

# OREGON WILDLIFE

Spring 1995





# OREGON WILDLIFE

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Jim Gladson, Editor  
Pat Wray, Managing Editor  
Randy Henry, Staff Writer  
Kay Barton, Graphic Artist

Reader comments are welcome. Send to P O Box 59, Portland, OR 97207.

## The Cover

A Rocky Mountain bighorn ram watches over his domain from a mountainside in Alberta, Canada. Photo by Randy Henry.

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## Care Enough To Get Involved

Every one of us cares deeply about something. Our country, our family, our religion, our land, our culture. And for those things we make extra efforts to keep them healthy, strong and safe. We volunteer at our children's schools, we willingly serve in our nation's military, we work at and contribute to our churches, we participate in celebrations designed to preserve our cultures.

We do those things because we care, because for one reason or another we feel a debt, because in a very real but undefinable sense, we want to give something back. We are committed.

In the realm of fish and wildlife resources, commitment is the difference between simple management and true stewardship. Anyone can care about fish and wildlife. Caring is simple. But getting something positive done requires commitment. And commitment requires a personal investment of time, energy and faith in the future.

That combination is personified in the story on page 10 about Chuck Woosley. Woosley and thousands of others like him are putting their effort...and a lot of it, where their hearts are.

The Department keeps track of how many hours volunteers spend assisting our work for Oregon's fish and wildlife. In 1994, that total was more than 200,000 hours. That is the equivalent of nearly 100 full-time, 12-month jobs, or over ten percent of the agency's permanent, salaried workforce.

In an era of industrial strength fiscal belt tightening — when funding for our most important programs is at risk — volunteers helping fish and wildlife management and education efforts may very well hold the key to successful implementation of our programs.

The dedication of Chuck Woosley and other volunteers reflects their caring and commitment to Oregon's natural resources, and serves as a beacon to others who may wish to lend a hand. If there were words in that beacon, they would say, "Caring, without involvement, is not enough — join us!"

Rudy Rosen, Director

## Oops!

As several of our readers have pointed out, the photograph in our last issue of a bird caught in a mist net was not, as we claimed, a black-capped chickadee. It was in fact, an Oregon junco. Thanks for your attention.



# "UPDATE"

## Nehalem Man Is "Landowner Of The Year"

**P**aul McCracken, a timberland owner along the North Fork Nehalem River in northwest Oregon, was awarded the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's "Landowner Of The Year" award during the March 22 commission meeting in Portland.

Commissioners cited his dedication to solving problems, to foster new ideas and to work, cooperate and debate resources issues that lead toward resolutions which greatly benefit fish and wildlife on the north Oregon coast.

This is the second time the award has been given. It was awarded to Dick and Virginia Wilkinson, of Heppner, in 1994 for projects benefiting wildlife on their ranch. The award comes from the department's effort to work more closely with landowners and recognize their valuable efforts.

McCracken has carried out numerous habitat improvement projects along Gods Valley Creek and designed a technique

to remove trapped hatchery coho and steelhead from the North Fork Falls fishway. In his position as a board member for the Oregon Wildlife Heritage Foundation, McCracken served as liaison with the department on a major habitat restoration project.

McCracken has also been an active member in the Nehalem River Basin Plan political action committee.

As McCracken received the award, he thanked the department for providing expertise and direction when needed, for being willing to listen and "argue" and to try new approaches in working with landowners to protect fish and wildlife resources in Oregon.



*Paul McCracken*

## National Wildlife Diversity Funding Initiative

**T**he International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) has launched a national campaign to secure substantial funding for nongame and wildlife diversity programs in all 50 states. The National Wildlife Diversity Funding Initiative could be before Congress as early as 1995.

Patterned after the Pittman-Robertson program, which supports game and sport fish programs, the Initiative would generate funds through a user-pay benefit funding mechanism targeted to reach outdoor enthusiasts and nongame programs. A surcharge of five percent or less would be placed on the wholesale value of a variety of outdoor merchandise, such as binoculars, birdfeeders, tents, field guides and film. Should the initiative be adopted, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife could receive \$2-10 million annually for conservation, education and recreation programs outlined in its Wildlife Diversity Plan.

Additional information will be found in future issues of Oregon Wildlife, or can be obtained by calling the Wildlife Diversity Program office at (503) 229-5454.

## Former Fish and Wildlife Commissioner Louisa Bateman Passes On

**S**taff of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife regret the recent passing of Louisa Bateman, the first female Fish and Wildlife commissioner.

Bateman, from Klamath Falls, served two terms as a commissioner during the 1970s and was widely respected for her strongly environmental stance.

"She was a very devoted commission member who fostered the doctrine of environmental truth," said longtime commissioner Phil Schneider. "We will all miss her."

## Internet Savvy Folks Find Outdoor Info Online

**H**undreds of people each week are tapping into Oregon Online, a computer service where the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife places hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing reports each week, as well as information releases, text from newsletters, magazines and more.

A person must have a computer, modem and Internet access to get to the information. Internet access is available through numerous online services, such as Compuserve, America Online, Prodigy and others, or through many local service providers like Teleport, Delphi and Compass.

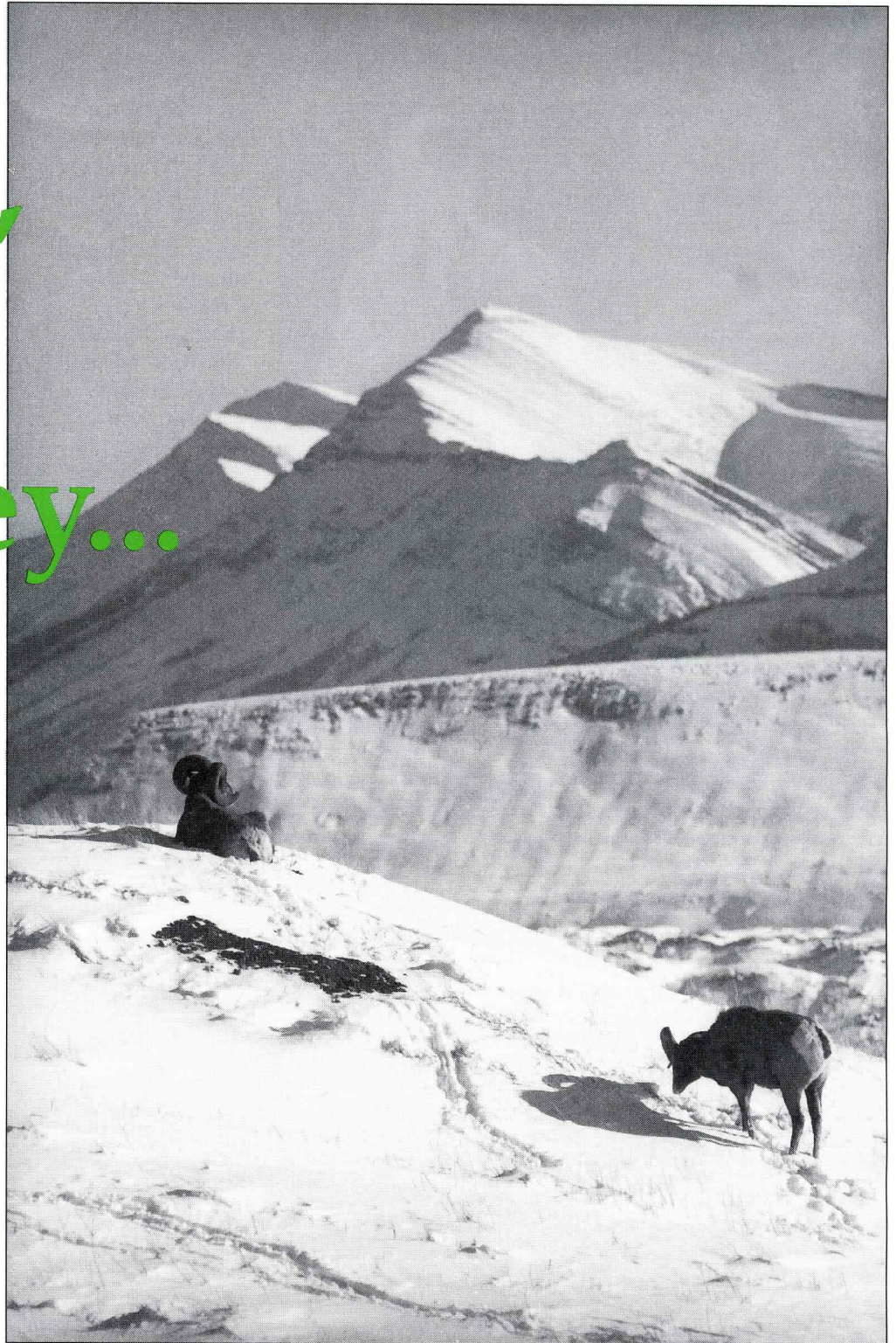
Oregon Online is a cooperative effort among many state agencies, with data and text files about forestry, agriculture, business, employment, legislature and much more. The electronic address for Oregon Online is "gopher.state.or.us" (no quotes). Users with World Wide Web access can access the information at "html:/odfw.state.or.us".



# Big Horns, Long Journey...

*Alberta  
Bighorns  
Come to  
Oregon*

*Story and Photos by  
Randy Henry*



*Bighorns bask in warm Alberta sunshine at the Cardinal River Coal, Ltd. Mine.*



This is rugged country - perhaps some of the most rugged in all of Oregon. High cliffs, boulder-strewn hillsides and deep canyon walls are cut sporadically with small and large patches of lush grass.

A visitor here two hundred years ago would have seen a similar sight, but with the addition of numerous small bands of bighorn sheep. Perhaps 15,000 populated both sides of North America's deepest river cut, the Snake River Hells Canyon.

are doing well. An aggressive trap-and-transplant program has brought bighorns in from other states, relocated their burgeoning offspring to new areas, and established a growing statewide population of nearly 3,000. In just the last few years, bighorns have been introduced into the lower Deschutes and John Day rivers and are reportedly doing well. Biologists this January transplanted California bighorns from Hart Mountain in southeast Oregon to Devils Garden,

and veterinarian checks," said Anglin. "We did a lot of negotiating and worked hard to reduce the stress on the bighorns as much as possible."

The sheep Smith offered to Coggins were part of a rapidly growing herd on Cardinal River Coal, Ltd. land near Hinton, Alberta. Under Canadian laws, the mine has successfully rehabilitated large portions of the open pit coal mine into grasslands for wildlife use. Thanks to the grass, bighorn populations soared from 200

*"We'll be fine," said Coggins a few moments later. "I never run out of gas."  
But there's a first time for everything.*

But for decades, the canyon was devoid of bighorns. Despite their ability to jump and run along cliffs impassible by most animals, bighorns couldn't compete with humans and their quest to conquer the land. A 1930s statewide biological survey relates stories about sheepherders killing bighorns on sight out of fear that they would compete with or even kill domestic sheep. Disease brought by settler's livestock killed thousands of bighorns. Competition from other livestock took traditional habitat out of their reach, too, and hunters found the bighorns an easy target before laws could be enacted to protect them.

The pioneering mindset of the day was painting a new picture of the land, and bighorns simply didn't fit in. California and Rocky Mountain bighorns were extinct in Oregon by the 1940s.

A different mindset exists today. With the help of sport groups, private landowners, volunteers and concerned public agencies, the Oregon Game Commission began reintroducing bighorns successfully to the state in the 1970s and into the Snake River canyon in the 1980s.

Thanks to these and ongoing efforts, populations at Hart Mountain, the Steens Mountains and other areas

east of Fort Rock, where bighorns haven't been seen in almost a century.

But the small bands of Rocky Mountain bighorns transplanted along the Snake River in recent years needed a boost. "This area offers tremendous potential," said department biologist Vic Coggins. "This could sustain probably the largest population in Oregon."

While attending the Northern Wild Sheep and Goat Council in early 1994, Coggins announced his request for 50 Rocky Mountain bighorns to help boost the Snake and other herds. His request was answered by an old friend, Kirby Smith, of Alberta Fish and Wildlife in Canada. The stock was the same as the very first Rocky Mountain bighorns introduced to Oregon in the 1970s.

### **The Journey Takes Shape**

With the initial contact made, department biologist Ron Anglin stepped in to begin planning a trip through rivers of bureaucracy and mountains of paperwork.

"We had a lot of work to do to get this trip organized. Every jurisdiction has its own rules of transport, its own import and export permit process, its own requirements for biological tests

in 1985 to more than 500 in 1994, despite hunting seasons and transplants to Nevada.

Cost of the transplant project was estimated at \$15,000 - no small amount. Such projects have in the past been paid for with funds from bighorn sheep tags the department auctioned or raffled. These funds, totalling \$150,000 in 1994, have given a huge boost to the program in recent years, said Anglin.

"But this project is unique," said Anglin, "It was funded entirely by volunteers. A Medford outfitter sponsored a fund raiser and individuals bid on the right to sponsor sheep. They raised \$15,000 specifically for this project." In addition, said Anglin, Mrs. Estel Vaughn helped fund the effort in honor of her late husband, Dr. Kenneth Vaughn. She wanted to leave a lasting memorial to him that would really embody how he felt about sheep."

### **The Journey Begins**

The Oregon crew left La Grande at 5 a.m. Sunday, February 5 heading to Hinton, Alberta via Cranbrook, B.C. Two volunteers, Holly Akinson and Keith Garroult, two U.S. Forest Service biologists, Cheri Mennell and



Tim Schommer accompanied Anglin, Coggins, and department biologist Dick Humphreys.

\*\*\*

*We didn't expect a snow storm. The day before had been so nice, and weather reports looked good. But here in the middle of Jasper National Park, the magnificent grandeur of the Rocky Mountains was lost in the heavy gray clouds and large snow flakes.*

*"We're below a quarter tank..." biologist Vic Coggins radioed to the other*

orientation and video showed people how to capture and process the sheep.

"This method of trapping worked extremely well because of the large concentration of sheep on the area and their tolerance for human activity," said Anglin. More than 200 bighorns, including a dozen or more mature rams and many lambs, were under or near the net which was draped over a winter feed site. Nearly 100 were caught when the net fell.

\*\*\*

*60 men and women converged on the struggling mass.*

*The work was underway.*

\*\*\*

"We let all the mature rams go. They just don't travel well and they often wander when released in a new area," said Anglin. "And Alberta Fish and Wildlife had many bighorns tagged and fitted with radio collars as part of a migration study, so we released them, also."

Biologists carefully processed each bighorn, taking blood, attaching an eartag, fitting certain animals with radio collars and checking for injuries or signs of stress. A mix of young rams, lambs and ewes were sorted into the three stock trailers. Anglin and Coggins had figured two days of trapping with 25 sheep each day. Forty-nine were trailered by day's end, so they decided to move ahead of schedule and release the sheep early.



*Big rams were carefully untangled and released.*

*...Mature rams stood on hind legs and pushed forward as 60 men and women converged on the struggling mass.*

*The work was underway.*

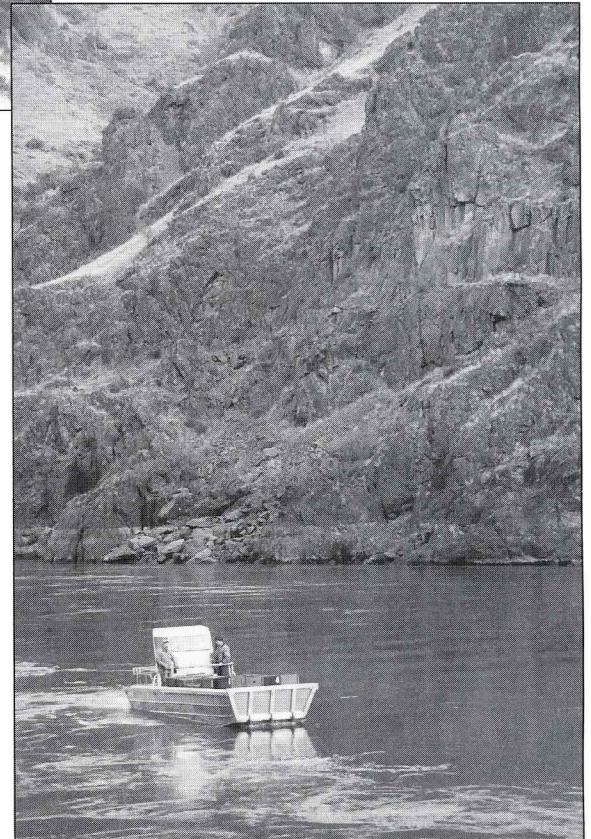
three vehicles in the caravan. "So are we," came another voice over the radio. Few gas stations in the park are open in the winter, and the crew still had 100 miles to go. "We'll be fine," said Coggins a few moments later. "I never run out of gas."

*But there's a first time for everything.*

\*\*\*

By Tuesday morning, the crew was at the open pit coal mine ready for action. Nearly 50 employees of Jasper National Park and Alberta Fish and Wildlife came to help. A brief

!!Kapowwww!! Like a rifle shot, the loud crack seared through a crystal clear Rocky Mountain morning. Blasting caps severed ties dropping a large net the size of a small circus tent on nearly 100 bighorn sheep feeding on the hay below the net. Suddenly trapped, the bighorns surged in all directions, tearing at the net and quickly becoming entangled. Mature rams stood on hind legs and pushed forward as



*Bighorns about to land at Jim Creek on the Snake River.*



## *This was the moment the trip was all about. Our journey was over, and their's had just begun.*

With blood serum samples in hand, Anglin and three others began a 500 mile drive to Lethbridge, Alberta. Stars shone brightly, obscured only by a fiery display of northern lights.

They arrived about 8:30 a.m. at an Agriculture Canada office where the samples would be tested for brucellosis. All samples must test negative before the United States Department of Agriculture would allow entry into the U.S.

\*\*\*

*Twenty-eight hours is a long day. A lot of miles had passed under our tires, and now, with six hours to wait while Canadian technicians test 49 bighorn sheep blood samples for disease, four of us lay exhausted in a hotel room in the middle of a sunny Alberta day. Snoring. Waiting for results.*

*At 3 p.m., the phone rings loudly and Ron Anglin quickly grabs for the receiver. "Excellent! Thanks. We'll be right over," he says. As he hangs up the phone, he clenches a fist and says, "Let's Go!"*

\*\*\*

All samples tested clean, and the group continued on to Cranbrook, British Columbia to meet with the caravan of stock trailers.

Except for running out of gas in Jasper National Park, the trip had gone extremely well. Even the border crossing went smoothly, taking less than an hour. The only significant problem on the entire trip was the death of bighorn ewe number 29, somewhere between Bonners Ferry, Idaho, and Baker County. "Capturing and moving sheep can be stressful, and bighorns are susceptible to a

condition called 'capture myopathy'," said Anglin. He was saddened by the loss, but having 48 sheep remain healthy at release time was more important.

Dick Humphreys released his load of ten bighorns at Sheep Mountain in Baker County. Vic Coggins took his trailerload to Cottonwood

trip was all about. Our journey was over, and their's had just begun.

### **A Perfect Place**

"This is beautiful, perfect bighorn habitat. It has probably the most potential of any habitat in Oregon," said Anglin while driving back to La Grande Friday night. "We have a lot

of high hopes for these animals."

Like all releases in Oregon, the Snake River bunch faces some formidable foes - some natural and some not.

The shoreline just downriver of Jim Creek was pockmarked with cougar tracks. And as sure-footed as bighorns are, they - especially the young ones - sometimes fall.

"Mortality can be

very high on these initial transplants," said Coggins.

Another problem is disease, both natural and from domestic livestock. Coggins and Anglin specifically chose this portion of the Snake River as a release site because no domestic sheep herds exist nearby. Bighorn encounters with domestic sheep are often deadly for bighorns because they have no natural immunity to the disease pasteurella, which is common among domestics.

But most of the adult ewes released are pregnant, meaning the herd will produce lambs this spring. Barring serious drought, high predation or other problems, the thousands of rafters, anglers, hunters and tourists who visit Hells Canyon each year will have a new and still-rare sight to behold.

Call them, "Oregon bighorns." ■



*Crates are opened and bighorns released.*

Creek, a tributary of Joseph Creek in Wallowa County. Biologists from the department and the U.S. Forest Service loaded the remaining 23 sheep into crates at Heller Bar on the Snake River. They placed the crates on a large jet boat, then carefully hauled the delicate cargo upriver to the mouth of Jim Creek.

Anglin had his concerns about hauling the sheep on a noisy jetboat, but everything went perfectly. "The sheep looked good, they seemed to settle right in and some even began grazing shortly after release," noted Anglin.

After six days and 2,000 miles, the crew was tired and ready to go home. Still, the volunteers and biologists lingered, watching the bighorns disperse into the rugged canyon side and settle in. This was the moment the





# Dealing with Wildlife in the Urban Environment

by Holly Michael

**A**s Oregon's human population grows, space left for wildlife shrinks, especially in urban areas. When their habitat and food disappear, "critters" look elsewhere for food and shelter...sometimes that means your attic, crawlspace or garage. So, here are some tips on dealing with wildlife around your home and property.

## How do I avoid problems with urban wildlife?

### DO:

- Critter-proof your home before the wildlife moves in.
- Think like a critter as you walk around your house and yard. Look for snug spots out of the rain that are accessible to an animal. Your eaves and attic look good to squirrels and raccoons. Skunks burrow under porches and woodpiles. Look for small openings, like foundation gaps or unscreened vents. Seal those openings before critters move in. Use durable materials like wire mesh, plywood or bricks.
- Provide alternative shelter and nesting locations. Your local Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife office has plans and ideas for houses and nesting locations for birds and other wildlife species.

### DON'T:

- Accidentally attract unwanted pests. Pet food left outside and unprotected garbage will attract wildlife.

## *I've already got a critter in my house, now what do I do?*

### DO:

- Allow it to leave. If the animal is loose in a room, open a window or door and leave for awhile. The animal will usually get out as soon as possible.
- Use humane traps. Some ODFW offices will loan traps to capture a pesky critter. You will be issued a temporary permit to trap wildlife. You may not trap wildlife without a permit from ODFW.
- Use repellants. Place rags soaked in ammonia, or a cloth bag of mothballs, within an opening used by wildlife.

### DON'T:

- Accidentally lock the animal within your house. Determining when a critter has left your house (so that you can seal up the entrances) can be a real mystery. Clues are important.
  - > If the critter is usually nocturnal, like a skunk, bat or opossum, wait until the animal leaves in the late evening to search for food, then seal any openings. Early morning or late afternoon is the best time to work when "daytime" critters are involved.
  - > Look for footprints. When you're ready to seal the openings, close up all but one, using durable material. At the one remaining opening, sprinkle flour or talcum powder. Check frequently, and

when the tracks show the animal has left, close up the opening.

- > Listen for sounds. You may hear an animal leaving, especially if it's in your attic or under the porch.

When you are certain the animal is gone, carefully seal the opening. Please be certain the animal has not left behind a nest of helpless youngsters. If it has, and you can live with the situation, please do so. The young animals will dehydrate and starve if you seal out the adults. Attempting to handle the young, even if you can reach them, is not recommended, since the adults may aggressively defend the nest.

## Other things you can do to help Oregon's wildlife:

- support funding for nongame and urban wildlife programs
- keep your pets leashed in natural areas
- don't let cats and dogs roam in the neighborhood
- plant native vegetation to provide natural shelter and food
- leave some space for wildlife - turn part of your lawn into habitat
- learn about wildlife - pick up a guide book or two, and learn about the interesting behavior and personalities of wildlife - they can be interesting neighbors

By law, we cannot assist you with domestic animals, but you can contact a private company or use a trap you obtained elsewhere. ■



# Shooting Ethically:

## *It's more than an image*



**Y**ou can feel your heart beating faster. There is a sense of urgency to act quickly, but you don't want to blow it. Many hours have been invested for this one opportunity.

You recheck all of the variables; distance, light, etc. You want this one shot to be clean, and crisp, for this magnificent bull elk may not stand for you to take a second shot. With a good rest, your index finger squeezes slowly to maintain a steady aim, and you shoot. Success. This animal is now yours, if only in image.

Photographing wild animals in their natural surroundings can be frustrating and enjoyable. Successful wildlife photography takes patience, some knowledge about your subject, and many times, just being in the right place at the right time.

Wildlife photography also requires ethics.

Unethical photographers can actually cause injury or even death to the animals they wish to photograph.

Upon locating a birds' nest, photographers have been known to remove vegetation from around the nest for a better view, rearrange the nest material, and even the nestlings themselves, in an attempt to get a more pleasing picture. Some photographers put snakes and lizards into refrigerators to help develop the cold-blooded lethargy that makes these subjects easier to photograph. Some photographers have camped for so long outside the dens of coyotes and foxes for cute pictures of the pups that the females give up and abandon the pups to

starve. Some photographers glue live insects into lifelike surroundings in order to get the pesky things to hold still.

Not all unethical photography is so blatant, sometimes it is more subtle. For example, a photographer moving in for a full-frame shot of a mule deer buck on its winter range finally causes the animal to flee and use valuable energy that otherwise may have been used to survive the hard times of winter.

Birds require 10-15 times more energy to fly than to rest. Disturbing birds in spring might reduce their ability to acquire food and make them use stored energy that would have otherwise been used for egg production, thus reducing clutch size and the chance for recruitment of new birds into the population. Disturbing bird nests may cause nest abandonment or increase the exposure of the nest to predators.

Careless photographers can even put themselves in danger. In 1987, a photographer was killed in Glacier National Park, and one was killed in Yellowstone, both were trying to photograph grizzlies.

The challenge for responsible photographers is to avoid causing additional stress on wildlife, while taking pictures of wildlife in natural settings. This means taking pictures without influencing your subjects' daily routine. Ethical photographers have the best chance for obtaining this goal.

One way to avoid unnecessary stress on your subjects, and to get full

frame photos, is to let wildlife come to you. Of course they need not know where you are. One of the most effective ways of accomplishing this is by the use of a blind.

A blind can be simple. I once photographed a drumming ruffed grouse through a hole in a burlap sack. After watching this particular grouse, it was evident he always approached his drumming log from the east. He drummed morning and evening. During the middle of the day I simply hung a burlap sack between two trees to the west of his log. The "blind" had no roof, no sides, and no back, it was simply a neutral colored barrier between the grouse and me.

Have you noticed a favorite perch for songbirds in your back yard as they are coming or leaving your feeder? A simple blind near that perch, a little time in the blind, and you are likely to get some great shots of backyard birds without disturbance.

Many species of wildlife become accustomed to vehicle traffic. Remaining in your vehicle will not cause any additional disturbance to the accustomed wildlife. However, in these situations if you exit your car often the wildlife will flee.

Wildlife photography is not automatically a harmless activity. When photographing wildlife consider the impact your presence or actions may have on your subjects. Responsible photographers know when to back off. And they know that spectacular photographs can best be taken by patient, ethical photographers. ■



# Top Notch Volunteer

by Sara Cartmel, ODFW Intern

## Chuck Woosley has been a Fish and Wildlife Volunteer since 1958

Things just wouldn't be the same at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife without the positive energy of volunteers. Chuck Woosley has been adding his energy to the formula for almost 40 years. If it's got to do with wildlife management or sportsmanship, then it's got to do with Chuck Woosley.

It all started with his interest in management of elk, deer, and bighorn sheep. This pursuit led Woosley to his initial contact with the Oregon Game Commission in 1958. Woosley has been involved with wildlife management in some fashion ever since.

Some of Woosley's first commitments as a volunteer were with youth outdoor education. In fact, he was in

the original group of Hunter Education instructors, and was active as an instructor from 1959-1975. Woosley also served on the steering committee for the Angler Education Program and became a charter master angler.

When Woosley retired at the age of 57, he wanted to remain a productive member of society. One of the many ways he has found to do so involves devoting his time to volunteer work and developing his experience even more fully.

ing brush." For five years, Woosley has worked on a regular basis at E. E. Wilson to re-establish native plants, control unwanted vegetation such as reed canary grass and poison oak, maintain easy access to the area, and restore wetlands.

Woosley also appears at E. E. Wilson to help with events held at the wildlife area. He has assisted with juvenile pheasant hunts, shotgun clinics, and walking game census operations.



Woosley's experience in landscaping has made him an invaluable asset to the E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area.

Pat Wray

Frequently this means being willing to do the kind of menial, repetitive labor that regular employees refer to as "grunt work." As Woosley puts it, "Often times I'm just spray-



Many of his major projects for the ODFW have been in northeast Oregon. In the autumns of 1990 and 1991, Woosley constructed a ramp roof on a sheep trap at the Lostine Wildlife Area, repaired the trap, and installed a gate.

Following his first work in northeast Oregon, Woosley has taken it upon himself to gather and direct volunteers to projects in northeast Oregon. These projects have involved spring development and improvement in several different locations.

Woosley also assembled volunteers from the Izaak Walton League of America, another organization that benefits from his dedication. This group worked on guzzlers, which collect water for animals, in central Oregon near Bend. Susan Sahnaw, volunteer coordinator for the Department of Fish and Wildlife in Corvallis, comments, "There is hardly a region where Woosley hasn't volunteered."

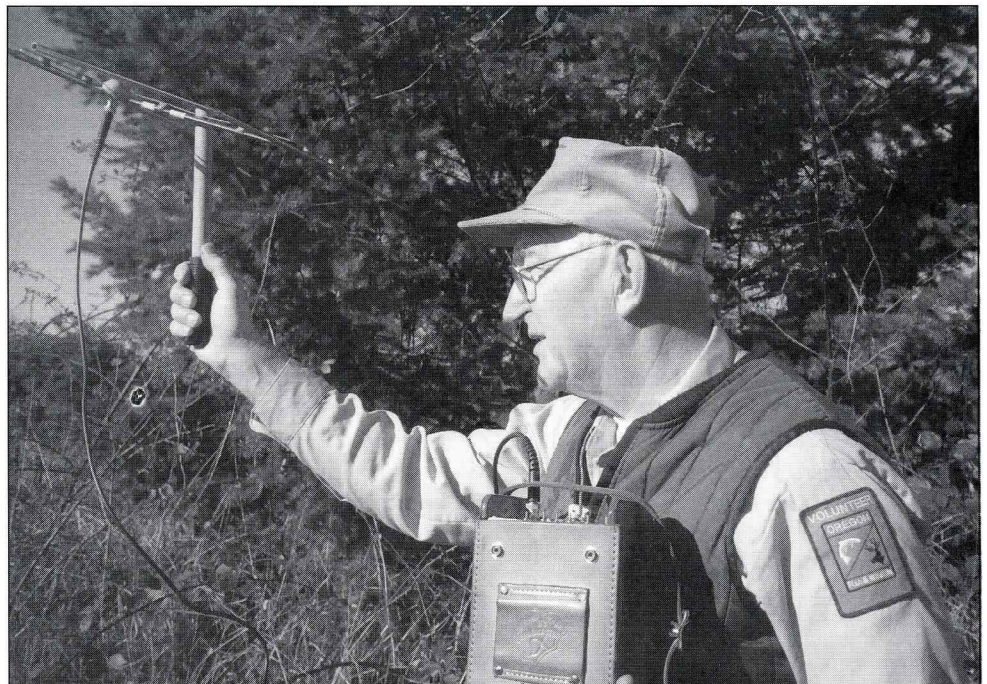
With such diverse involvement over time, Woosley developed skills and experience that allowed him to become more and more independent in his volunteer work. Woosley has built on his independence by going through the Volunteer Technician Program and becoming a Master Volunteer. Sahnaw explains that the Master Volunteer program "builds trust" between volunteer and staff. Woosley's special training and experience allow him to respond if a staff biologist needs his help.

Woosley now finds himself involved in a variety of self-directed activities. Every week to 10 days, he monitors radio collared elk at Cascade Head to establish areas of inhabitancy and calving. He also surveys elk and deer hunters during hunting season. Woosley has helped with stationary checks for hunting tags, worked on deer census routes, and many other important department actions.

All of these activities have made Chuck Woosley knowledgeable in many aspects of fish and wildlife and he buttresses that knowledge with considerable research on outdoor issues. This makes Woosley particularly credible as a witness in state legislative sessions. Woosley's interaction with the legislature has made him an important advocate for the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

As important as Chuck Woosley has become to the Oregon Department of Fish and wildlife, this exceptionally dedicated man believes that he receives as much as he gives. "Volunteering my abilities to assist our natural resources gives me satisfaction and pleasure." ■

*Chuck Woosley spends a great deal of time monitoring the movements of radio-collared bear and elk from the Coast Range to the Cascades.*



*Pat Wray*



# Western snowy plovers

by Pat Wray

## *Declining population on Oregon coast generates recovery effort*

**O**n the north spit at Coos Bay, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife biologists John Toman and Dan VanDyke, along with a team of volunteers and help from federal agencies, are pulling up resprouting European beach grass around an old dredge spoil site.

Near the south spit at Florence, biologists Rebecca Goggans and Doug Cottam, also joined by volunteers, are roping off sections of the sandy beach to prevent human intrusion.

In the morning shadow of southeastern Oregon's Abert Rim, volunteers peer through spotting scopes at the vast expanse of Abert Lake, searching and counting...searching and counting.

And on a deserted beach somewhere on Oregon's central coast, the object of all this attention scurries through the waterline swallowing shore flies, juvenile sand crabs and beetles. The small bird then returns to incubate its eggs, which lay in a nest protected by a wire cage to exclude predators. There are only 51 known western snowy plover nests on the Oregon coast. Some of them have been caged.

The western snowy plover has been in trouble for a long time. Oregon's

Fish and Wildlife Commission identified it as a threatened species in 1975, prior to the implementation of Oregon's Endangered Species Act. It was officially listed as threatened under the Act in 1988 and the Commission confirmed this listing again in 1993. The US Fish and Wildlife Service added the coastal population of the western snowy plover to the list of federally threatened species in 1993.

Snowy plovers (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) are widely distributed shorebirds, occurring in parts of Europe, Asia, North Africa, Java, South America, the Caribbean and North America. The western snowy plover is one of two subspecies found in North America. In Oregon, it is divided into two geographically distinct populations. Oregon's coastal population, which includes year-round residents as well as migrants, is now estimated at less than 60 birds and is the subject of an intense state and national protection effort. Coastal populations of snowy plovers in Oregon have declined by an average of seven percent per year in a 10-year period beginning in 1981.

Oregon's inland population, which nests on alkali lake beds, but migrates south to California in the winter, has benefited in some ways from the drought of recent years which has made more of the open sandy habitat available for nesting areas. Even so,

total numbers of plovers found in eastern Oregon have fluctuated since surveys began in 1980.

As is often the case with declining species, a number of factors contribute to the situation. In the case of the coastal population of western snowy plovers, changing habitat was and is a primary cause. European beachgrass, a non-native species which was imported to help stabilize the shifting sands, has been far too successful, from the plovers' perspective. On many beaches it has stabilized the naturally shifting sand into a steep, vegetated foredune that blocks movement of sand inland and allows the establishment of dense vegetation in the open sandy reaches that have been historic plover nesting habitat.

Although the plovers' habit of nesting in open, sandy areas has always made their eggs and young vulnerable to avian predation, crow and gull populations have increased with human activities and their greater numbers have adversely affected plover populations. Ground-based predators have become far more active in the vegetative cover of the beachgrass, along with other newly established exotic plants like scotch broom and gorse than in the previously open dunes and beaches. Striped skunks, raccoons and other mammalian predators cause significant loss of plover eggs and young.



Human activities have been even more destructive. Because of the widespread expansion of European beachgrass throughout the coast, all beach users,

including plovers and people, have been crowded into the remaining narrow strip of open beach. Simple intrusion by humans into the nesting area can result in loss of many chicks because the adults flush, leaving chicks unattended and vulnerable to predators and inclement weather. Joggers and walkers, especially those with dogs, pose a real threat to nesting plovers, a threat that they respond to by leaving the nest at least temporarily and sometimes permanently.

Off-road vehicles can also pose a serious problem for plover nests, especially where most popular areas of vehicular activity coincide with historic plover nesting areas. Fast moving ATVs can not only chase a plover from its nest, but can sometimes accidentally kill young and adults, because of their tendency to hide in depressions until it is too late.

Horses also tend to disrupt the nesting activities.

In some circumstances, the effects of human activities on western snowy plovers can be highly negative. There are several documented instances of extirpation of plover populations from beaches that became popular for bathing and recreation in southern California. The same thing has probably already occurred in Oregon as well.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, in concert with other state

and federal management agencies, is involved in a far-reaching effort to re-establish healthy populations of the western snowy plover. The

department's activities on behalf of the plover will be guided by a conservation program adopted last year by the Fish and Wildlife Commission, which has been created with input from individuals and organizations interested in the Oregon coast. The goal of the plan is to re-establish a healthy breeding and wintering population of



*Snowy plovers nest in relatively open areas of loose sand.*

ODFW



*Plovers feed on invertebrates along the seashore.*

ODFW

plovers on the Oregon coast and to maintain existing populations at known locations east of the Cascades.

In the short term, coastal plover populations are the primary concern. So the next step toward recovery will be involving coastal communities, beach users and other interested people to develop site-specific plans. This process will begin later this year, according to Department of Fish and Wildlife staff biologist Martin Nugent.

"Many protective measures are already in place," says Nugent. "The site plans will serve as guides for future work." This effort also will be coordinated with the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department and appropriate federal agencies, added Nugent.

Current and prospective actions fall under two major headings; limiting disturbance and improving habitat. These activities will be implemented under the state Threatened and Endangered Species Act, which is separate from the federal act and does not affect private lands.

"Although private landowners have no requirement to participate under state law, voluntary assistance to aid plover recovery would be welcome," Nugent said.

Roping off nesting areas along beaches to minimize human impacts, caging active nests to keep predators out and putting up signs to educate

the public are examples of the efforts now underway to limit disturbance to the snowy plovers. Biologists and others are attempting to improve habitat by removing European beachgrass in a variety of ways. Plowing, burning, hand pulling and spraying are all tools that can be used to

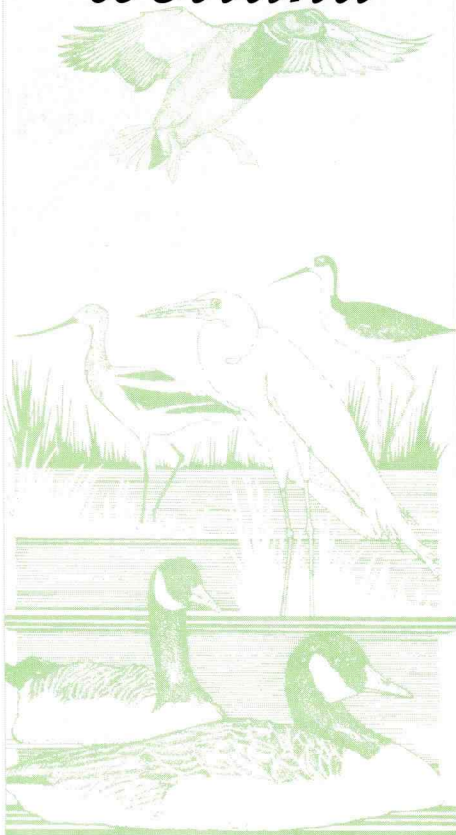
manage beachgrass in specific areas important for plovers. Irrigation with salt water also shows promise in keeping beachgrass in check.

On the east side of the mountains, efforts on behalf of the plovers revolve mainly around expanding the available knowledge of the birds and monitoring their population.

"If we are to be successful in conserving the snowy plover as a viable population, it will take dedication and effort on the part of everyone concerned," Nugent said. "The keys to success are having people understand the situation and become involved in protecting the snowy plover." ■



*Access and  
Habitat  
funds help  
re-establish  
important  
valley  
wetland*



# The Owen Wetland Project



*by Pat Wray*

**S**een from the air, the Owen Wetland Project almost makes you wish you were a duck.

Inviting expanses of water, created by a interlocking series of dikes, are sheltered by natural groves of Oregon ash. Those overhanging trees will protect you from the gliding pseudo-attacks from bald eagles, the ones where the big predators come sliding in to make everyone take flight, easily identifying those who are too sick or weak to fly. On those open ponds, if you don't take off on the first eagle pass, on the second one you are dinner.

Studies have indicated that these ash groves support the greatest biological species diversity of any habitat type in western Oregon.

Here you could get in underneath the protective branches or slide in amongst the bulrushes and cattails. Those classic marshland plants not only provide shelter and concealment from predators, but nesting opportunities for cinnamon teal as well. In addition, the roots, stems and canopy of the aquatic vegetation provides ideal breeding habitat for insects and other invertebrates which make up a large part of the diets of waterfowl.

The native tufted hairgrass that borders some of the marsh also would be a friend, providing shelter for ducks and nesting sites for western

pond turtles. Much of the Willamette Valley was once covered by tufted hairgrass prairie, not much remains. Here on a 67 acre parcel belonging to Rich Owen of Albany, much of what existed before the incursion of white settlers is being re-established, with help from Oregon's Access and Habitat Board.

"Rich bought the land in 1992 essentially as waste ground," said Steve Smith, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife habitat biologist from Corvallis. "It had been the failed site of a reservoir and development. He saw its tremendous potential as a wildlife area and contacted us and other agencies for help."

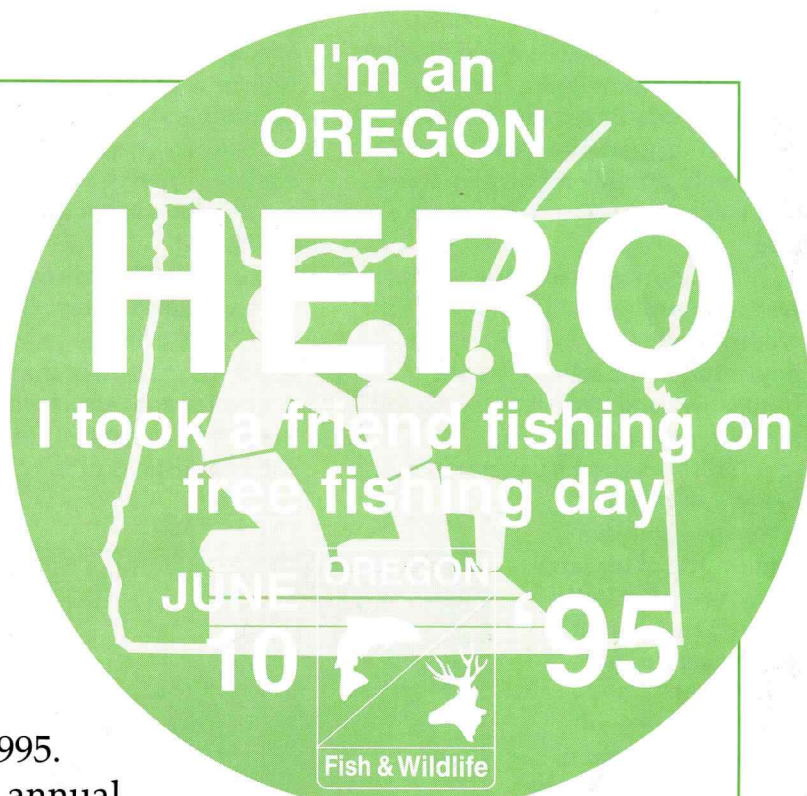
Because of that potential, and because it would be the largest established wetland on private land in the Willamette Valley, help was not hard to find. Owen received financial and technical assistance from the Farm Service Agency, the Polk County Soil and Water Conservation District, the Natural Resource Conservation Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. That kind of support, and Owen's own hefty financial contribution, made financial support from the Access and Habitat Board a more likely proposition.

"The board's first consideration is improvement of wildlife habitat and increasing public access to private



**F**or six years now, thousands of children and adults have been introduced to the fantastic world of fishing thanks to Oregon's annual Free Fishing Day.

It's grown from a simple idea to a statewide offering of activities designed to be educational and fun. If you've taken someone fishing on Free Fishing Day, congratulate yourself! If you haven't, begin a new tradition in 1995. Take someone fishing on Oregon's annual Free Fishing Day. Show them the joys of fishing in the great outdoors. Perhaps you will make a friend - and a fishing partner - for life!



**Oregon's Annual**  
***Free Fishing Day***  
**Saturday, June 10, 1995**

**O**ver 100 fishing clinics are planned state-wide by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and Oregon State Parks. Consult local papers two weeks prior to June 10.

- More than 10 state fish hatcheries will hold fishing clinics, including Bonneville, Wizard Falls, Roaring River, Cedar Creek and others.
- Free camping Friday and Saturday on most US Forest Service and BLM campgrounds statewide.
- More than 25,000 youngsters participated in 1994.
- No license or tags required. All other rules pertaining to bag limits, terminal tackle restrictions and other regulations still apply. Check your ODFW fishing regulations for your area.



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lands," explained Access and Habitat Coordinator John Beck. "Projects which already have other forms of financial support allow the board to effectively provide for quality access and habitat improvements." Beck said.

Like any viable wildlife habitat, wetlands support a wide variety of wildlife species. Two of the most important in the scheme for the Owens wetland project are waterfowl and western pond turtles.

"I'd like to find a balance in the habitat needs for waterfowl and the pond turtle. This land should support both species, and a lot of others, very easily," Owen said. "

The concept of balance is one that is used consistently in the world of wetland development, often in regards to the physical manipulation of the land.

"It's not easy to visualize and plan for changes that will occur when you start to hold water in an area. I had some of this professionally engineered and some of it we've done, with help from Steve Smith and the ODFW folks, sort of by the seat of our pants. We're making changes and adjustments all the time and I expect we will be for quite some time to come," Owen said.

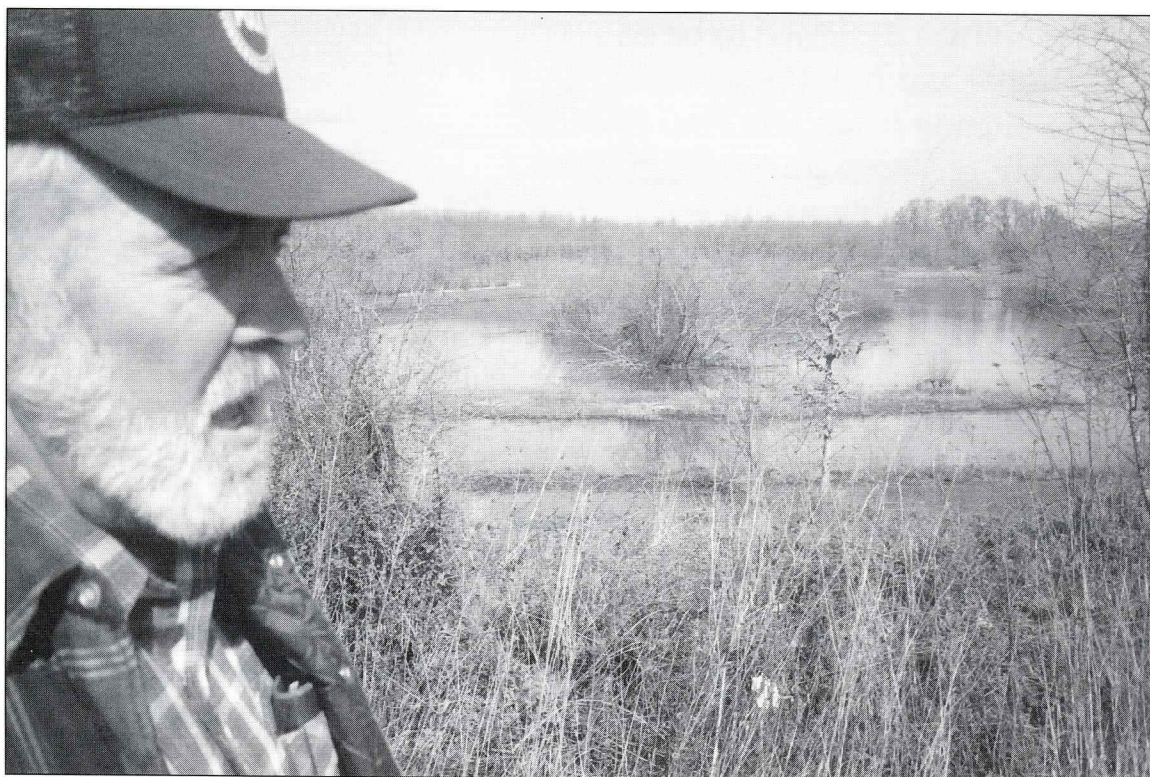
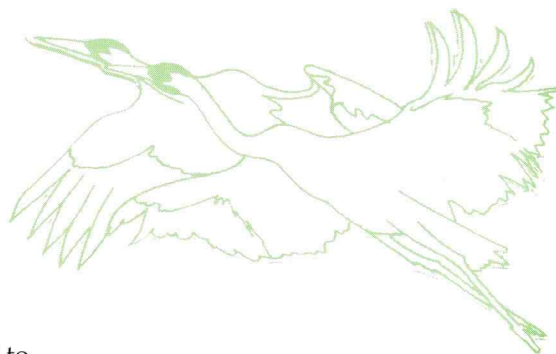
One of the major changes that had to occur right in the beginning was the eradication of reed canary grass.

"Reed canary grass is a Eurasian species which was initially brought to this country to help stabilize land around water sources," Steve Smith explained. It quickly crowds out native of plants and many native wildlife species of wildlife as well. Reed canary grass supports the lowest

species diversity of any habitat type in western Oregon," according to Smith.

Like many of the 'exotics we wish we'd never seen', reed canary grass is not easily eradicated.

It spreads by rhizomes under ground," Steve Smith said, "and over the years it develops extremely thick, tightly connected root structure. We had to use heavy equipment to scrape all of it out and dispose of it."



*Rich Owen looks over his developing wetland.*

Removal of the reed canary grass uncovered some interesting things, in more ways than one.

"What we discovered was that seeds from native plants, which had been covered by the reed canary grass for decades, immediately sprouted when that root structure was removed," Smith explained.

The concept of seeds lying dormant in wet ground for as much as 50 years and then sprouting is surprising; Smith and Owen are waiting to

see what plants might show up this spring.

Also still unclear are the uses to which the Owens wetland will be put.

"We're definitely going to sponsor some youth hunts for waterfowl," Owen explained. "And some other activities are certainly possible as well. My main concern is for the benefit of waterfowl. Any option that meshes with the use of this land as a wildlife area is possible in the future." ■