

WDFW seeks public comment on draft white-tailed deer plan

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

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OLYMPIA - The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is seeking public comment on a draft plan to guide management of the state's white-tailed deer populations.

Developed by WDFW over the past year, the five-year plan outlines strategies for sustainably managing the game animals throughout their range in eastern Washington.

Other key goals include maintaining stable deer-hunting opportunities for state citizens and reducing deer-related damage to crops and other personal property.

"Our white-tailed deer populations are generally healthy - and we want to keep them that way," said Dave Ware, WDFW. "This plan will provide a foundation for future management of this species, and we'd like to encourage people to give us some feedback on the strategies we've identified."

The draft plan, along with an electronic comment form, is posted on WDFW's website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/wildlife/management/white-tailed_deer. Public comments will be accepted through April 23 before a final plan is reviewed by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission and forwarded to the WDFW director for approval.

The plan divides the state's white-tailed deer population into six geographic zones, based on the ecology, population characteristics and management considerations of each area. The six zones are identified as Selkirk, Palouse, Blue Mountains, Columbia Basin, Okanogan Highlands and North Cascades.

Ware said the heavy winters of 2007-08 and 2008-09 took a toll on white-tail populations, especially in the northeast, but those in most other areas have rebounded in the past year.

"White-tailed deer are generally very resilient," Ware said. "The primary limitation is habitat - they do best in a mix of farm and forestlands."

Each year, hunters take an average of 13,629 white-tailed deer in Washington, representing for approximately 35 percent of the annual deer harvest. Black-tailed deer and mule deer account for the rest.

Ware said WDFW plans to develop similar management plans for mule deer and black-tailed deer over the coming years. Since 2001, the department has also adopted plans for eight of the state's 10 elk herds.

"For management purposes, it is important to look at both the similarities and differences of these populations throughout their range," Ware said. "These management plans provide a basis for developing consistent policies throughout the state."