

RECREATION  
REPORT

**WILDTURKEY  
FEDERATION  
BANQUET IN  
BAKER CITY**

The Baker County Longbeards, a chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, will have its annual hunting heritage banquet Saturday, Feb. 1, at 5 p.m. at the Baker Elks Lodge, 1896 Second St. Tickets are \$60 per person or \$85 per couple. More information is available by calling Bob Reedy at 541-403-1352.

**PRESENTATION ON  
BIGFOOT FEB. 6 AT  
HALFWAY**

HALFWAY — The Cornucopia Arts Council will host a presentation by Blue Mountain Bigfoot Research, started in 2017 by Scot Violette of Baker City. The presentation will start at 7 p.m. at Pine Eagle High School, 375 N. Main St. in Halfway.

**BACKCOUNTRY  
FESTIVAL SET FOR  
FEBRUARY 7-9**

The annual Eastern Oregon Backcountry Festival is set for Feb. 7-9, with events planned in Baker City and at Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort.

The Festival kicks off Friday, Feb. 7 with an airing of the new Teton Gravity Research film, "Fire on the Mountain," at 7 p.m. at Lefty's Taphouse, 1934 Broadway St. in Baker City. Entry is \$5 for students with ID, \$10 for adults and free for kids younger than 12. There will be a raffle and auction to raise money for the Wallowa Avalanche Center.

On Feb. 8 the Festival moves to Anthony Lakes for the Kip Rand Memorial Backcountry Race starting at 8 a.m. Winners in the male and female categories will each win a 2020-2021 season pass to the ski area. There will also be an avalanche basics clinic. On Sunday people are encouraged to tour the area around the ski area.

More information: [www.eou.edu/outdoor/eastern-oregon-backcountry-festival-2020/](http://www.eou.edu/outdoor/eastern-oregon-backcountry-festival-2020/)

INSECT-BORNE VIRUS KILLED ESTIMATED 2,000 WHITE-TAILED DEER IN UMATILLA COUNTY LAST YEAR

## Deer virus not widespread

By Jayson Jacoby  
Baker City Herald

The insect-spread virus that killed an estimated 2,000 white-tailed deer in Umatilla County last fall has been detected elsewhere in Northeast Oregon, but it hasn't caused any major die-offs in recent years, biologists said.

Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) is spread by the bite of midges that breed in stagnant water.

Deer can't spread the virus, also known as blue tongue, to other deer or animals by direct contact. Midges carrying the virus can infect other animals, including mule deer, elk and cattle, but the mortality rate is much higher with white-tailed deer than with other species.

The virus poses no threat to people, cats or dogs. Nor can people become ill by eating the meat of a deer or other animal infected with EHD.

Biologists with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) say EHD is responsible for the significant death toll among white-tailed deer last year in parts of Umatilla County.

There are herds of white-tailed deer in Baker, Union and Wallowa counties as well, and although biologists have confirmed cases of EHD in those counties over the years, they haven't seen any losses comparable to what happened last year in Umatilla County.

The biggest recent die-off in Baker County happened during the late summer and early fall of 2015, said Brian Ratliff, district wildlife biologist at ODFW's Baker City office.

Ratliff said ODFW didn't compile an official death toll, but he believes many dozens of white-tailed deer died in the county in 2015.

Dead deer were found in Baker Valley and in Pine Valley.

There haven't been any widespread outbreaks in white-tailed deer since 2015, and their population is rebounding in Baker County, Ratliff said.

White-tailed deer have expanded their range throughout much of Wallowa County, but biologists have



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife photo

White-tailed deer, which are found throughout Northeast Oregon, are especially susceptible to the Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease, which is spread by biting midges.

confirmed only an occasional case of EHD in white-tails, said Pat Matthews, ODFW's district wildlife biologist in Enterprise.

"We haven't had any significant losses that we're aware of up here," Matthews said.

When EHD is prevalent it's difficult to miss given the high mortality rate among white-tailed deer, he said.

"You'd notice if there was any significant number of deer dying," Matthews said.

In Wallowa County white-tailed deer populations are highest in the Wenaha and Sled Springs units, with smaller numbers in the Snake River, Imnaha and Chesnimnus units, Matthews said.

Matt Keenan, ODFW's district wildlife biologist in Union County, said biologists examined some white-tailed deer carcasses last year, but they weren't able to get tissue

samples fresh enough to have lab tests confirm EHD.

"But we think it's likely" that the virus killed at least some of those deer, Keenan said.

He said it's also possible that EHD killed two pronghorn antelope in Union County last year.

Ratliff said the only confirmed case of EHD over the past year in Baker County was in a mule deer that was living within the Baker City limits.

That deer had been showing neurological symptoms, he said.

Although infected mule deer are much more likely to survive than white-tailed deer are, Ratliff said the virus, which causes blood vessel constriction, can have severe and in some cases permanent effects on mule deer.

The vascular constriction can cause the testicles to shrivel and eventually fall off infected mule deer bucks, which renders them incapable of

breeding, Ratliff said.

The loss of testicles also means the bucks can't produce testosterone, the hormone that causes bucks to shed their antlers every year, generally in late winter.

When that happens the buck can have antlers for the rest of its life, and the antlers typically remain in the velvet stage constantly, Keenan said.

Ratliff said he has seen several mule deer bucks that apparently were infected with EHD in 2015, survived the virus but lost their testicles.

Ratliff and his colleagues, Matthews, Keenan and Phillip Perrine, assistant district biologist in Union County, all agreed that although white-tailed deer have been expanding their range in the region, they're not responsible for declining populations in mule deer.

Mule deer declines have more to do with predators, the biologists said.

## Coyote hunting can ward off winter doldrums

It's winter so you might as well put away your rifles and curl up and die. All is lost, right? No! One of the finest hunting opportunities is in full blast right now. What, you may ask? Varmint hunting! Varmint hunting can provide for some fast-paced shooting. If you've never done it, you need to.

You may also ask, where should I hunt them? One time I was driving to Boise to conduct a varmint hunting seminar at Cabela's. As I was about to get on the freeway I looked off to my right and there was a coyote working a fence line right in town. Unbelievable.

So to answer your question as to where to find them — almost anywhere. I've always



**BASE CAMP**  
TOM CLAYCOMB

said if the Communist dropped an H bomb on America, the only two things that would survive (and probably thrive) are cockroaches and coyotes.

Yes, you can occasionally pick up a coyote just driving around but we want to talk about targeting them. To really be efficient you need an electronic call. You can set one out 40 yards from you and run it by a remote control. That way when they come in, they're focused on the call and not you.

You also need to use decoys. They hear a lot of commotion, come running in and then whoa! Something is weird.

They don't see any other animals. You'll want to use an electronic waggler type of decoy. It is basically a wire that flips around with a white rag tied to the end of it. They work great.

I also like to use a coyote and rabbit decoy from Montana Decoys. You might also want to use a deer or antelope decoy since both are around the Limon area. I'd recommend tying a small rag on their tail to look like a tail moving in the wind.

You'll need somewhere to hide. You can duck behind a fencerow, brush pile or a lot of times I'll carry a piece of camouflage burlap and lay it over two sagebrushes. Or I also like the Ameristep Throwdown blinds. They set

up in a C-shape and are super lightweight.

Coyotes will always approach and then circle downwind so you'll want to use a cover scent. My brother-in-law carries a roll of toilet paper in a coffee can soaked in skunk scent and sets it downwind of us. All I can say is, you better make sure that it is downwind!

What kind of guns should you use? In the old days you wanted a bolt action .223 but now, AR .223s are super popular. And for good reason. They allow you to take fast follow-up shots. A lot of times more than one will come in.

If there are two or more of us, I make someone carry a shotgun. Get a Trulock full choke and use HEVI-Shot

Dead Coyote loads. Years ago, their marketing manager told me that she rolled a coyote DOA at 70 yards. After using them, I don't doubt it. They are deadly.

Everyone is on a budget so if you can't afford an electronic call, hand calls still work too. Sixty years ago that is all that we had.

It works best to call early morning and at dusk but night hunting is magical. We'll talk about that next week. So don't sit around shelling out your hard-earned money for counseling fees because it is winter and you're depressed. Grab your rifle and a call and go whack some coyotes. They have some cool pelts and you'll help the antelope and deer herds.

## Humorous take on tumbleweeds: A planned prickly assault?

By Peter du Pree

I have had encounters with the supposedly dead prickly devils known as tumbleweeds in the past, as probably many of you have. Here is the most recent:

**THE WASHINGTON INCIDENT**

On New Year's Eve, 2019, it was reported that thousands of tumbleweeds traveling 40 to 50 mph had stranded motorists for 10 hours on a Washington state highway. It is estimated that 9 million cubic yards of the prickly devils converged on the area.

It only took 30 minutes for the

troublemakers to completely cover the cars, in some places piled 30 feet high. The attack was so powerful it scraped the paint off some of the cars involved.

A Washington State trooper said that people couldn't make a run for it. "If your car is covered in it, you can't just meander out of there."

Ah, yes. Those pricklies.

Apparently, when mature and dry, tumbleweeds detach themselves from their stem, or root, and they roll in the wind, spreading their seed.

Introduced to the U.S. in the late 1800s by accident as a contaminant in grain or wheat seed from Russia,

this hardy plant has plagued ranchers for many years. When stuck to a fence in large clumps, they can weigh down the fence, letting cattle escape.

You can Google the story to get the details, but here is something nobody has brought up: Who or what planned this attack upon innocent civilians?

Here's something to consider: The odds of thousands of these weeds (commonly known as Russian thistle) catching just the right wind and all of them ending up on that particular highway at the same time are pretty low. This type of attack had to have some intelligence behind it. A bunch

of dumb weeds couldn't have pulled it off.

So what was the motive behind it? Could a person in one of the cars have abused a weed in the past, and the weed community was looking for revenge? Or maybe the Head Weed had ordered it just to put on a show to prove that Mother Nature could also provide local terrorism. There is also the theory that fun-loving weeds were behind it, disguising themselves as weeds to cover their identity.

Whatever the case, I can visualize them all gathering together stuck to a fence somewhere, working out the details. Done. Now to wait for a big

wind to come along. As usual, that big wind did come along as it happens everyday in Southeastern Washington. And the attack began.

The only force that controls this type of attack is the wind. Tumbleweeds are like little ducklings. Which direction they go is up to Mother (Nature).

Or is it?

The rest is history. The largest recorded, organized tumbleweed attack in U.S. history. Let's hope that more of these events aren't being planned for the future.

Peter du Pree is a Baker City resident.