

ELK

Because elk are larger, more robust animals more capable of muscling their way through deep snow to find food, they did not really suffer as much through the winter as deer, even in northeast, and no reductions in tag numbers are needed to protect those herds.

Torland, in John Day, reports that elk numbers in his area have been holding strong for the past five years. Similarly, elk are doing well in the central Oregon region units. "The calf ratio is good this year at 48 to 100 cows," says Heath. "With that calf ratio, there will be a good number of yearling bulls for the next hunting season." However, bull ratios are a little below MO in the Upper Deschutes, High Desert and Paulina units.

On the west side of the Cascades, both Vargas and Wolfer report the situation is still the same. A lack of logging on public lands has reduced the early seral stage habitat beneficial to elk (and deer as well) and there tends to be more elk on private timberlands where logging operations are ongoing. However, there are still a lot of elk in southwest Oregon, but you will do better if you hunt the private lands. Because of that lack of logging the Cascade elk rifle season can be difficult. "Private timberlands tend to have better hunting than the national forest," explains Wolfer. "There have been a few more wildfires in the national forest, especially in the Indigo unit, that has created more habitat." So hunters hunting public lands may be able to take advantage of those situations to increase their odds of success.

On the North Coast, elk numbers are good with favorable

habitat conditions giving them a boost. "We are seeing forests being opened up by clearcuts on both state and private lands so there is plenty of good early seral stage habitat," says Nuzum.

BIGHORN SHEEP

Across their range in Oregon, both Rocky Mountain and desert bighorns are generally doing fine, with problems usually herd specific, with disease or cougar predation the usual culprits. In John Day, Torland reports that the McClellan and Aldrich Mountain herds are doing well. Foster, in Lakeview, says that his herds are doing OK, but "we don't have any bighorn populations in Lake County that don't have lions in them that are affecting population size," he says. And there is a small, un hunted herd in the lava beds near Fort Rock that have been hanging in there for the past 20 years. ODFW manages bighorns very conservatively, and hunters who manage to draw a tag typically have a very good change of shooting a big ram.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN GOAT

Rocky Mountain goats are also doing well, with Oregon's largest population in the Elkhorn Mountains. The goats are doing well enough in the Strawberry Mountains, with a population of about 60 animals, that 2017 will be the third year a tag will be offered. One of the state's newest herds located in the central Oregon Cascade Mountains around Mount Jefferson has a current population of about 120 animals, although no tags yet are being offered for this herd.

PRONGHORN

Pronghorn populations have been doing pretty well in

Oregon. They are stable in the High Desert region around Burns as well as in the John Day area, particularly in the Murderers Creek unit. Torland has even seen some expansion of the local population into the Northside unit.

"Our population right now, with the exception of the South Wagontire Unit, is at an all time high," says Craig Foster, of the Lakeview ODFW office, "and tag numbers are as high as they have ever been." However, he is seeing signs of a potential increase in the coyote population, which may eventually impact future pronghorn fawn survival.

Unfortunately, as with mule deer, pronghorn also had difficulty getting through the harsh northeast Oregon winter and a number of hunts will have tag numbers reduced by 25 to 53 percent.

BEAR AND COUGAR

The story for bear and cougar remains the same. There are good populations of both species in Oregon with cougars most abundant in the southwest and northeast portions of the state. Bears are also widespread with the exception of the desert and drier mountain areas. The Coast Range has some of the largest bear populations with their numbers increasing as you move south. The Applegate Unit still yields the state's highest bear harvest.

The key to successfully bagging a bear is to locate their food sources, especially berry patches, because that's where the bears will be when the fruit ripens. Most cougars are taken opportunistically, but there is a small cadre of hunters who specifically target the cats, either tracking them in the snow or coaxing them in with predator calls.

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LOCAL RETAILERS GEAR UP FOR HUNTING SEASON

CUSTOMERS FIND AMMUNITION MORE ACCESSIBLE THIS YEAR

Story by Rylan Boggs

Blue Mountain Eagle

Local retailers are seeing increased sales of ammunition, attractants and other items for hunting season.

Buyers are experiencing increased ammunition availability now that former President Barack Obama has left office.

Under President Donald Trump, ammunition has become more readily available, Jake Bellinger of True Value Hardware said. He attributed this to decreased fear of gun control measures under Trump.

All calibers have become more available to customers in recent months, according to Bellinger.

Sales of .30-06 and .243 rounds have been high in recent months, and another caliber is growing in popularity, according to Brandy Whitmore of Ace Hardware.

"The hottest selling caliber right now is 6.5 Creedmoor," she said. "I've sold quite a few rifles in that and the ammo."

She credited at least part of the popularity of the long-range target round to television.

"Basically anything people see on outdoor TV, they want," Whitmore said.

Whitmore also described a general spike in ammunition sales, which she attributes to hunters sighting in their rifles for the season.

As well as ammo, Whitmore also reported an increased interest in archery supplies like arrows and targets, as well as attractants like Deer Cane.

She said archery hunters typically start preparing for the season a little earlier than rifle hunters.

In the coming months, Whitmore anticipated selling more items that hunters from out of town forgot, like sleeping bags

and knives, as well as warm-weather gear like long underwear.

