

## RECREATION REPORT

### FALL CHINOOK SALMON SEASONS OPEN ON COLUMBIA

Fall salmon seasons on the Columbia River opened Wednesday, Aug. 1 with modest forecasts and a few new regulations.

The popular Buoy 10 fishery will lead off Columbia River fall fisheries with effort and catch in other sections of the mainstem building over time. A total of 375,500 adult chinook are expected to enter the Columbia this fall, which is about 80 percent of last year's actual return and 50 percent of the recent 10-year average.

Due to a lower forecasted return of upriver bright fall chinook, fisheries have been planned to remain within a harvest rate limit of 8.25 percent on these fish. This rate is lower than in recent years and has resulted in season and bag limit reductions.

Coho returns are predicted to be similar to last year, with 213,600 adults expected to enter the river mouth, versus last year's actual return of 235,700.

Due to the below average steelhead forecast of 182,400, no more than one hatchery steelhead may be retained per day from Aug. 1 through Dec. 31 for all mainstem Columbia River recreational fisheries.

The Buoy 10 fishery is scheduled to be open for retention of any adult chinook salmon through Aug. 24 with a one fish daily bag limit. Chinook retention is scheduled to close Aug. 25, but hatchery coho/steelhead retention will remain open with a two-fish/one steelhead adult bag limit.

From Tongue Point upstream to Warrior Rock, retention of any adult chinook will be allowed through Sept. 2, with a one fish daily adult bag. Starting Sept. 3, the daily adult bag limit increases to two-fish/one steelhead (hatchery coho/steelhead only).

From Warrior Rock upstream to Bonneville Dam, chinook retention is scheduled to be open through Sept. 14 with an adult bag limit of one fish. Beginning Sept. 15, the daily adult bag limit will be two fish/one steelhead (hatchery coho/steelhead only).

For the area from Bonneville Dam upstream to the Highway 395 Bridge in Pasco, Washington, chinook retention opened Aug. 1 but will be managed in-season based on actual catch and the upriver bright chinook run size.

## CONTROLLING OREGON'S FERAL SWINE NUMBERS



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife photo

Feral swine are caught on a trail camera in the Trout Creek Basin in Central Oregon.

# Pig population pared

By Kyle Spurr  
WesCom News Service

On a rugged hillside south of Antelope, wildlife biologist J.D. McComas spent two nights last month waiting to shoot a feral pig that was destroying nearby farmland.

Each night, McComas drank coffee to stay awake as he used night-vision equipment to spot the pig in the darkness. But it never showed.

Hunting the last of the feral swine in Oregon takes patience.

McComas, a Madras-based wildlife biologist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services, was assigned to lead Oregon's effort to eradicate the invasive feral swine species in January 2017.

About a decade ago, the feral swine population in the state grew to more than 3,000. The pigs are one of the most dangerous invasive species in Oregon and cause damage to agricultural crops and fish and wildlife habitat.

Through aerial hunting from helicopters and corral trapping, the population has been reduced to less than 200. The remaining swine are roaming in the vast wilderness of Central Oregon, from Madras to Shaniko, and in the open terrain along the California border.

Finding the stragglers takes long nights of hunting and corral trapping in the remote terrain, McComas said.

"For the most part, they inhabit some of the roughest country Central Oregon has to offer," he said. "That High Desert country and canyons that have seen nothing but cattle for years. We had to cover a lot of ground just to find them."

State officials started to address the feral swine problem nearly two decades ago. In 2001, a law was passed to reclassify the pigs from livestock to predatory animals, allowing them to be hunted without regulation.

In 2009, the Oregon Legislature passed a law requiring landowners to notify the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife if they see feral swine on their land. The law also made it illegal to sell swine hunts because those operations bring in pigs and if any escape, the population problem

will worsen.

Feral swine spread in Oregon mostly through people bringing in exotic European and Russian boars for private hunts.

Some of the boars would escape and breed with escaped domestic pigs, said Rick Boatner, ODFW's invasive species wildlife integrity coordinator.

"People were bringing in Russian boars, and they cross bred with domestic swine," Boatner said. "Fairly often, we found hybrids."

Feral swine can start breeding as early as 6 months old, and produce at least two litters per year with up to 12 in a litter.

They can grow to nearly 300 pounds, and as omnivores they eat almost anything in their paths. They can eat small birds and young deer but also dig up roots in farmland and protected riparian areas.

Most of the damage is done during the night because they are nocturnal animals.

"They can go in and damage acres of pasture land," Boatner said. "Then you have weed patches instead of grass for your cattle."

Besides the environmental damage, feral pigs also carry up to 40 separate diseases that are dangerous to humans and livestock.

Boatner said the Oregon population is relatively disease free, although one was found with swine flu, a respiratory disease in pigs that can spread to humans.

About five years ago, Congress recognized the threat of feral pigs in each state and designated nearly \$20 million to eradication efforts, according to David Williams, director of USDA wildlife services in Oregon.

The U.S. agriculture department was tasked with leading land managers and private landowners in each state to help eliminate feral swine.

Oregon initially received \$165,000 in federal money per year, which helped rent a helicopter for aerial hunts.

About three or four times per year, Oregon wildlife officials would ride in a helicopter, flying at a low altitude to find large groups of feral pigs. As the helicopter pilot hovered above them,

another person would use a 12-gauge shotgun to shoot the swine.

One flight could take down more than 100 swine.

Recovering the carcasses can be time consuming, so they are usually left behind on terrain that is often too rugged to safely land a helicopter, Williams said. And if landowners want to keep a carcass, they have to have it inspected for diseases before it can be prepared.

Overall, the use of helicopters in Central Oregon eliminated about 1,200 feral swine.

The aerial hunting was the most effective way to reduce the population, but it hasn't been as necessary in recent years since the remaining pigs are hard to find from the sky, according to wildlife officials.

Helicopter flights were only done twice last year and once this year. Each flight only spotted about four swine.

Wildlife officials have entered the hardest part of the eradication effort — tracking and killing the few remaining pigs.

To assist the final push in Oregon, the annual federal funding was bumped up \$245,000 last year, and McComas was brought in as the lead biologist.

"Now, we have our lead biologist and we have a helicopter we can use and from time to time we will also assign some of our staff to work with landowners to run a lot of corral traps and monitor trail cameras to try to get to the last hold-outs of feral swine," Williams said.

Because of how quickly feral swine breed and how people are still bringing them in for illegal private hunts, wildlife officials worry the population could grow again.

McComas and his colleagues are working hard to eliminate the swine and monitor any new sightings.

If they start to back off now, they could find themselves back to where they were a decade ago, when thousands of swine damaged the landscape, McComas said.

"We are doing everything in our power to keep the foot on the pedal," he said. "Eventually, we will catch up with them all."

# ODFW launches 'Take a Friend Hunting' contest

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife this week launched its second "Take a Friend Hunting" contest.

Hunters who take someone new to the sport on a hunting trip — or even someone who just hasn't hunted in several years — can enter to win prizes including hunting gear and a statewide deer tag for 2019.

To be eligible for the contest, both the experienced hunter (mentor) and the new or returning hunter (mentee) must have a valid 2018 Oregon hunting license and be age 18 or older. New or returning hunters are those who have never purchased an Oregon hunting license, purchased for the first time in 2018, or have not purchased since 2013.

Both Oregon residents and non-residents are eligible to enter. Hunters can take a friend, spouse or any family member along hunting, as long as they meet eligibility requirements.

During last year's inaugural contest, 1,546 people joined the contest (773 entries of two hunters, the mentor and the mentee) and 22 people won prizes ranging from \$50 gift cards to the grand prize of a statewide deer tag.

"Learning to hunt can be challenging for adults who didn't grow up hunting," said Chris Willard, ODFW recruitment and retention coordinator. "Mentoring by a friend or relative is a great way for those interested in hunting to get started."

All types of hunting (big game, waterfowl, upland bird, small game, etc.) qualify, as long as they are legal, ethical and safe.

Mentees who want to go big game hunting but did not draw a controlled hunt tag are welcome to join the mentor's hunt (or vice versa). But the person without a tag may not carry a rifle or bow or take a shot at the big game animal with their friend's weapon.

Participants need to register for the contest no later than Dec. 31, 2018, at the MyODFW.com website on the contest page.

While both parties need to register and provide a Hunter/Angler ID number, the mentor will win the prize. Winners will be notified by Jan. 31, 2019.

A list of prizes will be updated regularly on the contest page on the website.

Among the prizes offered so far, donated by businesses and organizations, include binoculars, a \$500 Cabela's gift card, and Otis Technology gun cleaning system, a Halo XL 450 rangefinder, a Kershaw ultimate knife package, and a Siberian Sidekick cooler.

# Youth shotgun skills clinic Aug. 11 at Ladd Marsh

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has announced a youth shotgun skills clinic Aug. 11 at the Ladd Marsh State Wildlife Area. This free clinic is a chance for youth age 17 and under, who have completed hunter education or are currently enrolled in a course, to tune up their shooting skills prior to the youth pheasant hunts in September and the general game bird seasons this fall. Remember to bring your hunter

card or proof of enrollment.

The clinic will run from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Ladd Marsh headquarters office, 59116 Pierce Road. Advanced registration is encouraged by calling 541-403-0724 or 541-963-4954.

Participants will be taught basic shotgun shooting skills under the supervision of local hunter education instructors. Clay targets and shotshells will be provided, both

12- and 20-gauge steel loads, along with hearing protection and shooting glasses. For those bringing their own ammunition please note that nontoxic shot is required on the Refuge. Youth are encouraged to bring their own shotgun but asked to ensure it is in safe working order, steel shot compatible, and with an Improved cylinder or modified choke. Chokes tighter than modified, such as full choke, are not permitted with

steel-shot shotshells. Several youth 20-gauge semi-auto shotguns will also be available for use.

Thatcher's Ace Hardware in La Grande and Baker City has also donated a youth 20-gauge shotgun to be raffled midway through the event. One free raffle ticket per youth participating. An adult 21 years or older must be present with participants during the clinic and to take legal custody of the raffled firearm.

