

SHOOTING THE BREEZE Northwest safari

A quick look at the periodicals on display shows that the popularity of hunting is both alive and well. Inside the many magazines are articles upon more articles of hunting exotic game in exotic places. Most of these hunts are a pipe dream that most working Joe's and Jane's can only afford to live vicariously through the ink and photos of those ones lucky enough to get to travel the world enjoying the chase. But to be a traveling hunter or huntress doesn't have to be only a dream.



Dale Valade

There is hope, and luckily for you, you won't have to travel as far you thought to do it!

The Pacific Northwest is home to a vast array of mix big game animals. Sure the licenses and tags are more money for out-of-state hunters than for in-state, but it's a much more economical endeavor than an Alaskan sheep or an African kudu hunt. Right here in Grant County we can hunt cougar, pronghorn antelope, bighorn sheep, mule deer, whitetail deer, black bear, Rocky Mountain elk and Rocky Mountain goat. Elsewhere in the state we add blacktail deer and Roosevelt elk. There are a plethora of upland game birds, migratory and waterfowl and, of course, turkeys! Just across the Snake River in Idaho you can hunt all of the above plus Shiras moose and wolves.

While it may take a year or two or three to save up enough coin to pay for all of the proper state paperwork, there are other considerations one must take into account. For example, do you have the proper clothing and gear for the climate? Are you in good enough shape for the required physical activity? Do you need to stock up on medications or for special dietary restrictions? Have you practiced shooting at the proper distances for the particular type of game and terrain with your weapon of choice? Are there ammunition or weapon restrictions? Can you get the time off from work? Where will you be staying? Will you want a guide? Do you plan to tip for food, lodging and guide services? How will you store and transport the meat and trophy (antlers, horns or hide) back home if successful? Do you need it professionally butchered or will you do so at home? Is there room in the freezer? Are there any travel or state line transport restrictions?

There are other questions one may consider not listed above, but as you've likely gathered by now, a hunting trip can involve a lot of planning. However, the better you plan, the more enjoyable your trips will be. Make sure you don't forget your skinning knife or your camera. You may need both at a moment's notice.

Have you hunted outside of Grant County? Do you visit Grant County to hunt away from home? Write to us at shootingthebreezebme@gmail.com!

Dale Valade is a local country gent with a love for the outdoors, handloading, hunting and shooting.

McCracken takes first in state in cow cutting

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

A Grant Union High School student brought home the state title in cow cutting at the Oregon State High School Rodeo State Finals, held in Prineville June 18-20.

Sam McCracken, a junior, took first place in boys cutting, an equestrian competition where a horse and a rider demonstrate before a panel of judges both the horse and rider's ability to handle cattle. He scored a 258 in the final two go-rounds.

McCracken, who has competed in the rodeo event for two years and is student director for boys cutting in Oregon, took second in the

state last year and is headed to the National High School Finals Rodeo July 17-23 in Guthrie, Oklahoma.

He said winning the boys championship was really satisfying.

"I almost felt it last year, and it made the satisfaction of this year even better," he said.

McCracken said the difference in taking the top spot this year was that he and his horse, "Shorty's Buttercup," stayed connected throughout the whole ride.

"I kind of had to stay out of her way and let her do her job, and I kind of had to help her along every once in a while throughout the run," he said.

McCracken said he and the

17-year-old horse have been working together for the last year.

Shorty's Buttercup, said McCracken, is a year older than he is.

The two of them have been practicing a lot together with nationals right around the corner, McCracken said. He said his coach, David Glasier, despite being confident that he took first in the state, said there were areas he needed to improve on.

McCracken said working on the points that Glasier mentioned kept him busy this past weekend.

"I'm just working with my horse and getting ready to go to nationals," he said.



Contributed photo/LindseyWyllie.com
Sam McCracken chases down a cow during the Oregon High School Rodeo Finals last month in Prineville. McCracken took the top spot in cow cutting and is headed to the National High School Finals Rodeo in Guthrie, Oklahoma, July 17-23.

ODFW seeks input on potential Eastern Oregon archery, Cascade elk season changes

Blue Mountain Eagle

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is in the third year of a review of its big game regulations meant to improve regulations and align them with current biological objectives for wildlife and preferences among hunters.

The department is looking for feedback on the latest concepts for changes, which would take effect in the 2021 hunting seasons, according to a press release. Those concepts are to change general season deer and elk archery seasons in Eastern Oregon to controlled seasons, move general Cascade elk season to early November or allow deer hunting to continue during general Cascade elk season.

The general season archery structure for deer and elk in Eastern Oregon began in 1979 (when archery hunting was less popular, technology was limited and success rates were lower), and the current 30-day general season beginning in late August or early September has been in place since 1983. The season was originally intended to draw some hunters away from crowded rifle seasons. Over the last 40 years, archery hunting has certainly become increasingly popular, with participation and harvest now exceeding limited entry rifle bull hunts in some units — even while ODFW surveys show the majority of hunters would prefer to rifle hunt. Biologists believe the structure of the season is also contributing to complaints about over-crowding among archery hunters and elk distribution problems, with more elk on private land and fewer on public land during hunting seasons.

If this change were to happen, total archery tag numbers available for Eastern Oregon would be 5% less than 2019 current participation numbers, with moderate reductions in some of the highest use units but increases in surrounding less popular units. Opportunities would be managed similar to rifle hunting, with unit-level hunts in the Blue and Wallowa mountains and multi-unit hunts in the High Desert, East Cascade and Columbia Basin. As with rifle hunts, Eastern Oregon archery hunt tags would not be valid for general archery seasons in western Oregon. Western Oregon archery for both deer and elk will remain a general season.

For mule deer, population numbers have declined in Oregon and throughout the West since their peak in the 1980s, due to many factors including nutrition, vehicle collisions, poaching and predation. Many units are below management objectives. Biologists believe a general season is no longer an appropriate tool for managing mule deer.



Contributed photo
Jolynn Radinovich shows the mule deer she brought home Oct. 4.

As with elk, if this change takes effect, tag numbers offered would mostly reflect recent numbers on archery participation in the units (derived from mandatory harvest survey data), except in those units with significant population declines where controlled tags have been decreased. Archery deer tags for Eastern Oregon units would no longer be valid for western Oregon.

The final major concept being discussed would move the general West Cascade rifle elk season from early October to early November, or end the weeklong closure of deer season during Cascade elk season. In recent decades, due to public land habitat changes and other factors, Cascade elk season has become a poor-quality hunt with success rates in the low single digits. Moving the season to November would improve hunt quality, while the other option would allow general season hunters in western Oregon to pursue deer and elk simultaneously for the seven days of Cascade elk season.

For more details on these proposals and to comment through an online form, see ODFW's Big Game Review page, myodfw.com/articles/big-game-review. Hunt tables including initial proposals for tag numbers are also available on the page.

"Our challenges with archery season stem from managing archery hunting and rifle hunting differently — 40 years ago there was a reason to do so, but those reasons no longer exist," said Nick Myatt, ODFW project lead for the review of big game regulations. "Our goal in this big game review is to improve hunting regulations, allocate hunting opportunity fairly and consistently with hunter preferences and, of course, ensure that our hunting seasons are structured in a way that meet our biological objectives for wildlife species."

To accurately assess hunter preferences, ODFW has been working with Responsive Management, a professional survey and research firm that specializes in natural resource issues. The firm has randomly surveyed 4,000 resident hunters about deer and elk hunting and also hosted an open online public form that brought nearly 1,400 comments from almost 10,000 unique visitors to the site. The surveys are available on the Big Game Review page. While individual hunters have varying opinions, these random surveys found that, as a whole, a great number of Oregon's hunters support rather than oppose these concepts.

"We thank all the hunters who have provided input, and now we're asking for your opinions again on these latest concepts," said Myatt. Hunters who are interested should use the form on the Big Game Review page to comment. Feedback will be collected by department staff through early August.

Using the survey research and other feedback from hunters, ODFW will develop formal proposals for 2021 Big Game Regulations to take to the commission; these proposals will be available online the last two weeks of August. Hunters and others will again have a chance to comment on these proposals through the normal commission public process before the commission meets virtually online on Sept. 11, when adoption of final 2021 Big Game Regulations is expected.

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IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN APPLYING, EMAIL A COVER LETTER, RESUME AND THREE PROFESSIONAL REFERENCES TO EOUSBDC@GMAIL.COM. Applicants must have reliable transportation and a valid driver's license as travel within the county is required. If you would like further information or have questions, please call 541-962-1532.



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