

THE GORGE SPORTSMAN

HUNTING & FISHING IN THE GORGE



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THE GORGE SPORTSMAN

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THE GORGE SPORTSMAN

Monsters *of the deep*

There are two kinds of sturgeon found in Oregon: The green sturgeon on the Oregon coast and the white sturgeon in the Columbia River. Although the green sturgeon grows up to seven feet long, there are few in Oregon waters and attract few anglers due to their poor taste.

The white sturgeon, however, is a popular fish both for sport and for consumption, so much so that the catch is carefully regulated.

Sturgeon appeared in the fossil record 200-million years ago and have survived to today little changed. Both green and the larger white sturgeon are found in Oregon waters. Some of these fish can live to be 100-years-old, but they spawn only once every 2- to 8-years.

Features

There's no mistaking a sturgeon.

This primitive looking fish has large bony plates running down its back, a long flat snout and a deeply-forked tail. It's also covered in rough, scale-less skin, similar to a shark.

The white sturgeon is the largest freshwater fish species found in North America. Though they can reach lengths of 20 feet, most white sturgeon rarely get over 10-feet long, which seems plenty long to us.

Some populations migrate between the ocean and freshwater, but not necessarily with the same consistency as salmon or steelhead.

These prehistoric fish may not mature until they are 25-years-old.

Habitat

White sturgeon are primarily found in large freshwater streams and estuaries along the Pacific coast, but will occasionally undertake extensive ocean travels inside the 50-fathom line. The Columbia River is one the most popular sturgeon fisheries.

Technique

Sturgeon are bottom feeders and have four barbels near their snouts. They use these to feel and smell food, so putting some stinky bait on the bottom is the way to go when you're sturgeon fishing.

The largest sturgeon populations are in the Columbia and Willamette rivers, but anglers can find them in bays and estuaries along the coast as well.

Anglers fish for sturgeon both



A young girl gets help after hooking a sturgeon in the Columbia River, offshore of Union Street in The Dalles. Much of the sturgeon fishing on the river is catch-and-release, due to limited retention seasons. Regulations vary between the Bonneville pool in the west and The Dalles pool to the east, visit the ODFW website for details. Gary Elkinton photo

At left, Visitors can see sturgeon face-to-face at a sturgeon viewing pond and interpretive area at the Bonneville Dam fish hatchery near Cascade Locks. Chronicle photo/file

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THE GORGE SPORTSMAN



The art of the 'graceful lines'

MARK GIBSON

The Dalles Chronicle

Fly fishermen are seen by many as elite, mystical anglers who pursue sly, elusive fish with no more than a tuft of feathers on a hook.

Whether or not they deserve the reputation, they do nothing to discourage it. When a fly fisherman passes a "common angler," he smiles smugly at the can of worms propped precariously beside the 35-pound tackle box, slides a thumb in the pocket of his custom-made fishing vest and angles his fly pole so the sun glints nicely off his new chrome-plated reel.

Arriving at the next pool, his line gracefully arches over the river as he drops his fly gently on the surface. The "common angler" is then distracted by a tugging on his line, and by the time he is finished stringing his latest fish the fly fisherman has vanished beyond the bend.

As the sun goes down, they will likely meet again, one loading his 35-pound tackle box, worms and a stringer of fish into his car, the other empty-handed, mumbling about the ethics of "catch and release" and thumbing a set of barbless flies stuck prominently in the crown of his hat.

Years ago I spent a summer learning to fly fish, and would like to cast a little on what really happens after the fly fisherman has moved out

of sight around the next bend.

More often than not, the "graceful arching line" is suddenly halted behind the angler just as he makes his cast, pulling him backwards on the wet rocks and sitting him down in the cold water. I personally spent a great deal more time disengaging my line from "stupid trees" than I have actually fishing.

Sometimes, however, the effect is not so drastic, and the line arches gracefully over the water, the delicate fly landing in the company of a leaf, twig or clump of moss. Then all the fly fisherman has to do is retrieve the unsightly thing, unwrap the line from around his legs, untangle the backlash in his reel, work the knots out of his leader, dig the fly out of the leaf or twig or clump of moss and tie it back on.

With practice I did learn to place the fly in the general neighborhood of the fish, and at least occasionally managed to drift it downstream with as much style and grace as a dead insect can be expected to have. But I rarely caught a fish.

This is where the "catch and release" ethic and barbless flies come in. Before I figured it out, I had to convince my fellow anglers that there were no fish in the river, there was an alarming absence of aquatic insects this year and I had forgotten my second fly box at home and was unable to "match the hatch." Pretty lame excuses, and I quickly learned the conversational value of catch and release.

If fly fishermen pursuing the elusive trout are an elite group, then those who fish for steelhead on a fly are the elite of the elite.

I have myself hooked a steelhead.

I was, at the time, living on the Oregon coast and fishing for trout on one the many rivers flowing into Tillamook Bay. Casting fruitlessly across the only stretch of water where the trees were far enough behind me to allow a backcast, I was telling myself what good practice I was getting when I noticed my wife jumping up and down and pointing into the water.

I ran over and saw a steelhead working its way up the shallow stream. I had no steelhead flies, but figured what the heck and cast.

It was a beautiful cast, the dry fly landing gently and drifting right over the steelhead's nose. Which it completely ignored. The fly then hung up on its dorsal fin, which was sticking out of the water. As I tried to pull it free, the fish decided enough was enough and headed up the river. My line jerked free and sailed back into my face. I think I heard it laughing as I untangled everything.

So the next time you see a fly fisherman, give him my regards, don't follow him around the bend, and hide your stringer when you meet him again back at the car: He needs all the encouragement he can get!

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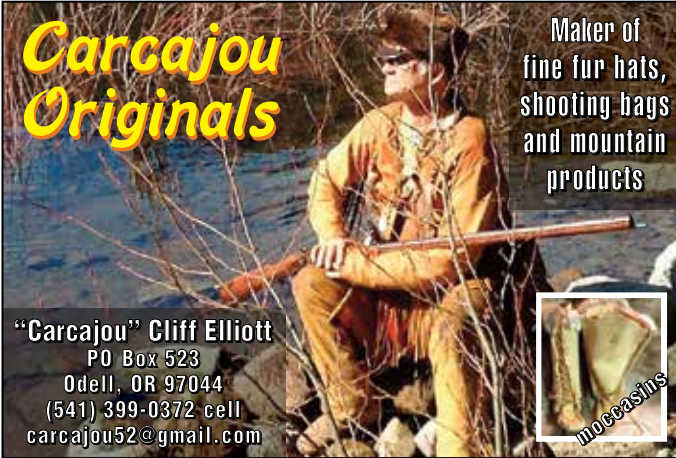
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THE GORGE SPORTSMAN

Angling the **Mid-Columbia**

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Sure, the Columbia River Gorge is the windsurfing capitol of the world, but when the wind stops there's excellent water fun to be had fishing!

Below is a rundown of some of the major fisheries, including tips on how and where to go, available to Mid-Columbia anglers.

Crappie Bluegill Catfish

The many lowland lakes located near the Columbia, most created by roadways separating them from the big river, offer a wide array of warm water fish species including crappie, bluegill and catfish. The main river too offers plenty of fishing opportunity for warm water fish types. These fish can be caught using a variety of lures and bait. Worms



still-fished on or near the bottom will attract catfish. For crappie and bluegill try a short section of worm or PowerBait nibble or grub suspended under a bobber. In addition, these feisty fish will hit spinners, like a small Rooster Tail, cast and slow retrieved through their hideouts.

Bass

A large population of smallmouth and largemouth bass inhabit the Columbia along with many of the lowland lakes connected to or adjacent to the big river. These fish can be aggressive biters and will respond to nearly any combination of spinner, plug and or bait. In addition, Oregon's John Day River is the regional favorite for smallmouth bass, especially in the back-water section located upstream from where the John Day River enters the Columbia just east from the dam having the same name.

Walleye

The Columbia River is a destination for anglers seeking walleye and offers some of the best action in the region for these fine-eating fish. While walleye can be caught from shore, anglers having a boat report the most consistent success. These big-eyed fish will respond to a wide array of lures and bait, including worms, jigs, and plugs. The most popular method is to troll a spinner harness near the bottom in combination with a night crawler rigged 4 to 5 feet behind a 2 ounce bottom walker weight set up.

When targeting walleye, your best bet will be to troll downstream, parallel to the bank, in 15 to 30 feet of water. It's important to keep your bottom walker near bottom and occasionally touching bottom as you troll along.

Above left, Buzz Ramsey, Klickitat Summer Steelhead, 2013.

Above right, Jarrod Higgenbottom, Columbia River Walleye, 2017.



Some of the popular worm harness rigs include the Hammer Time and Rufus Special. These pre-snelled rigs (and other similar products) feature a spinner blade and/or Spin N Glo body, beads and two single hooks snelled in tandem. The idea of the two hook rig is to make rigging your worm easy and facilitate the attachment of your worm so it will hang straight back behind your outfit. This is important as walleye respond best when your worm is straight.

Trout

This time of year the best trout action can be had on rivers emptying into the Columbia like the Deschutes, where trout will respond to nearly any combination of spinner or fly. And while many of the lowland lakes like Horsethief, Rowland and Taylor Lake offered trout action in the spring, high water temperatures have likely killed the trout bite in those locations by now.

If you crave summer trout action, you will likely find the best opportunity by visiting high mountain lakes located at or above 3,000 feet of elevation where the water temperatures have remained cool. A few I've fished include Goose Lake (located west of Trout Lake on the south slope of mount Adams) or Lost Lake located west of highway 35, just follow Lost Lake Road from Dee, Oregon.

If you're a bank-bound angler interested in a limit of Trout, try casting and still fishing Power Bait off the bottom. Besides rod, reel and line, you will need a jar of moldable PowerBait, a few one quarter-ounce oval-egg sinkers, size 12 swivels, four or six-pound test leader material, size 12 and 14 Corky (to help float your bait above bottom so trout can quickly find it), and size 12/14 treble hooks.

To rig, thread your main line through one of your oval-egg sinkers (which should remain free sliding on your line) and tie to a barrel-swivel. Then attach a few feet of leader, Corky and a corresponding size treble hook. The idea of the free-sliding sinker is to allow fish to swim off with your bait and swallow it before you set the hook. Lastly, form a ball of PowerBait around your hook and cast the works out into the lake. The idea is to make your PowerBait ball large enough (about the size of a dime) so when combined with your Corky single-egg-imitation it will float above the lake bottom, so cruising trout can quickly find it.

If you have a boat, you should also try slow trolling a small size FlatFish or Mag Lip plug, this can be especially effective early or late in the day. You can make your trout plug even more effective by tipping one prong of the treble hook with a small section from a PowerBait worm, grub or maggot.

Summer Steelhead

Biologists think as many as 200,000 summer-run steelhead will ascend the Columbia River before fall. Some of the native fish are in low abundance, but surplus hatchery fish await you and can be identified from the native spawners by their missing adipose fin. You should realize the adipose fin is the small back fin located between the dorsal and tail fin.

In August, when the Columbia's water temperature warms past the comfort level for steelheads, finding cool water will be a major priority for these fish. Many (sometimes nearly all) of the upriver-bound fish can be found holding where the colder tributaries enter the big river, many will stay in or at the mouths of tributary streams until the big river cools in late September, at which time they will resume their upstream journey.

You can expect to find hungry steelheads holding in or off the mouths of Herman Creek, Wind, Drano Lake, White Salmon, Klickitat, Deschutes and John Day rivers. Trolling plugs (like Mag Lip) is "the technique" for boaters in or near these tributary mouths.

The Columbia River hosts fall chinook and coho too, but that's another story.



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CATFISH *Derby*

EMILY FITZGERALD
The Dalles Chronicle

Very few women signed up to compete in Gorge Outfitters Supply's annual Catfish Derby in Rufus, Ore. over Memorial Day weekend; and most of the women who did entered alongside their significant other.

Such was the case with Chantelle Hickman, a resident of The Dalles who reeled in a 31-inch monstrosity and became the first woman ever to win first place in the Catfish Derby for Longest Fish.

With her win came a 55-inch curved Smart TV, a pocketknife, a Daniel Boone Green Mountain Grill and a bag of pellets.

The winning fish — caught in the very last hours of the competition — measured 31-inches and weighed 13 pounds: Just an ounce lighter than the first-place winner for Biggest Fish, which came in at 13 pounds, 1 ounce and 28 inches.

"This being my first derby, I thought it was crazy," she said, "I'm kind of thrilled about this because I've never done this before."

Hickman and her boyfriend, Mathew Lindsey, had very little luck at the start of the derby and kept reeling in "yellow-bellies," a type of bullhead catfish that rarely exceeds two pounds, when they really wanted the much larger channel catfish, or "channel cats."

Though the pair managed to catch one channel cat by the end of the day, they decided to switch up their technique before heading out on Sunday. The change paid off, and the two started reeling in larger fish. They spent the day moving around the river in search of a good spot and, just a few hours before the cutoff time, she caught it.

And immediately, it took off. "It was exciting and thrilling," she said, "You have to kind of tire them out and play with them a bit."

Unable to pull the enormous fish out of the water, the two had to resort to hauling it into the boat with a net

before racing back to Gorge Outfitters. "I still couldn't believe it," she said.

Hickman, who works as a nurse at a long-term care facility, first learned to fish from Lindsey, an avid hunter and angler who grew up hunting and fishing with his father and grandfather.

"I really couldn't have done it without my boyfriend," she said, "he was coaching me the whole time."

The Catfish Derby has been an annual event since 2014 and is sponsored by Gorge Outfitters and Supply, a store in Rufus, Ore. that serves as the home base for the weekend-long competition. Nearly 70 contestants registered with Saturday morning before heading out on the John Day River to fish for the day, bringing their catches back in to be weighed and measured before the 7 p.m. daily cutoff time. At the end of the day Sunday, awards are given out to the first, second and third place winners in each category.

Contestants also had the chance to challenge the state records for biggest channel and bullhead catfish, the main two species of catfish that inhabit the John Day. The record for largest channel catfish, or "channel cat," is 36-pounds 8-ounces, set by Boone Haddock in 1980; and the record for largest bullhead is 3-pounds 7-ounces, set by Bob Judkins in 2001.

Though no state records were broken at this year's derby, Hickman overheard competitors comparing the sizes of the fish they'd caught and "all were huge," she said.

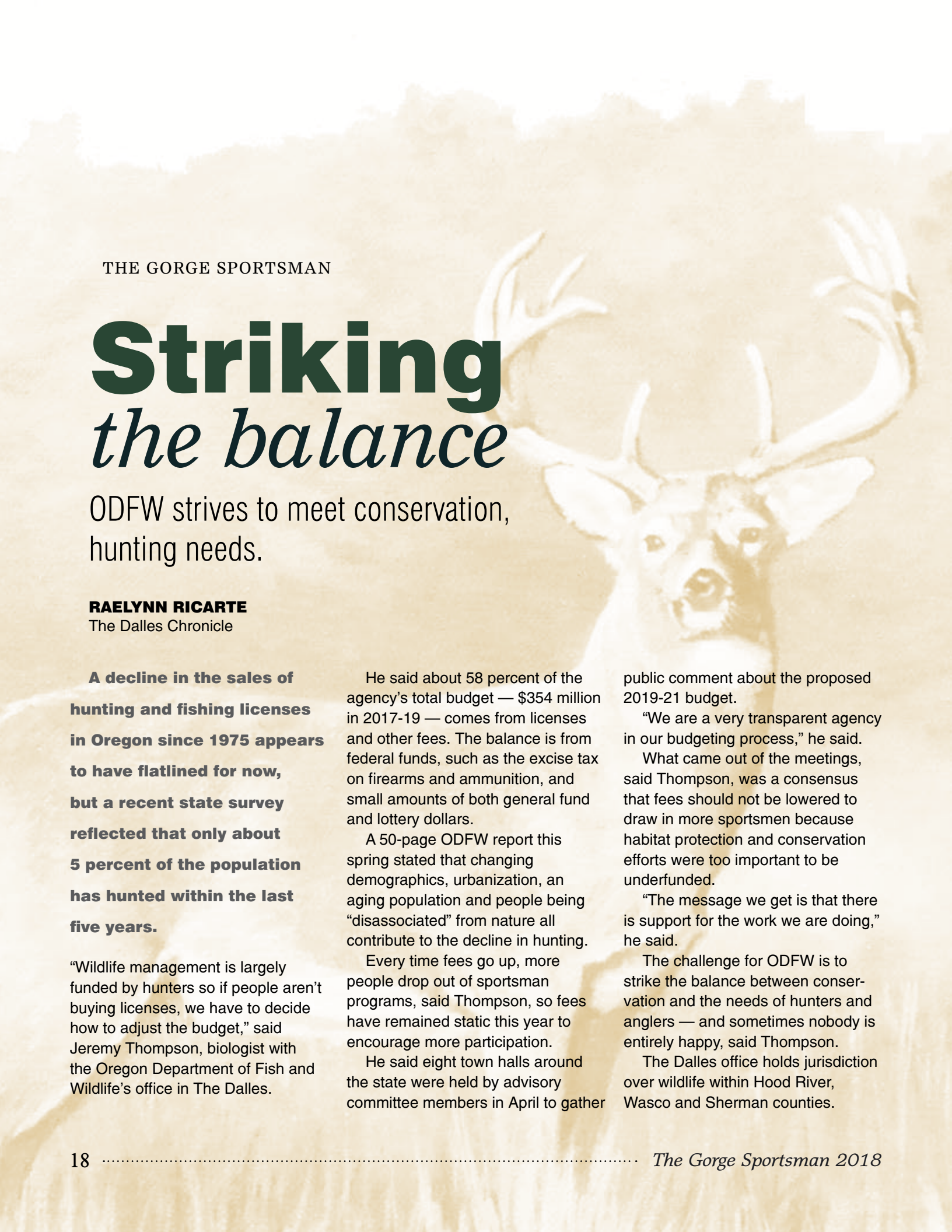
As for the one she reeled in, "I thought for sure it was a big fish, but I didn't think it was a winning fish," she said.

She's thrilled that it was.

Moving forward, Hickman suggested that those in charge of the derby start holding separate male and female events to encourage more female participation, but doesn't know whether or not they will. In the meantime, she plans to keep on fishing. "I love fishing, it's a great hobby, it's fun to do," she said.



Chantelle Hickman



THE GORGE SPORTSMAN

Striking *the balance*

ODFW strives to meet conservation,
hunting needs.

RAELYNN RICARTE
The Dalles Chronicle

A decline in the sales of hunting and fishing licenses in Oregon since 1975 appears to have flatlined for now, but a recent state survey reflected that only about 5 percent of the population has hunted within the last five years.

“Wildlife management is largely funded by hunters so if people aren’t buying licenses, we have to decide how to adjust the budget,” said Jeremy Thompson, biologist with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s office in The Dalles.

He said about 58 percent of the agency’s total budget — \$354 million in 2017-19 — comes from licenses and other fees. The balance is from federal funds, such as the excise tax on firearms and ammunition, and small amounts of both general fund and lottery dollars.

A 50-page ODFW report this spring stated that changing demographics, urbanization, an aging population and people being “disassociated” from nature all contribute to the decline in hunting.

Every time fees go up, more people drop out of sportsman programs, said Thompson, so fees have remained static this year to encourage more participation.

He said eight town halls around the state were held by advisory committee members in April to gather

public comment about the proposed 2019-21 budget.

“We are a very transparent agency in our budgeting process,” he said.

What came out of the meetings, said Thompson, was a consensus that fees should not be lowered to draw in more sportsmen because habitat protection and conservation efforts were too important to be underfunded.

“The message we get is that there is support for the work we are doing,” he said.

The challenge for ODFW is to strike the balance between conservation and the needs of hunters and anglers — and sometimes nobody is entirely happy, said Thompson.

The Dalles office holds jurisdiction over wildlife within Hood River, Wasco and Sherman counties.



Jeremy Thompson is pictured with his Pronghorn Antelope take in Central Oregon.

For the third year, the White River Wildlife Area north of Tygh Valley will be closed to access from December 1 to March 31 to protect wintering deer and elk. ODFW is seeking to help mule deer and black-tail deer populations continue recovering from the harsh winter of 2016-17 and an outbreak of diseases that followed six years of drought.

In 2015, ODFW estimated there were 540,000 deer in the state, 300,000 to 320,000 blacktails and 225,000 to 235,000 mule deer.

Deer populations in many areas dropped after the winter of 2016 and, locally, deer also struggled through the extremely dry summer of 2015 and 2016.

Hunting tags are awarded by “preference points” so every year that a hunter applies but does not get a license earns him or her a point.

A person can usually get a deer tag at least every other year, said Thompson.

A lottery system is in play for Big Horn sheep tags and the hunter can only get one in a lifetime. The odds of winning are one in 100. Fewer than 100 tags for this species are awarded each year.

There are an estimated 3,500 Big Horn sheep statewide.

“Knowing that these hunts are once in a lifetime, we try to make it a quality experience for whoever draws a tag,” said Thompson.

Pronghorn antelope that live near Maupin and west of Biggs usually take an average of nine preference points before a hunt can take place. There are about 25,000 of this species native to the Columbia Plateau and the High Desert shrublands of eastern Oregon.

ODFW offers about 2,500 tags each year for Pronghorn spread across rifle, archery and muzzleloader hunts, plus some youth-only hunts.

Because elk are harder than deer, Thompson said their population has not been as adversely affected by bad winters and diseases, so about 60,000 tags are issued each year.

Oregon has the fifth largest state elk population in the U.S., with about 65,000 Rocky Mountain elk (the species that resides in Eastern Oregon) and 60,000 Roosevelt elk the Oregon coast.



Jeremy Thompson, a biologist with ODFW and his son, Jarrett, show off their catch during a trip to the Oregon Coast.

Thompson said ODFW discourages the feeding of elk and deer during hard winters since it can habituate them to humans, disrupt migration patterns and alter natural foraging behaviors. ODFW does operate a feeding program at a few wildlife areas throughout the state, such as White River, to keep game animals from wandering onto area farmland and destroying crops, fences and hay barns.

He and other ODFW officials teach people who live on large swaths of land what types of vegetation to plant that will provide nutrition for deer and elk and deter them from damaging wheat and other commercially-grown plants.

"Elk seek out areas of maximum forage potential and minimal disturbance (by humans). Everybody likes a nice quiet neighborhood," said Thompson.

He said the ever-increasing pressure from outdoor recreation in the state can make managing for elk populations on public lands a greater challenge, adding to the trend of elk spending more time on private property.

Oregon is home to about 25,000 to 30,000 black bears, North America's most common bear species. The color of these bears is usually black, but they can also be brown, cinnamon or blond.

The population of black bears is high enough in the region that Thompson said it is not unusual to see them in and around communities in Hood River and Wasco counties. They can be drawn to neighborhoods when food is accessible in garbage cans or pet food has been left outdoors. Ripe fruit left on the ground or grease in a barbecue grill is also an attractant, as are low-hanging bird feeders.

Thompson said bears are generalists, eating whatever food is available. At times that can include pets and live-



stock, although he said predation complaints in the local area are rare.

"This is the time of year when they are on the move and we get a lot of sightings," he said. "People should stay indoors when they see a bear and let us know."

He said a bear that begins hanging around a neighborhood should never be fed. If the animal becomes too acclimated to humans, it will be euthanized as a potential threat.

ODFW advises people to secure garbage cans in a garage, shed or behind a fence. Pet food should be kept indoors, and bird feeders hung at least 10 feet off the ground and 6 to 10 feet from the trunk of a tree.

Landowners should remove fruit that has fallen from trees and add lime to compost piles to reduce odors. Do not compost meat, bones, fruit, dairy products or grease.

There are ample opportunities locally for public land hunting, said Thompson, with a good mix of state, federal and county lands that are accessible.

He reminds anyone recreating outdoors that there are many private properties scattered throughout the region and access to these lands is by permission only.

Thompson said in its quest to become more user-friendly, ODFW is engaged in a multi-year process to remove redundancies in regulations and make them easier to understand.

The agency launched MyODFW.com to support hunting, fishing, crabbing, clamming and wildlife viewing activities. The website is easy to navigate, mobile friendly and includes a link to a GeoPDF hunting access map.

For more information about ODFW programs, or to get questions addressed, call Thompson at 541-296-3023 or email, [jeremy.l.thompson @state.or.us](mailto:jeremy.l.thompson@state.or.us)



Above, ODFW's annual youth pheasant hunt draws a crowd at the White River Wildlife Area in Wamic each September.

Facing page at right, A Big Horn sheep capture is shown at a base camp. ODFW has been working to restore the sheep population throughout the state for the past 50 years and drawing a tag to hunt the species is a once in a lifetime experience.

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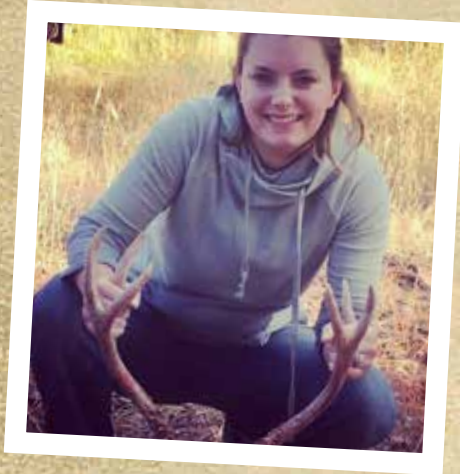
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Photos courtesy of Mark Russell



Mark and Brandon Russell

THE GORGE SPORTSMAN

Hunting with *Mark Russell* continuing the father-child bond

RJ CHAVEZ

Hood River News

“I had been proud of my hunting successes over the years, but nothing equals the pride of being with your son when he gets his first deer,” said Mark Russell.

Russell’s love for hunting started when he was too young to hunt.

“I can remember hunting with my dad and sitting in a duck blind, I was too young to hunt, but was assured I was the best duck and goose spotter around,” said Russell.

But, that wasn’t good enough for Russell, he didn’t want to be the best bird spotter, his aim was to be the best bird hunter.

Each year his dad would go on an annual hunting trip to Summer Lake in Southern Oregon, but Russell was always too young. “As soon as I was old enough to get my hunting license we went on our first hunting trip together and I felt I was finally part of the “elite” hunting group,” Russell laughed. Hunting became a very important part of his life.

His father was career Coast Guard which required the family to move frequently, from Neah Bay, WA to Oceanside, California and places in between.

While this was sometimes hard, Russell’s love and skill for hunting and fishing grew.

Learning how to hunt and fish in different environments and conditions. During all the moves, new faces and places, hunting with his father was the one constant. Their bond grew.

"It was nice growing up hunting with my Dad," said Russell "We were best friends and hunting made us even closer."

As Russell grew older, he moved to Spokane and joined the Air Force. Several years later, after being discharged he went to work for Les Schwab Tire Center.

While in Spokane he met and married his wife Shawna, and had two children, Brandon and Olivia.

Russell's work with Les Schwab moved his family around the Pacific Northwest and in 2008 they made their final move to Hood River.

With his love of hunting and fishing, he was thrilled to move to Hood River to manage the local Les Schwab.

Sadly, in 2004, Russell suffered the loss of his father, his best friend. "After my dad died it became even more important to continue the hunting tradition with my own son, Brandon," Russell shared.

His son was also introduced to hunting at the young age of five when he accompanied him to the Box Spring Hunting Lodge, an old, rustic hunting cabin near Bickleton, Washington.

With an outhouse, no running water and a generator for power, it was primitive to say the least.

"To us, it rivaled the fanciest hunting lodge in the world," he chuckled "Just like me at that age, Brandon was too young for a license, so he became the best critter spotter and fire tender around."

It was there, just a few years later, that his son shot his first, four-point buck.

"For my son and I, it's been one of our greatest gifts in life," he stated. "I've taken that hunting trip in my mind a hundred times over and remember all the amazing trips with my own dad."

"We still tell stories of past hunts and fishing trips at family gatherings," he said. "With all the great hunting and fishing opportunities here in the Columbia River Gorge, lots of memories are still waiting to be made. Hood River is truly a sportsman's paradise."



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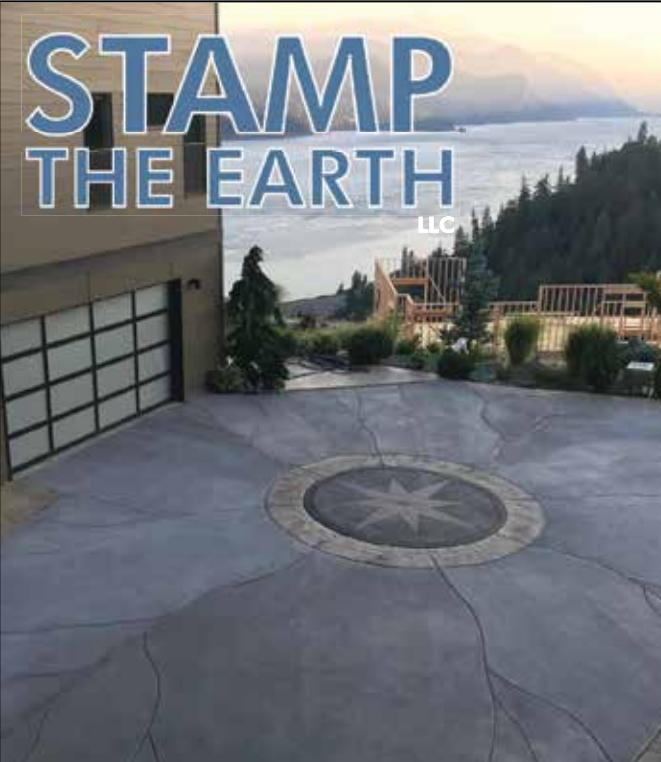
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Hunt of a *Lifetime*

RAELYNN RICARTE
The Dalles Chronicle

Tom Troutman of Maupin tried for 40 years to get a Big Horn Sheep hunting tag — and finally “won the lottery” last year.

“I couldn’t believe it, I had to look at the (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife) website three times to be sure it was right,” he said.

His family has roots in the area that extend back 100 years, so Troutman had no trouble getting wheat growers near Max Canyon of the lower Deschutes River to allow him access over their properties.

“That’s the good thing about being a local,” he said.

Troutman was one of about 100 hunters in Oregon granted the once in a lifetime permit to take one of the 3,500 sheep that now populate the state.

Getting selected for a hunt is made more difficult by the fact that no preference points are awarded.

In deer and elk hunts, points are accrued each time a hunter enters a drawing and gives him or her a better chance of being awarded a tag.

The tags are so valued among hunters that one sold for \$155,000 at an auction in 2014 that funds the sheep restoration program.

The animals were reintroduced from Williams Lake in British Columbia, Canada, to Oregon after being hunted to extinction. Wild herds are now established enough to allow limited hunting. Some of the animals born in Oregon are shipped to North Dakota, Wyoming, Washington, Idaho and Nevada to build up their populations.

Tom was joined on the 2017 hunt by his step-son, Nick Laflin, and family friend, Chad McDonald, both of whom live in Tygh Valley.

Because he would never get another opportunity, Troutman wanted to bag the perfect ram. As the owner of Deschutes U-Boats, a business in Maupin he has owned since 1981, Troutman was in a good position to float the river for weeks before the hunt to find out where sheep were hanging out.

“Basically, I was out every day in October,” he said.

He spotted a big ram that stood out because its wool was black, but one of its horns was broken, so he continued the search.

Finally, he decided on an area to spend the week he would be allowed to hunt and began making plans to set up camp. He also owns the Rafter’s Mini Mart next to the boat shop so had supplies on hand.

Although he could have harvested a ram the first day of the hunt last November, Tom wanted to make the most of the opportunity. No matter how many good-sized rams Laflin and McDonald pointed out, Tom took a pass.

“We had to let him think about it, you could see him sitting back shaking his head,” said Laflin.

The men observed how fast the sheep moved over the rocky landscape and knew they would have to be stealthy to get close enough for a clean shot.

Troutman selected a place known as “Snake in the Box” in Macks Canyon. That location had a steep grade and plenty of loose rock. The sheep had carved out resting places on the slope, which the men found challenging to descend.

Sherman County is also home to many rattlesnakes, another potential danger in the rugged terrain.

As if they didn’t have enough to worry about, the wind was howling, and Tom said keeping his footing was difficult when strong gusts battered him.

Laflin found it amusing that Troutman was closing in on the hunt of a lifetime and worried about getting home to fix his wife’s car.

When the team was 300 yards down into the canyon, Troutman fixed his eyes on a ram and told Laflin and McDonald that was the one; he liked its color and symmetry. It was the second biggest ram they had seen.

The targeted sheep was about 200 yards below them, so setting up the shot was difficult, said Troutman.

“It was really awkward to get into the right position,” he said.

His first bullet scattered the sheep but failed to find its mark. The second time, he hit the ram and it fell over backwards.

Laflin said its horns hung up in the rocks, which prevented the animal from plummeting farther down the slope.


“It was about 400 yards to the bottom of the rock slide,” he said.



Tom Troutman of Maupin, an avid hunter, is shown with the cape and head of the Big Horn ram he bagged last November in Macks Canyon. He had to build a platform in the rock slide area in order to stabilize work space to gut the animal.

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The ram shot by Troutman, who scored a once in a lifetime opportunity to hunt Big Horn, was turned over to a taxidermist, who is finishing up a shoulder mount.

His first bullet scattered the sheep but failed to find its mark. The second time, he hit the ram and it fell over backwards.

Lafin said its horns hung up in the rocks, which prevented the animal from plummeting farther down the slope.

"It was about 400 yards to the bottom of the rock slide," he said.

While Troutman and McDonald gutted the ram, Lafin carried all their guns on a two-miles hike back to the truck.

He returned with pack-frames to find that Troutman and McDonald had built a platform in the rocks to stabilize their work space.

"The wind was just howling by then," said Nick.

The trio divided the load and made their way back uphill. Lafin and McDonald said it took Troutman much longer to arrive back at the truck, probably due to his "advanced age."

All in all, they were out of the canyon within 90 minutes. Troutman had to report in to ODFW within hours of the kills and a special pin was put into the horns to denote that the hunt was legal.

"Tom was stoked, it was a beautiful, beautiful ram. He was very happy with it," said Lafin, who has now decided he wants to start applying for a Big Horn hunt.

The horns and cape of the sheep was turned over by Troutman to Michael Nelson, a taxidermist from Prineville, who is finishing up a shoulder mount of the Big Horn.

"This is the first one he's done, so he is taking his time to get it just right," said Troutman.

The sheep yielded 50 to 60 pounds of meat that Lafin said had an "amazing flavor but was tough." For that reason, most of it is being made into summer sausage.

Troutman is unsure if his wife, Donna, will allow him to hang it in their home, so the trophy might end up on display at his shop or the fire station, where he already has moose, a couple of antelope and a caribou mount hanging.

"I have a few heads hanging around," he said.

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