

RECREATION REPORT

FREE FISHING WEEKEND IN OREGON

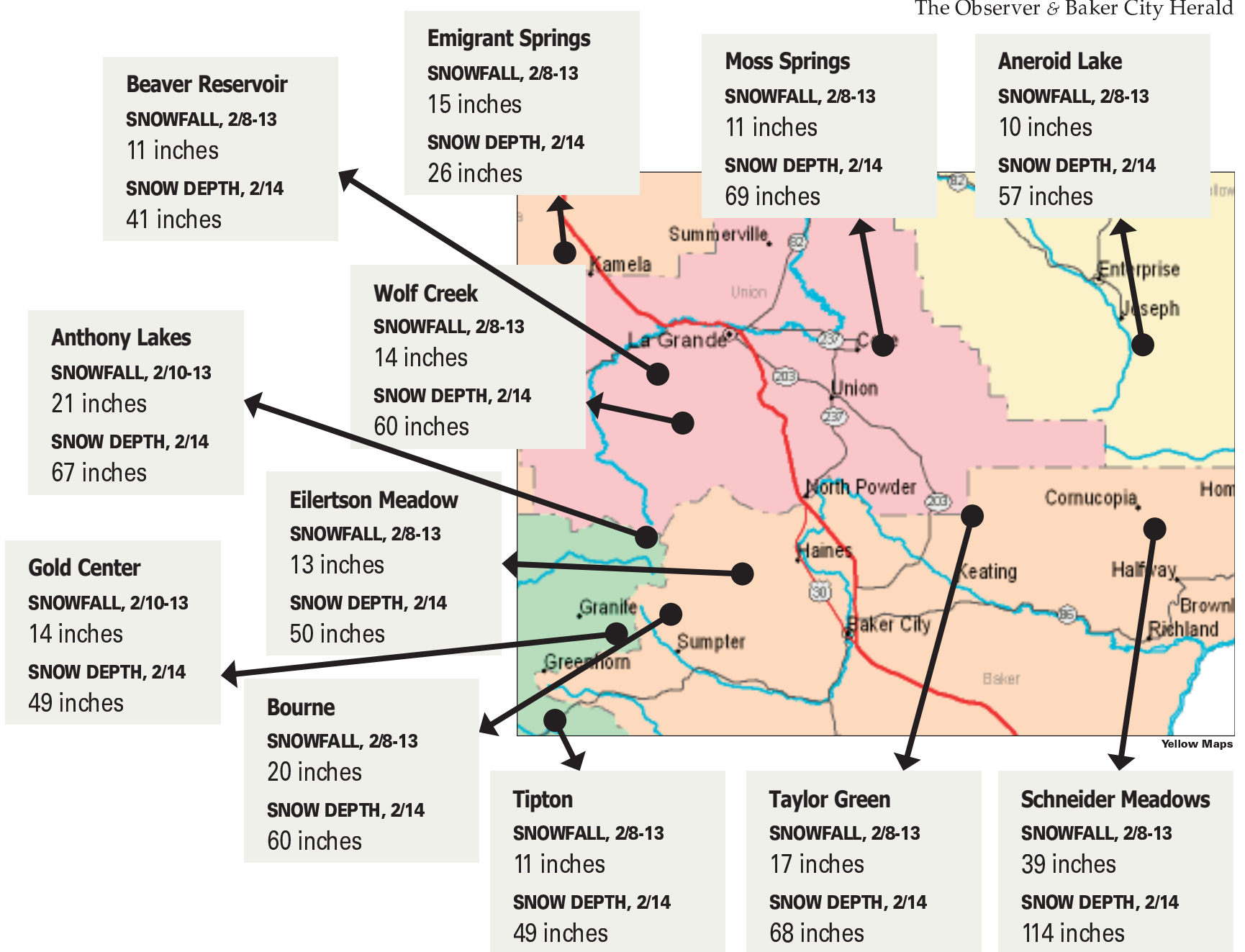
SALEM —It's free to fish, crab or clam in Oregon on Saturday and Sunday, Feb. 16-17, of President's Day weekend.

During these two days, no fishing licenses or tags (including a Combined Angling Tag or Columbia River Basin Endorsement) are required to fish, crab or clam anywhere in Oregon for both residents and nonresidents. Although no licenses or tags are required, all other fishing regulations apply including closures, bag limits and size restrictions.

This time of year, the best opportunity will be winter steelhead on the coast, stocked hatchery rainbow trout in the Willamette Valley and midcoast lakes, and ice fishing in Northeastern and Southeastern Oregon.

PHILLIPS RESERVOIR

Current reservoir storage is at 9 percent of capacity. The reservoir is fully ice-covered and ice fishing is underway. The perch are larger this year, averaging about 9 inches. Rainbows range from 10 to 20 inches. Construction of the new boat launch surface at the Mason Dam Boat Launch is now complete and the launch has re-opened to public access. Access has been good, but may be impacted by recent snowfall.



SURGING SNOWPACK



Photo from Cornucopia Lodge
A tracked Sno-Cat is a necessity in navigating the monumental snow depths near the Cornucopia Lodge in Baker County. This machine is owned by Jesse Cook of Vintage Sno-Cats.

By Jayson Jacoby
Baker City Herald

Snowpacks aren't built in a week. But they can get quite a lot deeper. A relentless series of storms over the past several days brought prodigious amounts of snow to Northeastern Oregon.

Snow totals are especially impressive in the southern part of the Willowa Mountains.

An automated snow-measuring station at Schneider Meadows, in eastern Baker County north of Halfway, recorded 39 inches of snow in the six-day period Feb. 8-13. That boosted the snow depth to 114 inches.

"It's been quite a week," said Sara

Atley, manager at Cornucopia Lodge in the Willows about 12 miles north of Halfway. "We've gotten so much snow in a short period."

Although the winter of 2016-17 ranks for many as the most memorable in the past couple decades, with deep snow and frigid temperatures even in the valleys, after this week's wintry onslaught several mountain sites have more snow than they did in mid-February 2017.

Schneider Meadows is one of those. The water content of the snow there was 27.6 inches on Thursday morning. On the same day in 2017 the water content, which is the standard snowpack measurement, rather than snow depth, was 22.6 inches.

Don't lock up the rifle just yet — plan a coyote hunt



BASE CAMP
TOM CLAYCOMB

Whoa, not so fast! I'm talking about not putting away your hunting rifle for the winter. No quite yet. One of the funnest and most high-speed shooting seasons is about to kick off. Varmint hunting! Varmints need to be managed since most of them have few natural predators. If you don't manage them, then the antelope, deer and elk herds will suffer big time.

There's a myth espoused out there in the world between science fiction and flat-out lies of the uninformed that wolves, coyotes and predators in general only kill the sick, lame and lazy. That's simply not true. They kill and eat whatever is the easiest to catch.

I remember a few years back a study in one zone found that 80 percent of the wolves' diets were calf elk. Of course, that makes sense, they're the easiest to catch. And what about pregnant does/cows right before or during calving?

This one may surprise you, but a big prey for cougars are big bucks right after the rut. They are worn down after chasing does 24/7 for days on end.

So with the above said, you can see why predators need to be managed if we want to have healthy, abundant herds of wildlife.

So other than occasionally stumbling across a coyote loping across



A coyote pursues a deer fawn.

the prairies, how do you purposely hunt them? The most popular method for coyotes is to call them. As a kid all we had were hand calls. Then Johnny Stewart came out with cassette tapes to electronically call them. We'd plug a tape in the truck and crank it up.

Fast forward a few decades. Now there are a million different brands of electronic calls available. All the way from small handheld ones on up to what may look like a boom box to you. I've got some with rotating speakers so you can turn them to face whichever way you'd like for the sound to travel.

And I failed to mention, most of them will have a remote control, which is great so when they run in

focused on the location of the call they're not as likely to spot you 30 yards away. I'm waiting to receive a FOXPRO Shockwave, which is the ultimate call.

It's a given that no matter which way they come in from, when they get close, they're going to circle downwind of you. So you want to have an open spot downwind of you so you'll see them. You'll want to be concealed. Pop-up blinds are nice but if you're running-gunning they're a pain to lug around. I did find one cool little one by Ameristep called the Throwdown blind. It's about 2 feet tall and sets up in a C shape.

But don't feel like you have to have a blind. Ninety percent of the

time I just hide behind brush or a fence line. Or look in the January issue of Fur-Fish & Game and I have a short article on how to construct a brush blind in less than five minutes. Or, you can take a piece of burlap camo'd cloth and lay over a fence or two sagebrushes.

Decoys also greatly enhance your setup. I use two kinds. I like the Montana Decoys offerings. I'll set up their coyote and then a rabbit, deer fawn or antelope fawn, according to what prey is available where I'm hunting. Attractants decoys are another popular type of decoy. They're an electronic decoy that is basically a wire with a piece of white cloth on the end that spins around. Predators are more comfortable coming

- 90 percent of the coyotes will come in the first five minutes.
- Bobcats will come in to a call but are usually a lot slower coming in. We called three in one day on the Texas hunt mentioned in the column.
- I just ordered a book, "Master Coyote Hunting," by Mike Huff

in when they see movement to go along with the noise. Or you can tie a turkey feather on the end of a wire and let it dangle.

What guns should you use? .223 ARs are the most popular because you can get fast follow-up shots with them. Many times you'll have two, three or more coyotes come in at once. And if there are two or more shooters, I always make one of us carry a shotgun. One year 40 percent of my coyotes came in within shotgun range. Use Hevi Shot Dead Coyote loads. They can reach out to 70 yards.

Last year I was varmint hunting for a week in Texas. I told my hunting buddy that one of us had to have a shotgun. He advised against it saying we'll be hunting in West Texas in the wide open country. What do you think we rolled the first coyote with?

Spotlighting at night is the ultimate. That's when they're really active. But check your local laws.

So don't get fat and lazy this winter. Crawl out of your man cave and go try your hand at varmint hunting.

Submitted photo