

Colorado Parks and Wildlife  
Habitat Partnership Program  
White River



## DISTRIBUTION MANAGEMENT PLAN



Approved - Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission: November 15, 2019  
This plan is valid for 10 years from approval date.

**2019-2029**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The White River Valley is home to some of the largest herds of elk and mule deer in the State of Colorado and also has small herds of antelope, bighorn sheep, and moose. The area supports a vibrant agricultural community in addition to active coal mining and oil and gas development.

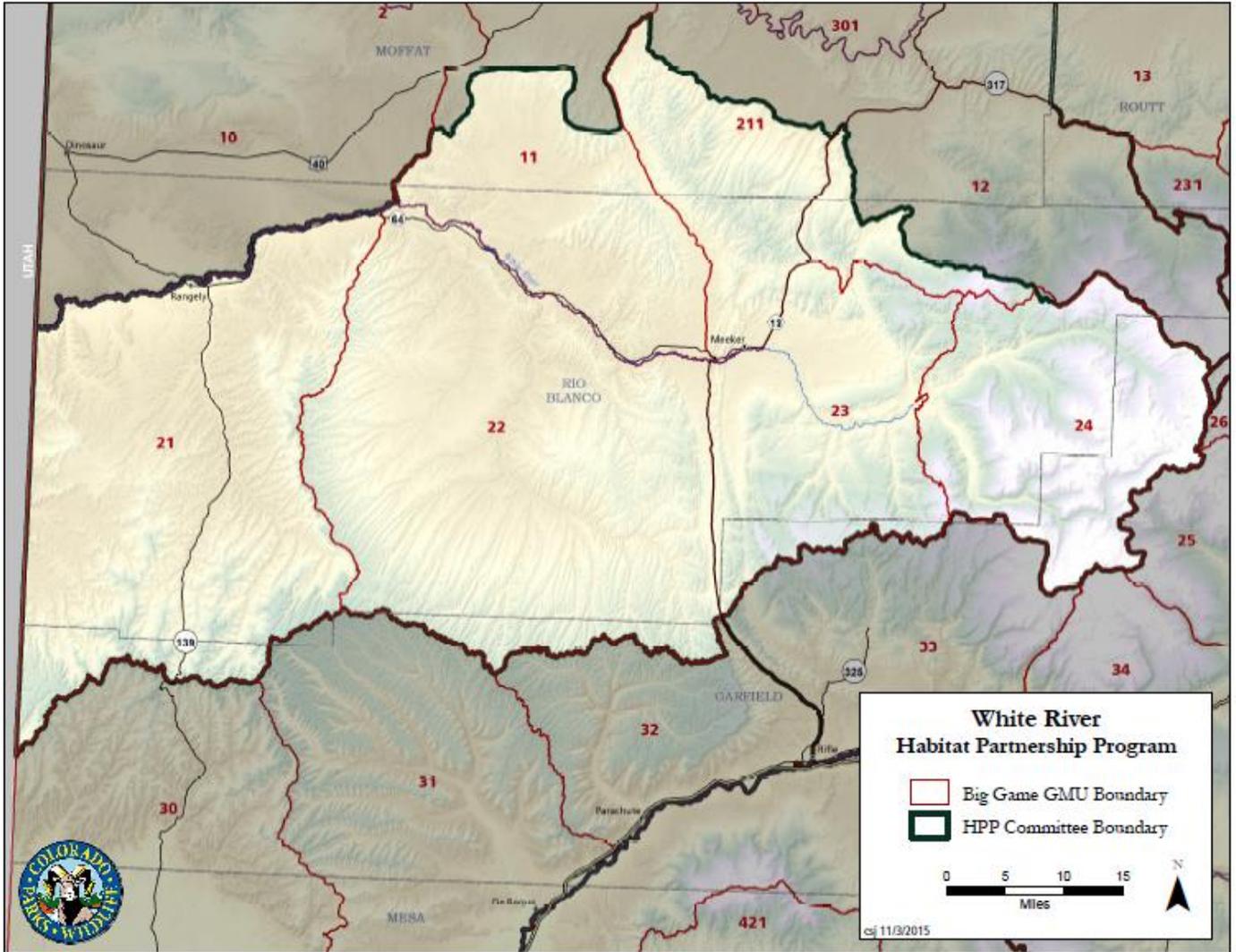
Since inception of the WRHPP committee in 1993, it has worked in cooperation with CPW to significantly reduce the White River Elk herd with aggressive antlerless harvest strategies to within the desired population objective, thus conflicts within the WRHPP area have been greatly reduced. However, the success of the distribution management plan depends heavily upon the ability to foster cooperation between the landowners and the hunting public since a major tool for moving the animals from the conflict areas, and decreasing the numbers will be the public hunters. Landowners in the WRHPP area have been reluctant in the past to open their private lands to the general public for reasons ranging from protection of their property to maximizing hunting income. This lack of public hunting access to many large parcels of private property has resulted in primarily elk finding a safe haven/refuge on some private lands during the regular rifle seasons, which has often made it difficult for CPW to reach annual elk harvest objectives and has exacerbated elk related habitat damage and conflicts throughout the WRHPP area. While some agricultural conflicts between big game and livestock definitely still do exist in the White River area today, the White River HPP committee and CPW in Meeker believe that both conflicts and the elk population have been significantly reduced. Therefore, in recent years the focus of the WRHPP committee has been to be much more proactive on a landscape scale with habitat improvements which are designed to assist CPW in achieving deer, elk, pronghorn, and moose management objectives.

It is important to note that the WRHPP committee has been recognized at the state level for its long-term, pro-active landscape scale habitat improvement and monitoring program for mule deer and elk which has been ongoing from 2009 to present. Further, since 2009, the WRHPP committee has hired a private consulting firm to intensively monitor and evaluate long-term vegetation and wildlife responses to the landscape scale habitat treatments, in order to determine which habitat treatment strategies are the most cost-effective. The WRHPP committee seeks to develop and implement long-term strategies that resolve conflicts while maintaining healthy and sustainable rangelands and big game populations.

The WRHPP feels strongly in the need to work cooperatively as a partnership with land management agencies, private landowners, and other entities. The WRHPP Committee also prefers to encourage people to leverage the funding available in order to implement as many projects as possible for maximum benefits to wildlife habitat. The WRHPP Committee also requires each participating landowner, agency, or other entity to submit a completed Conflict/Project Request Form prior to considering any proposed HPP projects.

The White River HPP program has been extremely beneficial to many landowners and government agencies throughout the White River area and there is substantial support for the WRHPP program in Meeker and the surrounding communities that it serves.

# WHITE RIVER HPP AREA



# COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The WRHPP currently has one administrative assistant and seven committee members: three representing local livestock growers, one representing U.S. Forest Service, one representing Bureau of Land Management, one representing Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and one representing the sportspersons. The WRHPP is also fortunate to have one member who has served on the Committee since its inception in 1993 Angelo Theos (livestock grower representative and chairman) and three members who have served for over ten years; Mary Taylor, Rich Parr and Bailey Franklin. We believe this is an indication of the extreme dedication of our HPP Committee to the wildlife habitat resources in the White River area.

## MEMBERS

- |  |                           |
|--|---------------------------|
| 1. Angelo Theos, livestock grower rep. /chair        | Started HPP Term: 01/1993 |
| 2. Lenny Klingsmith, livestock grower representative | Started HPP Term: 09/2012 |
| 3. Jim Brennan, livestock grower representative      | Started HPP Term: 06/2016 |
| 4. Rich Parr, sportspersons representative           | Started HPP Term: 03/2005 |
| 5. Bailey Franklin, CPW representative               | Started HPP Term: 10/2005 |
| 6. Curtis Keetch, USFS representative                | Started HPP Term: 11/2016 |
| 7. Mary Taylor, BLM representative                   | Started HPP Term: 05/2004 |

# INTRODUCTION

The White River Valley is home to the largest herds of elk and deer in the state and also has small herds of antelope, bighorn sheep, and moose. The White River area supports a vibrant agricultural community in addition to active coal mining and oil and gas development. The White River Valley experiences long, cold, winters with occasional above average snowfall which results in annual migrations of big game from the high elevation summer ranges at the headwaters to the lower elevation transition/winter ranges which lie to the west. With so many wild ungulates that inhabit the White River area year-round it is inevitable that conflicts arise with agricultural producers and private landowners.

The need to protect and improve critical seasonal habitats and migratory corridors for mule deer and elk within the WRHPP area has become more evident in recent years, considering the statewide ecological and economic importance of the White River Mule Deer and Elk herds to the state of Colorado. Any activity that fragments large, contiguous blocks of wildlife habitat into smaller tracts of land, negatively influence wildlife habitat quality, reproductive success, and long-term survival of wildlife populations. Housing developments, agricultural activities, gravel pits, recreational OHV trails, expansion of wild horse populations, and oil and gas development are the primary causes of deterioration, loss or fragmentation of wildlife habitat within the WRHPP area.

The White River HPP committee was originally appointed to resolve these conflicts in January of 1993, but at that time it was called the Yampa/White River HPP committee as it included portions of the Yampa River drainage in addition to the White River. Since that time, many changes in HPP committee boundaries have occurred in this part of NW Colorado, and in 2006 the name was changed to the White River HPP Committee.

## HPP ORIENTATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

- **GOAL 1:** TO WORK COOPERATIVELY WITH LOCAL, STATE AND FEDERAL AGENCIES TO IMPROVE HABITAT CONDITIONS AND TO REDUCE CONFLICTS WITH FENCING, FORAGE AND BIG GAME.
- **GOAL 2:** TO IMPROVE BIG GAME DISTRIBUTION AND HARVEST TO MINIMIZE CONFLICTS WITH LOCAL LANDOWNERS, TO SUSTAIN HEALTHY BIG GAME POPULATIONS, AND TO PROVIDE a QUALITY HUNTING EXPERIENCE.
- **GOAL 3:** TO MITIGATE LANDOWNER FENCE CONFLICTS DUE TO DAMAGE CAUSED BY BIG GAME.
- **GOAL 4:** TO MONITOR KEY HABITAT TREATMENT PROJECTS TO ASSESS COST-EFFECTIVENESS AND OPTIMIZE USE OF HPP FUNDING ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE FOR MAXIMUM WILDLIFE BENEFIT.
- **GOAL 5:** TO SUPPORT AND PROMOTE PLANS, EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, AND PROGRAMS THAT INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS AND IMPROVE KNOWLEDGE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT.
- **GOAL 6:** TO GIVE CONSIDERATION TO PROJECTS THAT REDUCE FENCE AND FORAGE CONFLICTS AND ALSO POSITIVELY AFFECT OTHER SPECIES OF WILDLIFE.
- **GOAL 7:** TO PROMOTE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES THAT IMPROVE KNOWLEDGE OF HABITAT CONDITIONS AND FACILITATE HEALTHY RANGELAND MANAGEMENT.
- **GOAL 8:** TO UTILIZE THE HUNTER RESOURCE AS A BIG GAME MANAGEMENT TOOL FOR REDUCING CONFLICTS AND ASSISTING CPW WITH MEETING THEIR BIG GAME MANAGEMENT GOALS.

**GOAL 1:** TO WORK COOPERATIVELY WITH LOCAL, STATE AND FEDERAL AGENCIES AND PRIVATE LANDOWNERS TO IMPROVE HABITAT CONDITIONS, RANGELANDS AND BIG GAME POPULATIONS.

## Objectives:

1. Conduct habitat management projects across the landscape to attract and hold wildlife in preferred areas on all state, federal and private lands.
2. Conduct habitat management projects across landscape and in key areas in order to control timing of big game migration to and from critical winter range habitats.
3. Encourage implementation of moderate intensity, short-duration livestock grazing management strategies which promote sustainable livestock grazing practices and provide for seasonal wildlife use during critical periods (late fall through early spring).
4. Disperse excessive concentrations of animals to reduce conflicts and to assist with disease management issues throughout WRHPP area.
5. Cooperate to reduce and control noxious weeds through integrated and landscape scale weed management efforts throughout WRPP area.
6. Participate in Forage Purchase/Lease arrangements when the Committee and landowner agree that leaving animals on a certain area of private property will alleviate conflicts in other areas.
7. Develop partnerships with groups that deal with pertinent issues within the WRHPP area.
8. Encourage landowners to focus on long-term protection, improvement and management of critical wildlife habitats throughout the White River HPP area.

### Strategies:

- A. Utilize distribution and harvest hunts primarily to move animals away from conflict areas but also to disperse excessive concentrations of animals for disease management.
- B. Mechanical thinning of decadent, mature habitats to improve forage quality and quantity.
- C. Conversion of agricultural habitats with farming/seeding to improve forage quality and quantity. May also, provide fertilizer or seed to offset agricultural losses from big game animals.
- D. Intensive reclamation of historic winter ranges to improve forage quality and quantity.
- E. Promote wildlife friendly and sustainable livestock grazing systems through associated projects such as water development, cross-fence construction, deferral, rest, rotation, etc.
- F. Burning, mechanical, chemical, and silvicultural treatments to control noxious weeds, to improve diversity and quality of forage available, and to enhance wildlife habitat.
- G. Remove or modify existing fencing that is impeding critical big game migration routes.
- H. Support perpetual conservation and access easements on critical wildlife habitats and participate in funding of transaction costs for conservation easements.
- I. Promote livestock salting, grazing and fencing practices and develop water resources which distribute livestock and wild horses away from key wildlife habitats and sensitive riparian areas.

**GOAL 2: TO IMPROVE BIG GAME DISTRIBUTION AND HARVEST TO MINIMIZE CONFLICTS WITH LOCAL LANDOWNERS, TO SUSTAIN HEALTHY BIG GAME POPULATIONS, AND TO PROVIDE QUALITY HUNTING EXPERIENCES.**

### Objectives:

- 1. Develop and sustain productive and healthy big game herds in the White River area through dispersal of concentrated herds, promoting additional harvest of antlerless animals.
- 2. Travel management/controlled access to distribute big game across landscape.

### Strategies:

- A. Utilize distribution and harvest hunts primarily to move animals away from conflict areas and refuge areas but also to disperse excessive concentrations of animals for disease management.
- B. Encourage and support landowners to manage critical big game transitional and winter ranges to the appropriate level of use through increased antlerless harvest, prescriptive livestock grazing management plans, and landscape scale habitat treatment strategies.
- C. Implement coordinated cow elk and doe mule deer hunts on private and public lands.
- D. Make recommendations to CPW about possible harvest strategies and opportunities.
- E. Facilitate/coordinate antlerless big game harvest opportunities on private lands within WRHPP area in order to assist CPW with harvest and disease management strategies.
- F. Work with landowners that harbor big game during hunting seasons, to improve harvest, distribution and to sustain long-term health and productivity of big game herds.
- G. Work with Ranching for Wildlife entities to increase habitat improvement opportunities and increase overall harvest during regular big game hunting seasons in order to assist CPW with achieving big game management goals and objectives.
- H. Encourage wise and conservative use of all motor vehicles and travel management planning on public lands in order to hold big game animals for as long as possible and to mitigate conflicts and movement of big game animals onto private lands.

### **GOAL 3: TO MITIGATE LANDOWNER FENCE CONFLICTS DUE TO DAMAGE CAUSED BY BIG GAME.**

#### Objectives:

1. Support alternative fence designs that are wildlife friendly and which reduce potential future fencing conflicts and expenditures.
2. Reduce annual maintenance costs.

#### Strategies:

- A. Promote Wildlife Crossing Structures, Gates and Passes within key migration corridors.
- B. Encourage use of wildlife friendly fencing designs and specs for all new fencing projects
- C. Remove or modify existing fencing that is impeding critical big game migration routes.
- D. Provide damage fence repair materials to eligible and cooperative landowners.
- E. Hire fence contractors for installation, repair, and maintenance if necessary.
- F. If HPP fencing project involves replacing of an existing fence, HPP recommends and may require that old fence be completely removed and disposed of properly to avoid leaving or creating any additional hazards for wildlife within critical big game migration corridors.

### **GOAL 4: TO MONITOR KEY HABITAT TREATMENT PROJECTS**

Objectives: Utilize CPW staff, other gov't agencies, universities, landowners and/or private consultants to:

1. develop methods and protocols for project evaluation.
2. consistently collect monitoring data and create a database of project treatment information and update and report data to WRHPP committee and others.
3. evaluate seasonal use and long term trend data of habitats, project effectiveness and future strategies using data collected from vegetative treatment projects and CPW efforts (radio collars, flights, etc)

#### Strategies:

- A. Analyze remote animal sensing and other developing technologies to evaluate seasonal use of habitats by big game animals to determine whether key habitat treatment strategies are positively impacting seasonal distributions of big game animals.
- B. Utilize CPW staff, other gov't agencies, universities, landowners and/or private consultants to assist with project monitoring and data analysis to evaluate habitat treatments and identify future treatment areas.
- C. Utilize photos, video, and photo points to record project completion and response.
- D. Make sure that WRHPP's long-term vegetation monitoring database and information can be maintained and made available electronically to interested parties.

### **GOAL 5: TO SUPPORT AND PROMOTE PLANS, EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, AND PROGRAMS THAT INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS AND IMPROVE KNOWLEDGE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT**

### Objectives:

1. Keep community, landowners and land managers informed about the Habitat Partnership Program and make sure that it is maintained and supported as a relevant CPW program that is beneficial and is accomplishing its statutorily funded mission within the WRHPP area.
2. Provide educational opportunities and information to promote knowledge and understanding of key issues within the WRHPP area.

### Strategies:

- A. Sponsor workshops and presentations to assist landowners and land managers and to inform the community about land use and wildlife habitat related issues within WRHPP area.
- B. Support development and implementation of brochures, newsletters, demonstrations, presentations and tours to further understanding about livestock/big game needs and interactions, habitat management, stewardship practices, and rangeland health issues.
- C. Sponsor and support workshops, tours, presentations, publications and cooperatively fund educational training and events for landowners, agencies and the public

**GOAL 6: TO GIVE CONSIDERATION TO PROJECTS THAT REDUCE FENCE AND FORAGE CONFLICTS AND ALSO POSITIVELY AFFECT OTHER SPECIES OF WILDLIFE.**

### Objectives:

1. Encourage HPP project cooperators and partners to select big game habitat treatment sites and utilize habitat manipulation methods that will assist CPW in the conservation and management of other species of wildlife that are of special concern (i.e. sage-grouse, sharp-tailed grouse).

### Strategies:

- A. Work to design HPP projects that reduce perches for raptors in sage-grouse habitat, such as mechanical mulching of encroaching pinyon-juniper woodlands in sagebrush habitats.
- B. HPP sponsored water development projects will be designed to: require installation of escape ramps in all water tanks to avoid avian bird/small mammal mortality; encourage overflows from water tanks into small ponds where possible; and to encourage landowners to leave water on in HPP waterlines/tanks for as long as possible throughout the year (i.e., fall) to maximize benefits to wildlife.
- C. Design habitat treatments to maintain adequate availability and quality of critical seasonal forage for all wildlife (i.e., mosaic treatments to maintain diversity).
- D. Avoid treatment or manipulation of high-priority and sensitive habitats such as critical sagebrush sites that are known to be occupied and heavily utilized by sage-grouse populations within the WRHPP area, unless the sagebrush sites are not currently meeting the habitat requirements and needs of sage-grouse.
- E. Cooperate with NRCS on habitat projects, whenever possible to leverage funding and maximize benefits to many wildlife species.

**GOAL 7: TO PROMOTE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES THAT IMPROVE KNOWLEDGE OF HABITAT CONDITIONS AND FACILITATE HEALTHY RANGELAND MANAGEMENT**

Objectives:

1. Provide educational opportunities and information to promote understanding of wildlife habitat needs and facilitate healthy rangeland management throughout the WRHPP area.

Strategies:

- A. Sponsor workshops, tours, presentations, publications and cooperatively fund educational training and events for landowners and land managers, including but not limited to: principles of rangeland science and management, wildlife friendly fence design, water development, salting practices, prescribed livestock grazing management, noxious weed control, shrub manipulation practices, wildlife seeding practices, etc.

**GOAL 8: TO UTILIZE THE HUNTER RESOURCE AS A BIG GAME MANAGEMENT TOOL FOR REDUCING CONFLICTS AND ASSISTING CPW WITH MEETING THEIR BIG GAME MANAGEMENT GOALS.**

Objective:

1. Use the hunting public as an effective management tool for additional and strategic harvest of antlerless big game animals within identified conflict areas but also with dispersal of concentrated herds throughout WRHPP area.

Strategies:

- A. Utilize distribution and harvest hunts primarily to move animals away from conflict areas and refuge areas but also to disperse excessive concentrations of animals for disease management.
- B. Work with landowners that participate with HPP to allow limited public access on private property within WRHPP area, especially for increased antlerless harvest of big game animals.
- C. Work with landowners that harbor big game during hunting seasons, to improve harvest and Distribution.
- E. Using HPP big game distribution hunts, facilitate and coordinate antlerless big game harvest opportunities on private lands.
- F. Encourage hunting at specific times and places to reduce big game conflicts through HPP dispersal and game damage hunts, as well as regular big game season and RFW hunts.
- G. Encourage appropriate use of all motor vehicles and travel management planning on public lands in order to hold big game animals for as long as possible and to mitigate conflicts and movement of big game animals onto private lands.
- H. Work with Ranching for Wildlife entities to increase habitat improvement opportunities and increase overall harvest during regular big game hunting seasons.

# AREA DESCRIPTION

The geographic area for the WRHPP includes the entire White River Drainage from the headwaters which originate above Trappers Lake in the Flat Tops Wilderness Area and flow west all the way to the Utah state line. The WRHPP area is primarily located within Rio Blanco county, although small portions of Moffat and Garfield counties are also included. Game management units (GMU) for the White River HPP area include units 21, 22, 23, 24, and the southern portions of units 11, 211, and 12. For the most part, the White River HPP area boundary is consistent with GMU boundaries which have specific legal descriptions (see boundary descriptions for GMU's 21, 22, 23, and 24 for further details about majority of the WRHPP area). For those areas along the northern portion of the WRHPP area where the boundary does not follow or coincide with specific GMU boundaries, the WRHPP area boundary is described as follows (starting in NW corner of map): White River northeast to Wolf Creek (along GMU 10/21 & 10/11 boundaries); then northeast on Wolf Creek to northern end of Pinyon Ridge; east from Pinyon Ridge to top of the Citadel Plateau; east from Citadel Plateau to Deception Creek Road (Moffat County Road 57; GMU 211/11 Boundary); north on Moffat County Road 57 to Moffat County Road 32; southeast along MCR 32 to Highway 13 (GMU 211/12 Boundary); northeast along Highway 13 to Milk Creek and then southeast along Milk Creek to the headwaters at Sleepy Cat Peak; then southeast along the Williams Fork - White River divide (GMU 12/24 boundary).

The White River HPP Area consists of approximately 4,000 square miles of prime wildlife habitat and includes 2,205,143 acres. This area is incredibly diverse and ranges from semi-arid desert shrub habitat at approximately 5,000 feet in elevation along the lower White River at the Utah/Colorado state line west of Rangely, Colorado, to lush alpine habitat at over 12,000 feet in elevation on top of Trappers Peak, in the Flat Tops Wilderness. Of the total acreage/habitat included within the White River HPP Area, 27% are privately owned lands, 54% is BLM, 16% is USFS, 2% is CDOW, and less than 1% is owned by other federal entities or State Land Board.

## STATE WILDLIFE AREAS

The White River HPP geographic area includes a multitude of land ownerships including BLM, National Forest, Wilderness, private, and state owned properties. Properties which are owned by the CPW and are designated as State Wildlife Areas (SWA) are substantial in size and are critical habitats for the big game animals that migrate along the White River corridor. These State Wildlife Areas were purchased for their high wildlife habitat values and are strategically located within the migration routes of big game populations. Improving habitat conditions on the State Wildlife Areas for big game can reduce many of the forage and fence related conflicts on the nearby private lands and is a very high priority for the WRHPP committee. However, it is important to note that CPW approval is necessary before the WRHPP committee can consider any proposals on a SWA.

State Wildlife Areas that are within the White River HPP area include:

<u>Name of SWA</u>	<u>Acreage</u>	<u>GMU</u>
Jensen SWA	6,000 acres	12, 23 / Deer, Elk
Meeker Pasture SWA	48 acres	23 / Fish, Deer
Oak Ridge SWA and Lake Avery	12,000 acres +	23 / Deer, Elk, Fish
Piceance SWA - Rio Blanco Lake	380 acres	22 / Fish

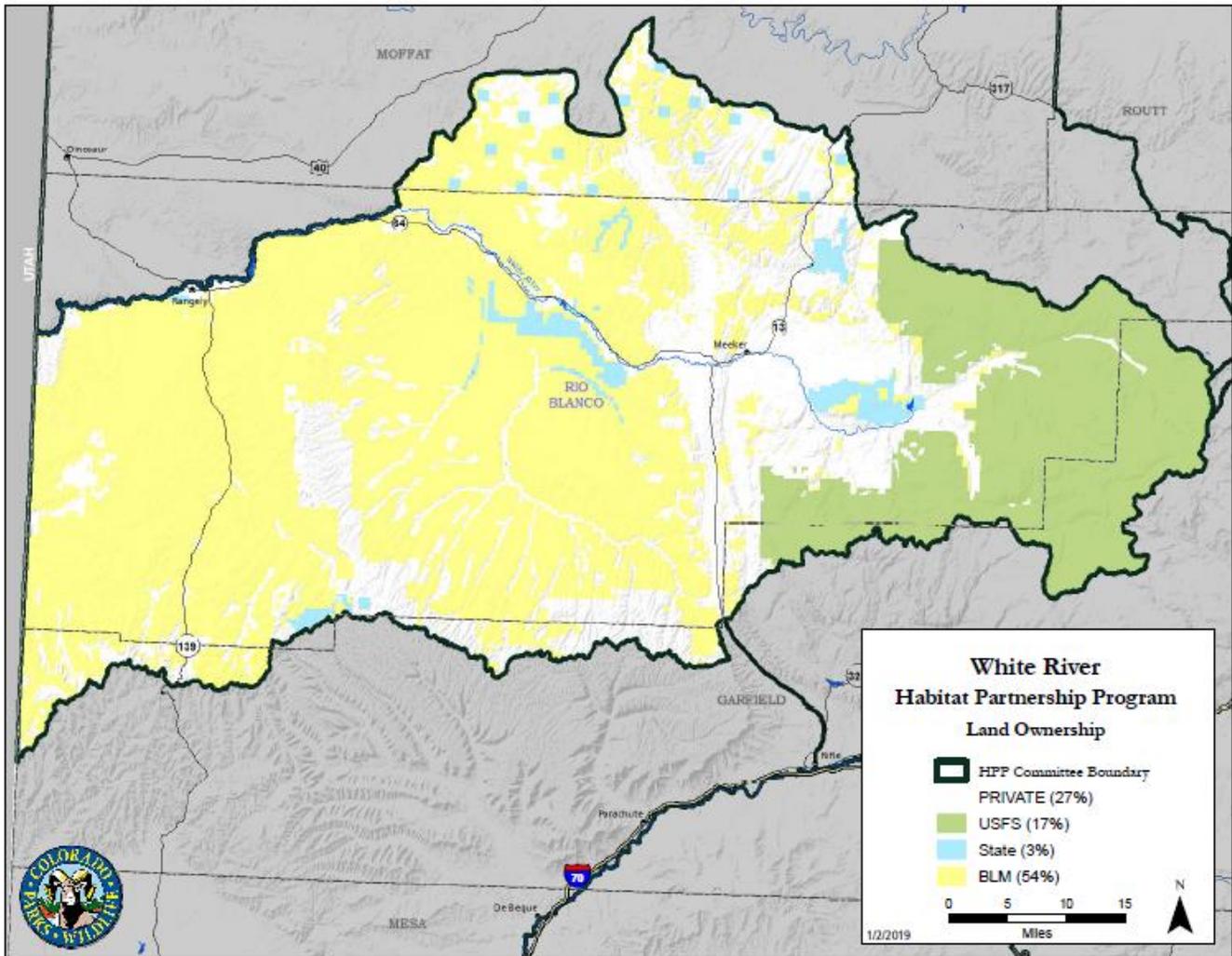
Piceance SWA - Square S Summer Range	4,880 acres	21, 22 / Deer, Elk
Piceance SWA - Square S Ranch	920 acres	22 / Deer, Elk
Piceance SWA - Yellow Creek	6,320 acres	22 / Deer, Elk
Piceance SWA - Little Hills	10,400 acres	22 / Deer, Elk

## STATE HABITAT AREAS

Properties where perpetual conservation easements have been purchased and are held by CPW are designated as State Habitat Areas (SHA). A substantial number of SHA's have been established within the WRHPP area and provide critical habitats for the big game animals that migrate along the White River corridor. These State Wildlife Areas were purchased for their high wildlife habitat and conservation values and are strategically located within the migration routes of big game populations. Improving habitat conditions on the State Habitat Areas (conservation easement properties) for big game can reduce many of the forage and fence related conflicts on the nearby private lands and is a very high priority for the WRHPP committee. However, it is important to note that CPW approval is necessary before the WRHPP committee can consider any proposals on a SHA.

State Habitat Areas (perpetual CPW conservation easements held by CPW) that are within the White River HPP area include:

<u>Name of SHA - Easement</u>	<u>Acreage</u>	<u>GMU</u>
Wenschhof Ranch SHA	537 acres	23 / Deer, Elk, Grouse
Dudley Bluffs Bladderpod SHA	505 acres	22 / Deer, Elk
Berthelson Ranch SHA	1,634 acres	23 / Deer, Elk, Grouse
Miller Creek Ranch SHA	3,115 acres	23 / Deer, Elk, Grouse
Flagg Creek Homestead Parcel SHA	2,598 acres	23 / Deer, Elk, Grouse
Collins Mountain Ranch SHA	2,422 acres	23 / Deer, Elk, Grouse



## HABITAT DESCRIPTION

A variety of vegetative habitats occur in the program area. The area west of Highway 13 on the lower White River, from the Utah/Colorado state line and Rangely area towards Meeker, is predominantly semi-arid, lower elevation winter range habitat dominated by sagebrush and pinyon-juniper communities with a mosaic of mountain shrub and limited aspen/conifer communities mixed in at the higher elevations. The vast majority of the area west of Highway 13 has seen and continues to be experiencing dramatic development from oil and gas explorations which have a significant impact on wildlife and their habitats in this area. Many of the creek bottoms and side drainages are now roads, oil/gas infrastructure, etc., replacing former agricultural fields.

The upper White River area to the east of Highway 13 near Meeker is a very diverse area that ranges from sagebrush and pinyon-juniper woodlands at the lower elevations to lush agricultural cropland and livestock pastures along the valley floor, to vast expanses of mountain shrub, aspen, and conifer forests and eventually to alpine tundra at the highest elevations in the Flat Tops Wilderness. Limited development is currently occurring in the White River corridor near and east of Meeker but these areas have been identified as potential growth centers.

Elevation, precipitation, and aspect largely determine the vegetation and habitat types that are found in the White River HPP area. The mountain peaks above approximately 11,000 feet contain mostly bare rock or alpine communities. Spruce-fir occurs mostly between the elevations of 8,000 and 12,000 ft. Aspen forest and mountain shrub mixes dominate the slopes from 7,000 to 8,500 feet with some mixed conifer forest. Sagebrush and pinyon-juniper woodlands dominate the slopes below 7,000 feet. In the western two-thirds of the unit, pinyon-juniper covers the foothills, and sagebrush parks appear on the more level sites as elevation drops. Aspen, an early successional species, is found mostly on sites that have been burned or disturbed within the past 150 years. Riparian vegetation parallels creeks and rivers. Big game species prefer areas with a diversity of vegetation types in close proximity to each other. These areas occur because of disturbance and changes in slope, aspect and microclimates. The best habitat areas generally have a ratio of 40% cover to 60% open foraging habitat.

The vegetation within the White River HPP boundaries can be categorized into five main groups: cropland/agricultural areas, riparian, shrublands, woodlands, and alpine.

Croplands and agricultural areas are found in the valleys, primarily at lower elevations and are mostly hay fields of timothy, smooth brome, orchard grass, wheatgrasses, and alfalfa.

Riparian vegetation is found along the major creeks and rivers. These riparian communities support the greatest abundance and diversity of plant and animal species.

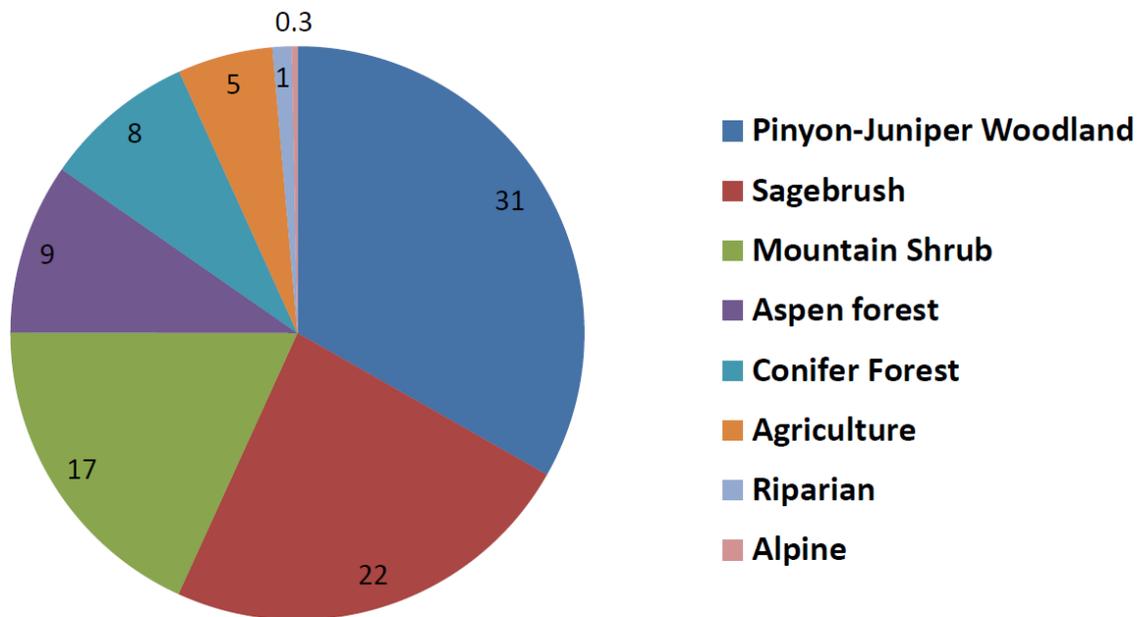
Shrublands consist of sagebrush, mountain shrubs, and grassland communities. Sagebrush is the most common land cover at the lower elevations. Rabbitbrush, western and slender wheatgrass, and native broadleaf plants commonly grow with the sagebrush. Mountain shrubs include serviceberry, snowberry, mountain mahogany, chokecherry, bitterbrush and Gambel's oak brush. The mountain shrub communities typically serve as critical transitional range/habitat for big game with diverse herbaceous understories. Grasslands occur on the more level sites throughout the area. At lower elevations grasslands are dominated by western wheatgrass, prairie junegrass, Indian ricegrass, needle and thread, squirreltail, and a variety of bluegrasses. In forested mid-elevation areas, grassland parks and openings are dominated by large bunchgrasses such as Thurber's fescue, wildrye, needlegrass, slender wheatgrass, and mountain brome. Grasslands in the higher elevation and alpine areas are dominated by Idaho and Thurber's fescue, Sandberg bluegrass, and blue bunch wheat grass. Grasslands are incredibly important foraging habitats for a variety of wildlife species, especially elk.

Woodlands fall into five major groups: pinyon-juniper, aspen and aspen-conifer mix, Douglas fir, lodgepole pine, and spruce-fir. Pinyon-juniper woodlands occur in the lower elevation foothills. They provide good thermal and hiding cover but poor forage because pinyon-juniper communities generally lack a productive and diverse herbaceous understory. Aspen and mixed aspen-conifer woodlands occupy the middle elevations. The understory consists of emerging conifers (where aspen is not the climax species), grasses and forbs, and some shrubs. The aspen community provides some of the most important calving/fawning habitat during the early summer, and also provides cover and forage during the critical spring and fall transitional periods for deer, elk and other big game species. Douglas fir shares the middle elevation zone mostly on the moister sites usually on north facing aspects, but is less represented than the aspen woodlands. It is a long-lived species valued for wildlife habitat diversity, scenic value, and big game cover. Lodge pole pine grows in even aged stands and below the spruce-fir. In mature stands, the dense overstory limits the growth of understory forage, but provides good thermal and hiding cover for big game. Spruce-

fir (Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir) dominates the higher elevations up to tree line. This habitat provides excellent summer cover for elk and other big game species.

Alpine sites occur on mountain peaks. Grasses, sedges, and numerous forbs are present. Short willows grow in moister areas. These sites provide important summer range for a variety of big game species including bighorn sheep, deer, and elk.

### Vegetation/Habitat Type (%)



### BIG GAME POPULATION SUMMARY

Each individual herd of big game animals (mule deer, pronghorn, elk 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 WRHPP, and all local HPP committees, participate in the DAU planning process. Presentations are heard from local biologists and written comments provided for consideration identifying the local committee’s concerns about big game management in the area as well as their preference for herd objectives and sex ratios. This involvement also insures that private landowners and private land issues are considered in these plans.

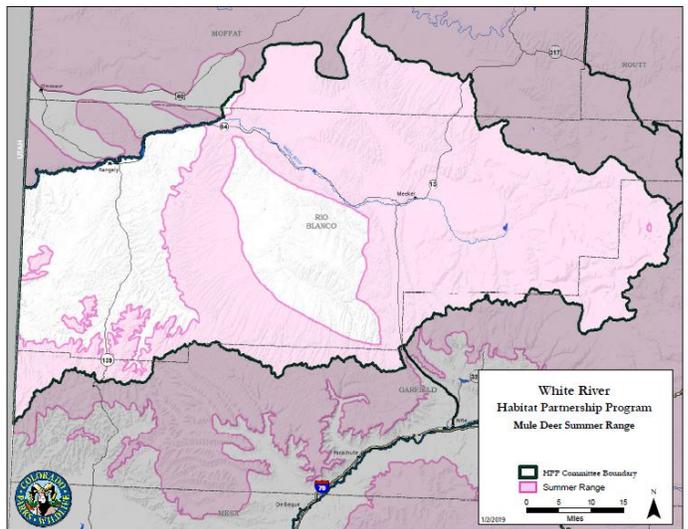
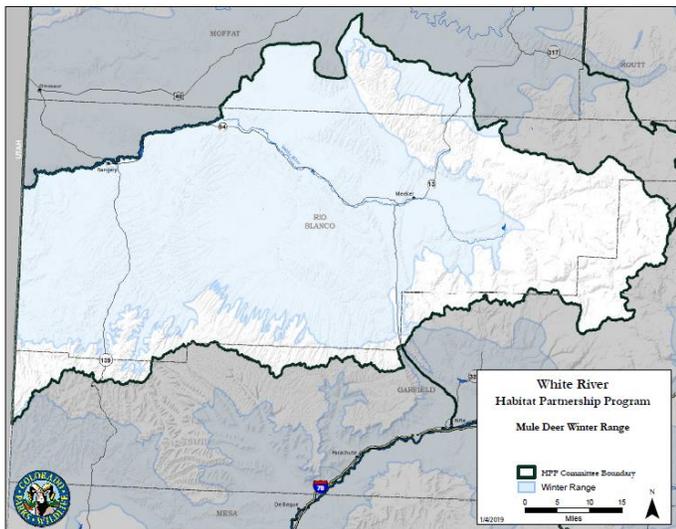
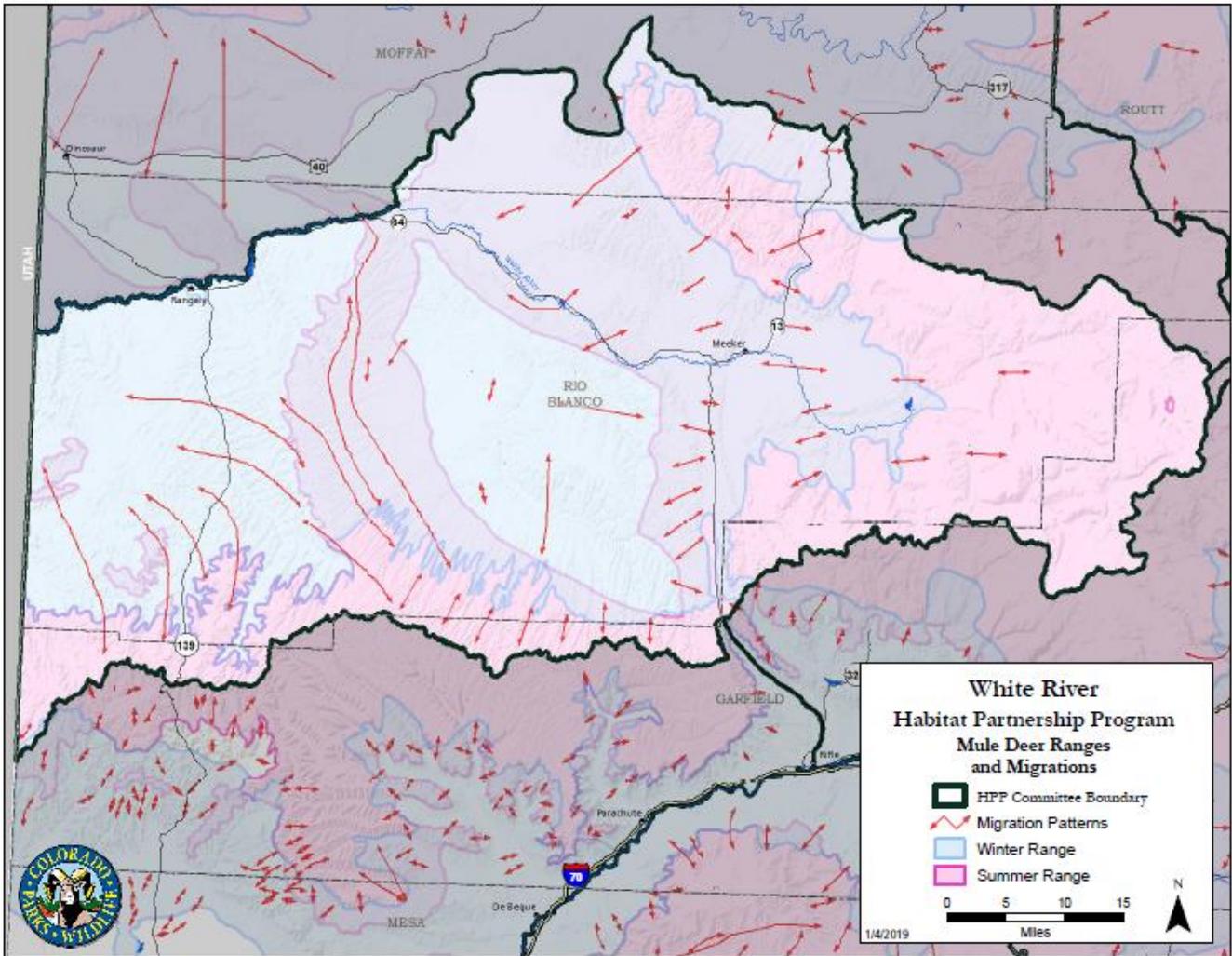
Below are the current management objectives for all the DAUs within the scope of the WRHPP area. The WRHPP committee will support and assist CPW with meeting all big game herd management objectives associated with the committee’s area.

**Table 1. Data Analysis Unit Summary for White River HPP Area**

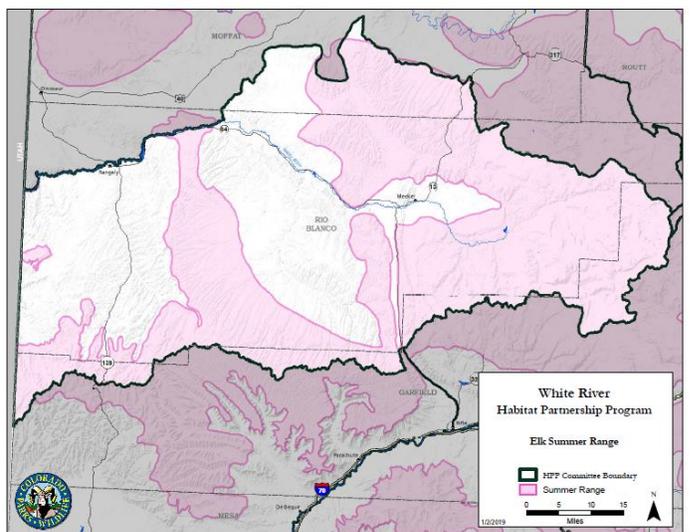
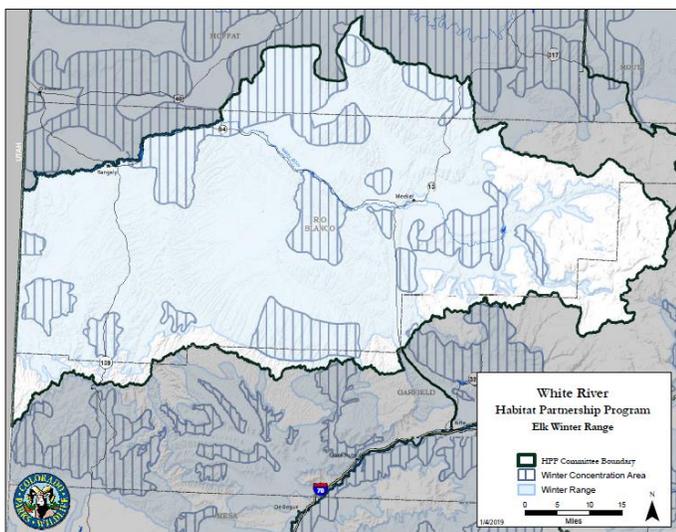
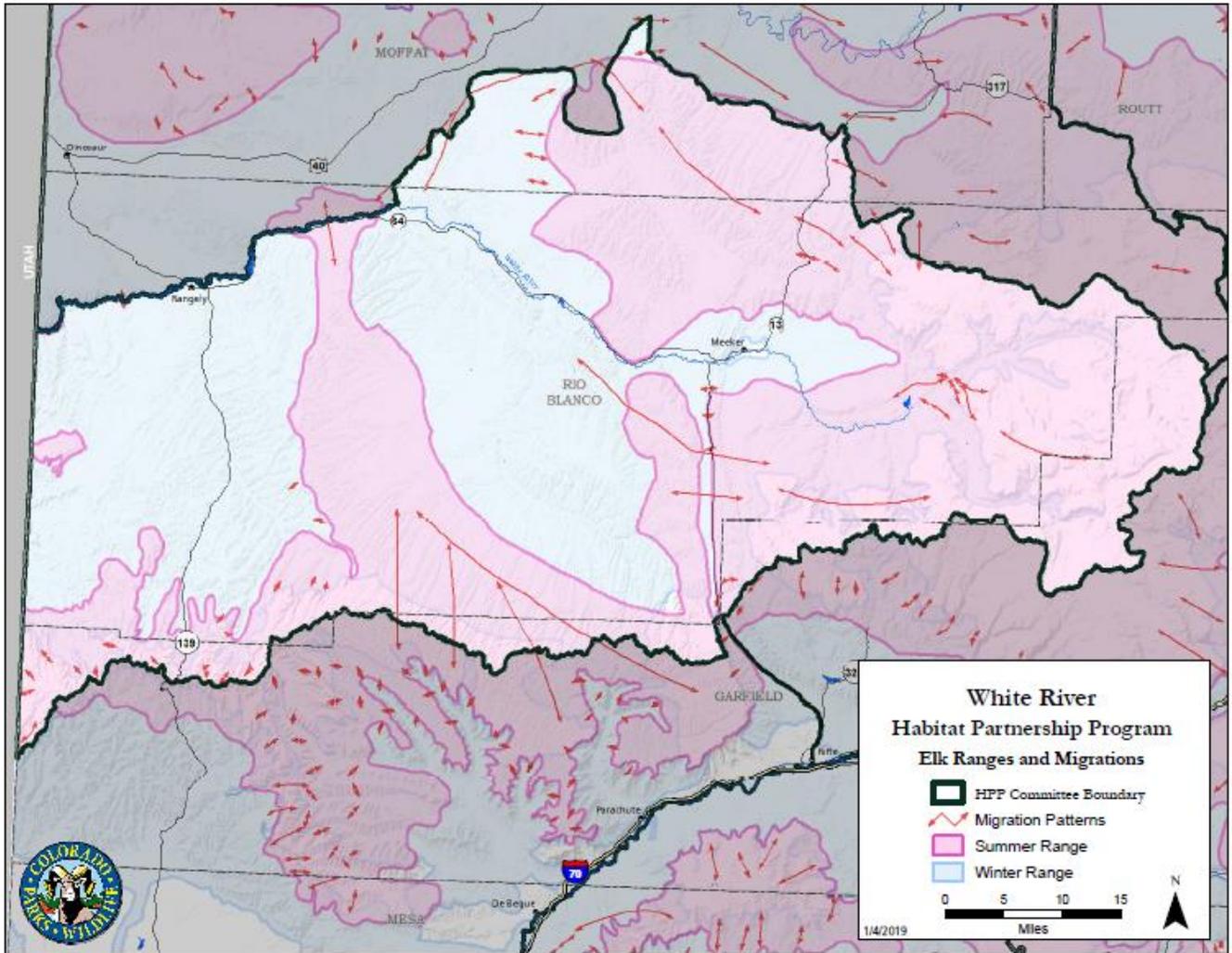
<b>Management Herd (*DAU plan in the renewal process)</b>	<b>1990s Population Avg.</b>	<b>2000s Population Avg.</b>	<b>2010 - 2018 Population Avg.</b>	<b>Current Pop.Mngt. Objective</b>
Deer - White River (D-7)	61,000	53,000	34,000	*67,500
<i>Game Management Units: 11, 12, 13, 22, 23, 24, 131, 211 &amp; 231</i>				
Deer - Book Cliffs (D-11)	10,500	9,100	8,300	10,000-12,000
<i>Game Management Units: 21 &amp; 30</i>				
Elk - White River (E-6)	52,700	52,800	42,000	32,000-39,000
<i>Game Management Unit: 11, 12, 13, 23, 24, 25, 26, 33, 34, 131, 211 &amp; 231</i>				
Elk - Yellow Creek/Roan Plateau (E-10)	9,600	10,700	10,800	7,000-9,000
<i>Game Management Unit: 21, 22, 30, 31 &amp; 32</i>				
Pronghorn - Maybell (A-10)	1,800	1,800	800	1,500
<i>Game Management Units: 11</i>				
Pronghorn - Axial Basin(A-34)	700	600	326	300
<i>Game Management Unit: 12, 23 &amp; 211</i>				
Moose - Flat Tops(M-6)	10	20	100	150
<i>Game Management Units: 12, 23 &amp; 24</i>				

# BIG GAME RANGES & MIGRATIONS

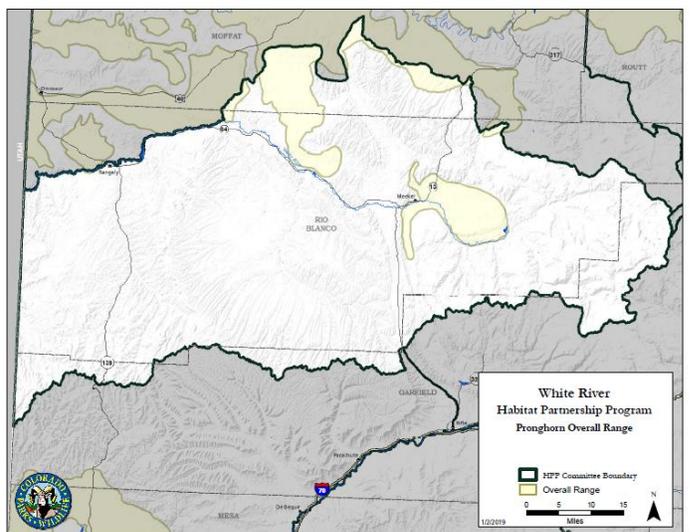
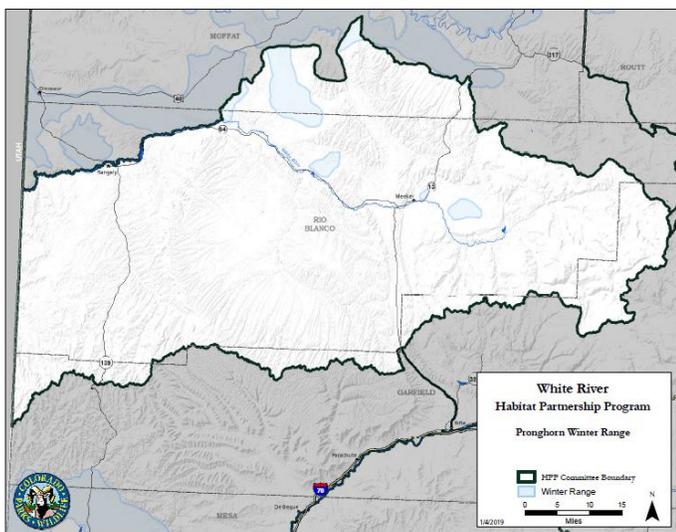
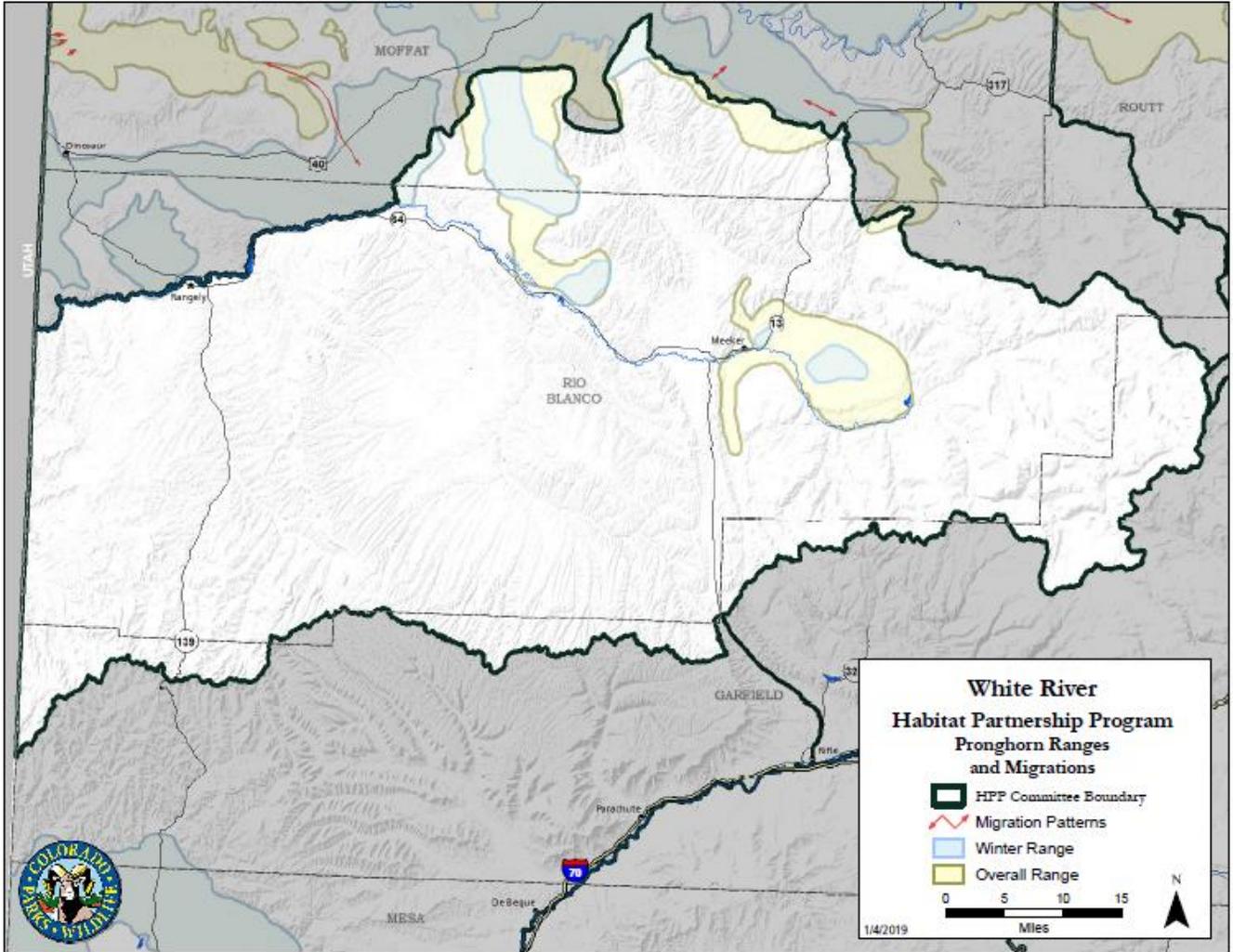
## MULE DEER



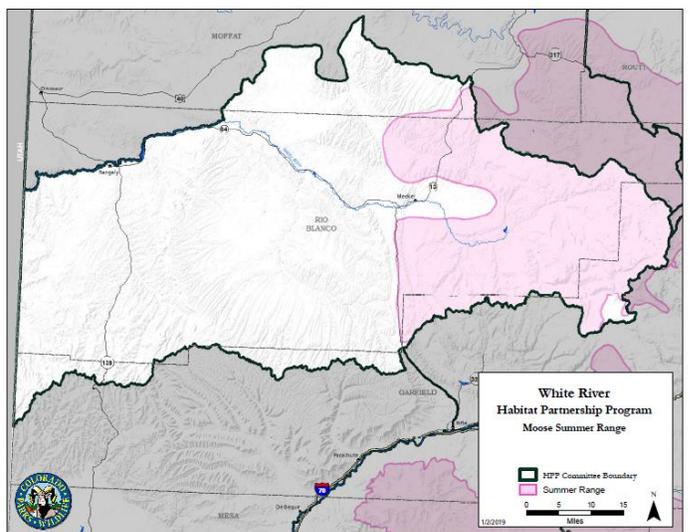
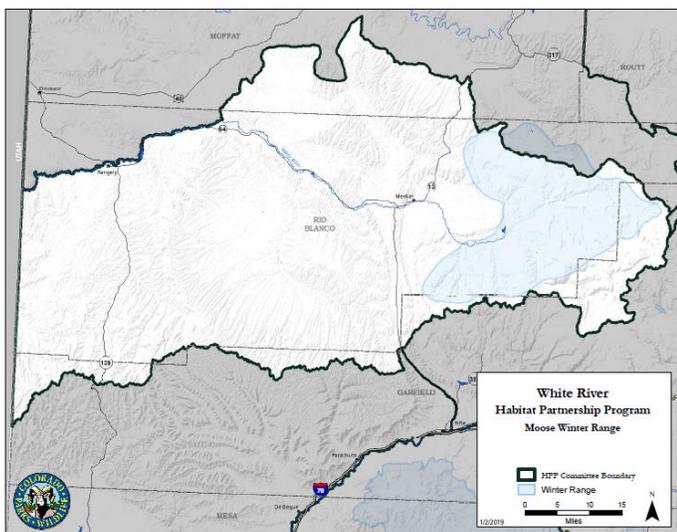
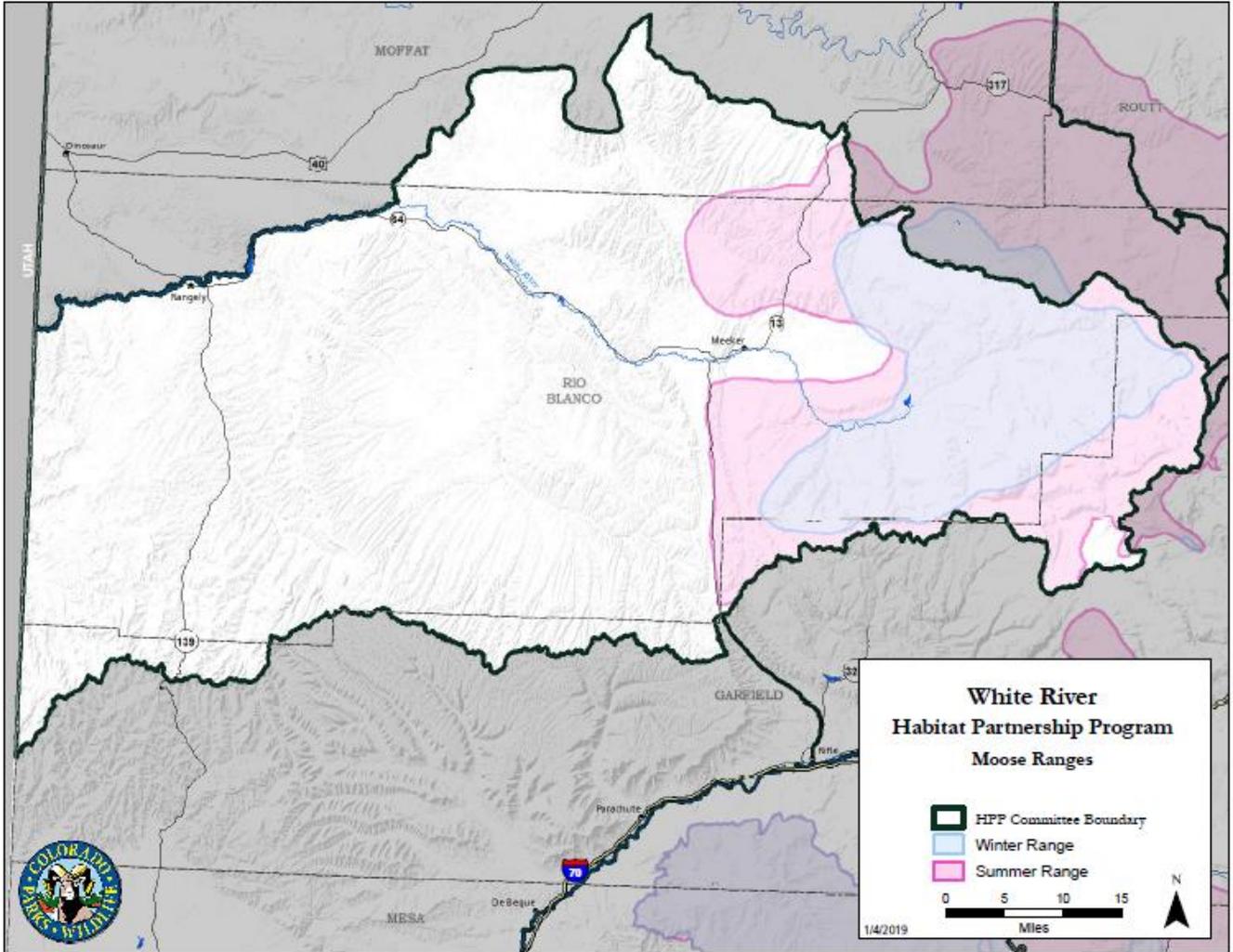
# ELK



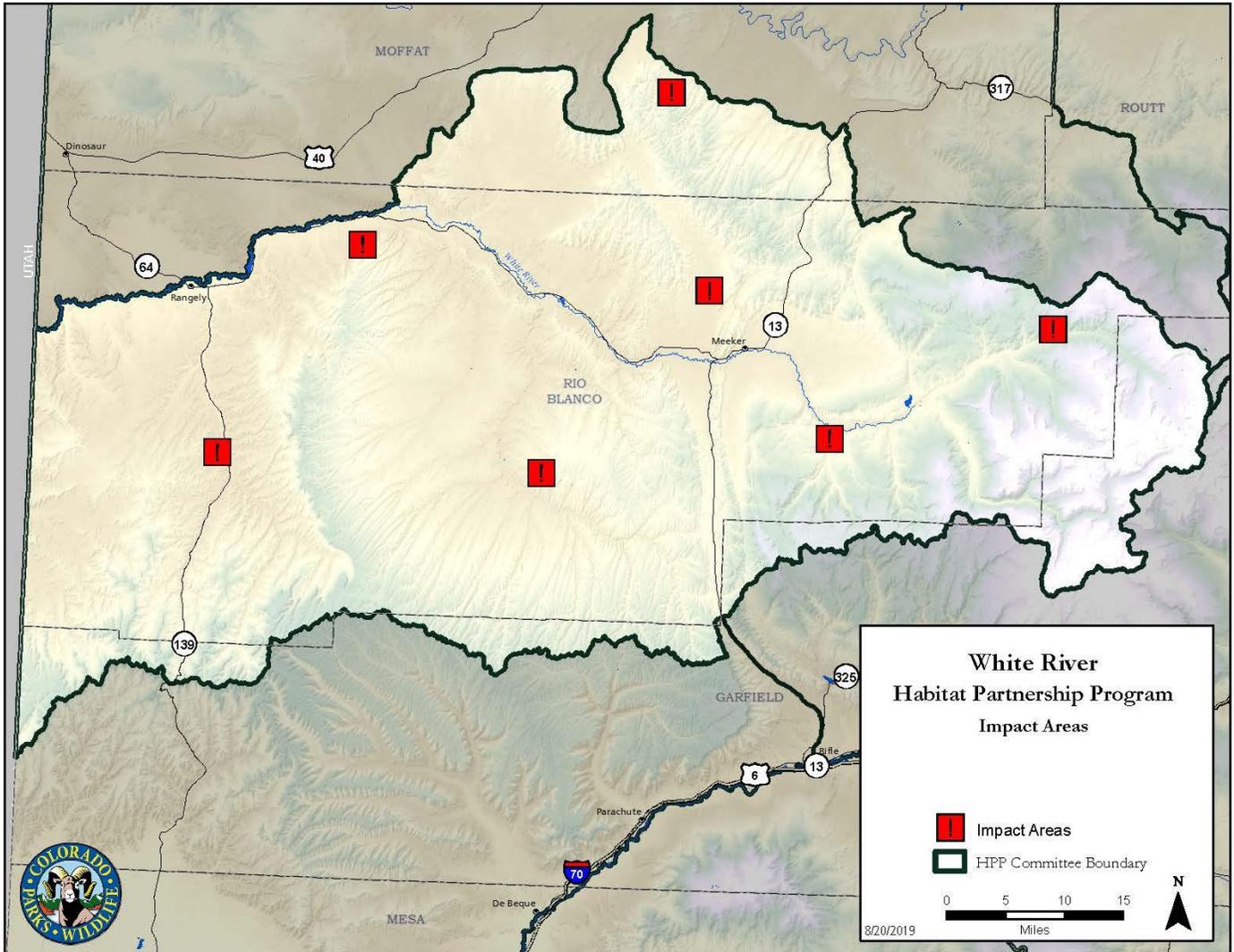
# PRONGHORN



# MOOSE



# IMPACT AREAS & DESCRIPTION



## IMPACT AREAS & SAFE HAVENS

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. Additional impact areas are “safe havens,” parcels of land where restrictions on hunting result in a significant concentration of animals and a corresponding reduction in harvest of big game animals. These animals then cause significant conflicts with fence and forage to other landowners in the area.

Other safe haven areas include private or government properties that restrict hunting to the point that efforts to meet the harvest objective are negatively impacted. Ranches that offer fee hunting and prioritize bull harvest over antlerless elk harvest become safe havens. Also falling into this category are ranches, and other landowners/managers that allow no elk hunting. 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.

The WRHPP Committee tries to resolve conflicts caused by these situations. Where possible, the Committee has undertaken habitat improvement projects in an effort to draw the elk away from the area of conflict. Impact areas on federally owned land appear to be less significant than those on private ground, primarily due to hunting pressure being much greater on public lands. The Bureau of Land Management reports that they are unaware of any conflicts caused by elk on any of the property they administer. The United States Forest Service has some areas of concern, such as Lost/Salt park areas, where concentrations of elk may have significant impacts on the vegetation but these are relatively small areas.

## **BIG GAME ISSUES AND CONFLICTS IN WRHPP AREA**

The most significant big game conflicts and issues within the WRHPP area are primarily associated with elk distribution, winter range habitat capability, and early spring elk use on public lands as elk migrate back to summer ranges. The conflicts with elk in the White River area involve several different components. Early movement toward summer ranges in the spring result in premature forage depletion causing delays of livestock pasture usage. Early migration from National Forest lands onto adjoining private property has resulted in significant loss of livestock forage available for fall use. Finally, early and sustained migration has begun to cause significant impacts to critical big game winter range. When elk from the White River Herd stage up on private lands in large bunches prior to their migration to winter ranges in the fall, or before their migration back to summer ranges in the spring, significant conflicts often occur. Conflicts include elk using irrigated hay meadows, fence damage, elk getting into unfenced hay stacks, and over-utilization of spring livestock pasture. The elk generally begin moving eastward in the spring following the green-up. Now that the White River elk herd is near the population objective, conflicts will primarily be a result of problems with elk distribution rather than an overabundance of elk. Conflicts tend to be worst during extreme weather/climatic conditions (i.e., during above average/bad winter periods and during below average/drought periods).

Hazing elk in the spring and summer along with damage and distribution hunts have helped to alleviate some of the damage. The WRHPP Committee has cooperated on many water development projects designed to help with elk and livestock distribution issues and conflicts. WRHPP has also cooperated on wildlife friendly fence construction projects along important big game migratory corridors and has provided fencing and stackyard protection materials in order to prevent concentrations of elk in agricultural areas. WRHPP has also provided panels to landowners during winter conflict periods to temporarily protect unfenced hay stacks until permanent fences could be built. Summer conflicts with elk in GMU's 23 and 24 have generally been negligible. Overall, elk conflicts in these two units have not been great over the last number of years, generally due to the pro-active efforts of both CPW and WRHPP. There is a considerable resident elk population in the Danforth Hills area of units 11 and 211. TriState Energy and Colowyo coal company have done a great deal of habitat work on their property to benefit deer, elk, and sage and sharp-tailed grouse. Portions of the Colowyo Coal Company are currently enrolled in the Ranching for Wildlife program (Morgan Creek RFW). A large portion of upper Strawberry Creek and

Price Creek are in Ranching for Wildlife Program. Conflicts with elk on private and public lands near these large RFW properties in the Danforth Hills/Axial Basin/Strawberry/Price/Maybell areas have occurred and are a concern of CPW and WRHPP. The majority of conflicts in units 11 and 211 are during winter and spring when many of these elk move to lower elevations and join other elk moving from GMU's 12, 23, and 24. The White River HPP Committee has proactively implemented HPP dispersal and distribution hunts annually from 2012-2019 in order to strategically place hunting pressure on antlerless elk and deer which are causing damage or conflicts to pastures, haystacks, and fences on private lands. Multiple stackyards have also been built/funded through White River HPP over the years to protect hay stacks along major migration corridors and to reduce winter elk conflicts on private lands.

Many of the conflicts in the past have been the result of an overpopulation of elk, as the White River Elk Herd was significantly over objective until post-hunt 2005. Post-hunt 2001, the elk population in DAU E-6 was estimated to well over 50,000 elk. However, due to extremely aggressive and creative licensing and harvest management strategies by the CPW (i.e., including either-sex 1st rifle season licenses, and antlerless private land only and late seasons/licenses), record breaking elk harvests from 2002-2005 brought the booming White River elk population back to within or close to objective. The current population objective for the White River elk herd (E-6 DAU) is 32,000 to 39,000. Currently, the elk population in DAU E-6 is estimated to be nearing the population objective at approximately 42,000 elk post-hunt 2018 and prior to the 2019 hunting season. Every reasonable effort will continue to be made over the long-term by CPW to bring the E-6 elk population down to within the E-6 DAU objective. Eventually over the long-term, the CPW plans to continue to reduce the elk population in DAU E-6 towards the lower end of the population objective range (32,000 elk) in order to further reduce fence and forage conflicts and other habitat related impacts. Fence damage remains a problem in localized areas and the WRHPP Committee plans to continue to take a proactive role in promoting new fencing methods, which could reduce fence damage.

Limited elk conflicts have also arisen from the Yellow Creek/Roan Plateau elk herd (DAU E-10) within the western portion of the WRHPP area. Although GMU 21 is mostly comprised of the Yellow Creek Elk herd (E-10 DAU) there is significant emigration and immigration of elk from both GMU 10 (E-21 DAU) and Utah's Bookcliff Elk herd. This exchange occurs most prominently along the Northern border of GMU 21, along the White River near T2N, R100W. These conflicts are mostly limited to growing alfalfa and fence damage during summer and early fall. Heavy utilization of spring livestock pastures by elk in the East Douglas Creek, West Douglas Creek, and Park Canyon areas have also created conflict with landowners. The past efforts to address these conflicts have included hazing the animals with propane canons and cracker shells along with game damage and HPP dispersal hunts. These measures have had limited, short term desired effects. Habituation to hazing and avoidance of harvest by becoming nocturnal, have defeated a long term solution to this problem area. The WRHPP committee has cost-shared on alfalfa fertilization and reseeding of agricultural fields in order to offset the heavy utilization and crop damage caused by elk in hayfields along the White River. WRHPP has also cooperated in multiple water projects on BLM permits and private lands to help improve water distribution/availability and resolve conflicts. Effective manipulation of the elk herd behavior in this area may be accomplished by a continuation

of these practices, along with strategic water development, reduction of nearby Pinyon-Juniper bedding areas and patches of isolated hiding cover (i.e., tamarisk patches along White River). In addition, the use of prescribed fire or mechanical habitat treatments designed to set back the seral stages of the mountain shrub communities in select areas of surrounding BLM may also be effective at reducing these conflicts with elk.

One of the biggest challenges in achieving an adequate elk harvest annually in WRHPP area is elk seeking refuge on large blocks of private lands to avoid hunting pressure. This is particularly a problem in the White River E-6 DAU since 41% of the land is privately owned, almost 60% of which is elk winter range. Elk hunting is big business in northwestern Colorado for some landowners, while other landowners do not allow hunting. Private landowners with hunting operations can make a substantial portion of their income from leasing to or outfitting for hunters. The demand is for bull hunting. Many landowners will not jeopardize their bull hunting operations by allowing cow hunters on their property during the regular rifle seasons. The minimal hunting pressure on private land during the regular hunting seasons often results in sanctuary situations for antlerless elk, making them unavailable for harvest and increases the potential for these elk to become problem/damage causing animals later in the winter as the elk migrate west. For management purposes, due to the inaccessibility of elk to hunters during earlier regular rifle seasons, more of an emphasis has been placed on 3rd, 4th, and late season elk hunts to achieve antlerless harvest objectives. In order to manage this population to the long term DAU population objective, it is important for CPW and WRHPP to be able to work cooperatively with private landowners and federal land management agencies.

In addition to elk distribution issues created by the private land refuge situations, changing climate patterns resulting in range expansions and year round elk use in non-traditional areas, habitat loss and encroachment to development and summer recreational use on public lands have all contributed to the challenges of managing elk in the White River HPP area. It should be recognized that local issues and problems associated with elk distribution can and will occur at any population level and it is beyond the scope of the White River E-6 DAU plan to address some of these elk distribution issues.

In general, significant issues and conflicts with other big game species within the WRHPP area (i.e., mule deer, pronghorn antelope, and moose) have been minimal to non-existent. A handful of forage and crop related conflicts from mule deer and pronghorn antelope in the past have been addressed by CPW via the game damage program and via WRHPP distribution/dispersal hunts. This trend is due to the fact that mule deer and antelope population numbers have declined significantly within the WRHPP area for a variety of reasons (habitat, weather, disease, predators), in contrast to the thriving elk population. Interestingly, many private landowners near Meeker that are concerned about the dwindling mule deer numbers in particular have approached WRHPP with habitat improvement proposals designed cooperatively by CPW to increase abundance and seasonal use of private lands by mule deer and also elk. No known moose conflicts have occurred within WRHPP area.

## **ENHANCEMENT AREAS**

Enhancement areas are locations where there are opportunities on public or private lands to improve/protect/enhance habitats to reduce or mitigate conflicts with other interests. As mentioned above, enhancement areas should be located near conflict areas in order to minimize the impacts of the elk causing the conflict. Oak Ridge and Jensen State Wildlife Areas are prime examples within the WRHPP area where CPW and WRHPP have collaboratively implemented many habitat enhancement projects long-term. Other enhancement areas include the considerable number of private ranches that have been encumbered by CPW with perpetual conservation easements within the WRHPP area (State Habitat Areas). These are the areas/properties where the WRHPP committee is currently trying to identify and focus efforts for implementation of the long-term landscape scale habitat manipulation project.

CPW Terrestrial biologist Darby Finley has collected a significant amount of long-term spatial data and seasonal habitat use information on both mule deer and elk within the WRHPP area. It is a very high priority of WRHPP to help CPW continue to collect and analyze spatial use data for key big game animals in order to better understand their seasonal habitat use patterns within the huge WRHPP landscape. Analyzing data and gathering feedback from these spatial big game research/monitoring projects will be invaluable to CPW and WRHPP for selection of the most cost-effective habitat enhancement sites across the landscape and will be critical for maintaining sustainable and healthy big game populations within the WRHPP area.

## **NON-CONFLICT AREAS**

Non-conflict areas are locations where concentrations of big game animals are tolerated. These can be on private property where the ranch is managed to include significant populations of big game-mainly elk- or government owned land where big game are considered to be part of their multiple use philosophy such as U. S. Forest Service, BLM, or Colorado State Forest lands. We have found that non-conflict areas can change over time-especially with changes in ownership. In recent years, a considerable number of large private ranches in the Meeker area have been purchased by landowners that are specifically interested in managing primarily for high quality mule deer and elk hunting opportunities, rather than focusing on traditional agricultural enterprises. These types of landowners have been great partners with CPW and WRHPP on many pro-active landscape scale habitat improvement projects from 2009-2019. It is anticipated that this trend will continue and will offer tremendous habitat improvement and enhancement opportunities to WRHPP.

## **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.

## STRATEGY OPTIONS FOR DISTRIBUTION MANAGEMENT HUNTS

The WRHPP Plan will utilize distribution and harvest hunts primarily to move animals away from conflict areas and to assist CPW with meeting their big game management objectives. The following criteria will be applied:

1. The WRHPP committee will work closely with Colorado Parks and Wildlife to recommend distribution management hunts for specific conflict areas but also to help CPW with achieving their big game management objectives. Such recommendations include number of licenses needed, time/season/date for hunt to occur in, specific private and/or public land locations to be included.
2. Hunts will be conducted as provided for in Parks and Wildlife Commission regulations.
3. As the number of licenses available for these hunts is restricted by Parks and Wildlife, this strategy will be used in most cases not to reduce big game populations per say, but primarily to effect positive animal distribution and assist CPW with achieving management objectives.
4. As these hunts are designed to provide conflict resolution and to assist CPW with achieving its big game management objectives, participating ranches will be considered only if they do not charge a fee of any kind to hunters with these special licenses. This also includes guides or outfitters or any other representative of the property owner.
5. HPP could be used for the coordination of distribution management hunts.

## 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; Agency Preferred)

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. Higher consideration will be given to projects proposed in/near past project areas.

## **PRIORITY AREAS**

This plan does not identify prioritized geographic conflict areas in which to expend allocated resources within the WRHPP area. No area within the plan boundary has a higher priority over another. The WRHPP plan provides for implementation of the identified management strategies over a broad geographic area based on meeting the objectives of the defined goals. This will be accomplished by implementing the identified management strategies throughout the WRHPP area as specific issues or conflicts are identified and brought to the attention of the Committee. However, emphasis and priority will be given to areas that the Committee feels will lead to long-term solutions.

It is the desire of the WRHPP Committee to broaden our methods of operation. We recognize the need to develop long-term habitat treatment plans for identified priority areas. Habitat management plans for priority areas should better address long-term resource needs and issues with the hope of better, more permanent solutions. During the next ten years the WRHPP Committee will work toward the consideration of several candidate priority areas for implementation of the long-term landscape scale habitat manipulation project. Selection of these areas for consideration will be based on knowledge of identified resource needs and issues, landowner interest, availability of resource data, and any other available information. We will then work toward developing a long-term habitat treatment plan for selected priority areas across the landscape.

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 feels strongly that the ability to be responsive on

short notice is one of our strengths. We will work to continue to improve our planning and project review process without limiting our flexibility and potential for success.

## OPERATING GUIDELINES

The need for the proposed project is clearly described and includes a discussion of either the agricultural conflict or how the project will assist CPW with achieving big game management objectives, and the effects of the proposed project on big-game distribution (i.e. completed application form). Project applicant should work with local CPW staff prior to submitting a proposal to the WRHPP committee to make sure that it is a well-designed project proposal that will be supported by CPW and that is eligible for HPP funding. Additional guidelines that may be used for evaluating WRHPP project proposals include but are not limited to:

- WRHPP does not have any set cost-share limit or any minimum required contribution level that is required by a landowner or project applicant. However, WRHPP typically recommends that project applicants strive for requesting no more than 50% cost-share rate on most project proposals. However, WRHPP retains the authority to approve any level of cost-share rate on project proposals, if WRHPP committee members deem it as justified depending on the totality of the circumstances.
- WRHPP meetings will be scheduled and held periodically throughout the year at the Meeker CPW office based primarily upon need/demand for approval of project proposals and availability of WRHPP Committee members; WRHPP meetings will not be held on a regularly scheduled and monthly basis.
- Unless additional information is needed or requested by WRHPP committee members, decisions of project approval/participation/funding will be given at time of the proposal presentation to the WRHPP committee.

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 State HPP Council then allocates funding to the individual HPP committees. The White 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.

**BASE BUDGET ALLOCATION:**

Habitat Manipulation	45%
Fence Construction & Repairs	10%
Game Damage (Stackyards, etc.)	2%
Information & Education	5%
Conservation Easements & NEPA Related Activities	1%
Monitoring	35%
Administration	2%

TOTAL ALLOCATION: 100%

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

## **CURRENT & FORESEEABLE ISSUES**

### **HOUSING DEVELOPMENT**

The need to preserve and perpetuate habitat has become more evident in recent years. Any activity that serves to fragment large, contiguous blocks of land into smaller tracts of multiple ownership, are thought to have negative influences on wildlife habitat, reproductive success, and long-term survival of wildlife populations. This is especially true on private land, and more specifically, on private land bordering public lands where small parcels of land are sold and converted into housing developments. While this is not happening in the White River Valley on a large scale, it is occurring incrementally and has the potential to intensify. Additionally, absentee ownership, summer homes, and trophy ranches can modify wildlife habitat which may cause crop/structural damage, disrupt migration patterns, and create artificial sanctuaries.

### **CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE**

The prevalence of CWD has increased dramatically in the WRHPP area and poses significant management concerns for CPW. HPP may play a role in helping CPW control and/or reduce this disease, primarily through its collaborative efforts and working relationships with private landowners in the WRHPP area.

## **RECREATION**

Many other recreational activities are becoming very popular on public lands in the WRHPP area, especially summer camping, mountain biking, hiking and off highway vehicle (OHV) trails and activities. The additional trail systems and human disturbance caused by increased recreational OHV activity in particular are presenting a significant threat and conflict to big game management in the White River HPP area. These additional recreational activities within the WRHPP area are having direct and indirect impacts to big game animals and are significantly altering seasonal habitat use and distribution patterns.

## **ENERGY DEVELOPMENT**

Oil and gas development is having impacts on wildlife in portions of the White River HPP area (i.e., the Piceance Basin and Roan Plateau/Unit 22 and Douglas Creek/Unit 21) as these activities further fragment important wildlife habitat. The majority of the mineral rights under the Piceance Basin, Roan Plateau, and Douglas Creek areas have been leased to oil and gas companies, which serves as important seasonal habitat for big game animals and many other wildlife species. Oil and gas development in the western portion of the WRHPP area present many challenges to managing wildlife populations, including sage grouse and non-game species, in the future.

## **GREATER SAGE GROUSE**

Presently there is a great deal of interest and activity to define sufficient protective measures for greater sage-grouse (GrSG) at the state and national levels. With the potential listing of these birds as threatened or endangered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), anything that could potentially impact these birds needs to be closely scrutinized. Three recognized GrSG populations exist within the WRHPP area: the Meeker-White River, Parachute-Piceance-Roan, and Northwest Colorado populations. The ability to do habitat treatments in areas occupied by GrSG may be restricted, limited, altered, prohibited and, in some situations, may be encouraged and expanded. The CPW statewide greater sage-grouse management plan has specific guidelines and recommendations for treatment areas.

## **WOLVES**

Concerns exist about the potential impact that gray wolves could have to the long-term health, survival and sustainability of mule deer, elk, pronghorn and moose populations if wolf numbers increase in the future either through wolves naturally migrating into Colorado or through any potential wolf reintroductions in the future.

## **WILD HORSES**

Wild horses currently exist within the western portions of the WRHPP area, within the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area (PEDHMA). Under federal law, wild horses are managed by the BLM. Horses pose significant long-term threats to rangeland health and are a major concern for future livestock and wildlife habitat improvement projects.