

ODFW warns hunters to watch for rabbit disease

Virus poses no threat to humans

EO Media Group

SALEM — A virus that can spread through rabbit populations and was first detected in the Portland area in March 2021 has been found in a wild rabbit in Crook County.

The dead black-tailed jackrabbit was found near Powell Butte on Dec. 13, 2021, according to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW).

The rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus 2 (RHDV2) can cause sudden death in rabbits and hares. The virus poses no threat to humans, but it can infect both wild and domestic rabbits.

Winter is the most popular time to hunt rabbits, and ODFW and the Oregon Department of Agriculture are asking hunters to be aware of the disease and take steps to avoid spreading it. Domestic rabbit owners should also take precautions.

The two state agencies are working together to monitor the disease and to try to limit its spread since it was first detected in Oregon in feral domestic rabbits near Portland in mid-March 2021.

The first known death from the disease was a black-tailed jackrabbit found dead near Rome, in Malheur County west of Jordan Valley, in April 2021.

The state veterinary diagnosis lab confirmed the cause of death in December 2021.

The second death was



A snowshoe hare.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

confirmed in a black-tailed jackrabbit found in May 2021 near Christmas Valley, in northern Lake County.

The jackrabbit found near Powell Butte was about 70 miles from Christmas Valley, and about 50 miles from La Pine, where the virus was detected in feral domestic and domestic rabbits.

The virus can withstand high and low temperatures and persists for long periods in decaying carcasses. Transmission is often through direct contact but can also be spread through excretions, via contaminated water or food, and through contaminated

objects or clothing.

Signs of the disease in rabbits may include respiratory or neurologic symptoms as well as bloody nasal discharge and sudden death. Often, a rabbit is found dead with a bloody nose but no other obvious external signs of injury. Rabbits that have clear evidence of trauma, such as being caught by a cat or hit by car, are not usually tested for the virus.

Dead rabbits may be rapidly scavenged by other animals and the camouflaged coloration of wild rabbit fur makes them difficult to see in the field, so it's very possible more wild rabbits

have died from the virus, according to ODFW.

To report suspicious wild rabbit deaths, call the Wildlife Health reporting hotline at 1-866-968-2600 or e-mail at wildlife.health@odfw.oregon.gov.

For sick or dead domestic or feral rabbit reports, call the Oregon Department of Agriculture at 1-800-347-7028 or go to <https://oda.direct/RHD>.

Tips to avoid spreading the virus:

For hunters

- If sick or dead rabbits are observed in an area, do not hunt, run dogs, or fly falconry birds in that area.

Contact ODFW immediately at 866-968-2600.

- Avoid rabbit hunting in areas in states where RHDV2 outbreaks have been recently documented. Contact the state wildlife agency where you will be hunting for information on where RHDV2 has been identified.

- After handling wild rabbits, wash hands and change clothing and footwear before handling or caring for domestic rabbits.

- Do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling animals.

- Take precautions when handling harvested rabbits, which can carry other diseases including tularemia that can be fatal to people. Wear rubber, nitrile, or disposable latex gloves while handling and cleaning rabbits and other game. Wash hands thoroughly with warm water and soap or sanitizer after handling game. Disinfect all knives, equipment, and surfaces that were in contact with game.

- Thoroughly cook all game to an internal temperature of 165°F.

- Do not feed game meat from wildlife that appear sick, are found dead, or test positive for a contagious disease to people or pets, including falconry birds.

For people raising domestic rabbits (talk to your veterinarian for advice)

- Minimize exposure to wild rabbits and hares by keeping your rabbits in hutches or cages that are elevated off the ground.
- Keep pet rabbits inside

to avoid exposure to environments potentially contaminated by wild/feral rabbits or by people, vehicles or implements that can spread the disease.

- Do not allow your rabbits to graze or roam in a yard if wild rabbits are present in your area.

- Restrict visitors to your rabbitry and limit the handling of the animals by visitors.

- Avoid transporting or importing domestic rabbits.

- After visiting a show, fair, or meeting where rabbits were comingled, shower and change clothes before handling your rabbits.

- Quarantine new rabbits away from existing ones for 30 days.

- Know the health status of the rabbitry from which you purchase rabbits.

- Be aware of the rabbit disease status of the state or country of origin of any equipment or supplies that you are purchasing.

- Wash and disinfect hands, clothing, gloves, footwear, cages, and equipment between rabbits from different sources. (RHDV is inactivated by 10% bleach to water solution.)

If you find a dead rabbit

- Wear disposable gloves when handling rabbit carcasses.

- Double bag carcasses and spray outside of bag with disinfectant.

- Wash hands with soap and warm water after handling carcasses and removing gloves. Dispose of gloves in trash headed to landfill.

DUNES

Continued from Page B1

I can grasp the basic concept of a snowdrift. If something interrupts the wind it necessarily loses some of its capacity to propel the snow. This is how cornices form on the tops of ridges.

But I am hopeless to understand why, along a road that's maybe 15 feet wide, the wind would scour down nearly to bare ground in one spot, while a few feet away the snow forms a fin four feet high, its crest as narrow as a pencil, rather like a fluff of meringue atop a lemon pie.

The road is far from flat, to be sure.

I've driven it in summer often enough to know that it's littered with rocks, ruts and the occasional scorched limb.

I can't fathom, though, how any of this detritus could serve as the foundation, so to speak, for these elaborate, powdery pieces of

natural art.

But appreciating art, of course, requires no special knowledge. This is one of the great attractions of art, it seems to me.

We hiked just a mile or so, to a saddle with a fine view of Bald Mountain's east flank.

The truly heroic drifts/dunes form a bit farther to the west, where the Skyline Road was hacked out of the stony brow of the ridgecrest. We have snowshoed up there in the past and found veritable walls of snow, taller than a basketball hoop.

The remnants of those drifts some years block the road until Memorial Day, or perhaps even a bit longer. The first time I no longer see a white glint on that ridge, while driving through Bowen Valley on Highway 7 just south of Baker City, is for me as sure a sign of summer's imminence as the roar of a lawnmower or the prick of a mosquito's proboscis.



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

Wind-sculpted snow drifts — or dunes — along the Skyline Road in Baker County on Saturday, Jan. 1, 2022.

LEWIS

Continued from Page B1

the mountains.

We take it for granted winter range will always be there, that there will always be a place for deer, elk and antelope. We are losing winter range fast.

Oregon's winter range is at the center of discussions from Portland to Salem to Hermiston, Burns and Lakeview.

The abundance of sunshine in Eastern Oregon makes it a prime location for solar farms.

When the sun shines, solar panel arrays collect the free energy. Blue sky days are dependable east of the Cascades. The more solar panels there are, proponents of the technology tell us, the better we prevent pollution, minimize waste and conserve natural resources. Really?

In March 2016, Kate Brown signed House Bill 4037 into law to offer a half-cent-per-kilowatt-hour incentive to large scale solar projects. Oregon is moving away from dependence on coal with a mandate to reach 25% dependence on renewable energy sources by 2025 and be 100% reliant on renewable energy by 2030.

The Oregon Solar Plan (2017) targets 10% solar power by 2027, powering 500,000 Oregon homes. In December 2016, Oregon had 264 megawatts of solar installations, which was enough to power 30,000 homes.

We have a long way to go. We get there by offering tax breaks to industry. Right now, incentives for commercial solar installations include a Federal Investment Tax Credit, state and utility rebate programs and accelerated depreciation.

Wonder where these projects will end up? Eastern Oregon offers the most dependable blue sky days and cheap land.

The Oregon Solar Plan says, "In the very near future, thriving communities will share a common commitment: to harness and use power from the sun. These communities will have robust solar



Gary Lewis/Contributed Photo

The Oregon solar plan targets 10% solar in 10 years, which will require hundreds of thousands of acres of solar arrays. Where do you find cheap land and blue skies? The same places mule deer find winter range.



Gary Lewis/Contributed Photo

An old growth juniper tree with its roots in an ancient spring.

industries that support local economic growth and provide local job opportunities. These communities will have resilient energy systems and stable electricity costs."

Let's add another sentence: And no mule deer.

What are the biggest threats to mule deer? Predators, poachers, disease, juniper encroachment, invasive plants. Maybe the biggest one is habitat loss. If predators are the problem, they tend to stop

expanding when the prey base is limited. Energy development doesn't stop when deer numbers decline.

That's what vineyards, marijuana grows and solar farms all have in common. When the fences go up, deer, elk, antelope and even the pygmy rabbits are locked out.

A lot of people look at empty sagebrush land or stands of bitterbrush and call it junk land. I call it critical winter range. The

fact that it has no people or homes on it, the fact that it is only fit for deer browse, is what makes it valuable.

Imagine, instead of a sea of silvered sagebrush, thousands of acres of solar panels. Where do the mule deer go when snow blankets the Blues and the Ochocos? With a solar farm on core winter range, the only place left to go is to farm and ranch lands, where they are not welcome.

Call it a green revolution. Call it a land rush. But the location of solar farms on empty land has a cumulative effect. Without winter range we have no mule deer.

Each of these projects are proposed one by one. Who is studying the cumulative effects?

We are tipping the scales in favor of the solar farm industry and those areas are not available for mule deer anymore.

Think solar farms will reduce our carbon footprints? I'd rather see deer tracks in bitterbrush than a sea of black mirrors pointed at the sky.

Gary Lewis is the author of *Fishing Central Oregon and Oregon Lake Maps and Fishing Guide and other titles*. To contact Gary, visit www.garylewisoutdoors.com.