

# Outdoor Rec / Local

## No early end to chukar season draws mixed public reviews

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In response to Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) plan not to end the chukar and Hungarian (gray) partridge hunting seasons early, which began October 8, 2016, and run through January 31, despite the snowy conditions this December, there was mixed opinion from the public. ODFW Wildlife Biologist Brian Ratliff, of the Northeast Region/Baker District Office, said, "What it boils down to is simply this: game bird populations are not driven by winter survival, meaning, if they're going to die, they're going to die anyway."

Ratliff had received, among other communication in favor of and in opposition to an early closure, a letter from local bird hunters Mike Purvine, Steve Mclean, and Ed Huggins, dated January 4, 2017, in which the three plead for an early closure they say should have happened near the beginning of December.

The letter, which begins, "As avid upland game bird hunters, we read with interest that state biologists have decided to not impose an early end to the hunting season, despite the snowiest December in more than a decade," because of some similarities, appears to have been at least partially prompted by an article titled "Full-feathered Season," by *The Baker City Herald* editor Jayson Jacoby, in the *Outdoors & Rec* section, on Friday, December 30, 2016.

Ratliff noted a specific section in the 2016-2017 Oregon Game Bird Regulations, on page 14, titled "Upland Game Bird Emergency Closure Procedures," which begins, "Irregularly, severe winter conditions can negatively impact segments of upland game bird populations. There's little that can be done to alleviate the effects when these conditions occur, including stopping hunting. In fact, a hunting closure may have the opposite effect by allowing more birds to compete for what little food may be accessible..."

Ratliff said that upland game bird populations, including chukars—a non-native game species, introduced specifically for hunting opportunities—are driven by hatch rates in the spring, and not winter survival, and, "That's the point that's really hard for people to see. It makes sense, because they see those birds, and they're starving to death, but, guess what? Even if you close the season, they're going to starve to death... Biologically, there's no reason to close it... Wildlife (deer, elk, bighorn sheep, chukars, etc.) will naturally succumb in the winter—there's no way around that... You can close the season, and take away opportunities for hunters,



Submitted Photo.

Hungarian (gray) partridge.

with a reduced economic input to the County... and you piss off, usually, potentially, it's more than half of the chukar hunters..." Ratliff said that in the past, there have been early closures, and the flak ODFW had received in response to those closures significantly surpassed the amount of requests to close the season.

He displayed a Baker District Chukar Inventory graph, using an ODFW terminal, as he explained the resiliency of the chukar, following harsh winters. The graph covers "hatch years (the spring)," from 1973 through 2016, and shows the counted number of birds per 10 miles (there are different routes throughout the County), along with the chicks per brood. Looking at the graph, there were indications of some harsh winters, where the numbers were low, down to less than 10 per 10 miles, but the population bounced back, with an increase following those, in some cases like a major "baby boom" the next year. For example, the number observed in 1986 was about 20 per 10 miles, followed by about 90, in 1987. In 1995, it was about 12, followed by about 65, in 1996.

The highest number observed, about 95 per 10 miles, was in 2003, the second highest 90, in 1987, the third about 85, in 2004, and the fourth about 80, in 2002. For the last eleven years, the cycle varies from the lowest, about 12, in 1995, to the highest, about 95, in 2003. The 2016 hatch year shows about 57, with about 60 observed in 2015.

Ratliff said that, for the last eleven years, the winters have been fairly "mild," but this season, "This is a winter. It's cold, there's a lot of snow," but it's not an "abnormal" winter. He said that the graph shows the cyclical nature of chukar populations, and how quickly they can rebound.

Ratliff noted that the snowy conditions could force, and has forced, birds to congregate near roads, causing some unethical hunting practices, such as shooting from a vehicle, or shooting from a road, both of which are illegal,

and that actions such as these have been witnessed and reported this season. Ratliff said that, as a result, ODFW, working with the Oregon State Patrol (OSP), has increased game enforcement patrols and enforcement, including using extra OSP personnel from the Ontario area, to patrol for, and to investigate unethical hunting practices specifically. He said that the primary target area for enforcement (as far as chukar hunters are concerned) is along the Snake River. Other areas include Rye Valley, Burnt River, and the Powder River canyon, though Ratliff said that he hasn't seen evidence in the Rye Valley and Burnt River areas of illegal hunting, and the likelihood isn't high that the acts would be committed in the Powder River canyon area (the letter to Ratliff stated that, "We also have eye witness reports of unethical hunting practices in Powder River, Burnt River, and Snake River areas.").

The bird hunters' letter went on to say that, "We as hunters have shut down our hunting season for Chukar! (this was unexplained). Why doesn't ODFW do the right thing, close the season early, and provide some much need(ed) nutrition for the upland game birds? I am sure many hunters would be more than happy to volunteer time and equipment for the distribution of some much needed FEED. The upland game bird season closure which should have happened three weeks ago needs to happen immediately! (this part caused confusion, as the hunters had indicated that their most recent hunting trip for birds had been near the end of December. This resulted in a successful harvest, but they said the quality of the birds indicates the birds are starving to death.)"

Ratliff said, "If there was some logical, reasonable, and even possible way to do that (to feed the birds), I would be all for it...but, you're not going to save them. For example, how do you keep the deer out of the feeders?" He said that, while feeding the birds sounds like a great idea, it isn't feasible at this point, and that the increased patrols to combat unethical hunting practices is the

major focus. Ratliff said that OSP could request an early season closure if there were a lack in manpower, but that isn't likely, because of the availability of funds and resources to help curb unethical hunting practices.

Ratliff received a call from Baker County Commissioner Bill Harvey, who had received a copy of the letter from the bird hunters, along with Baker County Parks and Recreation Director Karen Spencer, Baker County Economic Development Director Greg Smith, Jacoby, and *The Baker County Press* editor and publisher Kerry McQuisten (Jacoby had also sent Ratliff a copy of his article, "Full-feathered Season," Ratliff said). Harvey told Ratliff that he doesn't have the manpower to request the Baker County Sheriff's Office assist with enforcement, to which Ratliff responded that's okay, and he appreciates any help offered, but he didn't request or expect that, because, "It's not the Sheriff's job," but rather, a duty that OSP is charged with.

Ratliff demonstrated the status of the conditions (at the time of this writing), outside the District office, by kicking some of the snow with his boot, to clear away enough to get to the grass below, which looked green and healthy. He reached down, dug up some still unfrozen and muddy soil, and displayed it, making the point that the snow was fluffy and didn't have a crust (at that time). He said that, of course, deer and elk, for example, would not have difficulty doing what he did, but that birds would find it more difficult, and crusted snow would cause a second look at the situation. Ratliff and others investigate the conditions week to week, and they could change at any time, but he said the option, at this point, would be (and this is stated in the Game Bird Regulations, too) to close the season early on January 15 if conditions warrant it, or to let it run through January 31 (conditions on December 31, the other possible closure date, didn't warrant a closure then). Either way, the public will know the status of the season by January 15.

## Governor declares state of emergency

(Salem, OR) — Governor Brown today declared a state of emergency in Oregon due to severe winter storm conditions. This declaration comes at the request of local officials and is based on the recommendations of the Oregon Office of Emergency Management (OEM).

"As snow continues to accumulate and local authorities respond to provide core services and clear roadways, all available state resources will be made available to ensure the safety of communities throughout Oregon," Governor Brown said. "I urge all Oregonians to follow the recommendations of local authorities, and avoid travel while ODOT crews clear roads and work to restore core services."

Governor Brown directed OEM to coordinate the deployment of the Oregon Department of Transportation, Oregon State Police, and the Oregon National Guard to Oregon support to local communities needing assistance.

OEM will facilitate the access and use of state resources, personnel, and equipment to protect communities, property, and the environment, and aid in the recovery from issues related to the recent series of severe winter storms. Governor Brown verbally issued the state of emergency that is in effect for 30 days, unless terminated sooner by the Governor.

## PEO scholarships available

Chapter AX of the P.E.O. Sisterhood will award two academic scholarships to two graduating senior girls from high schools in Baker County and North Powder in Spring of 2017.

The Gertrude Fortner-Rose Haskell Scholarship was named for two charter members of Chapter AX who strongly believed in higher education for women.

The Mildred F. Rogers Chapter AX P.E.O. Scholarship was established in 2000 by her daughter and her grandchildren. Mrs. Rogers was a long time member of Chapter AX, being initiated in 1951 and holding the office of president in 1952. She was a descendent of Oregon Trail pioneer grandparents and lived her entire life in Baker City. Always a loyal citizen, she gave of herself to the community of Baker City and to its people, so that future generations would have the opportunity to appreciate life as she had. She died at the age of 100.

Scholarship applications are available in the guidance office at high schools in Baker County (Baker, Pine Eagle, Burnt River and Huntington) and North Powder. Baker High School applicants must return applications to the high school office by 8AM February 28, 2017. Other Baker County and North Powder applicants must mail applications to arrive by 8AM February 28, 2017 to Dorothy Mason, PO Box 446 Baker City, OR 97814. All women students from Baker County or North Powder, who plan to enroll in an accredited college or university, are eligible. The scholarships are awarded on the basis of academic achievement, goals, activities, financial need and personal character.

The P.E.O. sisterhood is an international philanthropic educational organization, which was founded in 1869 at Iowa Wesleyan College in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa. P.E.O. promotes educational opportunities for women through a variety of scholarship and grant opportunities. The P.E.O. sisterhood owns and supports Cotley College in Nevada, Missouri. Chapter AX was organized in 1932 in Baker City.

## Grants available for Main Street projects

The State Historic Preservation Office is offering grants for up to \$100,000 in matching funds for downtown revitalization efforts in communities participating in the Oregon Main Street Network. The Oregon Main Street Revitalization Grant funds may be used to acquire, rehabilitate, and construct buildings on properties in designated downtown areas statewide.

Funded projects must facilitate community revitalization that will lead to private investment, job creation or retention, establishing or expanding viable businesses, or creating a stronger tax base. Projects may include façade improvement, accessibility enhancement, basic utilities, second floor renovations and more. Only organizations participating in the Oregon Main Street Network are eligible to apply. Projects must be within approved Main Street areas. A free workshop specific to the Oregon Main Street Revitalization Grant will be January 31 in Cottage Grove. Additional grant workshops on project planning and grant writing and using the online grant application will be offered. A two-hour workshop will be in Salem on March 15. A shorter webinar will be available on March 16. Two webinars, January 18 and 19, will explain the online grant system. To learn more visit [www.oregonheritage.org](http://www.oregonheritage.org) or contact Sheri Stuart at Sheri.Stuart@oregon.gov or 503-986-0679.

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