

RECREATION REPORT

BOAT RAMP CLOSED FOR CONSTRUCTION BAKER CITY —

The boat ramp on the north shore of Phillips Reservoir near Mason Dam will be closed through mid-December while a contractor replaces the asphalt ramp with a more durable concrete ramp.

The \$275,000 project is a partnership between the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest and the Oregon State Marine Board.

The restroom near the boat ramp is also closed during construction.

Work is projected to finish by Dec. 15. More information is available by calling the Whitman Ranger District at 541-523-6391.

TURKEY SHOOT SUNDAY AT VIRTUE FLAT RANGE BAKER CITY —

The Powder River Sportsmen's Club will host its annual Turkey Shoot Sunday, Nov. 18, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Virtue Flat Range about six miles east of Baker City. The entrance to the range is on the north side of Highway 86, about one mile east of the entrance to the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center.

There will be a variety of events, with an entry fee of \$3 per event and a prize of \$10 for the winner in each.

Events include:

- 22 silhouette special squads for all juniors
- Lucky 22 shoot at 10 yards
- Centerfire handgun at 50-yard chicken silhouettes
- Running deer target (100 yards for iron sights, 200 yards for scoped rifle)
- Centerfire rifles, turkey head targets at 200 yards

ODFW TO LAUNCH NEW ONLINE LICENSING SYSTEM DECEMBER 1

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife will start its new electronic licensing system (ELS) on Dec. 1 for the sale of 2019 licenses and tags.

The new system also allows hunters and anglers to store their licenses, tags and validations on their smartphone or tablet, and then use the electronic documents in the field via an app that works even if the device doesn't have internet access.

Customers can also print paper documents at home if they prefer. They will not have to pay the \$2 shipping/handling fee as is the case if they have documents mailed.



Photo by Ethan Shaw

Black hawthorn trees typically grow in draws, and in places the shrub-like trees create almost impassable thickets.

PRICKLY PRAISE

■ Cultivating an appreciation for Northeastern Oregon's brushy species, including the black hawthorn

A word (OK, a bunch of words) of appreciation for that underappreciated countryside we often call "brush."

Now, brush is the kind of label I'd imagine botanists recoil at — so vague and dismissive — but I sort of like it. It's certainly a colloquialism with widespread and deep-rooted currency in the American West. While it can suggest a wasteland to be cleared or disdained, it can also convey tracklessness, a stubborn and grudgingly admired scruffiness.

Given we've got no shortage of brush in our neck of the woods — from Ceanothus jungles in old mountain burns to dry shrub-steppe of sagebrush and bitterbrush —

I'll be talking about it more than once here, I'd imagine. But today I specifically want to highlight one variety, among the "brushiest" of all.

Shrublands of black hawthorn give Northeast Oregon its own brand of thornbrush: a landscape more extensive in such subtropical settings as the Sonoran Desert or the Horn of Africa. Black hawthorn — a big shrub or small tree commonly 15 to 30 feet tall — obviously doesn't make vast tracts of thornscrub as you find in those drylands. In its preferred Blue Mountain Province



THE LAY OF THE LAND

ETHAN SHAW



Photo by Ethan Shaw

The inch-long spines on black hawthorn trees pose a major obstacle — at least to people. Deer, elk and cattle are better equipped to traverse the prickly thickets.

"A hawthorn briar-thicket can be impenetrable indeed, given the above-your-head height of the shrubs, the stiff and tangled boughs, and those inch-long spines."

real estate, however — along montane draws and valleys, ribboning lowland stream-courses and gullies, and on relatively moist foothill slopes and benches — hawthorn can certainly form impressive thickets and copses.

Along riverbanks, black hawthorn may mingle with alder, dogwood, water birch,

and willow, or preside in fairly pure briar patches under tall black cottonwoods and ponderosas. In the grassy, outcropped foothills of the Northern Blues and Wallowas, it often grows with mock-orange, serviceberry, oceanspray, wild rose, snowberry, ninebark, and scattered Douglas maple and elderberry in mixed, wind-blasted shrublands.

A hawthorn briar-thicket can be impenetrable indeed, given the above-your-head height of the shrubs, the stiff and tangled boughs, and those inch-long spines. ("Haw" is an Anglo-Saxon word for "hedge.") Impenetrable to an upright biped, that is: Peer inside the barbed wall and you'll find the thorn-bowers arcing over animal runways and obscure deer beds: a hidden, up-close world of skitterings, flutterings, spiderwebs. Black-billed magpies favor the depths of such thornbrush for nesting. Grouse and rodents scarf hawthorn berries, or "haws." Cattle will navigate the spiked twigs to browse hawthorn leaves, and along with deer and elk seek out the snowberry foliage that often forms an under-layer in these thickets.

(Once I flushed an elk in the hawthorn alleys of Bird Track Springs along the upper Grande Ronde floodplain, and the heavy crashing that accompanied the beast's flight suggested what it would be like to run into a buffalo or rhino in some East African thornwood — a riski-

er proposition, obviously.)

Mature hawthorn often grows as a squat, sheafed trunk of multiple crooked stems — a "coppice" kind of look — with rough, stringy bark. The gnarled branches and thorny twigs make a tough, spreading canopy that in these leafless months appears vaguely burgundy from afar.

In spring, hawthorns turn snowy with blossoms; a long-used alternate name for hawthorn in Europe is May-tree. (Other hawthorn synonyms: whitethorn, thorn-apple.)

In October, the coarsely toothed leaves — deep green in summer — wear a rich dark crimson or bronze, giving our lowlands some of their finest fall color.

Eyeball an old black hawthorn — especially in winter, when the rippled, furrowed coppice trunk and the twisty scrawl of the well-armed branches, which rattle and creak in a wind, are most exposed — and it may not surprise you that its kind comes wrapped in human folklore and myth.

Hawthorn was associated with the Roman goddess Cardea, a guardian of door-hinges, and in a Welsh folktale with the ill-tempered giant Yspaddaden. In Ireland, where the "whitethorn" sometimes marks sacred sites, it was traditionally considered bad luck to fell an ancient specimen: Robert Graves writes, "The effect is the death of one's cattle and children and loss of all one's money" — that's all.



Photo by Ethan Shaw

Although they sometimes more resemble shrubs, black hawthorns can grow as tall as about 30 feet.

