

range expansion to the north, to refine capture and transplanting techniques, and to move deer from areas where damage has been a concern (S. Denney, ODFW, *in litt.* 2001).

The Columbian white-tailed deer was listed as endangered by the State with the passage of the Oregon Endangered Species Act in 1987 (ODFW 1995). In 1995, the ODFW reviewed the status of the Columbian white-tailed deer in Oregon (both Douglas County and Columbia River populations) and concluded that the subspecies had recovered (ODFW 1995). At the November 1995 meeting of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission, the Commissioners voted unanimously to remove the Columbian white-tailed deer from the State of Oregon List of Threatened and Endangered Species; the subspecies was placed on the State's Sensitive Species List for continued monitoring (Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission 1995). Oregon continues to prohibit hunting of white-tailed deer in all western Oregon big-game management units (ODFW 2001).

#### **Distinct Vertebrate Population Segment**

The Douglas County and Columbia River populations of the Columbian white-tailed deer meet the requirements for consideration as distinct population segments as described in our Policy Regarding the Recognition of Distinct Vertebrate Population Segments, published in the **Federal Register** on February 7, 1996 (61 FR 4722). For a population to be considered as a distinct vertebrate population segment, two elements are considered: (1) The

discreteness of the population segment in relation to the remainder of the species to which it belongs; and (2) the significance of the population segment to the species to which it belongs.

A population may be considered discrete if it is: (1) Separated from other populations of the same taxon by physical, physiological, ecological, or behavioral factors; or (2) limited by international governmental boundaries where there are differences in control of exploitation, management of habitat, conservation status, or regulatory mechanisms. The Douglas County and Columbia River populations of Columbian white-tailed deer are discrete because they are geographically isolated from each other. Historically, this subspecies ranged from the south end of Puget Sound in Washington south to the Umpqua River drainage in Oregon (Bailey 1936). At the present time, the subspecies is found in two locations (along the Columbia River in Washington and Oregon, and in Douglas County, Oregon), which are separated by over 320 km (200 mi), much of which is discontinuous or unsuitable habitat. Columbian white-tailed deer are not migratory and appear to restrict their movements to relatively small home ranges (ODFW 1995). Laboratory research has also demonstrated that there may be a relatively large genetic difference between the Douglas County and Columbia River populations of Columbian white-tailed deer (Gavin and May 1988), which indicates a lack of gene flow between the two populations. As a result, the wide geographic gap in suitable habitat between the Columbia

River and Douglas County populations demonstrates that this subspecies has two discrete population segments.

The following issues are considered when determining significance: (1) Persistence of the discrete population segment in an unusual or unique setting for the taxon; (2) evidence that loss of the segment would result in a significant gap in the range of the taxon; (3) evidence that the discrete population segment represents the only surviving natural occurrence of a taxon that may be more abundant elsewhere as an introduced population outside its historic range; or (4) evidence that the population segment differs from other populations of the species in its genetic characteristics.

The Douglas County and Columbia River populations are considered significant under our policy based on two factors. First, the loss of either of the Douglas County or Columbia River population would result in a significant gap in the range of the subspecies. The loss of either population would substantially constrict the current range of the subspecies. Second, each population has genetic characteristics that are not found in the other population (Gavin and May 1988). Because the Douglas County and Columbia River populations of the Columbian white-tailed deer are discrete and significant, they warrant recognition as Distinct Vertebrate Population Segments under the Act. The following map illustrates the location of these two DPSs.

**BILLING CODE 4310-55-P**