

Outdoor Rec / Local

Deer feeding

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Primus said that there are more deer (mule deer) down in the river corridor than what is typically seen, because of the winter conditions, and much of the time, they're on the south-facing slopes, north of the highway. He said that with the feeding, the risk to both deer and drivers increases. "It's really unsafe for vehicles. Bad for the deer, bad for the drivers," Perrine said.

Primus said that, while ODFW has seen flakes and remains of alfalfa along the highway, and the deer congregating to feed on it, there's been no success yet in identifying who, exactly, is feeding the deer, because they haven't seen individuals doing it, and they haven't received information about who's doing it. "I think they're probably feeding daily," Primus said. Some hay is placed along straight lengths of the highway, some on corners, some right along the highway, and some a short distance away from it, he said.

Perrine provided a copy of an informational section on ODFW's website, www.dfw.state.or.us, titled "Don't Feed Deer And Elk," pointing out some issues with feeding deer, elk, and other wildlife:

"Artificial feeding concentrates wildlife, which leads to the easier spread of disease and parasites and easier take by predators; Feeding deer and elk attracts their natural predators like cougars and coyotes to areas of human activity; Once wildlife associate people with giving them food, they come to expect it. Feeding will invite more deer and elk to your property and encourage them to stay; Artificial feeding can cause deer and elk to become habituated to humans and aggressive towards them; Concentrating deer and elk in human-settled areas can lead to an increase in vehicle collisions and conflicts between wildlife and pets; Concentrating deer and elk can hurt habitat by encouraging excessive grazing."

Primus said that the

Oregon State Police (OSP) is aware of the situation, and personnel have moved some of the feed, protein and salt blocks away from the highway, when possible. Primus said that OSP personnel are attempting to determine who's feeding the deer, so they could be informed of the traffic hazards being created.

Speaking about the effects biologically on deer, Primus said, "If you have a deer that's in poor body condition, and you switch them over to alfalfa, that's highly nutritious, the digestive enzymes in their stomachs aren't able to cope with that, and that high-protein forage content will cause a deer to bloat, and it will kill them." Primus said that, for the most part, the body condition of most of the deer seems to be good, without many "skinny" deer observed. "We came into winter looking good; we had a good fall green-up, deer were healthy, things were looking good," Perrine said.

Despite the appearance of good body condition, "Every year, ODFW also sees seemingly healthy deer and elk die because they have been fed the wrong food by well-intentioned people. Their diet requirements actually change with the seasons and are best met by native forage. Deliberately feeding deer or elk may inhibit digestion and lead to death by starvation or infection," according to ODFW information. Primus said that, even with the surge of green, natural forage in spring, deer can get scours, due to the higher water content, and many can die, after surviving the winter.

Primus also pointed out the economical aspect of feeding the deer (Primus said that deer typically eat about five or six pounds of feed per day, while an elk eats about ten), because, once there's a commitment to start, the number of deer may be small, but that herd could soon expand greatly, resulting in a financial hardship, and an inability to continue with the endeavor. Once the deer expect to be fed regularly in a certain spot, he said,



Todd Arriola / The Baker County Press.

Phillip Perrine of ODFW.

if that feeding stops due to financial woes, more deer could die as a result. Both Primus and Perrine said that, whether the public feeding is happening in rural areas, or within Baker City limits, for example, the issues are basically the same, with diet, disease, predators, and traffic.

Perrine said, "The thing is, most of these people who are feeding, we understand, care about wildlife, and, we do, too, but, feeding doesn't always mean you're helping them..." Both understand and appreciate that, with the onset of winter, the natural public instinct is to worry about and to try to feed wildlife, but, as Primus pointed out, "It really doesn't do the deer any good, in the long run...One thing I think folks should strive for, rather than the artificial feeding in the winter time, is having a good brush component, and good habitat, that's still available, above snow level for deer this time of year. So, if we had better brush, mahogany stands, they're going to stand up above the snow, and they aren't going to have to dig for those...If we had more areas of higher quality forage component, snow and winter conditions wouldn't really have an impact on deer."

Perrine echoed Primus's sentiments, stating that forage improvement projects are preferred, "...instead of spending more money on a feeding program that we discourage." Primus said that there are a number of different funding programs which can assist landowners in completing improvement projects, whether through ODFW, or through another agency, such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

One example Primus gave, from the ODFW

side, is that the Keating Wildlife Management Unit (WMU) is a Mule Deer Initiative (MDI) unit, which means that "...the Department has funding to do whatever kind of projects we want to do." Perrine added that donations can be made in a number of ways to support programs such as MDI.

ODFW established the Elkhorn Wildlife Area (EWA, one of numerous feed stations), located about 10 miles west of North Powder, which feeds roughly 800 deer and 1,400 elk during the winter, with 10 feeding sites located there, "...to keep deer and elk from feeding on private agricultural lands when they migrate down from snow-covered higher elevations..." according to ODFW. Perrine said, "There's a difference between the Elkhorn Wildlife Area, and the Keating stations that are set up, and the rest of our District. The EWA was put into place to alleviate damage, because of the lack of winter range. There is literally no winter range for the deer and elk, on the face of the Elkhorns...The rest of the District, in the places where people are feeding, we don't lack that winter range...There's a big difference...That's why we feed over here (at the EWA)..."

The EWA has a gate system for feeding deer and elk, Primus and Perrine said, which helps keep them separated, and alfalfa and alfalfa pellets are fed there, "...early in the season so deer and elk's digestive systems do not have to quickly readjust to new food types, and continues every day, no matter what, until forage conditions improve. Feeding areas are located away from human-populated areas to decrease conflicts. ODFW also conducts disease testing at some feeding sites," according to ODFW information.

Primus and Perrine said that they have some improvement projects in mind for this spring, which are in the planning stage, and they encourage interested landowners to develop some plans also, and to contact ODFW for assistance. "We encourage people to come up with ideas in the Keating unit (part of the MDI program)," said Perrine, and Primus echoed that sentiment. They said ODFW is already planning on completing riparian, invasive grass species, and aspen stand projects.

Primus said, "Whether you're for feeding, or against feeding, at least people are concerned about the wildlife around them, and they're wanting to take an active role in seeing them do well in the future." Perrine said, "We encourage people to care about wildlife. We're not discouraging them from that. We just want people to know the facts, that feeding isn't always the best route."

Fire destroys Huntington home



Eileen Driver / The Baker County Press.

A home was destroyed in a blaze this Tuesday.

BY EILEEN DRIVER
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The home of Tracy McQue, Huntington City Recorder and Travis Young, former Mayor and current Deputy Fire Chief of Huntington, was burned to the ground on Tuesday, January 24.

The fire that was reported about 11:00 a.m. burned up the entire four-bedroom, 1,352 square-foot home built in 1890, located at 585 Oregon Trail Blvd. / Old Hwy. 30, in a matter of two hours in a hot blaze, the cause of which is as yet unknown.

Firefighters managed to contain the fire to the residence, thanks to the inmate work crew that unburied the fire hydrant from the snow just that morning, and were able to keep it from spreading to the out-buildings or the surrounding homes.

Tracy McQue heard about the fire from a neighbor who called her a City Hall to tell her there was smoke pouring out of the back door of her house. She immediately rushed home to see what was happening and try and save her dog and two cats that were inside the home but it was too late as the home was fully engulfed by then.

McQue stated, "I am just glad that no one was home when it happened. I had the neighbor's little girl over this morning and am so glad she wasn't here when it started."

Young reported, "I got a call over my fire radio at work about a fire at my address!" He then called McQue to confirm that it was correct and rushed home to see for himself.

While most of their firearms and valuables are secured in a large fire proof safe a brand new rifle just purchased by Travis was sitting on the dining room table along with its ammunition, which started going off in the fire. Luckily no one was injured by the small explosions or stray bullets.

The couple is hoping that at least the safe held as otherwise they are left with the clothes they are wearing and the contents of their garage. Friends at the scene said they are planning to open a "go fund me" account to help the couple get back on their feet.

Huntington declares disaster

BY EILEEN DRIVER
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On January 19th the City Council of Huntington issued a declaration of local disaster due to the massive snowfall that has continually been bombarding the town. With the town's public works employees plowing the roads practically 24/7 in an effort to keep them safe for residence and make them passable the worst possible thing to happen did happen. The plow truck blew the transmission and the streets of Huntington remained unplowed while yet another winter storm passed over making the roads virtually unusable for two days while they worked to fix it. With fire hydrants buried in the snow and storm drains iced closed, the City knew they needed help and had to act fast to fix this problem before it became even worse.

As reports of carports, sheds and porches collapsing began to come in, the City along with the Chamber of Commerce began rounding up volunteers to shovel snow off roofs and sidewalks of elderly and disabled citizens who could not do it for themselves. Welfare checks of housebound residents were performed by Sandra Vaughn of the Huntington Senior & Youth Organization, which found everyone safe and sound to this point. Huntington Food Bank volunteers Allan Driver and Betty Tamburello dug a literal tunnel through the snow berm surrounding Lion's Park so that citizens who have been unable to get to Ontario to grocery shop could get access to the Food Bank for emergency supplies. Sean McKay of Burnt River Farms drove his tractor with snow plow attachment all over the City plowing out the VFW Hall and anyone else who needed help. All available volunteers with shovels in hand did their best to clean roofs and carports.

According to Deputy City Recorder Shellie Nash, "Citizens are stepping up and doing everything they can to help neighbors, but it (the storms) never seems end."

Working with Jason Yencopal of Baker County Emergency Management the City has secured a snow plow from the Baker County Road Department to use during this crisis to help with keeping the streets clean and an inmate road crew from the department of corrections was brought down to un-bury the fire hydrants that are under three feet of snow, as well as to unclog the storm drains so when the snow does melt it has somewhere to go other than the streets and basements of those who live in the lowest elevations.

Citizens are hoping the three or four days of non-snowy weather happening now will allow snow to melt and make a dent in the snow and ice accumulating on roofs.

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