

HUNTERS: Growing human population has big impact

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has initiated several programs to raise and sustain interest among younger hunters and anglers, including the Mentored Youth Hunter Program, Women in the Outdoors, and Free Fishing Days, designed to help expose Oregonians to hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation opportunities.

On the subject of wildfires, Heath said that overall effects from wildfires tend to be positive for ungulates, as fire reduces canopy and encourages new forage, resulting in good green-ups on summer ranges and beneficial habitat for both deer and elk populations. Wildfire effects on winter ranges can be more damaging in the long term, depending on the amount and timing of precipitation, and particularly if bitterbrush ranges are heavily impacted.

Last winter's unusually heavy snow load seemed to have no effect on elk populations this year, Heath said, noting that elk found very good conditions in the spring and that ODFW field biologists recorded the highest cow-calf ratios on record.

Deer populations did not find the same success coming out of last winter. According to Heath, this year's fawn populations were reduced by nearly half of normal, district-wide, meaning that deer will head into this winter with a severely reduced yearling crop. The same dramatic loss was true of adult populations, as last winter's extraordinarily harsh conditions were very hard on deer

survival rates.

The Nugget asked Heath about mountain-lion populations, and their overall effect on deer and elk herds, given persistent rumors among hunters that cougars are decimating both populations.

"We have predator impacts, for certain," Heath said. "There is no question that mountain lions are eating deer and elk, but those impacts also depend on the overall health of the (prey) populations. If population recruitment is not able to keep up with mortality rates, if habitats are lost, those populations end up declining."

“ Locally, we have a healthy cougar population. — Corey Heath

In some areas, Heath told *The Nugget*, predator impact may be the principle reason for declining deer herd populations, but in Central Oregon, where human populations have skyrocketed in

recent years, there are a host of other variables to consider.

"Locally, we have a healthy cougar population," Heath said, "and we have predator impacts, but there are also other factors. We lose deer to road kill, disease, habitat loss, car accidents, fences, tomato cages, badminton courts, soccer nets, Christmas tree lights, and other mortality factors, and so the impacts (of predators) are not so straightforward."

According to ODFW reports, at the end of 2016 there were approximately 112 known wolves in Oregon, though the actual number of wolves is, according to ODFW, likely higher than that. Although larger wolf packs are principally concentrated in the northeastern corner of the state, individuals and mating pairs have been observed as nearby as Silver Lake; and the Rogue Pack, in western Klamath County, is thought to consist of at least six wolves.

Given the extremely emotional political debates that rage around the topic of wolves, including the recent high-profile case of a hunter in eastern Oregon who shot

and killed a wolf he reportedly believed to be stalking him, *The Nugget* asked Heath what Central Oregon residents might come to expect from the continuing westward expansion of wolf populations.

"Wolf numbers are increasing," Heath said, "and they have been since they first came out of Idaho into northeastern Oregon. Since that time we have had several individuals travel through Central Oregon into Klamath and Jackson counties. It is probably just a matter of time before they are established on the east slope of the Cascades, and farther west."

It remains to be seen if wolves will begin to settle in Sisters Country, and what impact that might have on local game herds and livestock populations. And given that there is at least one documented case of Oregon wolves snacking on mountain-lion kittens, the effects of an apex predator returning to Central Oregon are, at the very least, intriguing.

Agenda

- Sisters City Council
Sisters City Hall
520 E. Cascade Ave.
4:30 p.m. Executive Session: Performance Evaluation.
5:30 p.m. workshop:
• Council review — public events; transient merchants.
• Charter review update.
6:30 p.m. regular meeting:
• Memorandum of Understanding between Wildfire Planning International, LLC. and the City of Sisters.
• Contract for system development charge (SDC) study to Donovan Enterprises Inc. in an amount of \$17,947.
• Contract for professional services for the Sisters Country Community Vision Project to NXT Consulting Group, LLC. in an amount not to exceed \$45,000.
• Audit review.
City Parks Advisory Board appointment.
• Staff comments and updates.
• New business licenses.

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