

Roadkill for the table

October 25, 2019



California has passed legislation joining 27 states, including Oregon, that have approved bills allowing motorists to salvage game animals killed by vehicles.

Senate Bill 395, which Gov. Gavin Newsome signed into law Oct. 13, authorizes the state's Fish and Game Commission to create a user-friendly app for personal phones by Jan. 1, 2022. Motorists, in the event they hit and kill any deer, elk, pronghorn antelope or wild pig, would be able to apply for a wildlife salvage permit through the app.

The legislation also authorizes the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to develop a pilot program to collect and compile information on wildlife-vehicle collisions to support wildlife conservation efforts.

In Oregon, the "Roadkill Bill," SB 372, was passed unanimously by both legislative chambers in 2017 and went into effect on Jan. 1 of this year.

Under Oregon's law, people can salvage deer and elk carcasses that have been accidentally struck by a vehicle, as long as they make sure to fill out a permit within 24 hours and follow a few basic rules.

Intentionally hitting a deer or elk in order to salvage it remains unlawful.

People salvaging animals must take the entire carcass, including any gut piles; must dispose of the remains properly; and must bring the head of the animal to an ODFW field office within five days so it can be tested for chronic wasting disease.

Details of the law and an online permit application can be found on myodfw.com by searching the term "roadkill."

The intent of the law is to provide people with a healthy food source that might otherwise go to waste, and to eliminate the work required of road workers to gather the carcasses and dispose of them.

"Over a million deer are hit by cars in the U.S. annually, meaning tens of millions of pounds of free-range venison could be salvaged by eating roadkill every year," according to the website wideopeneats.com.

The Triplicate checked in with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) assistant staff wildlife biologist Justin Dion to see how the new Oregon law is working and what advice he might have for California:

Question: How many permits have been issued since Oregon's roadkill law went into effect?

Justin Dion: The number of permits issued since Jan. 1 is 798.

Q: Are you able to break the numbers out by species and gender?

Dion: Most permits are for black-tailed deer (found in western Oregon, where most of Oregon's human population is). At this time of year, we are seeing a big uptick in males being road-struck, which is to be expected due to the rut (breeding season, when bucks will be on the move and more aggressive) and migration period. ODFW was expecting an uptick in the number of roadkill permits during migration period, and it's exactly what is happening. Over the weekend, 23 permits were issued. The number rose from 55 permits in July, to 81 in August, to 115 in September. We expect a drop-off after migration/rut is over and animals are in their winter habitat (so, December-January).

Q: How many permits have been issued in Curry County?

Dion: It's hard to drill down to county level because our permit doesn't require listing the county, and an animal can be hit in one area and checked in at any field office within five days. The Gold Beach office has had only one animal checked in as of the end of September.

Q: What areas in Oregon have requested the most permits?

Dion: The most permits issued checked in around Corvallis, Springfield and Bend – as expected, because these are the most-populated areas. Higher human populations equal more roadkill happening, especially on

the western side of the Cascades.

Q: How has the program been working so far overall?

Dion: It's great that some people have been able to salvage parts of deer and elk for meat. As of the end of September, of the permits issued, 150 animals were not checked in, around 20% to 25%. We are seeing people who fill in the permit and then choose not to salvage because the body condition of the animal is poor and there is no suitable meat to take. We are looking at this problem and how we might account for that in our system. In the future, (the Oregon State Police) or ODFW may be following up with people who did not check in after filling out a permit. We are looking at ways to account for situations where they fill out the permit but don't end up taking the meat.

Q: Have there been issues with people misunderstanding the rules? And is there something that your agency would especially like to highlight as a reminder or clarification?

Dion: One misunderstanding we see is people not realizing they need to bring in the permit and have it signed when they check in the animal. Sometimes, it's because they don't have a printer. To make this easier, we have duplicates of emailed permits available (although not available in real time) and blank forms available at field offices for those without internet access.

Q: Does your agency have any advice for California about what that state should definitely include in its rules?

Dion: Make it easy, but get as much info as you can. Be sure to test for (chronic wasting disease). Only require permittees to bring the head (not the entire carcass). Also, think of ways that people might try to cheat the system ahead of time, and try to get ahead of those loopholes. Make sure you require the entire carcass to be removed, so people don't just take the back-straps and leave a mess on the side of road.

Staff writer David Hayes contributed to this story.