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Duck Hunt Areas Might Close This Fall

Biologists need to burn phragmites

If you like to hunt ducks and geese at Ogden Bay or Farmington Bay, there's a Web site you need to visit this fall—wildlife.utah.gov/burn.

If the conditions are right, biologists will burn plants called phragmites at both of the waterfowl management areas this fall.

The WMAs will be closed on the days the burns occur.

Information about when the burns will happen will be posted at wildlife.utah.gov/burn as soon as it's available.

In addition to the Web site, you can also receive Twitter updates about the burns. You can receive the updates by signing up at www.twitter.com/DWRburn.

Improving the marsh

Division of Wildlife Resources biologists would like to burn phragmites at the Ogden Bay WMA two times this fall. They'd also like to do one burn at the Farmington Bay WMA.

Both WMAs are in northern Utah.

The burns would happen on weekdays. The WMA supervisor would close the gates to the WMA the night before the burn occurred.

The gates would remain closed on the day of the burn. The public would not be allowed to enter the WMA.

"To keep people safe, we need to close the WMAs on the days the burns occur," says Randy Berger, wetlands coordinator for the DWR.

"We wish we didn't have to burn during the hunting season, but the weather threw several curveballs at us this year."

Conditions must be just right

Every fall, DWR biologists spray phragmites on the state's WMAs.

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Phragmites is an aggressive, nonnative plant that's taken over parts of many of Utah's marsh areas. Phragmites crowd out the native marsh plants that provide birds with food and places to nest.

After spraying phragmites in the fall, the biologists give the chemicals time to work. Then in the spring, they return to the areas they sprayed and burn them.

Several weather, wind and air-quality factors have to be just right before a burn can happen. Unfortunately, those conditions didn't come together this past spring or this past summer. The only alternative biologists have now is to try to burn the areas during the hunting season this fall.

"If we don't burn the areas this fall, the phragmites will recover from the spraying we did last fall," Berger says.

Biologists usually know about 12 hours before a burn whether conditions will allow it to occur. However, the conditions can change, and a burn can be cancelled at the last minute. "That's why it's important to sign up for the Twitter updates and to visit wildlife.utah.gov/burn regularly," Berger says.

For more information, call the DWR's Northern Region office at (801) 476-2740.

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Contact: Mark Hadley, DWR Relations with the Public Specialist (801) 538-4737

More Ducks!

Utah's waterfowl hunt starts Oct. 3

This fall's duck hunt could be one of the best Utah's hunters have seen in years. The number of ducks is way up from last year. And the marsh conditions are great at many of Utah's hunting areas.

Now, if the weather will just cooperate!

Utah's waterfowl hunt starts Oct. 3.

More ducks

"The number of ducks that nested on Utah's marshes this past spring was close to a record," says Tom Aldrich, migratory game bird coordinator for the Division of Wildlife Resources.

"Nesting conditions were also excellent in most of the Intermountain West. That's where most of the ducks that migrate through Utah come from," Aldrich says. "Couple the locally produced birds with birds that will migrate through Utah, and plenty of ducks should be in the state's marshes this fall."

Aldrich says more water is the reason for more ducks. "Lots of rain fell in Utah clear into June," he says. "That rain provided ducks with excellent nesting conditions."

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Aldrich says Western Canada, especially Southern Alberta, also provide ducks to Utah. “Southern Alberta has been in a drought that’s lasted for decades,” he says. “It was still dry this past spring, but areas farther north were very wet. Plenty of ducks should migrate through Utah this fall from Canada and states north of us.”

Holding birds longer

The rain that fell into June also kept marsh conditions good through the summer. “Two large freshwater areas on the north end of the Great Salt Lake—the Willard Spur and West Bear River Bay—were covered with water through the summer,” Aldrich says. “Plants grew really well in these areas this summer, and there should be plenty of food for ducks in these areas this fall. All of that food should help keep ducks in Utah through much of the season.”

Long, lazy fall

There is one factor that could push birds out of the state—the weather. “I know waterfowl hunters love to hunt in storms, but every storm front we receive pushes more birds out of the state than it brings into the state,” Aldrich says. “So when we get these big storms, the net effect is we lose more birds than we gain. And those birds won’t come back until spring.”

Aldrich says a long, lazy fall, with cool temperatures and a few small storms, is the perfect recipe for a good waterfowl hunt. “That type of fall will keep more birds here than if we have some real severe cold fronts move through,” he says. “If severe cold fronts move through, you’ll see a lot of our birds move out of the state.”

WMA conditions

The marsh conditions at Utah’s waterfowl management areas will vary depending on where you hunt.

The best conditions are found at WMAs along the Wasatch Front, such as Ogden Bay, Farmington Bay and Harold Crane. “The Farmington Bay and Ogden Bay WMAs are fed by major rivers,” Aldrich says. “They receive good amounts of water every year, and they’ll be in great shape again this season.”

Conditions aren’t as good at three WMAs that are fed by springs or irrigation water—Locomotive Springs, Clear Lake and Deseret Lake. “Some of the units on these WMAs won’t have water in them until later in the season,” Aldrich says.

Learn more

Rules, season dates and bag limits for the upcoming season are available in the 2009 – 2010 Utah Waterfowl Guidebook. The free guidebook is available at www.wildlife.utah.gov/guidebooks.

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If you have questions about the hunt, please call the nearest Division of Wildlife Resources office or the DWR's Salt Lake City office at (801) 538-4700.

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Contact: Mark Hadley, DWR Relations with the Public Specialist (801) 538-4737

Plenty of Bull Elk in Utah

Rifle hunts starts Oct. 3; a few permits still left

If you're new to elk hunting, the big game coordinator for the Division of Wildlife Resources has some advice for you.

"The chance you'll take an elk while driving down a road is pretty small," says Anis Aoude. "As soon as the first shots are fired, the elk head away from the roads and into the thickest cover they can find.

"If you want to be a successful elk hunter, you need to get into that cover too." Utah's 2009 general rifle bull elk hunt kicks off Oct. 3. And permits for the hunt are almost gone.

On Sept. 17, about 1,600 permits to hunt on any bull elk units were still available. Permits to hunt on spike-only units sold out on Aug. 28.

You can buy an any-bull permit at www.wildlife.utah.gov. Permits are also available at DWR offices and from hunting license agents across Utah.

Elk are doing great

"The weather over the past six years has been excellent for elk," Aoude says. "Most of the state's herds are doing great."

Based on surveys this past winter, DWR biologists estimate the state has more than 67,000 elk. That's only about 1,800 animals shy of a statewide goal of 68,750 elk.

Aoude says some of the largest elk herds are found on the Central Mountains (Manti) and Wasatch Mountains units in central Utah; the South Slope, Yellowstone unit in northeastern Utah; and the Plateau, Fish Lake/Thousand Lakes unit in south-central Utah.

He says there's also plenty of elk on the Morgan, South Rich unit in northern Utah. But this unit is almost entirely private land. You must obtain written permission from a landowner before hunting on it.

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Finding the elk

Most of Utah's elk hunting takes place on units that are called spike-only units. Spike bulls are the only bulls you may take on these units. Plenty of spike bulls are available on these units, but once the hunt starts, the animals can be tough to find.

"The success rate on spike-only units averages about 16 percent," Aoude says. "Fortunately, you can do several things to increase the chance you take an elk."

Unless it gets cold and snowy before the hunt, Aoude says elk will be scattered at higher elevations when the season opens Oct. 3. He says the key to finding them is to get off the roads and into the backcountry.

"Elk are smart and wary animals, and they're sensitive to hunting pressure," Aoude says. "As soon as the shooting starts, they head into the thickest cover they can find. To find success, you have to head into the backcountry and find them."

The rut (breeding period), which occurs right before the general rifle hunt starts, can also make it challenging to find spike bulls.

During the rut, mature bulls gather groups of cow elk to breed. If one of these large bulls sees a spike bull, he'll chase the spike bull off.

Being chased into cover by the bigger bulls makes the spike bulls, which are already nervous, more apt to head back into the cover once the bullets start to fly.

"The larger bulls scare the spike bulls as much as the hunters do," Aoude says. "Unless you get into the backcountry areas where the spikes are hiding, you're probably not going to see many."

"The good news is, if you do get into the backcountry, there's a good chance you'll be among the 16 percent who take a spike bull this year."

OHV maps – don't leave home without one

Aoude has an important reminder for elk hunters who will be using off-highway vehicles. "It's critical that you obtain an OHV riding map for the area you're going to hunt," he says. "These maps are available from the agency that manages the land you'll be hunting on. That agency is usually the U.S. Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management."

Aoude says the DWR is receiving more and more complaints about OHVs being taken into areas where it's not legal to take them. "Taking OHVs into these areas damages the habitat the elk rely on, disturbs and scatters the animals, and ruins the hunting experience for other hunters."

Aoude also encourages you to do some preseason scouting and to check the boundary descriptions for the areas you'll be hunting.

Boundary descriptions are found in the 2009 Utah Big Game Guidebook. The free guidebook is available at www.wildlife.utah.gov/guidebooks and from DWR offices and hunting license agents across Utah.

For more information, call the nearest Division of Wildlife Resources office or the DWR's Salt Lake City office at (801) 538-4700.

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Contact: Mark Hadley, DWR Relations with the Public Specialist (801) 538-4737

Watch Hawk Fly Away

Raptor Watch Day happens Sept. 26

Orem -- Thousands of hawks, eagles and other birds of prey fly through Utah's clear, crisp skies every fall.

This fall, a hawk that's been nursed back to health will join them!

You can see and learn more about these raptors—and watch the release of the hawk that's been rehabilitated—during this year's Raptor Watch Day.

The event will happen Sept. 26, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., at the Orem overlook along Squaw Peak Road, east of Orem.

A Swainson's hawk that's been nursed back to health by Patti Richards, a wildlife rehabilitator in Springville, will be released at noon.

Getting to the site

You can access Squaw Peak Road from U.S. 189 (the road up Provo Canyon). To reach U.S. 189, exit I-15 at Exit 275 and travel east on 800 N. in Orem.

The Division of Wildlife Resources hosts Raptor Watch Day every year. The event is free.

"By the time the event occurs, the trees will be gleaming in their fall colors. And the air at our high-elevation watch site should be crisp," says Bob Walters, Watchable Wildlife coordinator for the DWR.

"With any luck, the skies will be clear. If they are clear, you'll be treated to an up-close look at harriers, vultures, eagles, hawks and falcons as they sail overhead on their migration south."

Walters says experts will be on hand to help you identify the birds and to answer any questions you have about the raptors' fall migration. "We hope you can join us," Walters says. "This event is always a great opportunity to kick back, relax and watch raptors."

For more information, call Walters at (801) 538-4771.

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Contact: Mark Hadley, DWR Relations with the Public Specialist (801) 538-4737

Apply for a Cougar Hunting Permit

Applications accepted until Oct. 12

You have until Oct. 12 to apply for a permit to hunt cougars on limited-entry units in Utah this season.

You can start applying on Sept. 21. Applications will be accepted at www.wildlife.utah.gov until 11 p.m. on Oct. 12.

As you're completing your application, if you have questions or need help, call the nearest Division of Wildlife Resources office or (801) 538-4700 no later than 6 p.m. on Oct. 12.

You'll be applying for a limited-entry cougar permit. Permits to hunt on Utah's harvest objective units go on sale Nov. 8.

"If you draw a limited-entry permit, you cannot buy a permit to hunt on a harvest-objective unit," says Judi Tutorow, wildlife licensing coordinator for the DWR. "Before you apply for a permit to hunt on a limited-entry unit, make sure a limited-entry hunt is the hunt you want to participate in."

More information about the two permits is available in the 2009 – 2010 Utah Cougar Guidebook. The free guidebook is available at www.wildlife.utah.gov/guidebooks. You can also get a copy at DWR offices and from hunting license agents across Utah.

Apply for a bonus point

If you won't be hunting cougars during the 2009 – 2010 season, you can still apply for a bonus point that will increase the chance that you draw a permit in the future.

If you'd like to apply for a bonus point, make sure you submit your application at www.wildlife.utah.gov no later than 11 p.m. on Oct. 12.

Questions

If you have questions about hunting cougars in Utah, please call the nearest Division of Wildlife Resources office. You can also call the DWR's Salt Lake City office at (801) 538-4700.

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