

ELK

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said Jim Akenson, senior conservation director of the Oregon Hunters Association. "It looked just like Africa's Serengeti except instead of wildebeests you had elk."

The elk generally spend the late summer on U.S. Forest Service land and fall and winter in the canyons and breaks. But in spring and early summer, they feast on tender, nutritious prairie grasses that ranchers intend to graze with livestock. And the elk were remaining longer on prairie grassland. Stronger, but not as agile as mule deer, elk tend to run through fences rather than jumping over them. The result is damaged fences and stray cattle.

"With the increase in elk numbers in the Chesnimnus unit, an increasing number of elk were utilizing the private prairie ground year-round," said Shane Talley, an ODFW assistant wildlife biologist. "The elk had found a safe area with good habitat where they were not being pressured by public land users and public land hunters. This caused an increase in the amount of damage experienced by the landowners on the prairie."

In recent years a number of stakeholders — landowners, ranchers, conservationists, hunters, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Oregon Hunters Association, the Nez Perce Tribe and the U.S. Forest Service — have worked together to better manage the elk population. The community effort was coordinated by the ODFW's Pat Mathews, rancher Tom Birkmaier and OSU Extension Agent John Williams.

Attempts at simply hazing the elk off the land were less than successful. Calves born on the grassland were more likely to consider the open prairie landscape home and return there as adults, according to The Nature Conservancy's biologist Chad Dotson. And the long-distance views afforded by grassland kept the animals and their young offspring safer from predation by cougars, bears, coyotes and wolves.

"If a calf is born in the grasslands, chances are that's what it considers



Photo by Ellen Morris Bishop/EO Media Group

An elk cow escorts three calves to find a safe place to cross a fence on The Nature Conservancy's Zumwalt Prairie Preserve.

home, that's where it wants to live when it grows up," Akenson said.

The tool used to change this particular elk mindset has been seven years of Zumwalt hunts that focused mainly on cow elk.

"Elk began to get the message that they are not welcome," Akenson said. "And so they more readily moved into canyon breaks of heavier timber. Ultimately, they began to learn that their real security is the canyon breaks and canyon country."

Elk also began to move toward the Nez Perce's Precious Lands area in northern Joseph Creek, a place they are welcome.

In addition, Forest Service hazardous fuels reduction practices, such as timber removal, thinning and prescribed burning on federal and private lands have helped increase elk habitat in the unit. The presence of fresh-sprouting spring forage on prescribed burns at the northern end of Zumwalt Prairie, for example, has helped entice elk off the grassland and back into the woods, according to Talley. This is doubly helpful because some of the older fires that opened up forest habitat to more grazing and browsing, including the 1988 Tepee Butte Fire, had since closed in.

Reducing cow elk numbers also reduces the reproduction capacity of the population.

"By removing cow elk we can reduce the population growth rate and eventually the total population,"

Talley said.

And so the ODFW opened multiple antlerless elk seasons beginning in August and ending in January. Many private landowners on the prairie also opened their land to tag holders.

The reduction in elk on private lands has been significant.

Birkmaier said before efforts began to move elk from private to public lands, "80% of the elk in the Chesnimnus unit resided on private lands on the Zumwalt Prairie that amounted to only about 15% of the total unit area. That's an amazing statistic that even the ranchers found hard to believe."

The rancher estimated elk populations have dropped from about 4,500 animals to about 2,600 today. But Birkmaier sees factors beyond hunting as contributing to the decline.

"Hunting is maybe 50% of the cause," he said. "The other part is that we've had two hard, polar-vortex winters, with snow on the ground into March and April."

That made it hard for calves and yearlings to survive, reducing elk populations on the prairie. But Birkmaier harbors some concern the bounteous crop of elk calves this spring might reverse the downward population trend.

"There are just a lot of calves out there," he said. "Lots and lots of calves."

Other Zumwalt ranchers agree elk numbers are down, and elk damage has been reduced.

"In the past couple of years, the number of elk that have been on our land has been down some," said Lew Bloodworth, a longtime Zumwalt Prairie rancher whose land is adjacent to The Nature Conservancy. "Not as many get onto our land in spring and eat up all the best forage before the cattle get onto the range."

In fact, elk numbers on the Zumwalt Prairie and the Chesnimnus unit now are below the target number.

"We observed a more rapid decline in the population than we expected over the last three years," Talley said. "This resulted in an emergency tag reduction for the 2020 Zumwalt hunts and changes to the tag numbers and season structure for 2021."

The tag reduction for the 2020 season is down to 61 tags from 110 tags in each of the seven Zumwalt archery and rifle seasons. So, 343 fewer antlerless (cow) tags, or a 40% reduction overall in cow tags.

"This is a little less than 18% reduction in total elk tags for the entire unit," Talley said.

The ODFW aims to slow the rate of population decline with the goal of a stable and healthy elk population at manageable levels for hunters, the public and private landowners.

"Both sides — the ranchers and the hunters — think elk are important," Dotson, the TNC biologist, said. "No one wants to see the numbers too high or too low."

COVID-19 death linked to Ontario senior facility that was taking precautions

By Aidan McGloin
Malheur Enterprise via AP
StoryShare

ONTARIO — The Brookdale Ontario senior living facility has had one COVID-19 death, the Oregon Health Authority announced Wednesday, July 15. The facility also has six more cases than last week, for a total of 32 with positive tests.

A state record from July 1 said the facility had 41 residents.

The facility was restricting visitors, requiring masks and hiring extra staff by April 30, according to a state inspection report obtained through a public records request from the Oregon Department of Human Services. The assisted living center used a hospital-grade disinfectant on counters, drawers, door-knobs and handrails, and had enough gloves, face masks and other equipment. The inspector found no reasons for follow-up in any of their 35 categories of precautions.

Heather Luther, Ontario Brookdale executive director, directed the Malheur Enterprise to the facility's corporate parent,

Brookdale Senior Living Inc. A company spokesperson, Heather Hunter, declined to answer two sets of specific questions about circumstances at its Ontario operation.

Brookdale Senior Living is a publicly traded national chain based in Tennessee, which operated and owned 763 senior living facilities across 45 states in 2019. One of their other Oregon locations, in Clackamas County, has nine COVID-19 cases with no deaths, the Health Authority reported.

After the first case, the Ontario facility began isolating residents with positive COVID-19 results, according to a July 1 state review. Each resident had a private apartment and bedroom, unless they were shared with a couple.

According to the review, employees with symptoms of the virus were turned away, and staff checked residents for symptoms twice a day. Residents routinely left the facility, but the reason for their trips was redacted in the report. Residents did leave the facility for reasons such as medical appointments,

Hunter said. Staff placed furniture in the common room 6 feet apart, canceled all activities and delivered meals from the kitchen to each resident's room.

Some of the residents would be transferred to a Portland-area COVID-19 treatment facility, the report said.

The July 1 report found several concerns: the break room was not large for social distancing, staff needed a face shield disinfection area, the designated personal protective equipment area needed to have instructions posted, and more.

On July 6, a new report found the break room issue was resolved, the equipment area had instructions and other fixes were in place. They

were in the process of starting to monitor their hand hygiene and cleaning practices.

The facility still wasn't monitoring symptomatic residents three times a day, the July 6 report said, not had it designated a place to disinfect, dry and store face shields.

By July 6, all COVID-19-positive residents were sent to one unit of the facility, with all but one entrance closed and sealed with a plastic barrier, tape and zipper. Nurses assigned to work with those patients didn't go to the other side of the facility. The facility followed CDC infection control practices, the report said. Some residents who contracted COVID-19 were receiving treatment from facilities in Tigard and Boise, the report said.

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LUNCH

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years ago before being restored with help from Elgin School District Superintendent Dianne Greif.

"She pushed hard to get it back," Myers said.

Stella Mayfield students, like all of those in Oregon schools, have not been allowed to go into their schools since mid-March due to the pandemic. The lunch program, however, gets students back to Stella Mayfield even though they cannot go inside.

"It is a good way for them to stay in contact with their school," Spikes said.

Greif credited Myers and Marago with doing an excellent job of making children feel at home when they come for their lunches.

"They are spectacular. They are so glad to see them and so welcoming," Greif said. "It makes all

the difference."

Myers said the meal program is giving Stella Mayfield students a chance to place a name and face with a familiar voice. She explained that while doing playground duty during the school year she calls students in, in booming fashion.

"Everybody here knows my voice," Myers said.

She said on a number of occasions, children getting lunches told her they recognized her voice.

Children picking up their lunches sometimes receive a bonus when they see their classmates, some of whom they may not have seen in recent months.

"They are excited to see each other," Myers said.

Spikes said he is glad the lunch program is making it possible for children to see each other more often.

"Not being together is tough on kids," Spikes said.



Staff photo by Dick Mason

Anji Schmittle and her children, Thorin (red shirt) and Morgin (green shirt), last week examine the lunches they received at Stella Mayfield School, Elgin. The summer lunch program provides lunches free to all youths age 18 and younger.

CASES

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symptoms of COVID-19.

Oregon also reported 262 Oregonians have died from the virus.

Oregon's 261st COVID-19 death is a 76-year-old man in Marion County who tested positive on June 22 and died on July 17, at Legacy Good Samaritan Medical Center. And the state's 262nd COVID-19 death is a 92-year-old man in Marion County who tested positive on July 8 and died on July 18, in his residence. The Oregon Health

COVID-19 CASE TOTALS FOR NORTHEAST OREGON COUNTIES

Umatilla County — 1,381
Union County — 383
Morrow County — 195
Wallowa County — 18
Baker County — 13
Grant County — 1

Authority reported both had underlying medical conditions.

The total number of deaths from the virus in Union County remains at two.

NEW CASES BY COUNTY

The Oregon Health Authority on Monday reported 277 new cases of COVID-19 statewide, increasing the state's total to 14,847. Here are where the news cases occurred by county:

Clackamas (11), Clatsop (2), Columbia (1), Crook (1), Deschutes (19), Douglas (2), Harney (1), Hood River (2), Jackson (5), Jefferson (7), Josephine (2), Klamath (5), Lake (1), Lane (4), Lincoln (2), Malheur (10), Marion (30), Morrow (1), Multnomah (85), Polk (1), Umatilla (41), Washington (38), Yamhill (6).



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