

Methow Valley News Online

Methow watershed gets \$3.5 million for salmon and wildlife habitat

By Marcy Stamper

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has received \$3.5 million in federal grant money for the acquisition of 2,700 acres and additional stream frontage in the Methow watershed to protect spawning and rearing habitat for endangered salmon. The funds will also help create habitat corridors for endangered mammals and mule deer and will benefit 23 other threatened species, according to the announcement released by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

“The Methow River Watershed is perhaps the most intact and ecologically functional major drainage in eastern Washington.... Nationally, it is one of the few places where endangered and threatened grizzly bears, gray wolves, lynx, bull trout, and salmon occur together, and it is the home of Washington’s first documented wolf pack,” said USFWS in its announcement of the award.

The monies will be used for voluntary land acquisitions. They will go toward Phase 8 of an existing habitat-conservation program in the watershed.

The acquisitions typically include both outright land purchases and conservation easements, which would be held by WDFW. Many of the properties in the Methow are existing ranches, which would be granted easements that allow agriculture to continue while maintaining a wildlife corridor, according to Joanne Stellini, coordinator of the USFWS Endangered Species Conservation Fund in Washington.

In its application, WDFW identified specific parcels with important habitat features that have already been reviewed at the state and local level, said Stellini. Now that funds are available, WDFW officials and private landowners must work out the details of the final transactions, including appraisals and a determination that the property owners are still interested in selling, she said. The transactions must be completed within three years.

The money for habitat in the Methow represents the bulk of the funds awarded to Washington, which received \$4.6 million total. Only state agencies can compete for these habitat grants, said Stellini. Nationwide, USFWS has provided \$53 million for habitat conservation in this round of grants.

Federal funding for the habitat acquisitions was cut by almost 50 percent this year, said Stellini.

MV News file photo by Sue Misao: Deer on the Methow River.

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