



**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Deschutes County Board of Commissioners  
**FROM:** Tanya Saltzman, AICP, Senior Planner  
**DATE:** August 26, 2021  
**SUBJECT:** Wildlife Inventory Update – Public Outreach Overview

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Staff is providing the Board of County Commissioners (Board) with a summary of the public outreach effort for one of the two tasks comprising the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) Technical Assistance (TA) grant, which was closed out at the end of May. Staff will provide additional information to prepare the Board to determine its preferred approach for the next phase of the project.

**I. Wildlife Inventory Update – Initial Project Scope**

For the initial phase of the project, the County engaged the public to present updated state and federal biological data and then gauge general interest in updating three inventories into the Comprehensive Plan that were selected by a team of wildlife biologists with experience in the County: mule deer winter range, elk winter range, and sensitive birds (golden and bald eagles).

Deschutes County’s Comprehensive Plan features extensive lists of “Goal 5 resources.” Statewide Planning Goal 5 aims to protect a variety of resources, from historic structures to surface mines. State administrative rules govern the implementation of Goal 5 ([Oregon Administrative Rules Chapter 660, Division 23](#)). In order to qualify for protection, a resource must first be inventoried. Wildlife inventories rely on federal or state inventories.

The majority of the County’s Goal 5 wildlife inventories were last updated in the early 1990s and no longer reflect the best available data for wildlife habitat. As the human population grows and with it, development pressure increases, it is important for these inventories to be based on the best available data for avoidance and minimization to wildlife and their habitats. The efforts summarized in this effort are intended to function as a pilot project to take the first steps towards updating three wildlife inventories, with a goal of serving as a model for future inventory updates.

## II. Data Overview and Highlights

The inventory process and data collected by the Interagency Working Group (IWG), which consisted of technical experts from Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW), U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the project consultant wildlife biologist, was summarized in a report by the consultant, which is included as an appendix to the public outreach report. The IWG report provides an overview of the inventory selection process and the methodology of the data collected and utilized by the IWG to form new recommended inventories for deer winter range, elk winter range, and sensitive birds. This report then formed the basis of the information presented during the public outreach process.

As noted in the Public Outreach Report, the IWG collected raw data on the three selected inventories using several methods explained in the report (aerial, collar data, etc.); using that data, the IWG developed recommended new inventory areas. These proposed new inventories do not mean that species do not exist outside of the proposed boundaries—rather, the areas within the proposed areas are the most biologically significant with respect to critical habitat.

The proposed new inventories are viewable in the project StoryMap at the below link:

<https://www.deschutes.org/WildlifeStorymap>

In the StoryMap, the reader can zoom in and pan around maps for each inventory, compare the boundaries of current and proposed inventories, and view snapshots of the raw data used to create the proposed inventories.

As illustrated in the inventory maps in the StoryMap, all three of the proposed inventories are larger than the current ones:

- The current Wildlife Area Combining Zone for mule deer winter range covers approximately 315,847 acres, and the proposed additional area covers 188,132 acres, resulting in a potential total of 503,979 acres.
- For sensitive birds, the current inventory is 5 bald eagle nests a 25 golden eagle nests, and the proposed new inventory totals 116 bald eagle nest locations and 103 golden eagle nest locations.
- The current Wildlife Area Combining Zone for elk winter range covers approximately 51,717 acres, and the proposed additional area covers 359,473 acres, resulting in a potential total of 411,190 acres.

The IWG noted that a larger inventory area does not mean a larger or more robust population of the species in question; rather, in the case of mule deer and elk winter range, this larger area is deemed necessary in order to protect the population. For example, during the open houses, representatives from ODFW noted that the mule deer population has been declining by roughly ten percent annually. For sensitive birds, USFWS experts noted in the StoryMap that the increased numbers of nests “do not necessarily correspond to increased eagle success or upward population

trends. Survey methods have improved and survey efforts have greatly increased over the past several decades, resulting in the record of several alternative nest sites per territory (e.g. the 103 golden eagle nest sites represent 41 territories).”

Based on the outreach undertaken by the county, which is described in the Public Outreach Report, it appears that a significant majority of participants are supportive of utilizing the proposed inventories to begin the update process to the County Comprehensive Plan and development code.

### **III. Public Outreach Report**

The attached Public Outreach Report provides an overview of the grant-funded phase of the wildlife inventory update project, including summaries of the work of the Technical Advisory Committee, IWG, and the consultant. The report outlines the extensive public outreach process, which consisted of a public information campaign, online survey, online interactive maps and background information about the three inventories using StoryMap technology (including illustrations from the StoryMap), and two online open houses. Survey responses and a summary of the open house questions and answers are provided as appendices to the report, along with the data summary report produced by the consultant, Mason, Bruce & Girard. The Public Outreach Report represents the culmination of the grant-funded phase of this project.

### **IV. Next Steps**

Staff can return to the Board with a “road map” of options for proceeding with a Goal 5 inventory update for these three inventories, including potential decision points, interagency coordination requirements, and a general timeline.

In addition, if the Board would like more specific information regarding the inventories and species/habitat data, staff can invite representatives from ODFW and/or USFWS to make a presentation to the Board.

Attachment:  
Public Outreach Report