

Oregon Wild Birds to be Tested for Bird Flu Virus

by Bend Weekly News Sources

State and federal wildlife biologists will be testing wild birds in Oregon this summer and fall as part of a nationwide effort aimed at the early detection of HPAI H5N1 "bird flu" virus in North America.

Sampling will focus on several species of migratory shorebirds and waterfowl that are most likely to have interacted with birds from Asia, where the disease has been established, while in the Arctic this summer. Oregon and other states cooperating in the national effort will test a statistically significant number of live birds, hunter-harvested birds, and fecal matter.

Wildlife veterinarians and biologists will also be closely monitoring bird die-offs. Die-offs are very common from spring to fall each year as birds stage on wintering and breeding grounds or migrate through Oregon. Unusual or large wild bird die-offs will be tested for HPAI H5N1.

Wildlife biologists and veterinary staff from ODFW, U.S. Department of Agriculture-Wildlife Services, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Geological Survey are managing the sampling effort. The Pacific Flyway Council, a multi-agency group composed of state and federal wildlife regulators who coordinate game bird management along the Pacific Flyway migratory bird route in the western United States, helped create the plan.

"Oregon is part of an unprecedented nationwide, cooperative effort geared for the early detection of this disease in North America," said Brad Bales, Migratory Bird Program Coordinator for ODFW. "The effort draws on the combined expertise of wildlife biologists who come from a variety of organizations and have studied migratory birds for decades."

Eleven other states along the Pacific Flyway, including Alaska, Washington and California, are sampling wild birds as part of the national early detection effort. As the first stop in North America for birds migrating from Asia, Alaska has been testing wild birds since last year. None have tested positive for HPAI H5N1.

Domestic poultry in Oregon will continue to be monitored and tested for HPAI H5N1 as part of the industry's ongoing disease surveillance efforts. For more information, visit the Oregon Department of Agriculture web site at <http://oregon.gov/ODA/>.

Oregon's wild bird sampling plan

Oregon's early detection plan calls for obtaining about 4,000 samples from migratory shorebirds and waterfowl including pintails, mallards, green-winged teals, geese and tundra swan. (For the full plan, visit <http://www.dfw.state.or.us/avian-flu/>.)

Live bird sampling will begin on Sauvie Island in late June and continue through September in six other Wildlife Management Areas operated by ODFW. Hunter-harvested birds will be sampled at various check stations throughout the state during the hunting season from September through December. Finally, fecal samples will be taken from June through January at wetlands or other areas, including urban parks and golf courses where waterfowl often gather.

Oregon's sampling effort is funded through a \$1.95 million grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for early detection efforts in the Pacific Flyway and Pacific Islands, of which ODFW will receive \$250,000. USDA will provide ODFW an additional \$140,000 as part of its \$1.06 million grant to states along the Pacific Flyway.

About avian influenza

Avian influenza, commonly called "bird flu," naturally resides in wild and domestic bird populations. Most avian influenzas cause little or no disease in birds.

The virus causing worldwide concern, first identified in Asia in 1996, is "Highly Pathogenic" H5N1. Pathogenicity refers to the ability of the virus to produce disease or disease symptoms. Highly pathogenic viruses often cause fatalities in domestic poultry. While most avian influenzas are low pathogenicity, high path H5N1 has been detected in birds in Asia, Africa and Europe. In rare cases where humans were in direct contact with infected birds, some people became sick and/or died from the disease.

HPAI H5N1 is currently a disease of birds but disease experts are concerned that it might mutate into one easily transmitted from human-to-human and be the source of the next pandemic influenza. State and federal public health departments and the World Health Organization are also closely monitoring the disease for this

reason. For more information on these efforts, visit www.pandemicflu.gov.

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