

RECREATION
REPORT

Starkey Forest
remains closed
to public due
to pandemic

The U.S. Forest Service's Starkey Experimental Forest and Range southwest of La Grande will remain closed to public entry until further notice to align with Oregon Gov. Kate Brown's executive order designed to reduce the spread of coronavirus.

The 25,000-acre Starkey Experimental Forest and Range was designated for research in 1940 and is the primary field location for collaborative studies of the effects of deer, elk, and cattle on ecosystems.

Starkey is popular with the public for gathering of shed deer and elk antlers each spring, and a large concentration of 100 or more people traditionally camp in a small area at the main gate in anticipation of opening day, May 1.

"This year, our field staff is extremely limited, owing to stay-at-home orders in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are not able to safely accommodate the traditional May 1 opening day," said Hans Hayden, Starkey area manager. "The governor's orders also do not allow large groups of the public to congregate, many of whom travel hundreds of miles to camp together at the Starkey entrance. The current pandemic and associated need to avoid large gatherings, maintain public safety, and maintain safety for those who serve the public are all key considerations in delaying our opening until further notice."

Starkey's temporary closure is part of a larger closure order that currently applies to developed recreation sites on the Wallowa-Whitman, Umatilla and Malheur national forests. A developed recreation site is a site which has been improved for recreation, including but not limited to campgrounds, trail-head facilities, picnic areas, rental cabins, Sno-Parks, and boat ramps.

Forest roads and trails, and general forest lands, remain open.

Ladd Marsh
Bird Festival
canceled

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and the Friends of Ladd Marsh have canceled the 2020 Ladd Marsh Bird Festival scheduled for May.

Next year's event, the 15th Ladd Marsh Bird Festival, has been scheduled for May 14-16, 2021.

Oregon's
wolf
numbers
rising

■ State biologists estimate population increased by 15% during 2019

By Jayson Jacoby

Baker City Herald

Oregon's estimated wolf population increased by 15% in 2019, and as has been the case since the animals returned to Oregon about 20 years ago, the majority of the state's wolves live in the northeast counties.

Biologists from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) tallied 158 wolves this winter, an increase from 137 the previous winter, according to the annual wolf report released Wednesday and available online at odfw.com/wolves.

Those are considered the "minimum known wolf counts" and don't represent the actual population of wolves, according to ODFW.

"The actual number of wolves in Oregon is likely higher, as not all individuals present in the state are located during the winter count," according to a press release from the agency.

Biologists counted 22 wolf packs this winter, up from 16 the previous

year. A pack is defined as four or more wolves traveling together during the winter count. Nine other groups of wolves, numbering two or three animals, were documented.

Three previous packs no longer have four wolves — Snake River, South Snake and Wildcat, all in Wallowa County.

Of the 22 packs, 19 have ranges that are in northeastern Oregon — Baker, Union, Wallowa, Grant, Umatilla and Morrow counties.

Nineteen of the 22 packs had pups in 2019 and consisted of least two adults and two pups at the end of 2019.

"The state's wolf population continues to grow and expand its range," said Roblyn Brown, wolf coordinator for ODFW.

Although most of Oregon's wolves continue to live in the northeast corner, this region, unlike in some previous years, wasn't the focus of wolf attacks on livestock during 2019.

ODFW confirmed 16 wolf attacks

on livestock, compared with 28 attacks in 2018.

In 2019 wolves killed one adult cow, one steer, 11 calves, six sheep and one protection dog, according to ODFW. More than half of the attacks were by the Rogue pack, which lives in Jackson and Klamath counties in southern Oregon.

Wolves from the Pine Creek pack in eastern Baker County killed an adult cow in April 2019 and a calf in May 2019.

Wolves from the Catherine pack killed one calf in Union County in January 2019. The Bear Creek pack killed one calf in May 2019 in Wallowa County, and the Ruckel Ridge pack killed six adult sheep in Union County in September.

ODFW confirmed that seven wolves were killed in 2019, five hit by vehicles and one that died from a disease.

On March 12, 2019, Lawrence Aguilar, who lives about 9 miles from Halfway in Baker County, shot and killed one of four wolves that he said

were chasing his cow dog near his home.

Then-Baker County District Attorney Matt Shirtcliff determined in April 2019 that Aguilar was legally justified in killing the wolf.

Oregon law allows people to kill wolves that are attacking working dogs or livestock.

ODFW didn't document any cases of people illegally killing wolves in the state in 2019, according to the annual report.

Oregon Wild, a group that advocates for wolves to expand into new territories in the state, lauded the trends detailed in the report.

"Wolf killing went down, livestock conflicts decreased, and Oregon's wolf population grew," Danielle Moser, Oregon Wild's wildlife program coordinator, said in a press release. "This is good news, and more strong evidence that focusing on nonlethal measures to reduce wolf-livestock conflict works."

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Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife photo

A wolf of the Wenaha Pack captured on a remote camera on U.S. Forest Service land in northern Wallowa County in February 2017.

Donations boost reward to \$10,000
in poaching of bighorn ram near Troy

TROY — Oregonians have raised additional money to bring the total reward to \$10,000 for information leading to charges involving a bighorn ram that was shot illegally Jan. 26 on the Wenaha Wildlife Area in northeastern Oregon.

The Oregon Hunters Association (OHA), Oregon Wildlife Foundation (OWF), and the Oregon Chapter of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep (OR FNAWS) chipped in to raise the reward from \$1,000 to \$10,000, or five hunter preference points. The original \$1,000 is from the OHA Turn In Poachers (TIP) rewards program, funded through

finances and restitutions from illegal fishing and wildlife convictions.

Field biologists discovered the crime after they received transmissions that the bighorn ram's radio collar had stopped moving, which is an indicator of death. They found the radio collar and one severed, tagged ear on the ground near an access road to a feeding station. Evidence indicates the ram was shot. Blood and hair were found beneath the collar.

"Collaborative efforts like this send a strong message that Oregonians feel protective of our fish and wildlife," said Curt Melcher, director of the Oregon Department of

Fish and Wildlife (ODFW).

OHA received support and encouragement from chapter branches across the state. The Union-Wallowa, Blue Mountain, Rogue Valley, Josephine County, Umpqua, Bend, Yamhill County and Tualatin Valley chapters each contributed \$500 for a total of \$4,000.

The Oregon Wildlife Foundation contributed \$2,500 to the reward. Collaborators are pleased to come together to stop poaching, said Tim Greseth, the Foundation's executive director. The nonprofit is dedicated to fish and wildlife conservation involving obstacles such as habitat loss, illegal hunting and collisions

with vehicles.

"These problems can be solved when organizations work together," Greseth said. "Oregon Wildlife Foundation is proud to join organizations like Oregon Hunters Association and Portland Audubon in the fight against wildlife crimes in Oregon. The Foundation is committed to doing that."

The Oregon chapter of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep also contributed \$2,500 to the reward.

"No one agency or organization has the resources to do everything on their own," said Kevin Martin, the chapter president.

In talking about the

January poaching of the ram, Martin said, "When they take an animal, they steal from the people of Oregon. And from everyone who contributed to the animals being there."

Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Capt. Casey Thomas agrees.

"Poachers take away opportunities from everyone else out there following the rules," Thomas said, "I'm very appreciative of all the different organizations coming together to increase the reward amount, which will hopefully generate a good tip or information that leads us to those responsible for killing this bighorn."

Turkey hunters need to prepare before heading out

By Tom Claycomb

There are some turkey hunting fanatics out there. In fact, you may be one of them. Here are a few symptoms/signs:

- You like turkey hunting almost as much as you do elk hunting.
- You get the DTs when you hear a gobble reverberating through the woods.
- You have or almost have lost a job over turkey hunting.

As you know, spring is the big time to hunt turkeys — Oregon's statewide spring turkey season started April 15 and continues through May 31. The toms are strutting and trying to impress the hens and calling one can almost be as cool as calling in a bull.

BUT ... before you actually go hunting you have some important tasks to complete and a few choices to make. First, you need to decide which ammo to use. When I was a kid pretty much



Tom Claycomb photo

Claycomb uses Birchwood Casey Shoot NC targets, which make it easy to see where BBs hit.

all we had was lead No. 2 shot, and 30 to 40 yards was about the maximum for range.

A lot has changed since then. No longer do a lot of people use their trusty old dove or duck shotgun. Many hunters have a turkey hunting shotgun. One big reason is that with the shells we now have, you can roll a

turkey out to 50 to 60 yards. So, you have to aim at an actual body part (head/neck) just like when hunting with a rifle.

It no longer suffices to use your beard sights on your regular shotgun. A lot of turkey hunters now use a scope or red dot sight. Riton Optics has a cool Red Dot Scope and a 3x magnifier that you ought to use.

The next thing you need to do is to choose your ammo. There are a lot of options on the market nowadays, and a lot of them work OK, but of all the ammo that I've tested HEVI-Shot is hands down the best. I did a comparison once for Bass Pro Shops and some of the competitors had 17 to 34 BBs in the kill zone if I remember correctly. HEVI-Shot had 119! The kill zone looked like Swiss cheese.

After choosing your ammo you need to sight in your shotgun just like you do when sighting in your rifle so

the main pattern hits where you want it to. But whoa, before you shoot you need to get a good choke to maximize your shotgun's performance. I use Trulock chokes. You'll want to use a tight choke.

Turkey loads kick so I use a Caldwell Lead Sled or a Caldwell Hydrosled to do my sighting in, especially if you're dumb enough to use some HEVI-Shot 3½-inch magnums. They're a killer (on both ends). And also, I like to use the Birchwood Casey turkey targets (Their Shoot NC targets). That way I can easily count how many BBs hit in the kill zone.

You'll want to sight in your shotgun right below the head. You don't want to shoot at the head and have half of the BBs go flying harmlessly overhead. Shoot at the neck so the turkey gets the main brunt of the pattern.

Now you're ready to go turkey hunting. Good luck.