

# DEER: Whitetail does usually have twin fawns every year

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fall of 2019, resulting in the cancellation of some deer hunts in that area.

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.

Deer are infected only by being bitten by midges; deer can't infect each other through nose-to-nose contact, as with some other diseases.

## Union County

EHD also spread through white-tailed deer in Union County this summer, including in higher elevation forested areas in the Wenaha and Sled Springs units where the disease has rarely been confirmed in the past, said Phillip Perrine, a wildlife biologist at ODFW's La Grande office.

"It was more prevalent than we've seen," Perrine said.

He didn't have an estimate for how many deer died, although he said there were outbreaks in both the mountains and in the Grande Ronde Valley.

Assessing the extent of the outbreak will be easier once ODFW receives hunter reports and conducts its annual aerial deer census this month, Perrine said.

He said ODFW started getting reports of dead white-tailed deer in early



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife/Contributed Photo

**An insect-borne virus killed dozens of deer, most whitetails, in Baker, Union and Wallowa counties this summer, but wildlife biologists said the die-off likely won't lead to a reduction in hunting tags.**

summer, and, as in Baker Valley, tissue samples confirmed EHD.

Both Perrine and Ratliff believe the severe drought contributed to the severity of this year's EHD outbreak.

Deer tend to be most vulnerable to being infected by midges when the animals are concentrated around water

sources, the biologists said.

And with fewer of those sources during this dry summer, there were likely larger numbers of deer gathering in places where they were exposed to midges, Perrine said.

It's not clear yet whether the EHD outbreak will prompt ODFW to reduce hunting tag numbers for any 2022 seasons, Perrine said.

He said he hopes that's not the case, particularly with a popular muzzle-loader hunt for whitetails.

Ratliff said the EHD outbreak ended quickly once freezing temperatures kill the year's crop of midges.

Both he and Perrine said they stopped receiving reports of dead deer in early fall.

"Once the conditions get

colder and these midges are no longer on the landscape, we didn't really have any more losses," Perrine said.

## Wallowa County

A total of 12 deer — 11 whitetails and one mule deer — were confirmed by tests as having died from EHD, said Bree Furfey, district wildlife biologist at ODFW's Enterprise office.

The disease is also suspected as the cause in another mule deer's death.

Furfey said she doesn't have an estimated total number of deer deaths due to the outbreak.

She said the virus was most prevalent in and around the city of Wallowa, but it was also confirmed elsewhere in the Wallowa Valley including near Joseph, Lostine and Enterprise, and in the northern part of the county near Troy and the Wenaha country.

Furfey said that although the extent of the EHD outbreak isn't certain, she doesn't believe the death toll among deer was high enough to warrant any reductions in hunting tags for 2022.

## Rapid recovery?

Although white-tailed deer are much more susceptible to EHD, the species has an advantage in that whitetail populations tend to grow faster than mule deer herds when conditions are suitable, Perrine said.

White-tailed does typically have twin fawns each year, he said.

"It's difficult to overhunt whitetails because they reproduce so quickly," Perrine said.

Furfey and Ratliff also cited the procreation potential of whitetails as one reason why this year's EHD outbreak likely won't affect next year's hunting season.

# MEASURE 110: Treatment still lacking

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ment when they refuse to get treatment on a voluntary basis," he said. "There is now very little accountability for drug-dependent persons, and we are seeing an increase in certain criminal conduct that could be contributed to the effects of Measure 110."

According to Hays, there is a 135% increase in theft cases, 113% increase in criminal mischief-related calls, a 33% increase in assault-related calls and a 83% decrease in drug law violations that correlate with the start of Measure 110's enforcement in February. The statistics are based on a comparison of criminal activity related to drug usage in Union County between February-November 2019 and February-November 2021.

Hays noted that it is difficult to quantify whether these stats are a direct result of Measure 110. He also stated that these numbers do not include calls for service where a report was not taken by law enforcement. The COVID-19 pandemic is another factor that is affecting crime trends across the country.

With that being said, Hays also noted mental health is the larger trend playing a negative role in communities.

"My personal feeling is the increase in people suffering from mental health issues has had a much larger impact on our policing and community than Measure 110," he said. "Although, some mental health issues can also be Measure 110-related due to chronic drug abuse."

He emphasized it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of Measure 110, seeing as a major shift in law enforcement takes time to fully take effect.

## Legal system

Law enforcement is not seeing the same results from relaxed punishments for drug abuse versus when drugs were criminalized. That is not to say that a focus on recovery and mental health can't be effective, but the legwork to switch the emphasis still is being put in place.

La Grande attorney Jared Boyd weighed in on what he has noticed from

a legal standpoint, noting there has been a significant case drop due to Measure 110. While the intent of the measure is to make treatment and recovery options readily available, he said those options are lacking in Eastern Oregon.

"It's a measure that was well-intended," he said. "I agree with the goal of the measure, but there needs to be a much better system in place."

Boyd said there are significantly less treatment options in Eastern Oregon as opposed to the western side of the state, which may be having a negative effect on Measure 110's effectiveness on the eastern side of Oregon.

*"I agree with the spirit of it. Jail doesn't treat addiction, we know that. There needs to be changes and it needs to be fully implemented to fix crimes."*

— Jared Boyd, La Grande attorney

Court statistics from around the state also show that individuals are not showing up for their court appearances in high frequencies. According to Oregon Public Broadcasting, defendants didn't show up for circuit court appearance in about three-fifths of the 978 cases through Oct. 1 since the measure's enforcement went into effect at the beginning of February.

According to Boyd, a rough estimate on reduction in criminal cases filed would be somewhere around 20-30%. He said he also expects a large ripple effect on defense attorneys' budgets due to the absence of drug-related cases.

"I agree with the spirit of it. Jail doesn't treat addiction, we know that," Boyd said. "There needs to be changes and it needs to be fully implemented to fix crimes."

## Path to recovery

Early numbers may not reflect the measure's long-term effects in Oregon, but the initial stages of Measure 110 have seen a major shakeup in how drug abuse is addressed in the state.

In a letter from Amy Ashton-Williams, the executive director of the Oregon Washington Health Network, she entailed what she described as positive strides that have been made since the passing of Measure 110. "Measure 110 alone cannot fix this nationwide crisis, but it's an important tool for how we stop treating addiction as a moral failing deserving of punishment, and start treating it as a health issue deserving of medical care," Ashton-Williams said.

OWHn is one of 70 organizations funded through the first round of Measure 110 grants that were distributed this summer. The idea of increased recovery and treatment comes from the notion that money saved from the cost of arrests and incarceration can go to increased medical care.

According to Ashton-Williams, OWHn has opened three new drop-in peer centers in Hermiston, Milton-Freewater and Pendleton — spaces where individuals can share experiences, get help and meet people who have overcome addiction.

While certain elements of the new system need time to be implemented and some aspects of law enforcement may see negative impacts, health officials such as Ashton-Williams are optimistic of Measure 110 moving forward.

"Oregon communities have been denied proper access to addiction recovery services for so long that it's going to take some time before we feel the full positive impacts of this new law," Ashton-Williams said. "We've got a lot of people who have, for far too long, fallen through the cracks. We're working hard to meet the tremendous need, ensuring there is no wrong door when it comes to accessing critical care."

As the new method for handling drug abuse and possession in Oregon becomes established, only time will tell the full impact of Measure 110 on substance abuse in the state.

# DINNER

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open again for congregating meals because of falling COVID-19 infection rates.

The meal was cause for a celebration, attended by more than 30 seniors. Colorful balloons were at the dining tables, champagne and the center's ever-popular fried chicken was served, and everyone got to eat for free.

"It is exciting to see everyone together again and see old friends," Kathy McDevitt, of La Grande, said.

She added the Dec. 15 reopening date was one seniors had been eagerly waiting for.

"There was such anticipation," she said.

Everyone coming for lunch was again signed in by Gerry Montgomery. The Union County Senior Center volunteer has been signing people in for meals for almost three decades.

"It was so nice to see everybody back," Montgomery said. "I was glad to see everybody happy and feeling good today. It makes you think we will be getting back to normal."

Deb O'Rourke, a volunteer server at the



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

**James Kleinknecht receives a lunch at the Union County Senior Center in La Grande on Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021.**

senior center, said it was delightful to see so many coming to enjoy a midday meal.

"I love to see the faces. It was nice to see people socializing again," she said.

Sydney Gleeson, Union County food services manager for Community Connection of Northeast Oregon, said having the seniors back for in-person dining was exciting, and it was gratifying to see how happy they were to be back.

"It was fun," she said. "Everyone one was bursting with energy."

While the Union County Senior Center had not served sit-down meals for 21 months due to COVID-19, it has con-

tinued to prepare lunches and dinners for its Meals on Wheels program and initiated a grab-and-go lunch program that will continue. The takeout lunches are now provided on weekdays between noon and 1 p.m. and can be picked up at the back entrance of the senior center's kitchen.

McDevitt credits the senior center's kitchen staff with doing an excellent job of continuing to provide tasty, nutritious meals despite not having as much food as needed because of supply chain issues.

"I think we all should be grateful that they are making do and putting out good meals. We should be honoring them," she said.

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and a

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