackles from our goose calls turned the loner to the pond. Boone made the perfect shot to end our hunt with a goose to take home.

PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR



Ron waits in the reeds over a small spread of decoys on a pond in Grant County.



A mixed bag of ducks is the reward for a morning of hunting over small waters that can produce big results without spending your retirement on a duck hunting setup.

A Puddle in the High Desert

For years, my brother and I drove by a pond on public land in the sagebrush country of Grant County on our way to the elk hunting woods. We noticed numerous ducks sitting on the water. On closer inspection, there were tall reeds where the creek, bone dry in September, entered on the far end.

"It'd be fun to hunt those ducks in November," I suggested. "We should plan to meet for a hunt."

"Yeah, I imagine we'd have it to ourselves way out here," Ron replied.

We met in early November to put our hunting plan in motion. As usual, we arrived at the pond well before first light. Ron once again had his pontoon boat to ferry the decoys and 5-gallon buckets for chairs, while I carried our shotguns and ammo bags around the shoreline.

Expecting a mix of dabblers and divers, we spread out about 10 decoys close to the reeds where we made our blind. We noticed ducks tended to congregate near the reeds, so this minimal spread would mimic their natural tendencies. The setup took only minutes. We sat down on our buckets, sipped coffee, and waited for the light of day.

The sounds and smells at this pond were different and pleasing. Coyotes yipped in the distance. Meadowlarks and song sparrows took turns greeting first light on the horizon. The strong smell of sagebrush wafted by on the light morning breeze. We sat in silence, relishing the essence of sagebrush country.

Morning light flooded the pond and the surrounding rocky sagebrush hillsides. We wondered if ducks would find their way to this remote location, but minutes later

a small group of mallards flew low into our setup without hesitation. A couple of well-placed shots splashed our first birds in the water.

"You can tell these birds don't get hunted," Ron laughed as he walked out to retrieve our birds.

Groups of ringnecks, wigeons and buffleheads flew into the pond intermittently until the sun had risen above the distant mountains. We sat in our reed blind until midmorning, but no other birds flew. It wasn't surprising. Our previous scouting suggested not many birds visited this high desert oasis. With nine birds for our larder, we were pleased with our success and appreciated the solitude of the remote sagebrush pond.

Hunting waterfowl on small ponds has been and always will be the kind of experience we seek. These places remind us of our formative years when we had nothing but time and a desire for local adventure. We are forever drawn to quiet waters like the puddle ducks we pursue.



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OHA NEWS & VIEWS

OHA's statewide conservation funds benefit wildlife from the canyons to the coast.

JEFF RICH

OHA funds, installs aspen protection on Elkhorn W.A.

OHA, in partnership with ODFW, recently constructed a 3,500-foot buck-and-pole fence that will promote aspen regeneration and expansion, while improving habitat for wildlife on the Elkhorn Wildlife Area.

OHA's Mule Deer Fund awarded \$10,000 to this project, and ODFW leveraged OHA funds to attain an additional \$30,000, which covered the cost of materials for the project.



The Union-Wallowa OHA Chapter provided volunteer labor and recruited help from local trap shooting teams (Eastern Oregon University and Union and La Grande high schools). The Union-Wallowa OHA Chapter also financially supported these trap shooting teams.

"This project was a great example of how the OHA Mule Deer Fund catalyzes excellent work that will benefit deer, elk and other wildlife," said OHA Conservation Director Tyler Dungannon. "OHA is fortunate to have chapters that not only financially contribute to our funds and projects, but also rally boots on the ground to implement projects, which exponentially increases our impact."

This project was one of five excellent projects that were selected for OHA Mule Deer Fund funding in 2025.

OHA launches new Black-Tailed Deer and Roosevelt Elk Fund

OHA is working to expand its impact on big game and habitat statewide. In 2024, we began our leadership role with Blue Mountains Elk Initiative and have since invested \$128,000 into eight outstanding projects in central and northeast Oregon. In 2025, we implemented the OHA Mule Deer Fund, and to date, we have contributed more than \$110,000 across nine projects that are working to improve conditions for mule deer.

Perhaps most importantly, OHA dollars have leveraged substantial private, state, and federal funds in Oregon to support wildlife and habitat projects that have attained millions of dollars in match funding. In order to expand our impact and this funding model across the state, we have developed the new OHA Black-Tailed Deer and Roosevelt Elk Fund.

This new fund will focus on supporting western Oregon projects that improve conditions for deer and elk, such as increasing forage availability, restoring meadows, protecting and enhancing habitat, addressing predation, investing in research, reducing deer and elk vehicle collisions, supporting anti-poaching efforts and more. The OHA Black-Tailed Deer and Roosevelt Elk Fund will allocate \$50,000-\$100,000 annually to projects selected by OHA Conservation Staff and our Deer and Elk Subcommittee. The first fund cycle will take place this winter.

OHA chapters that have contributed to this new effort so far include Umpqua (\$20,000), Yamhill County (\$20,000), Josephine County (\$15,000), Pioneer (\$10,000), Mid-Willamette (\$10,000), and Bend (\$5,000).

OHA to weigh in on Blue Mountains Forest Plan

The U.S. Forest Service has proposed a revision to the Blue Mountains Forest Plan and offered three alternatives for consideration:

Alternative 1 (no change) proposes continuing management under the existing 1990 Forest Plans and subsequent amendments.

Alternative 2 replaces the 1990 plan with a new framework focused on restoring forest resilience through active management. It provides flexibility for vegetation treatments, prescribed fire, and timber harvest to improve forest health and restore desired forest conditions. This plan does not create fixed diameter limit for protecting large trees. It also updates riparian management, wildlife habitat direction, recreation management, grazing standards, and monitoring programs. Under Alternative 2, current designated roadless acres will be opened if the 2001 Roadless Rule rescission is upheld.

Alternative 3 similarly prioritizes active management, but incorporates additional protections, such as permanently establishing the Inventoried Roadless Areas regardless of future changes to the national Roadless Rule. It also recommends approximately 34,000 acres of new

Wilderness across the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests. This alternative limits the harvest of large trees based on a diameter at breast height (DBH) of 21 or 30 inches, depending on species, and provides additional vegetation protections in riparian areas.

"We are reviewing the draft (Environmental Impact Statement) and are working to ensure the Blue Mountains Forest Plan prioritizes our deer and elk herds, their habitat quality and security, which impacts their availability to hunters in the fall," said Tyler Dungannon, OHA Conservation Director. "It's important that we cut trees and open the forest canopy so light hits the forest floor, which will improve forage quality for deer and elk. It's also imperative that open roads don't cover the landscape. Without secure acreage on public lands, elk will leave. OHA is working to balance road access with habitat security to retain elk on public land where they are desired."

A public comment period was opened July 2 and lasts until Sept. 30. To review a draft environmental impact statement and for information on how to comment, visit: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r06/umatilla/planning/blue-mountains-forest-plan-revision>

OHA supports NE Oregon at-risk sage-grouse

The Baker Priority Area of Conservation in northeastern Oregon supports one of the most vulnerable greater sage-grouse populations in the state. Recent monitoring estimates the population at approximately 475 birds.

Despite significant habitat restoration and predator management investments, the Baker population continues to decline, indicating demographic limitations – particularly recruitment and retention of breeding females



– are constraining recovery.

State OHA along with OHA's Mid-Willamette and Baker County chapters are financially supporting a new translocation project aiming to increase the number of breeding females that successfully recruit locally within 1 to 2 years post-release.

OHA is the reason that we still have sage-grouse hunting seasons today, and this is yet another example of our commitment to the species' conservation.

Nominations now open for OHA State Board

OHA members interested in serving as state president or state vice president should attain a nomination from a chapter or 10 member signatures and submit a position statement of up to 200 words no by Sept. 15, 2026. Both are two year positions that will commence on Jan. 1, 2027.

Three-year board positions are also open. No chapter nomination or signatures are needed for board seats; contact

OHA Vice President Cindy Rooney at cindyrooneyoha@outlook.com for an application and instructions. Applications must be received by Sept. 15.

OHA's board and committees meet at least once a month, twice a year in person on Saturdays, with other meetings by Zoom conferences on weeknights.

For more information, call the OHA state office at (541) 772-7313.

OHA welcomes Ellen Condon aboard in new marketing role

OHA is thrilled to announce the hiring of Ellen Condon as our new Brand and Engagement Specialist. Ellen comes to OHA with an impressive background in the outdoor industry, formerly serving in international sales and administration at Bowtech Archery.

A dedicated advocate for the sporting community, Ellen brings a deep passion for wildlife conservation, a strategic mindset, and a proven track record of building strong industry relationships. In her new role, she will lead efforts

to elevate the OHA brand, strengthen community partnerships, and drive meaningful engagement with hunters across the state.

OHA welcomes Ellen to the OHA team as we mobilize our community and strengthen our voice for the future of hunting in Oregon.



OHA STATE-LEVEL SPONSORSHIPS

Please support the sponsors who support OHA's mission of protecting Oregon's wildlife, habitat and hunting heritage. For information about OHA state-level sponsorship opportunities, call the OHA State Office at (541) 772-7313.

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OHA announces next winners in 2026 Gun Calendar Raffle

The next winners in OHA's 2026 Gun Calendar Raffle have been announced!

The 2027 Gun Raffle Calendar is on sale now; call 541-772-7313 or visit <https://oregonhunters.org/shop/#raffles>

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

★ **Citadel 1911 Flag .45 ACP**
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★ **Weatherby Vanguard Badlands 6.5-.300 Wby**
Mark Goody, Ochoco Chapter

★ **Christensen Evoke Hunter .300 PRC**
Roger Heegard, Bend Chapter



OHA honors volunteers with awards

OHA recently recognized outstanding volunteer efforts with the announcement of statewide annual awards at the annual OHA Chapter Leadership Summit at Diamond Lake on July 25. Chapters, state board members and staff nominate deserving individuals for awards, and then vote from the nominees on the ballot.

MEMBER OF THE YEAR - WILDLIFE:

Rex Parks Sr. - Bend Chapter

Rex has shown his dedication to OHA's mission statement in everything he has done for the Bend Chapter and the state organization throughout his Lifetime Membership with us. His commitment to the Bend Chapter is nothing short of amazing.

Rex has been a part of the chapter's Mule Deer Classic Banquet Committee since his very first year as a chapter member. Rex is always active in OHA field projects, as well. From the Annual Youth and Family Field Day, the All Hands, All Brands for Public Lands, to the chapter's fall youth upland bird hunt.

Rex is always involved, always pitching in, and always showing up whenever he can for everything he's asked to do.

MEMBER OF THE YEAR - ORGANIZATIONAL:

Debbie Moore - Umpqua Chapter

Debbie is a long-standing and highly respected member of the Umpqua Chapter Board, serving faithfully as chapter treasurer for many years. She has also become one of the chapter's most dependable and versatile volunteers.

One of Debbie's most significant contributions has been her role as banquet chair, and she also plays a key role in organizing the annual chapter picnic. She keeps reports up to date, carefully manages the chapter raffle license, and assists with the monthly newsletter to ensure members stay informed and engaged.

Over the past several years, she has volunteered at the OHA State Convention,



OHA Josephine County Chapter President David Downs (left) accepted awards for Special Recognition and Chapter of the Year from OHA Executive Director Todd Adkins at OHA's Chapter Summit.

assisting at the bank and helping throughout the evening wherever needed. Her willingness to support statewide efforts in addition to her already extensive local responsibilities speaks volumes about her dedication to the organization as a whole.

CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR:

Shawn Woods, Wildlife Area Manager, E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area

Shawn annually helps make the OHA youth event at E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area a smashing success, and most recently conducted a massive wildlife forage seed giveaway coordinated with OHA and Turf Merchants, who donated the seed to OHA for use at wildlife areas and private land where wildlife winter.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARDS:

David Downs - Josephine County Chapter

David sees the big picture in OHA's mission, and the chapter he leads contributes thousands toward OHA statewide conservation efforts. He shows up for projects and events outside his own area – from meadow enhancement to convention and sports show support, and has been instrumental in moving OHA forward with banquet software (David led a demo at a recent Chapter Summit), website development, and electronic newsletters that save money that's better spent in support of OHA's mission.

Tate Sellers - Bend Chapter

Tate has helped with the Bend Chapter Youth Upland Bird Hunt as a field/dog



Debbie Moore of OHA's Umpqua Chapter was named Organizational Member of the Year for her efforts at the state and chapter level.

guide for the last 6 years. He is very good and helpful with the hunters, patient and instructive, positive and inspiring. He has become an asset for the chapter's event. The organization could always use more people like Tate.

OSP Trooper Ben Turner

Wildlife Trooper Ben Turner always answers his chapter's call to speak at chapter events and provides updates on poaching cases and more. This year he expanded that to boating and water safety, as well. The wildlife troopers wear many hats, and it requires someone with patience and common sense who can talk with people and put them at ease when trying to get information. Trooper Turner is someone OHA can count on.

LANDOWNER OF THE YEAR - CORPORATE: Frank Timber Resources

Frank Timber Resources sustainably manages 17,000 acres in Linn, Marion, Multnomah and Clackamas counties. Their forestlands have been certified by the American Tree Farm system since 1964. Frank Timber recognizes the opportunities for hunting, hiking, and outdoor pursuits that these lands provide for the public. Hunting is allowed during state regulated seasons. Responsible hunters and nature visitors can walk, bicycle or use horses when gates are closed.



OHA Wildlife Member of the Year Rex Parks always has a hand in the many Bend Chapter projects.

OHA is appreciative of Frank Timber's policy of public access to their lands. This is especially important at a time of ever-decreasing access to private ground for hunting and recreational activities. OHA is thankful for companies such as Frank Timber.

LANDOWNER OF THE YEAR - CITIZEN: David Sill

David Sill continues to work with OHA toward his goal of making his waterfowl hunt club a public hunting area. In the past year, he agreed to host a successful Veteran's Waterfowl Day hunt at his club on the Tualatin River in cooperation with OHA and ODFW.

For some of the hunt's participating veterans, it was their first waterfowl hunting experience.

YOUTH MEMBER OF THE YEAR: Jonathan St. Firmin - Tualatin Valley

Jonathan has volunteered for several OHA events, rain or shine, with the Tualatin Valley Chapter and attends the monthly dinners.

He has volunteered at the Stimson main line gate on weekends, allowing public hunting access to private timberland, and he has helped youngsters learn outdoor skills at the OHA chapter's annual weekend youth event at Hagg Lake.

CHAPTER OF THE YEAR: Josephine County

Though the Josephine County Chapter is not one of the larger OHA chapters, they certainly have a large impact in both fund-raising and putting those funds to work for OHA's mission. The Josephine County Chapter contributes thousands toward seemingly every OHA statewide conservation effort, many of which are well outside their own area.

The chapter also hits the road to help neighboring chapters conduct wildlife projects and host sports show booths.

Chapter members have been innovators in moving OHA forward with banquet software (they led a demo at a recent Chapter Summit), website, and money-saving electronic newsletters.

The Josephine County Chapter is also big on passing along our hunting heritage, offering scholarships to college students studying in a field related to our mission, hosting a successful annual youth event, and working with Hunt of a Lifetime to help raise funds for guided hunts for children with life-threatening illnesses.

...

Nominations for OHA state awards are typically submitted in spring. If you know someone deserving of an OHA state award, please contact OHA staff, a state board member or your local chapter.



CHAPTER NEWS

Chapters wrap up busy summer slate of 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: We held our annual All Hands All Brands habitat project on June 19-20 in the Ochocos. Our annual youth upland bird hunt will take place on Oct. 17; call 541-480-7323.

BLUE MOUNTAIN

RICHARD SCHEELE 541-377-8578

ohabluemountainchapter@gmail.com

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

CAPITOL

DANNY SOUTH 503-577-6033

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

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

CLATSOP COUNTY

TROY LAWS 503-738-6962

ClatsopCountyOHA@pacifier.com

Chapter Meetings: 3rd Thursday, 5:30 p.m. no-host dinner, 6:30 p.m. meeting, Hong Kong Restaurant, Astoria.

COLUMBIA COUNTY

FRANCIS BROWNELL 503-369-5426

Chapter Meetings: 2nd Tuesday, 7 p.m., Village Inn, St. Helens.

Update: We had our Jewell Meadows work party June 4-6. We checked 430 tree structures and removed vines and brush.



Members of OHA and our conservation partners joined together in the annual All Hands All Brands for Public Lands project to do guzzler work and fencing in the Ochocos the weekend of June 19-20.

CURRY COUNTY

TONY DONALDSON 541-425-0006

currychapteroha@gmail.com

Chapter Meetings: 1st Wednesday, OSU Extension Office Meeting Room, 29390 Ellensburg Ave., Gold Beach, 6:30 p.m.

EMERALD VALLEY

RON MARTIN 541-954-5459

EmeraldOHA@live.com

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

HOODVIEW

LEVI BARRERA 503-863-4495

oregonhunters.org/hoodview-chapter

Facebook: Hoodview OHA

Chapter Meetings: Please check our website for meeting schedule.

Update: Hoodview was proud to partner with the Redmond, Tualatin Valley, and Yamhill chapters as a split sponsor for this year's NW Mountain Challenge at Hoodoo.



OHA's Josephine County Chapter had a record number of kids attend their annual youth day.

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: We conducted a Southwest Cascades Meadow Protection Project on June 26-28 at Short Creek Prairie in the Rogue Unit. Our annual youth day event on June 6 drew 275 kids, and our chapter picnic was held on June 13.



OHA's Klamath Chapter cleaned up trash - including a boat and a motorhome - in their annual project that keeps private timberland open to public hunting access.

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: After a busy season of projects, our chapter is again co-hosting the orientation barbecue for Gerber youth antelope tag holders at Gerber Reservoir.

LAKE COUNTY

LARRY LUCAS 541-417-2983

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

Update: We hosted our youth day June 27.

LINCOLN COUNTY

CHELSEA DIOSDADO 970-779-2817

chelsea.diosdado@gmail.com

Chapter Meetings: 2nd Tuesday monthly, social 5:30 p.m., Meeting 6 p.m., Bier One Brewing, Newport.

Update: We held a pint night fundraiser on June 12 at the Embarcadero.

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: Our annual youth shotgun shoot was held Aug. 8.

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

TRAVIS WARWICK 458-272-8207

oha.mid.willamette@gmail.com

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

Chapter Meetings: 2nd Thursday of odd-numbered months, board at 6 p.m., general meeting at 7 p.m., Old Armory, Albany.

Update: Our non-lead shoot will take place on Sept. 26; call 541-602-1819.

OCHOCO

JAMES COX 541-408-4816

Chapter Meetings: 1st Tuesday, 7 p.m., COCC Open Campus Room 120.

Update: Our 2nd annual Celebrate the Outdoors Event, in memory of Gary Prah, is slated for Aug. 22 at Crook County Fairgrounds. We hosted duck decoy painting for 30 kids at Yow Hunting Camp in July.

PIONEER

BRIAN ANDREWS 971-221-8827

oregonhunters.org/pioneer-chapter

Chapter Meetings: 1st Wednesday, 7 p.m.; dinner 6:30, Canby Rod & Gun Club.

Update: Our annual sight-in days will take place Sept. 12-13 and 19-20 at Canby Rod & Gun Club; call 503-710-1233.

REDMOND

WADE McDONALD 541-408-3271

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: OHA's Executive Director Todd Adkins spoke about the threat posed by IP28 and OHA's response at our July meeting.



Child labor was employed to pack fence posts when the retrievers refused to fetch those sticks at the Southwest Cascades project, where OHA installed wildlife-friendly fencing to protect a forage meadow in the Rogue Unit.

ROGUE VALLEY

RICKY CLARK 530-905-1186

Firepmt29@gmail.com

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

Update: The Southwest Cascades Meadow Protection Project was held June 26-28 at Short Creek Prairie in the Rogue Unit.

TILLAMOOK

JOHN PUTMAN 503-842-7733

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

TIOGA

MARCEY FULLERTON 541-294-7912

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

Update: We hosted a booth at the Coos County Fair on July 21-25. We raffled two rifles and had a free raffle for kids to win outdoor gear.



Jonathan St. Firmin, OHA's Youth Member of the Year (see Page 44) helps a youngster learn archery at Tualatin Valley OHA's youth event.

TUALATIN VALLEY

SHELLEY KIND 503-522-8723

oregonhunters.org/tualatin-valley-chapter

Chapter Meetings: 3rd Tuesday, dinner 6 p.m., meeting 7, Prime Time Restaurant & Sports Bar, Forest Grove.

Update: Our annual Hagg Lake youth event took place June 6. We had 500 youth participants.

UMPQUA

TADD MOORE 541-580-5660

<https://www.umpquaoha.org>

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

UNION/WALLOWA COUNTY

MORGAN OLSON 541-786-1283

Chapter Meetings: La Grande Library, next date TBA.

Update: Our aspen enhancement project – including construction of a 3,500-foot buck & pole fence – took place June 6 at the Elkhorn Wildlife Area. The project was funded with a \$10,000 grant from the OHA Mule Deer Fund and \$30,000 in match funding. See Page 42 to learn more about this project.

YAMHILL COUNTY

RUSS BRANDT 503-407-1761

ohayamhill.com

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

Update: Our annual youth shotgun shoot was held on Aug. 15.



In one search, OSP seized big game trophies and firearms as evidence, and 67 criminal charges were filed. To learn more about what OHA is doing to fight poaching in Oregon, see Page 12.

Wildlife crimes net \$114,000 in fines

The Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Division recently concluded a significant investigation with the sentencing of Christopher George Matson, 48, of Umatilla. In two separate court cases, Matson was sentenced to 24 months probation, a lifetime hunting license revocation, 300 hours of community service, forfeiture of firearms and property seized, and more than \$114,000 in fines.

OSP received information in 2024 that Matson, a former Oregon Corrections Officer, had been illegally taking big game animals. OSP served a search warrant in February 2025, and seized multiple big game animals and firearms as evidence.

A total of 67 criminal charges were referred for prosecution, ranging from unlawful take/possession of a black bear with the aid of bait, falsely applying for a license/tag, unlawful take/possession of buck deer, unlawful take/possession of antlerless elk, loaning/borrowing big game tags, unlawful possession of silencers, unlawful possession of a short-barreled rifle, hunting during prohibited hours, failing to validate a big game tag, and unlawful take/possession of a game bird.

The charges spanned multiple counties, and the case was handled by the Oregon Department of Justice Wildlife Anti-Poaching Resource Prosecutor Jay Hall.

Matson pleaded guilty on June 18 in Grant County Circuit Court to four counts of unlawful take of buck deer (felony and misdemeanor), and three counts of unlawful take of black bear (felony and misdemeanor). He was sentenced to 18 months of probation, lifetime hunting license revocation, 300 hours of community service, forfeiture of all firearms and property seized, and a \$52,500 fine payable to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

On June 29, Matson pleaded guilty in Umatilla County Circuit Court to unlawful possession of a short-barreled rifle (felony), unlawful possession of a silencer (felony), unlawful possession of multiple wildlife (misdemeanor), and unlawful take of mule deer (felony). He was sentenced to 24 months of probation, lifetime hunting license revocation, 300 hours of community service (to run concurrently), forfeiture of all property seized, and a \$62,000 fine payable to ODFW.

"This is another example of serial poaching that rises to the level of felony conduct based solely on the repeated poaching conduct and impact of one individual on Oregon's game mammals," Hall said. "The conduct across the several counties amounts to one of the highest damage amounts done to Oregon wildlife by any single individual."



OHA pays \$5,600 in 11 reward cases

In the last two months, OHA issued 11 reward checks to informants in 11 cases totaling \$5,600 from our Turn In Poachers (TIP) reward fund. Amid the summer fishing season, Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife troopers have been active on Oregon's waters, but a couple of the wildlife cases were the most bizarre.

Fishing cases were the most common violations this summer, but the wildlife cases were the most bizarre.

Charges for the recent citations included: Snagging of salmon and failure to validate salmon tag; snagging of Chinook salmon and unlawful possession of salmon; exceeding bag limit by 11 lingcod, six rock fish, one cabezon and angling without a license; waste of razor clams; continuing to angle after retaining bag limit/salmon; illegal possession of 49 female Dungeness crab and one undersized crab; unlawful take of cow elk after shooting hours, then butchering it with a machete; failure to immediately validate combined angling tag/steelhead; unlawful take of chinook salmon; attempted snagging of salmon; a warrant was issued for the arrest of a California man who dumped deer parts in a box, with his address label still on it, alongside the road.



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5,000* deer, elk, bear, and other large animals are killed in collisions with cars and trucks every year in Oregon. Collisions and accident avoidance also claim the lives of 1-2 motorists annually. Funds from your purchase of a Watch for Wildlife license plate support projects that help wildlife move safely around busy highways and between habitat patches. Learn how you can help at myOWF.org/WatchforWildlife

*ODOT animal carcass incidents data

Visit myOWF.org/WatchforWildlife

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TACTACAM TRAIL CAM CONTEST

See rules and enter your best shots at oregonhunters.org for a chance to win a great Tactacam prize!



WINNER:

Robert Crawford, an OHA member from Forest Grove, is the winner of a Tactacam Reveal Trail Camera for his photo of a northwest Oregon cougar making use of a log bridge in June.



SCAN HERE TO ENTER

HONORABLE MENTION:



Salem resident and OHA member Steven Hartsock earns an OHA hat and Honorable Mention for his June photo of a nursing Willamette fawn.



OHA member Rocky Barrett from Christmas Valley claims Honorable Mention and an OHA hat for his Lake County bobcat in March.



OHA member Evan Boyer of Oregon City nabs Honorable Mention and an OHA hat for this whitetail in Sled Springs, where rifle whitetail tags were left over this year.



Sisters OHA member Dave Jones wins an OHA hat and Honorable Mention for his July photo of a Deschutes County monster mule deer buck.



OHA member Darren Fast from Albany bags an OHA hat and Honorable Mention for his closeup photo of a Grant County bull elk, captured two days after bow season ended.

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Pheasant & Wild Rice Soup

Bill let his black lab Chuckles out of the dog box while I tooled up the hill in a side-by-side with my pudelpointer Pepper riding shotgun. I didn't let her out of the vehicle till I had plunked two 16-gauge rounds into the open maw of the 1930s vintage twin barrel Western Arms Long Range Gun.

We would hunt down the draw while Bill and Chuckles would come up from the bottom. It had been almost three weeks since our last hunt, and Pepper was antsy. We worked down through six-foot tall sage brush, and once she pointed a spot where I found no bird.

I walked around through the grass and kicked bushes and we both looked at each other and when I shrugged, she started off again and ran up the hill as if to tell me the pheasant went that way and we should look for another one.

There might be another one, I wanted to tell her, but this is Sherman County, and while there may be a lot of quail, roosters are hard to come by.

As the draw narrowed, the sage brush was even taller, and where water was close to the surface, a few cattails grew along with the tall wild rye. Here there were multiple stories of cover, and this was just the kind of place a long-tailed Chinese pheasant might burrow in. For a couple of minutes I lost sight of the dog, and then a rooster erupted up through the limbs of a sagebrush, going right to left, and I swung through it and saw it go down in a puff of feathers. Pepper had marked it and she brought it quickly to me, a smaller, compact rooster with wicked long spurs.

Merrilee had said she would make a pheasant and wild rice soup. I sent her a picture to let her know we had bagged the main ingredient. Here is how we make Pheasant and Wild Rice soup in our Camp Chef Dutch oven.

Pheasant & Wild Rice Soup

- 2-1/2 cups turkey broth
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 3/4 cup chopped onion
- 2-1/2 teaspoons dried parsley flakes
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- 2 teaspoons rosemary finely chopped
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 medium carrot
- 2-3 stalks celery finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 6 bacon strips, chopped
- 2 cups cooked wild rice (soak overnight for best consistency)
- 1/2 pound sliced fresh mushrooms
- 1 pheasant (or 2 chukar), skinless, boneless



Soak wild rice overnight. Prepare bacon by pre-cooking, then chop while soft. Slice mushrooms, onion, celery and carrots. Cut



It's a hearty soup good for cooking indoors or outside in a Dutch oven.

pheasant meat in small pieces, then roll in flour and fry in butter with a lid over the pan. Sauté mushroom, onion, celery and carrots in butter in a separate cast iron pan. Add a little more butter and throw in a tablespoon of flour over the sautéing vegetables. Pour vegetables into Dutch oven and pour in broth. Add salt, pepper, rosemary and parsley and garlic powder. Throw in the cooked pheasant and wild rice. Cook for 10 minutes in Dutch oven. Add two cups of heavy cream and cook for 20 more minutes. Stir occasionally and salt and pepper to taste. Add bacon at the end. Serve with brown bread.

This is a recipe sure to stir tastebuds and recall to mind great moments in the field when pheasants rise out of the cattails and the tall grass.



To contact Gary Lewis, visit www.GaryLewisOutdoors.com

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SHARING THE HERITAGE

By JENN KEPLER

The Ladies Hunting Camp inspired her passion for pursuing predators, and she was determined to go out and get her own.

Passing along the passion for stalking predators

Jessie Lynn Gatchet of La Pine first started hunting at the age of 26, when a friend took her on a deer hunt. She was inspired to go bear hunting after attending the Ladies Hunting Camp in Fort Rock, where Heather Aldrich gave a class on bear hunting.

"That fueled my passion for bears and predators," Jessie said. "I was determined to go out and get my own."

In preparation for her fall bear hunt, Jessie started to research the topography and what Heather had taught in the class, such as how to look for certain foods bears are eating at that time of year.

"I pinpointed a spot on a map and decided to go check it out," Jessie said.

When she arrived, she found bear tracks along a muddy bank and knew this was where she wanted to put up some game cameras. Then, every two weeks, she would return to the spot and check her cards. She also started a bear journal.

"I would write down what time the bears came in and what time they left," she said. "I basically stalked them." By doing this, Jessie was able to develop a pattern of when the bears were coming and going.

Once the season started, Jessie would arrive before the time she thought the bears would be there, and she would sit all day.

"It was a week before I finally walked in one morning and there was my bear, standing by the water," Jessie said. Her friend Tom was with her and asked, "Is that a cow?"

Jessie was starting to realize that the time and effort she'd put into scouting the area was about to pay off.

She took the 92-yard shot, and the bear ran.

"I never heard a crash or any sign that the bear went down," she said. She and Tom waited 30 minutes, and everything was quiet. They started to hike up the hill where the bear had run.

They could see footprints but no blood. "My heart sank, thinking I had missed," Jessie said.

As they continued up the hill, she could hear heavy breathing. She asked Tom if he was all right. When he said he was fine, she thought maybe someone else was out there. The sound was coming from the north, and Jessie knew there was a dry lakebed in that direction. They pivoted that way, and about 20 yards in the distance, near the edge of the lakebed, Tom spotted a bear's foot.

The area was a steep maze of logs, and it took them a while to reach the bear. When they got there, Jessie poked it a couple of times with her rifle. The bear didn't move. "It was like a ton of bricks," she said.

Tom helped her flop the bear over. "It really did look like a cow, it was so big. I had no idea how big it was. I had to take a moment and thank the Lord, and then I just broke down because I was so grateful."

She and Tom field-dressed the bear, and Jessie called her husband, who brought their son to help with the pack-out. But before they arrived, Jessie and Tom tried to carry the bear themselves. "We put it on a log and tried to walk out with it, but because Tom is so much taller than me, the log was uneven, and the bear ended up

falling on me!" Jessie said. "I was sandwiched under the bear, and Tom had to pull it off me."

When Jessie's husband and son arrived, they loaded the bear into a game cart. The bear was so large that it took the four of them to get the cart back to Jessie's truck.

Jessie, who is a disabled hunter, didn't think she would be able to carry her pack and hike the two miles each way, but she was determined. "I learned I can overcome obstacles," she said.

She also learned about patience. "Give yourself some grace," she said. "It does take time. They are sneaky animals."



Jessie selected an area to hunt based on the food in the area, put up trail cameras, and patterned her bear, so when the season opened, she put herself in the right place.

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ODFW Hunter Education Program (503) 947-6002
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Before You Hunt

Set Yourself Up for Success

A successful hunt starts before scouting, setting up base camp, and even breakfast! Here are some tips to make sure your hunt goes smoothly, with maximum opportunity for success.

Know where to go

- Oregon has new east side deer hunt areas this year. The new boundaries follow herd ranges rather than historical Wildlife Management Unit (WMU) boundaries which didn't really line up with mule deer behavior. Use updated maps like *OnX* to stay within legal harvest boundaries and double check that your license and tag match the hunt area.
- East side deer and elk archery hunters should be especially aware of these changes to ensure they can legally harvest both species in the areas they are hunting.
- Check for active wildfires or closures before you go. Parts of your hunt area could be closed or have fire restrictions. ODFW will typically get in touch with hunters when closures impact large portions of their hunt area so make sure we have a valid email address in our system.

Ask permission from private landowners before crossing private property.

- Property owners have the right and responsibility to know who is on their property, and what activities may occur. Many landowners allow hunting and fishing access, especially if visitors leave no trace that they were there. Leave gates the way you found them.

Review the bag limits for the species and location you plan to hunt or fish.

- Harvest limits vary by date and locations. Check regulations for species, dates, and limits.
- There are seven deer hunt areas in NE Oregon, where white-tailed deer and mule deer are separated into different hunts. Pay attention to the bag limit and species listed on their tag in those units.

Know your target.

- Identify the species before you pull the trigger.
- ODFW has white-tailed and black-tailed identification videos for practice. You can also reference YouTube videos and hunting websites for information on how to distinguish one species from another.
- When hunting bear, take time to observe the animal to make sure you aren't looking at a sow with cubs. Cubs often stay hiding while mom grabs a meal. It can be difficult to tell from a distance if the bear is a sow with cubs.

Be prepared with licenses and tags.

- Download the latest version of the MyODFW app on your phone (which lets you tag when out of cell reception).
- Login to the app before fishing or hunting and be sure your licenses and tags are available in your portfolio.
- If you are in an area with poor cell service, toggle to field mode in the app (under *Settings*) or put your phone in Airplane mode to make e-tagging easier. Use the app's field mode with e-tagging when using peripherals (GPS, fish finder, camera) that use your WiFi connection.
- Immediately tag your fish or game after harvest and if you are e-tagging, enter required information properly. Tag by pressing the "Tag a Game Animal" button. Don't forget to also physically tag your animal when e-tagging: write down the confirmation number provided by the app, plus your name, ODFW ID, date of birth and harvest date on anything that will stand up to the elements (like flagging or duct tape). Affix it to the animal like a traditional tag and keep it attached to the carcass in transport.
- Keep your phone charged—it's your responsibility to be able to show your license and tag to OSP



NOSLER[®]

2026 PHOTO CONTEST

FINALIST PRIZES

Prizes will be awarded in general and youth categories.

FIRST PRIZE: Nosler Model 21 rifle

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

THIRD PRIZE: Leupold scope

FOURTH PRIZE: Benchmade hunting knife

FIFTH PRIZE: Born & Raised Outdoors meat bags

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



NOSLER® PHOTO CONTEST

GENERAL CATEGORY FINALISTS



OHA member Brian Wilson of West Linn is a finalist in the 2026 Nosler Photo Contest and a winner of an OHA Coast knife for his photo of a turkey posed with his home-crafted boat on a successful April float trip.

Eric Strecker, an OHA member from Portland, captures a finalist spot in the 2026 Nosler Photo Contest and an OHA Coast knife for his Chesnimnus Unit mule deer bagged with his Remington Model 700 .270 Winchester this past October.



NOSLER[®] PHOTO CONTEST

YOUTH CATEGORY FINALISTS

Bend resident and OHA member Harrison Jennrich is a finalist in the 2026 Nosler Photo Contest and wins an OHA Coast knife for his opening morning photo of Eddie Jennrich and a Wheeler County buck bagged last year with a Nosler Model 48 chambered in .260 Remington.



OHA member Tyler Douglas from Medford captures a finalist spot in the 2026 Nosler Photo contest and an OHA Coast knife for his photo of Easton Douglas and his Evans Creek Unit blacktail taken last December on his last youth tag with a 6.5 PRC.

VIEW FROM BEAR CAMP ROAD/TERI DUNGANNON

NOSLER® PHOTO CONTEST

HONORABLE MENTION



Darren Fast, an OHA member from Albany, wins a Nosler hat and Honorable Mention for his photo of a "whale tail" bull elk from a successful archery hunt in Wallowa County last September.



OHA member Michael Holloran from Dallas gets Honorable Mention and a Nosler hat for his photo of Adam Geitl and his first buck taken in Wallowa County last fall.



OHA member and Medford resident Schyler Gorman grabs Honorable Mention and a Nosler hat for his Idaho mule deer photo from last fall.

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





Newberg OHA member Justin Lenhardt wins a Nosler hat and Honorable Mention for a photo of Justine Lenhardt and a Stott Mountain turkey last May.



OHA member Darren fast of Albany grabs a Nosler hat and Honorable Mention for his photo of Tyler Donne and a Harney County mule deer taken last September with a Bergara Wilderness Sierra 6.5 CR.



Salem OHA member Brett Herb wins a Nosler hat and Honorable Mention for his photo of a Gredos Ibex taken in Spain's Sierra De Gredos Mountains with his .300 Weatherby Magnum last November.

THREE SISTERS WILDERNESS/TERI DUNGANNON



When Jack and the Beans Talk

Why you don't take your bear to memory care

Falcon Heights is the kind of neighborhood not unfamiliar in higher priced corners of the West where the real estate got too pricey to run dairy cows. Next thing you know, there's a golf course and a destination resort and even the nutria get to live full, productive lives. Such a place attracts retirees from San Francisco and Seattle, and because they don't fit in down at the auction yard, the denizens of Falcon Heights get to know each other at cheese tastings and coffee clatters where the topics of conversation run not to black bears, the rising cost of taxidermy and the relative ripeness of skunk cabbage.

When Joe the Starman moved into a house in Falcon Heights, he had a life-size black bear mount in the moving truck and Mrs. Starman informed him in her sweet and serious way that there was no room in the new house for taxidermy.

"Mister Fuzzy is just too big for our new house, Joey," she crooned in a way that fed Joe's ego. And Joe looked around for the next best place to install the taxidermy.

It happened that Joe's aging mother-in-law was checking into a memory care center with open beam ceilings in that season of her life. To Joe's way of thinking, the exposed architecture over the front desk was a good place for Mister Fuzzy to gather dust while he could think of a better place.

This all happened 10 years ago, and when Joe settled down to dip the fried cod in puckish sauce and sip the dark and foamy with us at Charlie's Fish & Chips on a recent Thursday, he took off his sweat-stained Texaco cap and related the above circumstances, which had caused him to be separated from his bear.

"So now I want to go get Mister Fuzzy," Joe said, "and I went back to the memory care center and the lady that used to manage the place had moved to Michigan and no one else remembers me putting the bear there."

"We have no recollection of that," the new manager said. Which was ironic.

"Matter of fact, last week I heard Eddie in 13B tell Mrs. Keller he killed that bear in Alaska and Mr. Beans told Mrs. Smith in Room 15 he killed it in Colorado."

That gave Joe an idea.

"Can I talk to Mr. Beans?" Joe wanted to know. To which the front desk manager said Mr. Beans was not taking visitors. Joe thanked her and went on his way. And when he got out to the truck, he called his uncle Jack, who used to be a policeman.



Anyway, two days later, Uncle Jack walked into the memory care center, flashed a badge and asked to converse with Mr. Beans, who he said he knew from the old days.

Mr. Beans was about ready to take a nap, which of course meant Mr. Beans was resisting a rest when Uncle Jack caught him.

After much questioning, the sleepy Mr. Beans admitted he did not kill the bear in Colorado. He said he shot it in Arizona, whereupon Uncle Jack displayed his badge and said Mr. Beans better produce an Arizona bear tag forthwith or pay a \$50 fine.

Mrs. Beans was listening the whole time and finally she had something to say.

"I hear that humans eat more berries than bears and I think it's true. I ate a flat of blueberries last week and I can't remember the last time I ate a bear."

Anyway that's what can happen when Jack and the Beans talk.

Next, Uncle Jack circled around and knocked on Eddie's door in 13B and asked him if he had shot the bear over the front desk.

Eddie had to put his chompers in. He fished them out of a glass on the corner of the nightstand and applied a light coating of a minty substance.

"I didn't shoot him over the front desk," Eddie said, cackling and clacking his teeth like an old boar defending the cave. "Got him in Hells Canyon in '68. Packed it 10 miles to camp, and when I got down to the river, I remembered I left my rifle leaned against a stump and so I jogged back up the hill . . . and . . . Say, sonny. . . can you get me a glass of milk?"

"I'll get you a glass of milk if you can show me your bear tag. Otherwise I am going to have to confiscate that bear."

Eddie was quick to agree.

"Never keep your Polident and your Icy Hot on the same shelf," he said later.

The next time Joe went to the memory care center, the manager was on duty and Joe showed her the text of a study that said too much exposure to taxidermy can cause short-term memory loss.

"Next thing you know they'll be saying too much taxidermy causes short-term memory loss," the manager said. And went and got a ladder.



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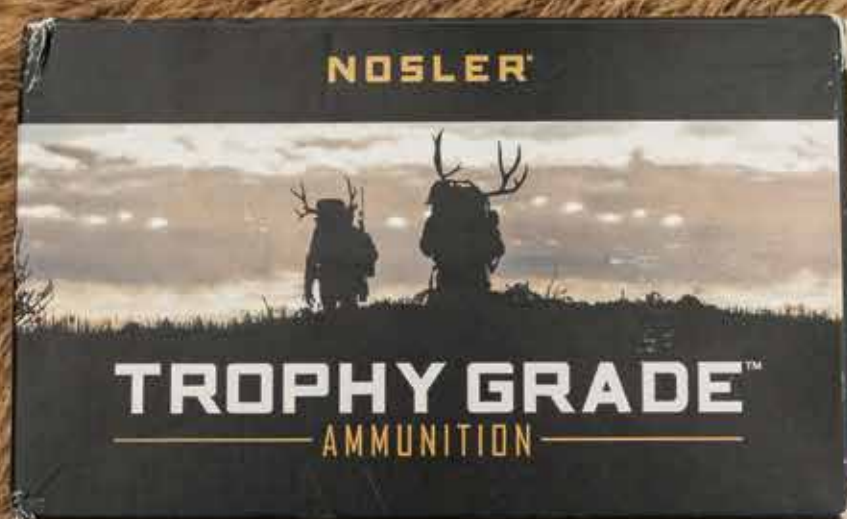
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