

# Oregon's Access & Habitat Board News

Summer 1999



The Access and Habitat Board was created by the 1993 Oregon Legislature and is funded by a \$2 surcharge on hunting licenses. The Board identifies and recommends funding for projects that improve wildlife habitat and facilitate public hunting access on private lands.

## COOMBS CANYON COOPERATION

**A \$52,000 Access and Habitat Program grant helps establish 12,500 acres of hard-to-find public upland game bird hunting grounds outside Pendleton in Umatilla County**

By  
Jim Yuskavitch

Beginning this fall, upland bird hunters will have new territory to explore in a part of the state renowned both for its excellent populations of pheasants and lack of public hunting areas.

The idea for the Coombs Canyon Regulated Hunt Area began when Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Umatilla District assistant district wildlife biologist Mark Kirsch was putting together a wildlife plan for 2,800 acres of property owned by Steve Wolfe located just southwest of Pendleton. This piece of land — a part of Wolfe's 12,500-acre winter cattle rangeland and wheat ground — was formerly in the Conservation Reserve Program, and Kirsch was preparing plans for developing wildlife habitat on the land so that it could be re-enrolled in the program.

The Conservation Reserve Program is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency. This program was established in 1985 to protect highly erodible farm lands and encourage farmers to preserve and create wildlife habitat on their properties by sharing the expenses involved in developing wildlife-friendly environments. Typical efforts by property owners participating in the Conservation Reserve Program includes planting vegetation beneficial to wildlife, establishing vegetation buffers along streams and ponds, and creating small wetland areas.

"Because ODFW was interested in working with Wolfe on a long-term basis, we started talking about his options and what sort of benefits he would get out of coming into the regulated hunt area program," explains Kirsch.

A regulated hunt area is simply a block of land where private and public entities have agreed to allow public hunting access. In return, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife manages use of the area during hunting seasons including patrolling of the area by law enforcement personnel. This releases landowners from having to continually field requests for permission to hunt from large numbers of hunters over the course of the season and assures that the property will be looked after through regular patrols. Landowners who allow public recreation on their lands are released from liability concerns by state law.

As Kirsch and Wolfe discussed the subject, it turned out that there were quite a few benefits for everyone involved. ODFW had been interested in developing wildlife habitat on the entire property to increase pheasant populations and eventually to reintroduce sharp-tailed grouse. The Department also wanted to provide more public hunting opportuni-

ties for upland game birds for people who did not have access to private lands.

Public hunting access has been scarce in the Pendleton area for the past 20 years. Although Umatilla County — and the Pendleton area in particular — has the largest ring-necked pheasant population in Oregon, virtually all of the birds are located on private lands. For the hunter without connections with local landowners, the odds of getting permission to hunt on these properties are slim. "We wanted to have an area near Pendleton," says Kirsch, "where hunters who don't know any landowners can come and hunt without having to ask permission."

For Wolfe, joining the regulated hunt area program would allow him to receive financial assistance for improving wildlife



**Over 12,000 acres of upland game bird and mule deer habitat will be available just outside Pendleton, when the new Coombs Canyon Regulated Hunt Area opens this fall.**

Photo by Jim Yuskavitch

habitat and free him from the worry of managing the area during hunting seasons. So he agreed to allow his entire 12,500-acre property to become the Coombs Canyon Regulated Hunt Area for at least the next eight years.

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# What's New?



## Continued from previous page

A critical factor in establishing the regulated hunt area was a \$52,702 grant recently awarded to Wolfe Hereford Ranch and the Northeast Region of ODFW by the Access and Habitat Program. Grant funds will be used specifically for habitat enhancement within the area including grass and shrub plantings for wildlife food and cover, and water development. Grant funds will also be used to hire a retired Oregon State Police officer to patrol the area during hunting seasons, procure regulatory signs, and to provide a 50 cents per acre access payment to Wolfe for his participation. This money represents the first year funding for the eight-year project. Annual grants in subsequent years will be in the \$20,000 range.

The Sage Basin and Owen Denney chapters of Pheasants Forever will also contribute funding for wildlife seedings and access payments. ODFW's Upland Bird Stamp Program is providing funds for wildlife water guzzlers and grass seed, while the Natural Resource Conservation Service is cost-sharing with the landowner through the Conservation Reserve Program.

The Coombs Canyon Regulated Hunt Area, located seven miles southwest of Pendleton, will be "open for business" this fall, and Kirsch expects the area to be well-used by hunters. In addition to ring-necked pheasant, the area also harbors chukar, Hungarian partridge, and valley quail. Antlerless deer hunts will also be permitted as well as trophy buck deer hunts for youth, slated to begin in 2000. "Establishing the Coombs Canyon Regulated Hunt Area is a big coup for hunters," says Kirsch. "They need to come out here and enjoy it."

## Continued from next page

2000. A controlled antlerless deer hunt is permitted in 1999. Grant funds will be used for habitat enhancement, to hire an Oregon State Police trooper to patrol the area and to provide a 50 cents per acre payment to the landowner.

### **10** Wallowa County Cooperative Wildlife Habitat Protection and Improvement

The Wallowa County Weed District and 14 Wallowa County landowners received a \$92,189 grant to fund a four-year program to control noxious weeds damaging to range vegetation and protect critical winter range habitat for deer, elk, bighorn sheep, and other wildlife. The landowners will allow public hunting access on a by-permission basis to an estimated 29,000 acres.

### **11** Morgrass Regulated Hunt Area

As part of a successful public hunting access program in cooperation with ODFW since 1997, the Morgrass Grazing Association of Long Creek received a \$25,500 grant to be used over a three year period for fence construction, water developments, and administering a public hunting program. The landowner allows up to 20 hunters per day to use the area for big game hunting on a by-permission basis.

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

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City/State/Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

## Calendar of Events

### August 27

Tag purchase deadline for deer and elk bow, (503) 872-5275

### September 1

Forest grouse and mourning dove season begins (503) 872-5268

### September 17

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission Meeting, Portland (503) 872-5268

### October 1

Tag purchase deadline for western Oregon deer rifle and general black bear season (503) 872-5275

### October 15

Tag purchase deadline for Cascade elk (503) 872-5275

### October 22

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission Meeting, Astoria (503) 872-5268

### November 22

A&H Board Teleconference (503) 872-5260 x5349

## Farewell, Stub Stewart!

After serving on the A&H Board as a landowner representative since the program's creation in 1993, L.L. "Stub" Stewart is stepping down. He attended his last official board meeting on August 9 in Eugene.

Stub is involved with the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee and the trade organization Associated Oregon Industries. He was president of Bohemia, Inc. for 30 years and also served in the Oregon Legislature from 1951 to 1955.

Stub's presence and insights will be greatly missed by his fellow board members. A search to fill the landowner representative vacancy is currently in progress.



# Program Update

## Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission Approves 11 New A & H Grants on June 4

### 1 Abiqua Basin Hunter Access

Steve and Nori Kaser, of Silverton, received a \$7,865 grant to continue a hunter host program on Longview Fibre Company's 24,000-acre Silver Falls Tree Farm in Marion County, which is open to public hunting access. Since 1992, the Kasers and other Silverton-area volunteers have monitored the area during deer and elk hunting seasons. Grant funds will be used to reimburse volunteers for mileage, sign materials, and other project-related expenses.

### 2 Yachats Wildlife Management Area Habitat Enhancement

A \$21,550 grant awarded to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's North Coast District will be used to improve the quantity and quality of elk forage on the 104-acre Yachats Wildlife Management Area in Lincoln County. A 30-acre pasture will be renovated to improve forage conditions. Tree and shrub plantings will enhance cover conditions while improving habitat diversity. A five-acre wetland will also be improved. This property is an important public access point to adjacent forest land.

### 3 Access and Habitat Improvement and Youth Stewardship Education

The Rural Outdoor Education Project, based in Medford, was awarded a \$9,750 grant to teach pond and creek habitat studies to students and school groups from Coquille and Myrtle Point, in Coos County, on a 200-acre private parcel of land under an agreement with the landowner. Student groups will also conduct plant and wildlife surveys, install wood duck nest boxes, construct riparian fencing, and other habitat improvement work. The landowner will allow access for waterfowl hunting on a by-permission basis.

### 4 Dawson Wetland Restoration

The Umpqua Soil and Water Conservation District was awarded a \$37,500 grant to contribute to the construction of a levee to separate a flood-prone 100-acre parcel of private land along the lower Smith River in Douglas County, into a 75-acre reclaimed pasture and 25-acre restored wetland. The reclaimed pasture will allow the property owners to continue utilizing that portion of the property while 25 acres will be donated to ODFW to be managed as wetlands habitat and to provide public recreational access. The grant will also help fund levee work on the nearby Stowe Marsh Wildlife Area, also managed by ODFW.

### 5 Cow Valley Elk Hazer

Vale rancher Ray Belnap received an \$18,150 grant to continue an elk hazing program on his 3,000-acre property in Cow Valley. The grant also includes installation of three cattle guards to facilitate hazing activity and hunter access. The property owner allows public hunting on a by-permission basis.

### 6 Heppner Regulated Hunt Area

Twelve Morrow County landowners were awarded a grant of \$53,920 per year over a five-year period to continue a highly successful program that provides year-round recreational access to approximately 100,000 acres of their property just southeast of Heppner which makes up the Heppner Regulated Hunt Area. The grant money is used to provide participating landowners with reimbursement for conducting habitat improvement projects or as direct cash payments.

### 7 Zumwalt/Bartlett Elk Hazer

A \$4,000 grant was awarded to six Wallowa County landowners and ODFW's Northeast Region to continue an elk hazing program on private lands in Zumwalt Prairie, Sheep Creek Divide, and Bartlett Bench. All the involved landowners allow hunter access to their properties during antlerless elk hunting seasons.

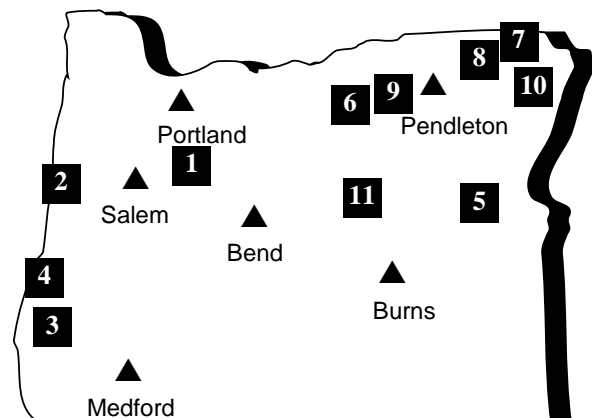
### 8 Sled Springs Management Demonstration Area

The Boise Cascade Corporation and the Northeast Region of ODFW were granted \$19,500 to hire a seasonal technician to patrol the Sled Springs Management Demonstration Area in Wallowa County. The technician will provide public relations contact with hunters, collect harvest information, and maintain signs and gates. A total of 200 square miles of Boise Cascade timberlands is included in the Management Demonstration Area. The area is open for all game bird and big game hunting seasons.

### 9 Coombs Canyon Regulated Hunt Area

Wolfe Hereford Ranch and the Northeast Region of ODFW received a \$52,702 grant in first year funding over the course of an eight year project to establish a new regulated hunt area on 12,500 acres of private lands southwest of Pendleton. Called the Coombs Canyon Regulated Hunt Area, it will provide public hunting access for pheasant, Hungarian partridge, chukar and valley quail. A trophy buck deer youth hunt is proposed for

Continued on previous page



Access & Habitat Board  
 Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife  
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# Get Involved

For information on applying for an Access and Habitat grant contact Beth Waterbury, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, P.O. Box 59, Portland, OR 97207 (503) 872-5260 x5349

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