

# Elk: Encroachment on Wallowa County ranch-land may take long-term solutions

Continued from Page A1

“[B]y 1924 there were numerous complaints about competition between elk and domestic livestock,” Dennehy said.

Complaints of elk destruction by cattle ranchers are, on the whole, nothing new. What is new are the reasons behind them. Population is often the most general and easy to correct cause for complaint – although there is some discrepancy about the degree of overpopulation throughout Oregon at this time. A new and more complex issue that is more difficult to solve is distribution.

The reasons behind this shift in habit are numerous, including: a decrease in ranching in the Canyon-lands – where the elk winter – causing an insurgence of bunchgrass, the outlawed use of hunting dogs for cougars and bears – increasing the number of predators in the canyons, decreased forest harvest – which increases the forest’s density and reduces forage available in those areas, yearly hunting on US Forest Service lands and the encroachment of public roads upon elk habitat.

“It really isn’t a good habitat for elk,” Pam Harshfield said of the current state of the Canyonlands. “And they have found this greener pasture in the valleys.”

Harshfield, along with her husband Mike, owns a ranch outside of Wallowa, Ore., where the couple has been dealing with extreme elk damage to their hay crops, feed barns and fencing that began in earnest in 2016.



Ellen Morris Bishop

“[T]hat was the only winter in 40 plus years,” she said. “We had close to three feet of snow. It felt like the elk almost got trapped because of the amount of snow. And honestly, the elk just are not leaving the valley the way they used to.”

The Harshfields, who were working with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to find a solution for the increasing size of the elk herd grazing their land for many years before the difficult winter of 2016-17, were initially reluctant to utilize many of the solutions they were offered, including the use of damage tags and a kill permits.

“In the beginning we weren’t really wild about having hunting on our property,” Harshfield explained. “I was just cautious about

who we allowed on our property.”

But now, after several more years of damage from a herd of nearly 200 elk that have made the Harshfield ranch their nearly constant home, they are planning to allow hunting in earnest on their 450 acre ranch, in the hopes that it will either thin the herd or, at the very least, drive them away.

“We have to keep trying,” she said. “I’m going to purchase these pop up camo blinds and set them out at different points on our place. I’ll need hunters in August and September – seven days a week.”

Although that level of thinning may seem extreme, Dennehy views the Harshfield’s new plan as a step in the right direction.

“ODFW recognizes that

elk damage is a problem for the Harshfields and other landowners in the area,” she said. “We ask that any landowner experiencing damage be proactive and work with us using the many legal tools available. These tools are only effective if the landowner takes an active role in helping solve their damage problem... and if neighboring landowners share the same objectives when it comes to elk damage and the presence of elk on private land.”

But not all neighbors do share the same outlook on the presence of elk in the valley lands and because elk roam, that too can lead to issues.

“[D]ifferent and often neighboring landowners can have different objectives, with some allowing hunting for example, and some not,” Dennehy said. “For exam-

ple, in the Harshfield situation, there are neighboring landowners who desire more elk and who would prefer ODFW not attempt to reduce local elk numbers.”

Tsiatsos agrees that neighboring cooperation is key to solving the elk issue but – because the land around his ranch is regulated by the state – he has a unique view of how the teamwork should be handled.

“If [the elk] are doing damage then the state needs to control that,” he said emphatically. “Say I had 50 cows get out here on state ground, I would have them off in 24 hours. Let’s have them have the same effect. A landowner can’t support the mismanagement for the public – it’s the state’s animal. Where are my rights to protect my property, land and livestock?”

Currently this issue is one with foreseeable short-term resolution. Williams only sees as a series of long-term solutions that would need to play out over many years.

“We need much more aggressive management of forests on public lands, we need predator control and we need, if possible to balance the hunting pressure between the public and private lands,” Williams suggested. “And we need to do these things over a period of time because changing wildlife patterns is a slow process. All this while reducing the numbers overall.”

But that sluggish timeline may be difficult for ranchers who continue to offer safe haven to elk herds that number in the hundreds.

“Every year we have to pay someone to go out and repair our fences,” Harshfield said. “And the herd comes in and eats a lot of our [hay] crop. Mike figured this year that loss of revenue – because of eating of our hay crop and no forage – he figured it cost us about 10,000 dollars in lost revenue. We’re actually being forced to consider cutting back on the number of cattle we run and we have to buy hay. We should not be forced to make that decision.”

Although certainly in agreement that the situation is making ranching more taxing, Williams is not worried about the future of Oregon’s ranching economy.

“Wallowa County ranchers are resilient,” he stated confidently. “They will survive and at times thrive in spite of the challenges of ranching.”



Ellen Morris Bishop

Wallowa Firefighters tow Steven’s Honda CRV out of the Wallowa River.

## Winter: The season of dangerous driving ‘isn’t over yet’

Continued from Page A1

“That’s one nice thing about living in a small community,” Stevens said. “You know all your rescuers by their first names.”

Stevens, a retired teacher who taught both social studies and Driver’s Education for Union, Baker and Wallowa Education Service Districts, noted that her misfortune should warn other Wallowa County drivers that winter is not over yet.

Serious accidents have a history on Highway 82 along the river and Minam Grade. In the last, decade, two people have died in crashes there. Others were

transported by Life-Flight or ambulance with serious injuries. And while the Oregon Department of Transportation plans to complete a \$6.7 million project to improve the sharp, 25 mph corner on Minam Grade this year, the curving 10-mile stretch along the Wallowa River will remain unchanged.

Especially in the winter, that part of the highway gets little sun, and is often cold, foggy, and wet. “Coming back from the District playoff games Friday night the road was really icy and pretty foggy,” said long-time truck driver Del Stanley. “Winter isn’t over yet.”

Years in business **1**

**RUBY PEAK REALTY**  
541.398.1297 (Cell)  
Diane.Daggett1297@gmail.com  
Diane M. Daggett  
Broker

**THOMPSON AUTO SUPPLY** Celebrating **74 Years!**

Locally Owned  
Nationally Known  
Est. 1945  
106 SW Second Street • Enterprise, Oregon 97828  
541-426-3181 • After Hours 541-426-3271

11 South Main Street  
Joseph, Oregon 97846  
208) 790-7318

**1 Year**

**NORTON’S WELDING & REPAIR**

- Norton Auto Repair
- Enterprise Auto Parts

**Celebrating 41 Years!**

541-569-2436  
Auto Shop: 541-569-2069 Toll-free: 866-628-2497  
131 Highway 82 • Lostine, OR 97857

**WHEATLAND INSURANCE CENTER, INC.** Celebrating **36 Years!**

AT THE FOLLOWING LOCATIONS:  
Enterprise • 121 W Main • 541-426-3177  
Pendleton • Athena • Baker City  
Elgin • La Grande • Heppner  
Ione • Hermiston • Condon • The Dalles  
www.wheatlandins.com

**The SPORTS SC CORRAL**

**43 YEARS!**

401 N Main Street in Joseph, OR  
(541) 432-4363 • sportscorral@eoni.com

**February Savings!**  
Companion Animal Dental Procedures

**\$20 off**  
Dental Cleaning throughout February  
Call 541-426-3331 to schedule  
Come in and enter to win a dog or cat dental procedure.

706 Depot St.  
Enterprise, OR 97828  
enterprisevet.com  
542-426-3331

WALLOWA COUNTY  
**Health Line**

**Wallowa Valley Eye Care**  
519 W. North Street, Enterprise  
541.426.3413  
Mon-Thurs 9 to Noon/1-5pm; Fri. 9-1

Celebrating **135 Years** in Business

**Wallowa County CHIEFTAIN**  
209 NW First St. Enterprise, OR 97828 • www.wallowa.com