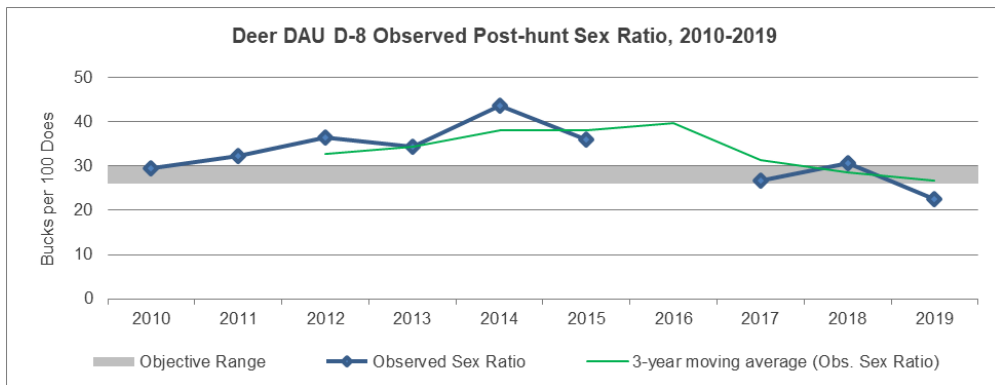
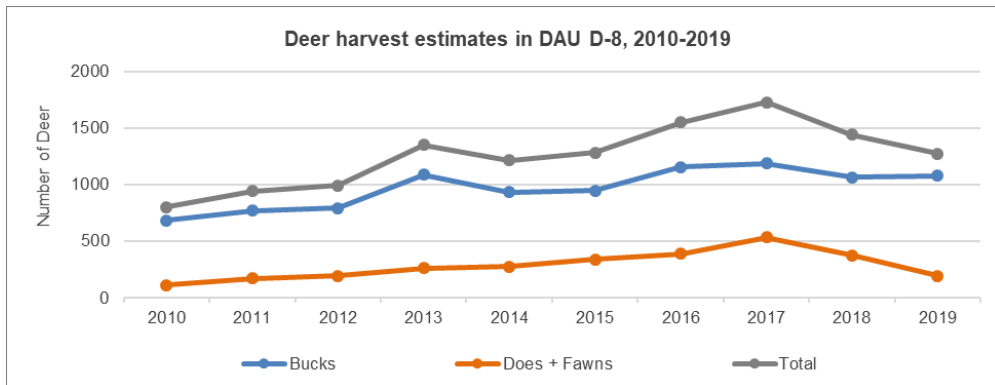
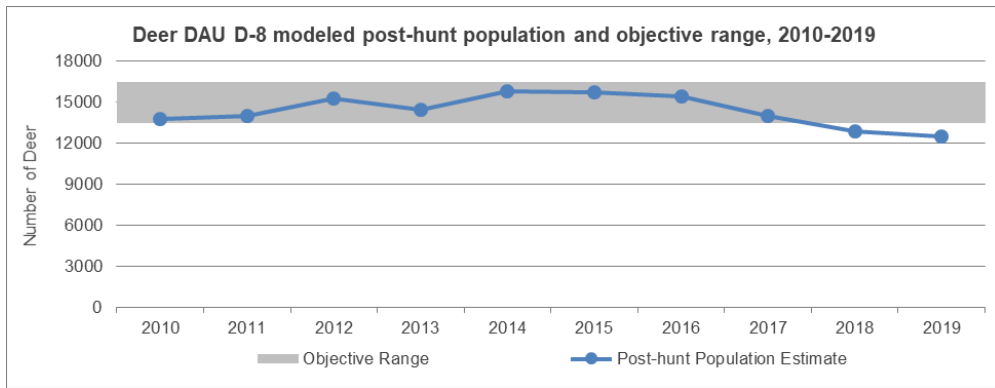


# State Bridge Deer Herd Management Plan, DAU D-8

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

<b>State Bridge Deer Herd (DAU D-8)</b>	<b>GMUs: 15, 35, 36, 45, and 361</b>
<u>Post-hunt population:</u>	
Current (2009 plan) Population Objective:	13,500-16,500 deer
Current (post-hunt 2019) Estimate:	12,476 deer
Preferred New Population Objective	<u>10,000-14,000 deer (slightly below carrying capacity)</u>
<u>Post-hunt Sex Ratio (Bucks:100 Does):</u>	
Current (2009 plan) Sex Ratio Objective:	26-30 bucks per 100 does
Current Sex Ratio Estimate (3-year average):	27 bucks per 100 does
Preferred New Sex Ratio Objective:	<u>26-30 bucks per 100 does (status quo)</u>



## **Background**

The State Bridge DAU (D-8) is located in northwest Colorado and consists of GMUs 15, 35, 36, 45, and 361. D-8 contains parts of the Eagle, Colorado, and Yampa River watersheds. Counties included in the DAU are Routt, Grand, Eagle, and Pitkin. The towns of Vail, Minturn, Avon, Edwards, Eagle, and Gypsum lie along Interstate-70, which cuts through the central-southern portion of the DAU. D-8 covers a land area of 3,765 sq. km (1,453 sq. miles), approximately 80% of which is public lands.

In the 2009 herd management plan, CPW lowered D-8's population objective to account for the changing landscape and set an objective range of 13,500-16,500 deer. Over the past 10 years of managing for this population objective, the population has fluctuated within the objective range, both almost exceeding and later dropping below the range. We have adjusted license quotas widely in both directions to attempt to stabilize the population within objective range. D-8's most recent population estimate in 2019 is 12,476 deer, which is below the current objective range.

The herd's sex ratio objective was set in the 2009 DAU plan at a range of 26-30 bucks:100 does. Due to conservative harvest management during the first several years, the buck ratio increased well beyond the objective range. As CPW restored buck license quotas incrementally over the past 10 years, the buck ratio finally appears to have dropped down to within the current objective range in the past few years. The current 3-year (2017-2019) average is 27 bucks:100 does.

D-8's herd management plan is now just over 10 years old and is due for renewal. This revision will involve a review of the herd's objectives, current status, and a consideration of changes in the objectives for the next 10 years.

## **Significant Issues**

D-8 is one of the larger deer herds in the state, but as with many herds in western Colorado, the cumulative impacts of decades of human population growth and the direct and indirect impacts of human activities have continued to diminish both the quality and quantity of habitat and its carrying capacity for deer. Land development, fragmentation by roads and trails, increased human activity on public lands, and suppression of large-scale wildfires have long-term and perhaps even irreversible effects on the landscape. The proliferation of all forms of outdoor recreation on public lands has continued since the 2009 herd management plan. Continued conversion of habitat on private lands into residential housing developments is expected over the next decade or so, especially in the units near Interstate-70, leading to further loss of mule deer winter and summer range habitat. Vehicle traffic also continues to increase as the region's human population grows, and wildlife-vehicle collisions continue to be a concern.

## **Management Objective Recommendations**

CPW recommends a new population objective range of 10,000-14,000 deer (Alternative 2). This alternative would lower and widen the objective range to  $\pm 2,000$  deer around a midpoint of 12,000 deer. The current (2009 Plan) objective of 13,500-16,500 deer is likely set too close to the habitat carrying capacity and is also too narrow of a range, making a stable equilibrium population difficult to achieve. Over the past decade, the population swung between both the bottom and top ends of the current objective range, requiring CPW to increase and then drastically decrease license quotas. The proposed wider, reduced objective range of 10,000-14,000 deer would manage for a population level slightly below habitat carrying capacity and would give CPW more latitude in maintaining license quotas at a more consistent level, giving D-8 hunters more predictability from year to year when applying for licenses. CPW would still adjust quotas depending on the trajectory of the population size and where it sits relative to the objective range, but the adjustments may not be as drastic under a wider, lower population objective range compared to the current objective range.

CPW recommends maintaining the current sex ratio objective of 26-30 bucks:100 does that was set in the 2009 D-8 Plan. This range is a moderate sex ratio at which the herd is still managed primarily for ample buck hunting opportunity. The maturity of available bucks would be about the same as it currently is. Buck license quotas would likely remain similar to the recent few years' quotas to keep the observed sex ratio within the objective. We expect that by managing for this moderate sex ratio, chronic wasting disease (CWD) prevalence rate in bucks in D-8 will remain below 5%. However if the CWD prevalence rate reaches 5% or higher, then other measures including a revision of the sex ratio objective downward may be needed to suppress CWD in the herd.

## **Strategies to Address Issues and Management Concerns and to Achieve Herd Management Objectives**

CPW will continue to work collaboratively with our partners in the federal land management agencies, private landowners, county governments, local municipalities and NGOs to protect and enhance the remaining mule deer habitat. Important habitat conservation methods include habitat treatments, conservation easements or land acquisitions, maintaining landscape connectivity and movement corridors, and adhering to seasonal recreation closures on winter range areas.

To achieve the updated population objective and to maintain the current sex ratio objective, CPW will continue to set licenses annually to provide sufficient buck and doe hunting opportunity for the public and to use hunting as a management tool to keep deer densities and buck ratios at moderate levels to discourage the spread and prevalence of chronic wasting disease. CWD prevalence will continue to be monitored through periodic mandatory testing and through voluntary sample submissions.