



Few hunting-related bills move, others stall

By Al Elkins, OHA Lobbyist

Two months into Oregon's 2017 Legislative Session, new hunting bills were still coming forth every day. Here's a quick roundup of the status of some of those bills.

BILLS SEEING ACTION

HB 2566: OHA Youth Mentor Program

This bill was introduced for OHA. OHA has amended the bill to extend the current youth mentor program from age 14 through 17 to allow busy high school students with a marginal interest in hunting to be able to sample hunting under the close supervision of an experienced, licensed adult. On March 7, the bill had a hearing, where there was opposition from the Oregon Association of Hunters Education Instructors (OAHEI). Their opposition to the bill was that, in theory, youths might never have to take hunter education before they're 18 if they stay in the mentor program that entire time. While OHA's board believes it is far-fetched that anyone would want to mentor or be mentored for several years – sharing tags and bag limits the entire time and not having their own, OHA has drafted an amendment that would meet the stated concerns by limiting those 15 through 17 years of age to a one-time participation in the youth mentor program without taking hunter education. At this writing the OAHEI is still opposed to the bill.

SB 6: Modifies Trap Check Requirements

The bill, sponsored by Senator Courtney (D-Salem), would require that traps be checked every 24 hours instead of the current 48, provide for signage on certain traps, and require reporting requirement changes. The bill was scheduled for a hearing in early February, but was abruptly pulled from the agenda. Since then there has been no action on the bill.

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A coalition made up of individuals from organizations representing trappers, hunters, agriculture, the forest industry and cattle and sheep ranchers was formed to oppose SB 6.

SB 372: Wildlife Salvage Permits

This bill, sponsored by Senator Hansell (R-Athens) and Representative Barreto (R-Pendleton), directs the ODFW Commission to adopt rules for issuance of wildlife salvage permits to salvage deer or elk accidentally killed as result of vehicle collision. This bill also requires ODFW to report on implementation of wildlife salvage permit rules during 2023 regular session. ODFW and the bill sponsors are working on amendments to the bill. The amendments being discussed are language that would make the meat available only if it is fit for human consumption and that the Oregon Department of Agriculture, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Oregon State Police are not required to certify the meat. The bill had one hearing in early February.

HB 2634: Disabilities Under Wildlife Laws

This bill expands the disabilities statutes in wildlife laws. This bill was up for a hearing in February and at that time OHA cautioned the committee that there would be great changes in outdoor recreation if this bill passed. There has been no movement on the bill since that time.

Wildlife Services Budget Deficit

The Governor's Recommended Budget has cut the general funds for

the Wildlife Services program, some \$900,000 in all, to zero. The program is administered by two state agencies: the Oregon Department of Agriculture and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. OHA testified in support of restoring the general fund level when the issue was discussed at a hearing on the Department of Agriculture budget. OHA will testify at the ODFW budget hearing to restore the funding for this program as well. Others testifying in support of restoring the funding level are: Oregon Farm Bureau, Oregon Cattlemen's Association, Oregon Outdoor Council and various fishing groups.

BILLS NOT SEEING ACTION

HB 2487: Deer or Elk Tag Guarantee Bill

Sponsored by Rep. Bentz (R-Ontario), the bill would require the ODFW Commission to, as part of the current preference point system for controlled hunt permits, guarantee issuance of one deer or elk controlled hunt permit to any applicant who is 75 years of age or older and has a resident annual pioneer license. There has been no action on this bill.

HB 2107: Cougar Hunting with Dogs

This is the cougar bill that OHA asked the House Interim Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources to introduce this session. HB 2107 would allow a county to exempt itself from the banning of the use of dogs to hunt or pursue cougars if voters approved a county measure proposed by initiative petition or referred to the people by the governing body of the county. There has been no action on this bill, nor SB 458, which would require the Commission to adopt a controlled hunt program for hunting cougars with dogs. The bill is in the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee.

See this week's Hunting Headlines at www.oregonhunters.org

ISSUE UPDATES

• Mule Deer LOP Tag Allocations:

OHA has been an active stakeholder in a process to re-structure this program. ODFW staff made recommendations to the Commission on March 17 in Corvallis, based on stakeholder input and mule deer biology. OHA also gave testimony at that time. Our testimony recommended postponing any change to the current LOP program based on the recent severe winter coupled with a continuously declining mule deer population in most eastern Oregon management units.

• Elliott Forest Sale:

In February, the State Land Board (Governor, Treasurer, and Sec. of State) voted 2-1 to move forward with a process to sell the Elliott Forest. It is not known at this time if the Elliott will remain in public or private hands. Regardless, OHA will be lobbying for maximum recreational access to 83,000 acres of this land.

• Ochoco Summit Trail System:

All indications are that the Ochoco National Forest will move forward with the proposed 130 mile Summit Trail system for OHVs. OHA has opposed the trail, at both the state and chapter levels, based on concerns for elk security and elk hunting quality. OHA will continue to use the best available science to encourage stopping or changing this proposal.

• Oregon Wolf Management Plan:

OHA has given input as a stakeholder through several meetings led by ODFW. The next opportunity will be at the Fish & Wildlife Commission meeting April 21 in Klamath Falls. OHA has consistently promoted using hunting, or controlled take, as a management tool during the next five-year planning period. Recently, ODFW has declared northeast Oregon in Phase III status, which gives greater consideration to management actions. Early summer is now the projected timing for plan adoption by the Commission.

• Oregon Cougar Management Plan:

OHA continues to advocate for maintaining current hunting levels, and recommending expansion of special management zones (target areas) to enhance big game populations. OHA will provide additional input on cougar hunting and population monitoring until plan approval, which will likely be this summer.

Winter takes toll on deer; OHA, landowners help

By Jim Akenson, OHA Conservation Director

This past winter has been the most severe in 20 years, and in some places, it has been 40 years since we matched the cold and persistent snow depth of 2016-17. The species hardest hit have been mule deer and antelope. Elk seem to be doing better with their bigger body size and mobility to winter range. Eastside whitetails have survived fairly well due to their closeness to agricultural practices – mooching off livestock feeding – and their general adaptability. As March came in like a lion, the actual mule deer numbers were still coming in from each district, but preliminary indications are that tag numbers for several units will need to be cut back to offset this winter kill. ODFW officials are expecting to do a press release in April to outline what the effect will be on each unit's controlled hunt allocation.

Many in our membership recall the winter of 1992-93, which devastated doe-to-fawn ratios across much of eastern Oregon, and affected hunting opportunities for many seasons following. This situation is comparable – possibly even more severe – in parts of the Owyhee, Beulah, Lookout Mountain, Keating and Pine Creek units in eastern Oregon.

Reports from central Oregon are similar, maybe a bit better, because fawn numbers aren't looking as dismal. However, tag reductions could occur in North Wagontire, North Fort Rock, Paulina, Metolius, and Upper Deschutes. With snow cover not leaving until well into February, spring green-up is also delayed. The good news is that most mule deer herds went into the winter with good body condition, so we'll hope for a good fawn crop as spring progresses into summer.

OHA partnered with a number of ranchers in eastern Oregon this winter, purchasing hay that the landowners made available to starving deer visiting their livestock feeding operations. In most cases landowners supported between 50 and 100 deer per site. Of course, many other landowners opened their hearts to wintering wildlife, as well, and OHA thanks them.

OUTDOOR OUTLOOK

APRIL 1

OHA chapter banquets:
Baker County 541-403-0402
Lake County 541-417-2329
White River Youth Turkey Clinic
503-358-7821;
W. Oregon spring bear opens

APRIL 8

OHA chapter banquet:
Josephine County 541-761-1852

APRIL 8-9

Statewide youth spring turkey hunt

APRIL 15

OHA chapter banquets:
Siuslaw 541-997-4258
Tioga 541-267-2577
Harvest reporting deadline, winter tags;
Spring turkey and most E. Oregon season
spring bear seasons open

APRIL 22

OHA chapter banquets:
Capitol 503-881-1610
Mid-Willamette 541-619-8393
Umpqua 541-430-4722

APRIL 28

OHA Redmond Chapter weekend spring
planting on John Day River 541-383-1099

APRIL 29

OHA chapter banquet:
Klamath 541-891-3734;
OHA Pioneer Chapter Spring Youth Day
503-829-2912

MAY 5

OHA Capitol Chapter weekend powerline
project 503-767-3657

MAY 6 

OHA Tillamook Chapter banquet,
Pronghorn tag auction, 503-842-2475;
OHA Tioga Chapter Youth Day
541-267-2577

MAY 13 

OHA State Convention,
featuring A&H Statewide Elk tag auction
and A&H raffle tag drawings, Chinook
Winds Casino, Lincoln City,
541-772-7313;
OHA Bend Chapter Flymon juniper
clearing 541-647-0424;
OHA Tualatin Valley Chapter Tillamook
Forest Scotch broom removal
503-290-6143