

Bone up for Cascade bulls

The bad news for Cascade elk hunters is success is still low. The good news is tags are available over the counter, and you only need one bull. So if you didn't draw a controlled elk tag, make the most of your 2019 Cascade elk hunt by doing your homework.

The winter of 2017–18 was drier and warmer than normal. Most places were dry at the start of last fall and 150 wildfires burned thousands of acres throughout Oregon. This should create quality habitat moving forward. There were fires on the Umpqua, Rogue River, Winema, and Siskiyou National Forests.

Dan Etheridge, assistant Rogue District biologist, shared preliminary spring counts and stated that the data “didn’t show well.” Rogue Unit bull ratios were “pretty poor at 8 per 100 cows, which was



KENO UNIT/PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

Bow or rifle, you need a solid work ethic or a lot of luck to take a bull in the Cascades.

disappointing for us,” he said. ODFW has difficulty finding bachelor groups at higher elevations in thick timber, so keep that in mind. I’ve already seen dandy Rogue Unit bulls on cams.

Etheridge reported good green-up in burnt areas of the Seven Lakes Basin in Sky Lakes Wilderness. How that will hold up come fall remains to be seen.

Central Oregon experienced a long winter. ODFW published shed hunting guidance out of concern for wintering herds, but according to Deschutes District

Wildlife Biologist Corey Heath, elk fared just fine. Heath’s district includes the Upper Deschutes, Metolius, Paulina, and Northwest Fort Rock areas. Spring flights showed calf ratios are good at 32/100, district wide. Metolius was better at 41/100. Herd numbers are increasing west of Highway 97, although bull ratios are low, district wide, especially on the west side.

According to ODFW’s most recent big game forecast, elk numbers in recent years are lower on most of the public lands in the Evans Creek, Rogue, and portions of Dixon units. Cascade general elk season success has been roughly the same over recent years with Evans Creek success up slightly to 10 percent and the Rogue Unit slightly up at 4 percent. That’s still poor.

Densities are higher in Dixon and Indigo, especially on the west sides near Powers and Melrose where numbers are close to management objectives. Elk hunting should be about the same there.

Most private timberlands are closed until after fire season, so get familiar with access policies. Scout the wilderness. Hunt cover adjacent to openings created by clear-cuts or wildfires. Think edges. Access is the key. —*JASON HALEY*

Roadless ruffs – another approach

There was a time when wherever I went in Oregon’s Coast Range for the Sept. 1 grouse opener, I would be alone, but no more. In fact, I encounter more upland hunters in the Coast Range during the early season than any other time during the five-month hunting season. Just think – all of the logging roads lead to the same place – upland hunters targeting the same grouse cover, the same edges. Even if I do not see another hunter, it is likely that another hunter has been through the area and pushed the birds.

Grouse are birds of edges. These birds inhabit space between thick and thinner cover. Study the maps, scout the forests, and develop a game plan to hunt grouse in locations away from the logging roads. Modern day technology now gives us a high resolution satellite view of our hunting areas. Think Google Earth and the ultra-portable apps like onX Hunt. Do some desktop scouting with Google Earth and then use onX Hunt with boots on the ground at hunting areas.

Coast Range lands are covered by timber company clear-cuts of various ages. Look for adjoining tracts of more recent cuts and mature forest. I also look for groves of hardwoods, or any deciduous tree zones within the coniferous Coast Range forests. I find birds in this thicker, early-season cover.

Early-season birds are always near sources of water. I map out and scout waterways as potential paths to grouse. Creeks are my corridors to the grouse cover I mapped out. Often new cover is discovered along the way. Many times, I find one grouse, then find grouse coverts unknown to other hunters. I continue my path along the creek, eventually breaking off to climb up to higher ground and the transition areas between younger clear-cuts and mature forest mapped out earlier. A GPS device while on these creekside hikes is essential.

Roadless ruffs, and the solitude, sounds and a wild bird in hand resulting from arduous efforts bring more satisfaction than any bird I can drive right up to. —*GLENN ZINKUS*



PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

Your best friend can help you find birds – dead or alive – in western Oregon’s thick backcountry.