

HERD MANAGEMENT PLAN – D-54 (SOUTH TABLELANDS) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GMUs: 93, 97, 98, 99 and 100

Land Ownership: 99% Private, 1% State

Post-Season Population:

Current Objective – 2,900–3,100; 2018 Estimate – 3,884; Future Objective – Pending

Post-Season Sex Ratio (Bucks/100 Does):

Current Objective – 35–40; 2018 Observed – 43; 2018 Modeled – 42; Future Objective – Pending

Figure I. D-54 Post-hunt Population Estimate

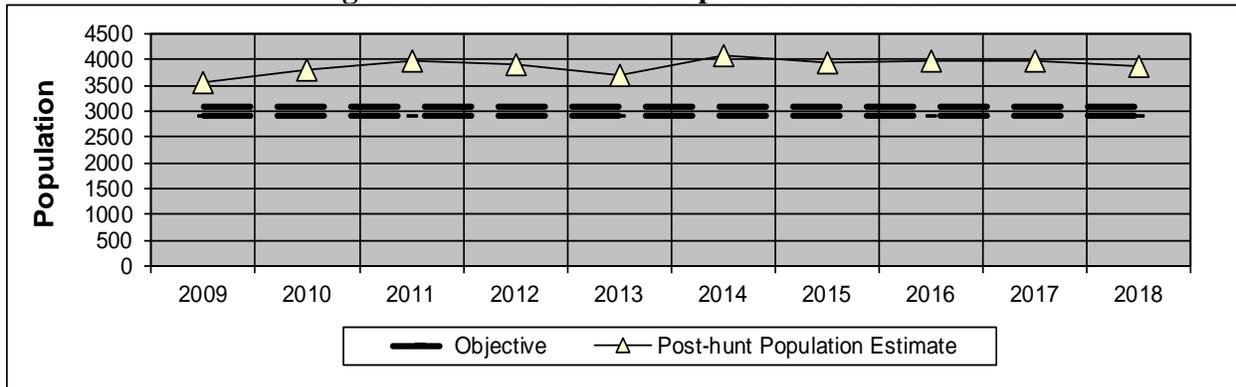


Figure II. D-54 Harvest

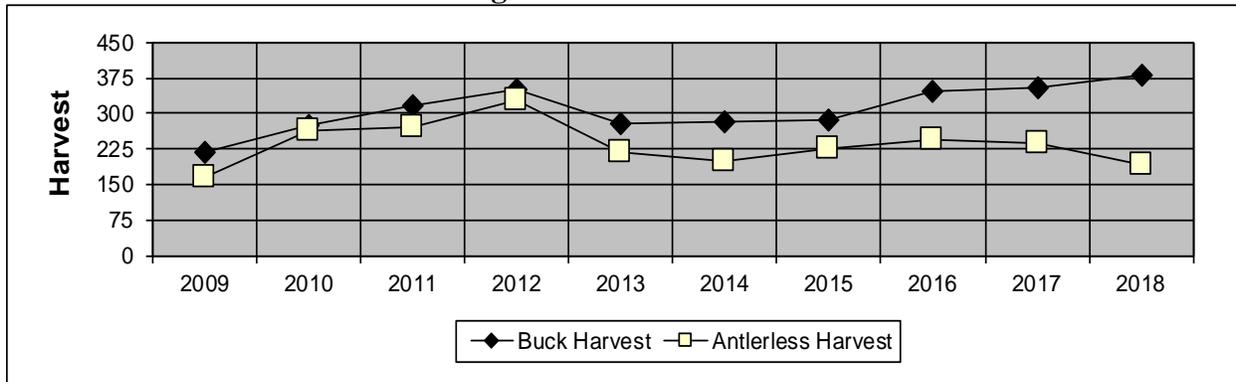
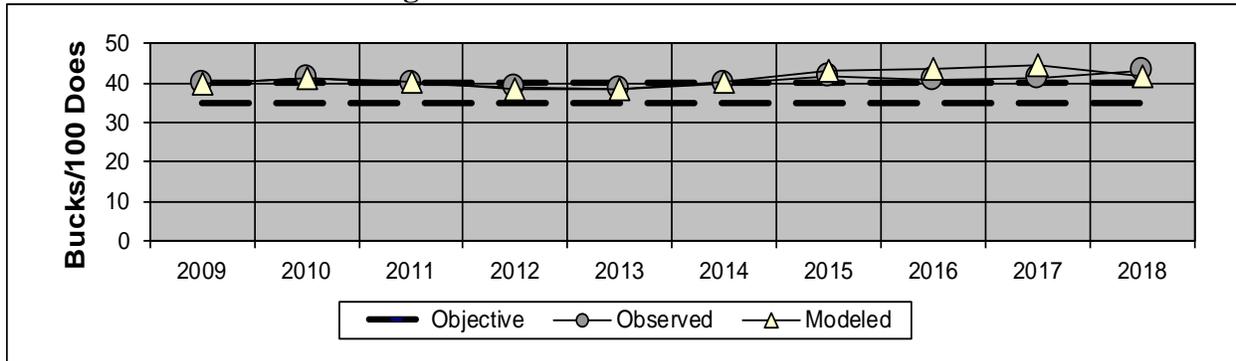


Figure III. D-54 Post-hunt Sex Ratio



Background

Over the past decade, the South Tablelands deer herd has been managed under the current management plan objectives of 2,900–3,100 deer and 35–40 bucks/100 does that were established in 2007. This Herd Management Plan (HMP) and the population and sex ratio alternatives presented are the result of an update and revision of that plan.

Since 2007, the South Tablelands deer herd, has been managed to provide quality mule deer hunting opportunities by maintaining a high buck/doe ratio and a higher proportion of 3+ year-old bucks in the population. For the past 10 years, the buck/doe ratio has averaged 40 bucks/100 does ranging from 38 bucks/100 does observed in 2012 and 2013 to 43 bucks/100 does observed in 2018. Estimated mule deer numbers for the South Tablelands deer herd has increased since 2009 from a low of approximately 3,567 in 2009 to a high of 4,072 in 2014. The 5-year population estimate average for this deer herd is 3,970 mule deer. Observed fawn/doe ratios have varied from a low of 55 fawns/100 does in 2018 to a high of 69 fawns/100 does in 2009 and 2014 and has averaged 63 fawns/100 does over the past decade.

Significant Issues

The South Tablelands deer herd has been managed to maintain mule deer numbers within the current population and sex ratio objectives. To address white-tailed deer in the South Tablelands, Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife (CPW) created a special white-tailed deer only season in 2003. Today, season choice white-tailed deer only licenses are used in D-54 to provide additional hunter recreation without the risk of over harvesting mule deer.

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) infection was first discovered in the South Tablelands deer herd in 1999. In 2019, mandatory testing of harvested bucks and does revealed that CWD prevalence was 21% in mule deer bucks. Thus, management changes will be implemented to address CWD in this herd in accordance with the CWD Response Plan. Management actions may include reducing the male age structure, reducing the deer density, or some combination of both.

Management Alternatives

The CPW preferred alternatives for D-54 are to manage for a post-hunt population of **3,500–4,000 mule deer** with an observed post-hunt sex ratio of **30–35 bucks/100 does**. Public comments strongly supported maintaining the South Tablelands mule deer herd at the current population level and continue to provide quality buck hunting opportunities. However, CWD prevalence was found to exceed the statewide threshold, therefore, the South Tablelands deer herd will be managed at a lower sex ratio objective.

Other alternatives considered in this HMP are: 1) reduce the population by 35% to 2,100–2,500 mule deer, 2) increase the population objective to 3,000–3,500 mule deer, 3) maintain the sex ratio objective at 35–40 bucks/100 does, and 4) reduce the sex ratio objective to 25–30 bucks/100 does.