

Hunting Violations on the Rise in Central Oregon

by Scott_Staats

This was a very bad year as far as illegal kills during the deer and elk seasons, according to Senior Trooper Amos Madison, an Oregon State Police fish and game officer based in Prineville.

A lot of the poaching started a week before the deer season, he said. Trespassing on private ranches was a common violation. Spotlighting and hunting after hours were other top violations. Five elk were shot during the deer season that Madison was aware of, including one person who shot two elk. Some of the violators were caught and cited while other cases are still being investigated.

OSP Trooper Amos Madison checks the tag of a hunter in the Ochocos during the first elk season this year. Photo by Scott Staats "There are so few of us fish and game officers who cover Central Oregon, that we have to rely on other people to be our eyes and ears out there," Madison explained. Although there are currently six officers in the three counties, other help from around the state is brought in during some of the hunting seasons.

Madison is responsible for the area from Highway 97 to the west and the South Fork of the John Day River to the east, and north and south from the John Day River to Highway 20 or about 6,000 to 7,000 square miles. When he worked out of Ontario, he covered about 10,000 square miles of southeastern Oregon.

Madison helped with two decoy operations in the Ochocos during the deer season. During one operation, seven vehicles drove by the decoy and all seven stopped and one to three of the occupants shot at it illegally. During the second operation, about 80 percent of the vehicles stopped and shot illegally. Madison said the other 20 percent apparently had prior knowledge that the decoy was out.

The decoy program came to Oregon in 1991. The purpose of the program is to detect and apprehend violators attempting to illegally harvest the state's wildlife. The program has proved successful in conserving wildlife by improving compliance, deterring offenses and intercepting the offender before an animal is killed.

Although most of the hunting seasons are now over, OSP will still run decoys in areas such as winter range where large bucks gather. The decoys are considered wildlife by law, so shooting at one is the same as shooting a real animal. According to OSP, the decoy program is simply giving poachers an opportunity and not forcing them into something they wouldn't otherwise do.

“Some people seem misinformed pertaining to what they can and can’t do pertaining to the laws,” said Madison. Rather than contact a game officer or the department, he believes they rely on information they get from their buddies and sometimes it’s wrong information.

Many people don’t seem to understand the meaning of the word “poaching.” According to the American Heritage dictionary, it means “to trespass on another’s property in order to take fish or game” or “to take fish or game illegally.”

“Some people think that poaching is just taking an animal out of season or after dark, but it’s much more than that,” Madison said. Violations include shooting from a road, shooting from a vehicle, using or filling someone else’s tag and wasting of fish or game.

Wasting of game often occurs when hunters get themselves into places where they’re not prepared to take an animal out because of physical limitations or not being able to go back and find the kill site. This is an example where a GPS can help the hunter mark the location of the animal so they can return to it later.

Although many hunters use flagging to mark the path from the animal to their vehicle, there is so much flagging in the forest these days that it can get confusing. Hunters should always remove their flagging on their last trip out of the woods. So should any other folks such as contractors or government workers. Deer and elk have also been known to eat the flagging, which can be detrimental to them.

Some of the worst violations Madison has seen include spotlighting large bucks or bulls where the violators take only the heads. When this happens on private property, he said the landowners often don’t let anyone hunt on their property afterwards and poachers ruin it for the legal and ethical hunters.

Madison believes there are more deer and elk on private land than public land. He said the animals don’t get pressured there twelve months out of the year. They stay on private ground and successive generations are born on those private pieces and don’t know to go back up on the forest.

“We also have a significant increase in ATVs on public land where people drive cross-country and make roads where they shouldn’t be made,” he said. “Besides pushing animals off the forest, ATVs are also causing natural resource destruction.”

Sergeant Dave Pond heads up the fish and wildlife division of OSP in Bend and says he’s seen an increase in some of the big game violations this year. “We’ve had more people hunting at night with rifles during archery season than we normally have,” he noted. “We’ve also had more elk violations

during the deer season. He added that these were probably just the tip of the iceberg “ the cases that OSP actually hears about.

To help catch violators, Pond suggests that more people use the TIP hotline (Turn in Poachers) at 800-452-7888. There are substantial rewards for turning in a poacher. Madison said there’s a reward offered now (that could be several hundred dollars) for a violation that occurred around November 4 or 5 that involved a deer found dead in a farmer’s field just off Johnson Creek Road northeast of Prineville. The head had been removed from the deer. Anyone with information should call Madison at 419.1654.

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