

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Middle Park Deer Herd (DAU D-9)	Game Management Units (GMUs): 18, 27, 28, 37, 181, and 371
Post-hunt Population: Previous Objective: 10,500-12,500 deer; Estimate for 2019: 16,668	
Preferred Alternative: <u>Increase and widen population objective 10,500-14,000</u>	
Post-hunt Sex Ratio (Bucks:100 Does): Previous Objective: 30-35. Post-hunt (3-year average) 41	
Preferred Alternative: <u>Status quo 30-35 Bucks:100 Does</u>	

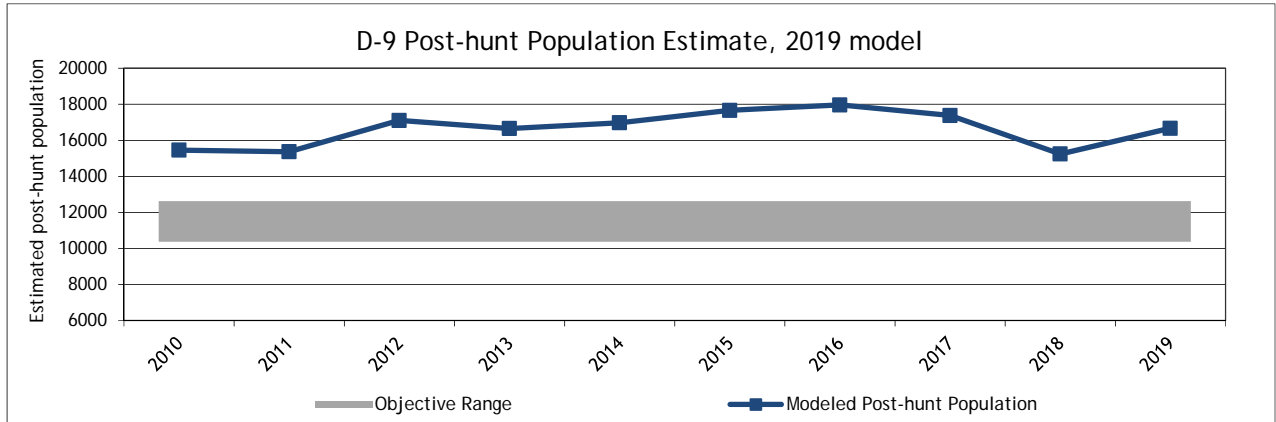


Figure 1. D-9 Post-hunt population estimate and objective 2010-2019.

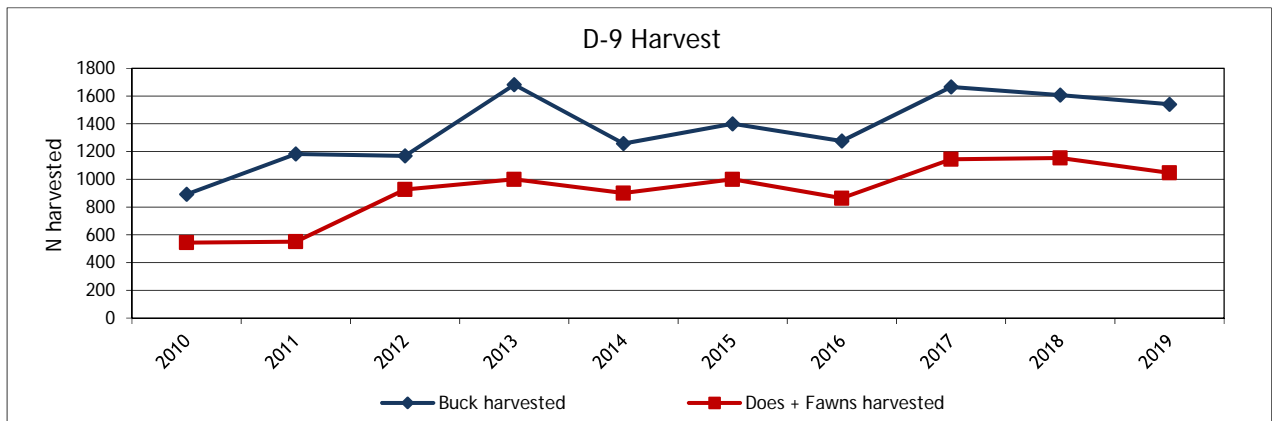


Figure 2. D-9 buck and antlerless estimated harvest 2010-2019.

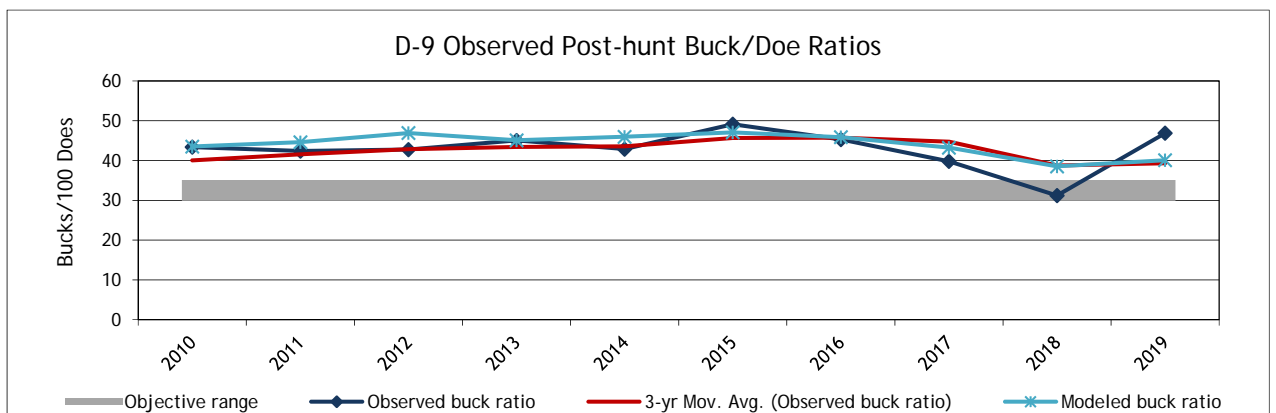


Figure 3. D-9 observed and modeled post-hunt sex ratio (bucks:100 does), and objective 2010-2019.

BACKGROUND

The Middle Park Deer Data Analysis Unit (DAU) D-9 is located primarily in Grand and Summit Counties in north-central Colorado. The DAU is approximately 2,387 square miles, and land ownership is 25% Private, 9% BLM, 56% USFS, 6% NPS, 3% State Land Board, and <1% CPW.

From 1989-2009, the population objective for D-9 was 10,500 animals. The deer population was relatively high in D-9 during the early 1980's through the early 1990's. Since that time, the herd slightly declined, rebounded, and for the last ten years has remained above the current objective range of 10,500-12,500 which was established in 2009. The current model estimates the deer population at 16,668 animals. Although trends of many mule deer populations have been declining throughout Colorado and the Western U.S, the D-9 DAU has remained productive.

The Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) has conducted aerial sex and age composition surveys in D-9 since the late 1960's. Although the sex ratio was below objective until the late-1990s, these ratios have generally increased and have remained above objective since (in large part due to totally limited male licenses implemented in 1998). For the last 40 years, the sex ratio in the DAU averaged 32.2 bucks:100 does. Post-hunt classifications in 2019 estimated 46.9 bucks:100 does (most recent 3-yr average; 39.3 bucks:100 does). Fawn production in the DAU has been good over the years, generally ranging between a low of 40 fawns:100 does and a high of 90 fawns:100 does. For the last 40 years, the fawn ratio in the DAU has averaged 69 fawns:100 does (most recent 3-yr average; 70 fawns:100 does). In 1999, CPW instituted a juvenile (fawn) and doe survival study (in 2010, bucks were added to the study) to more closely monitor survival rates which allows for more precise modeling.

Deer harvest in DAU D-9 has fluctuated over time, primarily because of license allocation. The 40-year average for antlered and antlerless deer harvest is around 1,100 and 600, respectively. The three-year average for antlered and antlerless deer harvest is 1,600 and 1,100, respectively. The Middle Park deer herd has been managed with hunter opportunity in mind, and thus buck and doe license allocation has been aggressive throughout the years.

Significant Issues

The proliferation of all forms of outdoor recreation on public lands, land development, fragmentation by roads and trails, and suppression of wildfires has the potential to impact habitat quality and quantity for the Middle Park deer herd. Although Middle Park has not been affected in some of these areas at the same rate as other deer herds in CO, the concern remains high that if not kept in check, loss of quality habitat could eventually negatively affect this herd. Although Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) prevalence remains low in D-9, this disease continues to be a concern for managers.

Management Objective Recommendations

CPW recommends a new population objective range of 10,500-14,000. This alternative will keep the previous lower end of the objective, while widening the overall objective and increasing the upper end. CPW recommends maintaining the current sex ratio objective of 30-35 bucks:100 does.

Strategies for Addressing Management Issues and Achieving 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 encourage herd productivity and discourage the spread of CWD.

