

Outdoor Rec / Local

Skunk vs. cats and a 12-gauge



THE OUTDOOR COLUMN
By Todd Arriola

Recently, I was once again reminded that winter is near, as smaller animals showed up unannounced, taking food, harassing my cats, and testing my tolerance and patience, neither of which is in infinite supply.

Over the course of several nights, I watched the cats' food and water bowls, because I couldn't figure out why the bowls didn't quite look right the next day.

I finally caught sight of a skunk, but the first time I tried to get a .22 caliber rifle and make it back to shoot him, he ran away before I could complete the task.

The next night, I had both a .22 rifle and a 12-gauge shotgun, ready to bring to a halt the late dinner buffets of the skunk, which he used as an excuse to rudely interrupt the peaceful lives of my

orange-and-white tribe. I opened the door, stood outside, and shot once, with the scoped, bolt-action .22 rifle, while the skunk was near the food and water bowls.

He took off, and I shot twice more, since the second shot didn't stop him. By this point, I realized he'd blessed the immediate area and other objects for some distance, with one of the most disgusting odors I've been unlucky enough to smell, spray from a skunk.

That smell comes to mind as I sit writing this, and the only way I can describe it is, that, well, it smells like spray from a skunk.

That night, I didn't pick the skunk up, because I didn't feel like dealing with it until the next day.

The next day, my Brandi picked the skunk up, because she didn't feel like seeing and smelling it.

When I arrived back home later that day, I realized I'd forgotten to pick up the skunk that morning, which isn't the best way to avoid being in the dog house (luckily, we only have a cat house, and it's

not large).

I called a veterinarian, and she suggested a great solution to combat the smell--vinegar. I found a spray bottle around, rinsed it out, and sprayed everywhere and everything where the skunk had been. I didn't smell the odor of skunk after that, because the area was so saturated with vinegar, that I could practically taste it.

Brandi, with enthusiastic concurrence from four-year-old Airianna, informed me that some members of our furry little family of misfits had apparently caught some of the skunk spray, so I also asked the vet about that particular situation. She gave me another great solution, which consists of one quart of hydrogen peroxide, one-quarter cup of baking soda, and one tablespoon of dish soap, all used together to bathe the stinky animals.

Since I value my skin, and my first aid kit needs more supplies, I opted to skip trying to clean the cats.

The next unwanted guest to show up was a raccoon, a non-native (to my abode, anyway) who made himself right at home, harassing and eating and drinking whatever he pleased, usually late at night, which, like the skunk, was expected.

Unlike the skunk, however, the raccoon prompted

me to consider using the shotgun, which had in its magazine loads, which were usually meant to be used as deterrents against intruders of the two-legged variety.

On the night I was finally able to scare off the raccoon, I saw the patriarch of my feline family, Harry, Jr, standing on the cat house on his toes, with his back in an extreme shape of an arch, and staring down at something below him.

I saw the raccoon through the window, and I was pleased to see Mama Red, Harry Jr.'s granddaughter, reaching out to try to strike the raccoon with her claws. The raccoon, with its eerily human-like front paws, easily deflected the strike, but still, it was a proud moment.

I grabbed the 12-gauge, I chambered a shell, and I opened the door.

The raccoon saw me, and I shot above him (he bolted right after that). I had no light and no sight, other than the small brass bead on the front of the shotgun, hardly suitable for all scenarios (I mounted a light later).

I haven't noticed any activity since I scared away that raccoon, but I anticipate more harassment from future visitors, including skunks, raccoons, and badgers, especially this close to winter—but I'll be ready for them...

Prescribed burns scheduled

The Wallowa-Whitman National Forest will begin implementing its prescribed burning program following wetting rains and milder weather this fall. Prescribed fire managers are planning to implement hazardous fuel reduction burns beginning at many project sites. Prescribed fire is a major component of the Cohesive Wildfire Strategy to meet the goals of restoring and maintaining resilient landscapes and creating fire-adapted communities. Prescribed burning is done to reduce dead and down fuels, selectively thin understory trees in dense forested stands, stimulate fire-tolerant plant species, enhance forage and browse, reduce the risk of large stand-replacement fires, create strategic fuels breaks allowing safe fire suppression activities in the urban interface, and restore fire under controlled conditions as a disturbance factor in these landscapes. Prescribed burns can range from ten acres to thousands of acres in size. Prescribed burns often are accomplished with combined resources of local rural fire departments, contractors, Oregon Department of Forestry, and other federal land-management agencies.

Fire history studies have shown that fire was a dominant natural process in the Blue Mountains, maintaining a more open and park-like condition throughout the low- to mid-elevation forests. Low-intensity surface-fires burned throughout these drier forests and grasslands perpetuating open, park-like stands of fire-tolerant tree species such as ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and larch.

Hazardous fuel reduction is not without impacts. Smoke associated with prescribed burning is a major concern and the hardest to forecast in the implementation planning process. Prescribed fire managers work closely with the Oregon State Smoke Forecast Center in accordance with the Oregon Smoke Management Plan to determine when, where, and how much is burned on a daily basis. Smoke dispersion models are used to look at the volume of smoke, the direction of spread and the mixing height prior to each burn. If a burn is forecasted to produce smoke that will be a significant impact to a community or sensitive area, it is rescheduled until there is a more favorable weather forecast.

Burning is part of the series of fuel reduction treatments intended to decrease the damage done by wildfires, including reducing the amount of smoke that typically impacts communities during the fire season. The intent is to keep smoke out of populated areas. Burning under controlled conditions reduces surface and ladder fuels, setting the stage to limit future high intensity unplanned fires and the smoke that they would produce. Many areas are burned on 10- to 15-year rotations to limit fuel accumulations and enhance forage important to wildlife.

Wallowa-Whitman forest managers have been successfully conducting prescribed burning operations for fuel reduction for over 20 years and plan to continue into the foreseeable future. In the last five the forest has increased prescribed burning by 20 percent. Twenty thousand acres of hazardous fuels were treated last year.

Actual acres within a project area may vary due to fuel conditions, smoke dispersion, wind patterns, and other variables. Acres may be higher or lower in some project areas than listed. Weather patterns, fuel conditions, and smoke dispersion will determine exactly where and when units are ignited within the project areas. It is anticipated that not all areas will be within prescription and will not be implemented this fall, while other project areas may have additional acres within prescription that may be implemented.

The Wallowa-Whitman plans to burn approximately 12,000 acres across the forest this fall, beginning as early as late September. For more information about the Wallowa-Whitman prescribed burning program, you may contact Steve Hawkins at 541-523-1262, or visit the forest web site at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/Fire-Aviation> to view the fall 2017 burn unit maps.

Whitman Ranger District (WRD) – 541-523-4476 (Baker, Halfway, and Unity). The WRD plans to conduct prescribed burning on 5,000 acres this fall:

- Foothills (200 acres) – 4 miles west of Baker City, OR
- Deer (800 acres) – 1 mile northeast of Sumpter, OR
- Little Dean (700) acres – 7 miles southeast of Sumpter, OR
- Mile 9 (500 acres) – 6 miles northwest of Unity, OR
- Pine Valley (600 acres) – 6 miles north/northwest of Halfway, OR
- East Pine (600 acres) – 6 miles north of Halfway, OR
- Barnard (1,000 acres) – 6 miles northwest of Halfway, OR
- Greenhorn (250 acres) – 1 mile southeast of Greenhorn, OR
- Broman (1,500 acres) – 8 miles northwest of Unity, OR
- Sparta (1,000 acres) – 15 miles northeast of Baker City, OR

The Wallowa Fire Zone (WFZ) - 541-426-4978 (Wallowa Valley Ranger District, Hells Canyon NRA and Eagle Cap Ranger District). The WFZ plans to conduct prescribed burning of up to 5,000 acres this fall:

- Muddy Sled (1,600 acres) – 15 miles north of Enterprise, OR
- Puderbaugh 504 (2,500 acres) – 25 miles southeast of Joseph, OR
- B-Vine (1,000 acres) – 30 miles north/northeast of Enterprise, OR

The Grande Ronde Fire Zone (GRFZ) – 541-963-7186 (La Grande Ranger District). The GRFZ plans to conduct prescribed burning on up to 2,500 acres this fall, which may include:

- Trail (1,000 acres) – 7 miles west of La Grande, OR
- Bird Track (1,000 acres) – 7 miles west of La Grande, OR
- Sugar (500 acres) – 20 miles southeast of La Grande, OR

Wolf depredation confirmed up Little Catherine Creek

Date Investigated: 10/9/17

General Area: Little Catherine Creek - private land

General situation and animal information: A dead calf, estimated 600-pound steer, was found on 10/9/17 by a livestock producer while flying to locate cattle for roundup from a large forested pasture.

Wolves were seen at the site of the mostly consumed carcass and ODFW investigated the same day.

The calf was estimated

to have died early on 10/8/17.

Physical evidence of attack by a predator:

Running cow tracks to the place the calf died, premortem hemorrhaging, tissue trauma, bite scrapes and punctures to the lower right hind leg, left front elbow, chest, and neck were present.

These are clear signs of attack by a predator.

Evidence that the predator was a wolf: Trauma to the back of one hind

and one front leg with

bite marks consistent with wolf size and extensive trauma to the neck with corresponding punctures, scrapes and marks and consistent with wolves.

Evidence of wolf presence near the time of the animal(s) death/injury:

Numerous wolf tracks and scat at the location of the carcass.

GPS collar location data of OR24 (Catherine Pack) at the location of the dead calf near the time of death.

Recent wolf depredation in the same or nearby area:

None

Cause of death/injury: Confirmed Wolf/

Summary: There is sufficient evidence to confirm that the calf was attacked by wolves based on the premortem wounds in wolf-attack locations, and the size, number, and severity of bite scrapes.

The death is confirmed as caused by one or more wolves of the Catherine Pack.

Wolf depredation confirmed in Wallowa's Harl Butte area

Date Investigated: 10/11/2017

General Area:

Harl Butte area – public land General situation and animal information: On the morning of 10/11/2017, an ODFW employee found a 550 lb. dead calf in a large rangeland pasture.

Wolf depredation was suspected and the calf carcass was examined the same morning.

The calf was estimated to have died earlier the same morning. The carcass was about 50% consumed with all entrails, both hind-quarters, and most of the right front shoulder tissue

missing.

Physical evidence of attack by a predator: The remaining carcass was skinned and examined. Premortem bite marks were found behind the left ribs, between the shoulders, the right brisket, and under the jaw.

These bite marks were associated with severe hemorrhaging and muscle tissue trauma, and are clear evidence of a predator attack.

Evidence that the predator was a wolf: The areas of bite marks found on the carcass measured up to eight inches long, six

inches wide, and 1.5 inches into the muscle tissue.

These combined with the severe hemorrhage and muscle tissue damage found behind the ribs, between the shoulders, and under the jaw are similar to other observed attack injuries from wolves.

Evidence of wolf presence near the time of the animal(s) death/injury: OR50 of the Harl Butte Pack was located by GPS radio-collar data at the location of the carcass at 6:00 a.m. on 10/11/2017.

Recent wolf depredation in the same or nearby area: There have been ten calf

depredations attributed to the Harl Butte Pack between 7/15/2016 and 10/01/2017. All depredations occurred within nine miles of this site.

Cause of death/injury: Confirmed Wolf.

Summary: The locations, and size of the premortem bite wounds are indicative of wolf attack.

These combined with the GPS radio-collar data made proximal to the time of death were adequate to confirm this incident as a depredation by a wolf or wolves of the Harl Butte Pack.

— NE OREGON HUNTING REPORT —

BAKER DISTRICT (Sumpter, Keating, Pine Creek, Lookout Mt.)

Rifle Deer controlled season closes Oct. 11. Baker Co. experienced an extremely severe winter with high deer mortality. Tags were reduced earlier in the year and hunters will encounter fewer yearling bucks.

Cougars can be found throughout Baker County but hunters should target areas with high concentrations of deer and elk. Setting up on a fresh kill or using distress calls can all be productive techniques. Hunters are required to check in the hide of any

cougar taken, with skull and proof of sex attached. Remember a 2017 cougar tag and hunting license is needed to hunt as of Jan. 1.

Coyote numbers are good throughout the district. Try calling in early morning and late afternoon.

UNION COUNTY

Black Bears are plentiful throughout the county. Bears can be concentrated along creeks and rivers in the late summer feeding on Hawthorn berries and other fruits. This year's bumper berry crop should make for good early season bear hunting in Union County.

Hunt in the early morning and evenings for the best chance of seeing bears. Bear skulls must be checked in within ten days of harvest.

Cougars are common in Union County. Focus on game rich areas with long ridgelines or saddles that cats typically travel. Setting up downwind of a deer or elk killed by a cougar can be productive.

Nonresident hunters can include a cougar tag with others tags for only \$14.50. All cougars taken must be checked in within 10 days of harvest; call for an appointment before check

in. Remember a 2017 cougar tag and hunting license is needed to hunt as of Jan. 1.

Rifle Elk season opens to controlled hunt tag holders on Oct. 25. Any bull tag holders can expect to see good prospects in all units with in Union County. Spike hunters may encounter fewer yearling bulls due to the tough winter. Hunting conditions should be good with cool evening temperatures and snow at the higher elevations. Hunters should carry chains for trucks and trailers to ensure safe passage along snowy mountain roads.