

Turkeys released in the Ochocos

by Scott_Staats

Crook County's population increased last week with the arrival of 35 newcomers to the area. The new arrivals, however, won't be paying any taxes or driving any of our roads.

These winged transplants came from the Roseburg area to join a total of over 1,100 other turkeys that have been released in the Ochocos since the late 1920s.

Sean Glaab, a National Wild Turkey Federation volunteer, assists in the release of 35 turkeys in Crook County - Photos by Scott Staats

Over 1,100 turkeys have been released in the Ochocos since the late 1920s. According to Meg Eden, wildlife biologist with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in Prineville, these 35 turkeys (18 toms and 17 hens) bring the total count to 1,140 birds transplanted in the Grizzly (274), Ochoco (586) and Maury (280) units since 1929.

The bulk of these releases began in the mid-1980s. About 7,000 turkeys have been trapped in Douglas County during the last 20 years and were transplanted at various sites around the state. Eden said that although over a thousand birds have been released in Central Oregon, she does not consider the overall turkey population to be established. She pointed out, however, that some local populations are sustaining themselves.

These latest birds were released just below the snowline in the Ochocos where they will have adequate food, water, shelter and roosting sites. Four National Wild Turkey Federation volunteers assisted in the release last week including Sean and Cindy Glaab, Don Lantz and Elden Bauerle.

Sean Glaab, present Central Oregon Chapter president, believes the transplant program is successful and said he enjoys going out hunting turkeys each spring.

Past president Don Lantz said the turkey population in certain parts of the Ochocos seems to be establishing itself. "They have to do something with those problem birds down in Roseburg that people complain about and the Ochocos seem like a good place for them," Lantz said. So far there haven't been many, if any, complaints with these transplanted birds.

Lantz noted that the release site area has excellent spring and summer habitat for the turkeys. He said that winter habitat is more limited on Forest Service land, and private landowners are helping establish suitable habitat for the birds on their ranchlands.

"We aren't trying to establish a huge population of turkeys throughout the Ochocos," Eden explained. The state doesn't want to create a situation like that in southwestern Oregon where exploding turkey populations are causing problems for landowners. During winter, turkeys retreat to lower elevations,

which contain a lot of private land. All transplanted turkeys in the Ochocos are what the state calls "damage birds".

Where problems begin, according to Eden, is when people attempt to feed turkeys. She said the birds habituate to humans very quickly and can actually get "quite demanding at feeding time." This is what's happening in the Roseburg area. Once the birds are fed, they'll stick around and cause problems such as digging up gardens, scratching vehicles and even chasing dogs and people.

Just before getting back into the trucks, we could hear some of the turkeys calling from the cover of the nearby stream and from the juniper and sagebrush covered hillsides.

Scott Staats is a fulltime outdoor writer who has lived in Central Oregon the last ten years. His articles have appeared in local, regional and national publications.

Adventure of a Lifetime - Hells Canyon Trip: Those seeking adventure may want to consider a raft trip through Hells Canyon this June 16-19. Winding Waters River Expeditions is outfitting a 4-day archaeology/geology trip and is looking to fill 12 seats. Join USFS archeologist Skip Miller, geologist Dr. Tracy Vallier and geologist/photographer Ellen Morris Bishop for an unforgettable float trip through the deepest, most rugged parts of Hells Canyon. From Hells Canyon Dam to Pittsburg Landing, the group will learn about the canyon's oldest rocks, the greatest Ice Age Flood that scoured through the canyon 12,000 years ago, as well as getting a look at many of the more than 2,000 archaeological sites. Rafters will also run Hells Canyon's biggest whitewater. The trip includes breakfast on the 16th through lunch on the 19th. Price is \$1,145, with \$575 deposit required. For more information, contact Winding Waters River Expeditions in Joseph at 877-426-7238 or go to www.windingwatersrafting.com.

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