

Mesa de Maya Deer Herd Management Plan

Data Analysis Unit D-33

GAME MANAGEMENT UNITS 137, 138, 143, 144



Created for:



COLORADO

Parks and Wildlife

Department of Natural Resources

By:

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Approved XXXXX by the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

<p>Mesa de Maya Deer Herd (DAU D33) GMUs: 137, 138, 143, 144</p>
<p><u>Post-Hunt Population</u>: Previous Objective: 2,350; Estimate for 2021: 2,250 deer Recommended Objective: 2,000-3,500 deer</p>
<p><u>Post-Hunt Sex Ratio (Bucks:100 Does)</u>: Previous Objective: 33 Recommended Objective: No Sex Ratio objective; Expected Sex Ratio Range: 20-50</p>

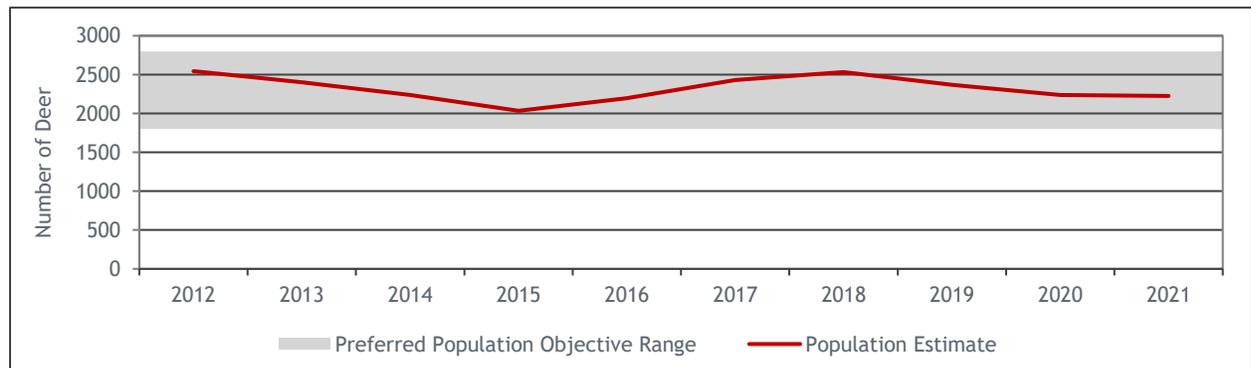


Figure 1. Mesa de Maya Deer Herd post-hunt population estimates and recommended population objective.

DAU Amendments

For all previous D-33 herd management plans (HMP), the Mesa de Maya Deer DAU consisted of GMUs 143, 144, and 145. CPW is adjusting the DAU boundaries for D-33 by making the following changes:

- GMUs 137 and 138 are being added to D-33.
- GMU 145 is being removed from D-33 and added to D-28.

This plan is for the amended D-33 that contains GMUs: 137, 138, 143, and 144.

Background Information

The Mesa de Maya DAU encompasses GMUs 137, 138, 143, and 144 in western Baca County and eastern Las Animas County. Approximately 82% of D-33 is in private ownership. The Comanche National Grasslands provides most of the DAU’s public access.

There have been no significant management concerns in D-33 in the last 10 years. The population is stable. Most landowners indicate that the deer population should be maintained or even increased. Deer are causing limited issues with crop damage. Most hunters are satisfied with their hunting experiences in D-33. The DAU offers hunters great opportunities to harvest mature mule deer bucks. Therefore, CPW recommends maintaining the current management strategy in D-33.

CPW conducted a mail survey before drafting this HMP to ascertain landowner opinions regarding deer management in D-33. In June 2021, we mailed 225 surveys to randomly

selected landowners, representing ~50% of the DAU's landowners. When asked how many deer they would like to see on their land relative to the current numbers, the highest percentage of landowners (43%) preferred an increase in deer numbers. When asked about their preferred buck:doe ratio, the majority of landowners (53%) indicated that they would like to see the buck:doe ratio maintained at its current level.

CPW also conducted a hunter survey for D-33, sending surveys to 200 hunters who had received at least one D-33 rifle, muzzleloader, or archery license for the 2018, 2019, and/or 2020 seasons. When asked about the number of deer they would like to see on the property they hunt, the highest percentage of hunters (45%) indicated that they would like to see an increase in deer numbers. Of those who would like to see a population increase, most called for a fifty percent increase in deer numbers. When asked about their preferred buck:doe ratio, the highest percentage of hunters (54%) indicated that they would like to see the buck:doe ratio maintained at its current level.

D-33 has a relatively small population with low deer densities. It is not cost-effective to conduct annual helicopter sex/age classification surveys due to the low densities. A useful computer population model cannot be produced without classification data. CPW generates rough population estimates for D-33 using buck harvest rates (see Post-hunt Population Size, pg. 10). CPW recommends a large population objective range to account for the imprecision of the population estimate.

To inform license quota recommendations, CPW will use alternative metrics such as CWD sampling results, hunter/landowner surveys, harvest estimates, and personal communications with landowners and hunters. Every five years, CPW will conduct a landowner/hunter survey effort to identify if there are any new management concerns.

Population Objective Alternatives

Preferred Alternative: 2,000-3,500 deer: This alternative will maintain the population at the current size. The proposed objective range is large due to the limitations estimating D-33's deer population. This range allows for population growth, which both landowners and hunters support. The deer herd has been managed within this range for the past 10 years.

Alternative 2: 2,800-3,900 deer: The hunter survey suggests that the majority of hunters and landowners would prefer this alternative. Most survey respondents indicated they would like to see a 50% increase in the D-33 population. However, even if all doe harvest was eliminated, the population may not be able to grow to this objective range. Currently, doe harvest accounts for just 1.6% of the estimated pre-hunt population. There are likely limitations to this population that are outside of CPW's control.

Sex Ratio Alternatives

Preferred Alternative: *Expected sex ratio range of 20-50 bucks per 100 does:* It is unlikely that CPW will collect sex ratio data in D-33 or be able to estimate sex ratios in D-33 accurately. We expect that sex ratios would fall within this range, especially with license quotas remaining similar to those set over the last ten years.

Alternative 2: 28-38 bucks per 100 does (status quo). This alternative would require managing with the use of annual sex/age classification flights. To manage within this range, CPW would need to utilize limited flight resources that may be better used in other deer DAUs with higher populations and/or densities.