

# Elk 'Alive And Kicking' Following Relocation

The second round in an ongoing tribal effort to bolster a weak population of elk in the North Cascades was highly successful, tribal officials said. All 10 of the elk transferred from the Mt. St. Helens area near Toutle, where elk are plentiful, survived their relocation to the North Sound region.

This year's transfer adds to the 41 animals the tribes and the state worked together to transfer to the dwindling bands of the Nooksack elk herd.

"We're happy and proud that all of the animals we brought north have survived," said Todd

Wilbur, a Swinomish tribal member who chairs the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission's Inter-tribal Wildlife Committee. "Now, 10 more elk are alive and kicking in core habitat for the Nooksack elk herd."

During two spring capture sessions this March, the tribes worked with state and local groups to transfer six cow elk and four calves from the wilderness around Mt. St. Helens to the North Sound. This continues a multi-year effort by the tribal and state co-managers to rebuild the North Cascades elk herd, also known as the Nooksack elk herd, by removing animals from the overpopulated Toutle River Valley.

The tribes will continue monitoring the collared animals at least once a week for the next several years.

"Elk and other wildlife have always been essential for the tribes," said Scott Schuyler, natural resources policy coordinator for the Upper Skagit Tribe. "Allowing elk populations to vanish is simply not an option for us."

Besides assistance from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the tribes received valuable volunteer assistance from Mark Smith and Jim Marks of the Mount St. Helens Preservation Society. The Yakama Nation also provided material assistance.

"This shows what can happen when we work together," said Shawn Yanity, chairman of the Stillaguamish Tribe. "The tribes are committed to preserving natural resources for future generations, and cooperation is the way we want to achieve that goal."

Another capture is tentatively planned for mid- to late summer.

The Point Elliott tribes include Lummi, Muckleshoot, Nooksack, Sauk-Suiattle, Stillaguamish, Suquamish, Swinomish, Tulalip and Upper Skagit.

Biologists believe a number of factors contributed to the decline in the North Cascades elk herd's population, including habitat changes and over-hunting. WDFW and the tribes have forbidden hunting in the herd's core area since 1993, and hunting will not be allowed until elk populations have reached recovery goals. — *J. Shaw*



A radio-collared cow elk surveys her new home in the North Sound. *Photo: C. Madsen*

## Deer Study Sheds Light On Shedding Deer

About one-quarter of the black-tail deer examined as part of a study by the Makah Tribe are afflicted with a parasite-induced hair loss disease called hair slip syndrome. Hair loss reduces the ability of the deer to regulate its body temperature during cold spring rains, which can lead to hypothermia, stress, exhaustion and often death.

Recently, Oregon state wildlife scientists concluded the syndrome is caused by a non-native louse that likely came to the United States via imported exotic deer. Lice cause the deer to lick and scratch incessantly, resulting in hair loss.

Makah wildlife biologists believe the incidence of hair slip is high enough that it is depressing black-tail deer populations on the North Olympic Peninsula. They are expanding their study to confirm that belief by tracking the offspring of mothers with the hair slip syndrome. "We want to study these fawns through the birth of their own fawn," said Jon Gallie, wildlife biologist for the Makah Tribe. "All the deer with the syndrome don't die, but the mortality rate reported in other studies ranges from 30 to 70 percent." Fawns likely contract hair slip from their mother.

During the past two years, Makah tribal biologists have radio collared 35 deer, on and off-reservation. Along with quantifying the incidence of hair loss, biologists are identifying habitat preferences of the deer, tracking deer behavior relative to logging roads, causes of mortality, and overall survival rates.

Tribal biologists were expecting to see a surge in fawn survival this year because of increased logging activity both on and off reservation that initially increases forage for deer and elk. "That, coupled with two consecutive mild winters, led us to expect higher survival, but that's not the case and part of it might be related to the high percentage of deer with the hair loss," said Gallie. "There could be other factors, but we'll have a better idea after we process some of the data this fall."

— *D. Preston*