



OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Operation of Wildlife Check Stations

April 5, 2021

Wildlife check stations are operated in many states to survey for wildlife harvest data, obtain biological samples for aging and disease surveillance, and to deter poaching activities. Wildlife check stations also allow wildlife managers the opportunity to conduct valuable public outreach and interact with department customers in a positive setting. It is currently voluntary for hunters to stop at temporary wildlife check stations operating in Oregon.

Wildlife check stations are beneficial for disease surveillance and critical as a harvest information gathering tool. Sampling wildlife carcasses and monitoring for emerging diseases are the foundation for preventative measures for detecting diseases early in the course of population exposure and provide the best opportunity to effectively respond. Species, sex and harvest location data are recorded for each biological sample taken in the field. Samples that test positive for a disease provide department biologists an early warning of a potential disease outbreak, and trigger an increase in testing in that area, that may potentially enhance our ability to manage exposure or prevalence of the disease.

Personal conversations with hunters in the field can help raise awareness of disease issues and provide a critical source of real-time hunting and harvest information for local wildlife units or large regions of the state. However, locating and contacting individual hunters in camps or in the field can be inefficient and limit opportunity to meet with a significant number of hunters. Wildlife check stations, on the other hand, allow for many one-on-one interactions between staff and the public at a single check station site, affording more opportunity to answer questions, address concerns, and share information and education materials.

Wildlife check stations can also work as a deterrent to poaching and other illegal activities, however, check stations are not considered a primary tool for catching intentional poaching activities. Wildlife check stations provide a more effective and efficient opportunity to monitor compliance of lawful harvest and transportation of wildlife. Surveillance and enforcement of the wildlife laws related to the unlawful importation of prohibited parts of deer, elk or moose harvested from other states is more effectively implemented through check stations. Check stations also provide an opportunity for outdoor recreationalist to directly communicate with department staff on activities they observed while in the field.

Operating Wildlife Check Stations

Wildlife check stations are fairly simple in design. Mobile signs are placed along roadways directing motorist transporting wildlife from the field to stop. Motorist traveling for other reasons are not required to stop. Typically, wildlife check stations are located along primary travel routes used by hunters and are set up at inactive weigh stations or other large pull-outs easily and safely accessible by motorists. Shade tents are often provided to reduce weather exposure to staff and customers, and biological sampling activities are conducted on portable folding tables. Wildlife check stations are staffed with two to three department employees. Department veterinary and wildlife health laboratory staff often assist local district staff to operate a weekend wildlife check station for appropriate deer, elk and occasionally waterfowl hunting seasons. The stations are



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operated up to 8 to 10 hours a day, closing within in an hour or two after the end of legal hunting hours when hunters typically have headed back to camp or home with their harvest.

Funding Wildlife Check Stations

Equipment and supplies needed to conduct wildlife check stations are limited to mobile signs and portable sampling tables, shade tents, maps and sampling tools. Costs of operation is based on the staff time to operate the check station. Department staff involved are primarily funded by License Fund or federal Pittman-Robertson Act funds. Staff field positions were established to manage wildlife which includes collecting harvest data and biological samples at check stations and is considered within the regular duties of the job, similar to conducting field visits to hunter camps and working during hunting seasons to assess hunter harvest.

From a cost-comparison evaluation, individual biologists in multiple vehicles making in-field or camp checks spend significantly more in time and funds for fuel, typically with far fewer harvested animals observed. Utilizing temporary check stations, where hunters with game stop for inspection, provides a more efficient, cost-effective data collection effort.

Compliance at Wildlife Check Stations

HB 3152 requires the operator of a vehicle transporting taken wildlife or parts of taken wildlife to stop when arriving at a Wildlife Inspection Station. It makes the failure to stop at a Wildlife Inspection Station a Class A violation with a maximum fine of \$2,000.

The concept is similar to the law developed for Watercraft Inspection Stations which require motorists transporting boats to stop at inspection stations to assist in detecting aquatic invasive species. The department has been operating these stations at key points of entry into the state since 2010. Dedicated funding from the sale of Waterway Access and Aquatic Invasive Species permits allows for each inspection station to have staff to conduct visual inspections and decontamination of watercraft as needed. Inspection stations are located in Ashland, Ontario, Brookings, Klamath Falls, Lakeview and Umatilla. Recently, Ashland and Ontario became operational year-around, while the other locations operate May through the boating season into mid-September.

In 2011, HB 3399 made it mandatory for boaters to stop at Watercraft Inspection Stations which has been critical to preventing aquatic invasive species introduction. The department has decontaminated 141 watercraft for quagga and zebra mussels and 2,372 watercraft for other type of aquatic bio-fouling. HB 3152 (2021) would help add similar emphasis to the importance of stopping at wildlife check stations in various field locations, and assist with obtaining compliance by hunters and anglers.

A vehicle observed with readily apparent harvested wildlife failing to stop at a wildlife check station would elicit notification to Oregon State Police or local law enforcement. Law enforcement will attempt to contact the individual(s) and redirect them back to the station for sampling or take other enforcement action as necessary.



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Image 1: Department staff sampling bull elk at a voluntary wildlife check station in 2014.



Image 2: Department wildlife veterinarian, Dr. Burco, sampling waterfowl for avian influenza at a voluntary wildlife check station in 2016.