

## RECREATION REPORT

### SMARTPHONE LICENSING SYSTEM BEGINS

ODFW's new licensing system allows people to carry their licenses and tags on their smartphone. (Though they can still print them to paper at home or at a license vendor.) The first step is to go to the MyODFW licensing page to locate and verify the account. Next they will want to download the MyODFW app, which will store documents even when people are out of cellphone range. They should ensure they verify their account at MyODFW.com BEFORE trying to log into the MyODFW app.

### HAINES POND

The pond was last stocked with rainbow trout the week of Oct. 8. Surface ice has formed on the pond, but is not yet thick enough for ice fishing.

### NORTH POWDER POND

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### UNITY RESERVOIR

The reservoir is at 17 percent of capacity and launching larger trailered boats is not advised as the water level is below the asphalt ramp. Ice is beginning to form on the reservoir. Fishing for trout has been fair, the fish averaging 15 inches long.

### GRANDE RONDE RIVER

The daily bag limit of one hatchery steelhead will continue through Dec. 31. Bag limits were reduced to protect limited numbers of wild fish returning to the Snake River Basin and to ensure hatchery programs meet production goals.

Steelhead fishing has been difficult this year due to the low numbers of returning fish and low flows. However, anglers did see an increase in action last week with a few more fish being caught. Pressure tends to drop off heading into winter and persistent anglers that are willing to fight the cold can have a few fish to themselves.

### WALLOWA RIVER

There are reports of anglers catching fish. Despite there being a few fish around, success rates will likely be low until fish have a little more time to move through the system. Due to an effort to adjust the run timing of hatchery steelhead, more fish have been available in the fall in recent years.

DAN MARVIN IS THE NEW MANAGER AT ODFW'S ELKHORN WILDLIFE AREA ELK-FEEDING PROJECT

# The New Elk Master

By Jayson Jacoby  
Baker City Herald

**NORTH POWDER** — Dan Marvin stands beside a chest-high bale of alfalfa hay and gazes west to the dark forest at the base of the Elkhorn Mountains, where the hungry beasts wait.

They were here earlier on this gray early December day.

And as certain as the sun will rise, they will return.

Hunters might well dispute the notion but in this case and this place, at least, elk are nothing if not predictable.

"They know the routine," Marvin said with a chuckle.

And although he's new to this job, he too is familiar with the way things work in this operation.

This meadow beside the North Fork of Anthony Creek, about 10 miles west of North Powder, is one of the 10 sites that comprise the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) Elkhorn Wildlife Area.

The state started the project in 1971, and Marvin, who has worked for ODFW since 2005, is just the third full-time manager.

He replaces Eddie Miguez, who recently retired after 20 winters managing the Elkhorn Wildlife Area and living in the home at the headquarters near the Anthony Creek feed site.

ODFW didn't employ a full-time resident manager for the first decade. Ken Emerson moved into the home — it was built in the 1950s when the property was privately owned and part of the Sorenson Ranch — in February 1981 and managed the area for 18 years.

Emerson was the only full-time employee when he started.

Today the Wildlife Area's staff includes Marvin, two other full-time workers and two seasonal employees who help during the winter, when the crew feeds around 1,500 elk and hundreds of deer every day.

Marvin, 39, moved to the Elkhorn Wildlife Area from Grant County, where he worked at ODFW's Dayville



S. John Collins / Baker City Herald

Dan Marvin talks about his new role as manager of the Elkhorn Wildlife Area near North Powder.

*"It's a desirable place to be, the Baker Valley. My end goal was to come back and manage this project at some point."*

— Dan Marvin, Elkhorn Wildlife Area manager

office and managed three wildlife areas.

He grew up in Northern California, attending high school at Yreka near the Oregon border, before earning a bachelor's degree at the University of Montana and a master's degree at Oregon State University.

But though Marvin is new to the manager's job, this is actually his second stint at Elkhorn.

He worked on Miguez's crew for two years starting in 2005, before taking a job with ODFW at Sauvie Island near Portland.

But Marvin said the Elkhorn manager's job has interested him since his two years there at the start of his ODFW career.

"It's a desirable place to be, the Baker Valley," Marvin said. "My end goal was to

come back and manage this project at some point."

Marvin understands well that the Elkhorn Wildlife Area, and specifically its purpose, can create misunderstandings among the public.

During the winter of 2016-17, for instance, when snow lay deep across Northeastern Oregon and temperatures plummeted to 30 below zero, some residents wanted to feed deer and elk but were advised by ODFW officials to avoid doing so. Some of those people pointed out that the agency itself every winter doles out hundreds of tons of alfalfa and pellets to elk and deer.

The answer to this apparent contradiction is a simple one, Marvin said.

ODFW created the Elkhorn Wildlife Area not to save animals from starvation

but rather to prevent the animals from gobbling haystacks on private property in the Baker and North Powder valleys.

The problem is largely one of topography.

The Elkhorns lack substantial foothills that can serve as winter range for elk and deer. When snow begins to accumulate in the Elkhorns, covering the animals' food supply, they have little recourse but to migrate to lower elevations — which is to say, into Baker Valley where ranchers stack hay to feed their cattle throughout the winter.

ODFW's idea with the Elkhorn Wildlife Area was to establish sites where ODFW staff could, in effect, intercept elk by enticing them with alfalfa, and convincing them to eat the state-provided handouts.

The strategy has proved to be largely effective — so long as it's also consistently applied, Marvin said.

"This is a seven-days-a-week job," he said. "The elk

will eat one way or another. If we're not out there to feed them they'd be down in the neighbors' haystacks, and that's what we're here to prevent."

Achieving that goal requires a 150-mile round-trip drive each day, as the feed sites extend from Old Auburn Road, several miles southwest of Baker City, to Shaw Mountain north of the Wildlife Area headquarters.

Elk, generally numbering over 1,000 head, are the main customers, but the Elkhorn crew also feeds deer at one site on Antelope Peak, several miles south of the headquarters, and deer also show up at the Muddy Creek, Hunt Mountain, Auburn and Elk Creek sites.

The Anthony Creek site, on River Lane, and the Old Auburn Road sites have viewing sites along the roads where visitors can watch elk.

The Wildlife Area itself is closed to the public from Dec. 1 to April 10 to reduce the risk that the elk will be scared and leave.



S. John Collins / Baker City Herald file photo

Elk munch on alfalfa hay at the Elkhorn Wildlife Area during a previous winter.