

# 2016 Big Game Preview

By Jim Yuskavitch; reprinted with permission from the Oregon Hunters Association.

Last year's big game preview noted that a mild winter went easy on deer and elk, resulting in increased overwinter survival of fawns and calves, producing better hunting opportunities for the fall. The winter of 2015-16 was a bit harder, not enough to knock down big game numbers in any significant way, but it did have impacts on overwinter survival that will translate into some limited hunting opportunities for younger bucks in some areas. The usual challenges for big game managers remain including cougar predation in some parts of Northeastern Oregon and diminished logging levels in the Cascade Mountains that are limiting elk numbers. And the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is continuing its Mule Deer Initiative to bring those animals' numbers back up to speed. Nevertheless, the big game outlook is still pretty good for the most part, and even in areas where opportunities might be on the thin side, there are things that hunters can do to increase their odds of success. Here's a rundown on what ODFW wildlife biologists around the state have to say about the current state of big game populations and prospects for the fall hunting seasons.

## Deer

"Deer-wise it's been fairly productive over the past couple of years," says Dave Nuzum, Assistant District Wildlife Biologist in Tillamook, of the North Coast region. "Our buck ratios are around benchmark," he continues. He also notes that they are not seeing much in the way of diseases lately, especially hair loss syndrome that was a major concern to wildlife managers a few years ago. Based on what he's seen so far, Nuzum predicts pretty good black-tailed deer hunting on the North Coast this year.

"We've been meeting our buck-doe ratio benchmarks," says Springfield-based District Wildlife Biologist Brian Wolfer, of his black-tailed deer populations, with 25 to 30 bucks per 100 does. Fawn ratios are also very good, with 30 per 100 does in the north Indigo Wildlife Management Unit and 56 to 100 in

the McKenzie Unit.

"In general, we have pretty decent buck carryovers from last year so there will be some big, mature bucks around for those hunters who can find them," says Wolfer.

Unlike other parts of the state, last winter in Southwestern Oregon wasn't especially harsh according to District Wildlife Biologist Tod Lum in Roseburg. "Deer are doing about as well as last year and are in good shape. Two years ago there was an outbreak of Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease, a major wildlife disease that killed at least 300 deer in Lum's district, and probably more, but seems to have since subsided.

According to Tom Collom, District Wildlife Biologist in Klamath Falls, deer number there are at about status quo. "However," he says, "we had a little lower overwinter fawn survival that will impact the number of juvenile bucks. We're still below our population Management Objective but because we can control hunter numbers we can maintain good buck ratios."

In the Ochoco Mountains region, District Wildlife Biologist Greg Jackle reports that, due to a harder winter, the fawn survival rate was down from the previous two years. "I will expect fewer yearling bucks on the landscape," he says. "Overall, deer are stable to slightly down this year.

"Deer are doing okay," reports Autumn Larkins, Assistant District Wildlife Biologist in Hines. "We had better than expected fawn survival except for the Silvies Unit, probably because of heavy winter weather." Buck ratios are down a little from past years, but still at MO. The bottom line for the High Desert country is that deer numbers are stable and, except for the Silvies Unit, hunting should be good.

Leonard Erickson, District Wildlife Biologist in Pendleton reports that buck ratios are around MO for his districts, although due to a harder winter parts of Northeastern Oregon also experienced reduced fawn survival resulting in fewer juvenile bucks. There are still good hunting opportunities but with fewer juvenile bucks available, hunters may have to work a little harder to find the bigger, older, more wary

# Ione falls to Triad in Opener 42-14

Eli Builta, Triad's speedy junior quarterback, scored twice on long runs in the first quarter last Saturday in Dufur. The Cardinal's defense tightened up in the second, but Builta found a seam and ran in another touchdown with 6:37 to go in the second. The Christian school from Klamath Falls would lead Ione 22-0 at half.

The Cardinals found the going tough against Triad's nimble defense.

"Triad's team speed was as good as we'll see all year," Coach Todd Knop said.

Ione would enter the red zone twice in the first half, only to have the drives fall short. Triad would open the scoring in the third with a 40-yard touchdown run by senior tailback James Homfeldt. The Timberwolves would add two more scores through the air before the quarter would finish.

The Cardinals scored twice in the fourth on runs by



Ione sophomore Aaron Smythe (#27) looks for running room against Triad. -Contributed photo

Cord Flynn. Flynn would finish the game with 111 yards rushing to lead the Cardinals.

"Cord plays with a lot of heart," Knop said.

A 35-yard pass from Flynn to Hector Aguilar set up

Flynn's second touchdown. Flynn would rush in from 18 yards out to make the score 42-14.

Knop was encouraged by the line play of sophomore Tyler Carter, saying, "He got

better as the game went on."

"Our goals haven't changed," Knop said. "We'll get back to work on Monday."

Ione will face Echo Friday, Sept. 9, at 7 p.m. in Echo in a non-league matchup.

## bucks. Elk

Elk numbers remain pretty good throughout Northeast Oregon, with populations at or above MO in many, but not all units. "Overall elk numbers in the Catherine Creek and Starkey units are good and above MO," says Erickson. However, in some areas, cougar predation is the likely culprit in keeping calf to cow ratios below target levels.

Elk are doing great in the Silvies, Malheur and High Desert units of Southeastern Oregon, in part due to the increase in the number of alfalfa pivots going in that attracts elk like kids to ice cream, and Autumn Larkins and other ODFW staff in Hines spend lots of their time managing damage issues. That will translate into good elk hunting opportunities come fall.

"Elk are doing pretty good this year," says Greg Jackle of the Ochoco region. Even though they are a bit below their benchmarks for bull and calf ratios there are still a lot of elk in the Ochocos — about 4,150 in the Ochoco Unit — just a few hundred below MO — making this part of the state a top destination for elk hunters.

Even though the Klamath Falls area isn't known for elk, there are decent numbers that are currently about at MO. "We've seen some good-size bulls in the Keno Unit this year," comments Collom.

Brian Wolfer reports that the elk situation in the

western Cascades is largely the same as it has been for a number of years now. With less logging on national forest lands, elk are tending to move onto private industrial timberlands where regular cutting produces more desirable habitat and forage conditions. Despite lower elk numbers and shifts in land use, bull ratios remain good. Wolfer emphasizes that advance scouting and research is paramount for elk hunting success in the Cascades now. Some suggestions include checking Google maps and aerials to scope out burns that are at least a couple of years old that will have the vegetation mix attractive to elk. The Forest Service also maintains good fire maps that will give you leads on where to concentrate your efforts.

The situation is similar in Southwest Oregon. "The biggest gripe among folks who have been hunting elk for years is that they have seen a big decline in elk numbers," says Lum. But there are elk available in southeast, including some nice bulls. Like Wolfer, Lum also emphasizes that hunters who do their homework will be the ones who have a successful hunt.

With more logging going on in the Coast Range Dave Nuzum says that habitat isn't as big an issue in his region, although "elk populations are a little below MO," he explains. But he thinks those numbers will come back up in a few years, noting that bull ratios remain good.

## Bighorn Sheep

While Oregon's overall bighorn sheep population is stable, the situation can vary between herds. Some herds in the Hells Canyon area are still recovering from past disease outbreaks while others may be having predation issues. Autumn Larkins has just under 1,000 bighorns in her district that are doing okay. They are still keeping a close eye on the Riverside herd, which is not faring as well as ODFW would like, possibly due to cougar predation, so it may be awhile yet before any tags are offered for that herd. ODFW recently relocated the last of the Branson herd to the Klamath River canyon where they are doing well. The Branson herd was a band of bighorns released near the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument a few years ago in an attempt to reintroduce the animals to that region but failed due to contact with domestic sheep that increased the threat of disease transmission. Despite the ups and downs of bighorn sheep management, overall, lucky hunters who draw "once in a lifetime" bighorn tags generally have a very high success rate.

## Rocky Mountain Goats

Rocky Mountain goats are an Oregon wildlife success story and are doing well with a total population in excess of 400. While the Elkhorns in Northeast Oregon have Oregon's largest goat population, herds have been established in other parts of the state includ-

ing the Strawberry Mountains, and more recently, the Mount Jefferson area in the Cascades. There are even a couple roaming the Newberry Crater National Volcanic National Monument south of Bend. Overall, Rocky Mountain goats are doing very well.

## Pronghorn

Pronghorns are one of Oregon's more reliable, steady big game species with populations that tend to be mostly stable, and ODFW manages them conservatively to provide good quality hunts with high success rates.

Tom Collom reports a slight increase in pronghorns in the Klamath region over the past four or five years along with high buck ratios. Larkins says that pronghorns are doing similarly well in the High Desert country, with the Juniper Unit providing the best hunting opportunities. There are even some "woodland" pronghorns in the Ochocos that Greg Jackle confirms are stable with decent buck ratios.

## Bear and Cougar

Bear and cougar numbers are generally strong throughout the state, with cougar numbers lowest on the North Coast and highest in Northeast and Southwest Oregon. You'll find bears in just about any forested parts of Oregon, with the highest populations on the south coast. With the exception of spring bear hunting, hunters mostly take bear and cougars incidentally while hunting other game species.

## Sheriff's Report

**July 12:** -A Heppner resident advised Morrow County Sheriff's Office there was constant traffic near her residence, and that vehicles speed through and tear into the gravel at the park. She requested extra patrol and advised she was going to attend the city council meetings. A deputy was advised.

-MCSO was advised of a bunch of wood just north of the golf course in the middle of Hwy. 74, Heppner, that looked like something fell out of the back of a pickup.

-MCSO was contacted about a mental facility resident who walked off during an outing in Hermiston. The caller advised they have guardianship but the resident refused to get back in the van. The caller requested information and options how to get the resident back to the facility.

-MCSO received report of a motorcycle versus car hit-and-run in Irrigon. The caller advised he was on his way to work and the vehicle left the scene while he was

standing up from his bike.

-MCSO was notified of a non-blocking rollover accident in the mill zone, Hwy 74, Heppner. The subjects appeared to be okay and were out of the vehicle and walking. MCSO, Heppner fire and Heppner ambulance responded. Christopher Lee Fritz, 36, was cited for driving outside restrictions - no ID as required, and was scheduled to appear at Heppner Justice Court. Patient refused medical transport.

-Law enforcement was advised of dogs that attacked someone riding horseback in Boardman. The rider was thrown but it didn't appear anyone was injured. Boardman ambulance responded and transported a patient.

-A subject in Boardman advised of a fire that started due to a transformer that exploded. Boardman fire, Boardman PD and Umatilla Electric responded.

-An MCSO officer reported stopping to check on a possibly disabled vehicle on Hwy. 207, Lexington, Echo. The family had

stopped to clean up after a dog that got sick in the car.

-The City of Irrigon reported receiving multiple code complaints.

**July 14:** -A driver on I-84, Boardman advised there was a person lying on the ground alongside the freeway with a piece of cardboard over his body. The caller did not see him move, but was just passing by; thought he might be sleeping but wasn't sure. Oregon State Police was advised.

-A Morrow County Sheriff's deputy was advised of ATVs going up and down the street in Lexington at odd hours.

-MCSO received report of a dog that needed to be picked up in the city park play area in Heppner. The caller advised it was wearing a collar but they couldn't get close to it and would like a deputy to respond. MCSO reported that a citation was issued.

-MCSO received report of an office that was broken into in Heppner; the caller advised they believed it

was juveniles who did it. A deputy responded and took a report.

-MCSO was advised that Jason Michael Francisco Garza, 26, was lodged at Umatilla County Jail on an Oregon State Parole Board warrant for probation violation with a Morrow County hold placed. The subject was also lodged on a Umatilla County warrant.


-An MCSO officer reported being out with several goats in the road in Irrigon. A deputy made contact with the owner and he was advised to keep the goats in.

-A driver on Hwy. 74, Heppner advised MCSO that a red station wagon passed them and then was pacing them, and that it would go over the white line and then into the other lane. They advised they caught up with it at Lexington, and it went 45 mph through Lexington and then stopped at the gas station, but didn't see where it went after than as they went in the store. MCSO was un-

-Continued on PAGE EIGHT

# NOW HIRING DRIVERS

**MILES & MILES OF SMILES**



**Our success... It's All About Kids, Employees, & Customers!!**

Mid Columbia Bus Company provides a family atmosphere for the employees to come to work each day and know they are appreciated.

**NOW HIRING SCHOOL BUS DRIVERS**

**Starting Wage \$11.75/Hr.**

Apply at:  
Mid Columbia Bus Co.  
541-676-5861    541-481-7551