

Mule Deer Getting Close To The Rut



Photo by Jim Ward

The mule deer rut is fast approaching. Bucks will be scanning the forest and range for receptive females. A unique method used to determine the breeding status of the females is referred to as flehmen. A buck will open his mouth and breathe in the doe's pheromones. These will flow over his vomeronasal organ in the roof of his mouth — indicating estrous in the doe. A doe will only be receptive to breeding for about 24 hours and will repeat in 17 to 24 days if not bred the first time.

Slow steelhead season

By Ellen Morris Bishop
EO Media Group

ENTERPRISE — Steelhead season is a cold-weather institution for Wallowa County fishermen. But this year's steelhead run is going to be small, according to ODFW fishery biologist Kyle Bratcher.

"We're well into the steelhead run this year and we're getting a clearer picture of what returns will look like," he said. "It's going to be a pretty tough year."

So far this season, only about 3,700 steelhead that are bound for the Grande Ronde, Wallowa, and Imnaha rivers have made it over Bonneville Dam. Usually the number is about 10,000 by now.

Ocean conditions have been adverse for steelhead and most salmonids, Bratcher said. Ocean waters have been warm, reducing upwelling that provides nutrients and, ultimately, food for growing steelhead. Warmer ocean waters also mean that predatory species like mackerel, that often favor warmer water, hang around in steelhead territory longer. They compete with steelhead for food — and also dine on the younger steelhead. And there just isn't much food,

Bratcher said.

"NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) and others monitor how the fishery is doing," he said. "The fish they found this year are not in good condition."

Because of overall low return numbers, the Columbia and Snake rivers are shut down to angling for steelhead. Many of the steelhead bound for Wallowa County rivers are still moving up through the Columbia and Snake rivers. Oregon, Washington and Idaho biologists are monitoring those movements as they make their way to Lower Granite Dam.

"My projections suggest we can have a steelhead season on our rivers in Oregon and still get enough fish back to the hatcheries to make broodstock goals," Bratcher said. "Maintaining a one-fish limit on steelhead will help ensure this."

The one-fish limit provides a slight advantage for wild fish, Bratcher said. He estimates that about half the returning fish are hatchery-produced. So if fishermen can keep just one fish, and it's a hatchery broodstock, that will leave more wild fish to spawn.

Fishing for steelhead is

closed on the Clearwater and other Idaho rivers, Bratcher noted. That's because those fish are part of the "B run" Snake River steelhead. Those fish remain in the ocean for two to three years, and return to their natal streams earlier than the "A" run fish that are native to Wallowa County's streams.

Wallowa County steelhead ply Pacific Ocean waters for only one to two years. The longer residence time in the ocean means that the Clearwater's "B" run steelhead are larger — but also more vulnerable to ocean conditions. And that means that fishing is closed for the "B" team fish.

At present, there's a temporary rule that ends steelhead season on Dec. 31, with a bag limit of one fish. But Bratcher is optimistic that "our" Wallowa County and Grande Ronde "A" run steelhead, currently crossing Lower Granite Dam on the Snake River just below Lewiston, Idaho, and showing up in local rivers, will be abundant enough to allow for a one-catch steelhead

TOUR

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Volunteers run the Museum, so hours of visitation fluctuate and a phone call may be needed to assure entrance.

Leave Union on the Medical Springs Highway 203. Spool out of the Grande Ronde Valley next to Catherine Creek and back up into the trees at Catherine Creek State Park. Take pleasure in the bucolic serenity of horses, cattle and turkeys along the way. Keep in mind that this road has a low traffic volume except when residence are traveling to and from work in La Grande and Union. Celebrate the last evening camping out on this seven-day adventure among the large ponderosa pines and the burbling of the creek as it shelters baby salmon and travels to the ocean.

Photo by Mavis Hartz

Colorful fall foliage lines Catherine Creek as it meanders from the Wallowa Mountains east of Union.



BLM chief: Controlling wild horse populations in West will cost \$5 billion

■ Acting director also estimates the effort would take 15 years

By Scott Sonner
Associated Press

RENO, Nev. — It will take \$5 billion and 15 years to get an overpopulation of wild horses under control on federal lands across the West, the acting head of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management said Wednesday, adding that several developments have made him more optimistic about his agency's ability to get the job done.

William Perry Pendley announced the agency adopted out more than 7,000 mustangs and burros captured last year — the most in 15 years and a 54% increase from the previous year.

He said that helps clear space in government holding pens so they can accelerate roundups while scientists develop new fertility-control drugs to eventually shrink the size of the herds from 88,000 to the 27,000 he says the range can sustain. He said a new coalition of animal welfare advocates and ranchers is helping promote solutions and Congress appears willing to help.

Pendley, who is awaiting Senate confirmation as director, said the agency is in the process of hiring additional staff to speed roundups in Nevada, the state with the

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— William Perry Pendley, acting director, Bureau of Land Management

most horses.

"I'm not going to speculate on what Congress is going to do about money," Pendley said. "But I know there is a sense of sincerity on the Hill about this issue. They get it. They have talked to the secretary about it. And they want to try to solve the problem."

"I'm more optimistic about the future than I've been in quite some time," he told reporters on a conference call.

The Senate Appropriations Committee approved \$35 million last month for a new package of mustang proposals supported by an unprecedented alliance including the Humane Society of the United States, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, National Cattlemen's Beef Association and American Farm Bureau Federation.

They say it would eliminate the threat of slaughter for thousands of free-roaming horses and shrink the size of herds primarily through

expanded fertility controls on the range and increased roundups in certain areas.

The proposal has been condemned by the largest and oldest mustang protection groups in the West, including the American Wild Horse Campaign and Friends of Animals, who have been fighting for decades to block roundups.

In July, then-Acting BLM Director Casey Hammond said in Idaho the Trump administration won't pursue lethal measures such as euthanasia or selling horses for slaughter.

But critics say the new plan could allow for sterilization of mares. They argue the animals must be permitted to roam the range in federally protected management areas established under the Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971. They say BLM's population quotas are often outdated and lack scientific data to support roundups to cull herd sizes.

The Senate committee included a \$35 million increase for the bureau's wild horse and burro program as part of the \$35.8 billion Interior Department appropriation bill. It's not clear when the full Senate will consider the measure.

Bring Amtrak Back

Passenger Rail Public Forum

Community Room, Cook Memorial Library

La Grande; 10 am to 2 pm, Saturday, October 26

The public is encouraged to attend to learn about returning rail passenger service to Baker City and La Grande, the benefits of passenger trains, and to voice their preference for the type of service offered with the goal of creating a local advocacy group in Eastern Oregon to promote passenger rail.

Sponsored by the Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates (AORTA).

For more information: (817) 480-5385

Time for a fall clean up?

What you should know about the disposal of household hazardous waste.

What is household hazardous waste?

HHW is anything labeled toxic, flammable, corrosive, reactive or explosive. These materials can threaten family health and the safety of pets and wildlife.

What are some examples of hazardous waste?

Aerosols, Bleach, Drain Cleaners, Metal Polish, Mothballs, Oven Cleaners, Toilet Bowl Cleaners, Ammonia-based Cleaners, Mercury Thermometers, Wood Polishes, Waxes, Fertilizers, Insecticides, Herbicides, Rodenticides, Spa and Pool Chemicals, Roofing Compounds, Antifreeze, Batteries, Motor Oil, Paint Strippers and Thinners, Gasoline and more.

Where can I safely dispose of my hazardous waste?

La Grande Facility: Open to any resident of the three counties every other Tuesday, 8am-12 noon. By appointment, however, small labeled quantities accepted daily. (541) 963-5459.

Baker City Facility: Open the first Wednesday of each month, 10am-12 noon. By appointment only. (541) 523-2626.

Enterprise Facility: Open the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month 10am-12 noon. By appointment only. (541) 426-3332.

Americans generate 1.6 million tons of HHW per year!

The average home can accumulate as much as 100 pounds of hazardous waste.