

RECREATION
REPORT

Anglers can keep one wild chinook from Snake River

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has modified bag limits for the Snake River fall Chinook season to allow anglers to harvest one wild adult fall chinook in the Snake River.

The National Marine Fisheries Service recently approved a three-state fall chinook fishery management plan that allows Idaho, Oregon and Washington to expand harvest of fall chinook salmon to include unclipped adults.

The current regulations:

- Through Oct. 31, 2019, or until further notice, the Snake River from the Oregon-Washington border upstream to the deadline below Hells Canyon Dam is open to fall chinook fishing.
- Effective Nov. 1 through Nov. 17, 2019, or until further notice, the Snake River from Cliff Mountain Rapids (RM 246.7, 1.1 miles below Hells Canyon Dam) upstream to the deadline below Hells Canyon Dam will remain open to fall chinook fishing.
- The daily bag limit is 6 fall chinook per day of which 1 may be wild; with no daily, possession, or season limits on marked or un-marked jack salmon (less than or equal to 24 inches in length). Anglers must cease fishing for salmon for the day when they retain 6 salmon (non-jack).

Fall chinook have returned to the Snake River in strong numbers in recent years prompting fisheries managers to peruse these changes.

“If we see strong runs in future years, we’ll consider expanding harvest to more than one unclipped fish,” said Kyle Bratcher, acting district fish biologist at ODFW’s Enterprise office. “We’ve decided to be somewhat conservative in the first year while we gain a better understanding of what harvest will be.”

While some wild fall chinook will be harvested, the majority of these fish are unmarked hatchery fish.

Fall chinook fishing has been slow in the Oregon section of the Snake River with fish still making their way through the lower river. Fisheries managers expect fish will begin arriving in greater numbers over the next two weeks with the best fishing to come.

The Observer & Baker City Herald

Iconic, majestic: The elk

The elk: a great runner, an eater-upper of rough terrain, a beast that knits the Blue/Wallowa Mountain country together in its yearly rounds — summering in the high parklands and meadows, wintering in the foothills and valleys, following old hoof-broken travelways in between. And a beast tightly bound up in local human culture for millennia.

Our Northeast Oregon wapiti cover a great spectrum of topography and ecosystem in their journeying year: grazing subalpine meadows, calving in dense shady groves, wading up to their bellies in Ladd Marsh pools. They also call up the deep time of their ancestry and all their farflung relatives, from the Mongolian steppes to the Scottish Highlands. This time of year — as we listen to bulls bugling and stalk them with bow and rifle, and as the herds prepare for their fall migration — seems as good as any to ponder the elk’s backstory and specialness.

The nomenclatural confusion surrounding elk is probably familiar to many of you. In Europe, “elk” refers to what we here in North America call (after an Algonquin label) “moose”: the giant, gangly, cantankerous deer that lately has been colonizing our neck of the woods. The off-base label came from European colonists, who also variously called elk “gray moose” (as opposed to the true “black moose”) and “red deer,” a more understandable categorization given the close resemblance and genetic affinity between New World elk and Old World red deer.

(More on that later.)
As far back as the early 1800s naturalists were advocating for the American “elk”



S. John Collins/Baker City Herald file photo

Rocky Mountain elk at a state-operated winter feeding site.



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to be called the “wapiti,” after the Shawnee name for the creature that — right on point for its appearance — translates to “white rump.” I’m totally on board with wapiti: It’s an indigenous American name that eliminates all the moose-mixup confusion of “elk.” That said, “elk” is firmly entrenched, and I use both terms interchangeably.

The North American wapiti is the biggest and most advanced of the red-deer line. It’s an impressively adaptable generalist: a grazer of grasses, sedges, and forbs, but also happy to browse everything from shrubs to tree seedlings to lichen. It’s a lover of open spaces — mountain balds,

prairies — but also fond of deep woods, the timber stringers of canyon and mountain-side, long ago even colonizing the heavy forests of the East.

“Long ago,” though, is definitely relative. Notwithstanding their vast occupation of the North American continent at the time of European settlement — coast to coast, and from southern Canada down to Mexico — elk are among the newcomers of our fauna.

A 2014 study that conducted radiocarbon and genetic assessments of prehistoric elk remains from both Asia and North America shed some light on wapiti colonization of the New World. For much of the Late Pleistocene, elk (and moose, too) were apparently absent from the eastern parts of Beringia — the landmass encompassing the Bering Land Bridge and adjoining

parts of present-day northeastern Russia, Alaska, and Yukon, part of the Ice Age “mammoth steppe” — while occupying its western reaches in northeastern Siberia.

The research suggests elk and moose didn’t cross over into Alaskan Beringia until about 15,000 years ago — in the waning days of the Pleistocene — coincident with a warming phase and an ecological shift toward more browse. Around 11,000 years ago, the seas reclaimed the Bering Land Bridge, separating Asian and North American wapiti; elk in northeastern Siberia, the source population for our wapitis, died out in historical times.

The 2014 study suggests the apparently significantly colder and wetter realm that prevailed in central Beringia formed an ecological barrier for elk preventing their

eastward expansion until the end-Pleistocene climatic and ecological changes. Overall, a greater shrub component in eastern Beringia at the tail end of the mammoth-steppe days seems to have encouraged browsing wapiti and moose to “hoof” it over to North America — and may also have eased the way for people, the Beringian archaeological record for which roughly syncs with the elk’s timetable.

Taxonomists long debated whether Eurasian red deer — the classic “stag” of medieval art and story — and the wapiti of Asia (which include the Altai, Tian Shan, and Manchurian wapiti) and North America were the same species, but recent evidence suggests they’re distinct lines within the genus Cervus.

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Deer hunters bracing for wintry weather

By Jayson Jacoby
Baker City Herald

Wes Morgan isn’t thrilled by the prospect of slogging through snow before the calendar flips from September to October.

No matter that the white layer might betray to Morgan the location of a fine buck deer.

“I’d rather have good clear fall weather,” said Morgan, who’s among several thousand hunters who will venture into Northeastern Oregon’s forests and rangelands Saturday morning for the opening day of the deer season.

Morgan, who lives near Sumpter, is among about 825 hunters who have a tag for the Sumpter unit for the season that continues through Oct. 9.

He said he doesn’t mind chilly temperatures, especially at night, since that makes it easier for hunters to take care of fresh venison.

But snow less than a week into autumn, before the cottonwood leaves and the tamarack needles have taken on their seasonal tinge, well that’s a different matter.

“A little extreme,” Morgan said.

He said he’s more amenable to wintry weather during elk seasons, which generally start in late October or November.

Eldon “Buck” Buckner, who lives near Baker City, is hunting an area new to him this season — the Grizzly unit near Antelope.

Buckner, the author of “Field Guide to Measuring and Judging Big Game,” said he doesn’t mind unsettled weather while hunting.

“Personally I would rather have it a little cooler and damper,” he said.

Deer tend to be more active in such conditions, he said, rather



S. John Collins/Baker City Herald file photo

Thousands of hunters will be hoping to see a trophy mule deer buck like this one.

than bedding down for most of the daylight hours as they’re prone to do in sunny and warm weather.

Rain-soaked or snow-covered ground is also quieter to walk on. That’s no minor benefit when it comes to deer, with their keen hearing.

Buckner said he’s not eager, though, to try to fill his tag during a downpour or a blizzard.

If the weather is harsh enough the deer are apt to seek shelter much as they do on hot days, Buckner said.

“It’s not my favorite weather to hunt in,” he said.

Baker County Sheriff Travis Ash said for the past several years he has concentrated on hunting elk, but this year he also has a deer tag.

Ash said he prefers cooler weather

Granite Gulch
fire closure ends

An area of the Eagle Cap Wilderness in the Minam River area closed to the public since Aug. 23 due to the Granite Gulch fire reopened today, the day before the rifle deer hunting season opens.

because it prevents overheating — in both the hunter and, ideally, the deer meat.

But with his law enforcement perspective, and specifically the sheriff’s office’s search and rescue role, Ash said his main concern about the incoming inclement weather is the potential for hunters to be caught unprepared.

He urges hunters to dress adequately, with multiple layers so they can adjust to changing temperatures, to have fire-starting materials and, perhaps most important, to make sure someone at home knows where you’re planning to hunt and when you expect to return.

Unseasonable forecast

Deer hunters typically don’t have to deal with snow.

Indeed, mild weather, with daytime temperatures rising into the 70s or occasionally even higher, is more common during deer season.

The average high temperature at the Baker City Airport for the last week of September is about 72, and into the first 10 days of October the average dips only into the upper 60s.

But according to the National Weather Service, temperatures dur-

ing the opening weekend of the deer season, and at least for the first part of next week, won’t come close to those seasonal norms.

The strongest Pacific storm of the season is forecast to barge into the region Friday and Saturday.

And like an uninvited guest who claims the most comfortable section of the sofa and litters the floor with potato chip fragments, the low-pressure system is apt to linger.

According to the Weather Service’s Boise office, weekend high temperatures will run about 15 to 20 degrees below average, with widespread precipitation.

Valleys will mainly see rain but the snow level could plummet to 4,000 feet — low enough to take in much of the prime deer-hunting habitat in the area.

Drier and warmer weather is forecast to arrive around Wednesday.

Beulah, Sumpter, Keating, Pine Creek, Lookout Mt. Wildlife Management units

Over-winter survival was fair in all units with average fawn ratios of 29 per 100 adults counted in the spring. Heavy snow in late winter hurt fawn survival. Animals will be the most active early in the morning and late in the afternoon when temperatures cool off. Hunters should concentrate their efforts in areas of good forage near north slopes that provide good bedding cover.

The Beulah unit, is still recovering from the winter of 2016-17 with a fawn ratio of 24/100 adults. The buck ratio is 14/100 does, which is just below the buck management objective of 15/100 does.

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