

# Making a Difference for Wildlife

Hundreds of local conservation projects are undertaken annually by SCI Chapters. They are reinforced by many notable conservation initiatives funded by the SCI Foundation.



## Inland Empire Deer Research

Northeastern Washington State, USA  
Total Funds: Volunteer man-hours, minimal cash contribution is significant enough that credit is given SCI on the WDFW Web site.

In the last two seasons, 184 does have been fitted with collars enabling WDFW biologist Woody Myers to discover where they live, what habitats are preferred and how they die. These does are captured, weighed, measured and sampled to assess disease exposure, parasite loading, trace elements and DNA to provide indications of condition by WDFW staff and SCI volunteers. One unique aspect of this study is an examination of captured deer by ultrasonography, which gives an indication of fat levels and body condition.

Taking the research one step farther, Myers is comparing wild mule deer to does raised at Washington State University that are receiving well-characterized diets. Their body condition also will be measured by ultrasonography, and their reproductive success will be followed after breeding with captive bucks.

Vegetation mapping and nutritional analysis of various forage species were begun in the spring of 2002. The results of this research should complement similar studies investigating the roles of habitat and predators in declining mule deer populations elsewhere, and may indicate what habitat management strategies are needed to ensure healthy mule deer populations into the future.

The role of mountain lions in deer population dynamics also is under investigation by researchers from Washington State's Large Carnivore Lab as part of this SCI-sponsored project.

**A** GENERAL DECLINE in mule deer populations across western North America has biologists and managers seeking answers. Northeast and north central Washington has been no exception, with the decrease in deer numbers documented by survey results and declining hunter harvests.

One possible cause, low forage nutrition, is being investigated by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) with assistance from SCI's Inland Empire Chapter.

Does are recaptured twice a year to provide measurements of their health going into winter and upon leaving winter range in the spring. These data are important because does with deficient diets can produce fawns with low birth weights. Studies show that fawns born late and with low birth weights have a poor chance of surviving their first winter. Fawns also are being radio-marked for study during winter capture sessions.

