3.8 MIGRATORY DEER HERDS IN THE PLANNING AREA

[**Note to Reviewers:** Map of Deer Herds is in preparation by DFG, and will be included in the next draft of this chapter]

Descriptions of deer herds in Butte County were developed primarily from the Butte County General Plan (Butte County 2005). A deer herd is defined as a breeding population of deer that occupies a range common to that population. Many covered natural communities, including oak woodland and savanna, grassland, and riparian communities provide important winter range for migratory and resident deer herds in Butte County. Herds of black-tailed deer (species name) are common in Butte County (Figure 3-19).

Migratory deer use different areas for summer and winter activities and migrate between these areas to meet their year-round needs. Deer that remain in a restricted area on a year-round basis are considered resident populations. Migratory and resident deer that use the planning area are primarily associated with oak woodland and savanna and riparian communities. Three separate migratory deer herds, the East Tehama, Bucks Mountain, and Mooretown herds, occupy the eastern foothills and mountains in Butte County and depend on these areas for all or part of their habitat requirements. Resident deer herds in Butte County are the Camp Beale and Sacramento Valley herds.

Migratory Deer Herds. Migratory deer populations are less tolerant of humans and their pets, requiring a greater distance from areas of human habitation and use. They migrate mainly to take advantage of the availability of food. Migratory deer can occupy areas that will not support resident deer on a year-round basis. The majority of migratory deer habitat in Butte County is winter range. Winter range is considerably less abundant than summer range and is considered the limiting portion of the deer habitat because of its small size relative to summer range and its location in areas where land is in demand for other uses. The black-tail deer winter range within Butte County extends from the valley floor to nearly 4,000 feet in elevation. The critical winter range generally extends from 1,000 to 3,000 feet in elevation.

The main factors limiting populations of migratory deer in Butte County are the quantity and quality of habitat. Habitat values include food-producing areas in summer and winter, water, thermal cover, fawning areas (protection from predation during critical periods), and areas that allow for freedom of movement. Availability of food and water for deer varies seasonally and the amount of food available in winter may be the most limiting factor to deer populations, as they must meet their minimum energy requirements during the winter to survive. The necessary winter range components preferred by deer include a good interspersion of vegetative cover, abundant browse and herbaceous forage, limited residential development, and southerly aspect.

Eastern Tehama Deer Herd. The Eastern Tehama deer herd is the largest migratory deer herd in the county and occupies a range considered to be the most extensive in the state. The range of the herd includes portions of Tehama, Plumas, Lassen, Shasta, and Butte counties. Winter range is approximately 520,000 acres; migratory and summer ranges total approximately 920,500 acres and migration routes to and from seasonal ranges are the longest in the state,

covering a

Figure

3-19 Map of Migratory Deer Herds in the Planning Area

[To be provided.]

distance of 50 to 100 miles. Approximately 40 percent of the critical winter range in Butte County has been severely impacted due to residential encroachment since the mid 1960s (Butte County 2005).

Bucks Mountain Deer Herd. The Bucks Mountain deer herd range extends from eastern Butte County to western Plumas County. Winter range is approximately 200,600 acres; migratory and summer ranges total approximately 265,600 acres. Approximately 28 percent of the critical winter range in Butte County has been lost to residential encroachment since the mid 1960s (Butte County 2005).

Mooretown Deer Herd. Mooretown deer herds occupy a range extending from the southern boundary of the Bucks Mountain deer herd into northwestern Sierra and northeastern Yuba counties. Winter range is approximately 232,000 acres; migratory and summer ranges total approximately 217,950 acres. Approximately 50 percent of the critical winter range in Butte County has been lost to residential encroachment since the mid 1960s (Butte County 2005).

3.8.1 Land Use Conflicts with Migratory Deer

Residential development in the foothills of the western Sierra Nevada Mountains has increased substantially since the early 1960s and has been a major factor in the loss of winter range habitat for migratory deer. This habitat loss has seriously threatened the welfare of migratory deer. Most of the deer winter range in California is on private land. Subdivision and development of parcels allow land use changes which result in a permanent loss of deer habitat. Habitat losses are due to the elimination of forage and cover plants; disturbance from noise, traffic, and domestic dogs; and public use as a result of improved road access and subdivisions. One of the direct effects of residential development in deer winter range is development of barriers that interfere with deer movement in and out of winter range and separate food and water source areas from shelter sites. Barriers to deer movement include areas with high housing densities, deer-proof or deer-resistant fencing, reservoirs, major streams or rivers, and major roads and highways.

Houses arranged in linear corridors through migratory pathways and rows of houses on small lots along roadways and streams present the greatest barriers to migratory deer. In addition, predation and harassment of deer by domestic dogs accompanies increased residential development in rural areas. Deer generally do not come within 1,000 or more feet of an occupied dwelling with dogs. Migratory deer appear to be far less tolerant of the presence of dogs than are resident deer.

Construction of large reservoirs and canals can block migratory deer movement and result in loss of habitat. Due to its size and location, Oroville Reservoir is a major obstacle to movement of migratory deer. Certain fence designs are barriers to deer movement, particularly to does and fawns. Landowners occasionally construct unusually high fences around large acreages to purposefully exclude deer and prevent damage to their horticultural plantings or crops. Deer-proof or deer-resistant fences around large acreages in winter range and across critical deer migration corridors adversely affect deer populations. Highways and roads are a source of deer mortality.

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