



ODFW Field Reports

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission
December 12, 2025

East Region

Nick Myatt, Region Manager

Lake Owyhee invasive freshwater mussel rapid response exercise

In late September, ODFW's Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator, the East and West Region AIS Check Station Coordinators, the Malheur District Fish Biologist, and East Region Public Affairs staff took part in a rapid response exercise and training session in Ontario and at Lake Owyhee focused on dreissenid mussels (zebra and quagga).

Throughout the two days, ODFW staff worked alongside federal, state, and local partners including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Army Corps of Engineers, Oregon Marine Board, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, Portland State University and the Owyhee Irrigation District to strengthen coordination and readiness in the event of an invasive mussel detection.



Lake Owyhee invasive freshwater mussel rapid response exercise participants, Sept. 2025.

The goal of the exercise was to prepare for the possible infestation of zebra or quagga mussels in Lake Owyhee which could severely damage irrigation systems and decimate the world-class fishery in the Owyhee River. This year's exercise was even more pressing given the fact that in 2023, Idaho detected quagga mussels in a portion of the Snake River near Idaho Falls

resulting in millions of dollars spent to chemically treat the waterway. Golden mussels, another new threat in the West, were detected in California in 2023. The threat of infestation in Oregon is an increasing concern and updating response plans is timely.



Lake Owyhee Dam's Morning Glory spill hole as seen with low water during Sept. 2025.

The development of rapid response plans and in-person exercises have served to inform and build upon rapid response preparedness for the Columbia River Basin for over 20 years. The Columbia River Basin Dreissenid Mussel Plan was developed in 2007 and has been updated and revised multiple times. Oregon developed their first dreissenid mussel rapid response plan in 2013 (revised in 2017).

The Lake Owyhee exercise was the fourth exercise that Oregon has participated in as part of the Columbia River Basin Dreissenid Mussel Response Plan. Exercises to explore roles, responsibilities and potential response actions took place in Portland (2008), Prineville (2013), and virtual Lake Billy Chinook (2020).

An after-action report about this year's Lake Owyhee rapid response exercise is being written and will be available to the public in 2026.

Minam River Wildlife Area's VR video is now available to the public

In collaboration with the Oregon Department of Forestry and 360 Labs, an immersive video production company based in Portland, ODFW and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation produced a virtual field trip of the Minam River Wildlife Area during the last week of May 2025.

The video can be found here:

<https://youtu.be/uxcyVBjtT5U>



The Minam River VR video produced by ODF was filmed May 2025.

The original idea for a virtual reality video was to give ODF's Board of Forestry a chance to see the Minam River Wildlife Area which was funded in part by Oregon's Forest Legacy Program. During five days of filming, ODFW and RMEF escorted the VR film crew around the wildlife area, provided camping and hosted dinners each evening. Subject matter experts featured in the video are Jon Paustian and Mike Lance (ODFW), Bill Richardson (RMEF), and Sara Anderson (ODF, MRWA Forester).

The video is in a 360-degree format or virtual reality, meaning the viewer can look in any direction at any time by clicking and dragging on a desktop or laptop or simply swiping or moving your mobile device. The video works best in a VR headset and is available in the YouTubeVR app on various devices.

Ladd Marsh hosts Public Lands Day

Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area hosted a successful National Public Lands Day event on Sept. 27, 2025, drawing approximately 40 participants, including Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Supervisor Shaun McKinney and Jessica Keys from Senator Merkley's office.

Seven partner organizations contributed staff or volunteers who led a variety of stewardship and educational activities. These included trash and Russian thistle removal (ODFW), water-quality sampling (Grande Ronde Community Science), bird box cleaning and birdwatching walks (Friends of Ladd Marsh), a plant identification walk (OSU Eastern Oregon Agricultural Research Station), and sun-print activities (Blue Mountain Conservancy). Several youth attendees also shared nature-themed books with younger participants.

Volunteers collected seven contractor bags of trash and Russian thistle. A free raffle was held with door prizes provided by ODFW (including a Dutch oven camping kit and Jamba tumblers) and Friends of Ladd Marsh (annual family memberships).

Two neighboring residents stopped by during the event to express appreciation for ODFW and partner efforts to promote stewardship of the wildlife area. One identified himself as a nephew of the late Jim Ward, whose family property borders the nature trail, and the other, who described himself as the "mayor of Ladd Canyon" noted his involvement in maintaining the interpretive site on Hot Lakes Road.

West Region

Mike Gauvin, Acting Region Manager

Fungus that causes white-nose syndrome in bats detected for first time in Oregon

The fungus *Pseudogymnoascus destructans*, which causes white-nose syndrome (WNS) in bats, has been [detected for the first time in Oregon](#). The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) confirmed the presence of the fungus in guano collected from a bat roost at Lewis and Clark National Historical Park in Clatsop County this summer. The sample was likely from a Yuma myotis (*Myotis yumanensis*). Although no Oregon bats have yet shown visible signs of the disease, the discovery indicates the fungus has reached the state.

WNS has killed millions of bats in North America since 2007 and continues to spread westward. The disease disrupts hibernation, leading to dehydration and starvation. The fungus spreads primarily through bat-to-bat contact during hibernation. While not harmful to humans, the fungus can be spread by contaminated gear or clothing used in or near caves or roost sites.

Since 2011, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and federal partner agencies (National Park Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) have surveyed for the fungus and white-nose syndrome across the state with the assistance of wildlife rehabilitators, the Northwest Bat Hub and the Oregon Veterinary Diagnostic Lab. Surveys are completed throughout the year in places where bats spend the winter, spring sites where they raise pups, and other roost sites.

Following the recent detection, ODFW is expanding surveillance efforts this winter. Beginning January–February 2026, the ODFW Wildlife Health Lab will add new monitoring sites and collaborate with partners to increase sampling coverage. Health Lab staff are also coordinating with the Oregon Bat Working Group to prioritize sampling locations and data sharing.

To engage the public, ODFW maintains an online reporting portal for unusual, sick, or dead bats and is developing a new survey for reporting bat aggregations. These public reports will help identify new hibernation or roost sites for targeted sampling.

ODFW has provided updated guidance to licensed wildlife rehabilitators to help identify clinical signs of WNS, safely collect swab samples, submit them for testing, and implement recommended biosecurity measures.

ODFW will continue coordination with partners through the winter and expand active monitoring to better assess the spread and potential impact of WNS in Oregon. Staff talking points have been developed and will remain a living document as new information emerges.



ODFW and Northwest Bat Hub staff identify, measure and assess bats during mist netting training, Sept. 2025.



A *Myotis* sp. bat is swabbed for WNS surveillance during hibernation at Oregon Caves National Monument, Feb. 2025 (Photo: Ivan Ekblom)

Beaver in the Upper Nehalem Headwaters: A two-year survey overview

To better understand beaver populations across Oregon, ODFW has established ten Beaver Emphasis Areas (BEA), one within each Watershed District. On the North Coast, the BEA is located in the Upper Nehalem Headwaters. As of November, staff have

completed two years of survey efforts covering 30% of the region's High Intrinsic Potential (HIP) beaver habitat.

These surveys are part of an effort to develop and field-test a standardized statewide protocol for assessing beaver trends in a given area. To identify priority survey sites, staff use GIS modeling that focuses on geomorphic variables such as active channel width, channel gradient, and valley floor width, variables that influence beaver habitat suitability. Areas flagged as "high intrinsic potential" or HIP for beaver can be surveyed either through a full census study or by selecting random sample sites, with each BEA leadership group choosing the approach best suited to their region.

The survey sets are split into two habitat classes – modeled "damming" habitat and "non-damming" habitat. All beavers are capable of building dams, but whether they choose to do so depends largely on local hydrology. When water is already deep enough to provide an escape from predators, access to food, and suitable lodge/den sites, beavers have little incentive to invest energy in dam construction. In other places, the physical conditions simply do not allow damming at all.

A clear example is the mainstem Columbia River where water depth already meets beaver habitat needs, removing any motivation to build a dam. At the same time, a river of that size and flow makes dam building functionally impossible. To accurately understand beaver distribution throughout a region, ODFW surveys equally target both habitat types – damming and non-damming.

During field surveys, staff document a wide range of beaver activity including dams, feeding stations, clipped vegetation, traditional lodges, bank dens, canals, scent mounds, scat, food caches, slides, and tracks. The type, density, and age of these signs help us understand how beavers are using a site and how they move across the landscape, both currently and historically.

In the Upper Nehalem Headwaters BEA, staff completed 140 surveys in 2024, covering 16% of

the HIP habitat, and another 120 (14%) in 2025. Reaching the 30% threshold gives staff enough information to extrapolate trends for the rest of the BEA. In 2024, beaver activity was detected at 99% of the sites surveyed, with 20% showing active (current) beaver sign. The 2025 survey data have yet to be processed. The next steps include revisiting sites with high levels of current activity to monitor occupancy and identifying areas near these locations to target for restoration planning.



A decades-old 'legacy' beaver dam over 5 feet tall that now impounds a multi-acre pond, showing how beavers can transform a simple valley creek over time.



Example of a coastal beaver dam, built by stacking and anchoring chewed sticks that eventually form a stable lattice shaped by the stream's flow.

Understanding Northwestern Pond Turtle movement in Willamette National Forest

In the spring of 2025, ODFW partnered with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) through a Good Neighbor Authority agreement to study Northwestern pond turtle movement in the Willamette National Forest. The project aims to determine seasonal movements within an ephemeral pond system (a temporary wetland that fills in winter and dries out later in the year), assess turtle population age structure, and investigate nest site selection. The findings will help guide future forest restoration, timber management, and prescribed burning projects that will benefit the turtle population and other wildlife. The Northwestern pond turtle is currently being considered for listing under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

The study area lies along the lower slopes of the Western Cascades and includes a seasonal pond and stream surrounded by temperate coniferous forest. Until now, very little was known about how turtles moved among adjacent waterways and upland overwintering.

In May, staff from ODFW, USFS, the U.S. Geological Survey captured and radio-tagged nine turtles (seven females and two males). The marginal scutes of each turtle were notched for identification, and the team locates each turtle weekly via radio telemetry to record their movements, behavior, and nesting activity. They also measure pond water levels and note any unmarked turtles observed during monitoring.

So far, 14 turtles have been captured, ranging in age from 1 to more than 26 years old, with a median age of 14 years old. Some turtles have been observed traveling as far as 290 meters over steep terrain with obstacles like downed logs, woody debris, and thick vegetation. The main nesting area is 275 meters uphill from the pond, with an elevation gain of about 150 meters. By tracking one radio-tagged female, the team also discovered a previously unknown nesting area. Many nests at the main site showed signs of predation, indicating that the limited number of suitable nesting sites near the pond may be a challenge for this population.

Starting the last week of October, the turtles burrowed deeper and exhibited less movement, likely responding to cooler, wetter weather. The project is slated to continue through the 2026 field season and the team is eager to continue tracking turtles through the winter.



NWPT burrowed in the ground at a nest site in the Willamette National Forest.



Radio-tagged NWPT pictured on the forest floor.

First sighting of Sierra Nevada Red Fox in 17 years in the Sky Lakes Wilderness

Biologists are working to better understand the conservation needs for Sierra Nevada Red Fox (SNRF) in Oregon.

The SNRF subspecies historically occurred in the Sierra Nevada and Cascade Mountain ranges as far south as Mt. Whitney in California, and as far north as Mt. Hood. Now, there are small (and genetically isolated) populations of SNRF in the Mt. Hood, Central Cascades, and Crater Lake National Park regions of the Cascade Range. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is in the process

of deciding whether to list Oregon's SNRF under the Endangered Species Act.

Threats to the SNRF may include impacts from recreational activities, vehicle strikes, rodenticide, and climate change. Other threats may be vulnerability due to small population size, effects of wildfire and fire suppression activities, non-target capture during trapping efforts, predation and competition with dogs/coyotes, and hybridization with non-native red fox lineages.

ODFW staff, partners, and volunteers are increasing efforts to inventory and monitor SNRF populations by documenting home range size and habitat use for the Central Cascades population. They also are working with Washington State University to develop standard survey methods, to generate baseline data on fox presence/absence and associated variables, and to evaluate how climate change will affect future fox habitat availability.

ODFW staff are collecting observation data in places where SNRF occurred historically, or where we have no SNRF observations despite recent model results that predict fox presence. In areas where foxes do occur, staff, partners, and volunteers are searching for scat, which can be used to better understand SNRF diet, levels of hybridization, and population size and health.

During the 2025 field season, more than 38 staff and volunteers contributed over 228 hours, searched more than 475 miles of trail, deployed 83 cameras, collected 93 scats, and documented six new fox locations in the Crater Lake and Central Cascades SNRF population boundaries. Excitingly, two ODFW undergraduate interns documented a red fox on a camera they deployed in the Sky Lakes Wilderness area, marking the first sighting on camera south of the park in Oregon in 17 years.



Sierra Nevada Red Fox caught on a game camera in the Sky Lakes Wilderness.



Biologists are working to learn more about Sierra Nevada Red Fox in Oregon.

Partnerships and PFA funding help connect an important tributary to Bear Creek

Blue Heron Creek was recently reconnected to Bear Creek, a major tributary of the upper Rogue River, by a partnership between a City of Phoenix based community-lead organization, Save the Phoenix Wetlands (STPW) and ODFW.

The leaders of STPW and ODFW biologists first noticed a rubble berm and an isolated cold-water spring following the 2020 Almeda Fire. After investigating, project leaders discovered the rubble berm had been generated when the Oregon State Highway Department moved Bear Creek in the 1950's to build Highway 99. The creation of this berm blocked Bear Creek's access to its floodplain and isolated access to a

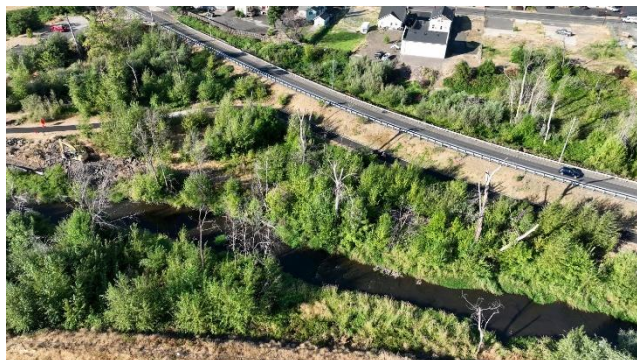
cold-water spring and tributary, Blue Heron Creek.

Blue Heron Creek was monitored for several years and shows that it acts as a cold-water input that would generate thermal refuge in Bear Creek. Bear Creek, the Rogue Basin's most urbanized stream, is known to still produce fall Chinook salmon, summer and winter steelhead, and federally listed Southern Oregon Northern California Coast coho salmon. The bottleneck for these fish species is over-summer habitat during their juvenile stage, as all resident species must spend at least one summer rearing in freshwater habitat.

STPW worked with the Rogue Basin Partnership to apply for and receive funding through the first round of Private Forest Accord funds. Despite several setbacks due to county and city permitting, STPW was able to reconnect Blue Heron Creek to Bear Creek this summer.

An alcove was also created at the mouth of Blue Heron Creek, which is anticipated to provide a cold water refuge for migrating adults and over-summering juvenile fish in the mainstem of Bear Creek. Riparian restoration planting is anticipated to proceed in the winter of 2026 and 2027 in partnership with the Rogue River Watershed Council.

The reconnection of Blue Heron Creek not only provides cold water refuge and floodplain connection for native aquatic species but further demonstrates the multi-organization partnerships that are required to achieve aquatic restoration. It is only possible through partnership that ODFW is able to achieve restoration and protection of Oregon's habitats.



Blue Heron Creek before being reconnected to Bear Creek.



After project completion, Blue Heron Creek is reconnected to Bear Creek.

Ocean Salmon and Columbia River Program

Tucker Jones, Ocean Salmon and Columbia River Program Manager

Community science fishing event used to compare creel models.

ODFW biologists from OSCRP and Inland Fish Program worked collaboratively with a third party, Angler's Atlas & MyCatch app, on the 2025 Bonneville Bass Catch and Click event (Figure 1) to test an alternative creel model against existing creel methods.

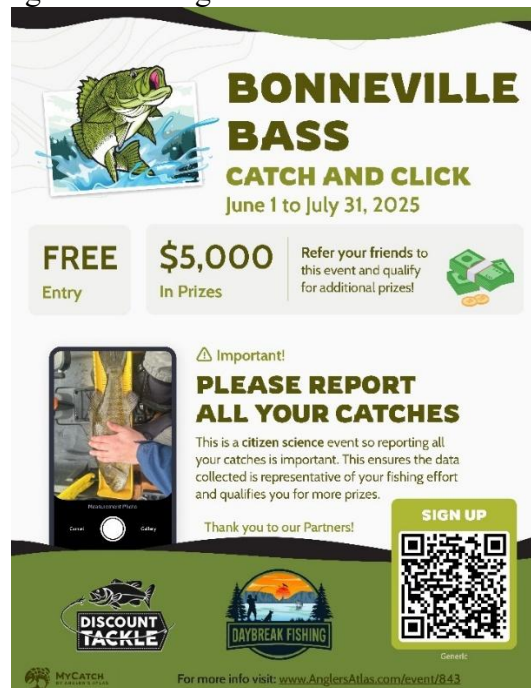


Figure 1. Poster advertising the 2025 Bonneville Bass Catch and Click fishing event hosted by Angler's Atlas. The event was free to the public and offered prizes provided by Anger's Atlas.

The alternative creel model, known as e-Creel, developed by ODFW biologists, uses a traditional mark recapture methodology to estimate catch, but incorporates angler-reported fish data to calculate catch estimates. This new methodology has the potential to reduce costs and focuses on more interactions with fish. ODFW staff have previously used this approach on coastal Chinook salmon and steelhead harvests. This methodology would be a challenge for jointly managed salmon and steelhead fisheries in the Columbia River because a singular place where anglers can report their catch does not exist. However, with the bass event, Angler's Atlas created an incentivized platform to encourage anglers to voluntarily report their catch electronically.

For ODFW's portion of the project, we conducted standard creel activities in Bonneville Reservoir. An additional question was asked between June 1 and July 31, 2025, to quantify the number of smallmouth bass encountered in the interview that were reported as part of the event. A combined (kept and released) 14,996 smallmouth bass were estimated to have been caught during the two-month period.

Angler's Atlas staff verified reported catch in their event and only shared the total number of smallmouth bass with ODFW staff, allowing privacy of individually reported catch to remain. Using the data from the additional creel question, we were able to use the e-Creel methodology to estimate catch at 11,684.

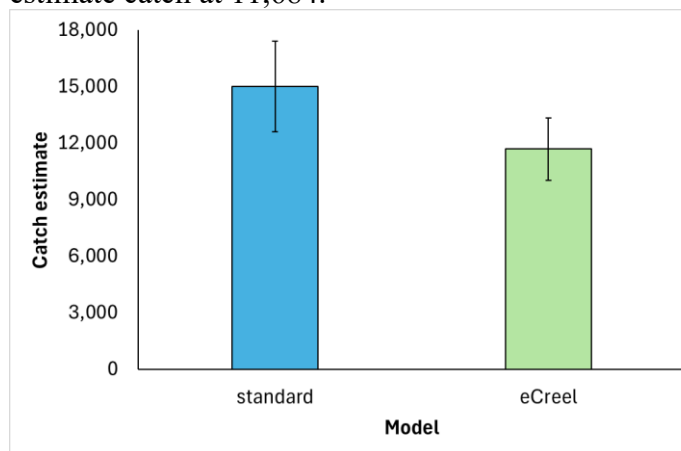


Figure 2. Comparison of catch estimates of Smallmouth Bass between e-Creel and standard creel methodologies. Error bars represent standard error.

In comparing the catch estimates, both models produced estimates that had overlapping confidence intervals (Figure 2), which implies the two estimates are not significantly different. Additionally, the confidence intervals for the e-Creel methodology were tighter, indicating a more precise estimate, though both methods had a high degree of uncertainty.

While this methodology is novel for smallmouth bass on the Columbia River, ODFW and Angler's Atlas were able to collect enough data (both through the event and through encounters in creel) to provide a comparable harvest estimate and confidence intervals. Staff continue to look for ways to monitor popular fisheries in large geographic areas effectively, and to explore novel ways to use community reported data.

Oregon State Police

Captain Doug Shugart, Fish & Wildlife Division



Thermal device operations result in charges and thermal and rifle seizures.

Fish and Wildlife Division members across the state have been conducting enforcement operations focused on the unlawful use of thermal devices for big game hunting and scouting. These operations have resulted in several subjects being cited for criminal charges and having their thermal devices and rifles seized as evidence.



Oregon State Police assists with freeing large buck deer caught in fencing.

A Fish and Wildlife Division member responded to a residence in Klamath Falls to assist ODFW with a large mule deer buck stuck in a fence. The deer was successfully sedated, and a large quantity of wire fencing was cut from its antlers. A ratchet strap was also cut from its antlers that appeared to have been attached for some time. The buck recovered and was released in much better shape. The elderly property owner was very grateful.



Deer hunter takes photo with Fish and Wildlife Trooper.

Fish and Wildlife Division members were working deer hunters when they observed a hunter lawfully take a large buck. Once the buck was tagged and the Troopers conducted an administrative check of the hunter, they assisted the hunter with dragging the buck out of the field. The hunter requested a photo with the one of the Troopers and their harvested buck deer.



Oregon State Police makes Klamath Basin Chinook salmon case.

A Fish and Wildlife Division member was contacted by ODFW about a subject actively angling on Spencer Creek. They provided photos of an unlawful take of Chinook salmon and the Trooper arrived a short time later. The individual had already left the area, but witnesses were able to provide a vehicle license plate. The vehicle was quickly located on Hwy 66 and stopped by the Trooper. The passenger admitted to fishing and advised he didn't think wardens would be working due to the federal government shutdown. The passenger surrendered two Chinook salmon and his rod and reel and was criminally cited. The fish were provided to ODFW at their request. The driver was warned for aiding in a wildlife violation.

****This is the first salmon case in the return of salmon to the Klamath Basin****



Investigation reveals several hundred illegal crab.

Fish and Wildlife Division members contacted a large group of crabbers at the Alsea Bay Port Dock in Waldport. Initially, the group was

evasive and uncooperative in answering questions and providing identification or licenses. The initial group of four who were contacted began signaling to another group on a lower dock, who began throwing crab from a cooler back into Alsea Bay. A large garbage bag containing approximately 40 undersized and female Dungeness crab was located on the upper dock. On the lower dock, a cooler containing approximately another 35 crab was also located. A search of three vehicles revealed four

additional coolers containing approximately 243 female and undersized Dungeness crab. In total, over 300 illegal crab were seized and returned to the bay and five subjects were issued citations for the Unlawful Take/Possession of Female and Undersized Dungeness Crab.

**End of field reports for
December 12, 2025**