

# Restoring the Columbian White-tailed Deer

by David L. Peterson

On July 24, 2003, decades of work to recover the Douglas County, Oregon, population of the Columbian white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus leucurus*) were recognized by the removal of this animal from Endangered Species Act protection.

The recovery of the Douglas County population of the deer was due largely to conservation efforts coordinated by the Fish and Wildlife Service and carried out by Douglas County, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Bureau of Land Management. All parties worked in partnership to help remove threats and protect the population. Recovery measures included acquisition and management of habitat, hunting restrictions, and local ordinances designed to protect the deer population. Population estimates for the deer in Douglas County have demonstrated a fairly steady upward trend since management began, increasing from about 2,500 in the early 1980s to more than 6,000 today.

Columbian white-tailed deer occur in two distinct population segments: 1) the Lower Columbia River population, found in Wahkiakum County in Washington, and Clatsop and Columbia counties in Oregon; and 2) the Douglas County population in southwestern Oregon. The two population segments are separated by about 200 miles (320 kilometers) of unsuitable or discontinuous habitat. The delisting of the Douglas County distinct population segment will not change the endangered status of the Columbia River distinct population segment, which remains fully protected by the Endangered Species Act. Efforts to recover that population will continue.

The Endangered Species Act requires the Service, in cooperation with the states, to monitor delisted species for at least five years. The purpose of this requirement is to detect any failure of the delisted species to sustain itself without the protective measures provided by the Act. If, at any time during the five-year monitoring period, data indicate that protective status under the Act should be reinstated, we can initiate listing procedures, including, if appropriate, emergency listing. The draft monitoring plan is composed of three parts: 1) monitoring population size and other key population factors; 2) tracking the incidence of disease; and 3) conducting an annual assessment of habitat protection.

The Service's Roseburg, Oregon, Field Office will continue to work closely with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to monitor the deer and assist in the possible reintroduction of the species into suitable unoccupied portions of its historic range to the north in the Willamette Valley.

---

*David L. Peterson is a fish and wildlife biologist in the Service's Roseburg field office (david\_l\_peterson@fws.gov; telephone 541/957-3471).*



USFWS photo

**The Columbian white-tailed deer is the westernmost of 30 white-tailed deer subspecies in North and Central America. Early records indicate that this subspecies was once numerous in its historic range, from the western slopes of the Cascade Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, and from Puget Sound in Washington southward to the Umpqua River Basin in southern Oregon. Intensive hunting by early settlers, who also drained marshes and cleared the riparian areas used by the deer, resulted in extensive loss of habitat and a severe decrease in numbers. In the 1940s, fewer than 700 Columbian white-tailed deer existed along the Columbia River in Oregon and Washington, and fewer than 300 remained within Douglas County.**