

OREGON WILDLIFE

Winter, 1997



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OREGON WILDLIFE

Winter 1997
Vol. 53, No. 3

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Oregon Wildlife (ISSN 0094-7113) is published quarterly by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife at 2501 SW 1st, Portland, Oregon 97201. Volumes 1 through 28 were entitled Oregon Game Commission Bulletin. Oregon Wildlife is circulated free of charge with second class postage paid at Portland, Oregon. Copyright 1992 by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without written permission of the editor.
Readers and POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:

OREGON WILDLIFE
P O Box 59
Portland, OR 97207

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The Cover

It doesn't get much better than this: hunters and dogs enjoy a day chukar hunting near Murderers Creek. *Photo by Pat Wray*

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

New Directions

As the John Day River article on page 10 points out, many of our fish and wildlife issues are as much social in nature as they are biological. In something of a departure from our typical Oregon Wildlife story, the author has focused on people, their perspectives and their beliefs, not ours.

There is much to be learned here because folks quoted in this story are saying many of the same things as other landowners around the state and the nation. Let me share with you what we have learned from the story and what steps we have taken to make changes in our way of doing business.

Some people don't trust government in general and don't believe fish and wildlife agencies are credible.

As an agency, we must continually reaffirm our commitment to good, solid, defensible science. We are advocates for fish and wildlife, but our advocacy must be grounded in science. We must be compassionate in our understanding of the needs of people and helpful, while standing firm on behalf of Oregon's fish and wildlife species.

Our attitude is as important as our program.

The BPA fencing project is successful because Department personnel in the John Day area, such as Tim Unterwegner, Mike Neal and his crew, have been

responsive to the needs and the feelings of the people with whom they work. The simple fact is that our efforts on behalf of fish or wildlife will be more successful with the commitment of landowners and other supportive individuals. They need to know that their opinions matter to us and that we value their involvement as we work together to protect and enhance watersheds, wildlife and fish.

People can study the same situation and hold completely different beliefs about it.

As an agency, we need to be appreciative of other people's beliefs, even if they are different from our own. Science is not the only teacher. We must monitor changes in attitudes about wildlife and land management practices. We know that nothing is certain... and that the best practices of today may give way to a landowner's daily observations tomorrow.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife does not have a monopoly on good ideas or good science. We intend to work as closely as possible with people around the state, supporters or not, to protect our fish and wildlife resources and to do so in a way that takes into account the people who own and manage their lands day in and day out.

Rudy Rosen, Director

WEYERHAEUSER RECEIVES OREGON LANDOWNER OF THE YEAR AWARD

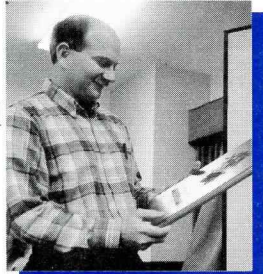
Weyerhaeuser Forestry has received the department's Landowner of the Year Award for its commitment to Oregon's fish, wildlife and the habitats in which they reside.

Rich Wininger, operations manager for Weyerhaeuser's Springfield timberlands unit, received the award from Fish and Wildlife Commission Chairman Jim Habberstad at the Commission meeting in Eugene on November 1.

The award is bestowed annually to the Oregon landowner

whose operations best support fish and wildlife.

In addition to its habitat work, Weyerhaeuser has strongly supported public use of its private



Rich Wininger

lands, as well. The company provides public access wherever and whenever they can without excessive risk of fire, vandalism, litter or safety hazards.

They also provide detailed maps of their tree farms to hunters showing damage areas where deer and elk populations are highest.

GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RELEASED

Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber released his 1997-99 Recommended Budget in early December, giving the public a first glimpse of how he plans to deal with new property tax "cut and cap" initiative passed by voters in November.

The Governor accepted all of ODFW's proposed consolidation strategies, but restored the 10 percent general fund cuts the department proposed and shifted all lottery funded programs to general fund. In addition, he attached a \$1.1 million general fund "add package" to ODFW's budget which would provide 10 new habitat biologists in the field. A \$2.4 million component of the Governor's Investment Budget could add 14 new agency positions to work on the Coastal Salmon Initiative and the Healthy Streams Partnership.

The 1997 Oregon Legislature convenes in January and will consider the Governor's budget proposal at that time.

MULTNOMAH HUNTERS AND ANGLERS RECOGNIZED

The Multnomah Hunters and Anglers have given many years and thousands of hours of volunteer service benefiting the White River Wildlife Area. The department honored the group in October with a plaque, permanently mounted at the area, for their efforts.

Over the group's 40-plus years, they have funded or assisted in numerous projects, from scholarship programs for fish and wildlife majors at Oregon State University, to relocating wildlife, building sheds, guzzlers and feeders, restoring and protecting key habitats and much more. Many thanks!

RULES PROTECTING NATIVE WILDLIFE ADOPTED

In December the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted a set of rules designed to protect native wildlife from exotic animal introductions.

Rules regulate the importation, possession, confinement, transportation and sale of nonnative wildlife in the state. Species which pose a threat to native wildlife fall into a "prohibited" list, meaning they cannot be bought, sold or imported once the rules become effective. People who already possess these animals can continue to breed and sell animals out of the state, but cannot import, sell or trade the animals in Oregon.

Full text of the rules is available on the department's Internet site at "www.dfw.state.or.us".

STRATEGIC OPERATIONAL PLANNING EFFORT NEARS COMPLETION

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is conducting a strategic operational planning effort to establish a focused direction for the department over the next three years.

More than 1,300 people took part in a computerized survey offered at 22 of the department's offices across the state in early December. In addition to the survey, the department held five "focus groups" for a more intensive session to respond to themes and trends identified by the survey respondents. The results will be analyzed over a three-day period in January.

An initial draft of the plan will be presented at the January 23 Commission meeting. Implementation will begin in February.

Suddenly the good news was buzzing around like mosquitoes in a campground. "Great rainfall this year...the potholes are full...waterfowl at near record numbers." "Mild temperatures...good overwinter survival, moderate spring...excellent nesting success, outstanding year for upland birds."

These are the kinds of reports that send hunters to the field. Oregon has always offered outstanding bird hunting but 1996 brought with it strong recoveries of both upland and waterfowl populations which had decreased over the past decade.

There are so many opportunities, in fact, that your main challenge is deciding where to go. How about waterfowling at Summer Lake or Klamath Falls or along the Columbia River or perhaps quail hunting near Madras? How about ruffed grouse hunting in the coast range or pheasants near Vale?

Choices like these are made with difficulty...but they must be made, nonetheless. The bad news is that no matter what choice you make, you won't be able to do everything. The good news is that any choice you make will be a good one.

Welcome to Oregon bird hunting.

A black and white photograph of two hunters standing in a field of tall grass and small trees. Two dogs are running in the foreground. The title 'Oregon Bird Hunting Adventure' is overlaid in large white text.

Oregon Bird Hunting Adventure

by Pat Wray and Randy Henry

Tuesday, November 19—Quail

The hunters emerge from a rainstorm only a little less soaked than their bird dogs. Six inches of snow lie on the ground, packing the sagebrush down into dense lumps.

This is not ideal weather for quail hunting.

Sometime back in July, biologists reported that quail numbers were the best in years throughout eastern Oregon, and the Crooked River National Grasslands south of Madras was no exception. It's a good place to hunt even when early winter storms dump snow and rain on the sage-and-juniper covered hills.

Prineville biologist Meg Eden said the Grasslands held good numbers of birds this year. Hunters now have a leg up finding them using the department's new Gamebird Hunting Guide. Read this, talk to local sport shop owners and other hunters and you'll likely find the quail, she said.

Valley quail are found throughout Oregon, favoring agricultural grass and croplands with good

amounts of brushy cover, weeds and water. They weren't always found in places like the Grasslands, the Willamette Valley and other areas. In Oregon, they originally populated only areas in counties bordering California and Nevada, but were transplanted by early Oregon residents to all corners of the state.

Quail populations statewide are generally stable. But in western Oregon, populations have declined noticeably since the 1970s because of changing agricultural practices that leave few brushy fence rows and little wintertime feed.

With quail, hunters may want to move around if they're not finding birds - especially in extreme weather conditions. Look for the habitat that seems right - the tall grass, the orchards, the fencerows, old farm steads and so forth.

On an extreme day like this, check under your feet. Quail hide in small pockets under the snow-covered sagebrush or grass. It

might take the cold nose of an eager dog to bring the birds out.

And if you do find the quail, be ready. Have extra shells at easy reach, because a large covey generally provides opportunities for



Quail hold tight beneath snow-bent sagebrush and in the juniper trees nearby. Hunters must be ready for explosive flushes with little warning.

multiple shots before they all clear the area.

Then check every tree, every bush, every clump. Believe your dog when she points longingly into that juniper or Russian olive where you're sure nothing is sitting. This year, anyway, the quail are probably there. *RH*

Wednesday, November 20—Chukar

Chukar hunting is a sacrificial, highly emotional, lower extremity activity.

Sacrificial? Sure. Show me a chukar hunter's shotgun and I will show you a weapon whose value has leaked out through the dings and dents and scratches to the point where resale would be a true sacrifice. Put it this way, did you ever see an advertisement for a chukar gun? It would be the equivalent of advertising a pickup which had been used only for pulling stumps.

It's the steep rocky hillsides that do it. Talus slopes and rimrock

combine to ensure that sooner or later shotgun and rock will meet, with predictable results.

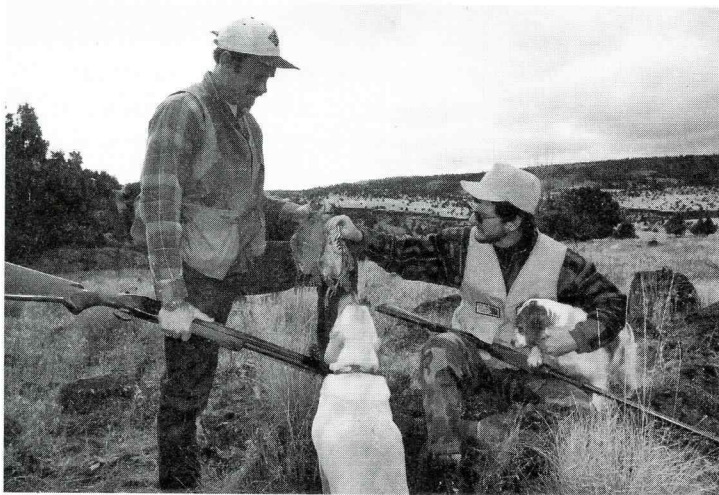
It is chukars' tendency to dwell in this sort of rough, broken country that has limited hunting pressure and allowed the bird to thrive since their first introduction into Oregon in 1951.

Chukar are natives of the Middle East and Southern Asia, the Oregon stock originated in India. They are good sized birds, larger than a Hungarian partridge and smaller than pheasants. They are fine runners, which can make life difficult for hunters and dogs,

especially when just getting up the hill at all is a bit of a chore.

Emotional? You bet. A typical scenario goes like this. You will see or hear birds on a hillside and will start after them. After a half hour climb, and just before you get into range, they will take off and fly across canyon to land on a slope facing you. Their 20 second flight will end only 300 yards away but it will take you the better part of an hour to get there. While you are doing so you will be subjected to a cacophony of chukar sounds which are actually their way of finding

See "Chukars," page 6



One of the benefits of chukar hunting, besides liberal bag limits and the opportunity to get into shape, is the spectacular view from chukar country.

Pat Wray

"Chukars," continued from page 5

each other. Your rising lactic acid level will cause you to interpret their calls as mocking laughter. Even the chukar will easily interpret the sounds you make as cursing.

This has been a good year to hear chukar laugh. They carried over last winter well and had a good spring nesting season as well.

Ken Durbin, upland gamebird program leader, says that in places chukar numbers are outstanding, and almost everywhere in the state the numbers are higher than they have been for several years.

"Weather is the major limiting factor," Durbin explained. "Hunting pressure tends not to be much of a factor unless the birds are

driven by bad weather into low elevation areas where they are easily accessible to many people."

Lower extremity? Chukar hunting will bring to you a heightened awareness of your anatomy, particularly your quadriceps. But toward the end of the day, you may find yourself wishing you could walk uphill more and downhill less, because as much as your legs may ache, the burning, pre-blister feeling on your heels and soles, coupled with the tenderness best described as 'chukar toe,' are far worse as you walk downhill.

Luckily, chukar hunting provides its own relief of such discomforts, with the sweet smell of sage, incredible panoramic views, and even a few birds in the bag to ease the pain. *PW*

Thursday, November 21—Waterfowl

First you've got to carry a few dozen decoys all the way from your rig to the blind, under trees, over railroad tracks, through fences, then you've got to set them out in a special pattern in freezing water and oh, yes...in the

dark. Then you've got to rebuild the blind, and hide everything from above. Then, after sitting and freezing for hours you've got to undo everything, put it away, carry it out, bringing everything you brought plus, hopefully, some

ducks and a few geese, which are amazingly heavy at the end of the day. Then, after you finally get home, you've got to clean the gun, put everything away and dress the birds. And we call this hunting.

An early morning walk along the Columbia River near Boardman can be an exhilarating experience, especially with the aforementioned equipment strapped to your torso somewhere. Look out over the river. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands of ducks in a single raft. Several hundred more are flying within sight, sloping down into protected areas of the river or veering off to one of the many ponds and sloughs that line the river.

Sprinkled across the horizon are dozens of geese as well, singing their way through the air. A few dozen can be seen over the river, landing in protected bays, though many times that number are



Handy Henry

"Get ready! Here they come!" The effort, the suspense and the human-dog connection are as much a part of waterfowling as the shooting.

flying over land, traveling to or from one of the hundreds of irrigated circles that form the primary type of agriculture in the area.

The only ones we see within shooting range come winging their way downriver at an altitude of 3 feet perhaps 30 yards from us. Unfortunately, they do this while the three of us are standing in the river spreading decoys. Their timing is pretty typical. It's either that or appearing while you are attempting a potty break.

For every duck that comes close enough to shoot, we watch

hundreds avoid our blind. It is part of the paradox of waterfowl hunting; each bird you see without shooting is a bit of a disappointment but a wonderful gift, nonetheless.

Here, along the mid-Columbia, it is a gift that is much greater now than it was 50 years ago. The development of irrigated agriculture has provided feeding and nesting habitat for hundreds of thousands of waterfowl that did not exist in this arid, sagebrush and bunchgrass plateau prior to the availability of pumped irrigation.

Essentially, the flyway was shifted to Boardman by the new availability of food. Waterfowl hunting opportunities for Oregonians have increased as a result.

And they are smart waterfowl, too, most are too smart for our decoys and so, with a few ducks to add to the many things that we brought in, we head out, again, under trees, over railroad tracks, through fences and back to the rigs, appreciating all the way the hundreds of ducks and geese speckling the skies. *PW*

Friday, November 22—Pheasant

On this cold, gray November day, the high wheat country south of Ione is crusted over by two inches of snow and freezing rain. All but the south-facing slopes and creek bottoms are coated with ice.

The rolling hills of wheat stubble surround and engulf you. They are one reason pheasants thrive here. The brushy draws are another.

Pheasant populations are good across much of eastern Oregon this year, with some locally heavy populations for hunters willing to do some looking.

A creek bed covered with tall sagebrush looks like good pheasant cover. A young Brittany spaniel charges the brush and soon flushes hens and roosters in all directions. In moments like these, some hunters stand awed, others curse their dog or perhaps their empty gun. The heart always pounds loudly in the midst of these legendary birds.

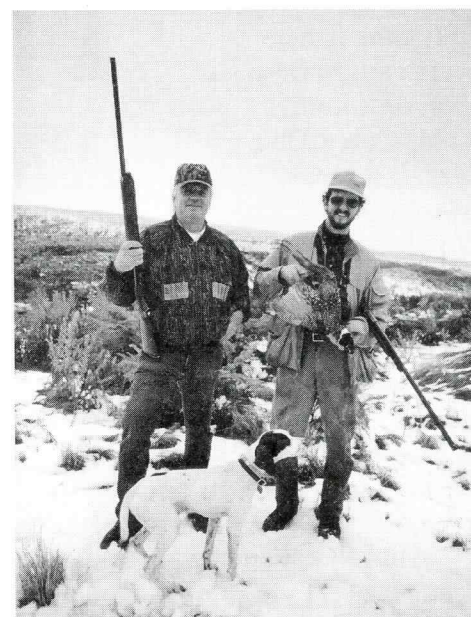
Judge Owen Denny brought the first of the colorful gamebirds to Oregon in 1882 and released them near Albany. Ten years later, some 10,000 pheasants were killed on the opening day of the season in Linn

County alone - many bound for restaurant tables in the big cities.

Ringneck found the primitive farmland of the Willamette Valley a perfect fit and thrived for decades. Small farm fields, numerous brushy fence rows, and inefficient harvest practices left a lot of food in the fields during the winter time. New farming techniques remove weed-infested fence rows and new harvest techniques leave little food in the field. Pheasant numbers in the Willamette Valley are low or non-existent in many areas.

But in eastern Oregon, pheasant numbers remain good. Biologist Kevin Blakely says untilled farmland enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has been good to pheasants in northeast Oregon. The Columbia Basin and farmlands along the lower Malheur and Owyhee River drainages of southeast Oregon offer good hunting, also.

On this day, the Brittany gets a second chance. She scents a pheasant on the wind and dives into a small, dry gully. A big rooster is jammed between rocks in the side of the ditch, hiding. The hunter



Pat Wray

Though ringneck pheasant numbers have declined precipitously in western Oregon in the last 30 years, many parts of eastern Oregon still offer good hunting opportunities.

comes close, the bird flushes. They collect their reward.

The young dog points more pheasants, but none are roosters. A darkening sky signals the end of a good hunt. The Brittany and his hunter are tired but smarter. They now understand why pheasants remain Oregon's most popular upland gamebird. *RH*

Few Oregonians have been lucky enough to see a fisher. In fact, you'd be almost as likely to spot Elvis as a fisher. Unlike Elvis though, fishers are secretive, solitary creatures and when seen, are usually only a fleeting blur of dark fur.

The fisher is an Oregon native that once occurred in forested habitats throughout the state but was never abundant. During the 1913-14 trapping season, for example, only nine fishers were caught from six Oregon counties: Lane, Curry, Douglas, Josephine, Marion and Umatilla. Although their pelts were extremely valuable (often exceeding \$100), relatively few fishers were captured by trappers before the Oregon State Game Commission closed the season in 1936.

After that, fishers were seldom seen. It was thought that predator control efforts (poisoning campaigns aimed at wolves and

coyotes), loss of old forest habitat, and trapping reduced fisher numbers to extremely low levels, but no one really knew for sure. A petition submitted in late 1994 to list the fisher as "threatened" in the western U.S. under the Endangered Species Act has focused renewed

attention on the conservation of fisher populations in Oregon.

Fishers are one of the larger members of the weasel family, Mustelidae. They are a larger, darker version of their cousin, the pine marten, and have a

proportionately longer tail. Although not as big as wolverines, the largest terrestrial members of the weasel family, female fishers weigh about four to five pounds and males weigh eight to 12 pounds. Their weight hardly slows them down though, as they have blazing speed on the ground and can sprint up trees, especially when pursuing a meal. Fishers are fond of a wide variety of foods, including small and medium-sized mammals, birds, insects, fruits, and carrion. One of its claims to fame is the fisher's unique ability to prey upon porcupines, much to a forester's appreciation. This ability made them valu-

able to timber companies in Oregon that were interested in reducing porcupine numbers on commercial timberlands.

In 1961, the Oregon State Game Commission, Weyerhaeuser Timber Corporation, and the USDA Forest Service worked cooperatively to release 24 fishers from British Columbia in Oregon as a means of reducing the number of porcupines that damaged commercial timber. Eleven were released near the Mountain Lakes Wild Area in Klamath County, and 13 were released in the Eagle Cap Wilderness Area in Union and Wallowa counties. While occasional



Linda Fehl

THE FISHER

A Rare Forest Carnivore

by Jeffrey C. Lewis, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
and Keith B. Aubry, U.S.D.A. Forest Service



ODFW

Top: A very lucky shot! This may be the first ever picture of a kit in a den in western North America (Jackson County, Oregon, June 3, 1995).
Left: Release at Buck Lake, Klamath County, 1961.

sightings of fishers occurred after these releases, it appeared unlikely that these fishers survived and repopulated these areas. Consequently, from 1977-1981, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), USDA Forest Service, and a group of timber companies released an additional 24 fishers near the Rogue-Umpqua Divide Wilderness Area in Douglas County. Between 1977 and 1980, 11 British Columbia fishers were released, and in 1981, 13 Minnesota fishers were released. Afterwards, biologists and foresters waited with fingers crossed, and hoped for the best.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, fishers were sighted in areas surrounding the release site. Unfortunately, the only verified reports included a fisher that was hit by a vehicle north of Medford and another that was caught raiding a chicken coop south of Roseburg. In the 1990s however, biologists hoping to detect wolverines on the Rogue River National Forest obtained photos and video footage of fishers at baited camera stations. Having found what appeared to be a small population of fishers, the Pacific Northwest Research Station of the USDA Forest Service (in cooperation with Rogue River National Forest and ODFW) initiated an investigation into the habitat relationships of fishers in southwestern Oregon in March, 1995.

So far, research biologists have been successful in capturing and radio-collaring eight fishers; three adult females (one with three kits), a full grown juvenile female, and four large adult males. The study will seek to identify habitats used by fishers, determine the size of their home ranges and the foods they eat, and evaluate their population status by studying the

reproductive success of females and the survival of radio-collared individuals.

The researchers have found two dens in large logs that an adult female used to house her two kits in while she hunted. Radio-collared fishers have also used logs as resting sites, as well as mistletoe brooms in tree canopies, cavities in live trees, and large, moss-covered branches. The remains of Stellar's jays, woodpeckers, grouse, snowshoe hares, deer, and both tree and ground squirrels have been found




Jeff Lewis

at den and resting sites, indicating that they make up a part of the fisher's diet. The presence of quills in the skin and feces of three of the male fishers provided evidence of porcupine predation as well.

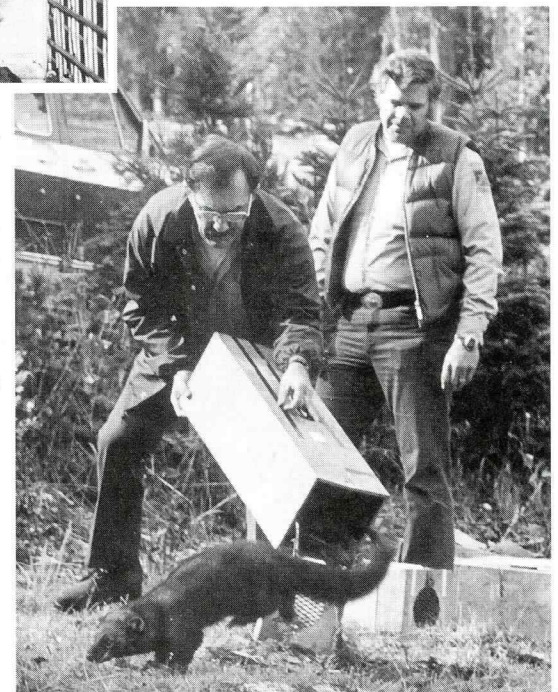
Presently, fishers are known to occur in several areas of southwestern Oregon; however, their occurrence in the northern and central Cascades, the Coast Range, and north-eastern Oregon is uncertain. Consequently, Forest Service biologists have initiated a statewide survey of fisher

sightings, and have received the cooperation of Oregon trappers and hunters in this effort. The response to trapper and hunter questionnaires has provided valuable information about the present distribution of fishers in Oregon.

Rare carnivores like the fisher and the wolverine present wildlife management dilemmas. To conserve these rare members of Oregon's fauna, we need to understand their natural histories. The dilemma is that the rarity of some species hinders our ability to study, and ultimately, understand them. Fortunately, we are starting to learn more about the fishers that presently reside in Oregon, and hopefully, we can prevent them from ever disappearing. 

Left: Mother of kit on preceding page, about to be released after being ear-tagged and radio-collared, September 22, 1995.

Below: ODFW employees release fisher near Cougar Butte, Douglas County, 1981.



ODFW

"...you'd be almost as likely to spot Elvis as a fisher."

THE UPPER MAINSTEM JOHN DAY RIVER

A fencing program revisited

Story by Pat Wray
Photos by Randy Henry

Ten years ago the Bonneville Power Administration introduced a program to landowners along the upper mainstem of the John Day River designed to help re-establish riparian area vegetation and thus improve fish survival and spawning success. Essentially, the BPA offered to build fences along the riparian areas at no cost to the landowner and maintain them for 15 years, also at no cost to the landowner. At that point the landowner would assume responsibility for the fence, and could maintain or remove it, as he or she wished.

From a biologist's perspective, the program has been a solid, if not complete success. Lush vegetation now lines the banks of the river where exclusionary fencing was erected, often in contrast to the stark, shallow, unvegetated riverbanks belonging to landowners

who chose not to participate or apply sound grazing practices. Plant roots have stabilized the riverbanks and fenced portions of the river channel have become deeper and more narrow, with more pools. Insect life abounds in the shaded areas and although no temperature data has been collected in this reach, it is probable that the vegetation and the narrower channel have helped keep the river water cooler than before its growth.

"Figures don't lie but liars do figures. What we should do is let the fish talk—they'll tell us how we're doing."

MARK LAWRENCE

The program has unquestionably done a great deal of good for John Day chinook but it has been as much a social program as a biological one. The program's importance transcends its effect on the fish...and even on the riparian

habitat...it is a microcosm of our world-wide struggle to balance the needs of humans with the limitations of the earth. The program's successes light the way for future efforts. Its failures provide even more important lessons.

We can learn these lessons if we listen to the words of the people there. We may

not agree with everything they say but that is not the point. It is important only that the speakers believe it and that we are listening. Listening has always been the key.

TIM UNTERWEGNER is the district fish biologist in John Day. Two years ago he replaced the legendary Errol Claire. Since taking over he has worked to improve the status of fish in his district and establish a rapport with the landowners in the area.

"Historically, the John Day probably had hundreds of thousands of spring and fall chinook," Unterwegner says. "Fall chinook were victims of low water and high temperatures brought on first by the massive overgrazing by sheep herds near the turn of the century and then by extensive water diversions from the river for irrigation. Spring chinook have persisted because they migrate when flows

are higher in May and June and because of the lack of major dams along the river. The John Day is the longest free flowing river in the Columbia River basin.

"But even the spring chinook have had a rough go of it. During the 1950s much of the river bottom was dredged for gold. Pond flushings from mines and mills helped to make the river extremely inhospitable for juvenile fish. In 1959 the redd count was near zero in the upper mainstem. After the '64 flood the Army Corps of Engineers came in and channelized much of the river; as a result it became more of a ditch and lost much of its habitat diversity.

"During that period heavy equipment was used extensively for in-river work. In the last 15 years there's been a real turnaround



Mark and Diane Lawrence

in the mindset of the local folks about that sort of thing, much of it resulting from Errol's efforts.

"And of course we've got the BPA program, which has provided fencing for about 60 percent of the mainstem John Day from the town of John Day upstream. We think it has done great things, the first fences were built in 1985 and since 1986 the redd count has averaged

"I didn't take part because I didn't want to lose control of my land." JOHN COOMBS

10.8 redds per mile, with highs of 19 in 1987 and 17.5 in 1996. Between 1959 and 1987 only two years exceeded 10 redds per mile.

"We wish we could have more of the river fenced but each piece that we do contributes to the health of the entire river. A stretch of river with good vegetative cover will be cooler than without vegetation, and that cool water will be passed on downstream."

JOHN COOMBS is known as a good land manager. Most of Coombs' riparian area remains unfenced but is well vegetated anyway.

"You have to spend a little more time moving cattle around, if you don't have fence," he says.

Coombs chose not to be part of the BPA program primarily because he doesn't like the idea of government involvement in his ranch.

"I didn't take part because I didn't want to lose control of my land. I didn't want them to be able to come on my land whenever they wanted to. If I needed fence I'd put it up myself."

He maintains his own riparian areas in a way that brings smiles to the faces of fish biologists but does so for his own reasons. He is not sure it's necessary.

"I don't think we really know what the salmon need. I haven't seen any definitive proof that cut

banks and overgrazed areas are bad for salmon. Maybe they provide the stream diversity that everyone says is important."

MARK LAWRENCE and his wife Diane bought a ranch whose previous owner had taken part in the BPA project. It had fences. The Lawrence's run cattle on it year round. Mark studies the river carefully and reads widely. He

became concerned in 1993 when OSU researchers were snorkeling in pools inhabited by adult spring chinook. He noticed fish moving out of the river and into tributaries where there had not been fish for many years.

"I think those fish were just being harassed out of the areas where they wanted to stay," he says. In an effort to protect the fish, Lawrence refused the researchers access to the river through his land. He is uneasy about the results of research as well.

"Figures don't lie but liars do figures. What we should do is let the fish talk—they'll tell us how we're doing."

Lawrence appreciates the fence as a management tool but remains unconvinced of its importance to the salmon.

"I really only need a fence on one side of the river to control the cows. You know, salmon need gravel for spawning and gravel is recruited into the river through erosion. Maybe we should appreciate the ranchers who let their cattle graze the riverbanks because the erosion that takes place puts gravel into the river."

Lawrence worries that urban people living in a service-based economy do not understand the realities of rural economic life.

The Price of Success

The Bonneville Power Authority fencing program on the John Day, like many other programs around the state, is designed to keep domestic cattle away from stream-banks so that vegetation can re-establish itself, providing soil stability, shade and other benefits to the stream and its inhabitants.

But sometimes success is its own kind of problem...and those problems are just around the corner on the upper mainstem John Day.

"I look out my living room window a ways upriver and the water is level with my eyes. That makes you think a little bit about the possibilities of a flood," says Alan Jacobs.

On his land, as on that of other program participants, cottonwoods and willows have grown tall and broad, some leaning out across the river. These trees, and other vegetation which have been allowed to grow by the fences, have helped to rechannelize the river, deepening and narrowing the channel. But they have also made the river more susceptible to flooding in the winter and spring, when heavy water flows combine with freezing temperatures, especially if one or more large trees should fall across the river.

"He's right," said district fish biologist Tim Unterwegner. "In some of those conditions, the only thing missing from an equation for disaster is an obstruction in the river and one of those large trees could certainly fill the bill."

"Prior to white settlement, when the river overflowed, it simply recharged the wetland that surrounded it. But these wetlands have been converted to pastures and houses have been built on them. It is not realistic to think that we could return to those days. People have a right to live...and to make a living. We're looking at a variety of management options, which might include some selective burning and other ideas."

And so Unterwegner, Jeff Neal and the landowners are searching for a balance between the thick streamside vegetation before settlement and the raw, heavily grazed moonscapes of recent memory. A balance between the needs of fish and of people.

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"People need to realize that our economy is natural resource-based. If a dollar is not based on something being mined, cut, grown or caught, it's not a real dollar. I'd like for people to realize that resource-based, extractive activities do not necessarily destroy habitat.

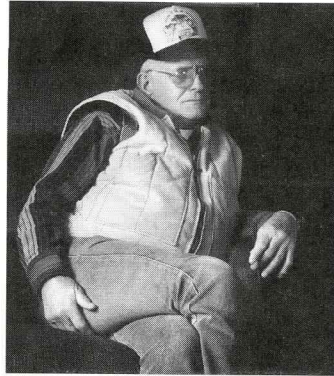
"We need to take care of the salmon but we need to leave room for people as well. Folks have to realize that the maximum number of fish may not be the same as the optimum number."

MIKE SMITH is aggressively protective of his land and his rights as a landowner. It is fair to say that he is not a fan of government in general or the Department of Fish and Wildlife in particular. He chose not to participate in the BPA fencing program and sees no reason to second-guess his decision, although he says that if he kept cattle in those pastures all year instead of just in the winter, "I'd probably have to fence the river."

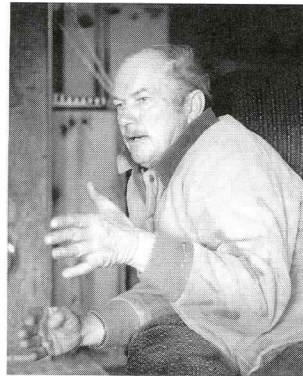
"We get blamed for the raw banks and erosion when it's actually high water flows and floods that do the damage. Besides, salmon need the gravel that comes from the raw banks. They like it on my place. I love to watch them spawning; I check them several times a day.

"People talk about how willows and cottonwoods cool the water but they don't. Water moving through shady areas doesn't get cooled down. And it doesn't get warmed up either. Water is moving in the river fast enough that the sunlight doesn't warm it up.

"The thing that bothers me is that we've got good habitat and plenty of fish and the people that



John Coombs



Mike Smith

are raising hell have never been here to look around. They don't know anything about our situation."

ALAN JACOBS bought his place along the John Day after the fences had been put in. He inherited the fence program from the previous owner.

"I know there are a lot of people resistant to this program but I think it's a great management tool. The

"The thing that bothers me is that we've got good habitat and plenty of fish and the people that are raising hell have never been here to look around."
MIKE SMITH

fences don't just keep cattle out of the river, they also allow us to more closely control their movement as well. We certainly couldn't have afforded to put up the fences ourselves.

The ODFW folks not only put it up but they maintain it as well and we appreciate their attitude about it. We've had some problems. My cattle will occasionally leak through the fence and end up in the river. They're contrary like that but the folks from ODFW don't harass me about it, they just let me know, and if I can't get away to take care of it, they work with me to fix the problem. Any number of things can go wrong when you're trying to keep cattle from where they want to be but no matter what the situation is, the ODFW people always call and

ask permission to come on the land and they do things right the first time.

"I feel like their attitude is as important as the project is...if we're working together we can make things work. At the same time, I don't want to give up my claim to the land.

"We make our living out of this dirt and what grows out of it—we treat it like its our own and like we need it to be in good shape next year and the year after that...because we do.

JEFF NEAL is the fish habitat biologist in charge of implementation of the fencing program. Like the two men who work for him maintaining fence, Neal's position is funded by the BPA. With the exception of a two-year break Neal has been involved in the program since its inception.

He knows that the success of the program depends on his ability to connect both personally and professionally with the landowners.

"We've got 100 miles of fence on 52 miles of stream bank and there are about 320 more miles of stream that should be fenced.

"It's important that we not allow the program to be a liability to the landowner. Once we get them in the program it's a give and take relationship. We try to do what's necessary to make it the kind of program they will recommend to their friends."

Like most human activities, the fencing project along the upper mainstem John Day River is evaluated differently by different people. In the end, it will be judged, as Mark Lawrence recommends, by what the fish tell us. So far, at least, they seem to be telling us that they like it. 🐟

Winter Backyard Fishing

by John M. Yaskovic, Angler Education Coordinator
Illustrations by Phil Fehrenbacher

How to teach your youngsters fishing skills this winter so that you can fish this spring

Ahh, daydreams! Here you are in the middle of the winter dreaming about fishing side by side with your son or daughter this coming spring. Both of you are soaking up the warming spring sun and skillfully casting for that elusive trout or bass.

Reality check! Actually, this spring will probably find you on the riverbank with a knot the size of Rhode Island at your feet and your son or daughter thinking wistfully about computer games.

Sound familiar? Isn't fishing suppose to be a fun, recreational activity for the whole family? Well, here's a solution to make that initial outing a pleasure for both parents and kids. Teach your kids fishing skills this winter, in your living room or backyard between storms.

CASTING THE PINK PEARL

Tie on a "Pink Pearl" type eraser made of soft rubber. Use a pocket knife or other tool to bore

two holes in each end. When the line eventually tears through one end, tie up the other, when both ends wear through, recycle the eraser for school use. This eraser "casting plug" is very soft and

much safer than using a lead sinker.

Teach your youngster to cast the eraser in your backyard or other safe place.

Use old bicycle tubes or Hula Hoops as targets.

HANGERS TO HOOKS

Cut or saw through a heavy duty plastic hanger to make a giant hook. Drill a small hole through the top end of the plastic hook. Teach youngsters to tie anglers knots (Palomar and Improved Clinch knot) by using ordinary "sash" cord and the plastic hook made from the hanger. Sash cord, the small diameter rope used to pull home drapes, is available for little cost at every hardware store.



For a free comic book showing how to tie angler knots write to:

ODFW, Angler Education, Fishing Comic book, P.O. Box 59, Portland, Oregon 97207.

TACKLE BOX SHUFFLE: trout to the left, bass to the right

Help your youngster organize his or her tackle box by splitting the trays into trout or panfish sections. Explain the different baits designed to attract specific fish - trout like flies, flashy small lures etc. while bass tend to hit larger plugs and lures. Use Styrofoam packing "peanuts" to imbed the hooks for safety.

This is also a great time to teach youngsters about fish identification and the ethics of fishing. Take time to review the fish regulations concerning catch limits and other rules regarding your favorite fishing place.

Make your dreams of fishing with your young son or daughter come true by practicing your fishing skills in your backyard this winter.



Oregon's Premier Furbearer Gives Salmon A Hand

by Randy Henry



ODFW

We call Oregon the "Beaver State," and indeed beavers permeate much of our history and popular culture. We have towns named after beavers, creeks named after beavers, college mascots that are beavers, and a state flag with a beaver proudly displayed on one side.

Beavers have something in common with another state icon - the salmon. Their relationship is intertwined in ways biologists are coming to value. Some biologists believe beavers are important in helping Oregon's beleaguered coastal coho survive and thrive in the future.

A Brief Beaver History

As far back as 1778, trapping expeditions into the western United States found gold in the form of plentiful beavers. In the years from 1834 to 1837, pelts from 405,472 beaver from Oregon and southwest Washington were shipped to Europe through Fort Vancouver.

"That extremely heavy trapping effort almost eliminated beaver in Oregon by the early 1900s," said Larry Cooper, furbearer biologist

for the department. "Fortunately a few remained. In 1932 populations had rebounded somewhat and the first controls protecting beavers were put in place by the legislature."

In the early 1940s, biologists trapped and relocated 2,000 to 3,000 beaver across the state. "In fact, they were so successful in relocating beavers that the state hired 16 trappers to handle a growing number of damage complaints across the state," said Cooper. In 1951, the Oregon Fish and Game Commission set a three month recreational harvest season on beavers, but each beaver had to be tagged, each tag cost \$1, and each trapper was limited to 100 beavers per year.

The department removed the tagging requirement in 1979 and licensed trappers now have a four-month season. However, pelt prices are low and fewer trappers continue their practice, so harvest rates declined.

Fish-Friendly Critter

Salmon and beaver have been living together in coastal streams for thousands of years, says Mario Solazzi, fisheries researcher for the

department. Biologists once believed that beaver dams blocked fish passage, so dams were routinely removed. Research eventually discovered that beaver dams routinely blow out during the high flows when coho travel to the river's headwaters to spawn. When flows decrease, beavers repair their dams and coho young end up with excellent habitat in which to grow and thrive.

Solazzi worked on studies in the 1980s that confirmed juvenile coho salmon routinely use this type of habitat. "Beavers have a profound effect on the riparian area surrounding their ponds and can dramatically alter the water flow and storage patterns of a stream," said Solazzi. "These are things the salmon have evolved in and need to survive."

Department fisheries biologist Bob Buckman routinely works with central-coast timberland owners who have beavers and salmon on their lands. He believes that beavers perform an important function that is critical to salmon. "A problem we have with fish habitat in tributary streams is that the streams have been cleaned out of large woody materials," says Buckman.

"We have a deficiency of pool habitat in many streams."

Buckman looks at beavers as cheap labor. "We spend a lot of time and effort moving these large pieces of wood into waterways to provide fish habitat. Beavers do it for free in the same way they've always done it and on a much larger geographic scale," says Buckman.

For the last year, Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber has directed state agencies to work together to develop a plan to rebuild Oregon's coastal salmon populations. Called the Coastal Salmon Restoration Initiative, the plan was submitted in October to the National Marine Fisheries Service as a way to recover coho populations being considered for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act.

As part of the Initiative, fishery and wildlife biologists came together to discuss beaver management and address some key questions people were beginning to ask.

Why Continue Trapping Beavers?

Industrial timberland owners, like other private and public land managers, face many challenges during the year. One of those is beavers that find culverts handy places to anchor wood to build a dam. But when flows become high,

the back-pressure and overflow conditions combine to blow the culvert out, destroying the road and releasing silt into the river system.

In some cases, beaver find young timber plantations a handy, tasty food source. Those tender, young trees just off the stream bank can be a temptation too big to resist. In addition, recreational trapping of beavers is a legitimate, though shrinking, sport managed by the department.

Through discussions fostered by the Salmon Restoration Initiative, department fisheries and wildlife biologists agreed to disagree on several issues, such as how much unpopulated beaver habitat there is out there, and how relocating beavers would help salmon. They did agree on a common sense approach to work together for the benefit of salmon.

"In areas where we think beavers are beneficial to fish, we've informed landowners of these benefits and have encouraged them to solve the problem in ways other than removing beavers," said Buckman. "Many industrial timberland owners are very interested in restoring coho habitat, so they are willing to take those steps. For instance," said Buckman, "they may replace culverts with bridges

that aren't affected by beavers. In some cases, they may choose to simply not expect a conifer plantation to flourish in an area where beavers are active."

Solazzi says there isn't much information on beaver abundance, but biologists are now recording beaver structures during annual stream surveys in an effort to help understand where there are vacant habitats and where excessive beaver numbers may be hurting salmon habitat. Biologists agree that transplanting beavers is tricky - it must be done at the right time of year and in the right habitat or the beavers simply migrate out. Larry Cooper has talked with trappers who pursue beavers along the coast. "They are willing to cooperate in any way they can - by live-trapping beavers for transplant to other areas, or by voluntarily staying out of key tributaries," said Cooper. "However, we believe that much of the good quality beaver habitat is already at capacity, so transplanting a beaver from one drainage to another could actually be damaging by creating a high population, by pitting one beaver against another for limited space, introducing disease or influencing genetics. It's not as easy as it seems and it's not a step to be taken lightly."

Because so few people trap recreationally now, Cooper sees no measurable benefit in prohibiting beaver trapping. But he does echo Buckman's sentiments of working together and trying new approaches. "This is an area where fisheries and wildlife biologists have some differing views, but that doesn't preclude a cooperative effort. Managing beavers in a way that is sensitive to the needs of coho salmon will benefit us all."



ODFW

Beaver ponds like this are not an uncommon sight in Oregon's forest lands.

Oregon's Wildlife Look to You For Help



Baby Black-crowned Night Herons

Make your mark for Oregon's nongame wildlife

Contact ODFW for a year's subscription to *WILD FLYER* newsletter if you:

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- donate \$5 or more directly to the "ODFW Nongame Fund"

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