

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

FEATURE

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BIG-GAME WINTER RANGE IN THE WEST

Eleven Western States had more deer, elk, and antelope last autumn than in any year since the turn of the century--largely because of a variety of effective State and Federal management programs, Interior Department officials said today.

One of the important measures has been the acquisition of key wintering range as well as access corridors from established summer range, using Federal aid in wildlife restoration funds.

This is the money collected as excise taxes on sporting arms and ammunition and allocated by the Interior Department's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife to State wildlife agencies for research and development programs, including acquisition of key habitat. States get 75 percent of costs for Bureau-approved acquisitions under present provisions of Federal aid legislation.

Today 11 Western States--Washington, California, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, Oregon, Utah, and New Mexico--operate about 115 winter ranges with more than 670,000 acres owned and 198,000 additional leased acres--all acquired with Federal aid money. Combined with about 180,000 acres purchased by the States wholly with their own funds, this totals more than one million acres expressly managed for big game.

Washington leads with more than 197,000 acres, followed by Utah with about 141,000, Colorado with about 103,000, and Montana with slightly more than 99,000.

Added to the State totals are the areas of public lands in Federal ownership, maintained by the Agriculture Department's Forest Service and the Interior Department's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service. Many of these tens of millions of acres serve as winter range during much of the year.

Typical winter ranges in the West extend through timbered lands down to foothills with open ridges and ravines, and spread into valley bottomlands. The herds use such areas as refuge from the weather and for forage. Trees include a variety of conifers and such hardwoods as quaking aspen and cottonwood. Browse species include service berry, snowbrush, chokecherry, mountain mahogany, bitterbrush, and mountain maple in the high country, with rabbitbrush, sage brush, saltbrush, rose and willow on the lower sites. Grasses include wheatgrass, needlegrass, junegrass, mountain brome, downchess, and fescue.

The ranges are attended by resident managers who build access roads and fences to control livestock, reseed preferred browse, and generally improve the range. During severe winters, hay is sometimes furnished for such species as elk, but most winter range management plans provide adequate natural forage while controlling herd numbers to prevent over-browsing.

In many instances, big game have been restocked on improved ranges, bringing an increase in wild populations--and the need for acquisition of additional habitat.

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