

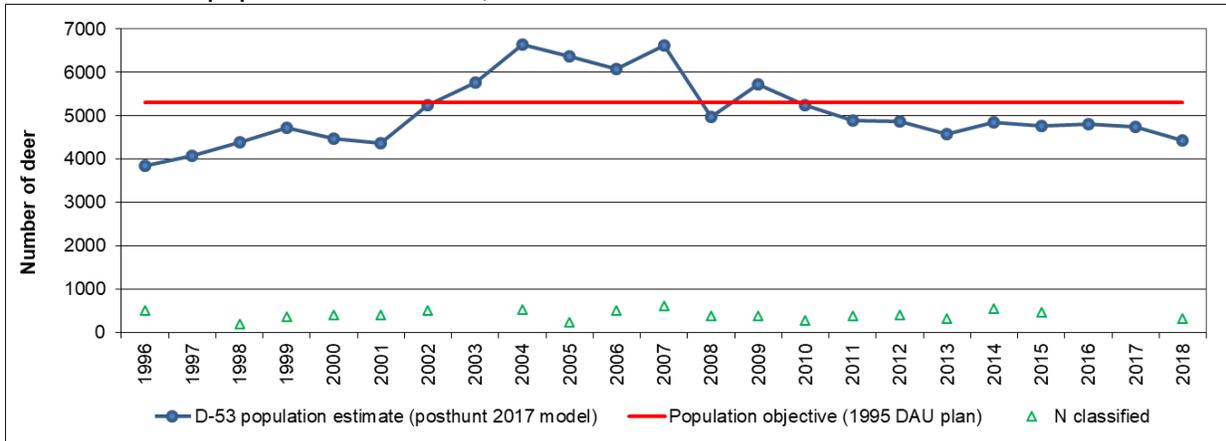
Basalt Deer Herd Management Plan, DAU D-53

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

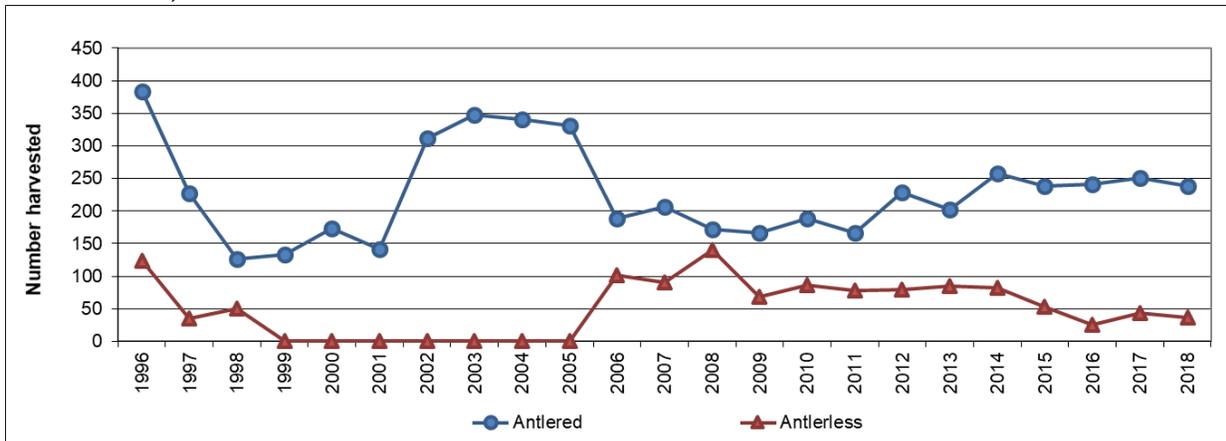
Game Management Unit:	444
Current (1995 DAU plan) population objective:	5,300 deer
Current (post-hunt 2018) population estimate :	4,440 deer
Proposed Population Objective	
Alternative 1:	2,500-4,500 (midpoint 3,500)
Alternative 2 (preferred):	4,000-6,000 (midpoint 5,000)
Alternative 3:	5,500-7,500 (midpoint 6,500)

Current (1995 DAU plan) Sex Ratio Objective:	30 bucks per 100 does
Most recent (2014, 2015, 2018) 3-year average sex ratio:	42 bucks per 100 does
Proposed Sex Ratio Objective	
Alternative 1:	24-32 (midpoint 28)
Alternative 2:	28-36 (midpoint 32)
Alternative 3 (preferred):	32-40 (midpoint 36)

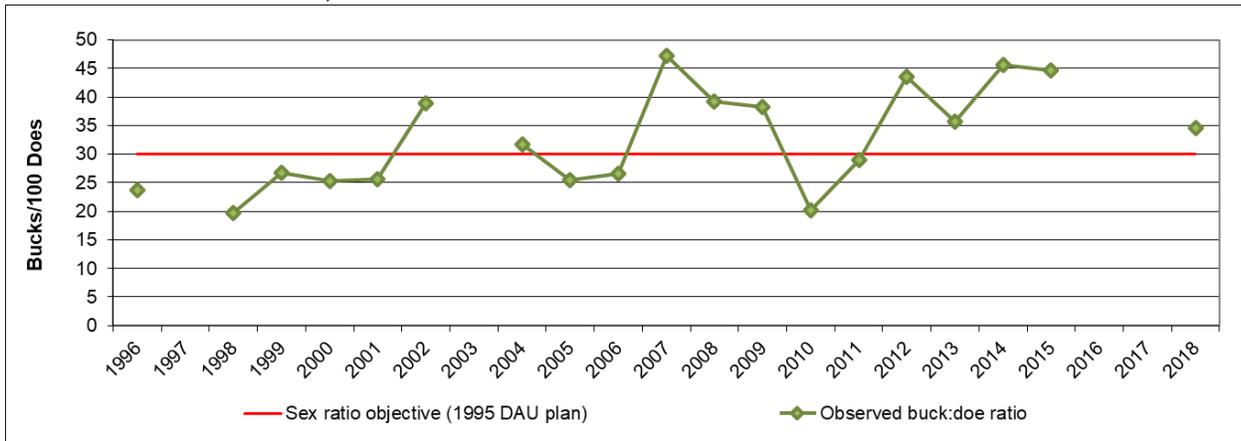
D-53 Post-hunt population estimates, 1996-2018



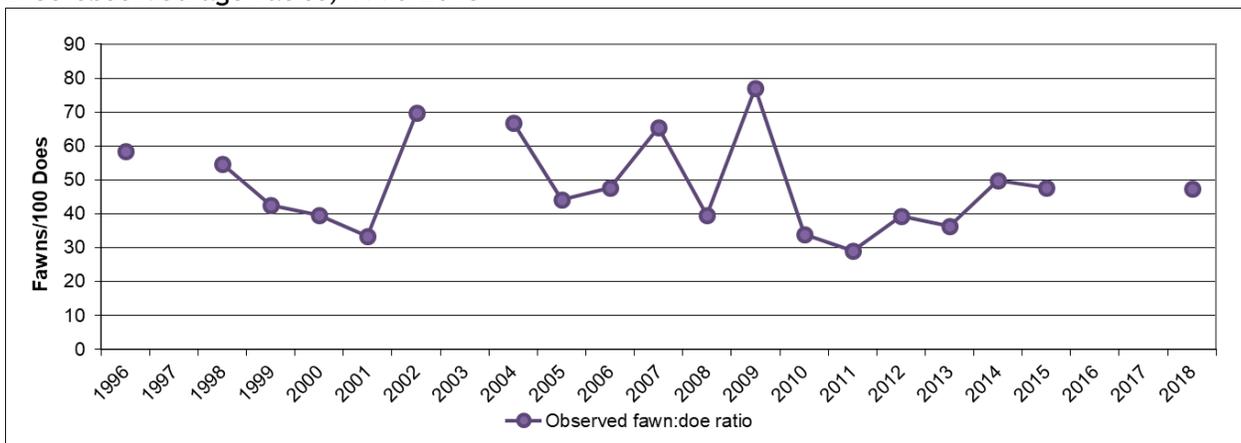
D-53 harvest, 1996-2018



D-53 observed sex ratios, 1996-2018



D-53 observed age ratios, 1996-2018



Background

The Basalt mule deer Data Analysis Unit (DAU) D-53 is located in Pitkin, Eagle, and Garfield Counties within northwest Colorado and consists of Game Management Unit (GMU) 444. The unit covers 960 km² (371 mi²), 65% of which are public lands. D-53 is bounded roughly in the area between the Fryingpan River, Roaring Fork River, Colorado River, the top of Red Table Mountain, and the ridgeline of the Sawatch Range¹. Major towns within and adjacent to the unit include Basalt, El Jebel, Carbondale, Glenwood Springs, as well as the smaller communities of Meredith and Thomasville.

When D-53 was established in 1995, the population objective was set at 5,300 deer and the sex ratio objective was set at 30 bucks per 100 does. Since that time, the estimated population has varied within -28% to +25% of the objective, between 3,850 and 6,650 deer. The population declined after the severe winter of 2007-08 and, much like other neighboring deer populations in the area, has never recovered. Within the past 5 years, the population has been on average 11% below the 1995 objective and the population trend has been generally stable. The current (2018) post-hunt population estimate is 4,440 deer or 16% below objective. The buck ratio, on the other hand, reached the 1995 objective by the year 2003. It has fluctuated over time but has generally been on an increasing trend. The most recent 3-year (2014, 2015, 2018) average is 42 bucks per 100 does, which is 40% over objective. CWD

¹ For a complete description of the boundaries of GMU 444, see page 4 of the main text of this document or any big game brochure.

prevalence in this herd is not well characterized due to very low sample size, but so far no CWD-positive deer have been detected.

Although the herd's objectives were established in 1995, D-53 has never had a formal written management plan. Given the significant changes in land use and the deer herd's current and potential performance, an update of D-53's population and sex ratio objectives is due.

Significant Issues

The major issues for this deer herd involve the cumulative effects of decades of human population growth and impacts of human activities on deer habitat in the Roaring Fork Valley. The result has been a loss of habitat quantity and quality and less solitude from human disturbance. The unit's carrying capacity for mule deer has declined compared to conditions in past decades when the current objectives were set over 2 decades ago. Significant issues include habitat loss and fragmentation from land development, declining habitat condition, and impacts of human recreation on deer. Other management concerns include the need to balance competing herd management objectives.

Management Objective Recommendation

CPW is recommending a population objective range of 4,000-6,000 deer. This alternative provides the most flexibility in population management relative to the herd's current status. Within this objective range, the herd could either remain stable or be allowed to increase if habitat conditions, land use changes and/or weather conditions are favorable for population growth. CPW is recommending a sex ratio objective of 32-40 bucks per 100 does. This objective range balances the hunting public's desire for quality bucks while still maintaining enough buck licenses to provide hunting opportunities every year or few years. Because of limited public lands in the western one-third of the unit, managing lower than Alternative 3's sex ratio objective range would likely increase hunter crowding and private land trespass issues to undesirable levels. With no documented CWD in this unit yet, a slightly higher sex ratio can be sustained; but if CWD is detected and the prevalence rate reaches 5% or higher, then a revision of the sex ratio objective may be needed to adjust the sex ratio downward.

Strategies to Address Issues and Management Concerns and to Achieve Herd Management Objectives

CPW will continue to work collaboratively with our partners in the federal land management agencies, private landowners, county governments, local municipalities and NGOs to protect and enhance the remaining mule deer habitat. Important habitat conservation methods include habitat treatments, conservation easements or land acquisitions, maintaining landscape connectivity and movement corridors, and adhering to seasonal recreation closures on winter range areas. To achieve the new objectives of a population size of 4,000-6,000 deer and a sex ratio of 32-40 bucks per 100 does over the next 10 years, CPW will continue to set licenses annually, keeping in mind such issues as providing sufficient hunting opportunity for both buck and doe harvest, and sustaining a stable, if not growing, deer herd.