

Rough winter means fewer hunting tags for deer, pronghorn

Elk fare better, according to ODFW

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

Local hunters may face longer odds this year drawing a deer or pronghorn tag in northeast Oregon after the animals struggled through a particularly harsh winter.

The Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife has announced 2017 emergency tag reductions for buck deer, antlerless deer and pronghorn primarily affecting hunting units in Baker, Union and northern Malheur counties.

Just half of the usual buck and pronghorn tags will be available in Baker County, and two doe hunts scheduled on agricultural lands — one in the Sumpter Unit and one in the Keating Unit — were canceled entirely.

Tags were also reduced by 35 percent across Union County, along with 40 percent in the Beulah Unit and 25 percent in the Owyhee Unit.

Brian Ratliff, ODFW district wildlife biologist in Baker City, said there are still hunting opportunities though it may be difficult for hunters to draw a tag they are used to drawing with fewer preference points.

“As the populations grow again, we can move our tags back in an upward direction,” Ratliff said.

The tag reductions are based on early spring flight surveys, which show how winter took a toll on mule deer. Fawn ratios are down considerably, Ratliff said, with some units as low as eight fawns per 100 adults. Spring surveys typically show fawn counts in the mid-30s per 100 adults, he said.

What’s more, Ratliff said



A herd of deer grazes in a field in the Umatilla National Wildlife Refuge outside of Irigon, in January 2015.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Baker County lost 32 percent of adult radio-collared does. The average for the Blue Mountains is 8 percent.

“That’s really concerning,” he said.

Wildlife officials feared this kind of mortality earlier in the winter, when temperatures in Baker County dipped as low as minus-28 degrees and failed to rise above freezing for 28 consecutive days. Snow depth exceeded 18 inches in many areas, including lower elevations where deer and elk usually migrate for winter forage.

Ratliff said it was the worst winter for wildlife in more than 20 years.

“The deer went as low as they could possibly go,” Ratliff said. “I saw them in places I’d never seen them before. But there was no forage for them that wasn’t covered by snow and it was just really tough on fawns.”

Elk, however, seemed to fare better due to their larger size. Ratliff said elk are able to

generate more body heat with less energy, and can break through hard, crusty snow easier than smaller ungulates like deer and pronghorn.

Though Ratliff said they did have some elk mortality, it was not significant and ODFW will not be reducing elk tags come fall.

Brian Laughlin, acting assistant district wildlife biologist for ODFW in Pendleton, said the Umatilla District was not as severely affected by winter and does not anticipate any reductions in big game tags.

“We definitely had a hard winter,” Laughlin said. “But we didn’t have 28 days straight with below-freezing temperatures.”

The district, which includes the Walla Walla, West Mount Emily, Ukiah and Columbia Basin units, should see deer and elk numbers comparable to previous years, Laughlin said.

“Looking at those

numbers, we do not see a drastic change in this year’s spring (survey) flights compared to last,” he said.

Across the Blue Mountains, Ratliff said hunters can expect to see fewer deer on the landscape this fall, especially yearling animals such as spikes and 2-point bucks. Those age classes made up about 33 percent of Baker County’s total harvest last year.

By reducing tags now, Ratliff said they can allow those populations to recover and get back ahead of the game.

“This way, we can get underneath it,” he said.

Hunters who applied for one of the affected hunts have until June 1 to change their choice for free. A unit-by-unit look at available tags can also be found online at www.dfw.state.or.us.

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

MILTON-FREEWATER Settlement conference set for former police officer assault case

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
East Oregonian

Former Milton-Freewater police officer Brian David Scott has a closed-door conference Thursday to work out a deal in his assault case.

He also is looking to move to Colorado.

Umatilla County Circuit Court records show Scott has a settlement conference starting Thursday



Scott

Milton-Freewater city manager Linda Hall said Scott resigned from city police on Dec. 16.

Scott’s attorney, Sean Riddell of Portland, in early January presented the state with a mitigation and settlement letter. Riddell in court documents stated the letter “was 10 pages in length and contained

177 pages of attachments including an expert opinion letter and several audio files.”

Soon after, records show, Riddell and Umatilla County District Attorney Dan Primus agreed a “judicial settlement conference was in the best interest of all parties” due to the “complicated legal matters and unique nature of the case.”

Oregon State Police reported Scott pushed a handcuffed Fields in the back while in the Milton-Freewater Police Department, and Fields fell forward and struck his head on a concrete wall, suffering injuries to his scalp and vertebrae.

Scott has been free on bail since Sept. 29. Court documents also show he received a judge’s approval for trips to Colorado in late March and mid April. According to Riddell’s requests from the visits, Scott is moving his family there and needed to check out housing and attend job interviews.

Contact Phil Wright at pwright@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0833.

BRIEFLY

Senior center groundbreaking April 26

HERMISTON — The community is invited to a groundbreaking ceremony for the Harkenrider Center on April 26.

Once completed, the building will serve as the city’s senior center and after five years of use will also be opened up to recreational classes and other community uses in the evenings.

The Harkenrider Center will be located downtown at 255 N.E. Second Street, behind the Hermiston First United Methodist Church, with a parking lot stretching behind the Hermiston Public Library. It is being paid for by a \$2 million federal Community Development Block Grant and funds from the city of Hermiston.

G2 Construction of Kennewick will complete the work on the center, which is scheduled to be finished in the fall. Demolition of the former Umatilla County Fairgrounds, including the current Hermiston Senior Center, is scheduled to begin June 12.

The groundbreaking ceremony will be at 12:30 p.m. on Wednesday, April 26 and will include free shaved ice.

Fire destroys building, displaces six

UMATILLA — A building was destroyed by fire, displacing six adults in Umatilla on Tuesday morning.

Umatilla Rural Fire Protection District, aided by Umatilla County Fire District 1, responded to the 623 E Street at about 7:06 a.m. for a fully involved structure fire involving a triplex.

According to senior firefighter and incident commander Marc Matlack of Umatilla Fire Protection District, crews found one of the apartments totally involved, and knocked down the fire before it spread to the other two. Damage from the fire, smoke and water rendered the other two units uninhabitable, however.

No one was injured. The cause is under investigation. Matlack said a preliminary investigation concluded that the cause of the fire was accidental and started in the unit that was a total loss.

The American Red Cross reported that it assisted six adults displaced by the fire with temporary housing, food and clothing needs and information about recovery services and mental health resources.

Briefs are compiled from staff and wire reports, and press releases. Email press releases to news@eastoregonian.com

HERMISTON

Skate park to ramp up if Senate bill passes

Bill would give cities recreational immunity

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

A bill that could pave the way for a new Hermiston skate park passed unanimously in the state Senate and has had its first reading in the House of Representatives.

Recreational immunity, as Senate Bill 327 is known, is a key piece of legislation that Oregon cities have been counting on to restore their protection from lawsuits arising from injuries in public parks.

Previously, Oregon law protected owners of private and public lands from being sued over injuries that happened while they were allowing members the public to use their land for free for recreational purposes. If a child fell off the monkey bars and broke an arm at a city park, the city was protected from a lawsuit.

Last year, however, the Oregon Supreme Court ruled that the protection only applied to the government entity itself, and not individual employees, after a jogger who was injured by an open hole in a Portland park sued the employee who dug the hole to fix a sprinkler system and then left it unattended.

Since cities are responsible for defending their employees in court, the ruling essentially took away the “recreational immunity” they previously enjoyed. The impact was felt throughout the state in the form of closed parks and delayed projects.

Hermiston parks and recreation director Larry Fetter said the ruling had a chilling effect on cities’ desire to expand parks and recreation offerings to their residents.

“Some cities were talking about doing some crazy things,” he said. “They were talking about charging to get into city parks, because there’s different law relating to that.”

In Hermiston, Fetter said his department felt they were

already acting in a safe and responsible manner and that they did not need to drastically change the way they handled parks.

They did decide to put the brakes on building a new skate park across the street from the police station, however.

“We said, let’s just let the dust settle,” Fetter said.

If the bill adding protections to city employees and volunteers passes both chambers and is signed by the governor, Fetter said he has got “money ready to go” to move forward with the skate park.

“As soon as we get a final resolution, we’ll crank up,” he said.

In Pendleton, after being urged by its insurance company to evaluate its parks system for safety risks, the city in June closed decades-old playgrounds at Aldrich Park, Vincent Park and May Park that they felt were no longer safe.

Parks and recreation director Donnie Cook said the court ruling has put a strain on the department’s employees, who worry if

they are doing their job and look away from a hole or equipment for just a second, they could be facing a major lawsuit.

Cook said that department staff have taken on additional work, looking through every park for a hole dug by a gopher or dog that might need filled in or marked by a sign. Passing Senate Bill 327 would help things go back to the way they used to be, with an understanding that using a public park comes with a certain amount of inherent risk.

“I think it will be a relief,” he said. “We still want to take out all the risks we can. ... We don’t want anyone to get hurt. We try to really do a good job. But when you have 20 parks and seven employees, there is only so much you can do.”

The bill also applies to employees of schools, farms, counties and other entities that allow free use of their property for recreational purposes.

Contact Jade McDowell at jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19
HERMISTON BREAKFAST KIWANIS CLUB, 6:30 a.m., Umatilla-Morrow Head Start, 110 N.E. Fourth St., Hermiston.

MILTON-FREEWATER CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, 7 a.m., Milton-Freewater Chamber of Commerce, 157 S Columbia St., Milton-Freewater. (541-938-5563)

WILLOW RUN LADIES GOLF CLUB, 8 a.m., Willow Run Golf Course, 78873 Toms Camp Road, Boardman. Rain or shine. Need not be a member to play. (541-481-4381)

PENDLETON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m., location varies, location varies, Pendleton. December meeting: Wildhorse Resort & Casino. Cost is \$13 for members if paid in advance, \$16 for all others, RSVP required. (541-276-7411)

BOARDMAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, 12 p.m., Port of Morrow, 2 Marine Drive, Boardman. (541-481-3014)

CAY-UMA-WA TOASTMASTERS, 12-1 p.m., Wildhorse Resort & Casino, 46510 Wildhorse Blvd, Pendleton. Everyone welcome. (Jeannette Taylor 541-276-9492)

HERMISTON LIONS CLUB, 12 p.m., Desert Lanes Bowling

Alley, 1545 N. First St., Hermiston.
MILTON-FREEWATER GARDEN CLUB, 12 p.m., Milton-Freewater Community Building, 109 N.E. Fifth Ave., Milton-Freewater. Luncheon followed by general business meeting.

ALTRUSA INTERNATIONAL OF PENDLETON, 12 p.m., Red Lion Inn, 304 S.E. Nye Ave., Pendleton.

HERMISTON ELKS DINER, 5:30-8 p.m., Hermiston Elks Lodge, 480 E. Main St., Hermiston. (541-567-6923)

WW.FRIENDS, 5:30 p.m., private home, 511 N.W. Despain Ave., Pendleton. Tostada feed. Open to all widows and widowers. (541-276-4708 or 541-969-2450)

FRIENDS OF HERMISTON PUBLIC LIBRARY, 6 p.m., Hermiston Public Library Lanham Room, 235 E. Gladys Ave, Hermiston. (541-567-2882)

OREGON GRASS ROOTS CRIBBAGE CLUB NO. 2, 6:30 p.m., Desert Lanes Bowling Alley, 1545 N. First St., Hermiston. All levels of players welcome. (541-567-6594)

THURSDAY, APRIL 20
BOARDMAN KIWANIS, 6:30 a.m., Riverfront Lodge, 6 Marine Drive, Boardman.

TUMBLEWEED TOASTMASTERS, 6:30 a.m., Eastern Oregon Higher Education Center, 980 S.E. Columbia Drive, Hermiston. Visitors welcome. (541-567-3360)

ARTS AND CRAFTS FROM THE DRY SIDE, 9 a.m.-2 p.m., Hermiston Assembly of God Church, 730 E. Hurlburt Ave., Hermiston. Use Seventh Street entrance. Monthly business meeting at noon. (541-567-4446)

HERMISTON TRAVEL CLUB, 10 a.m., First Christian Church, 775 W. Highland Ave., Hermiston. (Margaret 541-567-7234)

PENDLETON KIWANIS CLUB, 12 p.m., Roosters Restaurant, 1515 Southgate, Pendleton. Guests welcome. (541-278-5785)

HEPPNER CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, 12-1 p.m., Heppner City Hall conference room, 111 N. Main St., Heppner. (Sheryl Bates 541-676-5536)

ALTRUSA INTERNATIONAL OF HERMISTON, 12 p.m., ARC Umatilla County, 215 W. Orchard Ave., Hermiston.

PENDLETON TRAVEL CLUB, 2 p.m., Free Methodist Church, 1711 SW. 44th St., Pendleton. (Kathy or Karen 541-276-2244 or 541-276-0923)

Retired Employees Picnic

GenFoods • Ingleheart • Pendleton Four Mill

Employees 1961 - 1988

When: April 22nd 4pm

Where: Stillman Park behind the Elks Lodge

Bring your own food and drinks

Let’s Get Together to share a Memory and a Laugh or Two!

Hope To See You There!

STUDENT OF THE WEEK

Laci Wiggins
SENIOR
ECHO HIGH SCHOOL

Laci is involved in student leadership. She is a positive role model for the younger students and her peers. Laci is kind and caring. Laci is a FFA officer and very involved in teaching the younger students about animals and agriculture. Laci plays basketball and runs cross country. With all her involvement in school and extracurricular activities Laci also holds down a job.



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