

Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Habitat Partnership Program
Upper Yampa River



DISTRIBUTION MANAGEMENT PLAN



Approved - Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission: May 10, 2019
This plan is valid for 10 years from approval date.

2019-2029

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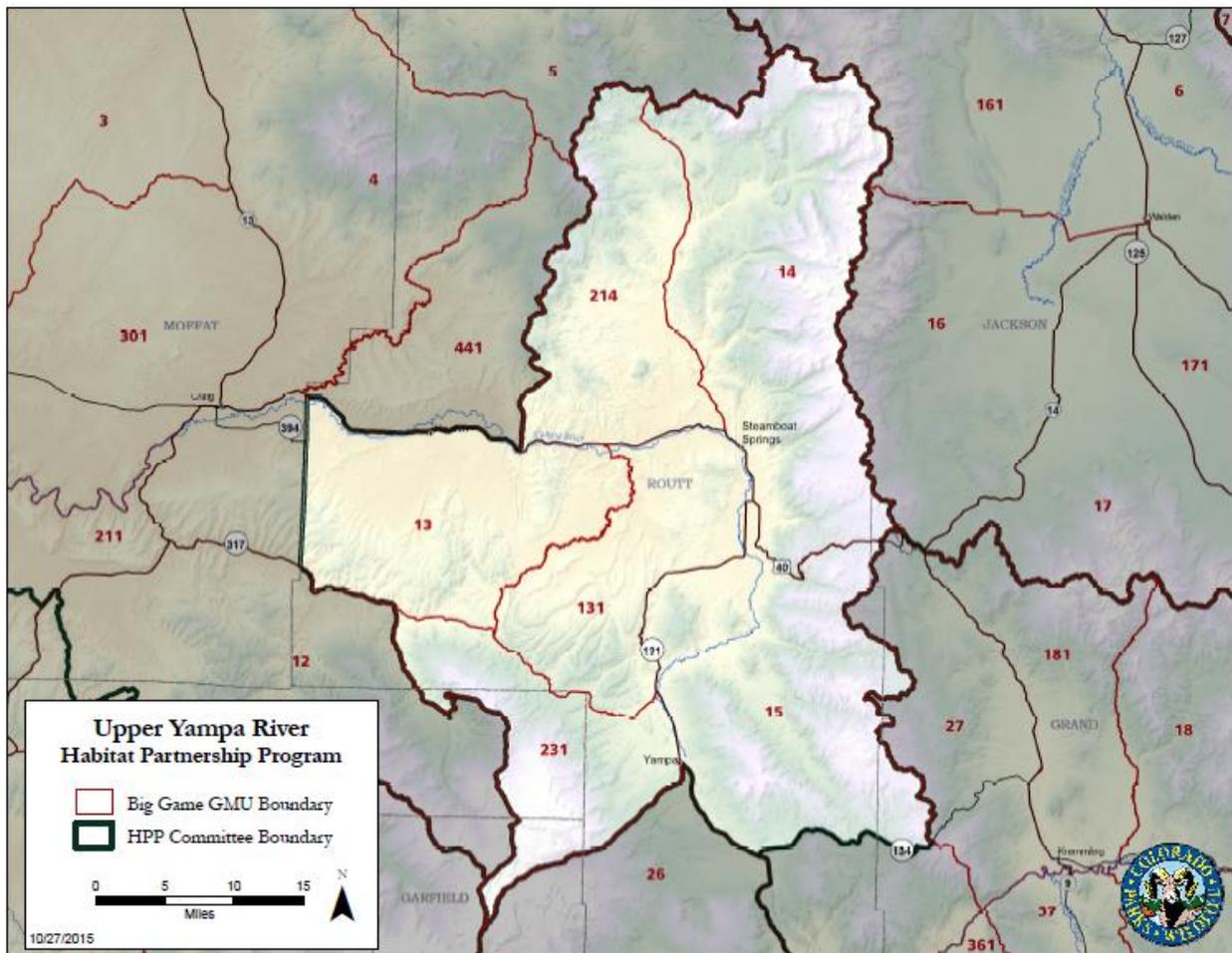
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Upper Yampa River Habitat Partnership Program (UYRHPP) and its committee continue to provide an essential function of assistance to residents of the UYR area in addressing and mitigating conflicts between agricultural producers and big game.

The shifting population in the UYR region from primarily agriculture-based operations, to more urban and residential settings has created issues for wildlife and residents alike. The fragmentation of private lands into smaller acreages, the increased use of adjacent public lands, and varying local habitat conditions have effects on big game and their seasonal distributions. These effects are resulting in immediate and long-term consequences for land managers and producers.

Recognizing the changing land use patterns within the UYR area, the committee continues to promote the program among residents needing assistance. The committee seeks opportunities to involve landowners and various land management agencies in developing and implementing variety of projects to help resolve game damage conflicts and promote habitat improvement to maintain big game objectives.

UPPER YAMPA RIVER HPP AREA



COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The Upper Yampa River Habitat Partnership Program's (UYRHPP) Committee is currently governed by a seven member committee. Three committee members are livestock producers representing agriculture and the other four members represent sportspersons, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW). Member's terms are four years with no limit on the number of terms a member can serve.

MEMBERS

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| 1. Larry Monger, livestock grower representative | Started HPP Term: 05/1993 |
| 2. Nita Naugle, livestock grower representative | Started HPP Term: 05/2002 |
| 3. Tom Rossi, livestock grower representative | Started HPP Term: 05/2005 |
| 4. Darren Ebaugh, sportsperson representative | Started HPP Term: 05/2009 |
| 5. Kathy McKinstry, BLM representative (chairperson) | Started HPP Term: 09/2009 |
| 6. AWM Kris Middledorf, CPW representative | Started HPP Term: 03/2017 |
| 7. Kelsey Crane, USFS representative | Started HPP Term: 11/2018 |

INTRODUCTION

The Yampa Valley is home to a vast variety of wildlife, including a diversity of big game species. Populations of elk, mule deer, pronghorn antelope, moose, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, black bear and mountain lion are all found within the UYRHPP committee boundaries. White-tailed deer are also found in this area, and while sightings have been increasing over the last ten years, overall numbers are low.

Aside from big game species, the Yampa Valley is also home to a large number of species of special interest. Several of these species are particularly important to the local agricultural community and the general public due to the potential (both present and future) for these species to factor into property management decisions. These species include, but are not limited to Greater Sage Grouse and Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse.

In addition to abundant wildlife, the Yampa Valley also supports a vibrant agricultural community that produces high quality crops, predominantly hay crops, and thousands of sheep and cattle.

Changes in wildlife habitat and land use in the Yampa Valley have increased the number and types of conflicts between big game and private landowners, especially on land that is still in commercial agricultural production. To help resolve these impacts in the Yampa Valley, the DOW expanded the Habitat Partnership Program in 1993 to create the Upper Yampa River Habitat Partnership Program. Since its inception, the UYRHPP Committee has successfully involved landowners, CPW and land management agencies in a process of developing and implementing projects to help resolve game damage problems within the Yampa Valley caused by big game, primarily elk.

This DMP is intended to be a ten year plan beginning in 2019. This updated document will serve as a guide for choosing projects to reduce conflicts between big game and agricultural operators. The vast majority of the conflicts between big game and agricultural operators in the UYRHPP area involve damage caused by elk; subsequently, the focus of the UYRHPP committee is often on elk and this fact is reflected within this DMP. However, the UYRHPP Committee does consider other wildlife species as part of our overall goals.

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

- **GOAL 1:** CONTINUE EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN, IMPROVE, PROTECT AND/OR DEVELOP HABITAT TO ENSURE HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE WILDLIFE HABITAT AND RANGELAND.
- **GOAL 2:** CONTINUE EFFORTS TO MINIMIZE CONFLICTS BETWEEN BIG GAME AND AGRICULTURAL OPERATORS.
- **GOAL 3:** CONTINUE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE BIG GAME DISTRIBUTION TO FURTHER MINIMIZE CONFLICTS WITH AGRICULTURAL OPERATORS AND ASSIST CPW WHEN POSSIBLE TO HELP ACHIEVE THEIR OBJECTIVES.
- **GOAL 4:** CONTINUE TO MONITOR PROJECTS TO ENSURE THAT SPORTSPERSON'S DOLLARS ARE BEING USED TO EFFECTIVELY REDUCE DAMAGE IMPACTS WHILE ALSO BENEFITING WILDLIFE.
- **GOAL 5:** CONTINUE EFFORTS TO DEVELOP AN *INFORMATION AND EDUCATION* COMPONENT TO INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS AND INVOLVEMENT WITH UYRHPP. THIS *INFORMATION AND EDUCATION* COMPONENT WILL MAINTAIN AND ENCOURAGE AN ATMOSPHERE OF PARTNERSHIP TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CPW, PRIVATE LANDOWNERS, SPORTSPERSONS, LAND MANAGEMENT AGENCIES AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC SO WE CAN COOPERATIVELY RESOLVE BIG GAME CONFLICTS AND IMPROVE RANGELAND AND WILDLIFE HABITAT.

GOAL 1: CONTINUE EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN, IMPROVE, PROTECT AND/OR DEVELOP HABITAT TO ENSURE HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE WILDLIFE HABITAT AND RANGELAND.

Objectives:

1. Implement habitat management projects to attract and hold wildlife in non-impact areas.
2. Implement habitat management projects to help CPW reduce conflict between individual species and individual species population objectives.
3. Where appropriate, implement range improvement projects to enhance forage production for the benefit of livestock to help compensate for forage loss.
4. Develop partnerships with private landowners and various groups that deal with wildlife habitat issues.
5. Focus on long-term protection of habitats for all wildlife.

GOAL 2: CONTINUE EFFORTS TO MINIMIZE CONFLICTS BETWEEN BIG GAME AND AGRICULTURAL OPERATORS.

Objectives:

1. Implement projects to move wildlife away from impact areas towards non-impact areas.
2. Design and/or utilize fences that are wildlife friendly and reduce big game damage.
3. Protect harvested crops from big game where impacts are documented.

4. Reduce conflicts between big game and crop production where impacts are documented.
5. Reduce conflicts between big game and livestock grazing where impacts are documented.

GOAL 3: CONTINUE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE BIG GAME DISTRIBUTION TO FURTHER MINIMIZE CONFLICTS WITH AGRICULTURAL OPERATORS AND ASSIST CPW WHEN POSSIBLE TO HELP ACHIEVE THEIR OBJECTIVES.

Objectives:

1. Implement projects to move wildlife away from impact areas into non-impact areas.
2. Assist CPW with development and maintenance of quality big game herds in the Yampa Valley through reviewing and influencing hunting season structures and Herd Management Plans (HMP).
3. Influence travel management and controlled access where possible to appropriately distribute big game.

GOAL 4: CONTINUE TO MONITOR PROJECTS TO ENSURE THAT SPORTSPERSON'S DOLLARS ARE BEING USED TO EFFECTIVELY REDUCE DAMAGE IMPACTS WHILE ALSO BENEFITING WILDLIFE.

Objectives:

1. Follow a simple monitoring protocol to provide consistent data collection used for analyzing the effectiveness of projects.
2. Maintain the cost effectiveness of all projects.

GOAL 5: CONTINUE EFFORTS TO DEVELOP AN *INFORMATION AND EDUCATION* COMPONENT TO INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS AND INVOLVEMENT WITH UYRHPP. THIS *INFORMATION AND EDUCATION* COMPONENT WILL MAINTAIN AND ENCOURAGE AN ATMOSPHERE OF PARTNERSHIP TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CPW, PRIVATE LANDOWNERS, SPORTSPERSONS, LAND MANAGEMENT AGENCIES AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC SO WE CAN COOPERATIVELY RESOLVE BIG GAME CONFLICTS AND IMPROVE RANGELAND AND WILDLIFE HABITAT.

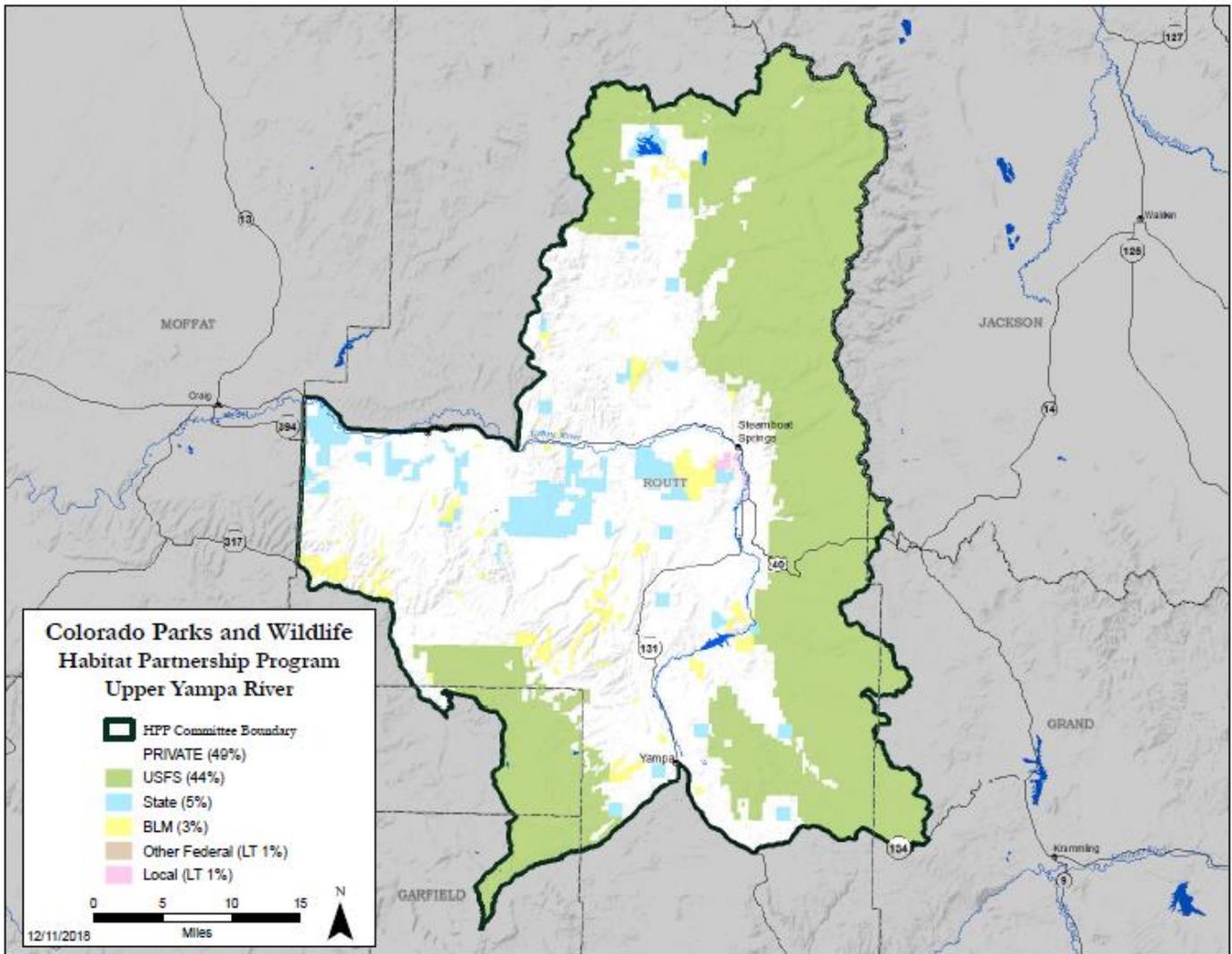
Objectives:

1. Keep the Yampa Valley community, land managers and interested parties informed and educated about the Habitat Partnership Program.
2. Keep the Yampa Valley community, land managers and interested parties informed and educated about habitat improvement, protection and/or development strategies.
3. Keep the Yampa Valley community, land managers and other interested parties educated about strategies to minimize conflicts between big game and agricultural operators.

AREA DESCRIPTION

The Upper Yampa River HPP area encompasses 2,767,214 acres and is located mostly within the northern half of Routt County and includes Game Management Units (GMU) 13 (only those portions within Routt County), 14, 214, 15 north of Gore Pass (CO State Highway 134), 131 and 231.

Landownership in the program area is approximately 49% private, 44% USFS, 5% State of Colorado, and 3% BLM (see Landownership Map). The area ranges in elevation from 6,500 feet at the confluence of the Yampa and Elk Rivers up to approximately 12,000 feet along the Continental Divide and Little Flat Top Mountains.



HABITAT DESCRIPTION

The vegetation types that comprise the UYRHPP area are numerous and diverse and range from alpine grass and forb at the highest elevations to herbaceous riparian and irrigated agriculture at lower elevations. Almost all of the 60 plus vegetation types have some big game habitat values associated with them. However, a few vegetation types are especially important for big game, particularly elk. These vegetation types are further discussed below. In addition, those vegetation types independently decisive to changing land management practices are also briefly discussed.

Spruce, fir and aspen vegetation types are a valuable component to the montane/subalpine zone. Depending on the degree of canopy closure and resultant understory of grasses and forbs, the spruce-fir areas represent moderate to good summer and fall forage for elk. Aspen groves and associated meadows provide high quality forage from spring through fall. Aspen habitat is also extremely important as calving areas for elk, especially when there is sufficient understory. In addition, they provide critical winter forage for elk, particularly during hard winters. Lastly, aspen habitats also provide important edge zones for a wide diversity of wildlife species.

Mountain shrub zone vegetation consists of native grasses and Gamble's oak. Serviceberry, snowberry and chokecherry are also common. This zone, from roughly 6,500 to 8,500 feet in elevation, is very important for big game forage and cover throughout the year. It is important to note that the lower half of this zone contains most of the traditional elk winter range found in the UYRHPP committee boundaries. Furthermore, the mountain shrub zone provides critical fall forage for black bears, and the level of human/black bear conflicts has a direct correlation with mountain shrub production.

Herbaceous riparian vegetation types are found along the river bottoms and associated irrigated meadows. The vast majority of the Yampa and Elk River valley floors are privately owned grass and alfalfa meadows used for livestock grazing and hay production. Narrowleaf cottonwood and willow dominate most riparian areas in the UYRHPP area. In very severe winters, elk are forced down to the river corridors to forage on shrubs and trees. As a result, this habitat is extremely valuable to elk. Lastly, it is important to note that riparian areas also support the greatest abundance and diversity of wildlife species.

Lodgepole Pine is the dominant tree species throughout the forest vegetative zone and the vast majority of stands are mature, single age class trees. The forests in the UYRHPP area are currently experiencing an immense and fast-moving beetle epidemic caused by the mountain pine beetle. As a result, thousands of acres of trees are dying. Beetle epidemics are natural processes that cycle over time; however, this epidemic has and will continue to alter current forest management practices and the overall forest landscape. This will have both direct and indirect impacts on big game; therefore, it warrants special mention.

The Yampa and Elk River basins experience some of the deepest snow in all of Colorado. The average snowfall is nearly 180 inches. Almost all of the deer migrate out of the basin during the winter. Most of the elk stay in the valley where snow depths limit them to a very narrow band of habitat along the foothills near the valley floor. Unfortunately, the amount of available wintering habitat for elk in the UYRHPP area is only a fraction of their total range. Furthermore, most of the winter range is on private land. The elk winter range map illustrates the overlap of winter range and private property. These factors are directly relevant to the number and types of conflicts between big game and agricultural operators that occur within the UYRHPP area.

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, live, 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.

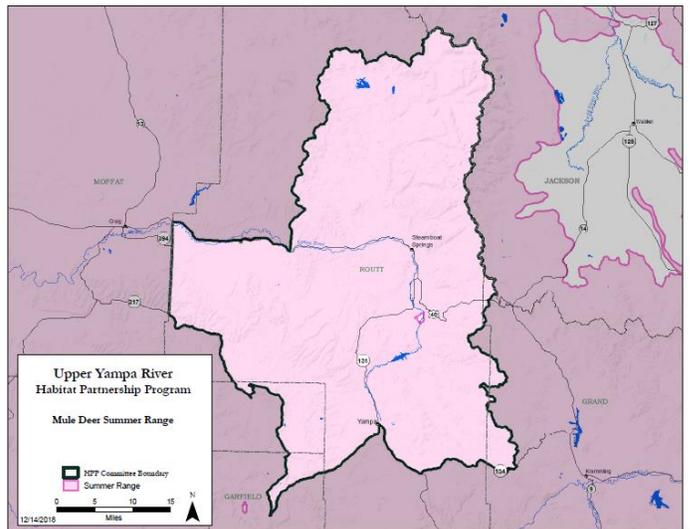
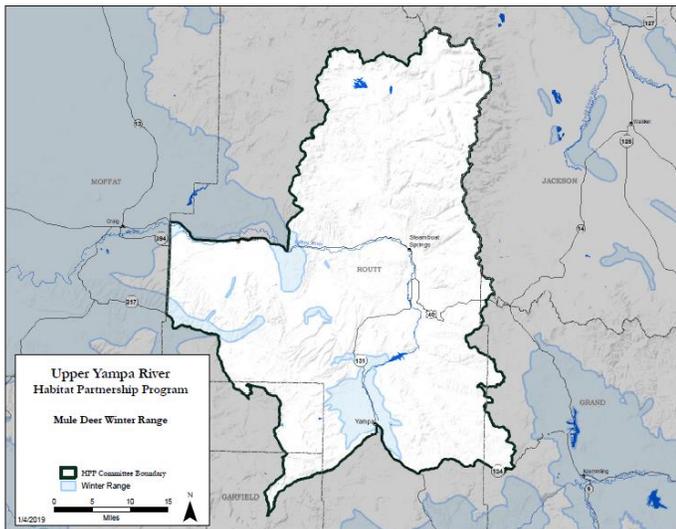
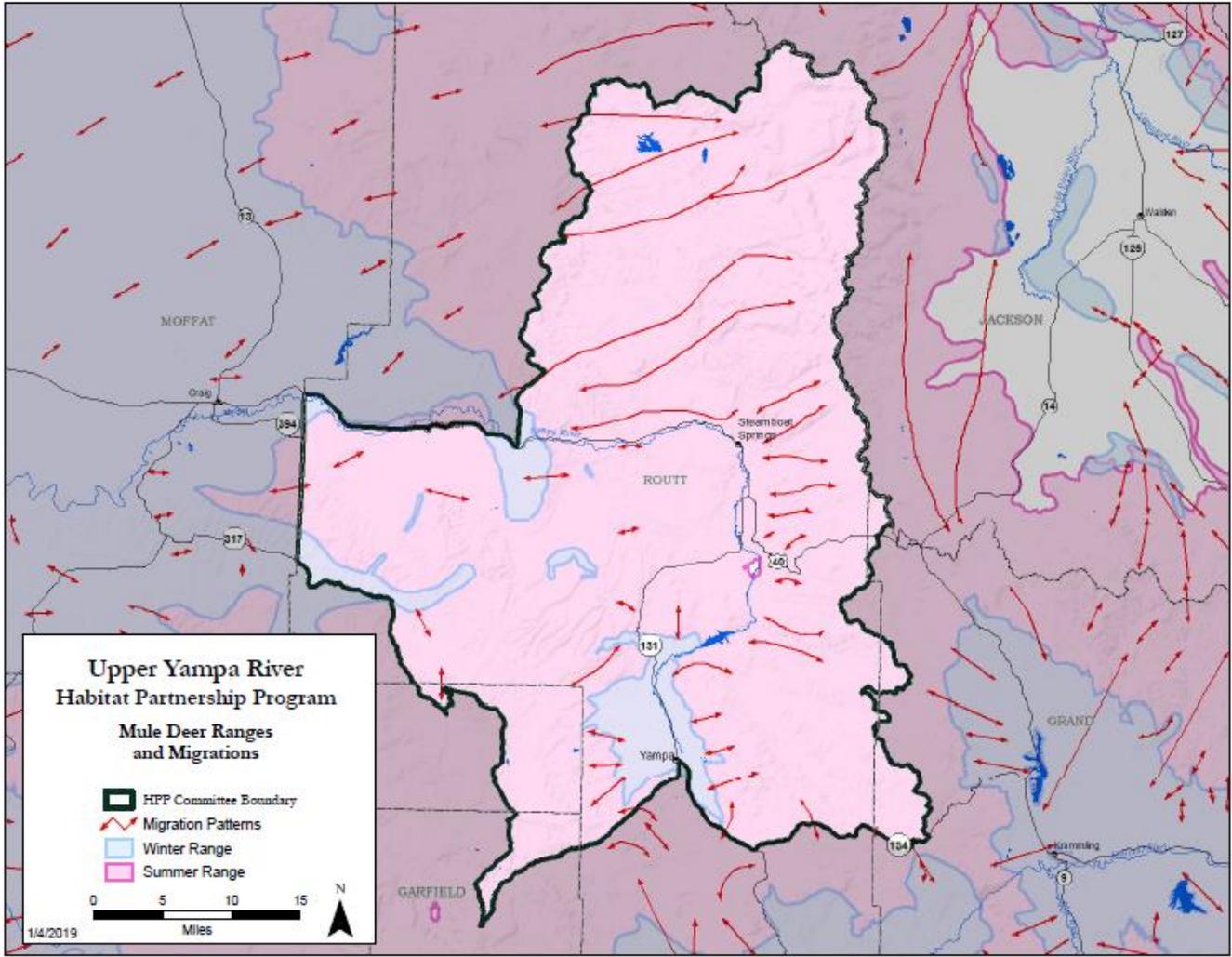
Below are the proposed management objectives for all the DAUs within the scope of UYRHPP. The UYRHPP committee will assist CPW to meet herd management objectives associated with the committee's area through utilization of hunter harvest and dispersal of concentrated elk herds in conflict and safe haven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

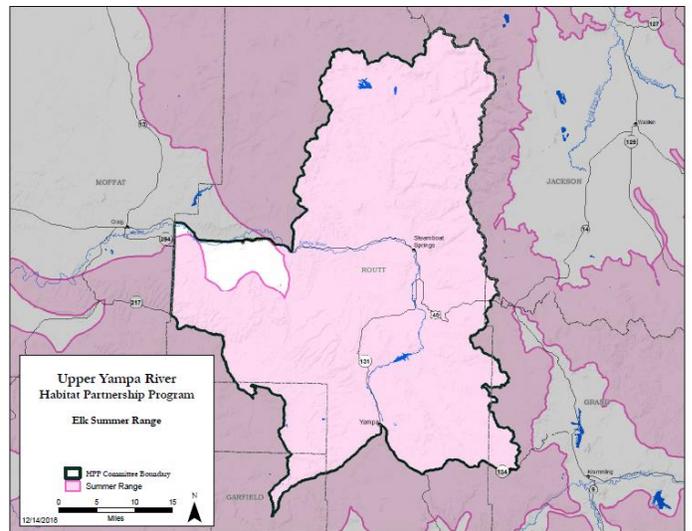
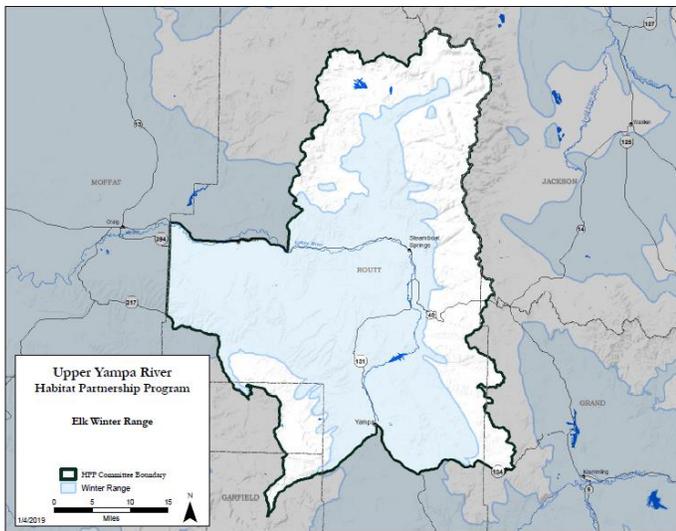
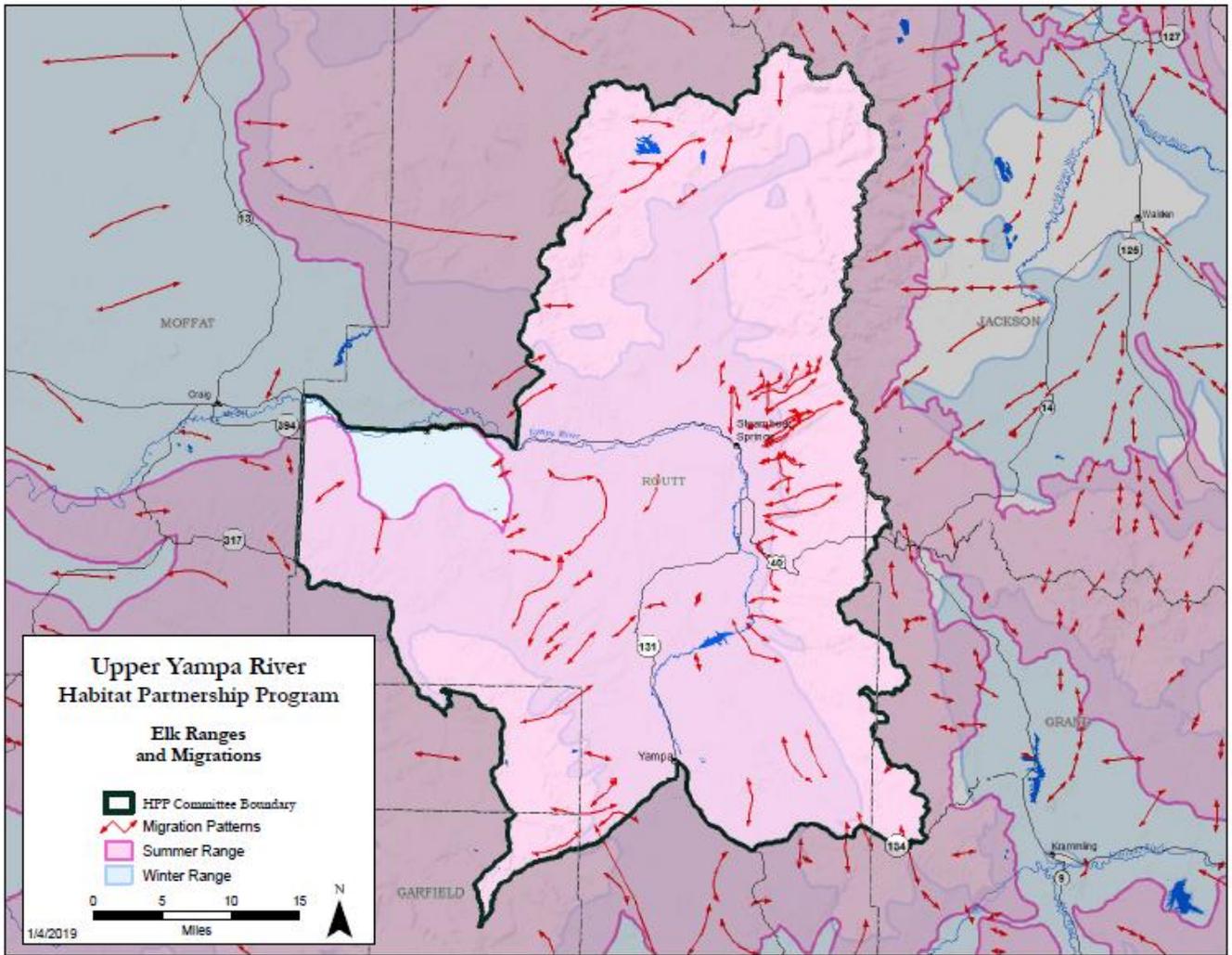
Table 1. Data Analysis Unit Summary for Upper Yampa River HPP Area

Management Herd	1990s Population Avg.	2000s Population Avg.	2010 - 2017 Population Avg.	Current Pop. Mgmt. Obj.
Mule Deer - Bears Ears(D2)	37,000	33,000	36,000	37,800
<i>Game Management Units: 3, 301, 4, 441, 14 & 214</i>				
Mule Deer - Flattops-White River(D7)	61,000	52,000	34,000	67,500
<i>Game Management Units: 11, 211, 22, 23, 24, 12, 13, 131 & 231</i>				
Mule Deer - State Bridge(D8)	15,200	16,900	14,700	13,500-16,500
<i>Game Management Units: 15, 35, 36, 45 & 361</i>				
Elk - Bears Ears(E2)	34,000	30,000	26,000	15,000-18,000
<i>Game Management Units: 3, 301, 14, 214, 4, 441 & 5</i>				
Elk - Flattops-White River(E6)	53,000	52,000	41,000	36,000-39,000
<i>Game Management Units: 11, 12, 13, 23, 24, 25, 26, 33, 34, 131, 231 & 211</i>				
Elk - Gore Pass(E7)	6,400	5,800	5,200	4,000-5,000
<i>Game Management Units: 15 & 27</i>				
Pronghorn - Bears Ears(A9)	14,000	11,000	15,000	15,800
<i>Game Management Units: 3, 301, 4, 441, 5, 13, 14 & 214</i>				
Moose - (M3)	100	245	350	190
<i>Game Management Units: 15, 18, 27, 28, 36, 37, 181, 361 & 371</i>				
Moose - (M6)	0	20	75	No plan
<i>Game Management Units: 13, 131, 12, 231, 23, 24, 25, 26, 33, 34 & 35</i>				
Moose - (M9)	0	30	75	Not yet determined
<i>Game Management Units: 4, 5, 441, 214 & 14</i>				

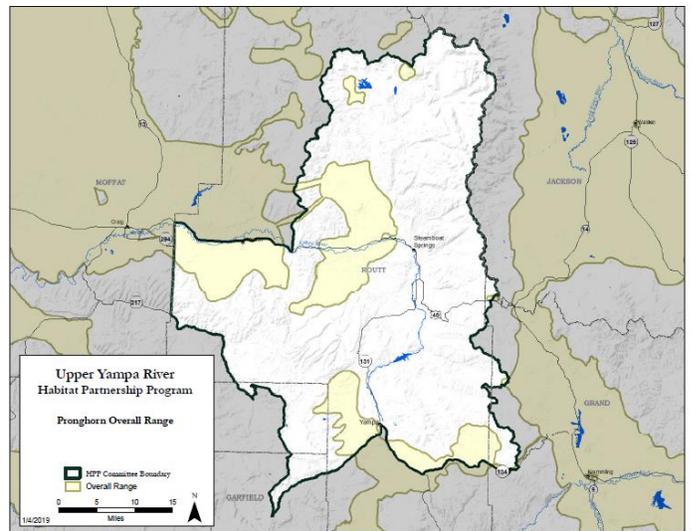
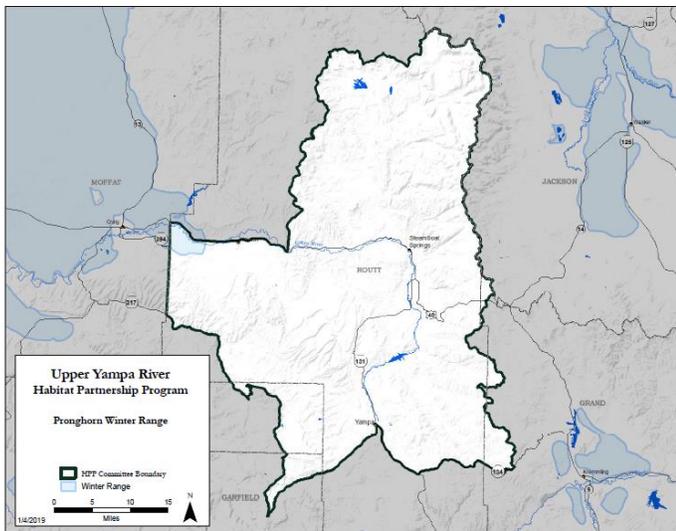
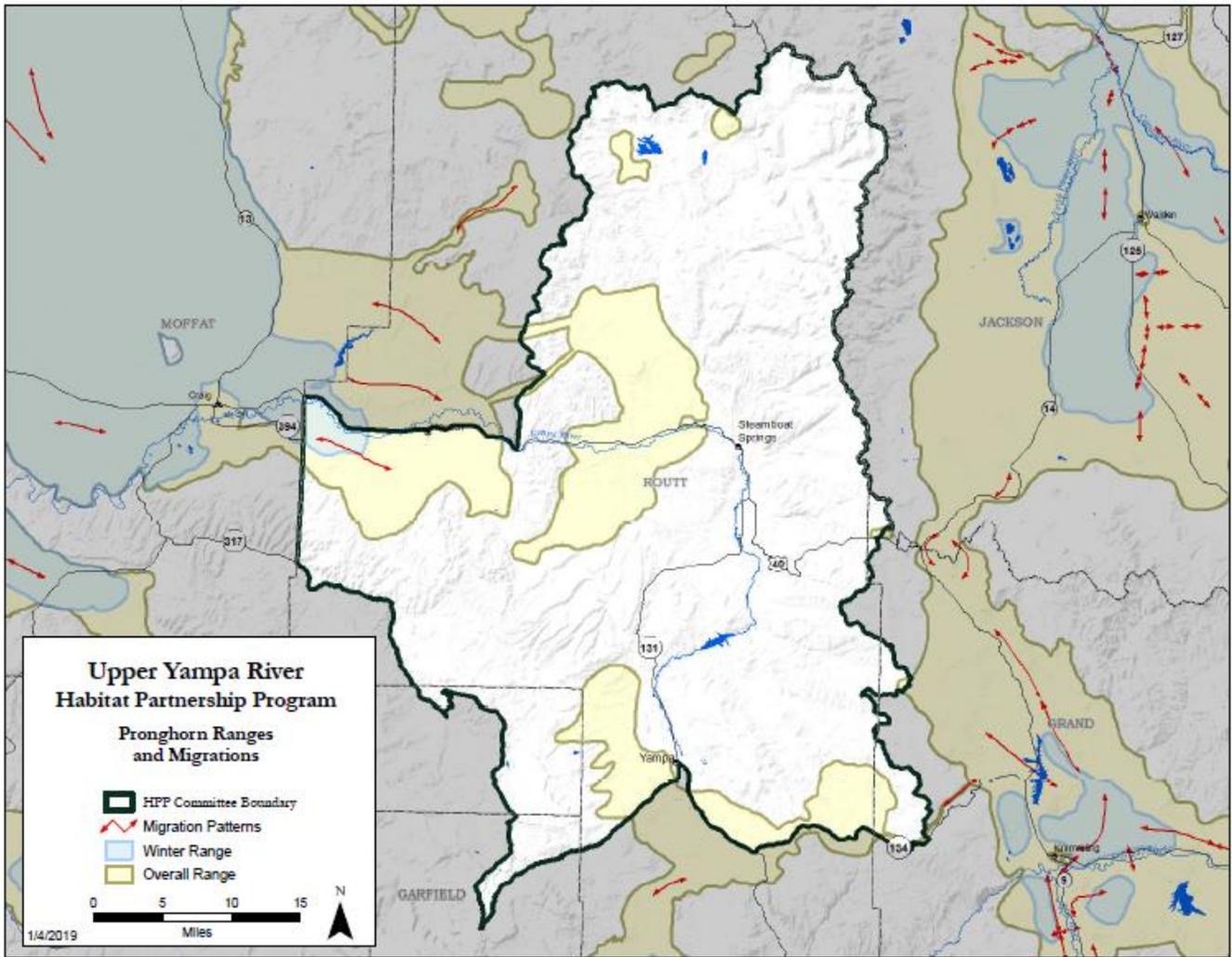
BIG GAME RANGES & MIGRATIONS

MULE DEER

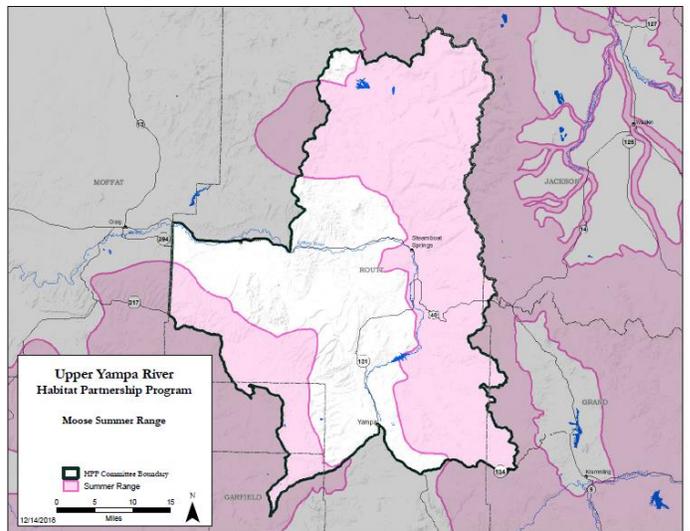
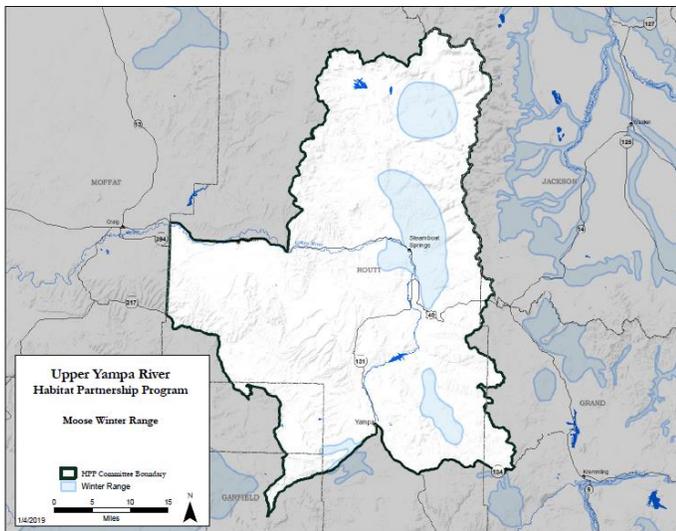
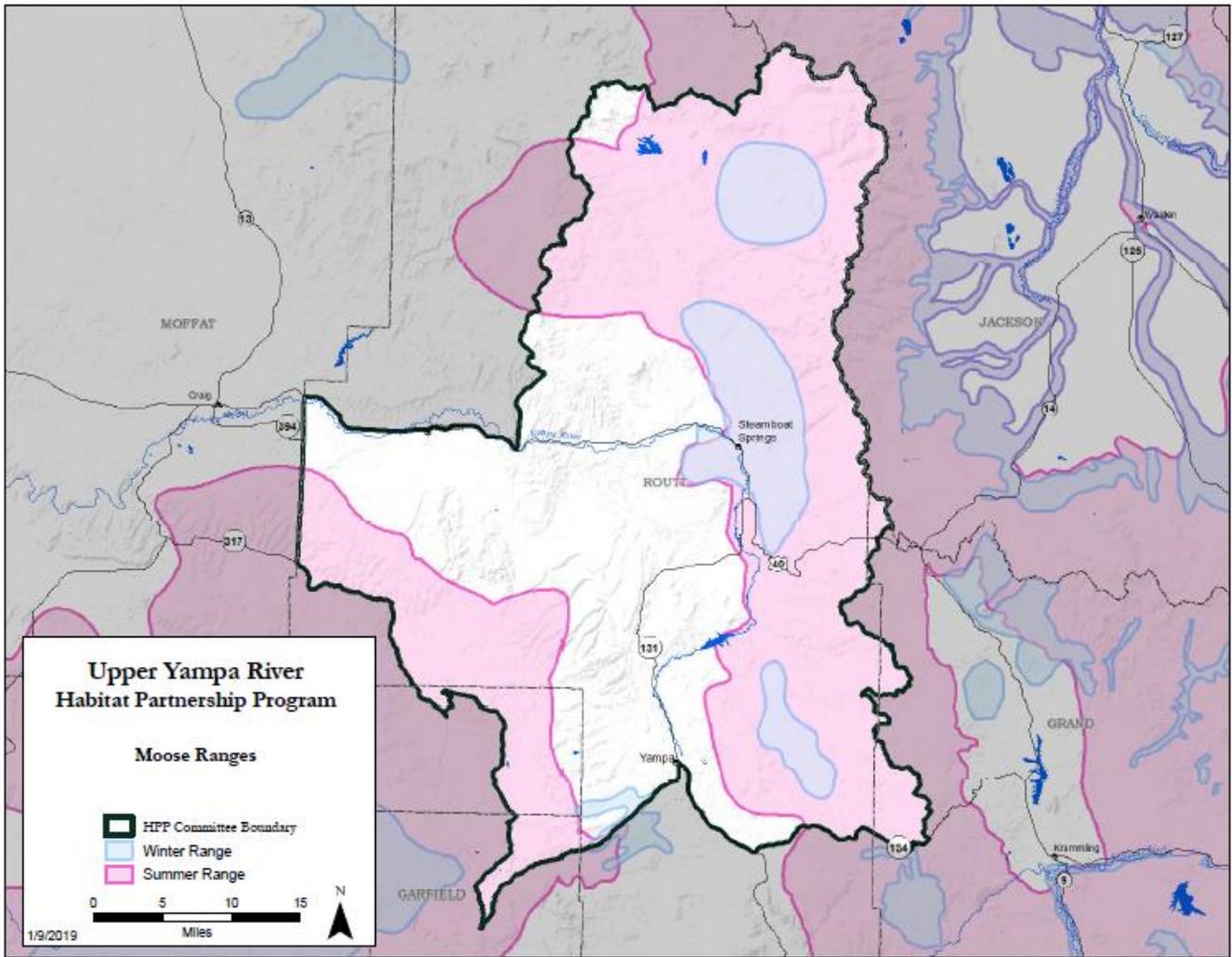




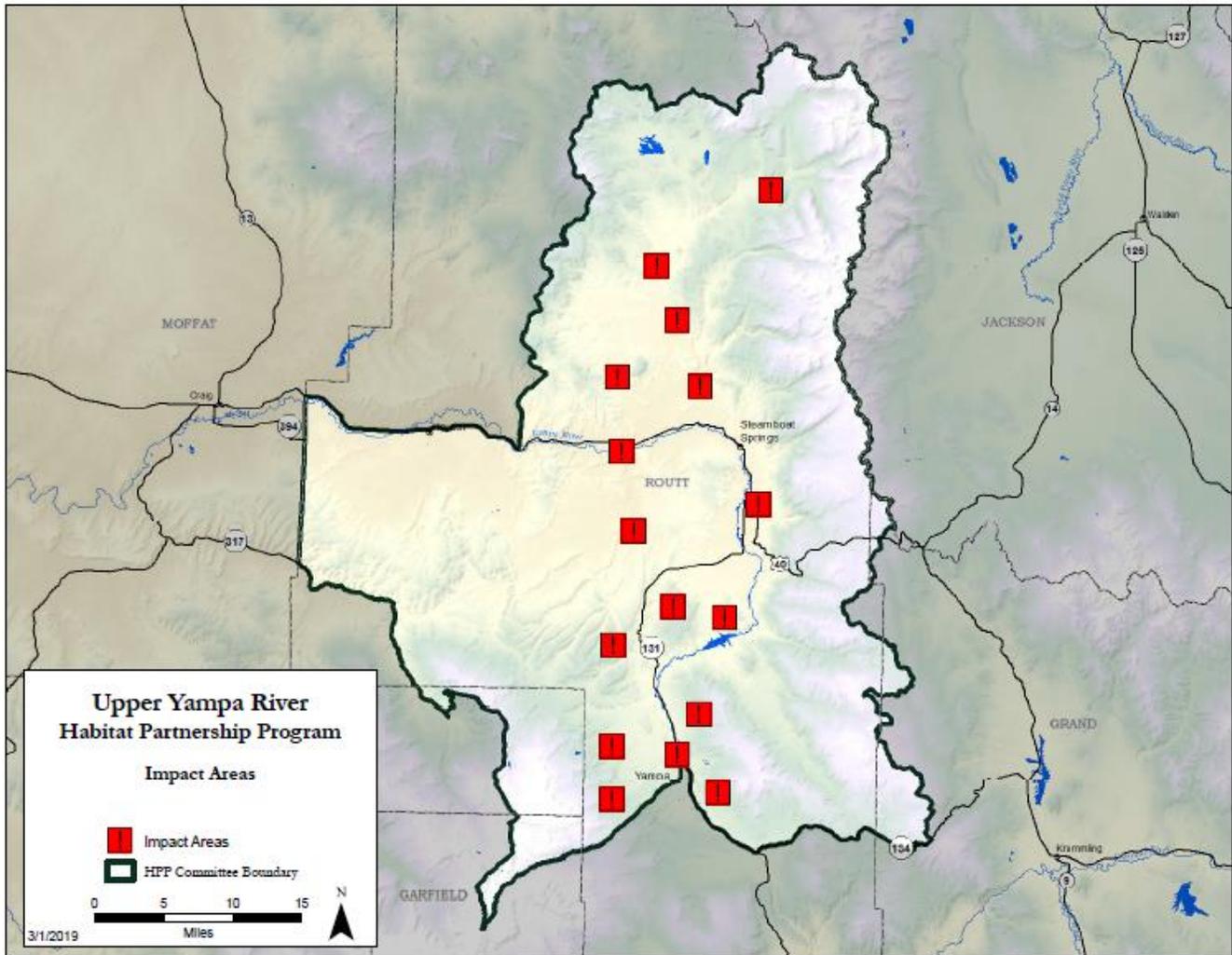
PRONGHORN



MOOSE



IMPACT AREAS & DESCRIPTION



The vast majority of conflicts between big game and agricultural operators in the UYRHPP area involve damage caused by elk. As a result, we have chosen conflict areas that primarily concern elk; however, this does not negate the fact that other species of big game may cause conflicts. Furthermore, while specific conflict areas for elk have been defined, that does not dismiss the fact that conflicts caused by elk may occasionally occur outside of these defined areas.

In regards to elk, local CPW District Wildlife Managers defined six different conflict areas located within the UYRHPP committee boundaries.

1. **The Upper Elk River** (north ½ of GMU 14 & 214)
2. **Lower Elk River** (south ½ of GMU 14 & 214)
3. **Saddle Mountain** (southwest of Steamboat, GMU 131)
4. **Priest Creek** (south end of GMU 14)
5. **Blacktail and Thorpe Mountains** (east of the town of Oak Creek, GMU 15)
6. **Yampa** (GMU 231 & 15)

Note: The Bear River corridor within the Yampa conflict area includes significant levels of damage; subsequently, this area warrants specific mention. The impact areas listed above have similar situations, which are generalized below.

- WINTER:** The vast majority of conflicts between elk and agricultural operators in the Yampa Valley occur during the winter months. Conflicts are varied, but nearly all of the conflicts are directly caused by hungry elk searching for food. Typical conflicts include but are not limited to:
- Elk getting into unprotected hay stacks (harvested crop damage)
 - Elk getting into inadequately protected hay stacks (harvested crop damage)
 - Elk feeding with livestock (oftentimes horses) in small feedlot situations
 - Elk feeding with livestock (oftentimes cattle) in large feedlot situations
 - Stackyard damage caused by elk getting into inadequately built stackyards
 - Fence damage caused by elk traveling through snow on heavily used paths
 - Fence damage caused by elk movement as a result of human activity of winter range
- SPRING:** As spring arrives, conflicts between elk and agricultural operators typically start to decline. This is primarily due to increased temperatures and receding snow, which opens up additional habitat for foraging elk. However, in some areas elk tend to linger at lower elevations, often on private lands which extends the duration of conflict. Typical impacts that occur during the spring tend to be the same as those that occur during the winter months. Additional impacts include but are not limited to:
- Fence damage caused by migrating elk
- SUMMER:** During the summer, the types of impacts between elk and agricultural operators in the Yampa Valley changes. These impacts are also varied, but very few impacts are directly caused by hungry elk searching for food. Many of these conflicts are driven by other factors, which can include disturbance on traditional summer range, etc. In general, there are fewer conflicts during the summer months: however, these types of impacts are increasing. Typical impacts include but are not limited to:
- Elk competing with livestock for forage (public lands)
 - Elk competing with livestock for forage (private lands)
 - Elk damage to growing crops (hay)
 - Elk damage to growing crops (other crops - oats, barley, etc.)
- FALL:** There are relatively few conflicts between elk and agricultural operators in the Yampa Valley during the fall. Depending on the weather for a particular year, summer impacts may linger or winter impacts may arise sooner. Additional impacts include but are not limited to:
- Fence damage caused by elk movement as a result of hunting pressure
 - Fence damage caused by migrating elk

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.

PROJECT PRIORITIES

Currently, habitat improvement strategies, especially those conducted on big game winter range usually receive the highest priority by the UYRHPP Committee. Projects which meet both statutory obligations of HPP will be prioritized higher than those that only meet 1 of the requirements.

OPERATING GUIDELINES

Project proposals will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. However, the UYRHPP Committee may in some cases establish specific parameters for some of the impact reduction strategies. Examples of potential parameters may include limits on available funding for a particular strategy or establishing minimum acreage requirements for project proposals to be considered.

The members of the UYRHPP Committee are certain that as HPP gets more exposure, the quality of the projects will improve and the number of project proposals will exceed available funding. As this happens, the UYRHPP Committee will use responses to the following questions to help further prioritize projects:

- A. Will the proposed project help maintain, improve, protect and/or develop habitat to ensure healthy and sustainable wildlife habitat and rangeland?
 - Habitat projects in big game winter range may often receive higher priority.
- B. Will the proposed project be in a defined impact area?
- C. Will the proposed project help minimize conflicts between big game and agricultural operators?
 - Is the proposed project a short-term or long-term solution?
 - Has the applicant tried other solutions?
- D. Will the proposed project help improve big game distribution to further minimize conflicts with agricultural operators?
 - Where will the proposed project likely redistribute big game?
- E. Will the proposed project assist CPW as possible to help achieve herd objectives?
- F. Does the proposed project effectively use sportsmen's dollars to reduce damage impacts while also benefiting wildlife?
- G. Will the proposed project help increase public awareness and involvement with the UYRHPP?
- H. Is the applicant willing to cost share the project?
 - Typically, projects with a minimum cost share of 50% will receive higher priority.
- I. Will funding the proposed project exceed any limits on available funding for a particular strategy that the UYRHPP Committee previously set?
- J. Is the project proposal for a prototype or experimental project?
 - If so, is additional approval required?

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.

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 Upper Yampa River 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 Upper Yampa River 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	50%
Fence Construction & Repairs	15%
Game Damage (Stackyards, etc.)	15%
Information & Education	5%
Conservation Easements & NEPA Related Activities	5%
Monitoring	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.

The primary focus of the UYRHPP Committee has been to reduce fence and forage related conflicts caused by ungulates (elk, mule deer, pronghorn and moose); however, the Committee recognizes additional wildlife conflicts between big game, other wildlife species and livestock do occur. Furthermore, CPW staff has received inquiries from livestock operators on projects that are not considered traditional fence and forage projects, which demonstrates a potential need in the Yampa Valley to explore additional opportunities to further minimize wildlife conflicts with local agricultural operators.

CURRENT & FORESEEABLE ISSUES

DEVELOPMENT AND ENSUING HABITAT LOSS

Over the last 20 years, there continues to be an increasing amount of development in the area including the accompanied reduction of large working ranches, especially within 10 to 15 miles of Steamboat Springs. Areas such as Oak Creek, Stagecoach and Hayden have also experienced significant increases in development pressure over the last 15 years and this trend is expected to continue.

The vast majority of winter range in the Yampa Valley is located on land that is choice for development. As a result, wintering animals have limited options when winter weather hits the valley and even fewer options when winter weather turns harsh. Concentrating big game animals in these areas can also result in habitat degradation, especially in mountain shrub communities.

Due to exorbitantly high land values within the Yampa Valley, many larger parcels are being purchased and converted into hobby ranches. Frequently, these hobby ranches maintain agricultural operations, but in many cases the agricultural operation is not the primary purpose for the ranch. In addition, hunting activity frequently decreases on these properties, which can result in the area being transformed into an artificial sanctuary making harvest and recreational objectives difficult to achieve.

Lastly, an increase in general development and density of development limits opportunities for large-scale habitat improvement projects like prescribed burns.

RECREATION

Recreation is one of the fastest growing activities in the Yampa Valley and a wide variety of projects are being developed by the local communities. Since many of these projects are desired to be developed close to towns, conflicts with big game, especially on winter range, have developed. Loss of this habitat and increased disturbance may result in movements of animals into unsuitable areas or an overall population decrease. It will become increasingly more difficult to maintain big game management objectives as development and recreation spreads into new locales including all time periods of the year, giving wildlife less opportunity to find refuge and carry out important life functions to survive.

The City of Steamboat recently authorized a lodging tax specifically for recreational development in/around the area. Having a dedicated source of funding has created expectations within the community for trail/recreation development. It is incumbent upon CPW and others to interact in this process to identify wildlife issues and mitigation opportunities.

Continuing involvement and discussions with user groups, the City of Steamboat Springs and the US Forest Service are vital to ensuring wildlife's needs are considered.

ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

Energy development is limited in the geographic area of the UYHPP committee, with the primary resource extraction activity being coal. It is likely that energy development will continue into the future and will expand to include both traditional and renewable energy sources and into areas not now currently being used for energy production.

GREATER SAGE GROUSE

The UYHPP area includes the south Routt/northern Eagle greater sage grouse population. Although not listed by the USFWS under the ESA, this species continues to be of interest by state and federal authorities.

PUBLIC LAND MANAGEMENT AGENCIES

BLM - LITTLE SNAKE RESOURCE AREA

Small parcels of BLM land are scattered over Routt County and in the area encompassed by the UYRHPP Committee, roughly 1% is managed by the BLM. There are approximately 46 grazing allotments contained or partially contained in GMUs 13, 14, 214, 15, 131, and 231.

BLM managed parcels within the UYRHPP area may provide opportunities for habitat manipulation and enhancement across the UYRHPP program area.

USFS - ROUTT NATIONAL FOREST-HAHNS PEAK/BEARS EARS and YAMPA DISTRICTS

The Hahns Peak/Bears Ears District and the Yampa District covers over 500,000 acres and currently has over 100 grazing allotments across the districts. Some lower elevation areas on the Hahns Peak/Bears Ears District are identified as critical elk winter range and these areas are managed for the winter concentration of elk. These areas have been and continue to be the targets of aggressive habitat manipulation to promote elk habitat. Due to overlapping habitat concerns, there is continued potential to utilize federal money, intended for reducing fuels in the wildland-urban interface zones on USFS land for these habitat manipulation projects. Ultimately, these projects have the potential to both reduce the fuel load and improve winter range habitat.

The UYHPP committee has also worked with the USFS to support winter range closures and provide signage to users alerting them to the closures and the reasons for them.