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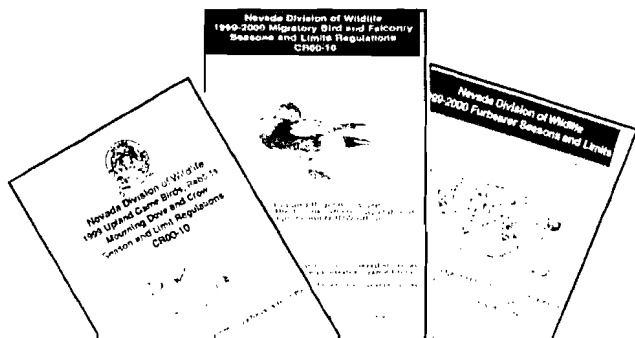
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Nevada where the interest in pursuing big

biologist's role in deer management and how

The management of deer in Nevada is an evolving

really should play a role in the management of your wildlife. The Division

ession, but critically important!

# FIRES AFFECT 1.5 MILLION ACRES-RESEEDING PROJECTS PLANNED

BY KELLY CLARK

Nevada's 1999 fire season set records that state wildlife biologists hope will never be broken. As of Sept. 1, 1999, a record-breaking 1.5 million acres of Nevada wildlands had burned. Vast expanses of wildlife habitat, including more than 45,000 acres of bighorn sheep habitat, 668,000 acres of antelope habitat, 144,000 acres of sage grouse habitat, 481,000 acres of chukar habitat, 304,000

acres of mule deer summer range and 341,000 acres of deer winter range were affected during the fires that swept the state in July and August.

One of the hardest hit areas was Game Management Area 6 in the NE portion of the state. Early reports by biologists show that the Clover Fire, in western Elko Co. and northern Lander Co.

burned 72,000 acres in the Izzenhood Range and the Dinosaur Hills, areas used extensively by wintering deer. In the past these areas supported an average of 1,742 deer, and the impacts to them are expected to be significant.

At the September Wildlife Commission meeting, commissioners heard

reports on the fires and their impacts on wildlife. One proposal to close Unit 065, which is located southwest of Elko, was heard, but commissioners decided to leave the unit open citing deer mobility and ample time for the deer to move to better habitat. However commissioners did decide to close the unit to sage grouse hunting due to concerns about limited

mobility and vulnerability of the remaining population pockets on small pieces of habitat throughout the area.

Since the fires, federal, state, county and local governments have organized to assess damages **Continued on page 2**

## Fire Information Sources

BLM Reno state office  
Mike Holbert 861-6767  
Jo Simpson 861-6629

BLM Elko field office  
Don Dagnan 738-4071

BLM Internet site for fire information  
[www.nv.blm.gov/wgbcc/default.htm](http://www.nv.blm.gov/wgbcc/default.htm)

USFWS Sheldon Refuge  
(541) 947-3315

## FIRE'S INFLUENCE ON DEER HABITAT

BY DOUG HUNT

Mule deer live in a wide variety of habitats, including open coniferous forests and forest edges, woodlands, and shrub rangelands. These habitats provide wind breaks during the cold winter and shade during the warm summer months, as well as escape cover from predators. Additionally, these habitats support favored food sources including

forbs and shrubs, like sagebrush and bitterbrush, and some grasses. Natural and man-made factors can limit the habitat, which in turn can cause hardships on the deer herd using them. For instance, a winter range critical to a particular deer herd may be altered or lost due to fire or other factors. When the suitability of a habitat is altered, it can create a "bottleneck" through which

only a limited number of deer can pass. This in turn can decrease the herd due to the lack of suitable habitat conditions at that time of year.

Changes to the vegetation in Nevada over the last 150 years have accelerated fire frequency dramatically. Prior to the explosive increase of cheatgrass, the Wyoming big sage

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## ETHICAL BEHAVIOR IN BURN AREAS

BY MAUREEN ANGEL

Division of Wildlife asks hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts to practice good ethical behavior in burn areas while out in the field this fall and winter.

Larry Barngrover, NDOW eastern regional manager, Elko, says he is concerned about activities in or around the burn areas. "Many of the wildlife species that are in these fire areas are still disoriented and are probably still trying to adjust to whatever habitat is left," said Barngrover.

Historically fires tended to burn in a patchwork pattern. There will be "patches" of unburned vegetation left in the burned areas, and the wildlife left in these areas will seek out these small patches of sagebrush, aspen, or other vegetation that is left.

"We would recommend that people try to leave these animals alone and not increase the impacts on them by chasing them with four-wheelers, motorcycles, or other motorized vehicles," Barngrover said. "I believe that most people consider it to be unethical to pursue or intensively hunt those animals in the little patches of vegetation that have not burned. It's just not a sporting proposition."

Another reason for not using off-road vehicles in the burned areas is the potential damage to the land itself. Vehicle traffic can accelerate erosion once the areas start receiving seasonal rains. Off-road activity will leave trails and tracks throughout the area, further intensifying the erosion cycle.

## INFLUENCE OF FIRE

*Cont'd from page 1*

community, which is heavily utilized by mule deer, burned on the order of every 50 to 100 years. Higher elevation vegetation (mountain shrub communities) may have sustained burns every 25-50 years. "Cool" fires, in the absence of cheatgrass, create greater edge effect by burning a mosaic through the vegetation, which may be crucial to mule deer for thermal and escape cover and provides a new growth of key forage species. Hot, wind driven fires on the other hand, especially in the Wyoming big sage communities, can be devastating to mule deer habitat and create a loss that may not be recovered for many years, if ever. These same hot fires, when occurring in shrub habitats infested with cheatgrass, may burn as often as every three to five years, and create a monotypic stand of cheatgrass which offers virtually no mule deer habitat benefits. The Winnemucca BLM District estimates that of the three million acres of

Wyoming big sage present in the District, one million acres has been converted to cheatgrass by this accelerated fire cycle over the past 14 years. Should this rate of conversion be maintained and go unchecked, very little Wyoming big sage will be left in this area within 30 years.

**What are the answers? We know fire will come, and we know habitat will burn. Science is moving forward with several experimental methods to control cheatgrass, both biological and chemical in nature.** Until such time as these methods prove effective, it behooves sportsman's and conservation groups alike to work with land management agencies like the BLM and Forest Service to rehabilitate critical habitats as soon as possible following a fire. This can be a costly endeavor and requires work at many levels to achieve positive results, but is of the ways that the cheatgrass/fire cycle can be broken.

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