

RECREATION REPORT

BIRD FESTIVAL MAY 17-19 AT LADD MARSH

Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area near La Grande is hosting the 14th-annual Ladd Marsh Bird Festival May 17-19. The festival offers an uncrowded, family friendly birding opportunity for expert and novice birders.

The festival occurs at peak spring migration and nesting season, and only on bird festival weekend do visitors have the opportunity to explore areas of the wildlife area typically closed to the public.

The event is free but registration is required. Optional field trips and workshops run from \$20 to \$40 and require pre-payment. Before joining the festival, visitors must purchase a parking permit at any outlet where hunting licenses are sold.

Festivities start Friday evening, May 17, with Rob Taylor, former Midway Atoll restoration ecologist who became acquainted with Wisdom, the oldest known living wild bird. Rob will discuss how the atoll, a military base, was transformed into a refuge for birds and other wildlife. This event begins at 6 p.m. at the Union County Senior Center, 1504 Albany St. in La Grande.

Saturday activities begin at 6 a.m. with local birding experts available until noon to help visitors find and identify birds at six stations located around the wildlife area. At 1 p.m., Blue Mountain Wildlife will bring live birds of prey and discuss life history of hawks, falcons and owls. Services for the deaf are available; call Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area at 541-963-4954.

Children's Saturday activities from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. include birdhouse building, coloring a canvas tote, and the Junior Birder program.

Youngsters completing the Junior Birder program earn a patch and a field guide. These activities are centered at the Tule Lake registration area on Peach Road.

Festival sponsors include the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Friends of Ladd Marsh, Eastern Oregon University, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service and several others.

FISHING FORECAST

WALLOWA VALLEY PONDS

Have been stocked, and will have good fishing for stocked trout. Kinney Lake is fishing well for stocked and holdover trout up to 16 inches.

9,300-acre area in Lookout Mountain unit closed to hunting starting Aug. 1



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

Sunrise over the Idaho mountains illuminates part of the Lookout Mountain unit near Brownlee Reservoir in eastern Baker County. This is part of the 9,300-acre Forsea Ranch property that had been open to hunting for more than a decade. Owner Dan Forsea announced recently that he will remove the land from a state hunting access program starting Aug. 1.

Hunting options shrinking

By Jayson Jacoby
Baker City Herald

A Baker County hunting unit with relatively little public access will have even less before the main hunting seasons start in August.

Dan Forsea, who owns a 9,300-acre area in the Lookout Mountain unit that had been open to hunting for more than a decade, announced last week that he will remove his property from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) Access & Habitat Program starting Aug. 1.

Forsea, a cattle rancher from Richland, cited as his reason his opposition to the Baker County commissioners' efforts to force an adjacent landowner to unlock two gates blocking a road west of the Forsea property.

Forsea said that since neighboring landowner Todd Longgood locked those gates about two years ago, he has noticed a reduction in vehicle damage on roads, as well as less trash.

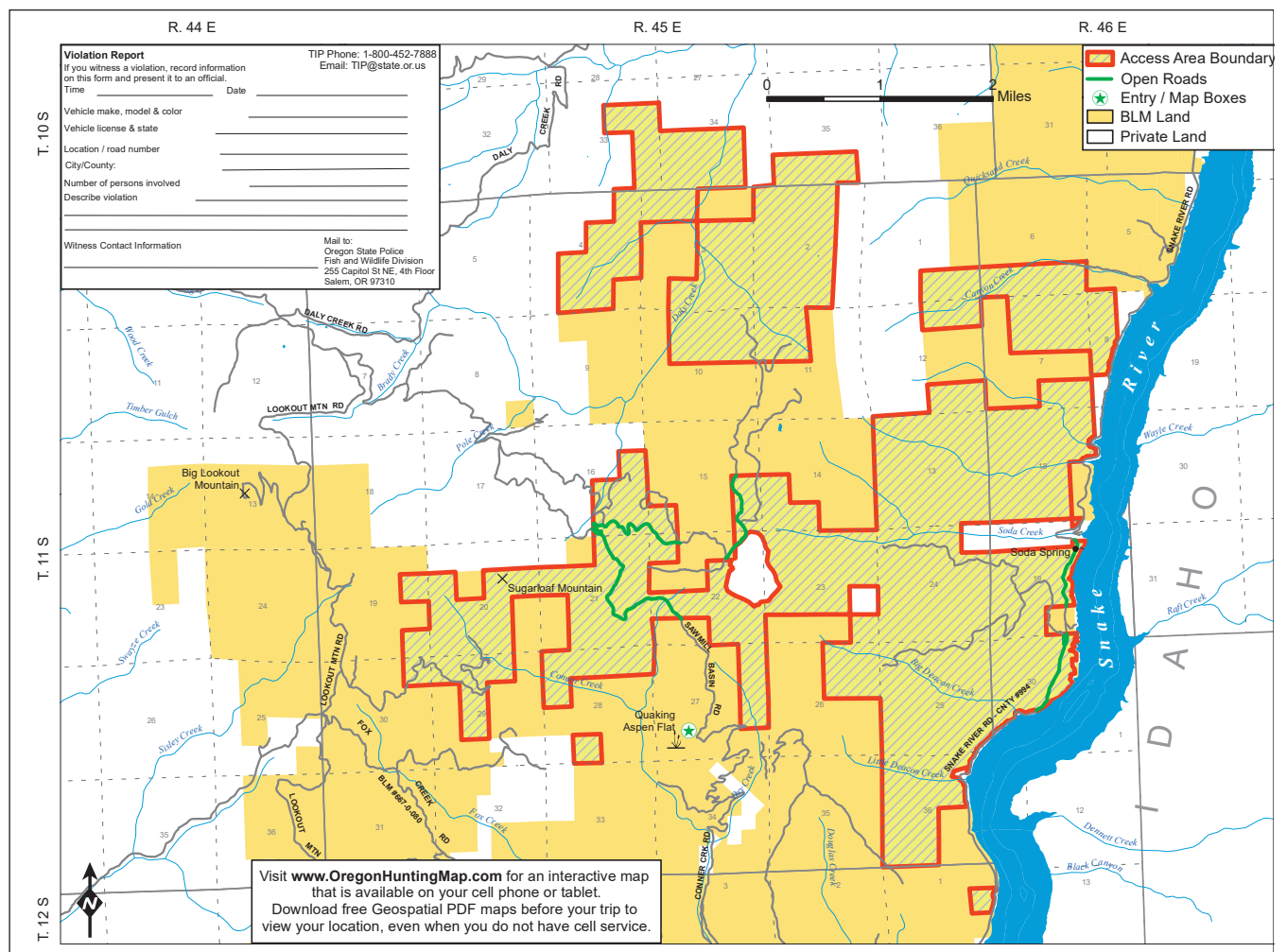
Forsea contends the county can't prove that the road, which enters his property from the west, qualifies as a public right-of-way.

The Forsea parcels constitute the largest of several Access & Habitat properties in the Lookout Mountain unit, which is bordered on the north by Highway 86, on the west and south by Interstate 84, and on the east by Brownlee Reservoir.

With 38% of its land public — including several parcels that are surrounded by private land and thus lack any legal access for hunters — the Lookout Mountain unit is one of the least accessible among hunting units in Northeastern Oregon.

(Sled Springs is 21% public, Catherine Creek 24%, Walla Walla 33% and Ukiah 35%.)

The scarcity of access has made it a challenge for the ODFW to manage big game herds in the unit — particularly elk. The elk population has exceeded the agency's objective for the unit, prompt-



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife photo

The map shows the boundaries of the Forsea Ranch Access & Habitat area in the Lookout Mountain unit of eastern Baker County. Owner Dan Forsea announced recently that he will remove the property from the program, which allowed hunters to access the land, starting Aug. 1.

ing officials to increase tag numbers and to extend the seasons in some cases.

"One of the biggest challenges in Lookout Mountain is land access," said Brian Ratliff, district wildlife biologist at ODFW's Baker City office. "We just don't have enough access to get the harvest level needed to curb the growth of elk herds."

The addition of new, and in some cases longer, hunts were designed to offset the limits on hunting imposed by the relatively lack of access.

Following Forsea's announcement, ODFW issued a news release reminding hunters who have already applied for a hunting tag in the Lookout Mountain unit that they have until June 1 to change their choice.

(The regular application deadline is May 15.)

The closure of the Forsea property could affect hunters

who applied for a buck deer tag (hunt No. 164). There are 161 tags for that hunt this fall, and last year about 680 people had that as their first choice.

There are four elk hunts in the unit — 264A1, 264A2, 264X and 264Y. Those hunts have 660 tags total, which is actually more than there were first-choice applicants last year.

There are also two bighorn sheep hunts in the unit, 564A1 and 564A2, as well as a pronghorn antelope hunt, 464.

There are three regular tags yearly for bighorn sheep, and Ratliff said the two winners of the state's raffle and auction tags also frequently choose to hunt in the Lookout Mountain unit, as it often produces trophy rams.

The closure of the Forsea property could affect how ODFW manages the big-

horn sheep seasons because historically about 90 percent of the rams harvested were taken on the Forsea Access & Habitat lands, Ratliff said. That could result in changing the timing of the seasons to coincide with when sheep are on public land.

In addition to big game hunting the Forsea property has populations of chukars and grouse.

"It gets quite a bit of use," Ratliff said.

According to ODFW the simplest way to change a hunt choice is to log in to your MyODFW.com account, go to Recreational Portfolio/Controlled Hunts and then click the Edit button next to Hunt Choices. Hunters who haven't logged in to their online account yet should use the "Verify/Look Up Your account" button to retrieve and set up their online account.

Hunt choices can also be

ODFW encourages hunters to apply for premium hunts

Premium hunts are Oregon's premier hunting opportunity for both residents and non-residents—deer, elk and pronghorn antelope tags with a four-month season (Aug. 1-Nov. 30) and any-sex bag limit.

Like all limited-entry controlled hunts, applications are \$8, and due no later than 11:59 p.m. May 15. Premium Hunt tags also cost the same as other big game tags.

changed through June 1 at ODFW offices that sell licenses, at license sale agents, or by contacting licensing — odfw.websales@state.or.us, or by phone at 503-947-6101.