

White-tailed deer move toward recovery

Federal status upgraded to 'threatened'

By CASSANDRA PROFITA
Oregon Public Broadcasting

After nearly 50 years on the endangered species list, Columbian white-tailed deer are moving up in the world.

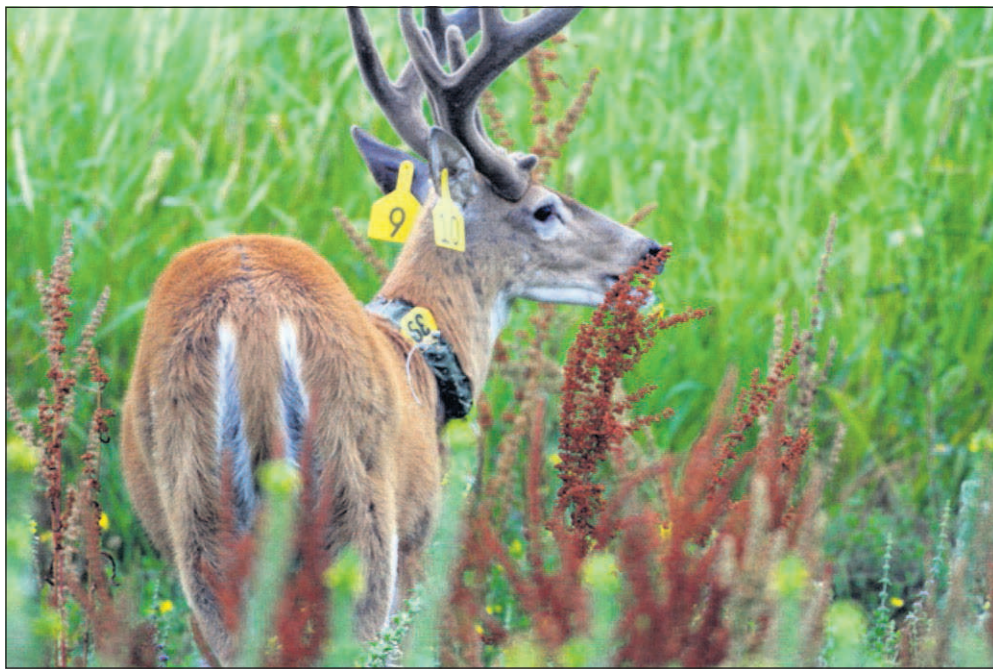
Their numbers along the Columbia River have more than doubled since the species was listed in 1967. On Thursday, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service upgraded their status from "endangered" to "threatened."

Officials are celebrating the occasion in Ridgefield, Washington, where the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge has played a key role in the deer's recovery.

In 2013, a dike at the Julia Butler Hansen Wildlife Refuge was faltering, putting the refuge that was created specifically to harbor white-tailed deer at risk of flooding.

Officials moved 88 deer from the Julia Butler Hansen refuge to Ridgefield's protected habitat with help from dozens of community volunteers.

"We had Boy Scout troops, families. We had hunting and fishing groups," said Megan Nagel, spokeswoman for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "We had all these folks from the surrounding communities investing in the recovery of this endangered



K. Meyer/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Columbian white-tailed deer have settled into the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge since 2013 when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service relocated 88 deer to the protected habitat. The species is on the rebound and moves from endangered to threatened status.

species."

Since then, staff and volunteers with the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge have planted more than 30,000 trees to create ideal habitat for the white-tailed deer, and the population there has grown to at least 110, according to refuge Deputy Project Leader Eric Anderson.

The relocated deer have been tagged so biologists can track them and their offspring.

"It's exciting. They're doing great," Anderson said. "Last weekend I was here and literally saw a female that was fawned on the refuge with her fawn. So, it's kind of like a grandparent moment — actu-

ally seeing your young having young on the refuge."

Hunting and habitat loss

Columbian white-tailed deer populations declined as a result of uncontrolled hunting and habitat loss from farming, logging and development that took over the river valleys and bottomlands the deer call home.

Their numbers along the Columbia River were down to around 450. Now they're up to more than 900 deer.

To rebuild the population, officials have moved deer into wildlife refuges and relocated elk that compete with the

deer for food. Wildlife officials have even killed coyotes to protect the deer from their natural predators while their numbers rebound.

Officials say the success thus far is the result of collaboration by the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, the states of Washington and Oregon, conservation groups, volunteers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Major milestone

The new "threatened" status is a major milestone for one of the original endangered species, said Paul Henson, state supervisor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Ser-



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Volunteers work with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists to capture and relocate endangered Columbian white-tailed deer.

vice in Oregon.

"In 1967, when the first version of the Endangered Species Act was passed by Congress, this deer, along with many other iconic species like the bald eagle and the brown pelican and the California condor, was originally listed as endangered," Henson said. "They were in very low numbers and now they've come back."

The deer are no longer on the brink of extinction. But they're not fully recovered yet, either.

"It's like a patient being released from the hospital after pretty serious surgery," he said. "They still have to come back and check in with the doctor."

The plan for easing protections on the deer includes implementing a new rule

that will allow landowners to manage deer on their property. Henson said he hopes that will make people less nervous about having the deer on their land.

The current population numbers are nearly high enough to consider removing the species from the endangered list altogether, Henson said. But he said he wants to see more deer populations in more places before delisting.

The current range of the Columbia River population of Columbian white-tailed deer includes areas on the Washington and Oregon sides of the river, including islands in the river.

Another population in southern Oregon has already been deemed recovered and was removed from the endangered list in 2002.

Brown, Pierce square off in fourth debate of the year

By PARIS ACHEN
Capital Bureau

MEDFORD — Gov. Kate Brown and GOP gubernatorial candidate Bud Pierce courted southern Oregon Thursday in their fourth debate.

The debate, hosted by KOB-TV/NBC5, challenged the candidates for solutions to the region's most critical problems, such as inadequate police protection in Josephine County, painkiller abuse and sex trafficking in the Interstate 5 corridor.

Panelists also probed candidates about how they would address southern Oregon's longstanding sense of disconnection from state leadership. The complaint dates back to at least 1941 when residents of several counties in southern Oregon and Northern California plotted to start their own state, the State of Jefferson, now the namesake for southern Oregon's public radio station.

"We hear from our viewers that they see their federally elected officials far more than they see their state public officials," said panelist Patsy Smullin, owner of KOB-TV.

U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley each hold a town hall in every county of Oregon every year, while governors typically have not.

"If elected, would you commit to doing an annual town hall meeting in each county of Oregon?"

Pierce, who has visited Medford eight times during his campaign promised that he "absolutely" would.

"I'm committed to staying three months out of every year in the rural communities and actually living probably a week at a time," Pierce said. "That's key so you can be governor of all of Oregon."

Brown said she would continue to "reach out and be in all of the communities throughout the state of Oregon."

"I will continue to work to fight to make sure that we make Oregon a place where everyone can thrive, and I will do that by being out in the communities on a regular basis," she said.

Pressed by Smullin to answer the question, Brown said that she would love to make that commitment, but she knows from her experience as governor that crises come up. For example, she said she had to focus her energy on responding to the Umpqua Community College shooting and recovery effort a year ago in Roseburg.

Experience

Brown's experience in state government and knowledge of the realities of the office dominate her arguments for rejecting Pierce, who has never held elected office.

She brought up her longer experience in answer to question about how the candidates would combat human trafficking along Interstate 5, which passes through Medford.

Brown worked on policy that the Legislature passed in 2007 to tackle the problem and created a task force to lay the groundwork for solutions. She said she would treat the problem similarly to domestic violence and sexual assault by increasing access to services and funding adequate shelters for victims.

"It is absolutely critical that this state play a role," she said. "I am the one who has leadership experience on this issue over the last 20 years."

Pierce said he supports prevention programs to identify vulnerable individuals and providing an easy way for victims to reach out for help.

Law enforcement

"Obviously, we need to have aggressive law enforcement getting involved in mitigating and identifying the people who are being abused," Pierce added.

Inadequate law enforcement protection remains a concern for Southern Oregon's Josephine County, where voters have rejected tax increases to pay for sheriff's services. Oregon State Police has had to step in to cover cases.

Asked what the candidates would do to keep Josephine County safe, Pierce said he would look for ways for counties to boost their revenue from state forests.

"We need a massive stimulation of the economy by that and other measures such as tax credits and enterprise zones," Pierce said. "Once people

make enough money they tend to be willing to pay for those services." He said he would commit to making sure basic law enforcement services are maintained in counties.

Brown said the state has an increasing population and decreasing federal money.

She said she also would like to boost the number of Oregon State Police troopers.

"As governor I will fight to make sure we have additional troopers on the front lines to make sure communities around Oregon remain safe," she said.

Measure 97

The candidates also sparred Thursday over issues they've covered in past debates, such as Measure 97's corpo-

rate sales tax on the November ballot and the \$22 billion unfunded liability in the Public Employees Retirement System.

Pierce, a Salem oncologist, is trying to unseat Brown to complete the last two years

of Gov. John Kitzhaber's four-year term. As former secretary of state, Brown became governor when Kitzhaber stepped down in February 2015 amid an influence-peddling scandal over contracts awarded to his fiancée, Cylvia Hayes.

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