



Contributed photo
Processing wild game may not be as much fun as hunting, but it can be rewarding in its own right.

SHOOTING THE BREEZE

You bagged your buck, now it’s butchering time

You went out and through hard work and a little luck were able to harvest some wild game this year. You kept it clean, got it home, skinned, hung and cooled. Now what?

You want to get it butchered and in the freezer so you can enjoy those tasty steaks all winter long, but how? It seems like it is harder and harder to find someone to do the butchering for you these days.

Many moons ago, I took a deer to a butcher and was sadly disappointed in the quality and quantity of meat I got back. Since then, I have done all of my own butchering.



Rod Carpenter

It isn’t my favorite part of the hunt, for sure. However, I like being in control of the quality of the outcome, and it isn’t really all that hard to do.

The downside is that it does take some time. I can do a deer in three or four hours. An elk takes six hours or so.

Naturally, there are thousands of tutorials on the internet. I like Randy Newburg and the Bearded Butchers myself. Basically, you just separate the individual muscle groups off the bone and determine if they are going to be good for steaks, roast or burger.

I almost always burger the front shoulders and trim meat of any big game animal. A 600-watt grinder won’t set you back much and, with the price of burger at the store over \$4 a pound, will pay for itself pretty quick.

You health nuts can grind straight meat for lean burgers. Adding some pork fat or bacon adds a nice flavor. Last year I found some jalapeno bacon that I added to my burger grind, and it was amazing.

The backstraps are always steaks. The hindquarters are usually a mix of steaks and roasts. If the muscle has little connective tissue running through it, it gets turned into steak. Otherwise it becomes roast. Fat and connective tissue contain most of the wild flavor, so try to trim off as you can for better-tasting meat.

Lots of folks like to package their meat with a vacuum sealer. It works, but personally, I’m not a fan. In my opinion it takes longer and the packaging isn’t as neat.

I like to put the meat in Ziploc freezer bags and wrap it in a double layer of freezer paper. It is important that you squeeze out as much air as you can from the bag before sealing it or it will freezer-burn quickly.

As with all things in life, it takes some practice, but it is worth the effort.

Once you get the basics of butchering down, you can branch out and try making jerky, pepperoni sticks or summer sausage. As I said earlier, butchering isn’t my favorite part of hunting, but it does give me a sense of pride and satisfaction in my ability to be just a little bit more self-sufficient.

Have a favorite big game recipe you want to share? Let us know at shootingthebreezebme@gmail.com.

Rod Carpenter is a husband, father and huntin’ fool.

Disease outbreak likely won’t affect deer tags

By JAYSON JACOBY
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BAKER CITY — An insect-borne virus killed dozens of deer, most whitetails, in Baker, Union and Wallowa counties this summer, but wildlife biologists said the die-off might not lead to any reduction in hunting tags.

Officials from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife started getting reports of dead deer around the region this summer.

Tests of tissue samples confirmed that the animals were infected with a virus, spread by biting midges, that causes the frequently fatal illness, epizootic hemorrhagic disease, or EHD.

Although EHD can kill both white-tailed and mule deer, as well as other wild animals such as elk and pronghorn antelope, and sheep and cattle, the disease typically is much more virulent among whitetails, said Brian Ratliff, district wildlife biologist at ODFW’s Baker City office.

In late summer, Ratliff said 33 of the 36 dead deer he had examined were whitetails.

Baker County

In Baker County the disease outbreak was mostly confined to the western edge of the Baker Valley, an area including Pine and Goodrich creeks, Ben Dier Lane and upper Hunt Mountain Lane, Ratliff said.

White-tailed deer are common in that part of the valley, about 12 miles northwest of Baker City.

Ratliff didn’t have a final estimated tally of how many deer died.

But because there is no special hunting season for whitetails — they are legal quarry during seasons, the same as mule deer — Ratliff said the



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife/Contributed Photo
A white-tailed deer.

dieoff won’t lead to a reduction in hunting tags in the Sumpter unit, which includes Baker Valley.

An outbreak of EHD killed an estimated 2,000 white-tailed deer in Umatilla County during the fall of 2019, resulting in the cancellation of some deer hunts in that area.

The virus poses no threat to people, cats or dogs. Nor can people become ill by eating the meat of a deer or other animal infected with EHD.

Deer are infected only by being bitten by midges; deer can’t infect each other through nose-to-nose contact, as with some other diseases.

Union County

EHD also spread through white-tailed deer in Union County this summer, including in higher elevation forested areas in the Wenaha and Sled Springs units where the disease has rarely been confirmed in the past, said Phillip Perrine, a wildlife biologist at ODFW’s La Grande office.

“It was more prevalent than we’ve seen,” Perrine said.

He didn’t have an estimate for how many deer died, although he said there were outbreaks in both the mountains and in the Grande Ronde Valley.

Assessing the extent of the outbreak will be easier once

ODFW receives hunter reports and conducts its annual aerial deer census this month, Perrine said.

He said ODFW started getting reports of dead white-tailed deer in early summer, and, as in Baker Valley, tissue samples confirmed EHD.

Both Perrine and Ratliff believe the severe drought contributed to the severity of this year’s EHD outbreak.

Deer tend to be most vulnerable to being infected by midges when the animals are concentrated around water sources, the biologists said.

And with fewer of those sources during this dry summer, there were likely larger numbers of deer gathering in places where they were exposed to midges, Perrine said.

It’s not clear yet whether the EHD outbreak will prompt ODFW to reduce hunting tag numbers for any 2022 seasons, Perrine said.

He said he hopes that’s not the case, particularly with a popular muzzleloader hunt for whitetails.

Ratliff said the EHD outbreak ended quickly once freezing temperatures killed the year’s crop of midges.

Both he and Perrine said they stopped receiving reports of dead deer in early fall.

“Once the conditions get

colder and these midges are no longer on the landscape, we didn’t really have any more losses,” Perrine said.

Wallowa County

A total of 12 deer — 11 whitetails and one mule deer — were confirmed by tests as having died from EHD, said Bree Furfey, district wildlife biologist at ODFW’s Enterprise office.

The disease is also suspected as the cause in another mule deer’s death.

Furfey said she doesn’t have an estimated total number of deer deaths due to the outbreak.

She said the virus was most prevalent in and around the city of Wallowa, but it was also confirmed elsewhere in the Wallowa Valley including near Joseph, Lostine and Enterprise, and in the northern part of the county near Troy and the Wenaha county.

Furfey said that although the extent of the EHD outbreak isn’t certain, she doesn’t believe the death toll among deer was high enough to warrant any reductions in hunting tags for 2022.

Rapid recovery?

Although white-tailed deer are much more susceptible to EHD, the species has an advantage in that white-tail populations tend to grow faster than mule deer herds when conditions are suitable, Perrine said.

White-tailed does typically have twin fawns each year, he said.

“It’s difficult to overhunt whitetails because they reproduce so quickly,” Perrine said.

Furfey and Ratliff also cited the procreation potential of whitetails as one reason why this year’s EHD outbreak likely won’t affect next year’s hunting season.

Bend skier hopes for Olympic return

By MARK MORICAL
The Bulletin

BEND — Professional skier Tommy Ford was in Alta Badia, Italy, last month for World Cup races — but as a spectator, not a racer.

“I was chomping at the bit to be in there,” said Ford, reached via phone in Austria. “It was kind of hard to watch, but also really exciting to watch my (U.S.) teammates do well. This month they’ve been great. It’s easy to be proud of them.”

It has been nearly one year since Ford’s horrific crash in Adelboden, Switzerland, that ended his World Cup run last season on Jan. 9. He was knocked unconscious and suffered significant injuries to his knee, wrist and head.

Much of 2021 has been about recovery for the 32-year-old Ford, a two-time Olympian who was born and raised in Bend. The past year has been a painful, often emotional challenge for Ford, who has dealt with bouts of depression while simultaneously rehabilitating his knee so he can return to racing.

Ford was in the midst of a banner 2020-21 season at



U.S. Ski Team/Submitted photo
Bend’s Tommy Ford, left, with U.S. teammates Travis Ganong (middle) and Steven Nyman at a World Cup race in Beaver Creek, Colorado, last month.

the time of his crash, posting four World Cup top-10 results in giant slalom, including a podium finish.

Ford said he tore two ligaments in his right knee, broke his tibial plateau and tore his meniscus. After four surgeries, Ford spent most of the offseason home in Bend recovering. He is also continuing to recover from the concussion he sustained.

“I’m feeling more and more normal,” Ford said. “I’m able to ski in a comfortable way and I’m just trying to push back into some training and run some gates. The knee’s been feeling really good and responding really well to training.”

Ford was able to get back on snow in mid-November at the U.S. Ski Team training camp in Copper, Colorado.

“That was wonderful,” he said. “The first couple days were pretty slow, just sliding around and getting comfortable. Once I started to go faster and link some turns, it was a really neat reminder of why I ski.”

Ford said he does not have a set timeline on a return to World Cup racing, but he said it is likely to be sometime this season. Whether that is in time to qualify for the Beijing Winter Olympics is unknown at this point. In order to qualify, Ford said, he would need to race in the final qualifier, set for Jan. 8-9 in Adelboden, the site of his crash.

“It’s all dependent on how I’m feeling with my body and if my knee’s allowing it, then

yeah, and if I’ve had enough training,” Ford said. “I have to qualify, and the qualifying races are happening right now, so ... I’m not sure how it’s going to work out. It’s hard to say. There’s one more race to qualify and to be ready for that race will be a bit of a squeeze, but it’s not unrealistic either.”

Ford said he continues to deal with lingering depression that set in during the offseason. He attributes the depression to the concussion and trauma he suffered in the crash, but also to the lack of a physical outlet while injured.

Getting back on the snow has helped.

“It seems like it’s kind of a wave thing. It comes in waves,” Ford said of his depression. “I wouldn’t say it’s gone, but I’m able to recognize it more.”

Ford said he is mentally ready to race again, but his body is not quite ready yet. At the same time, he knows the World Cup giant slalom in Adelboden is coming up soon.

“It would be great to get in there for that, and if not, there will probably be some FIS or Euro Cup races that I would do, and just spend more time training,” he said. “My head is a little in front of my body. I remember the feeling of skiing really fast and I feel like I could be in a race and do well ... tomorrow ... but I simply can’t do that.”

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