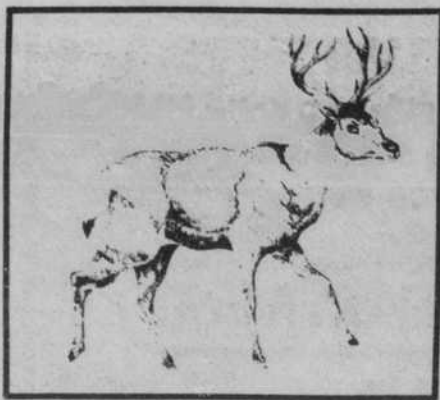




Development

People move in, deer move out

By GREG WASSON
Of the Emerald

Pulling images of Western Oregon deer hunts from the montage that is the past brings pictures of falling leaves, black-tail deer framed against autumn colors and hikes in the coolness of October sunrises.

The briars and poison oak made the hills of the coast range difficult to negotiate and blocked our vision to the point that hearing became the dominant sense.

The other side of the mountains was different. The open forests of Central Oregon made me feel exposed, as if someone was watching each step. Compared to the mildness back home, the weather seemed cruel. Rifle barrels were painful to touch, long-johns were standard attire.

However, this fall was late in coming to the Bend area. The aspens above summer lake were turning yellow on opening day but heavy shirts quickly became too hot. Coats were unnecessary. And there were other differences from hunts of the past. Two days of beating the brush brought only one deer to our party of four.

"Deer populations in Deschutes and Klamath Counties peaked in about 1954," says Don Eastmen, involved in big game management for the wildlife division. "They peaked again in 1964 but the '50's peak was the highest on record."

Oddly enough, Eastmen says man may have been responsible for those huge deer populations of Central Oregon.

"In those days there were a lot of sheep on the range and there was a lot of poison put out for coyotes and the like. It was a very intense predator control program in relation to what's gone on recently. Overall fawn survival was

better because predation was reduced."

Calls for predator control have decreased as the amount of sheep has decreased, says Eastmen. More animals are falling victim to those next in line in the food chain.

But where humans once aided deer herds, they're now threatening them. Eastmen complains variances allowing development in areas supposedly saved are dangerous for deer.

"Politics being what they are and real estate interests being involved means these variances are granted regularly," he says. "This makes the whole intent of land-use planning meaningless. This thing (the granting of variances) grows like a cancer and there's no indication from the local governments that they're going to stop it." So the wildlife division is trying to halt it.

"It's believed that Land Conservation and Development Commission (LCDC) goals are not adequately being complied with. The goals dealing with open space, timber land and grazing lands are compatible with maintaining wildlife populations. When LCDC goals are violated or subverted the developments severely impact the wildlife populations."

There are subdivisions planned near Bend the division is fighting. "The significance of the Deschutes County situation is the magnitude of it. It's immense. Because of recreational demands, Deschutes County is growing by leaps and bounds. It's simple urban sprawl and many of those developments are happening in areas we consider quite sensitive, both in regards to deer movements and deer wintering."

Bob Stein, assistant director of the wildlife division puts it more simply.



How quickly this snow melts and how mild the winter is play large roles in how many deer in this bunch live to see the summer. Encroachment of man, especially in Deschutes County, threatens this deer and others like it.

"If you let people cut down what's there to put in farms or houses, the deer aren't there anymore."

As light invaded the Summer Lake Rim, autos could be seen everywhere. Each corner revealed another four-wheel drive and red vests of hunters dotted the hillside.

"The popular areas are becoming too crowded," says Eastmen.

"The increase isn't wiping out the deer so we have very little biological justification for disallowing people to hunt. But we're hearing rumblings from the public that one of our responsibilities is to maintain some quality and enjoyment in the thing."

The division has tried closing roads in Central Oregon hoping that inconvenience will keep people home. But Eastmen laments that the closure is "proving more attractive to some hunters rather than discouraging them."

The division's also changed the way tags are given out. Under the old system one tag was good for the whole state. Now, hunters have to choose which side of the mountains they are going to hunt on.

"That's an answer to the fact too many were crowding into eastern and central Oregon on opening week-end then coming back and hunting in Western Oregon if they didn't fill their tags. The split tag puts them in one place or another. That's decreased some of the crowding east of the mountains, but there are still hotspots."

Eastmen says the deer situation in eastern Oregon is different than it is on this side of the Cascades.

"In Western Oregon, intense logging or fire is followed by a build up of deer. Within 10 or 15 years you're running peak populations. Your favorite hunting area might go through two or three cycles in your lifetime. In eastern Oregon, things happen much more slowly. One man's lifetime may be needed to watch a population cycle happen."

As the small buck twirled on the rope hung from the power tower, Junction City optometrist Lee Huff

reflected on why he makes the annual excursion.

"If I don't go hunting, I don't get into these areas at all. It gets me up in the high mountains in the fall, gets me out in territory I would never see otherwise and puts me afoot in ravines and along trails."

"Besides, whenever I go hunting, I go with your dad. Your dad's my best friend and hunting gives me a chance to see him."

Pizza Ray enjoys the social part of hunting too.

"It's a vacation, very definitely. I get away from the business. And I enjoy the hunting, the camaraderie."

For Ray there's no moral problem to deal with.

"It doesn't bother me, never has and it shan't."

Both he and Lee leave it to the Fish and Wildlife Department to see that hunting doesn't destroy the deer population.

"They can predict how many deer won't make it because there isn't enough forage," says Lee. "If they were to say 'we're decimating the deer population and they're not snapping back,' I just wouldn't hunt anymore."

Deer aren't the only big game animals in Oregon. The state has a large elk population too. There were about 18,000 elk killed last year and Eastmen says he's pleased with the job the department has done.

"In Northeastern Oregon the management we've applied has resulted in stocking every acre available. About two-thirds to three-fourths of that range is believed to be overpopulated."

Eastmen says the department gets called in when there's trouble with the animals.

"Elk tend to favor narrow val-

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Photos courtesy Register-Guard

Encroachment of man, especially in Deschutes County, threatens this deer and others like it.

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