

RECREATION
REPORT

EASTERN OREGON
BACKCOUNTRY
FESTIVAL SET FOR
JAN. 25-27

The annual Eastern Oregon Backcountry Festival is set for Jan. 25-27, with events in La Grande and at Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort. The event is a fundraiser for the Wallowa Avalanche Center in Joseph.

- Friday, Jan. 25 — Ski film “All In,” 6:30 p.m. at the Gilbert Center. General admission \$15, or \$10 for students. There will be an auction and raffle as well.
- Saturday, Jan. 26 — Third-annual Kip Rand Memorial Uphill/Downhill race at Anthony Lakes. The top man and top woman will each win a season pass to the ski area, or \$250 cash.
- Sunday, Jan. 27 — Michael Hatch, director of the EOU Outdoor Program, will lead a ski tour into the Angell Basin near Anthony Lakes

More information available at eou.edu/outdoor/eastern-oregon-backcountry-festival-2019/

DEADLINE FOR SPRING BEAR APPLICATIONS

The application deadline for controlled spring bear hunts is Sunday, Feb. 10. Hunters can apply online (make your choices during check out), at a license agent or at an ODFW office that sells licenses.

GLITCH IN NEW MYODFW APP CORRECTED

A glitch in the new MyODFW app has been fixed and anglers/hunters who are out of cellphone range can now record their harvest online. Anglers can get the update through the Google Play store (Android) and the Apple app store.

PILCHER CREEK RESERVOIR

Ice fishing is underway and rainbow trout fishing has been good. Ice thickness is 12 to 14 inches. Fall sampling by ODFW shows that good numbers of rainbow trout and black crappie are available. Rainbows range from 8 to 15 inches and black crappie from 6 to 13 inches. Access is fair. Both Tucker Flat Road and reservoir access have been plowed of snow, but additional snowfall has occurred since. 4WD vehicles are advised for accessing the reservoir.

BROWNLEE RESERVOIR

Fishing has been good for both catfish and bass. Good numbers of large bass are being caught.

EASY WINTER SO FAR FOR NORTHEASTERN OREGON DEER

REPRIEVE FOR DEER HERDS

By Jayson Jacoby
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The south-facing slopes of sagebrush, gray-brown in a season better known for glittering white, are a symbol of hope for some of Northeastern Oregon’s beleaguered mule deer herds.

The scarcity of snow, especially at lower elevation sites that serve as traditional winter range for deer, is reason to be optimistic that the animals will continue to recover from the harsh winter of 2016-17, said Brian Ratliff, district wildlife biologist at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (ODFW) Baker City office.

“About 90 percent of the winter range is snow-free” in parts of Baker County, Ratliff said Tuesday. “It’s been a pretty easy winter so far.”

And if the moderate trend continues until spring, this will be the second consecutive such winter.

That would amount to a respite for deer, which suffered major losses during the winter of 2016-17.

Hundreds of deer died, with the most severe effects in Baker and Union counties. In response, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission cut hunting tags by 50 percent in Baker County’s four units, and by 35 percent in some Union County units, for 2017 and 2018.

Deer fared somewhat better in Wallowa County.

Decimated herds started to recover in 2017, but the process, even with benign winters, takes more than a couple of years, Ratliff said.

During the spring of 2017, in the first deer herd census after the hard winter, ODFW biologists counted 9 fawns per 100 adult deer in Baker County, Ratliff said.

That ratio improved to 45 fawns per 100 adult does by the fall of 2017, and fawn survival during the 2017-18 winter was strong.

This past fall the fawn ratio was 50 per 100 does, slightly above average and evidence that Baker County herds continue to rebound.

(The spring census tallies fawns per 100 adults, rather than per 100 does, because in

A Tale Of 3 Winters

WEATHER DATA: BAKER CITY AIRPORT			
Average high temperature — December			
2016 — 24.5	2017 — 34.8	2018 — 36.8	
Average low temperature — December			
2016 — 4.9	2017 — 14.7	2018 — 21.9	
Average high temperature — January			
2017 — 22.7	2018 — 42.9	2019 — 37.6*	
Average low temperature — January			
2017 — 3.4	2018 — 26.4	2019 — 21.2*	

*through Jan. 15



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

Mule deer buck

the spring the bucks haven’t grown antlers and so can’t be distinguished from does.)

A certain number of fawns die every year regardless of the severity of the winter, Ratliff said.

Predators such as coyotes, cougars and wolves kill some. And fawns are even susceptible to an early spring that causes a lush crop of grass to sprout, he said.

Fawns, which have been



S. John Collins/Baker City Herald file photo

Mule deer on winter range

“We will have some mortality, but I would expect most deer to be able to get through this winter.”

— Leonard Erickson, ODFW biologist

subsisting on meager diet during winter, can come down with scours, a potentially fatal intestinal affliction, if they start gorging on the comparatively rich new grass.

Union County

If the weather trends continue, with relatively little snow and no extended periods of frigid temperatures, deer survival should be good, said Leonard Erickson, wildlife biologist at ODFW’s La Grande office.

“Any deer that came into the winter in normal or better condition should be fine,” Erickson said. “We will have some mortality, but I would expect most deer to be able to get through this winter.”

Erickson said one negative part of the equation is that, because of the dry fall, there wasn’t much green grass available for deer to fatten up on before temperatures dropped and snow fell.

That fall green up can help deer pack on the fat reserves that help sustain them through the winter, when their caloric intake drops at the same time they need to burn more calories to stay warm.

Wallowa County

The winter of 2016-17 didn’t

have such dire effects on Wallowa County’s mule deer, but the county’s mule deer population was already relatively low before that winter, said Pat Matthews, supervising fish and wildlife biologist at ODFW’s Enterprise office.

“We come into the winter with so few fawns any more, it isn’t even the winter (that’s limiting the overall population),” Matthews said.

He said the fawn to doe ratio across the county was 42 to 100 last fall, which is “not very good.”

The ratios ranged from a low of 32 fawns per 100 does in the Minam Unit to a high of 59 per 100 in the Wenaha Unit.

Deer are in good condition, however, he said, thanks in part to the mild weather.

“We’ve had some cold weather and snow, but on a lot of our winter ranges the south slopes have been bare quite a bit,” he said.

Matthews said that although mule deer are struggling in Wallowa County, their white-tailed cousins are thriving.

White-tailed deer are expanding their range from the Wallowa Valley, where the prevalence of homes and farms helps protect the animals from predators, to other parts of the county, Matthews said.

He said white-tailed deer seem to be better able to endure both harsh weather and threats from predators compared with mule deer.

“When it comes to winter conditions, whitetails will just hold on,” Matthews said.

TOTAL LUNAR ECLIPSE SUNDAY EVENING

Clouds could interfere with moon’s big show Sunday

By Jayson Jacoby
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The moon will pull a disappearing act Sunday but it’s possible the curtain will remain closed.

Figuratively speaking.

A total lunar eclipse will happen, with the moon completely within the Earth’s shadow for slightly more than one hour starting around 8:41 p.m.

During the eclipse the moon takes on a rusty orange-red hue — hence the term “blood moon” that’s sometimes applied to total lunar eclipses.

Sunday’s eclipse also coincides with a “super moon” — when the moon is a bit closer

than usual to Earth and so appears very slightly larger.

But the rare celestial event — the next one visible across the U.S. won’t happen until 2022 — might be concealed by clouds.

The National Weather Service is forecasting cloudy skies throughout Baker, Union and Wallowa counties Sunday night, with a chance of rain or snow across the region.

Should the skies cooperate, viewers need not take any precautions, as is the case with solar eclipses. All you have to do is look. Binoculars or a telescope can heighten the experience, of course.

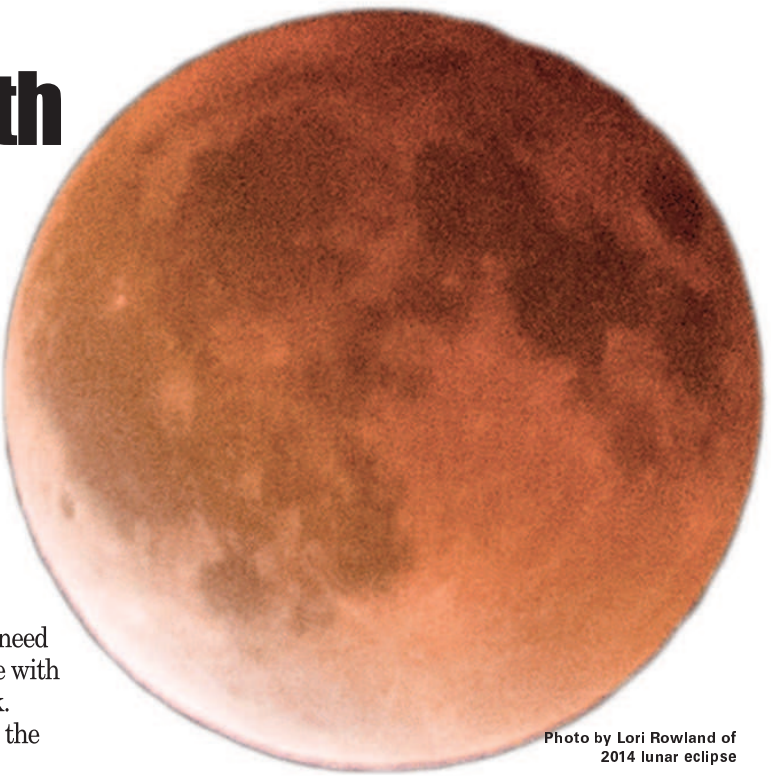


Photo by Lori Rowland of 2014 lunar eclipse