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Teach Kids How to Fish

Volunteer training starts in March

Want to help a group of kids have one of the best experiences they'll have this spring?

Then volunteer to help a youth fishing club!

The Division of Wildlife Resources is looking for volunteers to teach 6- to 13-year-olds about fish, the places fish live and how to catch them.

Volunteers are needed in communities stretching from Brigham City to Washington City. To learn more about the clubs, and to volunteer to help, visit www.wildlife.utah.gov/cf/clubs.php.

(You can also listen to a radio interview about the clubs at www.wildlife.utah.gov/radio.)

Anyone can help

The number of kids who can participate in the clubs is tied directly to the number of adults who volunteer to help. If more adults volunteer to help, more children can participate.

"If you want to help, but you don't know much about fishing, that's OK," says Chris Penne, community fisheries biologist for the DWR. "If you're a positive person, you're patient and you have good communication skills, you have everything we're looking for.

"We'll teach you all of the other skills you'll need to have a great experience with these kids."

Training

Most of the youth fishing clubs start in March and April. But a few begin as late as June.

Most of the clubs meet once a week for six weeks. Each club session lasts about two hours.

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The children spend the first 30 minutes of each outing learning a new lesson or skill. After teaching the kids, adult volunteers take them down to the water and help the children use their skills to catch fish!

"The kids look up to their fishing mentors. You're their leader," Penne says. "If you'd like to volunteer, it's best if you can commit to being with your club every time it meets."

Two to three weeks before a club's first meeting, DWR personnel will provide a volunteer training seminar in the community where the fishing club meets. The training takes less than two hours to complete.

Also, all volunteers must consent to and pass a criminal background check. "The DWR and the various communities are committed to keeping the children in the clubs safe," Penne says.

Rewards

Penne says a number of rewards await those who volunteer. "One of the biggest thrills you'll have is watching a young boy or girl reel in their first fish. Seeing that is priceless," he says.

"It's also rewarding to teach someone a skill they'll be able to use and enjoy the rest of their life. And knowing you're helping get these kids outside, so they can experience the natural world around them, is also very rewarding."

If you have questions, please e-mail Penne at chrispenne@utah.gov.

A popular program

"We had a great turnout in 2009," Penne says. "About 1,500 kids and 300 volunteers participated. Many of the volunteers were folks who volunteered the year before. They had a great experience, and they wanted to help again."

Penne says many of the city recreation departments in Utah have added fishing to the list of sports they offer to kids. That's one of the greatest reasons for the program's success. "For the first time, fishing has found its way into mainstream sports, right along with soccer, baseball and football," Penne says.

The number of children and communities involved in the program is growing. "We need volunteers more than ever before," Penne says.

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Disease Kills Bighorn Sheep in Northeastern Utah

Vernal -- Bacterial pneumonia, which has been raising havoc with bighorn sheep herds in other Western states, has found another set of victims on Goslin Mountain in northeastern Utah.

Recent surveys by Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) biologists have found most of the bighorns in the Goslin herd near the Green River in Daggett County are infected with the disease.

"We've noticed a decline in the Goslin population for a couple of years, but we weren't able to identify the reason until recently," says Charlie Greenwood, regional UDWR wildlife manager.

In mid February, Lowell Marthe, area wildlife biologist for Daggett County, saw a bighorn coughing. He then surveyed other animals in the area to determine if the coughing was an isolated event. Unfortunately, he found other bighorns coughing too. And some of the sheep were acting quite sick. Samples of lung tissue taken from several animals confirmed the animals had pneumonia.

The Goslin herd is relatively new. Bighorn sheep captured in Montana were reintroduced to the area in 2004 and 2007.

The population increased fairly rapidly after the 2004 release, which is normal for a new herd. That didn't happen with the 2007 release, however. Lamb production and survival were poor and the total number of sheep started to decrease.

The population estimate dropped from 65 to 40 between 2008 and 2009.

Tough decisions

When a deadly disease infects a herd, wildlife managers have very few options. Native wild sheep have several things going against them: they're very social animals, and they've evolved with few defenses or immunities against diseases. As a result, most diseases can be deadly to wild sheep. And those diseases can rapidly infect all the bighorns in an area.

Wildlife managers are left with two choices: watch the sheep die or try to keep the disease from spreading to other bighorns by severely culling (taking) animals from the herd.

"We've been watching similar events unfold in Montana, Washington and Nevada," says Leslie McFarlane, UDWR wildlife disease coordinator. "There's no known cure for pneumonia in bighorns. [The good news is that] it's not hazardous to livestock or humans.

"Taking infected sheep is the only way to prevent the disease from spreading to other bighorns in the herd," McFarlane says. "It's also the most humane thing to do. When sheep get pneumonia, it's almost always fatal. We want to end the suffering as quick as we can."

As of Feb. 22, the UDWR had taken 26 bighorns from the Goslin herd. Biologists are closely monitoring another small band from this herd. Biologists haven't noticed any coughing, but they're concerned that these animals could also be infected.

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Surveys of bighorns in nearby herds indicate that the animals in these herds are healthy.

“Our biggest concern is stopping the spread of the disease to the Bare Top, Carter Creek and Sheep Creek herds,” Greenwood says. “We are still trying to locate all of the animals in the Goslin unit. It’s not a pleasant task, but we know if we don’t get ahead of the disease, we could lose everything.”

Deadly legacy

Like many North American wild animals, ancestors of today’s wild sheep crossed the Bering Land Bridge from Asia. These sheep were isolated from their cousins in Asia, Europe and Africa by the great ice sheets that covered North America during the ice ages. They evolved into the bighorns (*Ovis canadensis*) and thinhorns (*Ovis dalli*) found today.

In addition to isolating the sheep, the ice sheets kept temperatures cold and dry. These conditions helped prevent diseases from spreading. As a result, North American wild sheep evolved few defenses or immunities against diseases.

In contrast, some of the sheep populations in Europe, Asia and Africa were domesticated. Great herds of domestic animals wandered the steppes and grasslands moving north or south as weather permitted. These great herds were breeding grounds for disease. Because they frequently encountered each other, the domestic sheep—exposed to a variety of diseases—developed strong defenses and immunities.

Wild sheep are highly social animals. They seek each other out and travel in small bands or larger herds. Individual bands will often mix with sheep from other herds. This mixing allows a disease to spread quickly from band to band and herd to herd.

When domestic sheep were introduced to the Americas, they brought their exotic diseases with them. These diseases proved deadly to native wild sheep and often eliminated entire populations. Bighorn sheep, once the most abundant large mammal in the mountainous areas of the West, were nearly driven to extinction by the early 1900s. Many factors, including competition for forage, habitat degradation and unregulated hunting all played their parts, but exotic diseases were the biggest factor.

Today’s bighorns are ancestors of isolated, remote bands that somehow escaped the exotic diseases rampaging through the herds as the Wild West was tamed. They still lack immunities to most diseases, and their survival depends mostly on remaining relatively isolated.

This deadly ice-age legacy—the lack of immunity to exotic diseases—is the biggest challenge still facing bighorns today.

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Contact: Ron Stewart, DWR Northeastern Region Conservation Outreach Manager
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See Hundreds of Tundra Swans

Seeing and hearing just one tundra swan is enough to take your breath away. Imagine seeing and hearing hundreds of them. You can at Tundra Swan Day.

Tundra Swan Day – March 13

The Division of Wildlife Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will host Utah's annual Tundra Swan Day on March 13. Admission is free.

Viewing will take place at three sites—the Farmington Bay Waterfowl Management Area west of Farmington, the Salt Creek WMA west of Corinne and the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge west of Brigham City.

Farmington Bay and Salt Creek

Viewing at the Farmington Bay and Salt Creek WMAs runs from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Spotting scopes will be available so you can get a close look at the swans.

Bear River

Viewing at the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge runs from sunrise to sunset. You can watch swans from your vehicle as you drive along the refuge's auto tour route.

Before heading to the refuge, stop by its Wildlife Education Center at 2155 W. Forest St. in Brigham City. The center has maps and more information about the refuge. The center is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

To reach the center, exit I-15 at Exit 363. After you've exited the freeway, turn west. The center is about one block west of the freeway.

More information

You can also call the DWR's Northern Region office at (801) 476-2740 or the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge at (435) 723-5887.

Watching swans on your own

If you can't attend the March 13 event, you can still get out and watch swans on your own.

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The Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge is one of the best places to visit. You can see hundreds of swans along the refuge's 12-mile auto tour loop.

As many as 35,000 swans are in Utah when the swan migration peaks in mid-March.

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Outdoor Fair for Kids

Sandy -- Kids can catch fish, learn about predators and find out how to ride an ATV safely at this year's DNR Youth Outdoor Sports Fair.

The sports fair is part of the upcoming International Sportsmen's Exposition.

The expo will be held March 18 – 21 at the South Towne Exposition Center, 9575 S. State in Sandy. The cost to attend the exposition, which includes the youth fair, is \$12 for adults. Kids 15 years of age or younger can attend for free.

The Youth Outdoor Sports Fair will be held at the south end of the exposition center. Six divisions will host activities: Forestry, Fire and State Lands; Oil, Gas and Mining; Parks and Recreation; the Utah Geological Survey; Water Resources; and Wildlife Resources.

More than 20 activities

More than 20 activities await children who attend the fair. Among the things kids can do:

- Catch trout in a fishing pond.
- Make a survival kit.
- Tie fishing flies.
- See how big they are compared to a deer, an elk or a moose!
- Learn how to stay safe in black bear country.
- Learn about dinosaurs.
- Learn about Utah's rocks.

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- Learn how to boat safely.
- Learn how to conserve water.
- Learn about a future career with the DNR.

“We want to get children excited about the outdoors,” says Mike Styler, executive director of the Department of Natural Resources. “We also want to teach them skills that will make their next trip into the outdoors safe and enjoyable.”

More information about the International Sportsmen's Exposition is available at www.sportsexpos.com.

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