

Methow Wildlife Area Winter Closure Proposal Frequently Asked Questions

What is being proposed? -

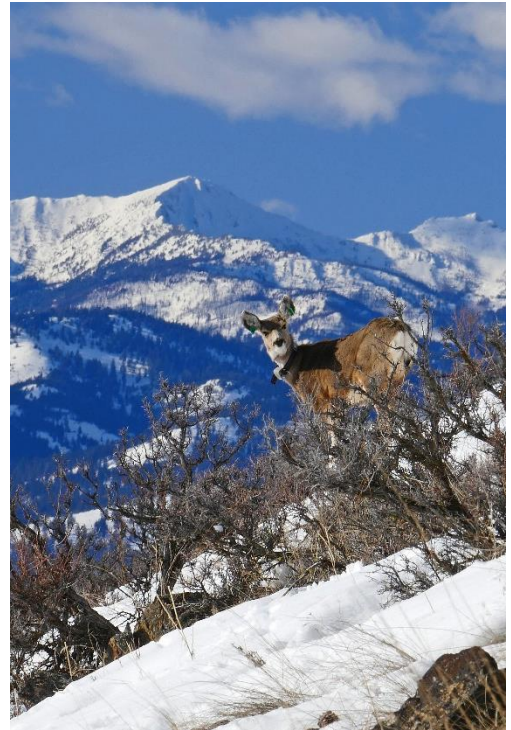
- Close approximately two-thirds of the Methow Wildlife Area to public access between Dec. 15 and April 15
- Closures do not include any groomed Nordic ski, groomed fat tire bike, or designated snowmobile routes.
- Closures are in areas of critical mule deer winter/spring range and migration habitat.
- Closures are in areas purchased primarily or partially for mule deer winter range conservation.
- Where applicable, a designated route (open county/USFS road, designated WDFW trail) passing through the closure will remain open.
- At least a portion of each Wildlife Area Unit will remain open to provide recreational opportunities near all valley communities.

Where are the proposed closures? - [See maps for details.](#)

- Closures encompass **only 2.2%** of the total public land in the Methow Watershed
- Closures affect **less than 1% (.73%)** of the annual public land recreational access in the Methow Watershed.

Why are the closures necessary?

- Mule deer are under increasing stress from a variety of sources including winter human disturbance.
- Winter human disturbance impacts add to other stressors, including fires, drought, disease, roadkill, and habitat loss.
- Observations suggest human disturbance on mule deer winter range has increased dramatically in the last decade, largely a result of increasing recreation (backcountry skiing, shed hunting, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, hiking, etc).
- Winter range availability is limited.
- Winter fawn mortality and productivity are the primary factors affecting the trajectory of the mule deer population in the Methow Watershed.



How does winter disturbance negatively affect mule deer? –

- Disturbance reduces energy reserves through increased movement, increased psychological stress (fight or flight responses), and displacement from limited forage.
- Reduced energy reserves increase the chances of overwinter fawn mortality and reduced productivity (embryo re-absorption/miscarriage).
- Reduced energy reserves increase the likelihood of a later parturition (fawning) date.
- Fawns born later in the spring are less likely to survive the following winter.
- Increases in fawn over-winter mortality and/or decreases in productivity reduce the population growth rate.

Why so much focus on mule deer?

- WDFW's mission is to protect healthy, self-sustaining, well-distributed wildlife populations.
- Mule deer are foundational to the ecosystem.
 - Mule deer are the primary prey base for cougars and wolves.
 - Mule deer are an important prey base for black bears, coyotes and bobcats.
 - Mule deer carcasses are the major food source for wintering golden and bald eagles.
 - Mule deer carcasses are an important food for many scavengers.

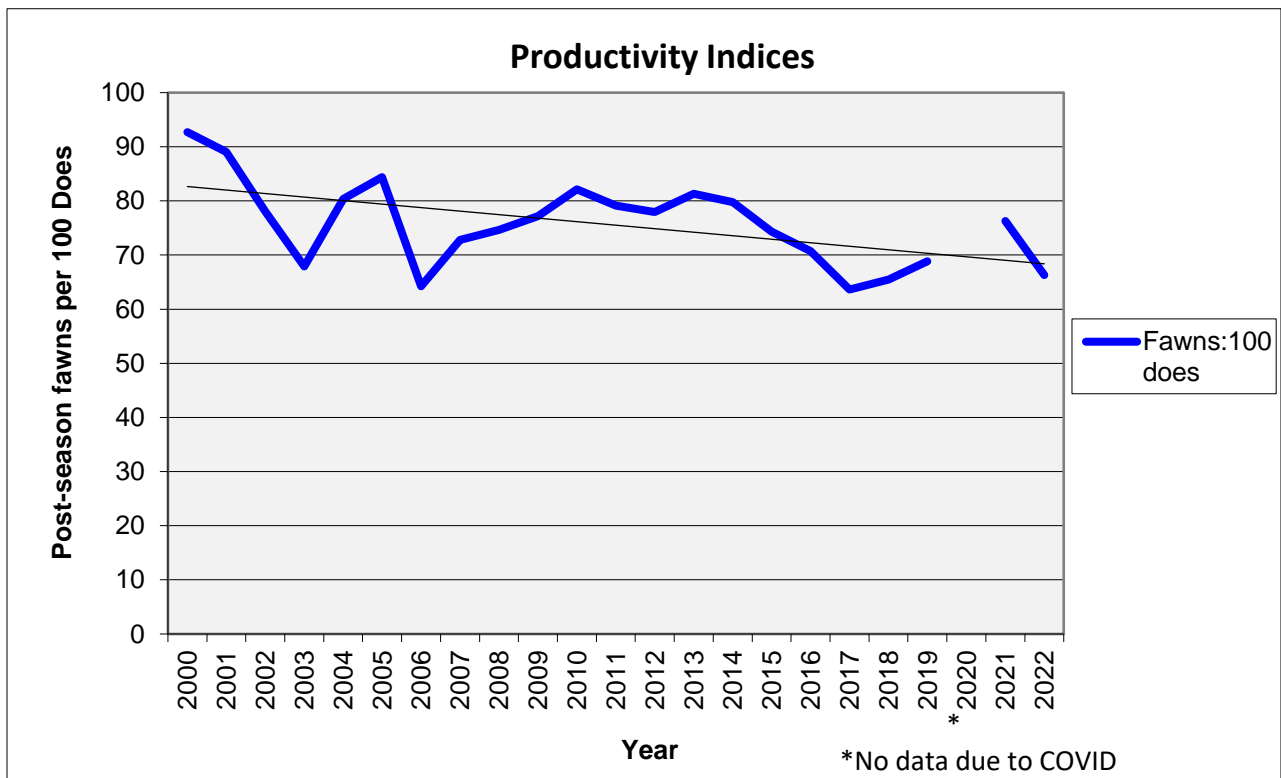
- Mule deer are an important, and arguably the most popular watchable wildlife species in the Methow Watershed.
- Mule deer are the most numerous and prized big game species in Okanogan County.

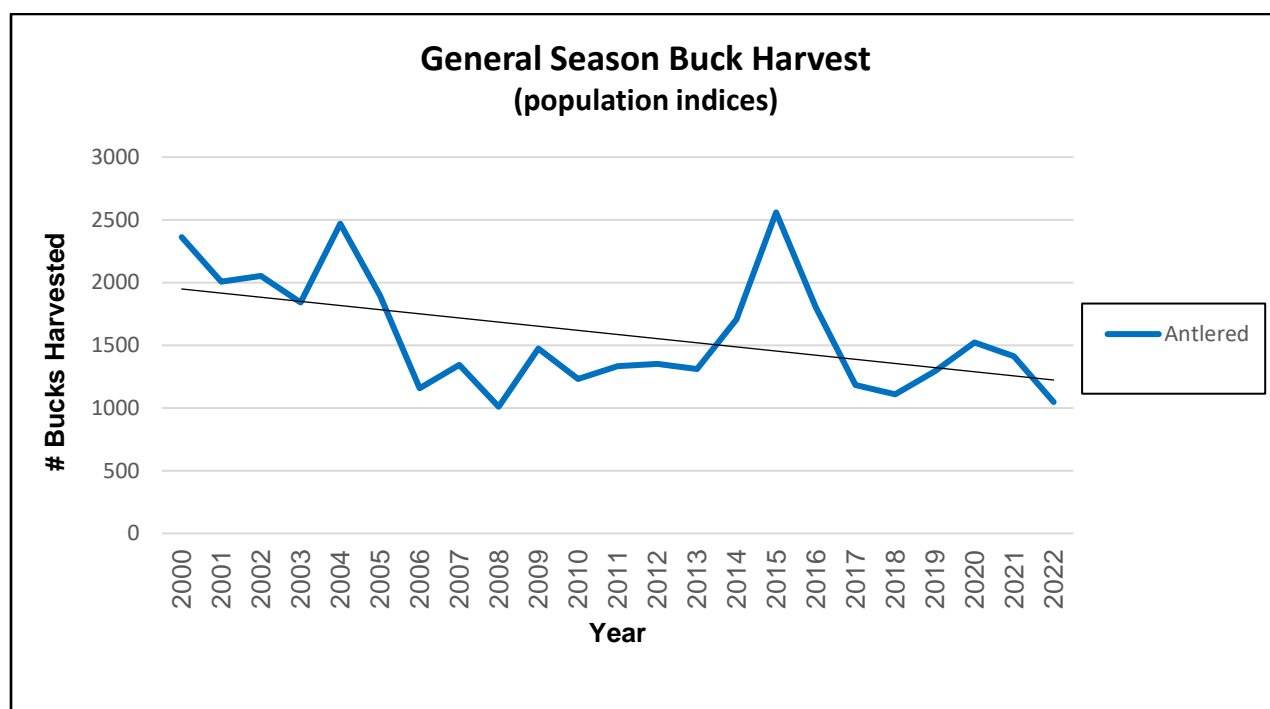
What is the science behind this management action? – There is a large and growing body of literature on the effects of human disturbance of mule deer specifically and wildlife in general (see attached bibliography).



What local data do we have to suggest this is an issue for mule deer in the Methow? –

- Since 2000, the long-term trend in late fall fawn-to-doe ratios (productivity indices) is down (see graph below).
- The long-term trend in general season buck harvest (overall population indices) is down (see graph below).
- Preliminary examination of spring fawn-to-adult ratios suggest that the population growth rate has also been declining long-term.





What else is WDFW doing to improve the health of mule deer populations? –

- Local WDFW field biologists are recommending the suspension of all antlerless mule deer hunting.
- Methow Wildlife Area staff are engaged in active restoration/enhancement on degraded mule deer winter/spring habitat.
- WDFW is continuing to protect critical mule deer habitat through strategic purchases and conservation easements.
- WDFW staff advise the Methow Conservancy on deer-friendly management for their lands and conservation easements.
- WDFW is developing a statewide recreation plan to help minimize/mitigate impacts to wildlife including deer.
- The Methow Wildlife Area is the pilot for including recreation management in the Wildlife Area management plan which is currently being revised.

Other important information –

- The human population of the Methow Watershed increased by 31% from 2005 to 2020.
- The human population of the Methow Watershed increased by 3.8% from 2020 to 2022.
- Developed residential parcels in the Methow Watershed increased by 33% from 2005 to 2020.
- Groomed Nordic trail skier use days in the Methow Watershed increased over 300% from 2011 to 2022.
- Although not quantitatively tracked, observations suggest other winter recreation pursuits have increased significantly as well.