

Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Habitat Partnership Program
North Park



DISTRIBUTION MANAGEMENT PLAN



Approved - Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission: May 4, 2018
This plan is valid for 10 years from approval date.

2018-2028

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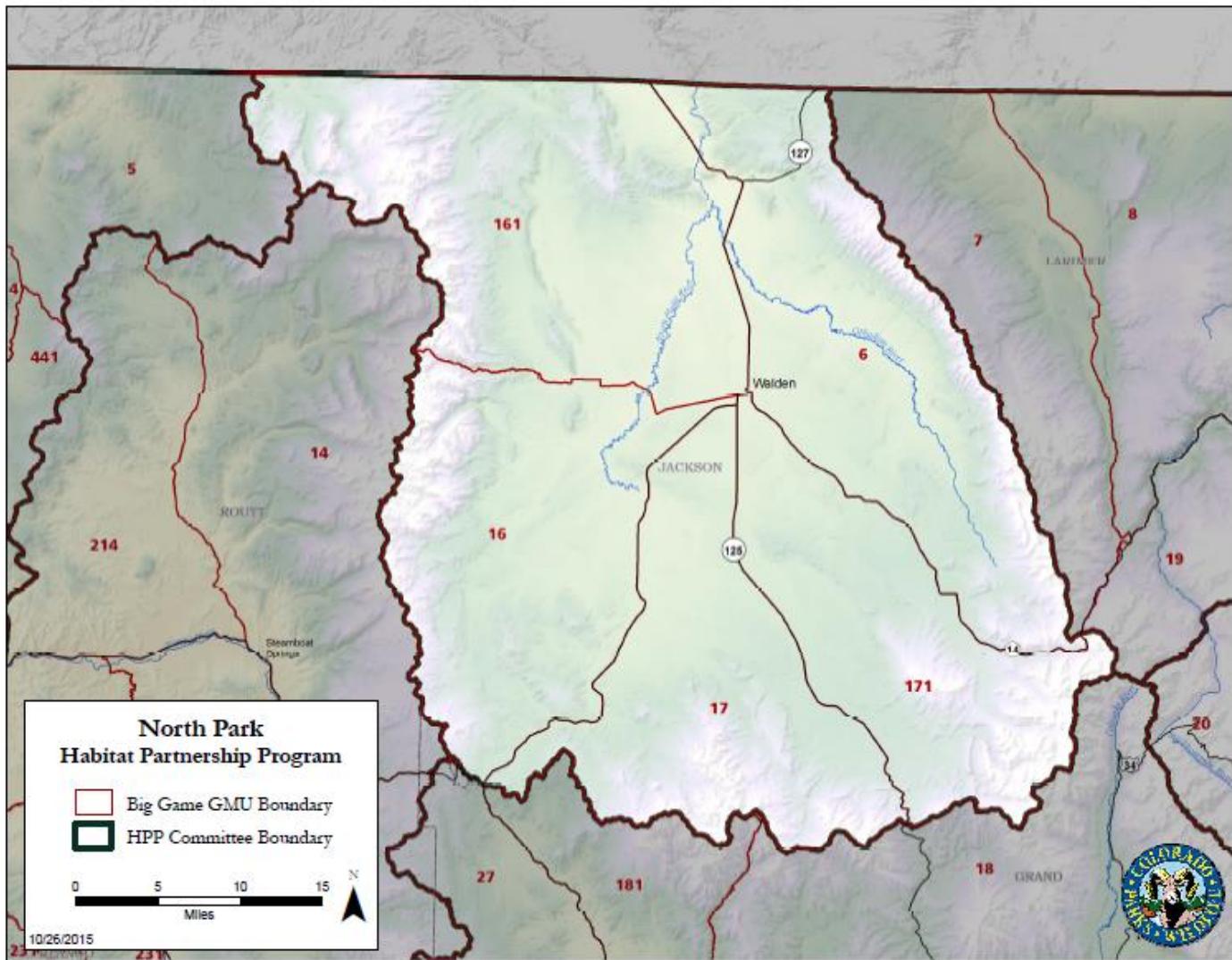
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The North Park HPP committee continues to be concerned with establishing short-term management actions to resolve immediate fence and forage conflicts caused by big game and to identify adaptive, long-term strategies that resolve those impacts. The committee strives for healthy and sustainable rangelands as well as assisting Colorado Parks and Wildlife in achieving big game management objectives.

The NP HPP committee works in a historic agricultural area and deals with the typical issues of hunting access, refuges or limited hunting access and elk damages to stockyards. However, the North Park area is currently facing new issues involving Greater Sage Grouse, oil and gas exploration and development plus increased public recreation demands.

NORTH PARK HPP AREA



COMMITTEE MEMBERS

There are currently eight committee members: three representing local livestock producers, three representing federal agencies, one representing the Colorado Division of Wildlife, and one representing sports persons of Colorado. The North Park committee has four members who have served ten years or more: Todd Peterson (past chairman and sportsman rep), Blaine Evans (livestock producer), Jimmer Baller (livestock producer), and Dan Meyring (livestock producer). We believe this is an indication of the dedication and commitment of our Committee. Two members- Dan Meyring and Todd Peterson have served on the committee since the NPHPP Committee's inception.

MEMBERS

1. Todd Peterson, sportspersons representative	Started HPP Term: 7/17/1991
2. Josh Dilley, CPW representative (chairman)	Started HPP Term: 01/2010
3. Danny Meyring, livestock grower representative	Started HPP Term: 7/17/1991
4. Blaine Evans, livestock grower representative	Started HPP Term: 9/20/1996
5. Jimmer Baller, livestock grower representative	Started HPP Term: 12/2002
6. Darrell Freeman, USFS representative (co-chairman)	Started HPP Term: 01/2016
7. Tara Wertz, USFWS representative	Started HPP Term: 05/2017
8. Bill Falvey, BLM representative	Started HPP Term: 2/2018

INTRODUCTION

North Park is home to large herds of elk, abundant moose, deer, and antelope, and a small herd of bighorn sheep. It also supports a vibrant agricultural community that produces high quality hay and thousands of cattle. North Park experiences long, cold, winters with occasional above average snowfall. With so many wild ungulates it is inevitable that conflicts arise with agricultural producers. To alleviate some of the cost and damages caused by wildlife and incurred by private landowners, the North Park Habitat Partnership Program (NPHPP) Committee was formed in 1991.

The North Park HPP area consists of large ranches and large tracts of both USFS and BLM lands. In 1994 the North Park HPP committee applied to the Seeking Common Ground organization for a grant to form a partnership between government agencies and local landowners in an attempt to address local issues beyond the fence and forage problems with which HPP was concerned. The grant was given to our committee and the Owl Mountain Partnership was formed. This partnership developed into a landscape based ecosystem management group that encouraged the use of livestock grazing systems, habitat development projects, water developments, and information and education efforts to benefit overall land health. Unfortunately, in 2012 the Owl Mountain Partnership was dissolved.

Resolving conflicts between agricultural producers and wildlife will remain one of the committee's main objectives. However, due to increased development and recreational pressures the committee's focus may shift toward habitat improvements and helping CPW to achieve game management objectives.

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 GOALS, OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

- GOAL 1: HELP CPW ACHIEVE GAME MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES.
- GOAL 2: MINIMIZE LANDOWNER CONFLICTS DUE TO DAMAGE CAUSED BY BIG GAME.
- GOAL 3: IMPROVE HABITAT CONDITIONS TO ENSURE HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE RANGELANDS AND WILDLIFE PLUS REDISTRIBUTE BIG GAME TO NON-IMPACT AREAS.
- GOAL 4: MONITOR PROJECTS TO DETERMINE THEIR EFFECTIVENESS.
- GOAL 5: DEVELOP AN INFORMATION AND EDUCATION PROGRAM TO INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS OF THE HPP PROGRAM.

GOAL 1: HELP CPW ACHIEVE GAME MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES.

Objectives:

1. Develop and maintain quality big game herds in North Park at levels within the CPW management objectives. Utilize hunter harvest and dispersal of concentrated elk herds in impact and safe haven areas when possible.

Strategies:

- A. Support the USFWS in the evaluation of the current public elk hunting structure on the Arapaho Wildlife Refuge. Encourage and support the expansion of elk hunting opportunities on USFWS lands near Pole Mountain and on the Chandler tract in Jackson County.
- B. Make recommendations to CPW about possible harvest strategies.
- C. Work with landowners that harbor elk during hunting season to allow elk to be available for harvest.

GOAL 2: MINIMIZE LANDOWNER CONFLICTS DUE TO DAMAGE CAUSED BY BIG GAME.

Objectives:

1. Design fences that are wildlife friendly which reduces big game damage.
2. Protect hay from big game where conflicts are documented.
3. Reduce conflicts between big game and livestock grazing or hay production.
4. Work with the United States Forest Service (USFS) to reduce human disturbance on critical elk calving and early summer ranges to reduce elk movement from the USFS land to adjacent privately owned hayfields.
5. Improve travel management/controlled access to distribute big game and provide written comments on proposed travel management changes on public lands.

Strategies:

- A. Build fences using vinyl coated high-tensile top wire, lay down designs or any other wildlife friendly designs.
- B. Build or provide materials for elk-proof stackyards for qualifying landowners (game damage eligibility, antlerless hunts, and cost share).
- C. Assist private landowners to redistribute big game, based on predetermined criteria.
- D. Continue funding habitat improvement projects to attract and hold big game in non-impact areas.
- E. Utilize distribution and harvest hunts primarily to move animals away from impact areas to non-impact areas.
- F. Hire a hunt coordinator to manage and organize an antlerless elk season where significant impacts are documented.

GOAL 3: IMPROVE HABITAT CONDITIONS TO ENSURE HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE RANGELANDS AND WILDLIFE PLUS REDISTRIBUTE BIG GAME TO NON-IMPACT AREAS.

Objectives:

- 1. Conduct habitat management projects to attract and hold wildlife in non-impact areas.
- 2. Implement grazing management strategies to sustain cattle grazing and wildlife use.
- 3. Develop partnerships with groups that deal with wildlife habitat issues.
- 4. Focus on long-term protection of all wildlife habitats.

Strategies:

- A. Fertilization and seeding to improve forage quality and quantity.
- B. Develop grazing systems through associated projects such as water development, fence construction, etc.
- C. Burning, mechanical, chemical, and silvicultural treatments to control undesirable vegetation, increase forage, and enhance wildlife habitat.
- D. Support the North Park Sage-Grouse Working Group on projects to improve sage grouse habitat.
- E. Become active in supporting conservation easements on wildlife habitat that meets conservation easement criteria.
- F. Contract cultural clearances when possible/feasible to facilitate above strategies.

GOAL 4: MONITOR ALL PROJECTS TO DETERMINE THEIR EFFECTIVENESS.

Objectives:

1. Follow a monitoring protocol to provide consistent data collection to analyze the effectiveness of projects.
2. Maintain the cost effectiveness of all projects.

Strategies:

- A. Develop and implement a monitoring protocol that is easily understandable and repeatable by others.
- B. Evaluate how monies are spent.
- C. Send evaluation form to project participants to determine project effectiveness.

GOAL 5: DEVELOP AN INFORMATION AND EDUCATION PROGRAM TO INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS OF THE HPP PROGRAM.

Objectives:

1. Keep the local community and land managers informed about the Habitat Partnership Program.

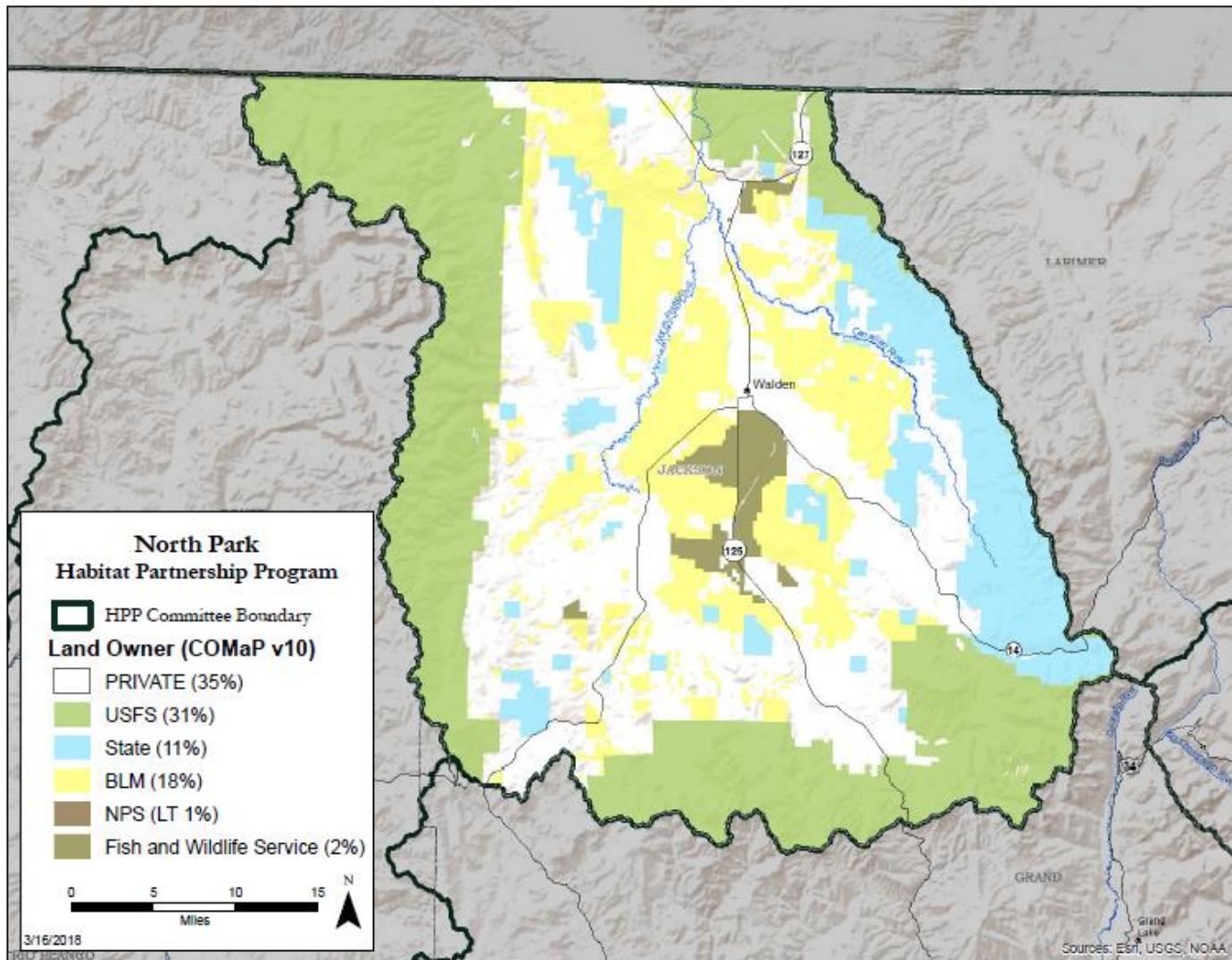
Strategies:

- A. Sponsor workshops to assist landowners and land managers and to inform the community about land use issues.
- B. Develop brochures, newsletters, demonstrations, and tours to further understanding about livestock/big game needs and interactions, and land health issues.
- C. Inform interested parties of website and advertise local meetings.
- D. Partner in outreach efforts with other groups such as North Park High School, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Natural Resource Conservation Service, etc.

AREA DESCRIPTION

The North Park Habitat Partnership Program covers the area consisting of Jackson County, Colorado. Most of Jackson County is a high, relatively broad, intermountain basin known as North Park, which covers approximately 1,615 sq. mi. This basin opens north into Wyoming and is bordered on the west by the Park Range, on the south by the Rabbit Ears Range, and on the east by the Medicine Bow Mountains.

Jackson County (North Park) encompasses 1,036,495 acres, of which 124,765 acres is owned by the state, 541,073 acres is federally owned, and 370,660 acres are privately owned. Therefore, state and federal land comprises 64% of the total acreage and 36% of the total acreage is privately owned.



HABITAT DESCRIPTION

Elevation ranges from 7,800 to 12,953 feet above sea level and is home to the headwaters of four major rivers, including the North Platte River. Throughout time a maze of valleys and benches were formed across the Park by the tributaries of these rivers. Most of the benches support sagebrush steppe plant communities while many of the valleys have been converted into hay meadows by flood irrigation from the rivers and streams. Additionally, numerous ponds and lakes dot the landscape, some are natural but many are the result of higher water tables and overflow from years of irrigation. Willows, alders, and cottonwoods have expanded along the many irrigation ditches, perennial creeks and ephemeral streams, providing quality habitat for a variety of wildlife species.

Plant communities in North Park range from salt desert shrub in the lowest elevations, to sagebrush steppe in the uplands, and then to a marginal mountain shrub community just below the edge of a broad band of lodgepole pine that circles the Park at mid elevations. As elevation continues to rise, the vegetation transitions into spruce-fir forest and then to krummholz, wind-blown white spruce, and finally, tundra is found near and on the top of the mountains.

The salt desert shrub community, which consists mostly of greasewood, saltbush, and western wheatgrass, is localized and occupies relatively few acres. Within the sagebrush steppe community, there is a wide diversity of sagebrush species, forbs and grasses, with the dominant shrub either Mountain big sage or Wyoming big sage.

Climate, soils, aspect, elevation, and herbivore use limits the vigor, diversity, and extent of the mountain shrub community. Depending on location, serviceberry is generally found in the more mesic sites and bitterbrush exists at the higher elevations of the sagebrush steppe. Bitterbrush is sometimes associated with serviceberry, but when found; bitterbrush is usually the dominant shrub.

Lodgepole pine is the dominant tree species in the mid-elevation forest, with buffalo-berry and ceanothus the most dominant shrubs. Aspen groves are found within this zone but their abundance has been reduced over time due to encroachment from conifers. The mature, single age class lodgepole forest has been heavily influenced by infestations of Mountain Pine Beetle, killing large numbers of trees. In many mature lodgepole stands throughout North Park, the mortality rate has been as high as 80% in trees with a DBH of 4"-6" and larger. As natural succession occurs, the areas dominated by older age class lodgepole pine are being replaced by new stands of lodgepole, aspen, shrubs, and grassland species. Sub-alpine fir and Engelmann spruce are the dominant tree species at the higher elevations. The lodgepole pine, aspen, and spruce-fir communities provide food, shelter, and cover for elk and deer in the spring, summer, and fall, and for moose in all seasons.

BIG GAME POPULATION SUMMARY

Each individual herd (deer, elk, pronghorn and moose) is grouped into a Data Analysis Unit (DAU). The DAU boundaries are drawn so that they approximate an individual herd unit where most of the animals are born, rose, and die with as little egress or ingress from other herds as possible. The unit contains the entire habitat necessary for wildlife to breed, rear young, migrate, and forage.

Below are the proposed management objectives for all the DAUs within the scope of NPHPP. The NPHPP committee will assist CPW meet herd management objectives associated with the committee's area through utilization of hunter harvest and dispersal of concentrated elk herds in conflict and safe haven areas when possible. Lastly, the committee will make recommendations to CPW about possible harvest strategies.

Table 1. Data Analysis Unit Summary for North Park HPP Area

Management Herd (*DAU in the process of being renewed)	1990s Population Avg.	2000s Population Avg.	2010 - 2018 Population Avg.	Current Pop.Mngt. Objective
Deer - (DAU D-3)	6,818	5,879	6,101	5,400-6,000
<i>Game Management Units: 6, 16, 161, 17 & 171</i>				
Elk - (DAU E-3)	7,736	8,896	6,688	4,000-4,500
<i>Game Management Units: 6, 16, 17, 161 & 171</i>				
Pronghorn - (DAU A-3)	1,407	1,353	1,533	1,400-1,600
<i>Game Management Unit: 6, 16, 161, 17 & 171</i>				
Moose - (DAU M-1)	372	482	553	500-600
<i>Game Management Unit: 6, 16, 17, 161 & 171</i>				

NOTE

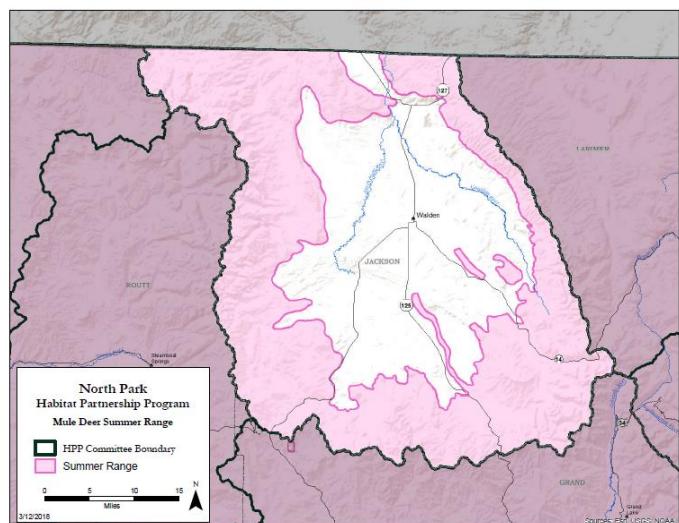
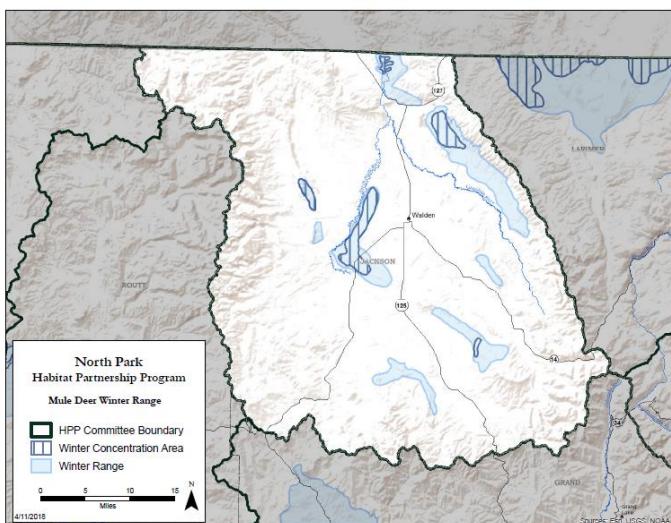
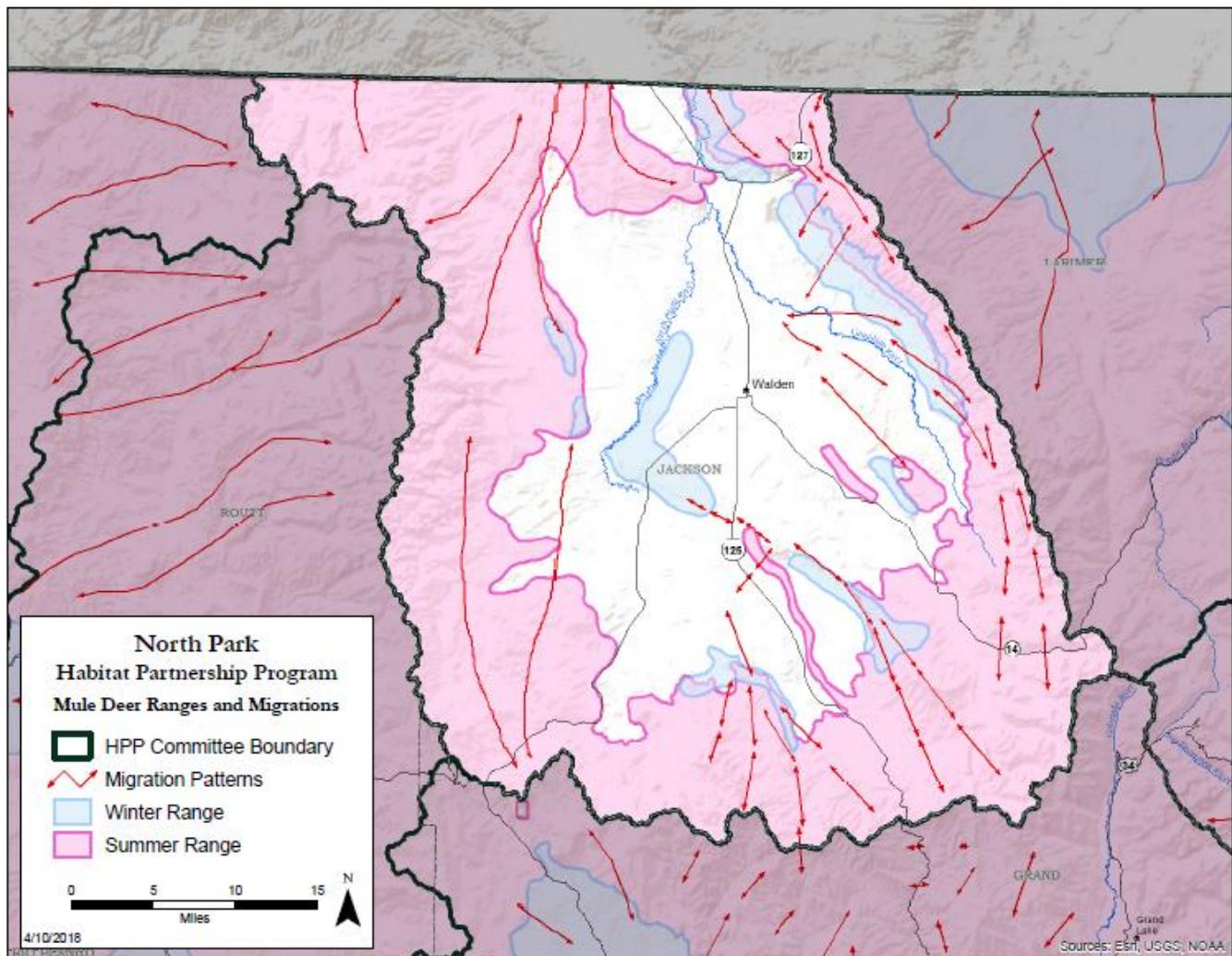
The population numbers used here are modeled predictions and, for deer, do not necessarily indicate an accurate representation of deer on the ground as D-3 does not fit the definition of a Data Analysis (DAU) since most deer migrate out of North Park for the winter.

Though the E-3 herd maintains relatively high average population number for the 2000 through 2018 time period the modeled population shows a fairly sharp decline in the population for the most recent 4 year period declining from 6,202 to a predicted 4,551 elk post hunt 2019.

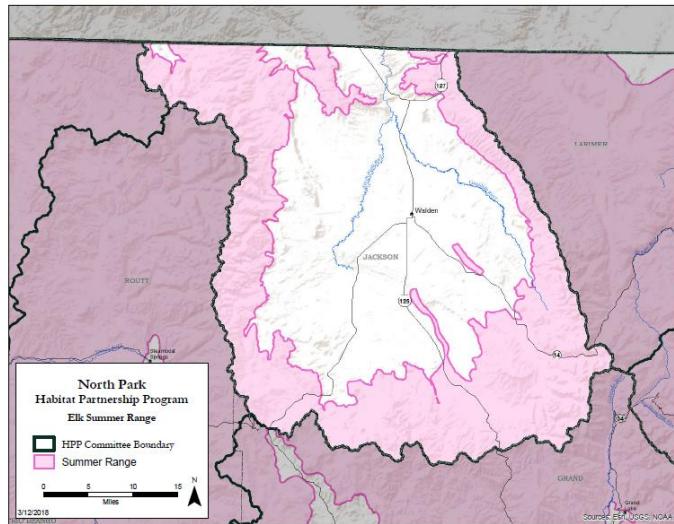
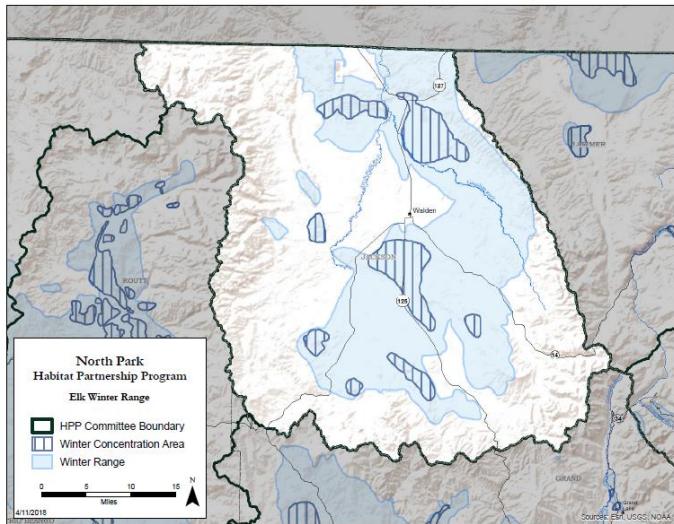
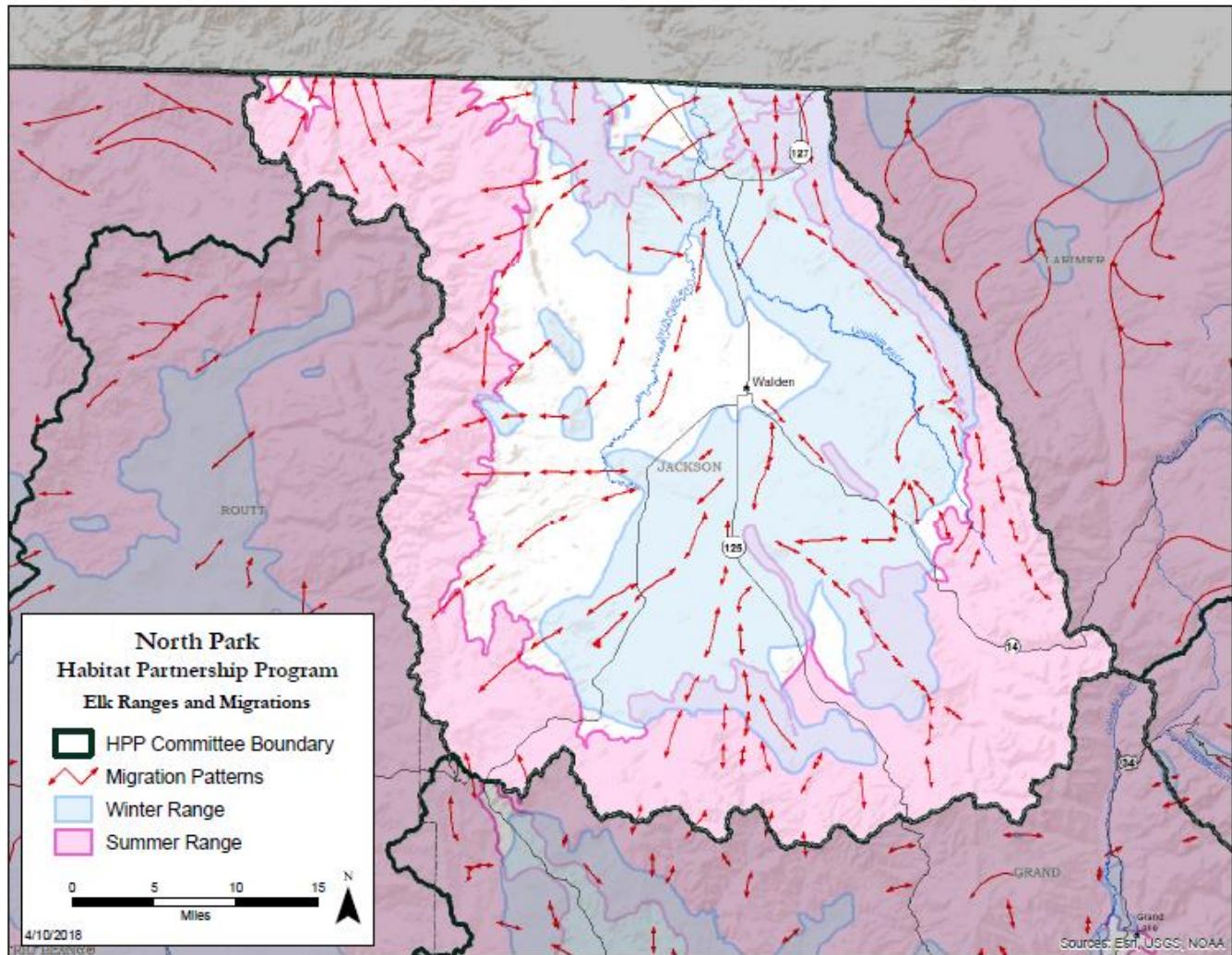
A-3 and D-3 current population management objectives are based on draft Herd Management Plans (HMP) that were recently completed in 2017 and awaiting Parks and Wildlife Commission approval.

BIG GAME RANGES & MIGRATIONS

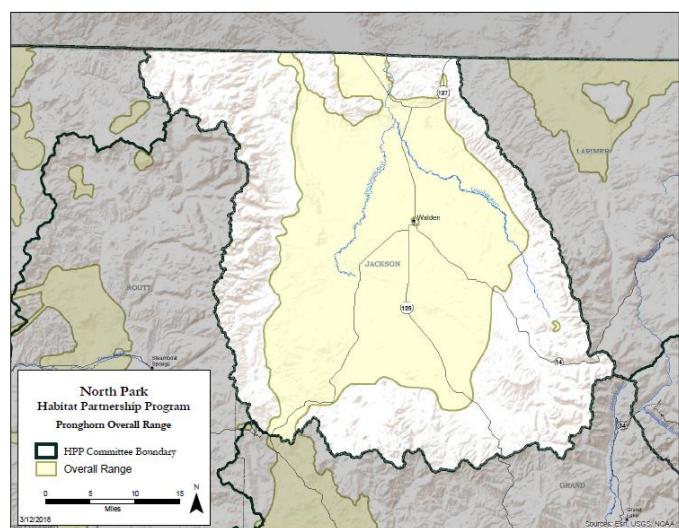
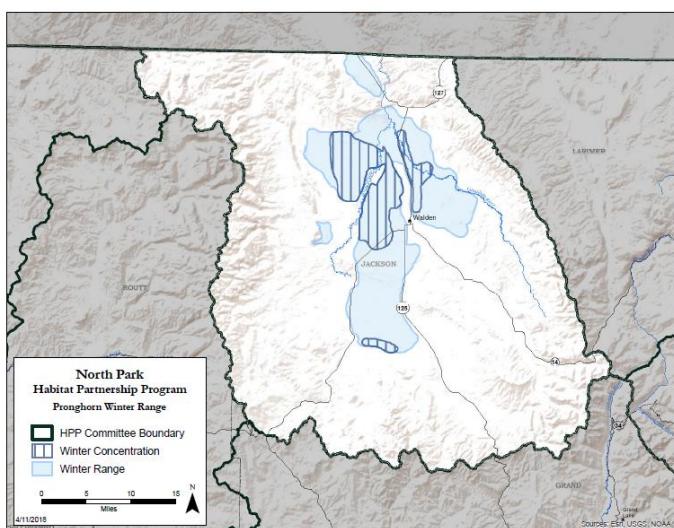
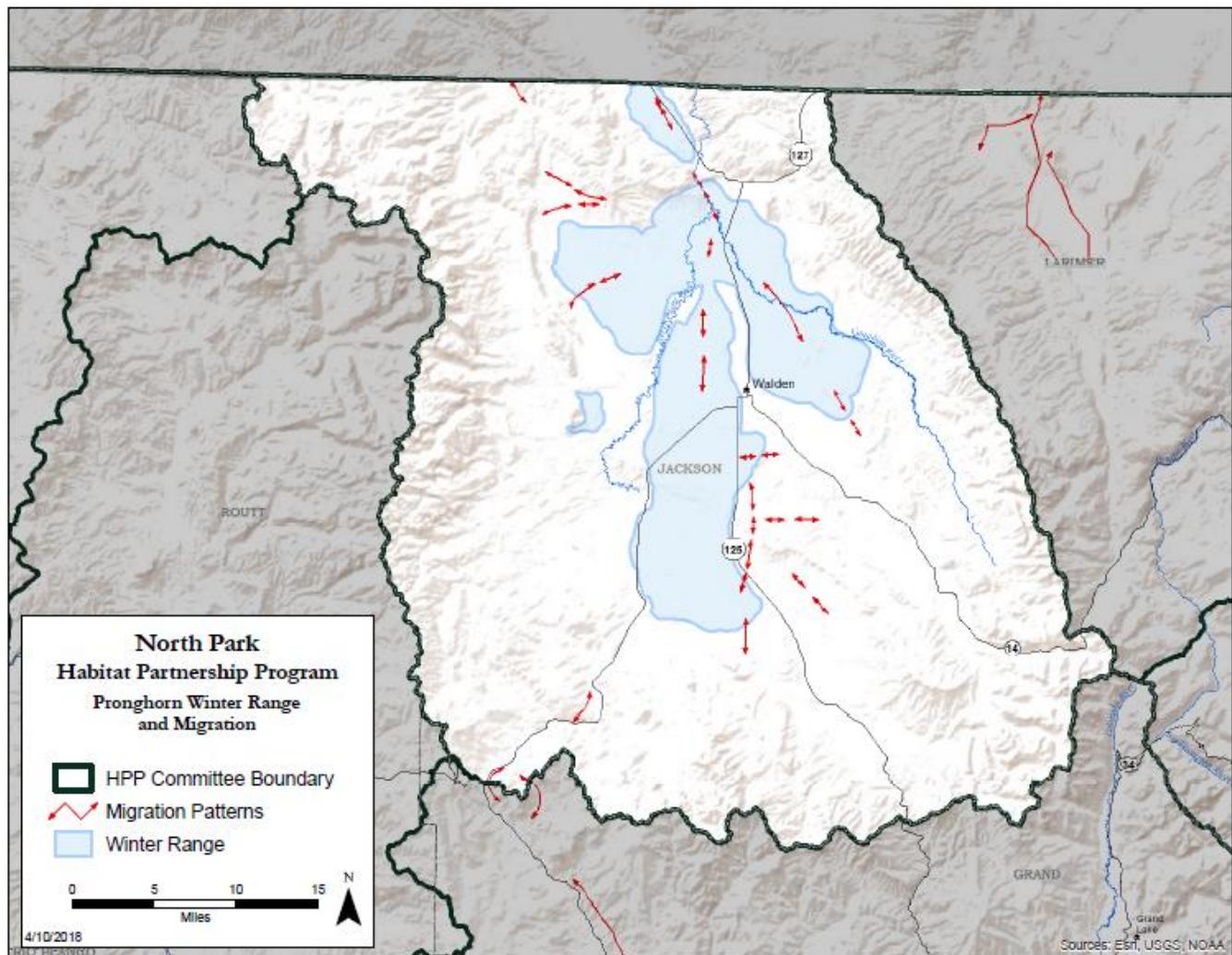
DEER



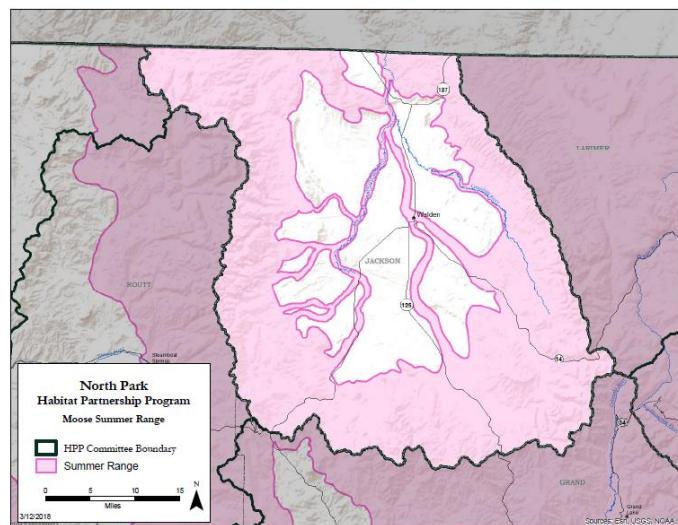
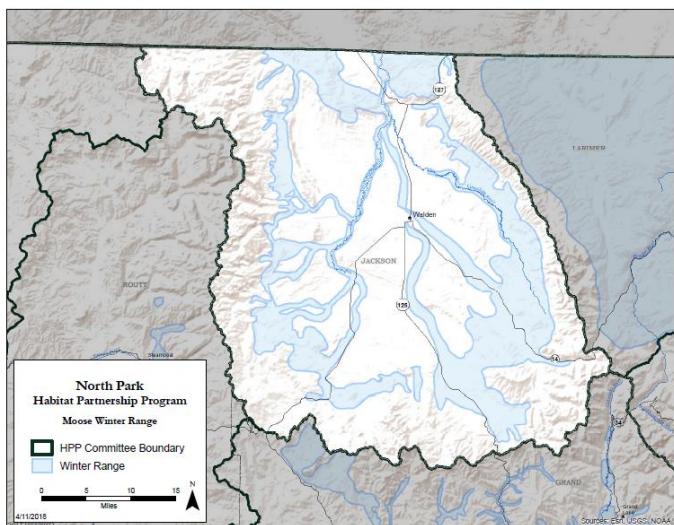
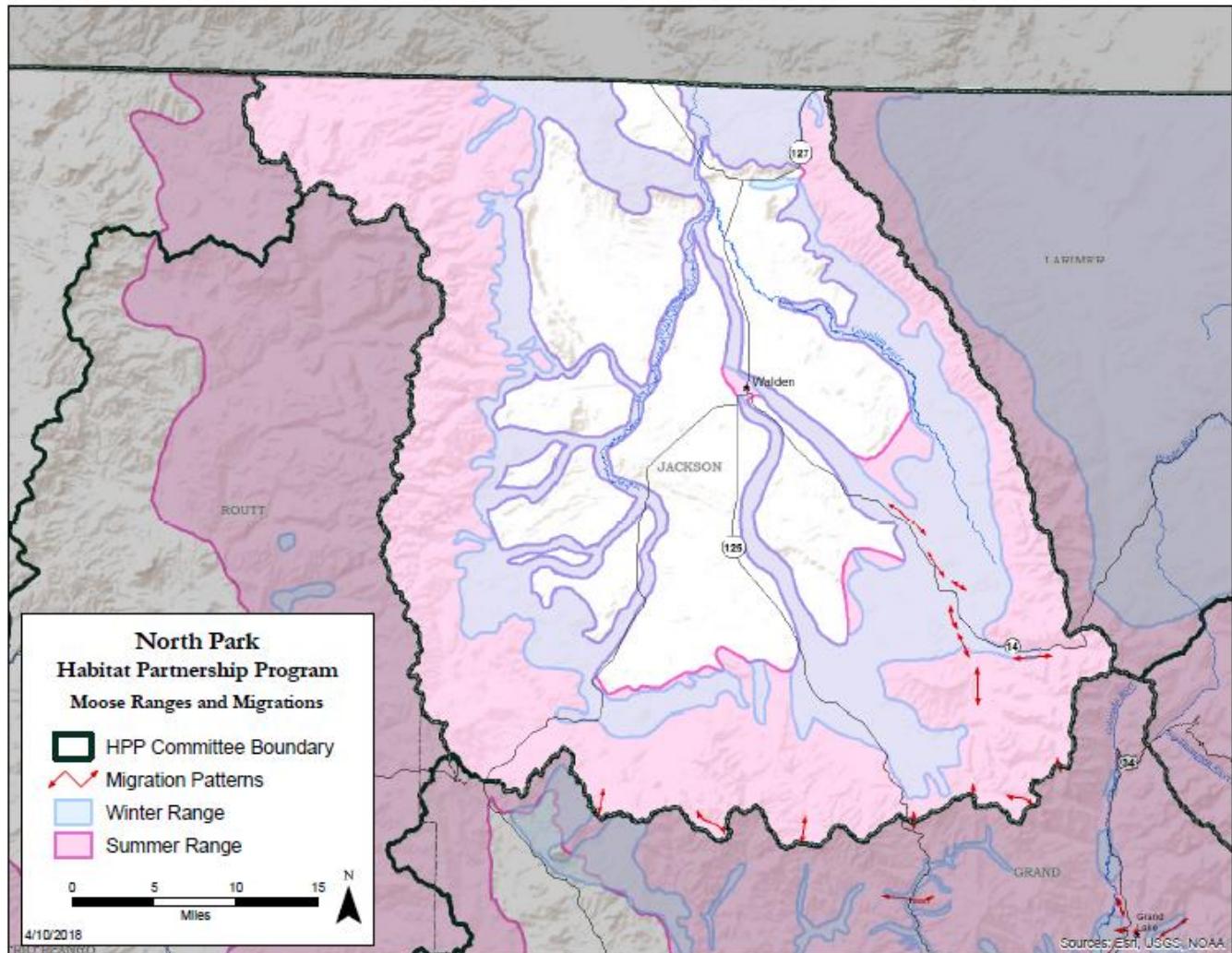
ELK



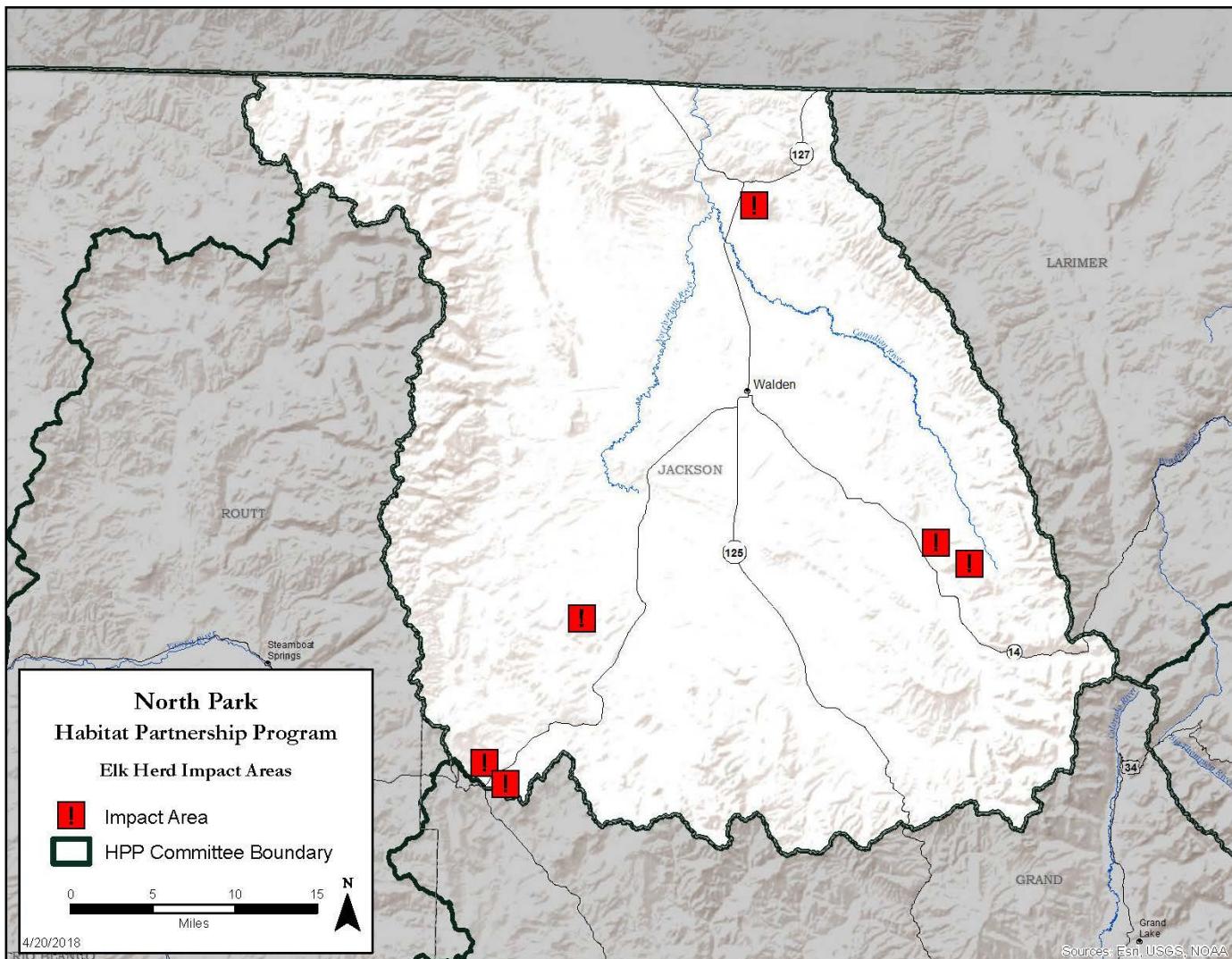
PRONGHORN



MOOSE



IMPACT AREAS & DESCRIPTION



Impact areas are public or private land, where an excessive concentration of big game animals causes a problem with the management of those lands with respect to forage, growing crops, harvest aftermath, fences, and/or general use. Impact areas may also be “safe havens”, where hunting restrictions (fee hunting, emphasis of bull hunting over cow hunting, no hunting) result in harvest objectives not being met. These animals then move from the ‘safe haven’ to adjacent ranch properties and cause significant conflicts with fence and forage to other landowners in the area. During the last five years conflicts like these have been reported on four ranches, mainly from elk in growing hay on private property.

On one impact area in southwest Jackson County, direct efforts have been made by using contract personnel or volunteers to haze the elk onto adjacent property where less potential for damage exists. Where possible, the Committee has undertaken habitat improvement projects in an effort to draw the elk away from the area of impact. One conflict has been reported with winter elk use on deferred pastures and early spring concentrations of elk on hay meadows.

Over time elk have found these safe havens and the number of animals using them appear to be increasing. The location of safe havens has the potential to change over time and none of the current safe havens are considered permanent.

Impact areas on federally owned land appear to be much less significant than those on private ground. The Bureau of Land Management reports that they are unaware of any impacts caused by elk on any of the property that they administer. The United States Forest Service has some areas of concern where concentrations of elk may have an impact on the vegetation but these are relatively small areas. Historically, one area on the Colorado State Forest has been heavily impacted by elk. The Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge (Pole Mountain and Chandler Tract) also serves as a safe haven for elk.

While these areas are currently targeted for conflict resolution work, conflicts exist throughout the NP area. It is likely that patterns of land ownership and land use will continue to change, resulting in new conflicts and challenges in the future. These may affect which areas the committee considers to be higher priority impact areas.

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 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

PROJECT TYPES (TO INCLUDE, BUT NOT LIMITED TO):

Habitat Manipulation:

- Prescribed burning
- Water developments
- Weed control, including herbicide vouchers
- Fertilization
- Seeding
- Hand thinning
- Mechanical (chaining, roller chopping, hydro axing, etc.)

Fencing Projects:

- 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:

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

Information/Education Projects:

- Seminars
- Workshops
- Brochures
- Electronic media: websites, etc.
- Comment letters
- Travel management (signage, temporary fencing, etc.)

Research/Monitoring Projects:

- 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 and/or improve, protect, enhance habitats.

PRIORITY AREAS

The NP HPP committee recognizes the need to identify priority areas on which to focus efforts for the next ten years. Based on knowledge of identified resource needs and issues, landowner interest, availability of resource data, specific funding availability and other factors, the Committee will undertake identification of 2-3 priority areas and develop and implement a multi-faceted treatment plan for one area.

However, there will always be the need to accomplish some projects on short notice due to the availability of funding, landowner needs, and shortness of the field season, special opportunities, or other reasons. The Committee's ability to be responsive on short notice is one of our strengths.

OPERATING GUIDELINES

Step 1: The proposed project must be clearly described on an application form plus include a discussion of the conflict and/or its potential to assist CPW to meet game management objectives.

Step 2: The Committee determines priorities for the proposed project(s) based on responses to the following questions:

- A. Will the proposed project re-distribute the conflicting animals to non-impact areas?
- B. Will the proposed project enhance/improve habitat conditions, attract big game animals to non-impact areas and effectively address the conflict over the long run?
- C. Does the proposed project address a recurring conflict that involves a herd unit or a significant number of animals, based on predetermined criteria?
- D. Will the proposed project benefit the landowners, agencies, big game, and the public?
- E. Have non-structural solutions been tried, such as distribution hunts, propane cannons, management changes, etc.?
- F. Does the proposed project replace or maintain an existing fence? If so, what is the condition and style of the existing fence?
- G. Does the applicant/landowner allow low-fee or no-fee public hunting such as PLO (private land only) licenses, big game distribution hunts, or general public hunting access?
- H. Is the landowner willing to participate financially (direct funds and/or in kind service) in the project? If so, what is the percent match the landowner is willing to provide for the total cost of the project (funds or in kind service)?
- I. Is the proposed project experimental?

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 administrative assistants.

From 2018-2028, the LPI method will continue to be used for monitoring any treatments performed in grassland or shrub land plant communities. A random selection, cardinal direction, photo point method will be utilized for any treatments in timbered plant communities.

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, public, and tribal lands 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 stackyards 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/EDUCATION PROJECTS:** 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 will 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 for those areas that have HPP committees. The Statewide HPP Council then allocates funding to the individual HPP committees. The North Park 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 North Park 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:

Habitat Manipulation	40%
Fencing & Game Damage	20%
Information & Education	10%
Research/Monitoring	20%
Conservation Easements & NEPA Related Activities	5%
Administration	5%

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.

We anticipate that our emphasis will remain on habitat manipulation projects over the next ten years while administration and monitoring remain constant. One change we foresee over the next ten years is an eventual decline in the need for fencing projects, especially elk-proof stackyards. As we continue to improve rangeland conditions and address big game conflicts as they arise, we should be able to adjust our budget to reduce fencing dollars and increase our outreach and education dollars to reflect a need to better educate the public on what HPP is all about, and the role we play in resolving big game management conflicts. In addition to education, the committee feels that projects should focus on the historic and continued problem of limited winter range. These projects will include large scale habitat manipulation projects such as aspen and sagebrush treatments, both mechanical and burning, and conifer removal. Landowners are responsible for project maintenance once completed.

CURRENT & FORESEEABLE ISSUES

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

The need to preserve and perpetuate open space has become more evident in recent years, even in North Park. Activities that fragment large, contiguous blocks of land into smaller tracts of multiple owners have negative influences on wildlife habitat, reproductive success, and home range. Development of land and ranches is occurring in North Park and has the potential to increase. Additionally, absentee ownership, summer homes, and trophy ranches can modify wildlife habitat that may cause crop/structural damage, disrupt migration patterns, and create artificial sanctuaries.

HABITAT CHANGES

With the recent conversion of dead lodgepole pine stands to mixed aspen, mountain shrubs, grasses, and forbs in the transition range, big game, particularly elk, are remaining on transition range for longer periods of time in the fall. This has relieved some pressure on winter range forage in the lower elevation areas of the park. However, increases in the number of some wild ungulate species, especially elk, in North Park have created a greater demand for food, particularly during the winter months. Some mountain shrub communities receive moderate to severe hedging and a considerable portion of the sagebrush community receives less, but significant use. Through responsible grazing practices, domestic livestock also utilize forage on these rangelands during the growing season. The amount of total use may not only reduce the abundance and viability of the overall shrub community but, over time, may reduce the availability and nutritional value of the browse community to wild ungulates which in turn could increase the frequency and duration of damage to harvested hay by wild ungulates.

Another result of the current mountain pine bark beetle epidemic in North Park has been the partial or total removal of the lodgepole forest canopy over large areas. This has created an increase in the quantity and quality of forage on both the summer and transition ranges for big game animals. This has the potential to increase big game populations which will make winter habitat even more critical for winter survival.

ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

Recent interest in oil and gas development may have significant impacts on wildlife in North Park as their activities further fragment important habitat. The Bureau of Land Management recently has leased the mineral rights under large areas of sagebrush steppe which is critical winter range for big game animals. This could cause additional challenges to managing wildlife populations, including sage grouse and non-game species in the future.

Since the last management plan was written, there has been a surge in oil development within the North Park basin. Much of this recent development, along with predicted future development, lies within big game transition and winter range and priority sage grouse habitat on both private and public lands. As this development occurs, there is the potential to displace wintering wildlife from non-impact areas, exacerbate current problems and create new game damage issues.

RECREATION

With the increasing demands being placed on public lands by a growing population of recreationalists, current big game conflicts may become worse, and additional conflicts may arise. Each year the increased human presence on public lands is displacing wildlife to adjacent public and private lands creating additional conflict areas. Much of this activity is occurring in the spring, summer, and fall months when big game are doing their best to tolerate human presence and raise their young in what used to be relatively “undisturbed” areas. These animals move to adjacent lands and at times, cause damage to agricultural crops and fences.

SAGEBRUSH MANIPULATION & GREATER SAGE GROUSE

In 2015, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) found that protections of the greater sage grouse under the Endangered Species Act were not warranted. One of the main factors in this determination was the ongoing conservation efforts and partnerships to conserve sagebrush habitats throughout the western United States. With this finding, the USFWS is scheduled to conduct a status review regarding the potential listing of the greater sage grouse in 2020.

Much of the big game winter range in North Park also lies within priority habitat for greater sage grouse. With the recent focus on greater sage grouse habitats throughout the west, the committee must evaluate each project for potential impacts to the sagebrush steppe. Some projects may meet the committee’s primary goals for big game and livestock and at the same time, enhance habitat for sage grouse. Other projects, although good for big game, may have negative impacts to the sagebrush in priority grouse habitat. Additional steps will be taken when any manipulation in the sagebrush steppe is proposed to ensure that significant impacts to greater sage grouse habitat are taken into consideration.

ARAPAHO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

The Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge has been a wintering area for approximately 800 - 1,200 elk for the past decade. Elk hunting is currently permitted on the Refuge, and although there is a year-round resident herd of approximately 100 elk, most of the animals typically arrive during the 2nd or 3rd hunting season (mid-October thru early November). The winter elk use of the Refuge is apparently not affecting the primary purpose for establishment - creating habitat for nesting waterfowl - but further study needs to be done. The committee and local CPW staff will continue to work with ANRF staff to expand elk hunting opportunities on the refuge, specifically the Pole Mountain and Chandler tracts that are not open to hunting now.