

Yellow perch on ice



Brad Trumbo/Contributed Photo

A few stunning little yellow perch are a prized ice fishing catch.

BRAD TRUMBO
UPLAND PURSUITS

Heavy snow and frigid temperatures in late December and early January may have kept me from traveling for a New Year vacation, but ice forming thick on one of my favorite yellow perch lakes was an acceptable consolation.

My fishing friend Chas lives about three hours closer to the lake than I, so it was no surprise to see he was already set up when I finally arrived in early afternoon. We planned to stay in a cabin nearby for a couple nights to see if we could dial in the perch, and anything else that would entertain the variety of gear in our tackle boxes.

The sun was settling behind the western ridges as I donned my arctic survival suit and hit the ice. Chas had no luck where he had started, so we moved across the lake to an area where a shallow “weed bed” extended from the foot of a dark timbered ridge. I was hoping to find an area between 8 and 15 feet deep on the fringe of vegetation where perch might linger, but also something attractive for cruising trout to keep things interesting.

We played the exhausting game of drilling a line of holes until we felt out the depth range, which left my desk-job arms feeling a bit quivery. Sixteen inches of ice drilling with a semi-dull manual auger makes one reconsider the gas-powered options. Finally dialing in between 8 and 12 feet above the weeds, we located a school of perch and sunfish, but the fish were picky and delicate. Having started with a small spoon, I switched out to a bead-head fly tied with a red floss body and a few straight feather filament tail strands. An extremely simplistic fly — small, attractive, and tipped with a Berkley maggot bait.

The mercury plummeted the last half-hour of daylight, but the bite got hot with

yellow perch and bluegill gently sucking up the little baited fly and finding their way through the hole. I use an old-school flasher that basically sends a sound wave down and reads the intensity in which it’s reflected by surfaces and objects. The fly appeared as a thin yellow line. When fish approached the fly, they too appeared as a

thin yellow line, at first. But as they closed in, the line thickened and turned green, then red outlined in green and yellow when they were right on top of the fly. As I jigged the little fly about a foot off the bottom, green lines continually blipped beneath as fish moved about the area. They were small, but the action was exceptional and

watching the lines on the flasher appear and change colors is just as thrilling now as it was when I first acquired the technology 20 years ago.

The next morning, we found ourselves back at the holes from the night before and the bite was once again on. The sun had barely laid a peach glow across the ridges to the south when the first yellow perch gave in to the little bead-head fly. Chas was into them as well and we bantered across the 15 feet that separated our holes, sharing tips on baits and asking if the other was seeing any fish when the bite would wane.

Curiosity caused us to move to other areas looking for bigger fish which proved fruitless, save for a single tiger trout that Chas lured in by jigging a rattling crank-bait. Luckily, no one laid claim to our original holes, and we settled back onto them for the evening bite.

Rainbow trout were cruising that evening and taking the little flies tipped with the maggot or a small piece of night-crawler to add a little flavor. While the perch and sunfish mostly pecked at the fly, the cruising rainbows would snag it on the go, leaving the drag zinging on our jig rods. Red squirrels chattered and scurried through the evergreens as the pink halo of dusk settled across the ridgetops. Every other angler had vacated the lake an hour before, yet Chas and I remained until it was black as the night would get, landing fish, telling jokes, and enjoying the peace of the mountains, broken only by the occasional singing of the ice.



Brad Trumbo/Contributed Photo

Sunrise creeping upon the frozen mountain lake.

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Coalition seeks to curb car-wildlife collisions

Bill in Oregon Legislature would allocate \$7 million for wildlife crossings

By **JAYSON JACOBY**
Baker City Herald

A coalition including hunters, anglers, Tribal representatives and members of conservation groups is promoting a bill in the Oregon Legislature that would allocate \$7 million to build fences, underpasses and other structures in areas where vehicles are more likely to hit deer, elk and other wildlife.

The coalition has compiled a report on the topic that includes a priority list for these wildlife crossing structures.

The list includes a section of Interstate 84 near Meacham, part of U.S. Highway 26 near Dayville, in Grant County, and a stretch of U.S. Highway 20 from Juntura to Harper Valley in northern Malheur County.

State Rep. Ken Helm, a Democrat from Washington County, introduced House Bill 4130-01, the Wildlife Crossings Investment Act, prior to the current legislative session in Salem.



Timothy Bishop/Travel Baker County, File

A cow and calf elk cross a highway in Baker County.

Reps. Mark Owens, R-Crane, Bobby Levy, R-Echo, are among the bill’s sponsors.

On Feb. 8, the House Interim Committee on Environment and Natural Resources passed the bill and referred it to the Ways and Means Committee for a vote.

Tyler Dungannon, conservation coordinator for the Oregon Hunters Asso-

ciation, a member of the coalition, testified in support of the bill.

Dungannon said in a phone interview on Wednesday, Feb. 16, that he’s confident the bill can pass before the legislature convenes.

Dungannon said that although the \$7 million allocated in the bill might seem a modest sum, the state could potentially use

that money to leverage dollars from the much larger federal budget.

The federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 includes \$350 million in competitive grants over five years to states, Tribes and local governments to address chronic problems with vehicles hitting wildlife.

“Thanks to Representative Helm and the other

sponsors of this bill, we now have an opportunity in front of us to really get the ball rolling at the state level,” Dungannon said.

That momentum has been needed for many years, he said.

“We have seen this issue gain traction over the past few years as Oregonians start to realize the extent of this issue,” he said.

From 2017 to 2021, the Oregon Department of Transportation recorded 30,951 collisions between vehicles and wildlife.

In 2021, the average cost of a vehicle collision with a mule deer — the most common — was \$9,086, according to the coalition’s report, “Wildlife Crossings: Prioritizing Safe Wildlife Passage Across Oregon.”

Collisions with elk, which averaged \$24,006 in expenses, totaled \$56.9 million 2020, according to the report.

Dungannon said Oregon is “far behind” other western states in addressing car-animal collisions on highways that pass through wildlife migration routes.

Some states have more than 50 wildlife crossings, he said, while Oregon has about five.

Underpasses, fences

and other structures have proved to significantly reduce the number of collisions, Dungannon said.

One of Oregon’s more prominent projects, which is a decade old, includes two wildlife underpasses along U.S. Highway 97 near Lava Butte, about 10 miles south of Bend. The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) also built four miles of fencing in the area to keep animals off the highway and encourage them to use the underpasses.

Between 2012 and 2019, car collisions with wildlife on a 4-mile stretch of Highway 97 dropped by 86%, according to ODOT.

“It’s not a question of whether these crossing structures work,” Dungannon said. “It’s really just a financial hurdle.”

Dungannon emphasized the nonpartisan support for the campaign to reduce car-wildlife collisions.

A 2020 poll commissioned by the Pew Charitable Trusts found that 86% of Oregonians who responded favored building more wildlife crossings, and 75% were in favor of spending more money on such projects, according to the coalition’s report.

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