

**SEPA #:** 24-056 Methow Wildlife Area Winter Closure  
**Comment Period:** November 26 - December 10, 2024

Comment Category	General Comments	WDFW Response
<p><b>Support the closure</b></p>	<p>Conservation Northwest supports the findings in the SEPA determination.</p>	<p><b>Response:</b> The Methow Valley is home to one of the most iconic herds of migratory mule deer in Washington state. Many of those deer take up wintertime residence on the Methow Wildlife Area. In fact, much of the Methow Wildlife Area was purchased specifically for the protection of migratory corridors and mule deer winter range. Due to the effects of climate change, including catastrophic wildfire, mule deer winter range has been on the decline. Simultaneously, year-round recreation has been on the rise. Therefore, there is less quality habitat available for wildlife and more human disturbance during those critical winter and early spring months. This closure is intended to conserve and perpetuate mule deer populations by reducing human pressure during the most critical months for mule deer when food is scarce. The closure areas are centered around quality winter range and known mule deer activity areas. WDFW greatly appreciates your support in our conservation efforts.</p>
	<p>I support the closure. It's critical that the deer are stress free during the winter months in this area for their survival. If the predators are a problem in this wintering area then something needs to be done. Since the wolves are protected under the ESA maybe measures to control their interaction with deer needs to be done like what's done when they kill cattle. Maybe monitoring their location and detouring them.</p>	
	<p>Big proponent of this, Washington is the smallest western state with the highest population density (110 people per Sq mile) (besides California 238). Much larger states like Montana (8 people per square mile) close much larger areas for longer time periods to protect ungulates on winter range. The Methow is inundated with winter recreationists. Give the wildlife the break!</p>	
	<p>I support these closures. During shed season, i have witnessed firsthand, snowmobilers and operators of side-by-sides with tracks, actually chasing antlered animals, hoping to have them drop their antlers. Even motorized recreating where ungulates are wintering, stresses them and decreases their chances for survival. Deer and elk are already stressed by winter conditions and need to be protected from the additional stress caused by human activities. Also, the wolf and cougar populations have greatly increased, adding to winter stress, and contributing to the reduction in numbers of deer and elk.</p>	
	<p>I support these closures as a necessary step to help deer and other wildlife have the best chance at surviving through the winter in good shape. WDFW's primary responsibility is to the state's wildlife per its mission, not to provide the most convenient recreation to people out their back door. The science from many studies across the west is clear about the disturbances caused by the presence of all types of recreationalists on the landscape. In an area with so much public land available, the closure for a few months of these specific areas is not an undue burden.</p>	

	<p>I support the closures. Wolf and lion numbers have increased and increased the pressure on the deer populations, the herds need to recover .</p>	
	<p>Supportive of the closures..</p>	
	<p>I support this closure.</p>	
	<p>I am in favor of these closures.</p>	
	<p>Strongly support this closure. These wintering ranges are critical for the herds success.</p>	
	<p>I fully support this closure. Once these habitats are gone it is always very difficult / impossible to recover them.</p>	
	<p>I support this decision to close these units.</p>	
	<p>I support this closure. This herd needs to rebound back to its full potential</p>	
	<p>A great move to provide protections to wintering wildlife. I support this decision but recommend having a flexible closure end date to address weather/snow pack conditions so the closure could be extended if needed.</p>	
	<p>I support this decision. This herd needs to be stress free during the harsh winters in this area.</p>	
	<p>Yes, please consider this email as a comment on this issue. I have property in Snohomish County, near Glacier Peak. We never see mule deer, so anything you can do to induce better lifespans for this deer would be greatly appreciated.</p>	

	<p>Good idea hope its not to late to get the heard to rebound</p>	
	<p>I think it's is very important that we close these wintering grounds because these deer are already struggling and having people hiking around or taking pictures or harassing these deer puts so much more stress on them.</p>	
	<p>I strongly support this closure! There is plenty of public land still open. The only change I would make is to extend the end date of the closure to April 30th.</p>	
	<p>The closure is a good step for mule deer recovery. I support the closure but controlling predator numbers would needs to be done in conjunction with the closure.</p>	

	<p>Methow Valley Citizens Council (MVCC) would like to express our continued support for the temporary winter closures of units of the Methow Wildlife Area (MWA) and the recent determination of nonsignificance (DNS). We believe that closing portions of the MWA is having positive environmental impacts on both local mule deer and their winter range, and that this is an important step toward ensuring the health of the population going into the future. Despite what some might think, a significant portion of MWA lands were originally purchased with the specific intent of conserving mule deer winter range and migrator corridors. Reducing human pressure in critical habitat during particularly vulnerable months when mule deer are most challenged by food scarcity and energy demands is a sound approach, and we are finally catching up to so many other communities in the rural west who have already implemented winter closures for deer. Additionally, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation support these closures as a means of protecting a species that is foundational to their lifeways, and we are grateful that WDFW continues to work closely with the tribes on this and other matters. While MVCC supports the closures, we would also like to take this public comment opportunity to encourage WDFW to continue to increase their communications and transparency within our local Methow community. Certain groups here continue to voice their frustration over the winter closures and WDFW's process of information sharing. In the future we recommend advertising comment periods in a timely manner in the paper, giving the public as close to the full legal notice as possible. Having intentional and clear communications regarding opportunities for public input, planning, or rule changes will go a long way in bringing more people on board with this, and we are available as partners to help share accurate information about the closures, whether through organized meetings, conversations, print or digital media.</p>	
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**Oppose the closure**

As a Texas Creek resident over 20 years I have watched the decline of the mule deer population up Texas creek go from seeing herds of 20+ deer on the hill opposing my front windows to now seeing 5 does and only by camera at night. Biggest loss of game was early 2000s there was deep snow then rain then frozen again where the coyotes ran down the deer easily and deer were froze in gulleys causing a huge loss of deer population that has never regained from. The talk about wolves was a supposition until having one looking at me through my living room window so I know they are here. The herd has never had a chance of returning to its glory days. I use to drive visiting relatives around showing off the mule deer herds, one time I counted 75 bucks in one field and videoed huge bucks anywhere you drove. No longer! This is the first year in a long time I have noticed an above normal deer kill on the highways. I hit one myself this year, first one in 10 plus years. I drive a lot within the county and first 5 years here I hit 7 deer, they were always darting in front of traffic, I believe if we could teach the wolves how to read the deer closure signs we might have a chance, but closing it to hunting is silly, I have 24/7 cameras up and have not seen a legal deer in them this year. Reducing wolf population may give the deer herd a fighting chance of returning but that wont be for several years.

I do not support this closure. Duck Season is open during this time and there is already limited access to hunt the Methow River. I use these wildlife areas to hunt. I would agree with a closure after waterfowl season but we should have fair access during all open hunting seasons. There is also small game hunting going on.

I strongly opposed this closure.

**Response:** Winter range is habitat to which mule deer migrate to find more favorable living conditions during the harshest times of the year. In the Methow, this is predominantly lower elevation shrubsteppe with shrubs such as bitterbrush being primary forage plants. During the winter, a deer's diet is lower in nutrients and less digestible. Therefore, stored fat is burned to partially compensate for nutritional deficiencies. Human related disturbance can stress animals and cause them to expend unnecessary energy, which may increase winter mortality. Additionally, human disturbance may result in mule deer avoiding preferred areas, forcing them into smaller or more marginal habitats. This may concentrate deer, which may increase predation, and may result in the overuse and eventual decline of forage plants that are critical to wildlife. Additionally, human disturbance adds to other stressors such as fires, predators, climate change, and habitat loss. Although, to ensure there are adequate and high-quality fish and wildlife related recreational opportunities, including hunting, each unit that is partially closed also has areas left open for the public's enjoyment.

It's completely unacceptable to close public land during winter months with the excuse of trying to protect mule deer. Where were you when all the recent fires came through and destroyed the habitat. The excuse is no money, too dangerous? That's unacceptable. Why would Wdfw have issued so many antlerless tags after the Carlton complex to reduce the herd numbers instead of opening feeding stations like they do all over the state for elk through the winter. Whoever made those decisions should be in jail! Who even thinks they have the authority to close public land to the public? Sounds like huge lawsuits are coming from this. Get rid of the morons that have no idea what they're doing and install people that actually care about the wildlife. It's become all about money in your pocket. It would be a failed attempt if you tried to show facts that public entry is to blame for declining deer numbers. It's obviously extremely poor management, poor decisions, and the lack of motivation to actually do anything for the animals.

Let me first state that the link for comments is not working, I would say this is deliberate to avoid negative comments by the majority who disagree with this government overreach. It seems the WDFW is being overseen by a group of unqualified politicians with a very low level of understanding of the subject at hand. This has been made extremely clear over the last several years by the incompetent decisions that are resulting in major wildlife issues in our state. When we introduce predators to include the wolves and now the grizzly bears it is very clear that the current administration has no clue of how nature actually works. Human interaction is the least of the worries at the migration calendar, in fact the introduction of predators that the animals have not in seen in generations would be the primary issue. It is my belief that the point of the closure would be to limit the residents of our state from truly documenting the destruction our "leaders" have caused by their mistakes. I see this becoming a pattern of hiding the truth from the public, as a local resident I object and I demand the land stay open for public use. This will ensure the predatory animals know there is a presence of humans and the public can document the truth of the situation. It is time for a change in our state and the current narrative is a complete failure as can be clearly seen by the public. I ask for the end of this nonsense and ask the current leaders of the WDFW to be mandated to complete continuing education on the matter at hand before proceeding.

	<p>The problem is not humans or climate change. WDFW reintroduced wolves into these areas, and that is one of the problems. Another huge problem is not being able to hunt mountain lions with dog's. Vegetation is now thriving in these burn/ migration areas. I do not support the closure.</p>	
<p><b>WDFW should take alternative measures</b></p>	<p>None of this matters. Unless you control predation you will see the numbers continue to drop. You can close land and end hunts but it's all window dressing and doesn't address the real issue causing populations of Ungulates to all over the North Western US.</p>	<p><b>Response:</b> The winter range closure is one tool WDFW has utilized to conserve wildlife, particularly mule deer, in an attempt to minimize human disturbance. There are numerous other things WDFW is doing to improve the health of mule deer populations. For example, local biologists have recommended suspending antlerless mule deer hunting. Staff are also engaged in numerous habitat restoration projects. WDFW also utilizes strategic acquisitions and conservation easements to protect critical mule deer habitat. Additionally, the Methow Wildlife Area is a pilot area for incorporating recreation management in the Wildlife Area Management Plan, which is currently being revised.</p>
	<p>You closed them last winter. Please be a little more transparent in your goals: what is an estimate of current mule deer population? What percentage increase in population are you looking for in order to determine if these closures are successful? Did the closures last year have any documented impact to mule deer populations? Are you also doing other things to enhance populations: eradicating weeds and reseeding with native forage in recently logged WDFW areas? Since deer don't just stay on WDFW lands are you working with other contiguous public lands to make the area more hospitable for mule deer, especially recent logging in USFS lands? How about suspending antlerless hunts in addition to closing wildlife areas? I agree that the proposed closures should continue but I want to see the issues above addressed clearly and publicly before any further closers are proposed (2025-2026).</p>	
	<p>Habitat rehabilitation and better control of predator population would do far more for these herds than this! Locking them up will just give the predators a bigger playground</p>	
<p><b>General statements or questions not clearly supporting or opposing the closure</b></p>	<p>I'm confused by why there's such a brief public comment period. Haven't you already decided to do the closures anyways?</p>	<p><b>Response:</b> WDFW issued the SEPA determination under WAC 197-11-340(2) that requires a 14-day comment period for a DNS.</p>
	<p>I am sad to lose access to some of my favorite areas close to town in the winter.</p>	<p>The proposed closure for Winter 2024-2025 is under consideration and a</p>



	<p>If the deer are bothered by people then why do they hang in town and all our neighborhoods. the game dept is making excuses for the poor job they do managing the state game lands and herds.</p>	<p>decision was not made prior to the 14-day comment period. These SEPA comments will be considered by WDFW in making its decision on whether to go forward with the closure as proposed and described in the SEPA checklist and DNS.</p>
	<p>If the goal of the closures is to reduce the calories deer spend fleeing people what about fencing? All the derelict and unnecessary barb-wire fencing changes deer movement in deep snow. Radio tracking and tracks in snow show how deer respond to the fencing in unnatural routes. If the closures are a serious effort to reduce stress on the deer the same effort should be done with fences. An inventory and plan for removal should be done soon. Plenty of trained and eager community volunteers would help with removal.</p>	<p>Although portions of the wildlife area are to be closed, if the closure occurs as proposed in the SEPA checklist and DNS, each unit has areas that will remain open for recreational enjoyment.</p> <p>The majority of deer in town are year-round resident deer who have become habituated to humans. The migratory mule deer herd are far less tolerant of humans and tend to be far more shy and much quicker to flee at the sight of people.</p> <p>The Methow Wildlife Area hosts annual fence removal projects with conservation partners and engages in other fence removal projects with volunteers. These efforts to remove derelict fencing throughout the wildlife area will continue.</p>