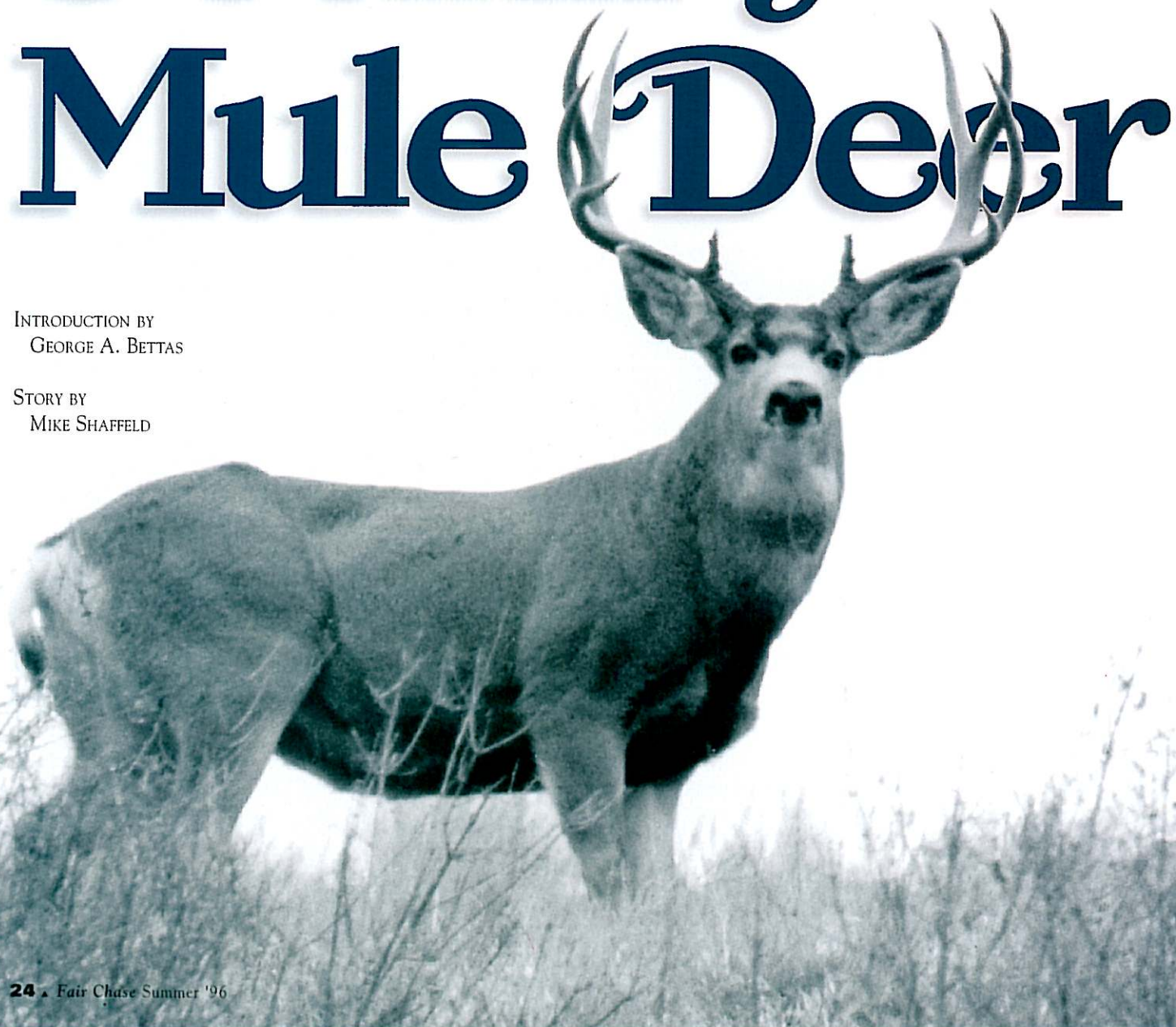


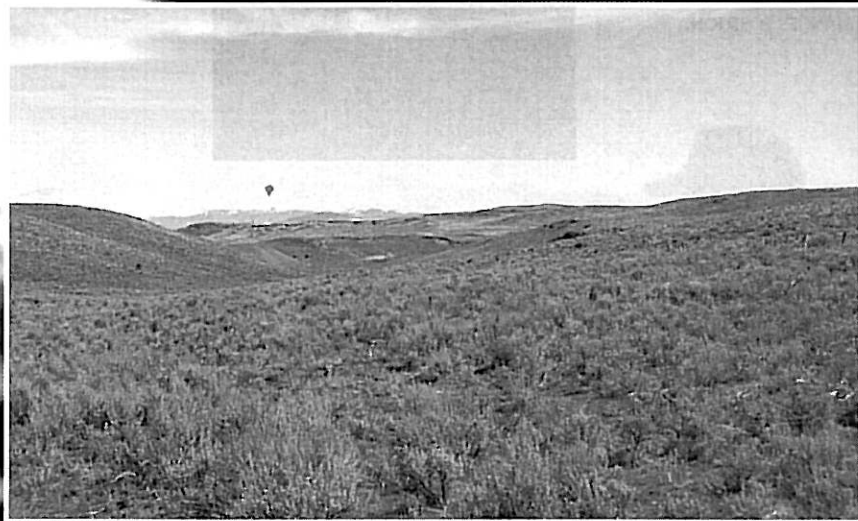
Oregon's Open Country Mule Deer

INTRODUCTION BY
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STORY BY
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Although he had heard of the quality of the mule deer in Eastern Oregon resulting from a variety of recent innovative management strategies implemented by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Bill Monson had no idea of the quality deer he would find after purchasing one of the two 1995 Eastern Oregon Deer Hunts made available to hunters through the Oregon Access and Habitat Board program.



Oregon, like most other states in the U.S. with mule deer, began experiencing a decline in mule deer populations about ten years ago. In order to maintain the herds at appropriate levels and to increase the age structure of the herds Oregon implemented a system of controlled hunts in Eastern Oregon in order to better match hunting pressure with herd numbers, sex ratios, and age structure. These strategies have begun to pay off as evidenced by the numbers of quality mule deer bucks being harvested throughout Eastern Oregon.

In addition to the management strategies implemented by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the 1993 Oregon Legislature created the Access and Habitat program in order to fund projects intended to improve wildlife habitat and increase public hunting access to private land throughout Oregon. This program (see side bar on following page) has begun to pay major dividends in bringing landowners and hunters

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PHOTO BY NEAL AND MARY JANE MISHLER

TO THE UNFAMILIAR HUNTER THIS COUNTRY MAY LOOK QUITE DESOLATE AND WITHOUT MANY DEER, BUT TO THE MULE DEER THIS COUNTRY IS IDEAL AS HUNTERS AND PREDATORS CAN BE EASILY SPOTTED IN THE OPEN COUNTRY.

INSET: MULE DEER WILL USUALLY SEEK A SHADY BED SOON AFTER THE SUN IS UP AND WILL MOVE OFTEN DURING THE DAY AS THE SUN CHANGES POSITION.



together for the benefit of wildlife. The deer tag which Bill purchased in 1995 was one of the tags made available to resident and nonresident hunters via this program.

Eastern Oregon's prime mule deer country is characterized by vast open spaces ranging from rolling hills covered by sagebrush in the low country to alpine and coniferous forests at the higher elevations. The mule deer hunter can find a great deal of variety in terms of the terrain he or she prefers to hunt as the deer are found in all of these habitat types.

The area Bill chose to hunt lies in Southeastern Oregon and is an area which has been traditionally known for its big open country mule deer. To the unfamiliar hunter this country may look to be quite desolate and without many deer as much of it is treeless and covered with sagebrush interspersed with bands of basalt outcroppings. To the mule deer this country is ideal. Hunters and predators can be easily spotted at significant distances in the open country. The basalt outcroppings provide bedding areas and the coulees and draws provide escape cover which the deer use to quietly slip away long before the unknowing hunter arrives. In short, hunting trophy mule deer bucks in this type of terrain is a significant challenge requiring a great deal of patience, good optics, and a flat shooting rifle.

Bill's tag enabled him to hunt most of Eastern Oregon's wildlife units from September 1, 1995, through November 20, 1995. Wanting to get an early start on his hunt Bill chose to begin hunting on September 1. Since he was not familiar with the area, Bill hired outfitter, Mike Shaffeld of High Lonesome Hunts in Vale, Oregon, to guide him on his hunt.

Mike began his usual pre-season scouting in late August in preparation for the coming fall hunting season. Such scouting trips usually involved being high up on a ridge early in the morning in order that deer may be spotted before they bed down for the day. In open country such as this mule deer will usually seek a shady bed soon after the sun is up. As the sun changes position

the deer will often move during the day to take advantage of shade which comes and goes as the sun moves across the sky. While scouting in late August with his son, Greg, and some friends, Mike located three large bucks, one of which was an outstanding buck. Mike has a habit of naming animals in his hunting area which impress him for one reason or another. This big buck appeared to be quite aggressive so Mike, Ken and the kids decided to name him "Pumba" after the colorful character in the movie, "Lion King."

When Bill learned of Mike's sighting of Pumba, he decided that this was the kind of buck he would like to hunt. Bill and his wife, Marie, arranged to meet Mike and his guides the day before they planned to start hunting. The following is Mike's day by day account of the hunt.

August 30: At daylight, I was watching Pumba and as I tried to get closer he left. I followed him and found him bedded down in what we discovered was one of the four beds he used.

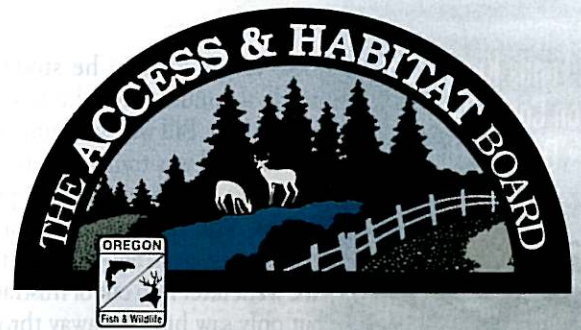
August 31: I met with Bill and his wife, Marie, and we got to know each other. Ken Crawford and John Large, who both help me, met with us and we anticipated the next morning, opening day.

September 1: As it began to get light we saw deer and soon we found Pumba. Bill took one look at him and gave his approval. He was a great buck. As we tried to sneak up on Pumba he gave us our first of many lessons. We followed him at a distance until he bedded down in another of his beds. He stayed there only about an hour. He then went to what turned out to be his favorite bed, a bed we called his "fortress." We called it this because it was like a castle out in the open. He would lay under a rim that was like a small cave that gave him shade and protection from above. Below him he could see anything that approached on the flat. Also other deer would lay down around him and below him to make it even more difficult for a hunter to approach. We watched him until dark

and hoped for better luck the next day. That night, Bill and I talked and decided that this was too good of a buck to make a mistake on. We would take our time and try not to make any foolish mistakes that might run him out of the country.

September 2: This morning, Bill and I crawled a good distance through the sagebrush to try to get a good shot. We had seen Pumba and three other bucks feeding. When we got to about 250 yards, I looked up and saw four bucks and I told Bill to get ready to shoot. As Bill got into position I attempted to find Pumba. He was not there. He had disappeared, and another buck had joined the other three. When we talked to Ken, John and Marie who had watched with spotting scopes from a long distance, they told us which way Pumba had gone. He had apparently not seen us but he just had that sense that there was something wrong. Bill and I followed Pumba but we were always just a little too far away. When we thought that we had caught up with him and assumed that he was bedded in the same juniper trees where I had seen him bed the first time. We waited and watched for along time. Then I found him. He was in his fortress. He had outsmarted us again.

September 3: After discussing strategy, Bill and I decided to leave early and go to the fortress and wait. Bill and I walked a couple of miles in the dark leaving Marie back at the truck. We waited and watched and finally saw Pumba and three other bucks about a mile away. The problem today was the weather. It had been 85-90° every day, and today it was 65° cloudy and raining. It looked as though the bucks were going to feed and bed intermittently throughout the day. We had lost sight of them so at 1:00 in the afternoon we decided that I would go down into the lower country to try to find them and Bill would stay near the fortress and watch for my signal. As it turned out, I got within 200 yards from where Pumba and the other bucks were bedded down. When they got up, I had the best



Oregon's Access and Habitat Board... A Winner For Wildlife, Landowners, and Hunters

Oregon's Access and Habitat Board was created by the 1993 Legislature to fund projects which would improve wildlife habitat and increase public hunting access to private land. An important side benefit of the legislation was an effort to bridge the gap between landowners and hunters, to foster communication and cooperations on behalf of Oregon's wildlife resources and the habitats on which they depend.

Funds are derived from a \$2 surcharge on hunting licenses, as well as from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Green Forage Account. In addition, all proceeds received from the access and Habitat Annual Auction and Raffle events are returned to the project account.

Since its creation in 1993 more than 90 Access and Habitat projects have been undertaken. These have improved 300,000 acres of fish and wildlife habitat and created or maintained public access to 1.5 million acres of private land. Additionally, projects have assisted landowners in dealing with wildlife depredation in a variety of ways.

PROJECTS HAVE INCLUDED:

wetland rehabilitation	protective fencing
enforcement personnel	riparian protection
wildlife water developments	wildlife food crops
habitats for wildlife diversity	erosion control
travel management areas	controlled burning
rangeland rehabilitation	natural spring developments
tree and shrub cover plantings	cropland fertilization
pasture and forestland fertilization	rangeland forage seedings
	livestock management systems

Since the program began, more than 500 individuals have teamed with corporations, sportsmen's groups, agencies and organizations to contribute nearly \$2 million and thousands of volunteer hours on behalf of wildlife and their habitats. These contributions, and the cooperation they have helped foster, have done much for Oregon's wildlife resources...and promise to do much more.

The Access and Habitat Board includes seven members; three represent landowner interests, three represent sportsmen and one member represents the public at large. Board members study projects recommended to them by Regional Advisory Councils and make recommendations for funding to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission.