

Seeking elk and finding them

Wildlife officials come on a mission to see elk, set fish rules

By Katherine Lacaze
Seaside Signal

More than a dozen Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commissioners and staff peered through telescopes on the banks of the Neacoxie River Sept. 3. They were seeking elk — and they found them during their daylong tour of fish and wildlife facilities along the North Coast.

The Reserve at Gearhart was their first stop, a precursor to the commission's monthly meeting the following day at the Best Western Ocean View Resort in Seaside. The tour provided commissioners a ground-level look at Clatsop County wildlife and habitat.

At The Reserve in Gearhart, commissioners witnessed elk that had separated from the main herd of about 70. Here, the elk are "in their natural element, which is kind of low-density development and golf courses," said Herman Biederbeck, a wildlife biologist for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The reserve is surrounded by two golf courses, Gearhart Golf Links and Highlands Golf Club. Thirty acres of North Coast Land Conservancy land to the east of the reserve are part of the conservancy's Neacoxie Wildlife Corridor project, designed in the 1990s to create a habitat for wildlife along the Neacoxie River.

As the Clatsop Plains get increasingly developed, elk and humans inevitably collide, creating risks for both. Wildlife photographer Neal Maine shared photos of what happens when elk and people share the landscape. In one, a young woman scurries away from an elk she angered by approaching the animal and its calf for an "elk selfie."

Elaborate landscaping can draw elk into yards



NEAL MAINE/PACIFICLIGHT IMAGES

Wildlife photographer Neal Maine said he spotted a woman and her dog get too close to an elk cow, which then charged. People are advised to stay well clear of cows and calves, especially during calving season from late May through early June.

where they are unwanted, Maine said, and the animals are known to create traffic hazards crossing U.S. Highway 101 and other roads.

Residents have differing opinions about the elk and how to deal with them, Biederbeck said. Some prefer elk roam unhindered; others, particularly farmers and commercial interests, prefer a more managed approach.

Because of strong contrasting opinions, the department tends "to deal with elk issues on an individual, case-by-case basis," Biederbeck said. "The elk have their pros and cons out here, for sure."

Jewell Meadows Wildlife Area

Inland, at the Jewell Meadows Wildlife Area in the Oregon Coast Range mountains, the department manages a different elk population.

The 1,114-acre area serves to protect and enhance wildlife habitat, reduce wildlife damage to surrounding properties and provide the public with an opportunity to observe wildlife in a natural setting. Jew-

ell Meadows Wildlife Area Manager Bryan Swearingen helps the department manage the herd's winter habitat and provide supplemental feeding for Roosevelt elk and black-tailed deer.

The department's management plan at the wildlife area is designed to keep the elk population artificially low, about 225 out of a land capacity of about 400,

and the Oregon Department of Forestry.

To determine population models, the department currently uses helicopters, a costly and potentially risky method. The state plans to partner with Oregon State University to conduct an elk census using unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones, which could register data in the sky over the Youngs River basin, Biederbeck said.

The wildlife area will provide an outdoor laboratory to calibrate and test aerial equipment before expanding the program to nearby control sites, he added. Success depends on capturing imagery with a resolution high enough to detect and classify the individual elk.

Western snowy plover

The western snowy plovers, a federally recognized "threatened" species, were also of interest to commissioners. The small bird can be found predominantly in California, Washington and Oregon, and is making a comeback on Oregon's south coast.

The department provides supplemental feed in winter to mitigate the animals' negative impact on the land uses of adjacent properties, owned by Weyerhaeuser Co., Stimson Lumber Co.

Swearingen said. A portion of the wildlife area, near Fishhawk Creek, is designated for elk refuge, although some tracts are open to the public for hunting.

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KATHERINE LACAZE/SEASIDE SIGNAL

Members of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission and staff members look for elk on the North Coast Land Conservancy's habitat to the east of The Reserve at Gearhart during the group's tour Sept. 3.

Protecting habitats, mitigating human issues and taking out ground predators — such as coyotes, raccoons and skunks — have played roles in helping the species re-emerge. For instance, Oregon State Parks will close beaches or cage nesting areas for protection.

"The success of the snowy plover program, especially on the south coast, is starting to be recognized," Biederbeck said.

New rules to fish by

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission considered the 2016 sport-fishing regulations and revisions to the Oregon Conservation and Nearshore strategies during its meeting Sept. 4 at the Best Western Ocean View Resort in Seaside. The commission usually meets monthly and rotates among its Salem headquarters and the congressional districts. Seaside is part of Congressional District 1.

Many of the sportfishing regulation changes are being considered as the result of the department staff's eight-month effort to streamline and simplify rules for trout and warm-water fishing.

Some proposed changes include:

- Streamlining the number of different seasons, gear restrictions and bag limits in order to have more consis-

tent rules for similar water bodies across the state.

- Removing the April trout opener and opening these water bodies to year-round fishing.

- Setting the May trout opener at May 22 each year, ensuring that trout fishing statewide would always be open Memorial Day weekend.

- Removing bag limits for warm-water fish in the Columbia, John Day and Umpqua rivers.

Additionally, the commission approved a 10-year update of the Oregon Conservation Strategy, including the Oregon Nearshore Strategy component. The documents, which are broad strategies to conserve the state's native fish, wildlife and marine resources, are to be submitted as required to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by Oct. 1.

The commission also updated the rules for commercial bay clam harvest. Based on recent landing and stock assessment data, department staff proposed adjustments to commercial landing quotas, minimum sizes, species taken and allowable harvest areas as an integrated package of shellfish management actions.

A complete list of the proposed changes for 2016 is on the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife website at <http://bit.ly/1MmL0Xi>.

Commission approves 2016 sport fishing regs

The Associated Press

SALEM — The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission approved the 2016 Oregon sport fishing regulations at its meeting in Seaside on Friday.

Under the regulations adopted, anglers should find it easier to navigate the rules for trout and warmwater fishing, thanks to fewer special regulations creating different seasons, gear restrictions and bag limits for different waters.

These changes are the result of an almost yearlong effort by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife staff to streamline and simplify the fishing rules. Mike Gauvin, ODFW recreational fisheries manager, told the commission that overly complex regulations is one of the most common complaints among anglers.

Some of the changes for 2016 include:

Eliminating of the April trout opener — most of these waters will now be open year-round. Setting the May trout opener at May 22 each year, ensuring that trout fishing statewide would always be open Memorial Day weekend. Removing the bag limit on non-native brown and brook trout in streams statewide, though some exceptions will still apply. Simplifying language, including replacing the terms "adipose fin-clipped" and "non adipose fin-clipped" with "hatchery" and "wild." Removing bag limits for warmwater fish in the Columbia, John Day and Umpqua rivers.

In addition to the regulation changes, there also will be a new format for the regulations booklet that will make it easier to read. The 2016 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations will be available in early December 2015.

The commission approved the 10-year update of the Oregon Conservation Strategy, including the Oregon Nearshore

Strategy component. These documents are broad, overarching strategies for voluntary conservation of Oregon's native fish, wildlife and marine resources. Both documents were updated with new scientific technology and information, and had extensive technical and public review and input over the last year.

Along with updating the Strategy Species and Habitat sections, refining Conservation Opportunity Areas was a major focus of the Strategy revision. These areas are key landscapes where voluntary conservation actions will have the most impact on conserving native species.

The Nearshore component was better incorporated into the Strategy resulting in several changes. Species lists and habitats were modified and estuaries were included in the Nearshore Strategy. The revision also will include supplements on potential effects of global climate change and ocean acidification.

The Oregon Conservation Strategy including the Nearshore component will be submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by Oct. 1 and available in a new web application upon USFWS approval.

The commission also updated the rules for commercial bay clam harvest. The current commercial harvest rules had been in place since 1995. The new rules are based on recent fisheries landings and stock assessment data, and include adjustments to commercial landing quotas, minimum sizes, species taken, and allowable harvest areas. This integrated package of shellfish actions will improve the management of these species and reduce potential conflicts between different user groups.

Finally, the commission approved funding for three Access and Habitat projects that will provide hunter access.

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