

**MOUNT BLANCA HPP**  
**DISTRIBUTION MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENTS**  
**CHANGES FROM 2010-2020**

- Added “Executive Summary”.
- Updated “Introduction”.
- Updated committee members.
- Added “HPP Orientation” section.
- Added HPP Statute.
- Expanded on and updated “Committee Goals and Objectives” and re-named it “Committee Objectives and Strategies”.
- Updated “Area and Habitat Descriptions” and added GMU Boundary and Land Ownership Map.
- Updated big game population summary info with current data including summer and winter range maps for Elk, Deer, and Pronghorn.
- Added “Impact Areas” section.
- Added “Game Management Objectives” section.
- Added “Operating Guidelines” section to show minimum requirements when considering project funding.
- Added “Operating Guidelines” section regarding program eligibility
- Consolidated “Management Strategies” section.
- Updated “Budget Guidelines” section.
- Added “Current and Foreseeable Issues” section. Moved “Habitat Loss and Degradation” to this section.
- Removed “HPP Evaluation Form” appendix, Fence Conflicts maps, Conservation Easement maps, and Habitat/Vegetation map.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife  
Habitat Partnership Program  
Mount Blanca



## DISTRIBUTION MANAGEMENT PLAN



**DRAFT**

Approved- Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission \_\_\_\_\_  
This plan is valid for 10 years from approval date.

**2020-2030**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Distribution Management Plan (DMP) is the basic framework for the Mount Blanca HPP Committee for the next ten years - 2020 to 2030. The updated plan is centered on six key aspects including; resolving conflicts, communication, improving big game habitat, research, stewardship, and connectivity.

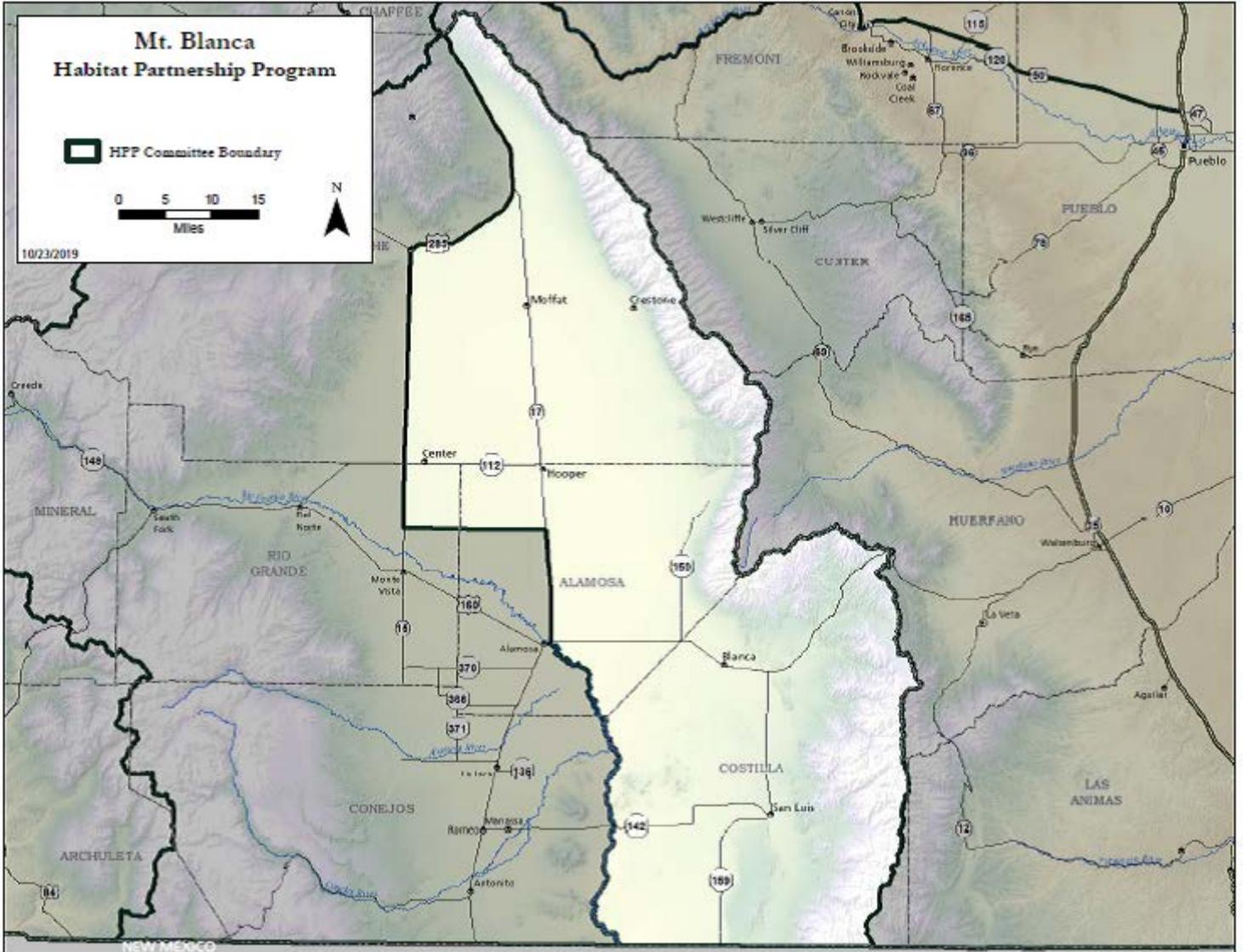
The Mount Blanca Committee area is comprised of large areas of contiguous private lands, which poses unique issues and conflicts with wildlife. The committee area has undergone changes to big game habitat and distribution. This has occurred as a result of precipitation and weather deviations and changes in agricultural production and land use. In the past, the committee has implemented some unconventional ideas and methods in order to resolve these issues as they arise. The committee will continue to monitor and adapt to these changes. This committee and this plan focuses on assisting CPW managers in working with federal land managers, owners of large private ranches, subdivision homeowner associations, and agricultural producers. We consider the goals, objectives and mandates of each of these entities when assisting with developing solutions and strategies to provide adequate habitat, reduce conflicts, and provide quality opportunities for sportsmen/women within the MBHPP area.

Operating guidelines have been established to help inform funding decisions and prioritization of projects. Budget guidelines show potential allocations of funds based on past projects. The Committee understands that budget allocations may change as new opportunities arise. We have identified current and foreseeable issues for the area and have specified project types and strategies that are aimed at adapting to these issues. The goal of the Committee is to continue to reduce wildlife conflicts while assisting CPW in achieving game management objectives.

Impact areas tend to focus around center pivot crop production and livestock production operations throughout the committee area. Conflicts have occurred south of Fort Garland along Costilla County Lane 6, in the area of Mesita/Jaroso, in the area of Saguache County Road AA, and near the town of San Luis. The Committee has also seen conflicts with elk associated with the Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge, the Baca National Wildlife Refuge, and the Great Sand Dunes National Park. The committee will continue to work with landowners and land management agencies to seek resolutions for these conflicts.

The Mount Blanca HPP committee seeks to provide a forum where mediation can occur between all parties about how to alleviate damage from migrating elk populations. The Committee has sought to provide a platform where open dialogue can occur and management and mitigation strategies can be agreed upon by all entities involved. The Committee continues to fund projects such as forage purchases, hunt coordinators, and fencing projects to help resolve these issues. We also continue to focus on the protection and enhancement of big game habitat. This includes identification and mitigation of forage conflicts, developing and maintaining communication links, enhancing stewardship opportunities, and supporting habitat enhancement projects.

# MAP OF MOUNT BLANCA HPP AREA



# COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- |   |                             |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. Mike Maldonado, Sportsman Representative, Chairman         | Started HPP Term: Jul. 1998 |
| 2. Alvin Kunugi, Livestock Grower Representative              | Started HPP Term: Jul. 1998 |
| 3. Roy Oliver, Livestock Grower Representative                | Started HPP Term: Jun. 2010 |
| 4. Shane Lancaster, Livestock Grower Representative           | Started HPP Term: May 2020  |
| 5. Ron Garcia, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Representative          | Started HPP Term: Jul. 2005 |
| 6. Brian Bechaver, Colorado Parks and Wildlife Representative | Started HPP Term: Sep. 2017 |
| 7. Scott Nilson, BLM Representative                           | Started HPP Term: Nov. 2019 |

# INTRODUCTION

The San Luis Valley is the largest high desert valley in the world and provides for abundant populations of wildlife. The largest industry in the San Luis Valley is agriculture in various forms, ranging from livestock production to crops as diverse as dairy quality alfalfa and native grass hay, wheat, barley, canola, potatoes, and other food products. As a result wildlife can have devastating effects for landowners, livestock producers, and crop growers.

The Mount Blanca Habitat Partnership Program Committee was the second committee formed in the San Luis Valley to address conflicts between wildlife and agriculture. The committee was established in July of 1998 to address some of the issues on the east side of the San Luis Valley. The committee consists of the typical members as specified in statute, but also has a representative from the US Fish and Wildlife Service due to the National Wildlife Refuges within the area.

The MBHPP area is unique in that it contains a large proportion of large privately held parcels or federal agency lands where CPW does not have the capability to administer traditional big game management techniques (i.e. regular hunts). In addition, it contains several large subdivisions in traditional big game wintering areas which influence big game migration and activity throughout the MBHPP area.

Large populations of elk have created significant conflicts with agricultural producers in the committee area, particularly regarding forage competition and damage to crops and fences. Deer and pronghorn populations have also affected landowners, though not on the same scale as elk. The southern portion of the Mount Blanca HPP area, particularly Costilla County, is especially impacted because there is very little public land and large populations of elk migrate onto the farms with the first significant severe snowfall and stay until the spring.

The Mount Blanca HPP Committee has implemented a variety of projects in cooperation with landowners and agencies in order to address these conflicts and assist CPW in achieving game management objectives. Projects include hydro-axing, wildlife friendly fencing projects, forage purchases on land where elk can winter, fence contractors to repair fences, and hunt coordinators to control and disperse elk from the interior farms and ranches. Hunt coordinators use hunters to disperse and harvest elk that venture out of the protected areas, all under the direction and control of Colorado Parks and Wildlife. The hunt coordinators and dispersal hunts have been in use since 1992 and have proven to be a very effective tool in reducing game damage claims and conflicts with landowners.

## HPP ORIENTATION

HPP was initially started to resolve fence and forage conflicts caused to agricultural operators by deer, elk, pronghorn and moose. While the law governing HPP was broadened in 2002 (“...reduce wildlife conflicts...game management objectives”) in 2017 the State Council and the NW Region Manager reaffirmed the intent and focus of HPP.

This direction provides for HPP participation, whether by local committees or the State Council, to be limited to those conflict resolution projects or game management objective projects that involve deer, elk, pronghorn and moose.

## HPP STATUTE - (C.R.S. 33-1-110)

(8) (a) The habitat partnership program is hereby created to assist the division of parks and wildlife by working with private land managers, public land management agencies, sports persons, and other interested parties to reduce wildlife conflicts, particularly those associated with forage and fence issues, and to assist the division of parks and wildlife in meeting game management objectives through duties as deemed appropriate by the director.

(b) The director, with the approval of the commission, shall have the authority to appoint a "habitat partnership committee", referred to in this section as a "committee", in any area of the state where conflicts between wildlife and private land owners and managers engaged in the management of public and private land exist.

(c) A committee shall consist of the following members: One sports person who purchases big game licenses on a regular basis in Colorado; three persons representing livestock growers in the area of the state in which the committee is being established; one person from each of the federal agencies that has land management responsibilities in such area of the state; and one person from the Colorado division of parks and wildlife. All persons on any such committee shall be residents of the state of Colorado.

(d) The duties of a committee are the following:

(I) To develop big game distribution management plans to resolve rangeland forage, growing hay crop, harvested crop aftermath grazing, and fence conflicts subject to commission approval;

(II) To monitor program effectiveness and to propose to the council changes in guidelines and land acquisition planning and review as appropriate;

(III) To request for the committee, on an annual basis, funds from the council consistent with the distribution management plan developed by any such committee;

(IV) To expend funds allocated by the council or acquired from other sources as necessary to implement distribution management plans;

(V) To make an annual report of expenditures and accomplishments of the committee to the council by August 15 of each year;

(VI) To nominate a person to act as a representative of agricultural livestock growers or crop producers to the habitat partnership council for the area of the state where such committee is organized;

(VII) To reduce wildlife and land management conflicts as the conflicts relate to big game forage and fence issues and other management objectives.

(e) The committee shall be authorized to procure from land owners, land managers, or other providers, materials or services necessary for carrying out activities identified in the distribution management plans pursuant to subparagraph (IV) of paragraph (d) of this subsection (8); except that all such procurements shall be certified as within the scope of the activities and funding levels authorized in such distribution management plans before any such procurement may be authorized.

# COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

**OBJECTIVE 1: Resolving Conflicts** – Work to reduce conflicts between big game (deer, elk, pronghorn, and moose) and livestock/agricultural producers by utilizing a range of prescriptions on private and public lands.

## Strategies

- Reduce conflict and potential conflicts on private and public lands through projects including but not limited to distribution hunts, hazing, habitat improvement projects, forage purchases, assisting landowners with land stewardship, and fencing repair/replacement projects (must be wildlife friendly).
- Influence population objectives through Habitat Management Plan (HMP) reviews and comments, and ensure that plans adequately reflect habitat availability, current distribution patterns and associated wildlife conflicts, agency mandates, and public demand.
- Utilize available project types to assist CPW in maintaining quality big game herds and appropriate objectives within the Mount Blanca HPP area with minimum cost and private land conflict.
- Work with CPW, owners of large private land tracts, and agency managers of large public land tracts to ensure that proper distribution of big game animals is occurring within the Mount Blanca HPP area. This includes preventing large groups of animals from concentrating in those areas where they are unavailable for harvest or redistribution efforts, taking into account landowner objectives and agency mandates, and using the tool of HPP funded hunt coordinators when necessary and appropriate

**OBJECTIVE 2: Communication-** Promote cooperation and collaboration between ranchers, farmers, sportspersons, recreationists, CPW, adjoining HPP committees, local governments and organizations, and land management agencies to resolve big game conflicts.

## Strategies

- Facilitate effective communication and collaboration between involved parties regarding game damage, game distribution, game health, public and private land access, and other conflict issues.
- Participate in events designed to educate the public about the value of maintaining proper big game distribution, available open space, suitable big game habitat, and agricultural lands as a valuable stabilizing economic influence.
- Schedule committee meetings with enough advanced notice to ensure advertising time in the various communities throughout the Mount Blanca HPP committee area.

**OBJECTIVE 3: Improving Big Game Habitat** - Improve and maintain suitable habitat conditions on state, federal, and private lands in order to reduce conflicts and assist CPW in achieving game management objectives.

## Strategies

- Use habitat improvements to influence effective distribution in order to minimize big game conflicts and increase capacity for adequate harvest.
- Promote habitat which provides for sustainable, healthy, and appropriately distributed big game populations.
- Provide resources to ensure proper big game distribution within the Mount Blanca HPP

area to prevent damage to sensitive big game habitats such as riparian and wetlands.

**OBJECTIVE 4: Research** - Support research that assists CPW, Federal and State land management agencies, and private land owners with developing operating or management plans designed to provide suitable habitat, effectively reduce conflicts, and provide quality opportunities for sportspersons when possible.

**Strategies**

- Support studies to aid in determining migration patterns and seasonal use habits, which may assist in developing focus areas for HPP projects within the Mount Blanca HPP area.
- Coordinate regularly with landowners and state and federal biologists and managers to determine research needed to gather necessary information for the development of relevant plans and management activities with the Mount Blanca HPP area.

**OBJECTIVE 5: Stewardship** - Support conservation efforts within the Mount Blanca HPP area to conserve undeveloped open lands and traditional agricultural operations, which provide for seasonal lifecycle needs of big game populations. Work with private land owners and agency land managers to develop operating and management plans that endeavor to provide suitable conflict free habitats for big game and/or reduce conflicts on surrounding lands.

**Strategies**

- Support new conservation easements in important habitat areas by assisting with transaction costs.
- Actively encourage landowners and conservation easement holders to work collaboratively with CPW to manage big game species within the proposed conservation easement areas, which may include hunting.
- Provide guidance to landowners to encourage comprehensive land management plans that encompass landscape level objectives including those of HPP and CPW.
- Assist private landowners with technical and financial support in the development of habitat and comprehensive conservation plans.
- Develop methods to “showcase” and recognize good stewardship efforts that benefit wildlife and improve big game habitat within the Mount Blanca HPP area.
- Discourage management practices that are detrimental to wildlife and agriculture.

**OBJECTIVE 6: Connectivity** - Increase effectiveness of habitat manipulation projects and implement a landscape-scale philosophy by increasing the scope and connectivity of projects.

**Strategies**

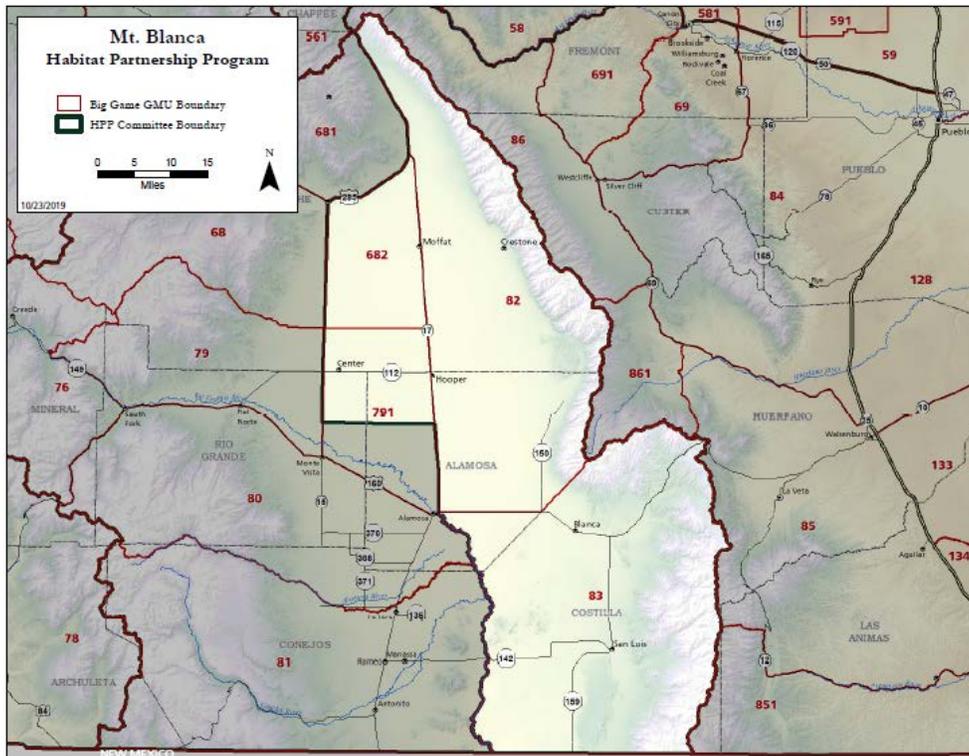
- Develop and maintain a map depicting past, ongoing and prospective habitat projects.
- Solicit and coordinate habitat treatments which incorporate public and private land, creating a link between past and future treatments on a landscape scale.
- Increase percentage of external matching funds contributed to HPP projects.

# MOUNT BLANCA HPP AREA DESCRIPTION

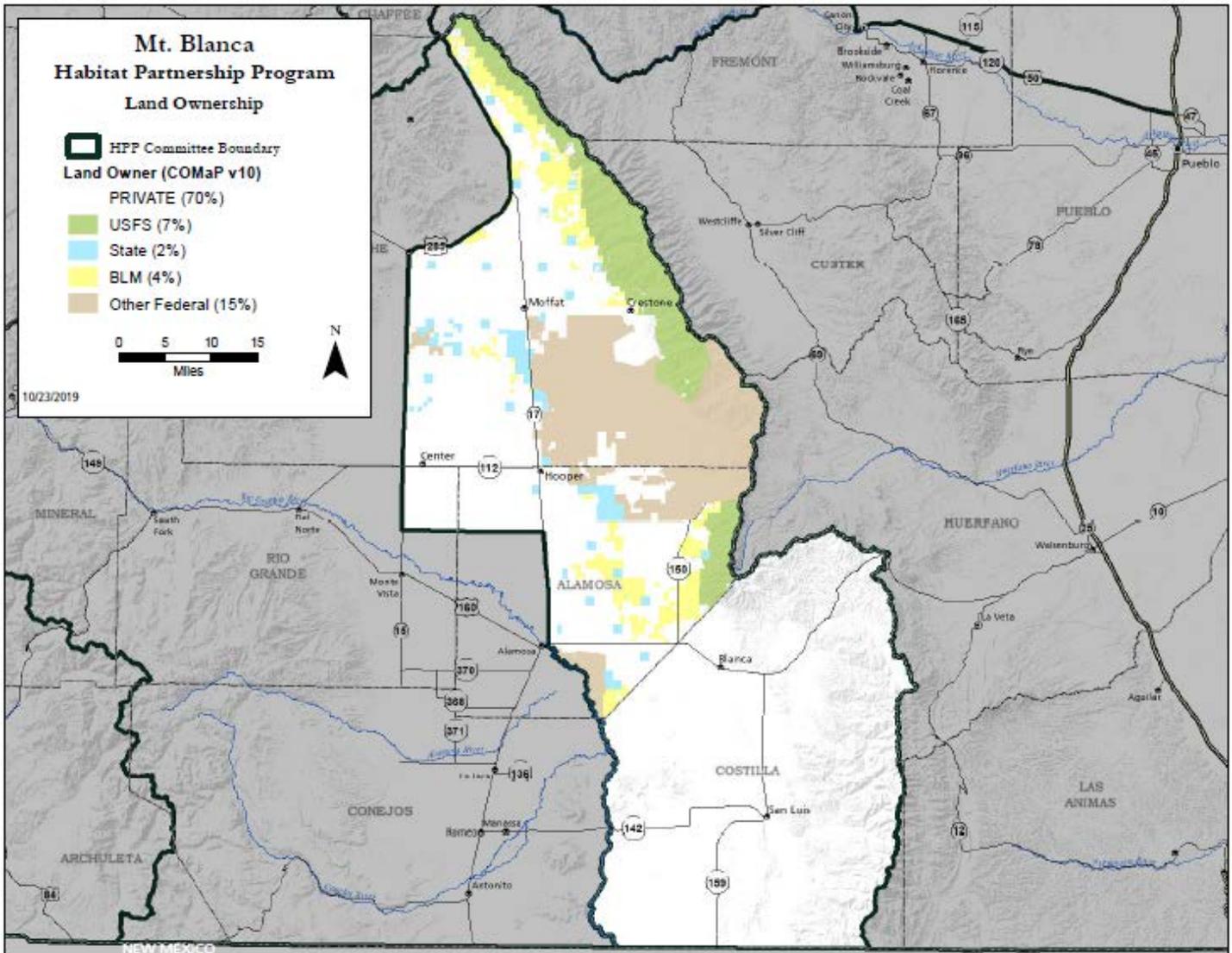
The Mount Blanca Habitat Partnership Program area (MBHPP) encompasses approximately 1,762,000 acres. The boundary begins at the top of Poncha Pass and follows the crest of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains south to the New Mexico state line, then follows the state line west to the Rio Grande River. It then follows the Rio Grande River north to Alamosa, then follows Colorado State Highway 17 North to Alamosa County Road 5N. Finally, it goes West along Alamosa County Road 5N to Highway 285, and then follows Highway 285 to the top of Poncha Pass.

The Mount Blanca HPP area encompasses all of Costilla County, the majority of Alamosa County except for the SE corner, the northeast part of Rio Grande County, and the eastern part of Saguache County. The MBHPP area contains all of GMU 83, GMU 82, GMU 682 and the northern half of GMU 791. Land ownership within the MBHPP consists of 70% private land, 2% state managed land and 26% federal land.

## MOUNT BLANCA HPP GMU BOUNDARY MAP



# MOUNT BLANCA HPP LAND OWNERSHIP MAP



## HABITAT DESCRIPTION

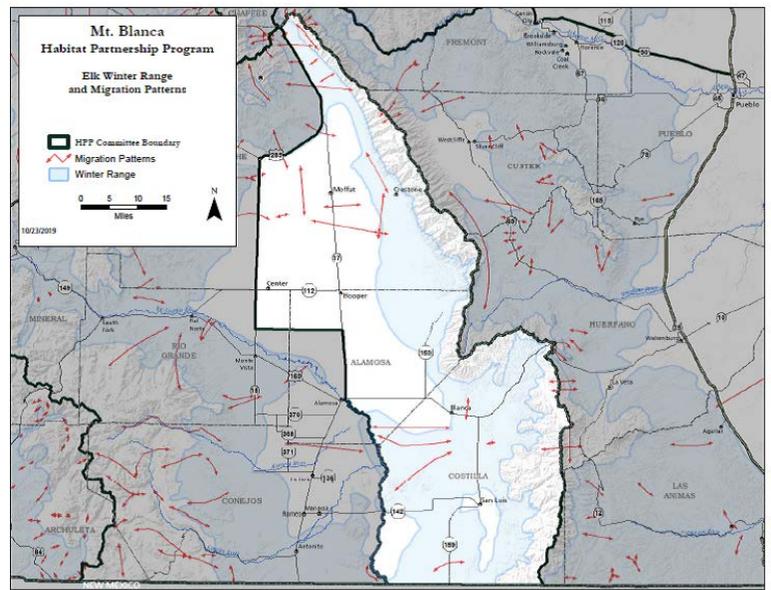
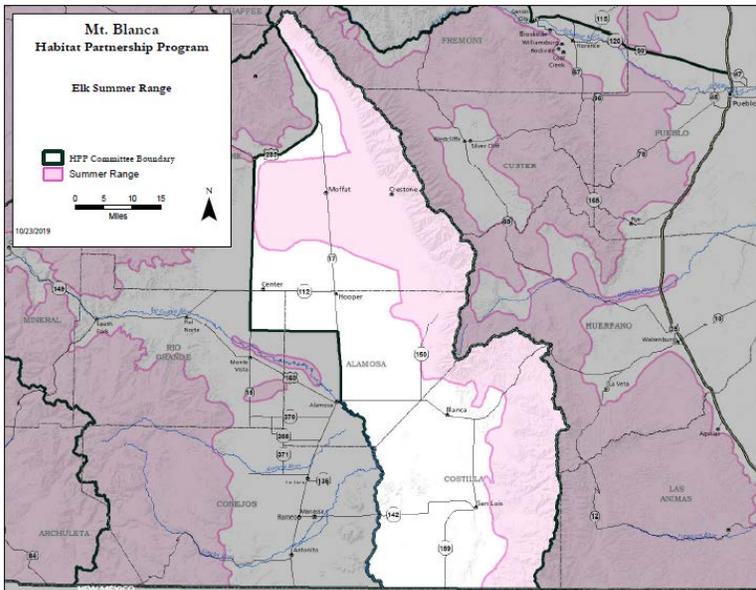
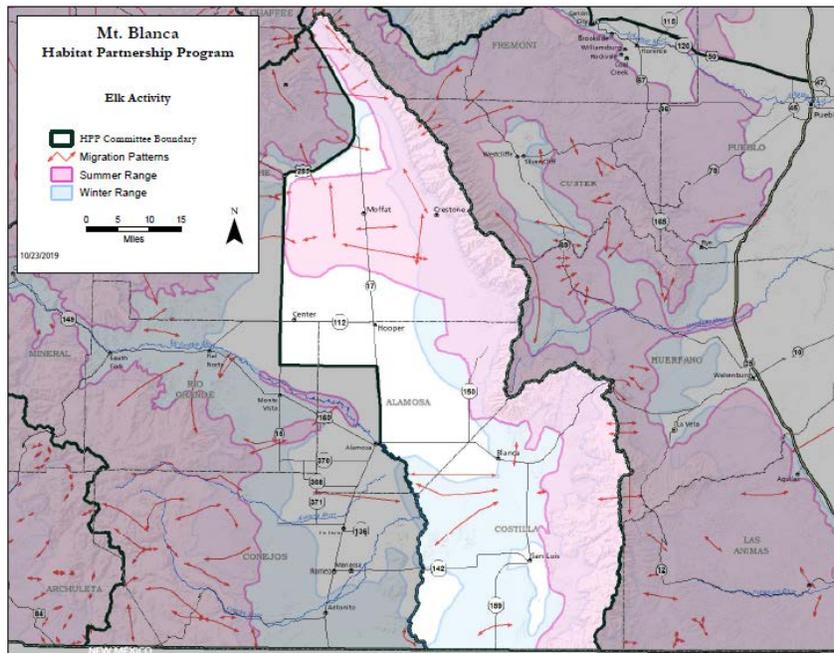
The average elevation of the valley floor is approximately 7,500 feet with the eastern edge contained by Sangre de Cristo mountain range which averages 11,000 feet. This mountain range has numerous peaks which exceed 14,000 feet.

The Mount Blanca HPP management area is made up of approximately 19% agricultural/cultivated land, 21% forested land, 53% upland range (shrub dominated), 2% wet meadow land, 2% residential/commercial land, and 3% barren land.

The agricultural/cultivated land consists of approximately 278,000 irrigated acres. Presently, this consists of alfalfa (14%), grain (12%), irrigated meadow (51%), potatoes (13%), and vegetables (1%). There are currently approximately 1,500 center pivot irrigation systems within the committee boundary.

# BIG GAME POPULATION SUMMARY

## ELK RANGE MAPS



**ELK** - The Sand Dunes elk herd DAU (Data Analysis Unit) E-11 is located on the northeastern side of the San Luis Valley. It only consists of GMU 82. DAU E-11 is approximately 1,088 square miles in size and encompasses portions of Alamosa and Saguache counties. The primary drainages in the DAU are Crestone Creek, Deadman Creek, Medano Creek, Rito Alto Creek, San Isabel Creek, San Luis Creek, and Sand Creek. CPW believes that this herd is above the population objective range.

Management strategies are to reduce the herd to the objective range. This elk herd has increased significantly since the mid-2000s, and management by CPW can be challenging because of the significant portions of federal and private land in the area. Landowner conflicts with this herd may occur year-round. These conflicts include pasture depredation and fence damage as well as damage to agricultural crops. Impacts on agricultural interests may occur with increased

numbers of elk. Currently, management on private land in GMU 82 is similar to that for the elk herd E-55 (GMU 682 and 791) on the valley floor in that it allows for harvest strategies outside of the traditional framework of fall hunting seasons. This is a management strategy that is unique and is intended to manage and distribute elk across the landscape and relieve damage on agricultural lands.

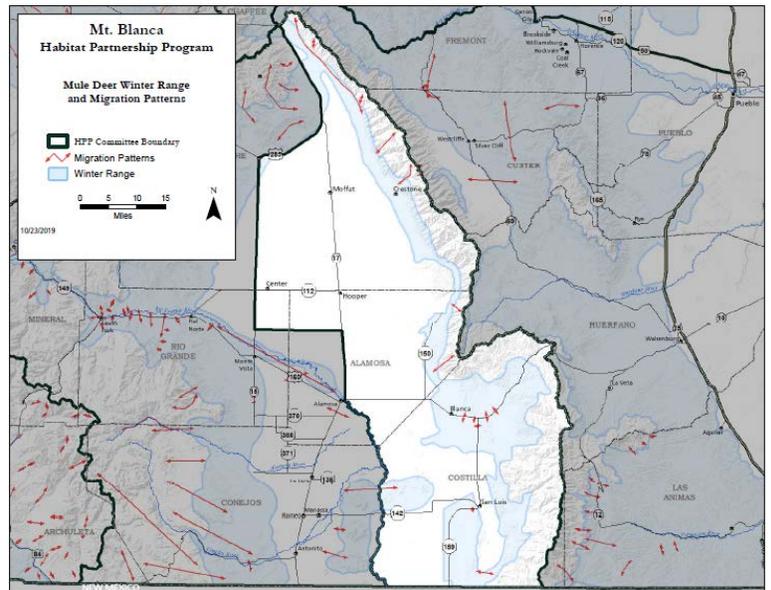
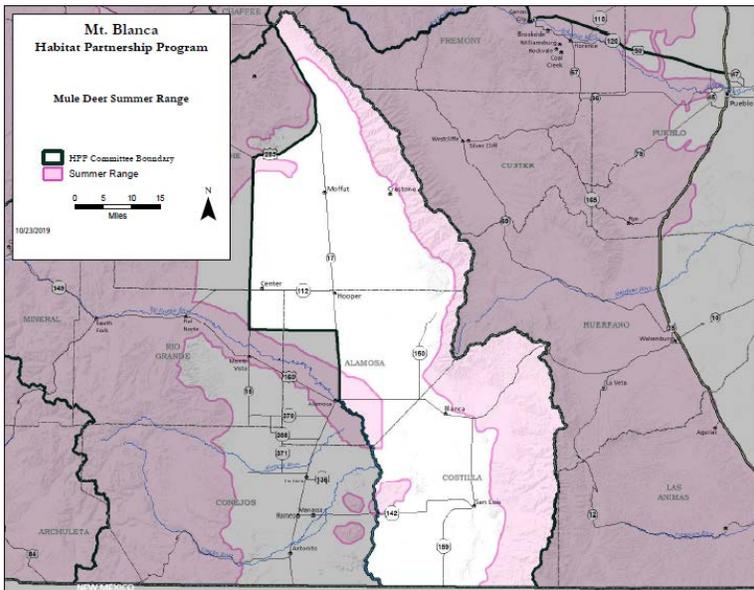
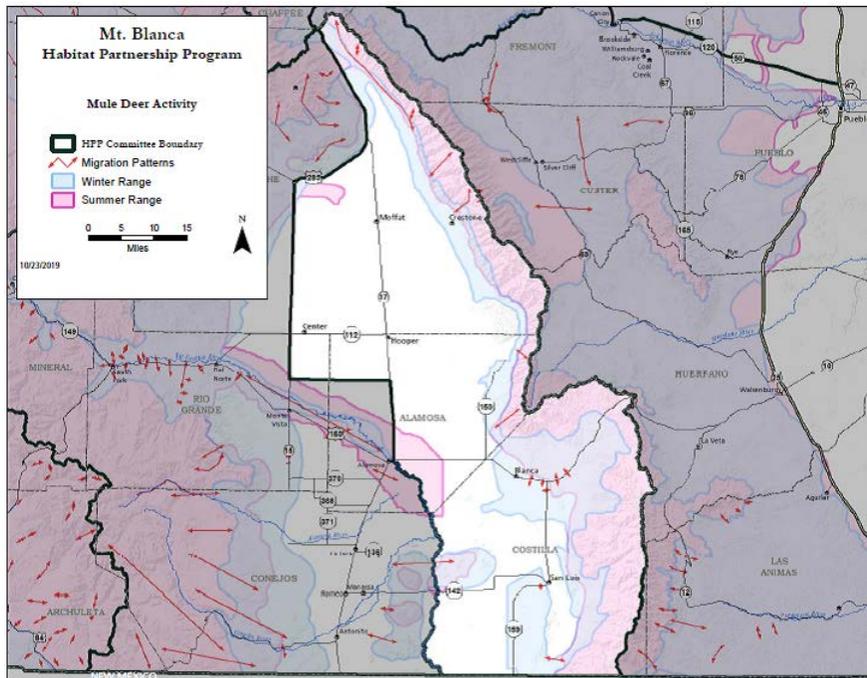
GMU 83 is part of the DAU known as the Trinchera elk herd DAU E-33. DAU E-33 is comprised of GMUs 83, 85, 140, and 851. Only GMU 83 is located in the Mount Blanca HPP area. The entire DAU is approximately 3,300 square miles in area and encompasses portions of Costilla, Huerfano, and Las Animas counties. Its main drainages are Apishapa River, Cucharas River, Purgatoire River, San Francisco Creek, Sangre de Cristo Creek, Trinchera Creek, and the Ute Creek. Of the entire DAU, approximately 1,250 square miles are within the Mount Blanca HPP area. Management considerations in GMU 83 must be reflected in the larger management strategies of DAU E-33.

Private land conflicts within the Mount Blanca HPP area of DAU E-33 can be significant, depending on the movement and distribution of the elk herds. The conflicts that occur in GMU 83 are because the majority of the unit (97%) is privately owned. These conflicts include pasture depredation and fence damage as well as damage to agricultural crops. CPW believes the herd to be relatively stable, but slightly above the current objective range. Future conflicts that occur will be dealt with on an individual basis. CPW will continue to offer controlled game damage and dispersal licenses in DAU E-33 to help relieve conflict impacts.

The northern San Luis Valley floor elk herd DAU E-55 is located on the central part of the San Luis Valley. The area has one of the largest concentrations of center-pivot irrigated crops in the world. The DAU consists of GMUs 682 and 791. DAU E-55 is approximately 580 square miles in area and encompasses portions of Alamosa and Saguache counties.

A significant number of the elk in DAU E-55 move in from nearby public land during the winter and early spring. The availability of crop residue forage is extremely attractive as a food source. The long-term objective is to reduce the population to a point at which conflicts become negligible. However, there are many private landowners in the DAU that tolerate the elk on their properties. As with private land in GMU-82, future conflicts that occur will be dealt with on an individual basis. CPW will continue to offer controlled game damage and dispersal licenses in DAU E-55 to help relieve conflict impacts.

## DEER RANGE MAPS

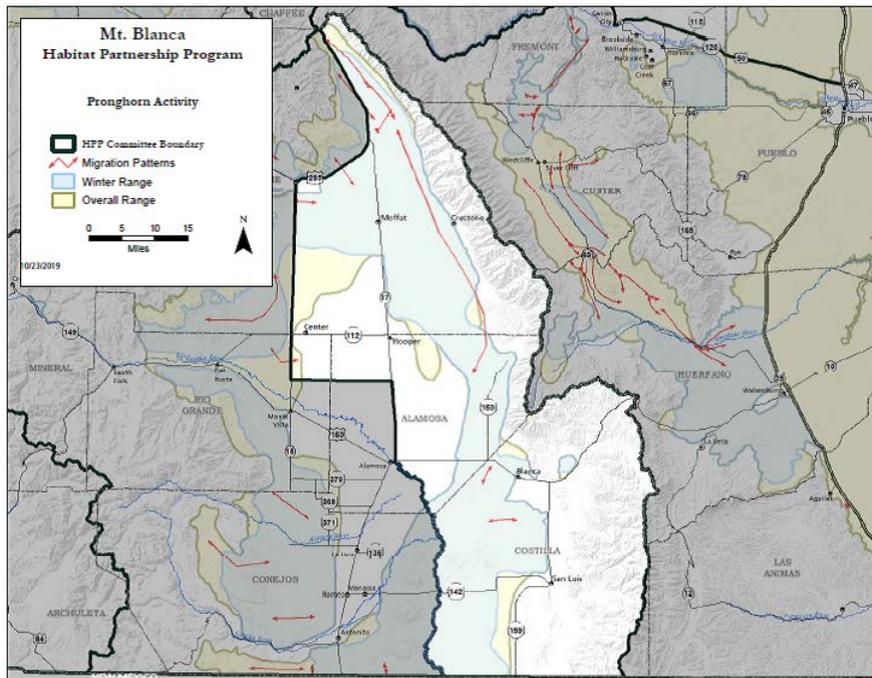


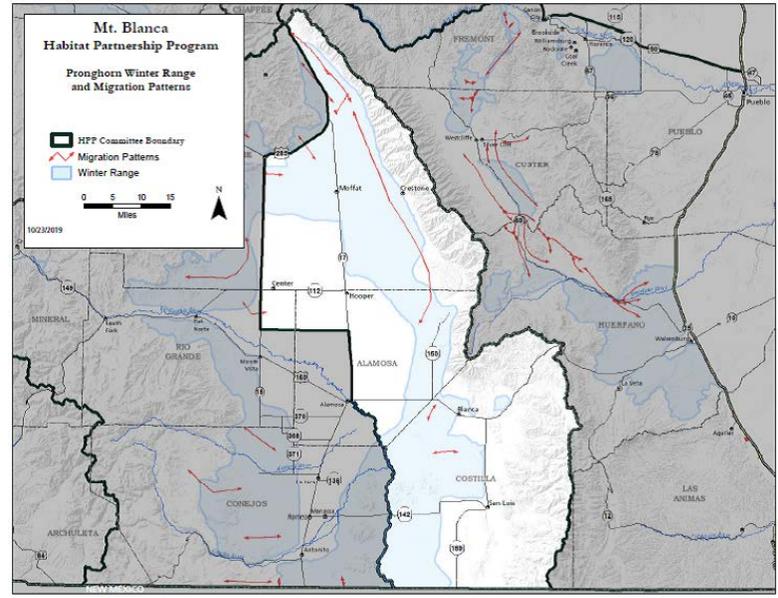
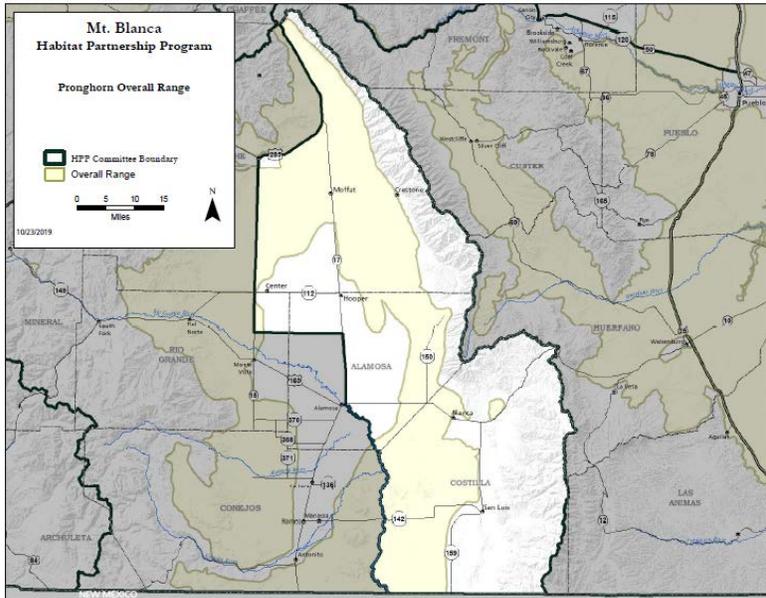
**DEER-** The Saguache deer herd DAU D-26 is located on the northwest side of the San Luis Valley. It consists of GMUs 68, 681, and 682. Only GMU 682 falls within the Mount Blanca HPP area. DAU D-26 is approximately 1,300 square miles in size and is entirely within Saguache County. Its primary drainages are Saguache Creek, Carnero Creek, and Kerber Creek. Deer conflicts have generally occurred at lower elevations while foraging on crops. Damage caused by deer has been relatively low in the recent past, but this could increase depending on winter severity or drought conditions driving deer onto private irrigated land. This herd has been increasing steadily but remains at the lower end of the objective range. Fawn recruitment remains strong, and the herd has the potential for modest growth in population. CPW has additional tools available to address any increased deer conflicts, should they arise.

The Trinchera deer herd DAU D-31 is located on the southeast side of the San Luis Valley. It consists of GMU 83. DAU D-31 is approximately 1,250 square miles in size and encompasses portions of Alamosa and Costilla counties. Its primary drainages are Culebra, Rito Seco, Trinchera, and Ute Creek. The vast majority of this unit is privately owned (approximately 97%). The Trinchera Ranch owns a significant portion on the north side of the DAU and participates in the ranching for Wildlife (RWF) program. Deer conflicts in this DAU are minimal. Potential conflicts that could occur would be at lower elevations. CPW believes that this deer population is presently on a downward trend, and it is below the objective range established in 2010.

The Sand Dunes deer herd DAU D-37 is located on the northeast side of the San Luis Valley. It is approximately 1,088 square miles in size and encompasses portions of Alamosa and Saguache counties. The DAU contains a single game management unit, GMU 82. Private land conflicts that may occur with deer in this DAU are minimal. Damage could occur if deer coalesce into larger groups that forage on alfalfa or hay crops. CPW estimates the herd to be trending around the lower end of the population objective range.

## PRONGHORN RANGE MAPS





**PRONGHORN-** The Northern San Luis Valley pronghorn herd DAU PH-14 is in south-central Colorado, on the north side of the San Luis Valley. It is comprised of GMUs 68, 79, 82, 681, 682, and 791. Only GMUs 82, 682, and 791 are included within the boundaries of the Mount Blanca HPP designated area. DAU PH-14 is approximately 3,225 square miles in area, of which approximately half (1,517 square miles) is considered pronghorn range. It encompasses portions of Alamosa, Mineral, Rio Grande, and Saguache counties. The primary drainages in the area are Carnero Creek, Rio Grande River, Russel Creek, Saguache Creek, and San Luis Creek.

Pronghorn conflicts in DAU PH-14 are usually related to the animals foraging on agricultural land. Depredation issues have subsided considerably over recent years. CPW provides game damage and dispersal licenses to private landowners to address any significant problems. CPW also offers Private-Land-Only (PLO) antlerless licenses in GMU 79. During the severe drought years, pronghorn tend to move from public lands to irrigated agricultural fields. Many of these pronghorn can become resident groups, particularly affecting areas in GMUs 79 and 82. The movement to private land has been a distribution predicament more than an overpopulation problem. Localized problems result from pronghorn distribution, which does not affect the entire DAU. Most private landowners who experience pronghorn issues accept the use of various management tools that CPW offers. Future concerns will be dealt with on an individual basis. Biologists believe the herd to be below the objective range.

The Southern San Luis Valley pronghorn herd DAU PH-16 is located on the south side of the San Luis Valley. It consists of GMUs 80, 81, and 83. Only GMU 83 is within the MBHPP area. The DAU encompasses portions of Alamosa, Archuleta, Conejos, Costilla, Mineral, and Rio Grande counties. No pronghorn are currently located in Archuleta or Mineral counties. The primary drainages in the area are the Alamosa River, Conejos River, La Jara Creek, and Rio Grande River.

Rarely are there conflicts with pronghorn in DAU PH-16. Depredation issues have subsided considerably over recent years. Crop depredation issues may occasionally occur in GMUs 80 and 81. As in DAU PH-14, CPW provides game damage and dispersal licenses to private landowners to address any significant problems. Localized problems result from pronghorn distribution, which does not affect the entire DAU. Most private landowners who experience pronghorn issues accept

the use of various management tools that CPW offers. Future concerns will be dealt with on an individual basis. CPW believes that this herd is slightly below the objective range.

**MOOSE-** The southwest Colorado moose herd DAU M-4 is located over a large portion of south-central Colorado, on both sides of the Continental Divide. It runs from Alamosa west to Durango, then north to Silverton and northeast to Blue Mesa Reservoir, east to Gunnison, then back south to Alamosa. It covers an area of approximately 8,815 square miles and contains approximately 3,000 square miles of suitable moose habitat. Only GMUs 682 and 791 fall within DAU M-4. CPW does not expect significant conflicts. There are no formal population objectives set for this herd. However, referencing the 2005 HMP, the objectives are, 1) to keep the population small enough to avoid excessive damage to willow stands, 2) maximize hunting opportunity while simultaneously maintaining high productivity in the herd, and 3) provide adequate opportunities for recreational viewing. CPW estimates the herd to be between 400 and 500 animals, and from anecdotal observations, it appears to be increasing. Broader distribution is possible as the population increases. An increase in numbers and distribution creates an elevated potential for moose conflicts.

Table 1. Data Analysis Unit Summary for Mount Blanca HPP Area

Management Herd	1990s Population Avg	2000s Population Avg	2010 - 2018 Population Avg	Current Population Management Objective
Deer - Saguache D-26	7,900	5,400	3,700	4,000 - 4,800
<i>Game Management Units:</i>	<i>68, 681, 682</i>			
Deer - Trinchera D-31	2,400	2,300	1,500	2,000 - 2,500
<i>Game Management Units:</i>	<i>83</i>			
Deer - Sand Dunes D-37	2,400	1,800	2,100	1,500 - 2,000
<i>Game Management Units:</i>	<i>82</i>			
Elk - Sand Dunes E-11	4,300	4,900	5,200	3,000 - 4,000
<i>Game Management Units:</i>	<i>82</i>			
Elk - Trinchera E-33	17,300	18,700	16,900	14,000 - 16,000
<i>Game Management Units:</i>	<i>83, 85, 851</i>			
Elk - Northern San Luis Valley Floor E-55	+	+	+	N/A
<i>Game Management Units:</i>	<i>82 (Private Land Only), 682, 791</i>			
Pronghorn - Northern San Luis Valley PH-14*	2,900	2,100	1,500	2,000 - 2,500
<i>Game Management Units:</i>	<i>68, 79, 82, 681, 682, 791</i>			
Pronghorn - Southern San Luis Valley PH-16*	970	800	900	1,000 - 1,500
<i>Game Management Units:</i>	<i>80, 81, 83</i>			
Moose - M-4 <sup>^</sup>	1,400	700	700	1,000 - 1,500
<i>Game Management Units:</i>	<i>80, 81, 83</i>			

*These numbers are only estimates based on the predicted population numbers from the models.*

*+ Not enough information to model population*

*\*Herd Management Plans (HMPs) are being re-evaluated in spring 2020 - No change is expected to the objectives.*

*<sup>^</sup>There is no current moose management that takes place within the Mount Blanca HPP area*

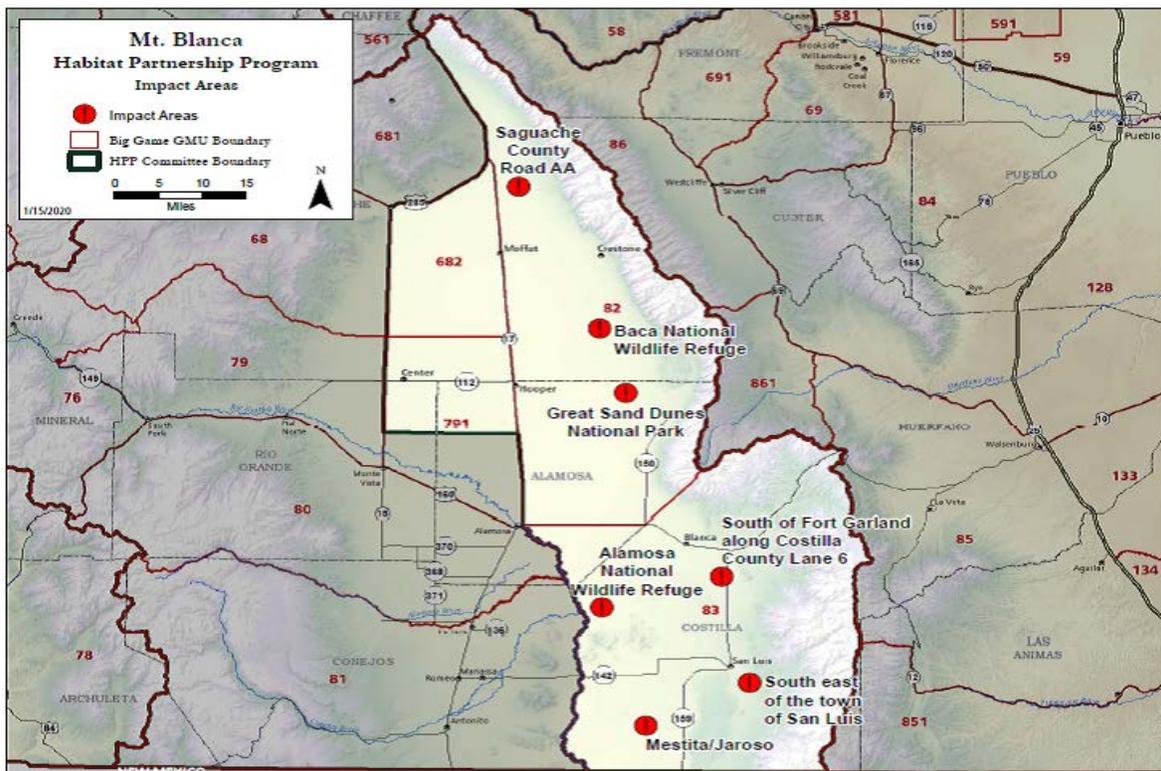
# IMPACT AREAS

Impact areas tend to focus around center pivot crop production areas throughout the area. Conflicts have occurred south of Fort Garland along Costilla County Lane 6, in the area of Mesita/Jaroso, and in the area of Saguache County Road AA.

The Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge and its associated elk herd have created conflicts with surrounding private lands. Similar problems continue to be documented with the Baca National Wildlife Refuge/Sand Dunes National Park and their associated elk herds that migrate into crop production areas on the valley floor. Production of high-value crops such as seed potatoes on the valley floor creates the potential for crippling game damage claims. In addition, large portions of these federal lands are not open to traditional hunting methods and seasons, which hamper effective distribution efforts. Using the hunt coordinator program, the Mount Blanca HPP committee can assist CPW with more effective distribution in these areas.

Fencing and forage issues have been identified near the town of San Luis, where small parcels of private land are used for crop and livestock production. These parcels create a unique problem when elk herds migrate through and cause significant fence damage to multiple private landowners in a very short amount of time. Management differences between large private ranches that control higher elevation habitats, and agricultural producers that occupy much of the lower elevation wintering range have the potential to create conflicts.

Conflicts continue to arise in subdivision areas in Costilla County south and east of the town of Fort Garland. Lack of public land hunting opportunities in the area, combined with a staggering complex of publicly accessible county roads creates encounters between landowners and hunters attempting to find areas to hunt. Trespass and hunter access issues are common in this area.



The committee understands that changing land use patterns, recreational pressures on big game habitat, and other new challenges may affect these impact areas as well as create new impact areas in the future. These issues may also create the need for projects intended to achieve/maintain desired management objectives.

## **GAME MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES**

In addition to resolving wildlife conflicts, HPP is also statutorily directed to “assist the division in meeting game management objectives....” This assistance will be directed towards a) maintaining/increasing the population in a given area primarily by habitat manipulation projects; b) maintaining/decreasing the population in a given area primarily by habitat manipulation projects and/or pursuing hunting opportunities; and c) participating in research activities aimed at habitat, population, disease, and/or movement factors that influence big game populations.

## **PROJECT TYPES & PRIORITIES**

Habitat Manipulation: (including but not limited to)

- Prescribed burning
- Water developments
- Weed control
- Herbicide Vouchers
- Fertilization
- Seeding
- Hand thinning
- Mechanical treatment (chaining, roller chopping, hydro axing, etc.)

Fencing Projects: (including but not limited to)

- Fence vouchers for fence repair materials
- Construction of new fences (usually > ¼ mile in length)
- Landowner reimbursement for purchased fencing materials
- Prototype or experimental fence designs
- Wildlife crossings or retrofitting fences to be more wildlife-friendly

Game Damage Projects: (including but not limited to)

- Stackyards- materials and/or labor
- Distribution hunts
- Hunt coordinators for distribution hunts, youth hunts, etc.
- Forage purchases
- Baiting

Information/Education Projects: (including but not limited to)

- Seminars
- Workshops
- Brochures
- Electronic media: websites, etc.

Comment letters

Travel management: signage, temporary fencing, etc.

Research/Monitoring Projects: (including but not limited to)

Habitat

Population

Inventory

Movement

Conservation Easements (transaction costs only)

Archaeological Clearances (and other NEPA required clearances)

HPP projects may be undertaken on public lands, private lands or a combination of both as needed wherever the local committee believes the project has the best chance to effectively reduce, minimize or eliminate the big game/livestock conflict or assist CPW in meeting big game management objectives.

## OPERATING GUIDELINES

In order to accomplish the goals and objectives of this plan, the Mount Blanca HPP committee will utilize the project types listed above in accordance with the following operating guidelines.

1. Has the applicant/landowner acted in good faith and cooperation with CPW? To maximize program effectiveness, applicants or landowners with a history of misconduct related to the HPP program shall be ineligible for program participation.
2. The committee will prioritize projects based on the level of conflict that occurs, game damage potential, increased habitat and winter range value, improved distribution of animals, and harvest availability. Cooperators must be willing to work with the committee in seeking solutions and implementing efforts to resolve any recurrent big game damage problems.
3. Fence replacement and improvement projects will be funded only when using committee approved designs that will reduce fence damage and facilitate natural wildlife movement.
4. The committee prefers that private landowner applicants be engaged in agricultural production or livestock operations. Project applications from landowners that are engaged in agricultural productions or livestock operations may be given preference over those that are not.
5. In funding habitat, fence, and other projects the committee will strive toward a 50/50 cost share between the MB HPP and federal resource management agencies, state wildlife agencies, grazing permittee associations, landowners, or other sources as may be available.
6. Habitat improvement projects on public land that may benefit multiple adjacent landowners will be given higher priority.
7. It is recommended that vegetative treatment projects be a minimum of 200 acres in size. Smaller projects may be considered if they are predicted to have desired results without excessively concentrating big game.
8. The project applicant or a representative must attend the meeting to present the project and answer questions.
9. An HPP application is required for all new project requests. All projects must be approved by the DWM in whose district the project occurs.

10. Future HPP projects **will not** be considered if previously funded projects were not completed on time without committee approval or to the committee's standards.
11. The committee will consider, but may or may not approve projects when the cooperator charges more than \$500 per hunter for access to big game causing the conflict.
12. Forage purchases that result in a direct payment to a cooperator will only be employed when other strategies have failed or the benefits out-weigh the costs. Direct payments will not be made unless the cooperator is willing to work with the committee in seeking and implementing efforts to resolve any recurrent big game damage problems, including but not limited to alternate fence designs, harvest on animals responsible for the damage, and/or habitat improvement efforts.

### **Guidelines for Distribution Management Hunts**

These hunts are designed to move and disperse big game animals (creating impacts) away from conflict areas, and/or to disperse animals from areas offering refuge from harvest. Hunts will be conducted under the following guidelines:

1. Permit numbers will not normally exceed 10% of the estimated number of animals causing the conflict. Under severe damage situations or where the committee determines that a local population must be reduced to control conflicts the permit numbers may go as high as 25% of the animals causing the conflict.
2. Hunt areas may include public land when it is closely associated with the conflict area and/or if animals moving to these lands would compromise the effectiveness of the hunts on surrounding lands.
3. Hunts will generally be for antlerless animals only and will only be considered from August 15th to February 28th, excluding regular rifle big game seasons, with the exception of kill permits which will deal with any animals causing damage.
4. Except for the cost of the license, no fees in excess of statutory limitations will be assessed to the hunters.
5. Hunts will be approved by the committee for cooperators that are engaged in agricultural operations or other situations desirable for achieving big game management objectives. Cooperators must be willing to work with the committee in seeking and implementing efforts to resolve any recurrent big game damage problems, including but not limited to alternate fence designs, harvest on animals responsible for the damage, and/or habitat improvement efforts. The committee will consider but may or may not approve hunts when the cooperator charges more than \$500 per hunter for access to big game causing the conflict.
6. Where acceptable to all landowners in the conflict area where hunts will occur, the committee may contract with a third party to coordinate and conduct hunts. Contracted Coordinators will be screened and vetted by the committee and will be used in situations where supervised hunting is desired or required. Hunt coordinator rules of conduct will apply.

In an effort to be consistent and fair to all applicants, the committee has established operating guidelines that detail priorities, eligibility requirements, project rules and limits, and other

policies. The committee retains the authority to review and update these guidelines as necessary to meet the changing needs of the area; however, these standard rules should apply to most HPP projects and will be enforced by the committee with few exceptions.

Monitoring projects are critical for the long term sustainability of the HPP program. To provide documentation, determine treatment effectiveness, and be able to convey results, monitoring will be done on all projects. Specific monitoring methodology shall be matched to the treatment. Monitoring data will be submitted to the HPP local committee and admins.

## MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Management strategies were developed to achieve the committee's objectives. Strategies primarily involve resolving big game conflicts through habitat manipulation, fencing, and game damage projects; or achieving big game management objectives through information and education, research and monitoring, or conservation easements. Most HPP projects will fall into one of the following management strategy categories.

1. HABITAT MANIPULATION: Improving habitat on private and public draws big game away from impact areas; improves big game distribution; holds big game for longer periods of time on public lands; or improves forage abundance, availability, or palatability such that it reduces competition between big game and livestock.
2. FENCING PROJECTS: Repair of existing fences and/or construction of new fences help alleviate ongoing big game damage, and offset the financial burden to landowners. Fences will be wildlife-friendly to HPP specifications. Maintenance of fences will be the responsibility of the landowner.
3. GAME DAMAGE PROJECTS: Providing stack yards for landowners otherwise ineligible for them and using hunt coordinators and forage purchases address pending damage problems that CPW may be financially liable for.
4. INFORMATION AND EDUCATION: Producing and distributing informative materials helps public land agencies and private land managers educate the public and provides information about the programs, agencies, conflicts and user responsibilities. Travel management may include signage or education on closures or activities that will benefit big game.
5. RESEARCH & MONITORING: Projects may include, but not be limited to, those focusing on habitat condition, populations, inventory, and movement patterns. While these types of projects may be funded, the committee's primary focus will be on conflict resolution between big game and livestock.
6. CONSERVATION EASEMENTS: Conservation easements help to protect a property's conservation values, particularly agricultural productivity, wildlife habitat, and hunting access.

# BUDGET GUIDELINES

The base-operating budget for the State HPP program is based on 5% of total annual revenues for big game license sales in Colorado. The HPP State Council then allocates funding to the individual HPP committees. The Mount Blanca HPP budget was developed to best meet the goals and objectives outlined earlier in the plan, while maintaining the flexibility to deal with emergencies and take advantage of opportunities.

Within certain parameters, the statewide HPP financial system allows local HPP committees to carry specific project dollars over from year to year if the project is ongoing or the funds have been committed. This allows us to better address long-term management and larger, more complicated projects as well as giving us the flexibility to more efficiently prioritize our projects.

Additional funds are also available through the HPP State Council for special projects or unforeseen opportunities outside of the capacity of the committee. These dollars supplement our existing budget and allow us to take on special projects from time to time.

The Mount Blanca HPP Committee has developed a budget allocation in line with our vision, which allows for short-term strategies to deal with immediate fence and forage conflicts caused by big game, but concentrates on adaptive, long-term management strategies leading to the establishment of healthy and sustainable rangelands. Our budget for the ten-year period has been broken down as follows:

## BASE BUDGET ALLOCATION:

Fencing & Game Damage	75%
Habitat Manipulation	10%
Research/Monitoring	5%
Conservation Easements & NEPA Related Activities	5%
Information & Education	3%
Administration	2%

TOTAL ALLOCATION: 100%

It is important to acknowledge that the budget allocation is based on past projects, future projects that are likely to be proposed as well as committee emphasis in funding certain project types. While these are desired and/or likely allocations, the committee retains the ability to shift funds as needed between categories as projects and opportunities arise or as situations dictate.

# CURRENT & FORESEEABLE ISSUES

## HABITAT LOSS AND DEGRADATION

Public land within the Mount Blanca HPP area contains a large percentage of deer, elk, and pronghorn winter range and contains primary big game migration corridors. Winter range quality for elk and pronghorn is compromised by poor land health in areas where historic livestock grazing and drought have affected habitat recovery, resulting in increased pressure on agricultural operations on private lands. Fire suppression on public lands has also resulted in a lack of age class diversity in oak and pinion-juniper stands, resulting in lower forage palatability and increased pressure on agriculture lands. Several key migration corridors are affected by non wildlife-friendly fencing and are also at risk for development due to large inclusions of private property not under conservation easements.

## PRIVATE LAND

The Mount Blanca HPP committee area is comprised of approximately 70% private land. Migrating herds of elk from large private ranches that control higher elevation habitats to agricultural producers that occupy much of the lower elevation wintering range have the potential to create conflicts due to management differences. Conflicts are also common between hunters and private landowners due to the lack of public land hunting opportunities.

## HUNTING SEASON PROBLEMS

In Costilla, Saguache, and Alamosa counties, large tracts of subdivided lots exist in the path of strategic seasonal migration paths as elk and deer transition from higher elevations to the valley floor during the fall and winter. These parcels of land are serviced by over 2,000 miles of county roads that are open to the public, and legally traversed by hunters during hunting seasons. Unfortunately, this greatly affects the movement of elk and also creates serious safety issues. Trespass has been, and continues to be, a chronic problem throughout the committee area. This includes large numbers of hunters from out of the area that travel here to take advantage of this situation, which has compounded the problem. Changes in the administration of hunting seasons in GMUs 82 and 83 by CPW will help this issue, but will not eliminate it.

## NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

The Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge and its associated elk herd have created conflicts with surrounding private lands. Similar problems continue to be documented with the Baca National Wildlife Refuge and their associated elk herds that migrate into crop production areas on the valley floor. Production of high-value crops such as seed potatoes on the valley floor creates the potential for crippling game damage claims. In addition, large portions of these federal lands are not open to traditional hunting methods and seasons, which hamper effective distribution efforts.

## **GREAT SAND DUNES NATIONAL PARK**

The Great Sand Dunes National Park provides refuge for a large number of elk and other wildlife, however no hunting is allowed on the park. Elk continue to move from the Park to private lands to the west where concerns over growing crops still exist. Additionally, bison currently inhabit areas within the Park and the effects they are having on the habitat and the movement of elk is unknown at this time. The committee continues to engage Park staff to discuss wildlife issues.

## **CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE**

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has not yet been determined to exist within the wildlife populations of the San Luis Valley. However, its occurrence is moving increasingly closer. Dispersal and movement of individual elk and deer over very long distances has been well documented. The committee recognizes that the potential for this occurring should not be ignored.