

# 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.



## Mule Deer Predator/Prey Research

Southeast Idaho, USA

Total Funds: \$125,000

(including leveraged funds)

**T**HROUGHOUT MONTANA, Idaho, Wyoming and Utah, the winter of 1992 was devastating to mule deer. After years of drought that reduced the carrying capacity of the range, heavy snows fell that year.

In parts of Idaho, herd sizes were cut in half. When herds did not rebound by 1996, Idaho Fish and Game initiated a massive 5-year effort to collar and track as many mule deer does and fawns as possible to determine whether predators, habitat changes, or some interaction between both was responsible. To help the expensive, region-wide effort, SCI Idaho donated \$13,000, including matching grants. SCI member Gloria Erickson followed with a generous \$15,000 personal donation. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, BLM and Forest Service matched these monies for a total of \$125,000.

In January, does and 6-month-old fawns are captured by being chased with helicopters into drive nets and waiting *Idaho Chapter* volunteer labor. Once in the nets, blood samples are drawn, measurements taken and tracking collars applied. Deer movements are then tracked by telemetry, revealing survival rates, growth rates and habitat choices. In four years, there have been no serious injuries to the deer, although there have been a few bruised biologists and volunteers.

The study is now entering its fifth and final season. The huge amount of data will then be summarized, revealing results that will be of use to mule deer managers everywhere about the effects of predators and habitat change on mule deer recruitment.

