

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Julia Butler Hansen Refuge for the Columbian White-tailed Deer



*The refuge provides protected habitat for the endangered Columbian white-tailed deer to help it survive and eventually repopulate its former range.*



*Bald eagle,  
Photo:FWS,  
J&K Hollingsworth*



## About the Refuge

Located in south western Washington, the Julia Butler Hansen Refuge was established in 1972 specifically to protect and manage the endangered Columbian white-tailed deer.

The refuge contains over 5,600 acres of pastures, forested tidal swamps, brushy woodlots, marshes and sloughs along the Columbia River in both Washington and Oregon. The mainland refuge unit, the Hunting Islands and Price Island are in Washington. Tenasillahe Island, Wallace Island and several small parcels around Westport are in Oregon.

The valuable habitat the refuge preserves for the deer also benefits a large variety of wintering birds, a small herd of Roosevelt elk, river otter, various reptiles and amphibians including painted turtles and red-legged frogs, and several pairs of nesting bald eagles and ospreys.



Julia Butler Hansen Refuge is one of over 520 sites in the National Wildlife Refuge System, symbolized by this blue goose insignia; and one of 56 established specifically to benefit threatened and endangered species. Managed by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this system is a vital living heritage, conserving wildlife and habitat for people today and generations to come.

*At Left,  
camouflaged fawn.  
Below,  
refuge habitat.  
Photos: FWS*



## A Deer Sanctuary

The Columbian white-tailed deer is one of 30 subspecies of white-tailed deer in North America, and the only one found west of the Cascade Mountains. These deer once ranged throughout the river valleys west of the Cascade Mountains from the Umpqua River in Oregon, northward through the Willamette Valley to Puget Sound, and westward down the lower Columbia River.



*Columbian white-tailed deer buck.*

During the 1800s, deer numbers were dangerously low due to over-hunting and loss of habitat. By the turn of the century, they had disappeared from nearly all of their range and, in the 1930s, were thought to be extinct. Remnant populations were discovered here and near Roseburg, Oregon.

In 1968, the lower Columbia River population was listed as a federally endangered species because it was in imminent danger of becoming extinct. This population is now found only along the lower Columbia River between Skamokawa, Washington and Clatskanie, Oregon.

Today, about 300 of these deer live on the refuge; another 300-400 live on private lands along the river. The areas upstream from the refuge on Puget Island and on the Oregon side of the river are vital to reestablishing and maintaining viable populations of the species. The refuge works with private and corporate landowners to maintain and reestablish deer on their lands.

## Protecting the Deer

### Coyotes



The coyote is one of the most successful animals at adapting to environments and coexisting with man in a variety of habitats. Therefore, coyote numbers can become too high on the refuge and reduce the deer population. Because of the endangered status of the refuge deer, coyotes are sometimes removed from the refuge to protect the integrity of the deer herd.

### Elk

A small herd of Roosevelt elk lives on the mainland unit of the refuge. Although elk are magnificent animals and are thrilling to see in the wild, they compete with the deer for limited resources. Herds of elk can feed on and trample shrubs in the woodlots, reducing food and cover for the deer. To manage the herd size, individuals are periodically trapped and relocated to remote areas. A nine-foot-tall wire fence keeps the elk from returning.



*Top, coyote.  
Photo: FWS,  
George Harrison  
Bottom, bull elk  
with cows  
Photos: FWS*

## Wildlife Viewing

### Best Deer Viewing Times

Deer and elk are easily observed year-round in the early morning and evening. Look for them in pastures along Steamboat Slough and Brooks Slough Roads,



and from the wildlife viewing site on State Highway 4. Beginning with the fall rut in November on through the winter, deer are more active in the daytime and are more often seen in open areas.

### Aquatic Mammals

Beaver can often be seen in the evening when they begin foraging. Muskrats are found in sloughs and ditches, although they are not nearly as abundant as the larger nutria, a non-native aquatic species, which are often seen waddling across the dikes and swimming in vegetated sloughs and ditches. Nutria eat aquatic plants and thus compete with native wildlife such as muskrats and waterfowl. River otters and mink can sometimes be seen hunting in the larger sloughs and river.

*Top, Columbian white-tailed deer doe. Photo: FWS*  
*Bottom, river otter. Photo: FWS, Dave Menke*



### Birds to Look For

A diverse assortment of waterfowl, wading birds and raptors can be viewed on the refuge from Steamboat Slough and Brooks Slough Roads. Thousands of Canada geese spend the winter on the lower Columbia River and can be seen feeding on the refuge's short grass pastures. Throughout the fall and winter, ducks such as mallards, pintails, American wigeon, bufflehead and green-winged teal are commonly found feeding in the refuge's sloughs, wetlands and flooded pastures. Great blue herons, grebes, coots, loons, cormorants and swans often rest in refuge sloughs. Bald eagles, peregrine falcons and red-tailed hawks perch on refuge trees while looking for a meal.

### *American bittern*



*Tundra swans.*

### Viewing Tip: Stay in Your Car

It's best to view wildlife from your car. Not only is it less disturbing to the animals, car viewing often allows you to get a longer look. Use binoculars, spotting scopes and telephoto lenses for close-up views and photographs.

### *Canada geese*



*Photos: FWS*

## Managed Lands Help Wildlife

### Mosaic of Habitats

The refuge actively manages land and water to change the landscape to benefit wildlife, primarily the Columbian white-tailed deer.

The refuge is managed to provide a mosaic of woodland, grassland and wetland habitats. Approximately one quarter of the area is managed for deer forage through haying and grazing. The other three quarters are set aside as woodlands and wetlands.



*Young Columbian white-tailed deer.*

Woodlands adjacent to managed grasslands are essential to deer because they use them for cover when feeding and to provide shelter for their young fawns. To maintain a mosaic of grasslands and woodlands, refuge managers plant trees and bushes in selected areas.

Fencing is needed to protect the tender seedlings from browsing by deer and elk until the woodlots are established.

### Grasslands



*Haying, Photo: M.S.Laws, FWS*

Managed grasslands are especially important to deer nutrition during late summer when grasses seed out and dry up, and in the winter when they provide a nutritious option to woody vegetation. Cattle grazing and haying are used in selected pastures to maintain the short nutritious growth of grass and forbs that deer prefer to eat. Weed control, balancing soil acidity, fertilizing, reseeding and discing are also used in the pastures to provide the most nutritious and natural food for the deer.

*Photos: FWS*

### Water Management

*Controlling water levels plays an important part in habitat management.*



Water management is key to providing the diverse habitats the deer and other wildlife require. The mainland and Tenasillahe Island Units, which were once tidally flooded, now have dikes protecting them from the Columbia River. Consequently, they stay drier and support many more deer than lands that flood with the tides.

To meet the needs of other wildlife, including a large diversity of water birds, refuge staff also maintain and manage a variety of wetlands. During late fall and winter, increased rainfall

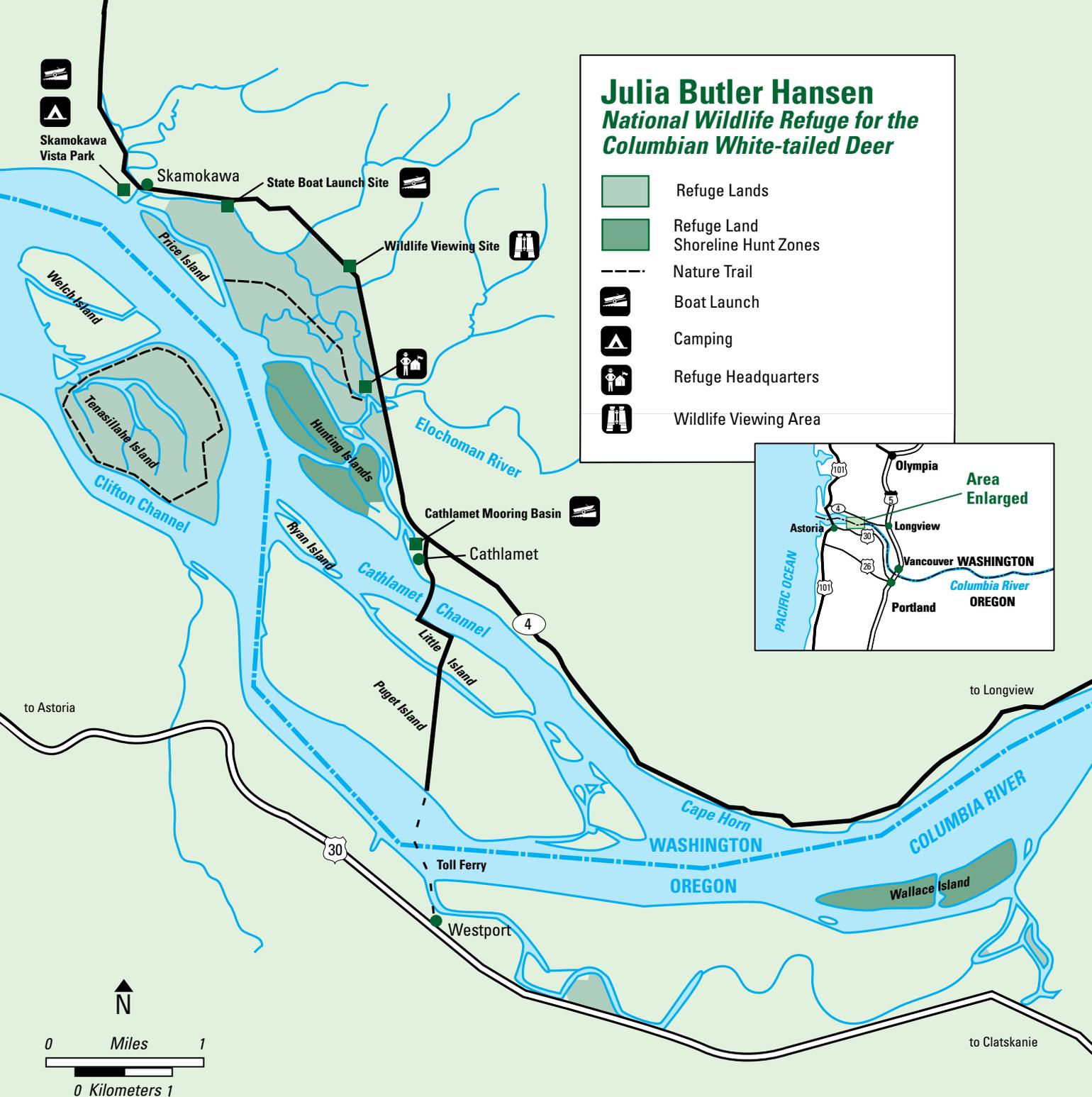
fills sloughs and impoundments, creating opportunities for ducks, geese, swans, shorebirds and wading birds to rest and feed. The refuge has enhanced some wetlands by installing water control structures, and removing dense vegetation to create shallow open water wetlands, which also help control flooding from heavy precipitation. A large expulsion pump and tide gates are used to control or remove excess water.

*Below, riparian habitat.*



# Julia Butler Hansen National Wildlife Refuge for the Columbian White-tailed Deer

-  Refuge Lands
-  Refuge Land Shoreline Hunt Zones
-  Nature Trail
-  Boat Launch
-  Camping
-  Refuge Headquarters
-  Wildlife Viewing Area



## A Brief History

### The Chinook People

Chinook Indians lived along the Columbia River for many generations before Euro-American explorers first arrived in the area. They settled in independent villages on both shores from its mouth to The Dalles, Oregon using the river as a highway to carry trade goods between the coast and the interior.

### Lewis and Clark

In 1805, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark made their historic journey down the Columbia River. They paddled through the refuge and visited a Chinook settlement, probably the village of Ilo'xumin, from which the Elochoman River takes its name. The expedition members traded with the villagers for food such as salmon and wapato, and for otter skins, which they used for clothing.

### Hunting Islands

Soon after they set out, Clark wrote, "...two Canos of Indians met and returned with us to their village which is Situated... behind a cluster of Marshey Islands, on a narrow chanl of the river through which we passed to village of 4 Houses...." Today those marshy islands are known as the Hunting Islands.

Throughout their journey, Lewis and Clark recorded scientific descriptions of the area's ecology and physical characteristics, including the first observations of the Columbian white-tailed deer, which they described as abundant from The Dalles to the mouth of the Columbia River.

### Deer Island

On their return trip in March of 1806, Lewis and Clark stopped to hunt on what is now called Deer Island. Lewis wrote, "I measured the tail of one of these bucks which was upward of 17 inches long; they are very poor, tho' better than the black tail fallow deer of the coast. these two are very distinct species of deer. the Indians call this large island E'lal-lar or deer island which is a very appropriate name."

### This Century

Before the 1920s, much of the mainland and Tenasillahe Island were marshes flooded by the daily rising tides of the Columbia River.

The Wahkiakum Diking District #4 was formed in the 1920s, at which time the area between Cathlamet and Skamokawa, as well as Tenasillahe Island, was diked and drained. The dikes converted permanent wetlands into agricultural lands which were farmed for nearly fifty years until the establishment of the refuge.

Although the dikes and fields remain today, management of the area is now focused towards managing deer and wintering waterfowl habitat.

**Julia Butler  
Hansen**

## Our Namesake

Originally, the refuge was named the Columbian White-Tailed Deer National Wildlife Refuge. The name was changed to the Julia Butler Hansen Refuge for the Columbian White-Tailed Deer in 1988 to honor a noted legislator who was instrumental in establishing the refuge.

Julia Butler Hansen (1907-1988) was the daughter of a pioneer family that settled in Cathlamet. She began her 43 years of public office in 1937 as the first woman on the Cathlamet City Council. She then spent 22 years in the Washington Legislature and 14 years in Congress, where she was the first woman to head an appropriations subcommittee.

As chair of the Appropriations Committee for Interior and Related Agencies, Hansen exerted tremendous influence on Federal natural resource agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and worked towards protecting our nation's natural resources.



*Canada geese in flight.*



*To right,  
Columbian white-  
tailed deer buck.  
Photos: FWS*

## Getting Around

### Vehicles

Motor vehicles, motorcycles and bicycles are permitted to travel on Steamboat Slough and Brooks Slough Roads and adjacent parking areas, the headquarters road to the refuge office, and the wildlife viewing site off State Highway 4. All other areas of the refuge are closed to mechanized traffic.

### Hiking

Hiking within the Mainland Unit is permitted during daylight hours on Center Road from June through September, and on Steamboat Slough and Brooks Slough Roads year round. Hiking on Tenasillahe Island is permitted only on the dike surrounding the island. Hiking is not allowed off these established roads.

### Boating

Hunting, Price, Tenasillahe and Wallace Islands are accessible only by boat. Public launching facilities are available in Washington at the Cathlamet Mooring Basin, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife boat launch on State Highway 4 between Cathlamet and Skamokawa, and at Skamokawa Vista Park. Launch facilities on the Oregon shore are

available at Aldrich Point east of Astoria. Kayak and canoe rentals are available in Skamokawa.

Tidal flows, strong winds, and large wakes from ships can make boating difficult and sometimes dangerous. Deep channels separate most of the islands at high tide, but during low tides, sandbars and exposed logs may hinder your travel or even ground your boat. Consult navigation charts and tide tables before venturing out.



Photos: FWS

## Activities

### Wildlife Observation and Photography

Wildlife observation and photography are encouraged at the wildlife viewing site off State Highway 4, along Steamboat Slough and Brooks Slough Roads, and by foot from the road running through the center of the refuge (Center Road) when it is open. Please help us minimize disturbance to plants and wildlife by staying out of all closed areas.



### Hunting



Hunting geese, ducks, coot and snipe is permitted along the shoreline on the refuge portion of Hunting and Wallace Islands in accordance with Federal and Washington and Oregon State Hunting Regulations. Temporary blinds may be constructed, but they must be available to everyone on a first-come, first-serve basis. Use or possession of ammunition containing lead shot is prohibited.

### Sport Fishing

Waters around the refuge, including the Elochoman River, Steamboat Slough, Brooks Slough and the Columbia River, are open to fishing in accordance with state regulations. Consult Oregon and Washington regulations for seasons and limits. Bank fishing is permitted along open shorelines. Interior sloughs in all refuge units are closed to fishing.



## Plan Your Visit

### Hours

The refuge is open daily from dawn to dusk. Refuge headquarters is open 7:30 am to 4:00 pm Monday through Friday, excluding Federal holidays.

### Restrooms

Restroom facilities are located at the refuge headquarters, and the wildlife viewing sites off Highway 4.

### Pets

No dogs are allowed on the refuge, except those used while hunting waterfowl.

### Bring Camera, Binoculars, Field Guidebook

To observe and photograph wildlife in their natural surroundings, move quietly and maintain distance between yourself and the animals.

Although animals often disappear when you arrive, they may return shortly if you are quiet and remain still. Binoculars and telephoto lenses will help you get a good look or photo.

Also, wildlife are more active in morning and late afternoon. Bring a field guidebook to help you identify various species and learn which habitats they prefer, when they are active and what they eat.

### Camping

Camping and building fires are not allowed anywhere on the refuge.

### Firearms

Possession of firearms in areas closed to waterfowl hunting is prohibited.

### Collecting Prohibited

Collecting and removing archeological or historic objects is prohibited, as well as removing any natural material such as plants, rocks and antlers.

### Nearby Facilities

Gasoline, grocery stores, restaurants and lodging are located in the nearby towns of Cathlamet and Skamokawa. Lodging is also available on Puget Island.



### Other Recreational Opportunities

Other nearby National Wildlife Refuges with recreational opportunities are:

Lewis and Clark National Wildlife Refuge, OR  
Willapa National Wildlife Refuge, WA  
Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge, WA



*Top, Red-legged frog. Photo: FWS, Al Wengerd  
Bottom, Barn owl.  
To Left, Hooded mergansers.  
Photos: FWS*

**Julia Butler Hansen Refuge for the  
Columbian White-tailed Deer  
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**For National Wildlife Refuge System  
Information  
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<http://www.fws.gov>**

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*Columbian white-tailed deer bucks  
Photo: Tom Kollasch, FWS*