ODFW Field Reports

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission
January 15, 2021

EAST REGION
Mike Harrington, Region Manager

Upper Deschutes Habitat Conservation Plan
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) published the Final Deschutes Basin Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in the Federal Register on November 6, 2020. The Service and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) anticipate making final permit decisions by December 31, 2020. The HCP is a document prepared by the Deschutes Basin Board of Control (DBBC) outlining conservation measures to mitigate for the impact of their activities on covered species, including the Oregon Spotted Frog (OSF), Mid-Columbia summer steelhead, bull trout and sockeye salmon. Each of these, excluding sockeye, is listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). The DBBC is comprised of eight central Oregon irrigation districts and the City of Prineville. In accepting the HCP, the federal agencies may issue the applicants an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) authorizing the DBBC's covered activities without jeopardizing the viability or recovery of the covered species. The term of the ITP is 30 years.

Development of the HCP was initiated in 2008. Completion required 12 years at a cost in excess of $5 million. Funds were primarily generated through the Service's section 6 program. The Oregon Department of Fish Wildlife (ODFW) served as the required State agency to receive the funds and appropriate for completion of required elements.

The applicant's primary impacts on covered species result from water management for agricultural and municipal purposes. This has significant influence on both water quantity and quality in the Deschutes River between Wickiup Dam and Lake Billy Chinook and in the Crooked River below Bowman Dam. The Deschutes hydrograph is highly altered to support irrigation, resulting in flows ranging from 1800 cfs during the irrigation season to 30 cfs during winter months. Historically, flows in the upper Deschutes River were among the most stable worldwide, with a narrow range of 700-900 cfs throughout the year. The current hydrograph limits the production capacity of OSF, a highly aquatic species requiring access to water year round.

The OSF Recovery Plan designates the Upper Deschutes as critical habitat. Consumptive water uses by the applicants also result in low flows in both the Crooked River and Whychus Creek, negatively affecting steelhead production and impeding success of the reintroduction program.

Upper Deschutes River at 30 cfs (October 15 – March 15)

Conservation measures proposed in the HCP are focused on restoring winter flows in the Upper Deschutes River in support of OSF recovery. Specifically, the applicants propose to increase winter flows up to 300 cfs in years 8 -12, and 400 cfs in years 13-30 (with provisions for up to 500 cfs). Additional OSF conservation measures include maintaining a stable water elevation in Crane Prairie Reservoir during the breeding period and additional winter flows in Crescent Creek. The HCP also provides for $150,000 to be allocated annually supporting OSF habitat restoration efforts. Conservation measures benefiting steelhead and bull trout in the Crooked River and Whychus Creek are limited but include

maintaining a minimum of 50 cfs in the Crooked River during the winter.

The department has been a participant in the HCP Working Group since its inception. The HCP process has received much attention by central Oregon interests and stakeholders. During the public comment period following the release of the drafts HCP and EIS, over 700 comments were submitted, including those developed by the department.

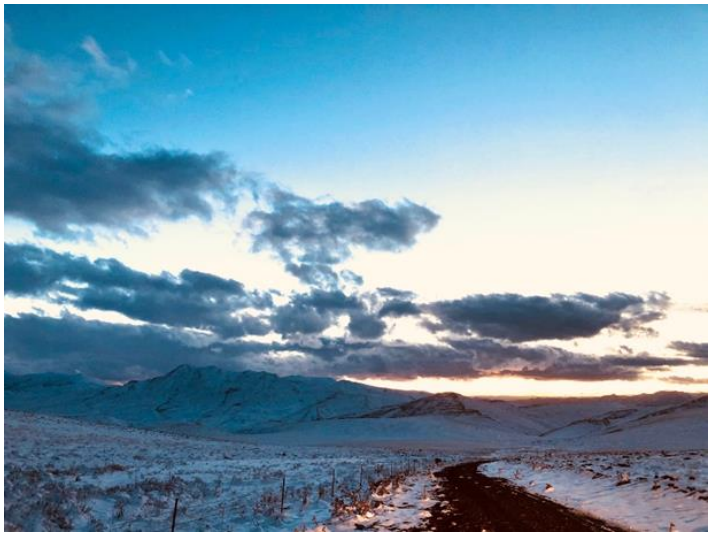
White-tailed Jackrabbit Research

Black-tailed and white-tailed jackrabbits are native to eastern Oregon. The black-tailed jackrabbit is common in eastern Oregon; however, white-tailed jackrabbits are limited and isolated with historical distributions scattered across eastern Oregon. The white-tailed jackrabbit is an Oregon Conservation Strategy species, but little is known about it and anecdotal observations suggest their populations could be declining.

Although the department has surveyed white-tailed jackrabbit populations in SE Oregon, surveys have not persisted over time and little is known about abundance, distribution and population trends. Additionally, due to this species nocturnal nature, traditional survey techniques often fail to detect presence. In order to understand current distribution, population dynamics, and habitat associations across their range, a new survey methodology must be developed and assessed.

In November, department staff initiated a project to survey white-tailed jackrabbits across East Region. The first phase of this project is to conduct spotlight surveys across the rabbit's historical range on routes that target historical observation points. These surveys are a collaboration between district and conservation program staff to determine presence of white-tailed jackrabbits, efficacy of routes, and effectiveness of spotlighting methods.

Through the first week of December, staff conducted 14 spotlight survey routes in six different wildlife districts. We have confirmed the rabbit's presence on eight survey routes in four different wildlife districts throughout all of East Region. Fall spotlight surveys will continue until the third week of December and surveys will be repeated in the spring. We will also investigate an alternate method of detecting white-tailed jackrabbit presence through game cameras in roadless areas that cannot be spotlighted.



View of sunset as staff prepares to spotlight survey for white-tailed jackrabbits in the Trout Creek Mountains

Without information collected from this project, changes in population trends and distributions cannot be quantified and appropriate conservation and management decisions are difficult. It is of particular interest that we collect baseline data of this and other rabbit species as rabbit hemorrhagic disease, a highly contagious and fatal disease, not yet detected in Oregon, continues to spread through the western United States.

Lostine River Falls

Between May and August, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed spring Chinook salmon and fluvial bull trout migrate to spawning grounds in the upper reaches of the Lostine River. While Chinook will use the entire river for spawning, the majority of bull trout will spawn above what is known locally as the Lostine River Falls. This falls is passable to both Chinook and bull trout but requires a leap of over six feet. It was recently discovered that while attempting to pass the falls, if Chinook or bull trout fail in their attempt, they occasionally fall into a dry pit and perish.
As many as 13 fluvial sized bull trout have been documented deceased here in a single season as well as numerous Chinook, with both species experiencing mortality on an annual basis. For perspective, the most recent 5-year average of bull trout trapped at the Lostine River Weir, located near the river mouth, is 84 fish. While weir counts are not a census, they do represent a significant

proportion of the population. Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that bull trout mortality at the falls has the potential to have significant population level impacts. Spring Chinook in the Lostine River are typically passed above the weir by the hundreds including supplementation with hatchery fish. This means losses are likely less consequential, yet still undesirable when attempting to recover a listed population.

After discussions on whether or not to alter this natural feature, department staff in Enterprise partnered with the Nez Perce Tribe (NPT) fisheries staff to make modifications that eliminated this source of mortality. Rock was removed from the bottom of the dry pit using a tool call a "Boulder Buster." This tool uses a small charge to fracture the rock, allowing for eased and safe excavation. The pit was deepened until water flooded it, providing a connection where fish can now return to the river after failed attempts to pass the falls. ODFW and NPT staff expect this modification to eliminate the risk to spring Chinook and bull trout while negotiating the falls. Staff will continue to monitor the site to ensure mortality has been reduced and to clear any accumulating debris if necessary.

Dry pit below the Lostine River Falls before modifications

Dry pit below Lostine River Falls after modifications

WEST REGION

Bernadette Graham-Hudson, Region Manager

Foster Creek Acclimation Pond Repairs Underway

The most successful acclimation facility on the Clackamas River was severely damaged by the Labor Day wind storm that helped ignite or fan many western Oregon wildfires. The site acclimates winter and summer steelhead to increase angler opportunity on the lower Clackamas River.

Anglers target returning adult steelhead that were acclimated at the Foster Creek acclimation facility as smolts. Cleaning and repairing the facility is a high priority for the North Willamette Watershed fish district staff. The facility needs to be operational by early February to accept steelhead smolts.

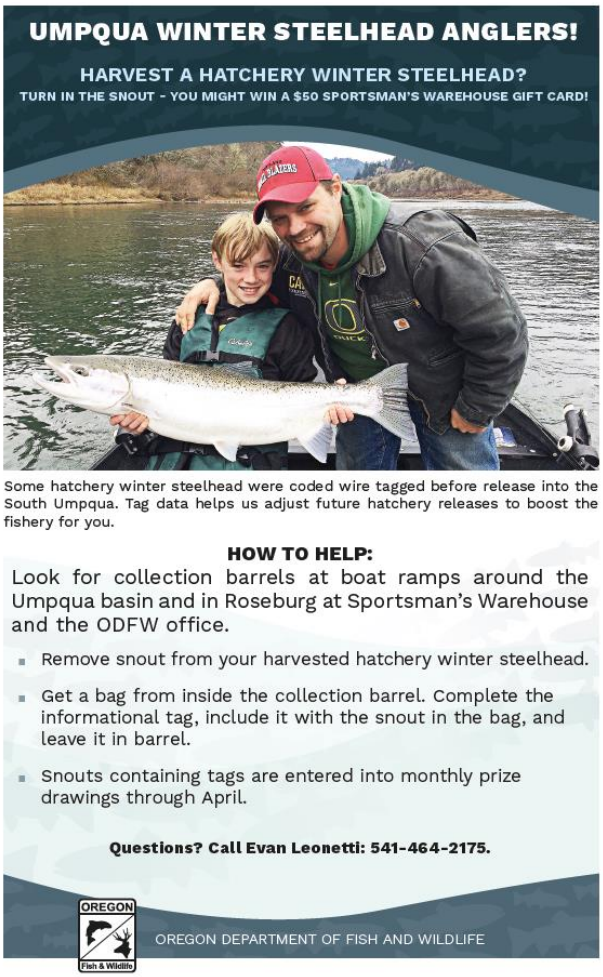
Tree damage at the Foster Creek acclimation facility

All downed trees, including large cottonwoods that fell into the facility were removed, and the damaged panel walls and pond liner were replaced. If all goes as planned, 25,000 hatchery winter steelhead smolts will be acclimated in the rebuilt pond in February followed by another 25,000 in March. In April, 25,000 hatchery summer steelhead smolts are scheduled to be acclimated. Staff submitted a request for FEMA funding to cover repairs to the facility which are estimated at about $7,000.

Third Year of Hatchery Winter Steelhead Study Begins

With the start of winter steelhead angling, the Umpqua Fish District is beginning the third season of a hatchery fish acclimation study. Hatchery fish

are coded wire tagged in spring and released in four groups at acclimation sites in Canyonville, each at a different time. Anglers are asked to return the snout of a harvested hatchery winter steelhead for the study and a chance to win a $50 gift card. Snouts are scanned for tags which contain the release date and group, informing which release timing is the most beneficial to anglers, particularly those in the South Umpqua River.



Some hatchery winter steelhead were coded wire tagged before release into the South Umpqua. Tag data helps us adjust future hatchery releases to boost the fishery for you.

Data collection began during the 2018-19 winter steelhead fishing season with anglers returning about 200 snouts. That number doubled during last year's season. The district will tag hatchery winter steelhead and collect snouts for at least another five years before determining what, if any, adjustments need to be made to the release timing.

Ringtail Research Study in Southern Oregon

The West Region Wildlife Research team and an Oregon State University graduate student began a new research project to investigate ringtail ecology in southern Oregon. Ringtails occur in southwest Oregon which is at the edge of their distributional range.

An Oregon Conservation Strategy Species, data on ringtails are very limited. Through trapping and radio collaring these small, nocturnal carnivores and collecting hair samples, researchers can collect habitat use and survival data, and provide distribution and abundance information.

Since early September, seven ringtails (four males, three females) have been captured and radio-marked in the Applegate Wildlife Management Unit. Weighing less than 2.5 pounds, these carnivores still move considerable distances while foraging at night. To date, maximum documented movement distances between daily resting sites was 0.65 miles for females and 1.63 miles for males. Radio-marked ringtails have been located at 3,000-4,800 feet elevation and one male moved 1,800 vertical feet between consecutive daily resting sites. Rock and brush piles, and standing dead stags are being used as daily resting sites.

Other small forest carnivores likely compete with ringtails for food and may even be a direct cause of ringtail mortality. One male was found dead with bite marks from a slightly larger carnivore, and grey fox have been insistent about getting to the fruit used for trapping before the ringtails.

The trapping season runs August 1 – March 31 and will likely go through March 2022. Grape jam is used to bait 24"x6" PVC traps placed alongside downed logs. Researchers pull hair samples to collect DNA while the ringtail are chemically immobilized.


Male, R02, Dave Keiter photo

Female, R04, Tiffany Stoddart photo

Male, R02, Dave Keiter photo

Highest elevation resting site of R02 (inside the rock pile)

Potential Cooperative Vegetation Management

Vegetation management under PacifiCorp power transmission lines in the North Umpqua area was discussed at a recent meeting with PacifiCorp, Bureau of Land Management, Umpqua National Forest staff, and contractors.

Umpqua Wildlife District staff proposed to PacifiCorp that ODFW be able to manage sections of the powerline corridor for big game forage opportunities. The lands within the powerline corridor have already been approved to be maintained as open areas. PacifiCorp contracts with private tree trimming companies to have this work done.

Potential wildlife habitat under powerlines

However, there is room for more wildlife habitat management after clearing trees. Where appropriate, the district proposed mowing dense shrubs to promote new growth and/or plant an approved forage seed mix which would maintain the opening free of trees. Overall, the proposal was met with favorable comments, and PacifiCorp thought it could be a mutually beneficial project. District staff will submit a detailed proposal to PacifiCorp in the near future.

Final EIS for Double-crested Cormorants

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently released a final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for management of double-crested cormorants across the lower 48 states. The EIS specifies a new permit option for states and tribes that will dramatically increase their authority to take double-crested cormorants or their nests to address depredation of fish, human health and safety, and other issues. Additionally, the EIS nearly doubles the number of individual double-crested cormorants that can be taken under permit across the Pacific Flyway. The EIS specifies that the new permit option is intended only to address site-specific issues, and that the new policy will not

significantly change the species' abundance across western states.

ODFW staff anticipate the new policy will facilitate management of ongoing cormorant conflicts with depressed salmon and steelhead stocks within the Columbia River estuary. The policy will also provide a new tool to address potential conflicts in other areas of the state as they arise.

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

Roger Fuhrman, Information and Education Administrator

Agency Working to Keep New Customers

ODFW saw a major surge of at least 118,000 new hunters, anglers, clammer/crabbers and wildlife viewers in 2020. This means increased financial support for the conservation and resource-management activities the agency undertakes. It also means increased public interest in healthy fish, wildlife and habitat. Therefore, the department is making an effort to keep the new customers permanently.

The retention project has two phases: short and long term. In the short term, the department is reaching out monthly by email (The Messenger) to new license buyers with information about how and where to get started in the Oregon outdoors. The last issue reached about 590,000 customers, including all of the new ones for which we have email addresses. Open and click-through rates were high, with over 200,000 people reading multiple articles and watching the videos.
This first phase assumes that new customers need basic, ongoing information to support them in their efforts to learn about the outdoors. Meanwhile, the department has launched a survey of 10,000 new customers to test our assumptions about what they need. In addition, 40,000 current customers will be surveyed to, among other things, help determine if there are differences between new and current customers.

Phase 2 will use the survey results to tailor new information products to beginners. We hope that the survey will allow customers to tell us what types of resources and educational activities would be most helpful to them. Some of this information is likely to come from open-ended questions asking what the agency as a whole can do, beyond providing information and education resources. Survey results should come in early in 2021. Staff will analyze the results and make adjustments accordingly to web, video, email and print content so that the new year will include new resources that better match customer needs. The results could potentially also result in new ways for ODFW Outdoor Education staff and others throughout the agency to assist customers

Stop Poaching Effort Launches OSP Video Series

The *Behind the Scenes with Oregon State Police* video series is a partnership between the Stop Poaching campaign and Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Division. The series is now available online and includes three 4-minute videos, with more on the way. Videographer is Adam Baylor, of ODFW, I&E Division. The series is linked through OSP, ODFW and other partner agency websites, and will stream for virtual Sportsmen's Shows and other exhibits across the state.

Wildlife Enforcement Decoy (WED): Viewers have a front row seat as troopers set up a deer decoy, wait for an offender to take an illegal shot, then engage the shooter in a conversation about unlawful activity.

Fish and Wildlife Trucks: Follow behind the scenes as OSP technician Nick Estrada leads viewers through the process of readying a vehicle from factory to fieldwork.

Marine Team: Ride along with the OSP F&W Division Marine Team as they maneuver their watercraft, *The Guardian*, off the coast of Newport. Troopers demonstrate the capabilities of enforcement watercraft and the importance of correctly identifying your catch.

These videos will be available on MyODFW.com and will be promoted one at a time in the monthly ODFW Messenger email to customers.

Sneak peek for readers of Commission Field Report only—

Truck/shop
video: https://youtu.be/R7sqsrXPiMQ

WED video: https://youtu.be/yPXqsTTAGzI

Marine Team video:
https://youtu.be/u6cRHw4Uv3U

OREGON STATE POLICE
Captain Casey Thomas, Fish & Wildlife Division

Trophy deer seized during investigation by OSP Fish and Wildlife Troopers

Fish and Wildlife Troopers conducted a knock and talk at a residence in Cascade Locks in regards to a TIP from a citizen involving the possible unlawful taking of a buck deer. During the contact with several individuals at the residence it was determined that the suspect was not present but that an unlawful take of a trophy 5X4 buck deer had occurred. Evidence was collected and a meeting was set up with the suspect and his probation officer for the following afternoon. The 19 year old suspect admitted to shooting the buck out of season and in a closed area. In addition to unlawfully taking the deer, he also violated conditions of probation. The suspect was charged criminally with the Unlawful Take.

A Fish and Wildlife Sergeant investigated a trophy mule deer buck shot and killed on private property behind the Oregon Institute of Technology. Information indicated the suspects killed the mule deer near dark and packed it out the following morning. The carcass was believed to be at a residence in Klamath Falls with the head and antlers being transported to Bonanza to an unlicensed taxidermist. A consent search of the resident's garage revealed remaining portions of an untagged mule deer carcass. After several interviews, the meat, head and antlers were recovered. All those involved admitted to the incident and face a multitude of charges including; Unlawful Take Closed Season-Mule Deer, Unlawful Method, Aiding in a Wildlife Offense and Unlawful Transfer of Wildlife.

Fish and Wildlife Troopers conducted a spike elk Wildlife Enforcement Decoy (WED) in rural Yamhill County. During the nighttime WED, a vehicle drove quickly into the set and stopped with the headlights directly on the WED. The driver emerged from the SUV and quickly shot the WED while still partially in the vehicle. The subject jumped back into his vehicle and sped away at a high rate of speed. The vehicle was subsequently stopped and investigation revealed the suspect had shot the decoy with his .40 caliber pistol. The subject was cited and released for Take/Possession of Spike Elk and the pistol was seized as evidence.

OSP Fish and Wildlife Troopers packing out a salvaged elk for donation

Fish and Wildlife Troopers responded to the Fossil unit for hunters who reported locating a cow elk that was shot and wounded by an unknown hunter. The Troopers met the hunters and located the cow elk, which was salvaged and packed out for donation.

CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Andrea Hanson, Oregon Conservation Strategy Coordinator

2020 Fisher Surveys in the Applegate WMU

Although fisher have been re-introduced in the southern Cascades, understanding the native Siskiyou population is a top ODFW priority. ODFW staff are working with the USFWS, U.S. Forest Service's Pacific Northwest Region Research Station, Bureau of Land Management, Institute of Natural Resources and Oregon State University to close knowledge gaps regarding fisher populations and distribution. The main priority of ODFW research is to estimate the population size, density, and range of fisher across the Applegate Wildlife Management Unit landscape.

Genetic data from 2020 is currently being analyzed, but 43 occurrences of fisher tracks were identified at 16 sites. Between 2017 and 2019, ODFW detected 20 (12 male, 8 female) unique fisher within ODFW's 206 km² survey area and three additional males that had been previously documented by OSU researchers. Fisher have been detected at the same site different times throughout the 6-week survey period and also recaptured at different sites in the study area. Sex ratio of identified fisher has been 1.75 males to 1 female and annual density estimates range from 4 – 8 fisher/100 km2.

Oregon Native Turtle Working Group Update

Conservation Program (CP) staff facilitated an inter-agency meeting of the Oregon Native Turtle Working Group Lower Willamette Chapter. Participants included other CP staff, district wildlife staff from Mid-coast, North Willamette and South Willamette, ODFW Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program staff, Port of Portland, City of Portland, City of Eugene, Clackamas Soil and Water Conservation District, USFWS, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Portland State University and Samara Group.

Western Pond Turtle – Oregon Conservation Strategy Species

The bulk of the meeting was focused on discussing the process for identifying Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs) for Northwestern Pond Turtle (NWPT) and completing an online questionnaire to identify highest and lowest priority conservation and management actions as well as threats for different NWPT Management Regions. Other discussion items were ODFW's NWPT dataset and process for reviewing and submitting additional NWPT occurrence data, of juvenile turtles in particular, the definition of a NWPT "site", and the USFWS' timeline for the NWPT Species Status Assessment.

OCRF Continues to Fund Critical Projects

The Conservation & Recreation Fund has raised more than $200,000 for projects that help implement the Oregon Conservation Strategy and connect people with the outdoors. In December, the OCRF Advisory Committee recommended a suite of seven additional projects from 65 applicants. These projects include taking urban teens on their first camping trips, tracking forest carnivores, and community science efforts for western pond turtles. The first round of projects was funded in September. More information can be found online: https://www.oregonisalive.org/projects.

Also, the OCRF Coalition hosted a free public webinar on Dec. 9. A recording is available here: https://wildlandsnetwork.org/blog/webinar-why-the-oregon-conservation-and-recreation-fund-matters-to-you/.

MARINE RESOURCES PROGRAM

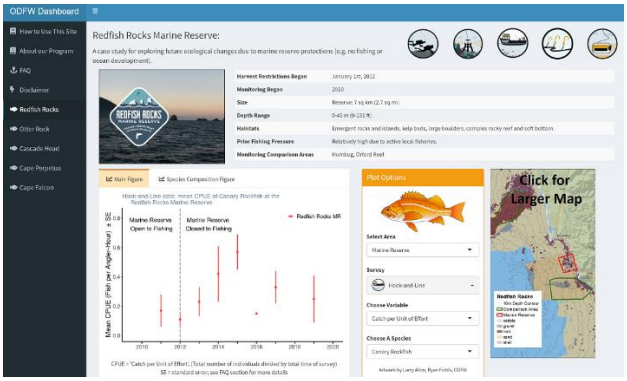
Caren Braby, Marine Resources Program Manager

Data, Data, Data!

As natural resource managers, we rely on a steady supply of targeted, rigorous, and relevant data. Data are the foundation of our recommendations on management needs, regulatory changes, and harvest opportunities. However, ODFW data are of great value far beyond the specific needs of ODFW management, and we have been making strides to make our data more accessible through multi-institutional collaborative data portals, as well as creating data portals that are stand-alone and designed specifically for ODFW and our stakeholders.

NEW: ODFW Marine Reserves Data Dashboard

MRP announces the release of our new ODFW Marine Reserves Data Dashboard. The dashboard is a website that allows you to use simple-drop down menus to navigate through data ODFW has collected over the last 10 years at Oregon's five marine reserve sites (sites closed to fishing and ocean development) and eight comparison areas (sites outside the reserves open to fishing).



Oregon's Marine Reserves dashboard allows anyone the ability to explore and access data

The dashboard is currently focused on the data collected during ODFW's long-term marine reserves monitoring surveys: hook-and-line, longline, SCUBA, and video lander (robotic imagery). These data are considered preliminary and for exploratory purposes. We invite you to explore the data as we begin to investigate nearshore ocean trends and natural variation of different fish, invertebrate, and algae species at each reserve.

Explore the Dashboard: https://odfwmarinereserves.shinyapps.io/Marine_Reserves_Shiny_App_v7/

Watch the Video Tutorial - How to Explore Marine Reserves Data (5 min): https://youtu.be/MTqK6x3paqs

END OF FIELD REPORTS FOR January 15, 2021