

Oregon's Access & Habitat Board News

Spring 2009



The Oregon Legislature established the Access and Habitat Program in 1993, funded primarily through a \$2 surcharge on hunting licenses. The A&H Board, composed of members of the public, identifies and recommends funding for projects that improve wildlife habitat and facilitate public hunting access on private lands.

Access and Habitat Program an active partner in new ODFW Mule Deer Initiative

Mule deer have always been an important and prized big game species for hunters not only in Oregon but throughout the western United States. But in recent decades mule deer populations across the West have been declining from their peak in the 1950s and 60s due to changes in habitat, predation, human development, and perhaps other factors yet to be discovered.

In response to hunters' concerns about the future of mule deer in the state, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has developed a Mule Deer Initiative designed to identify the limiting factors affecting mule deer populations in Oregon and to implement management actions to address those limiting factors.

The overall goal is to return the state's mule deer herds to management objectives and bring back the big bucks that were once a common sight.

The Mule Deer Initiative identifies five state wildlife management units that represent a variety of situations that may be negatively affecting mule deer, such as



ODFW's Mule Deer Initiative aims to identify and address the factors currently limiting mule deer numbers in Oregon.

poor habitat conditions or excessive predation. Those five pilot units are the Maury, Warner, and Steens Mountain wildlife management units in the High Desert Region and the Heppner and Murderers Creek units in the Northeast Region.

Because one of the Access and Habitat Program's primary functions is to provide funding for wildlife habitat improvement projects, it is playing an important role in the Mule Deer Initiative efforts, particularly on the Murderers Creek Wildlife Unit, where restoring big game winter range is a priority.

Most recently, the A&H Program is helping to fund a project in partnership with ODFW, Oregon Hunters Association, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and the Blue Mountains Elk Initiative to cut about 150 acres of juniper from the Water Gulch area within the Murderers Creek Wildlife Unit.

"Juniper is a native species, but it is also invasive," said John Day Watershed District wildlife biologist Ryan Torland. "It used to be contained by fire and constrained to rimrock and other places fire couldn't reach." But decades of fire suppression allowed the junipers to move down into what was once grassland steppe, out-competing forbs and shrubs that provide important forage for mule deer, elk and other wildlife species.

Up to 800 elk and 3,000 mule deer use



The Murderers Creek basin provides critical winter range for mule deer and other big game, but forage has declined due to juniper encroachment and other factors.

the Murderers Creek basin during the winter, and should see a noticeable increase in forage once the juniper has been removed.

The A&H Program funding for this project comes from a \$100,000 grant recently awarded to the Blue Mountains Elk Initiative for nine projects that improve elk habitat on 13,619 acres of public and private lands in eastern Oregon. In the case of Murderers Creek, the juniper removal will improve mule deer habitat as well.

Because the Murderers Creek area is such an important winter range for deer, the success of habitat improvement efforts here will be critical to the Mule Deer Initiative.

"Deer need a quiet place in the winter to forage," said Torland. "If they have forage to keep up their physical condition, that's important for their survival."

A&H Board Tours Grant County Habitat Projects

A&H Program Board members were treated to tours of Widow's Creek Ranch and Murderers Creek basin as part of their April business meeting, which was held in John Day on April 28-29.

Widow's Creek Ranch is located just south of Highway 26, about 30 miles west of John Day, where ranch owner Jim Dovenberg showed Board members, ODFW staff, and others around his property including the results of an A&H 2007 emergency reseeding project and several other fish and wildlife habitat projects he has completed.

The Shake Timber Fire burned nearly 18,000 acres in 2006, including about 1,000 acres on the Widow's Creek Ranch. Dovenberg secured an emergency reseeding grant from the A&H Program and planted a variety of grasses on the burned areas of his property to prevent erosion and the spread of invasive weeds, while jumpstarting the re-growth of wildlife forage.

Dovenberg has high regard for how the A&H Program and ODFW staff responded to his plight. "I thought there would be lots of help available for landowners who had their properties burned by wildfire," Dovenberg said. "But the A&H Program was the only one that was willing to help me do something about it."

Other wildlife and fish conservation projects Dovenberg has conducted on his land include fencing aspen groves to pro-



An A&H Program grant helped Grant County landowner Jim Dovenberg reseed his property after a wildfire.

tect them from livestock and wild ungulates, cutting juniper to reactivate springs, and screening irrigation diversions to prevent fish from being sucked out of the streams and into pastures.

The tour also included a visit to the Phillip W. Schneider Wildlife Area to look at past and planned juniper removal and shrub planting projects, some of which are funded with A&H Program grants.

ODFW John Day Watershed District wildlife biologist Ryan Torland explained some of the changes that have occurred to the basin's wildlife forage base over the years as a result of juniper encroachment and described plans to restore the area.

Murderers Creek basin is important winter range for big game and provides habitat for a wide variety of wildlife including deer, elk, pronghorn, bighorn sheep, cougar, coyotes, and game birds.

Calendar of Events

July 21

A&H Board Meeting,
Salem, 503-947-6087

September 4*

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission
Meeting, Grants Pass, 503-947-6044

September 7

A&H Project Applications Due

October 20

A&H Board Meeting,
Bend, 503-947-6087

December 11*

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission
Meeting, Salem, 503-947-6044

*Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission meetings where A&H business is being conducted.

Have an idea for an A&H project?

If you have an idea for a project that increases public hunting access to private lands and/or improves wildlife habitat, contact the A&H Regional Coordinator nearest you for advice and assistance on applying for an A&H grant.

Northwest Region

Dave Nuzum, Tillamook 503-842-2741
Jim Young, Corvallis 541-757-4186

Southwest Region

Vince Oredson, 541-826-8774
Central Point

High Desert Region

Crystal Strobl, The Dalles 541-296-4628
Dan Gonzalez, Hines 541-573-6582

Northeast Region

Jon Paustian, La Grande 541-963-2138

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8 A&H Projects Recently Approved

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission approved 8 new A&H projects at its March 20, 2009 meeting in Salem

Abiqua Basin Access Area

The Capitol Chapter of the Oregon Hunters Association has received a \$2,050 grant to reimburse volunteers for travel expenses to open and close the main gate to Longview Timber Company property during deer and elk rifle seasons. The company allows public hunting access to its property, which is located near Silverton. By managing entry to the project area, Oregon Hunters Association volunteers help minimize vandalism and other illegal activity on the property. Included in the grant amount is \$400 for signs and maps.

Jenkins Access Project

A \$33,283 grant will pay landowner Rich Jenkins to provide 'welcome to hunt' public access on 13,233 acres of his property from August 1, 2009 to March 1, 2010. Another \$200 will be used to produce and post signs indicating the open to hunt area.

The property is located within the Steens Mountain Wildlife Management Unit and offers outstanding hunting opportunities for mule deer, pronghorn, and sage grouse. It also offers improved access to 60,000 acres of public lands.

Jordan Access Project

Landowner Dan Jordan will receive \$1,600 per year through 2012 to allow public hunting access to 640 acres of his property, located within the Steens Mountain Wildlife Management Unit. Hunting periods will be August 1 to March 1.

An additional \$2,750 will be used towards construction of one-quarter mile of fence to keep trespassing livestock off the property.

Hunting opportunities on the property include mule deer, elk, pronghorn, and sage grouse.

Bloomer Access Area

In return for a \$6,048 grant, Gary Bloomer will open 2,724 acres of his land, located within the Sumpter Wildlife Management Unit, to public hunting from August 1, 2009 to January 31, 2010. The landowner will receive \$5,448 for allowing public hunting access and \$600 will be used for signs and maps. In addition, opening this property to the public provides access to 120 acres of public lands previously landlocked by private property.

Hunting opportunities on this property include elk, mule deer, and upland game birds.

Smutz Access Area

A \$3,985 grant will be used to open 1,414 acres of private land owned by Irwin Smutz within the Starkey Wildlife

Management Unit from August 1, 2009 to July 31, 2010. Of that amount, \$450 will be used for signs and maps, with the remainder paid to the landowner.

Hunting opportunities on the property include mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk, bear, cougar, coyote, wild turkey, waterfowl, pheasant, Hungarian partridge, California quail, and blue and ruffed grouse.

Forsea Access Area

Landowners Dan and Renece Forsea will receive a \$22,392 grant to provide open public hunting on 9,330 acres of their land, located within the Lookout Mountain Wildlife Management Unit, from August 1, 2009 to January 31, 2010. An additional \$600 will be used to print signs and maps.

Hunting for Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, elk, mule deer, bear, cougar, and upland game birds is available on this property.

Widman Access Area

'Welcome to hunt' access will be provided on 8,430 acres of property owned by Mike Widman from August 1 to December 1, 2009 in return for a \$17,460 grant. The property is located within the Lookout Mountain Wildlife Management Area. An additional \$600 will be used for signs and maps.

The property offers trophy mule deer hunting along with excellent chukar hunting opportunities.

Owsley Canyon Access Area

Landowner Don Shaw will receive an \$870 grant to allow public hunting access to 435 acres of his property from April 15, 2009 to April 14, 2010. An additional \$700 will be used to print maps and signs.

The land is located within the Mount Emily Wildlife Management Unit and offers hunting opportunities for mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk, bear, cougar, wild turkey, pheasant, Hungarian partridge, California quail, and ruffed and blue grouse.



Access and Habitat Program projects provide hunting opportunities to the public for a variety of game animals across the state.

Access and Habitat Board
 Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
 3406 Cherry Avenue, N.E.
 Salem, OR 97303-4924



For information on applying for an Access and Habitat Program grant contact A&H Program Coordinator Matt Keenan at 3406 Cherry Avenue N.E., Salem, OR 97303-4924, 503-947-6087

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