

The elk arrive

Snow or no, the animals know when state-run feeding sites are closed to the general public

By JAYSON JACOBY
Baker City Herald

NORTH POWDER — Elk don't need calendars.

Dan Marvin is convinced of that. He can't vouch for the animals' ability to recognize, say, Christmas or Independence Day or any other holiday observed by humans.

But elk certainly know when December arrives.

Some elk, anyway. Marvin can attest only to the chronological acumen of the elk that congregate each year at the Elkhorn Wildlife Area.

'They know where that feed is'

That's the series of 10 elk-feeding stations, ranging from Old Auburn Lane in the south to Shaw Mountain in Union County, operated by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Marvin is starting his fourth winter as the Elkhorn Wildlife Area manager.

The publicly owned portions of the wildlife area (some stations are on private land for which ODFW has leases) closed to public entry on Dec. 1, and remain closed through April 10.

Marvin said elk start to show up at some of the feed sites — most

notably the meadow along Anthony Creek, west of North Powder — on Dec. 1. And the animals stroll into the meadow even in years, such as the current one, when the fall has been mild, snow is scarce and the elk have no particular need for handouts of alfalfa hay.

"These elk, they know where that feed is," Marvin said on Friday morning, Dec. 10. "They have a phenomenal memory of where they've wintered in the past, and they can migrate for many miles overnight to be here at the feed site the next morning."

To be clear, Marvin and his crew distribute several hundred tons of alfalfa to elk each winter not because the animals wouldn't survive without the supplemental feed. Elk are tough and hardy, capable of digging through deep snow to get at the meager winter forage.

Keen instincts

Even a nasty winter, the sort that can kill hundreds of mule deer across Northeastern Oregon, typically takes only a minor toll on elk.

ODFW started the Elkhorn Wildlife Area in 1971 for a very different purpose — to stop elk from marauding cattle ranchers' haystacks in the Baker, North Powder and Bowen valleys. The idea, which has proven largely effective over the past half century, is to set up feeding stations where daily distributions of alfalfa will, in effect, intercept the elk, satisfying their hunger and discouraging them



Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

Rocky Mountain elk congregate at a feeding site in a meadow along Anthony Creek on Sunday, Dec. 12, 2021. This site, about 10 miles west of North Powder, is one of the 10 sites that comprise the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Elkhorn Wildlife Area.

from migrating into the valleys.

During the ensuing decades, Marvin said, the elk have become habituated to these seasonal offerings, their instincts so keen that their arrival, as the calendar turns from November to December, is quite reliable.

"The cows every year bring their calves here, and they learn, and then they bring their calves," Marvin said.

Although the elk know when December comes, they don't always wait until then, Marvin said. In years when snow comes early — 2020 was an example, with a couple feet of snow accumulating in the mountains the first half of November — elk will wander into some of the feed sites.

"Acting like they're going to starve to death," Marvin said with a chuckle during a 2020 interview.

But ODFW doesn't start bucking hay bales before Dec. 1, early snow or no. The reason, Marvin said, is that the Elkhorn wildlife area remains open to the public, including hunters, through Nov. 30, and he doesn't want to, in effect, set up bait stations where elk would congregate.

Typically, as was the case last year, early snow melts and the elk return to the mountains, waiting for Dec. 1.

Elk numbers

This fall was quite different, with little snow until this past weekend. Nonetheless, about 150 to 170 elk arrived at the Anthony Creek feeding site Dec. 1, and they've been showing up daily since, Marvin said.

Elk numbers have been much lower at the other sites, however.

That's pretty typical, Marvin said, even though the Wildlife Area crew set out hay at each of the sites on Dec. 1.

The elk that congregate at Anthony Creek tend to be the most consistent when it comes to the Dec. 1 arrival, Marvin said.

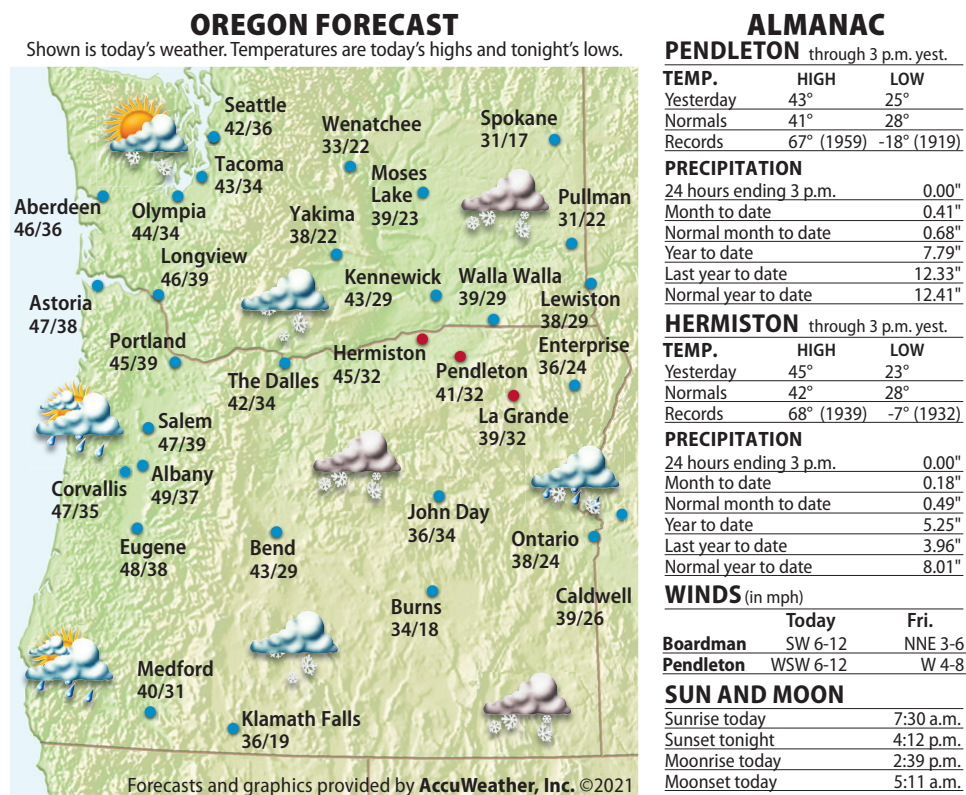
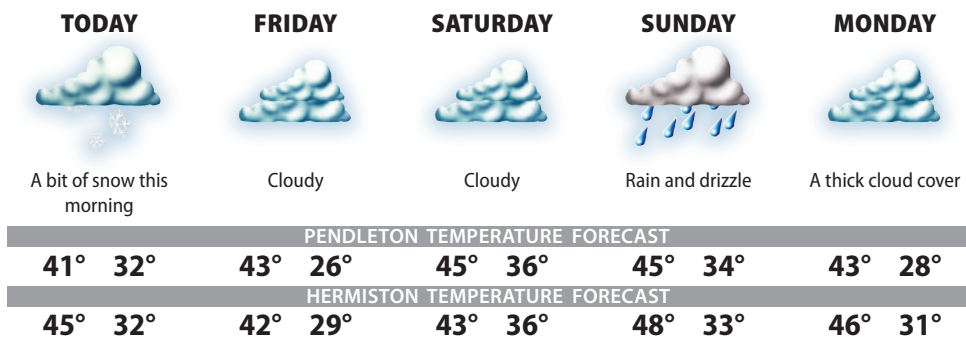
"They're very habituated elk," he said.

Elk that migrate to the other feeding sites, by contrast, often don't show up in large numbers until snow begins to pile up.

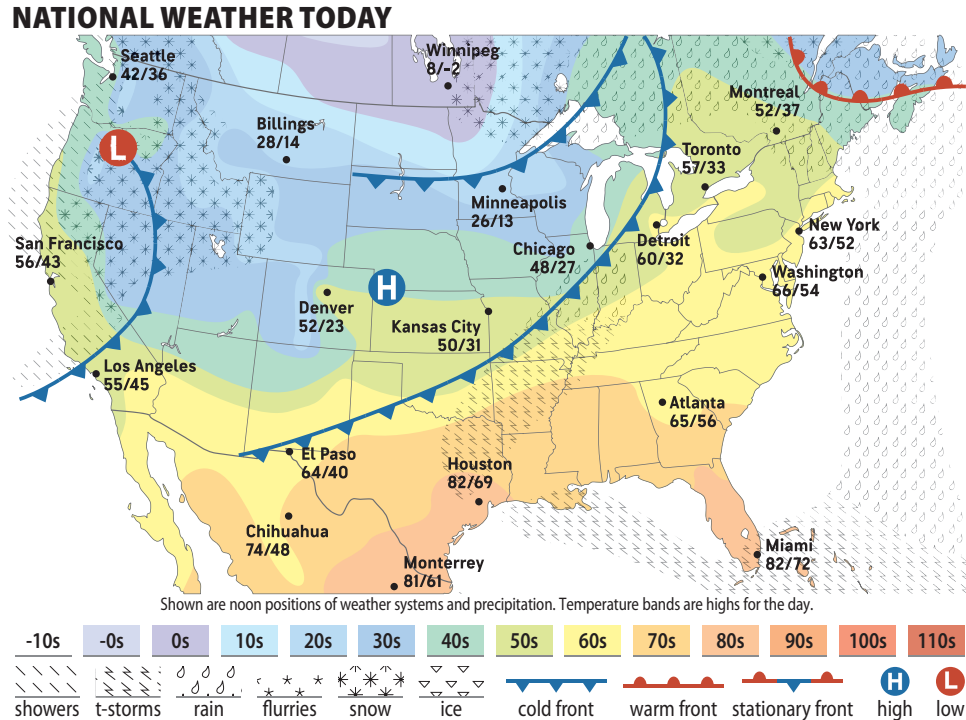
With the first major winter storm of the season bringing heavy snow to the Elkhorns this past weekend, Marvin said he expects the elk numbers will rise at all the sites soon.

"Peak numbers are usually in January when it's the coldest and the snow tends to get the deepest," Marvin said.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



NATIONAL EXTREMES
Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 89° in Zapata, Texas Low -10° in Stanley, Idaho



Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle

A Rude Logging truck on Saturday, Dec. 11, 2021, drives down Main Street in John Day during the 28th annual Timber Truckers Light Parade. Rude Logging's rig took first place in the timber category.

Yule loggers: Timber truckers brighten up Christmas season

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Trucks decked out with thousands of Christmas lights hauled in the holiday spirit Saturday, Dec. 11, as John Day's 28th annual Timber Truckers Light Parade rumbled down Main Street.

More than a hundred people lined the sidewalk and braved the cold to cheer on the decorated logging trucks, commercial vehicles, Forest Service rigs and others. This year the parade had 30 participants.

The parade floats represented four categories: farm

and ranch, timber, commercial and community.

Longtime parade organizer Leslie Traylor, a John Day resident, said the parade was started by D.R. Johnson, who, at the time, operated Prairie Wood Products in Prairie City and Grant Western Lumber Co. in John Day. The purpose was to showcase the importance of the timber industry in Grant County.

Traylor said the D.R. Johnson family continues to support the John Day parade as well as a similar parade in Riddle.

In the early years, Traylor said, a majority of the trucks — if not all — were log trucks.

The lighting displays of the parade floats, she noted, were extremely elaborate.

"They went to so much trouble," she said, "so much expense to give us some beautiful, beautiful entries."

Last year's parade, Traylor said, underscored how significant the event is to the community. Due to pandemic restrictions, the organizers could not host an awards dinner and did not seek donations from merchants for prizes.

She said she asked the drivers what they wanted to do, and they told her, "We'll have a parade anyway."

IN BRIEF

Anthony Lakes Ski Area opens for season Saturday

NORTH POWDER — With another eight inches of snow falling overnight Monday, Dec. 13, Anthony Lakes Ski Area will open for the season Dec. 18.

Anthony Lakes reported a base of 22 inches the morning of Dec. 14, with 19 inches of snow falling in the past three days.

The resort, in the Elkhorn Mountains

about 34 miles northwest of Baker City, will be open daily through Jan. 2, except Christmas Day. The ski area will close at 1 p.m. on Christmas Eve.

Unlike last winter, the lodge will be open this year, although face coverings are required indoors.

More information, including daily snow updates, are available at www.anthonylakes.com.

— EO Media Group

CORRECTIONS: The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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