

## 2023 MULE DEER WINTER RANGE COMBINING ZONE (WA-MD) FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

*This document will be updated throughout the public process to reflect additional questions raised.*

### **What is happening?**

The mule deer population is declining. Deschutes County has been asked by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to adopt a map and regulate additional areas of the County to protect mule deer habitat. New studies show the deer use or could use parts of the County that are not currently protected. A public process to balance economic, social, environmental and energy values (called an "ESEE") will be used to consider rules that could limit the development of property in mule deer habitat to protect the deer. Informational meetings will be followed by public hearings to discuss, review, and consider adopting rules to protect mule deer habitat.

### **Why are mule deer populations declining?**

ODFW has seen a decline in mule deer numbers in Deschutes County. Suspected causes for the drop include drought, disease, predators, habitat loss, and other human impacts.

### **How is development harming deer habitat?**

Deer habitat is harmed by being degraded. This happens when the natural landscape is changed to other uses that are not as useful to deer. For example, a road or driveway is not as useable as a grassland by deer to find food. Deer habitat is also harmed by being fragmented. This happens when development, roads, and fences split up deer habitat into smaller pieces.

### **What can the County do to protect mule deer habitat?**

Through this ESEE process, the County will consider rules to limit habitat degradation. This could include limiting the amount of land that can be developed or limiting the use of land in the winter when deer are present. It could also include rules to limit fragmentation of habitat, such as limits on fences. These rules will have to be balanced against other values, such as property rights and development opportunities.

### **How could this affect my property?**

Currently every property is allowed specific uses based on its zoning. Zones include residential zones, which are planned for homes, or farm zones, which are planned to protect farm use of the property. If adopted, the mule deer zone would be added (or

“overlaid” via a combining zone) to a property’s existing zoning and could place limits on the types of development allowed.

### **What use limits are being considered?**

For properties under 20 acres with an existing home, generally no changes are being considered. For vacant properties, rules on new fences and the location of new homes are being considered. For larger properties, rules requiring new subdivisions to leave open space areas are being considered. In addition, limits are being considered for several unusual commercial uses, such as veterinary clinics, golf courses, and solar farms.

### **Can I build fences for my farm?**

Yes. Fences used for accepted farming practices are exempt from the proposed fence criteria of the WA-MD zone.

### **I’m interested in the details. Where can I learn more?**

Visit [www.deschutes.org/muledeer](http://www.deschutes.org/muledeer) to see a summary table of the proposed amendments (including a list of commercial uses that have proposed limitations). To see detailed proposed code changes, the draft code is available for download on the same page.

### **How can I participate?**

This project will rely on input from the public to help shape the amendments as they go through the legislative process—first, hearing(s) before the Planning Commission beginning on April 13, and then a second set of hearings in front of the Board of County Commissioners.

Prior to the first hearing, the Planning Division and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) will host three public information sessions in early April (dates to be confirmed) to introduce the proposal and take questions from the public.

Please visit [www.deschutes.org/muledeer](http://www.deschutes.org/muledeer) for details on the information sessions and public hearings, as well as instructions for providing testimony for the record.