

Bag limit increased for area steelhead fisheries

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
East Oregonian

Steelhead runs are coming in stronger than expected up the Grande Ronde and Imnaha rivers, prompting fisheries managers to increase the number of hatchery-born steelhead available for anglers to retain in northeast Oregon.

The bag limit for steelhead was increased to two hatchery fish per day on the rivers beginning Saturday, Oct. 21, about two months after the limit was lowered to one fish amid reports of historically low summer steelhead returns.

Based on fish counts at Bonneville Dam, the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife now expects more than 3,000 hatchery fish in the Grande Ronde Basin and nearly 2,000 in the Imnaha Basin. The increased bag limit also applies to the Snake, Wenaha and Willowa rivers, as well as Big Sheep Creek.

"We've got more fish left over for fishermen than we thought we did," said Jeff Yanke, ODFW district fish biologist in Enterprise.

According to the most recent estimates, Yanke said there are twice as many Imnaha steelhead past Lower Granite Dam compared to this time last year, and about as many Grande Ronde steelhead. However, those totals are still just half of steelhead returns from two years ago.

"It's still a really low run," Yanke said.

Yanke said the one-fish limit was based on preseason forecasts, though it is better to manage conservatively off the bat than manage liberally and regret it later.

At the time, ODFW counted 70,000 hatchery and 25,000 wild steelhead past Bonneville Dam,



EO Media Group file photo

A fisherman casts his line into the Grande Ronde in this August 2014 file photo.

which was just 30 percent of the most recent 10-year average.

The increased bag limit brings Oregon into alignment with Washington and Idaho fishing regulations.

"We definitely think there are plenty of hatchery fish to harvest out there," Yanke said.

Chronic wasting disease increasing

Meanwhile, ODFW is also stepping up its monitoring for chronic wasting disease, a fatal neurological infection in deer, elk and moose.

Though it has never been detected in Oregon, chronic wasting

disease is spreading across North America and has been documented in Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, Utah and Alberta, Canada. The disease is caused by an abnormal protein that damages the brain of infected animals, causing them to gradually lose weight and bodily functions.

Chronic wasting disease is not treatable and always fatal. Colin Gillin, ODFW state wildlife veterinarian, said it is one of the most devastating wildlife diseases on the American landscape, and is nearly impossible to eradicate once it infects deer and elk.

"If we ever document (chronic wasting disease) in Oregon, we want to act quickly and will need

the support of Oregon hunters," Gillin said. "Early detection is our best chance to keep the disease from spreading, should it enter the state."

ODFW has run check stations for years in Eastern Oregon, monitoring for the disease. Wildlife officials sampled for chronic wasting disease during the opening weekend of rifle deer season, and will host another two check stations Sunday, Oct. 29 and Monday, Oct. 30 for elk season — one station will be set up at Biggs Junction along Interstate 84, and another will be set up east of Prineville along Highway 26.

Hunters interested in having their animals tested can contact

their local ODFW office to schedule an appointment. Chronic wasting disease has not been shown to sicken people, although the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advise people not to eat meat from infected animals.

Hunting, fishing fees set to increase again

Hunting and fishing license fees are due for a scheduled increase in 2018.

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission has adopted new fees that were previously approved by the state Legislature when it passed ODFW's 2015-17 budget. Normally, ODFW raises fees once every six years but opted instead for a more modest increase once every two years, beginning in 2016.

Hunting and fishing licenses for 2018 will go on sale Dec. 1. An annual hunting license will increase by \$1.50 to \$33.50, an annual fishing license will increase by \$3 to \$41 and a combination license will increase by \$4 to \$69. Fee increases were intended to help alleviate a \$32 million budget shortfall for the 2015-17 biennium.

The cost of youth licenses will remain the same, in an effort to make hunting and fishing more affordable for families, according to ODFW. Oregon's outdoor recreation and retail industry supports more than 20,000 jobs and contributes \$3 billion directly to the economy, according to figures the governor's office.

A complete list of hunting and fishing fees can be found online at www.dfw.state.or.us.

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



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife via AP, file

In this 2015 file photo provided by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, an ODFW biologist is in the process of collaring wolf OR-33, a 2-year-old adult male from the Imnaha pack, in Oregon's Willowa County. The wolf was killed illegally in southern Oregon in spring 2017.

Reward offered for info on wolf-killing poacher

By **GILLIAN FLACCUS**
Associated Press

PORTLAND — The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and five conservation groups have teamed up to offer \$15,500 for information about the illegal poaching of a federally protected gray wolf that was shot dead in a national forest in southern Oregon.

The wolf, known as OR-33, was being tracked by authorities and is one of at least eight that have been poached or died under mysterious circumstances in the state since 2015, the conservation groups said.

The groups in a statement Tuesday said OR-33 was found dead of gunshot wounds in Fremont Winema National Forest on April 23. DNA tests only recently confirmed that he was OR-33, a 4-year-old male who left a pack in northeast Oregon in 2015. His radio tracking collar stopped working last year.

Over two days in June, he killed two goats and one lamb at a small livestock operation near the small city of Ashland just north of Oregon's border with California.

The federal agency is offering \$5,000 for information about the poaching and the conservation groups are offering an additional \$10,500 combined.

"Wolf recovery in Oregon depends on wolves like OR-33 making their way

"Wolf recovery in Oregon depends on wolves like OR-33 making their way west and thriving."

— **Amaroq Weiss**, West Coast wolf advocate at the Center for Biological Diversity

west and thriving, so his death is a major setback. We hope someone will do the right thing and come forward with information," said Amaroq Weiss, West Coast wolf advocate at the Center for Biological Diversity.

Killing gray wolves in the western two-thirds of Oregon is a violation of the federal Endangered Species Act and of Oregon state game laws.

The federal offense is punishable by up to a \$100,000 fine, a year in jail, or both. The maximum state penalty is a fine of \$6,250 and a year in jail.

In 2016, OR-33 roamed almost within Ashland's city limits and was seen by numerous residents, according to the *Statesman Journal*.

Wolves in Oregon hunt deer, elk, bighorn sheep and goats, but also can target livestock and are loathed by many livestock owners.

State wildlife officials say 141 livestock or domestic animals have been killed by wolves in Oregon since they began returning to the state in the late 1990s.

U.S. considers higher entry fees at 17 popular national parks

By **FELICIA FONSECA**
Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. — The National Park Service is considering a steep increase in entrance fees at 17 of its most popular parks, mostly in the U.S. West, to address a backlog of maintenance and infrastructure projects.

Visitors to the Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Yellowstone, Zion and other national parks would be charged \$70 per vehicle, up from the fee of \$30 for a weekly pass. At others, the hike is nearly triple, from \$25 to \$70.

A 30-day public comment period opened Tuesday. The Park Service says it expects to raise \$70 million a year with the proposal at a time when national parks repeatedly have been breaking visitation records and putting a strain on park resources. Nearly 6 million people visited the Grand Canyon last year.

"We need to have a vision to look at the future of our parks and take action in order to ensure that our grandkids' grandkids will have the same if not better experience than we have today," Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke said in a statement. "Shoring up our parks' aging infrastructure will do that."

Annual \$80 passes for federal lands would not change, though fees would go up for pedestrians and motorcyclists. The higher fees would apply only during the five busiest contiguous months for parks; for most that's May through September when many families are on vacation.

The proposal would not affect several free weekends and holidays at parks throughout the year.

It comes not long after many of the parks that charge entrance fees raised them. The rationale is the same this time around — to address a backlog of maintenance and infrastructure projects.

The Park Service estimated deferred maintenance across its parks at \$11.3 billion as of September 2016, down from \$11.9 billion in 2015.

Kevin Dahl, Arizona senior program manager for the National Parks Conservation Association,



AP Photo/Ross D. Franklin, File

In this 2015 file photo, a long line of hikers head out of the Grand Canyon along the Bright Angel Trail at Grand Canyon National Park, Ariz. The National Park Service is floating a proposal to increase entrance fees at 17 of its most popular sites next year.

said maintenance costs should fall to Congress, not visitors.

"We've supported increases at the parks, they are a huge value for the price of entrance," he said. "But we want to look closely at this and we want local communities to look closely at this to see if it would impact visitation because we don't want to price people out of the parks."

Latino Outdoors founder Jose Gonzalez said the need for revenue and to control the crowds at the busiest parks is understandable but he questioned the potential impact.

"If there isn't always a question or consideration of equitable access to a lot of communities, it's only going to increase the disparity in terms of who is able to access our national parks and public lands," he said.

Not all Park Service sites charge entrance fees. The 118 that do keep 80 percent of revenue for things like fixing restrooms, signs, trails, exhibits and campgrounds and send 20 percent into a pot to help other free park sites.

Erik and Janet Schwartz of Boston said regular maintenance is vital for enjoying national parks. The couple was wrapping up a four-week trip that included visits to Bryce, Zion and the

Grand Canyon.

The entrance fees are a bargain considering the vastness of the parks, they said, but they also want assurance the revenue is used as intended.

"If they have the true justification for that, then I think preserving these lands for future generations is absolutely critical," Erik Schwartz said.

Flagstaff resident Brittany Montague said the proposed increase is "completely unreasonable," especially for young families and those making a day trip to national parks. If the cost included a guided tour or family photo, "it might make it worth it," she said.

The proposal applies to Arches, Bryce Canyon, Canyonlands and Zion in Utah; Yosemite, Sequoia & Kings Canyon and Joshua Tree in California; Grand Teton and Yellowstone in Wyoming; Mount Rainier and Olympic in Washington; Shenandoah in Virginia; Acadia in Maine; Rocky Mountain in Colorado; the Grand Canyon in Arizona; and Denali in Alaska.

Denali is structured differently because it's largely a drive-through park. The vehicle fee doesn't apply. The proposed increase per person is from \$10 to \$30.

Tribes release wild steelhead into Snake River

East Oregonian

This year's low steelhead returns are getting a much-needed boost after fisheries biologists with the Nez Perce Tribe and Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission released 100 wild, B-run fish Tuesday into the Snake River just below Lower Granite Dam.

Funded by the Bonneville Power Administration, the tribes' steelhead restoration project is an effort to increase adult steelhead returns to the Snake River Basin by maximizing their ability to repeat spawn. All of the fish released Tuesday were kelts, or steelhead that have spawned at least

once, collected during out-migration in spring 2016 and 2017.

The fish were nursed back to health at the Nez Perce Tribal Hatchery in Idaho before being the females were ready to spawn again, and released back into the wild.

"With an expected natural return of around 500 female B-run steelhead, this year's kelt release will boost the number of the spawners in the Snake River by 20 percent," said Doug Hatch, senior fisheries scientist and kelt project leader for CRITFC. "This work is beneficial every year, but absolutely critical in low-return years like this one."

Nearly all steelhead survive after spawning, though in the Snake River Basin only about half of each year's run makes it back to Lower Granite Dam, and less than 1 percent survive to repeat another spawning cycle.

Jaime Pinkham, CRITFC executive director, said kelts have always been part of the ecosystem.

"Through the tribal reconditioning program we are merely nurturing an existing process to increase natural reproduction and significantly increase a kelt's chances of spawning again," Pinkham said.

More information on the program can be found at www.critfc.org.

Did someone in your hunting party bag a trophy buck or bull this year?

Email a photo of the prize to tttrainor@eastoregonian.com