

# SHOWCASE SPECIES: NORTHWEST

## COLUMBIAN WHITE-TAILED DEER

The acquisition of Columbian white-tailed deer habitat by public agencies has helped provide protected habitat for the two distinct populations of the deer. In Douglas County, Oregon, the animal is thriving, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2003 removed that population from the federal endangered species list. The Columbia River population remains listed as endangered and has increased only modestly since listing. Predator control and careful monitoring should help improve fawn survivorship and increase the population to a point at which the Service can consider delisting it.

### Natural History

The Columbian white-tailed deer ranks as the westernmost of 38 subspecies of the Virginia white-tailed deer. Prior to European settlement in the Pacific Northwest, the subspecies probably numbered in the tens of thousands. It ranged from the western slopes of the Cascade Mountains to the Pacific Ocean and from Puget Sound in Washington south to the Umpqua River Basin in southern Oregon. Unrestricted hunting and clearing of its habitat for farming reduced the deer to only 200 to 400 animals by the early 1900s.

**The subspecies survives today in two distinct populations—the Lower Columbia River population in Wahkiakum County, Washington, and Clatsop and Columbia counties, Oregon, and the Douglas County population in southwestern Oregon.**

These two units are separated by about 200 miles of unsuitable habitat. The Douglas County population, which now numbers 5,000 to 6,000 individuals, was delisted in 2003. Its recovery—which was based on acquisition and management of habitat, on hunting restrictions and on local ordinances designed to protect the deer population—was coordinated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and carried out by Douglas County, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the federal Bureau of Land Management.



KEN ARCHER

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is now focusing its recovery efforts on a population of several hundred animals inhabiting islands in the Columbia River between Washington and Oregon from Longview, Washington, 30 or 40 miles west to Clatsop, Oregon. These deer live in part on lowland areas that periodically flood. During especially high water in 1996, nearly half the 800 deer then surviving in the region died. Since then, the population has been recovering slowly.

Coyote predation poses one of the primary threats to the deer now. On some islands where coyotes are subject to predator control, fawn survivorship is up and the deer population has increased slowly. Annual monitoring of the population and persistent coyote control will help determine whether this population warrants removal from the endangered species list.

# WHITE-TAILED DEER

## Listing

This species was listed in 1967 under the predecessor law to the Endangered Species Act.

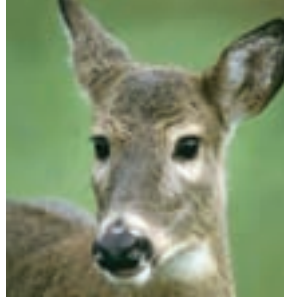
## Management

The listed population living along the Columbia River, which forms the Oregon-Washington border, uses some 8,000 acres of habitat owned and/or managed for the deer by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, state agencies or the private Columbia Land Trust, a group dedicated to deer recovery and land conservation. Such secure lands are critical to deer recovery, allowing wildlife management agencies to make decisions focused directly on habitat and on target species.

The Service also is assessing the need for further land acquisition, should habitat become available for purchase, and is encouraging the states to develop long-term management plans for deer habitat and to maintain the deer in a recovered status.

## Funding

Funding from all government sources for Columbia white-tailed deer recovery nationwide ranks the species at 298 out of 1,311 species, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service fiscal year 2004 report (the most recent available) to Congress, *Federal and State Endangered and Threatened Species Expenditures*.<sup>\*</sup> Total recovery funding for the deer from all government sources that year was about \$110,000, with \$66,000 coming through the Service. "Habitat acquisition has proved crucial to this species' recovery," says John



Alan Clark, USFWS

Kostyack, director of Wildlife Conservation Campaigns at the National Wildlife Federation. "Providing the Service with an increased budget for land acquisition will help put this species and many others on a faster road to recovery."

## Local Contacts

National Wildlife Federation Northwest Natural Resource Center, 206-285-8707; Washington Wildlife Federation, 360-705-1903; Columbia Land Trust, Executive Director Cherie Kearny, 360-696-0131; Fish and Wildlife Region One Office, Endangered Species Division, 503-231-6158; Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, 503-872-5310; Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, 360-902-2200; Nate Dreon, President of Ilahie Holdings, a company that has made its private lands available for deer conservation, 206-262-1400.

## Other Threats

The listed population is still tenuously small and susceptible to floods. Coyotes also pose a potential threat.

<sup>\*</sup> The U.S. Fish and Wildlife *Federal and State Endangered and Threatened Species Expenditures* report incorporates subjective estimates provided by regulated entities without any independent verification and without effort to segregate Endangered Species Act expenditures from other related expenditures. However, for most listed species, no other funding data is available.

## THREATS FROM GLOBAL WARMING



Climate scientists are increasingly convinced that global warming will yield rain storms both more severe and more intense than they have been historically. Such storms amplify the risk of floods, which, as discussed above, pose a clear danger to the deer.