

SHOOTING THE BREEZE The consolation prize at the end of the hunt

“This year, I’m holding out for a bull,” Ronald exclaimed as he and Jim assembled the wall tent.

“You say that every year,” Jim smirked.

It was second season and they both had burned a lot of preference points to draw these tags. The weather had been fair; a little too hot, to be honest. Both had made every preparation in advance for their three-day soiree and felt ready to go.

On opening morning Jim and Ron split up to cover more territory. They had either-sex elk tags, so any elk they found would be fair game.

When Ron made it back for lunch, there was no sign of Jim. He became especially concerned when he couldn’t raise his old friend on the radio. After wolfing down a sandwich, he tracked him southwest, deep into the steep, timbered country.

After two hours of searching, he was relieved to find his friend alive but with a twisted ankle. The batteries in Jimmy’s radio had gone dead. Upon fashioning a crutch, Ron and Jim slowly progressed back to camp. About a mile from camp it began to rain. Not a down-pour, but the wind made it miserably cold.

At camp Ron made a fire and prepped a simple dinner as Jim rested and did what little he could to care for the ankle. While they were gone, some kind of rodent had made its way into their tent and had bitten holes in their air mattresses, deflating them. Ron’s .284 was soaked from the rain, but a little Hoppe’s No. 9 gun oil by the campfire light and it was in ship shape once again. After eating, they put out the Coleman lantern and hit the sack.

The next morning Jim decided to stay in camp and give his ankle a rest. Ron packed a sandwich and ventured out alone. He saw some huge mule deer bucks and a bighorn ram but no elk. A grouse flushing from its cover nearly gave him a heart attack. Back at camp that night he and Jim reminisced about the old days as they played cards and enjoyed some of Jim’s legendary dutch oven peach cobbler.

That night it rained and blew hard. Either the rainfly



Contributed Photo

Bagging an elk is nice, but hunting is about so much more than harvesting game.

got loose or it developed a leak because both men awakened soaking wet, bobbing in their sleeping bags like soggy marshmallows in the bottom of their water-filled tent. Around 2 a.m. the storm quit and they spent nearly until daylight drying out their clothes, boots and sleeping bags by the campfire. It was a miserable night.

Jim still wasn’t feeling 100% but decided to hobble out of camp to make one last hunt as the trip drew to a close. As he neared the crest of the ridge the rising sun seemed to shine extra brightly off of a buckskin-colored rock lying just up the trail, maybe 50 or 60 yards ahead. A closer look at the rock through his Leupold scope revealed that it was no rock at all but a nice, fat cow elk bedded down, looking the opposite direction. Shouldering his rifle with a hasty sling around his left arm, he took careful aim and fired.

Ronny, still in his clammy bedroll trying to catch up on lost sleep from the night before, jerked awake at the report of Jim’s .30-06. An excited voice over the radio told him he needed to get his boots and pack-board on. At the end of the day they had elk meat hanging in camp and dined on tenderloin and eggs.

Although they were sad that they had to go back to their regular lives in the morning, they had once again gotten to feel the fall air, smell the campfire smoke, and enjoy the company of a lifelong friendship. The experience, after all, is the whole reason they go hunting. The elk meat is just a bonus or, shall we say, the consolation prize for all the miles walked, ankles twisted and shivering cold and wet nights.

Are you a hunting fool? Write to us at shootingthebreezebme@gmail.com and check us out on Facebook!

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



Dale Valade

Popular forest road reopens

EO Media Group

PENDLETON — The Umatilla National Forest has reopened a one-mile section of a popular road along the Umatilla River that was damaged by flooding in February 2020.

The reopened section of Forest Road 32 runs from the national forest boundary near Corporation Guard Station, about eight miles east of Gibbon, to the bridge near Umatilla Forks campground.

With the road reopened, Umatilla National Forest officials plan to reopen part of the campground, including nine campsites, in late spring or early summer. The rest of the campground will remain closed pending additional repair work.

Workers finished repairing flood damage to the road in the fall of 2021. They cleared debris slides from the road, cleaned and repaired culverts and ditches, and removed hazardous trees.

The February 2020 flooding, caused by rain falling on a deep snowpack,

caused significant damage to 14 roads and trails near the Umatilla, South Fork Walla Walla and Little Tucannon rivers on the Umatilla National Forest.

Road 32 sustained some of the worst damage, including five areas where the road was obliterated.

Crews have been repairing the road in segments. Road 32 remains closed from the bridge near Umatilla Forks campground to where the road turns south toward Ruckel Junction. Detailed closure maps are available at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/umatilla> and at all forest offices, and closure signs and barriers are posted on the ground.

Umatilla National Forest officials urged visitors to be careful during spring, when weather and road conditions can change rapidly. Many parts of the forest lack cell service, and travelers should be prepared to spend the night by bringing warm clothing, food and water. Conditions are updated on the forest’s website and Facebook page.



Umatilla National Forest/Contributed Photo
A section of Road 32 on the Umatilla National Forest near Umatilla Forks campground has reopened following repairs to sections damaged by flooding in February 2020.

Another wolf killed in NE Oregon

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

RICHLAND — For the third time this year, authorities are investigating a possible case of wolf poaching in rural northeast Oregon.

On March 25, state police were notified that a collared wolf — OR117 from the Cornucopia pack — was likely dead near Richland, about 40 miles east of Baker City.

Troopers estimate the 1-year-old male wolf died sometime March 12 or 13.

An agency spokesperson did not release the cause of death, citing the ongoing investigation. The Oregon Wildlife Coalition is offering an \$11,500 reward for information to help OSP catch whoever may be responsible.

“For us, this is definitely very appalling and frustrating to watch,” said Sristi Kamal, senior Northwest representative for Defenders of Wildlife, one of the coalition’s member groups. “It has serious implications for wolf recovery in our state.”

It is the latest in a string of wolf poaching cases that have made headlines in the area.

On Feb. 15, OSP said a collared female wolf was shot and killed near Cove, about 15 miles east of La Grande.

Another collared female wolf from the Chesnimus pack was also shot Jan. 8 about six miles southeast of Wallowa.

Between February and March 2021, eight wolves were poisoned near Mount



A gray wolf in Oregon.

ODFW

Harris in Union County, including all five members of the Catherine pack. Groups and individuals are offering nearly \$50,000 in reward money for tips leading to an arrest in that case.

Four wolves were illegally killed in 2020, according to the state Department of Fish and Wildlife’s most recent annual wolf report. One incident resulted in no charges after investigators determined the shooter mistook the wolf for a coyote.

Most of Oregon’s 173 known wolves are concentrated in the northeast corner of the state. ODFW removed gray wolves from the state endangered species list east of highways 395, 78 and 95, though the species is once again federally protected in Western Oregon following a court ruling in February.

ODFW plans online meetings to discuss budget proposal

EO Media Group

SALEM — The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is planning four online public meetings later this month to present information about the agency’s proposed budget for the 2023-25 biennium.

ODFW officials will also take questions and comments

from the public during the meetings.

The agency is not proposing any increases in hunting or fishing license fees. The last increases were approved by the 2015 Legislature and took effect in 2016, 2018 and 2020.

The agency will use public comments from the meetings to help draft its budget

request for the Fish and Wildlife Commission to consider during its June 17 meeting. Prior to that, the Commission will have a special meeting on May 13, also online and open to the public, to take public testimony about the proposed budget.

The budget proposal approved by the Commission then goes to the Legislature for its consideration in 2023.

ODFW headquarters staff will attend each of the four public meetings, along with regional officials, who will have local information for their area.

The schedule:

- Northwest Region, April 12, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.
- Southwest Region, April 13, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.
- Northeast Region, April 14, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.
- Southeast Region, April 15, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

All meetings are accessible through the same link and phone number. For the video meeting, <https://www.zoomgov.com/j/1602917760>.

For phone only, dial 1-669-254-5252, or 1-669-216-1590, or 1-551-285-1373 or 1-646-828-7666. The webinar ID is 160-291-7760.

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