DRAFT WET MOUNTAIN
DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN EXTENSION
-
DATA ANALYSIS UNIT D-34

GAME MANAGEMENT UNITS
69, 84, 86, 691, 861

APRIL 2020

ALLEN VITT, Wildlife Biologist
Colorado Parks and Wildlife
600 Reservoir Road
Pueblo, CO 81005

This herd management plan was approved by the Colorado Wildlife Commission on XXX

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wet Mountain Deer Herd (DAU D-34)	**GMUs: 69, 84, 86, 691 & 861**

Posthunt Population: Previous Objective: 16,500-17,500 deer; Estimate for 2019: 11,400. **Preferred Alternative: Maintain population objective of 16,500-17,500**

Posthunt Sex Ratio (Bucks:100 Does): Previous Objective: 20-25. Posthunt 2019 observed: 31; modeled: 28. **Preferred Alternative: Status Quo 20-25**
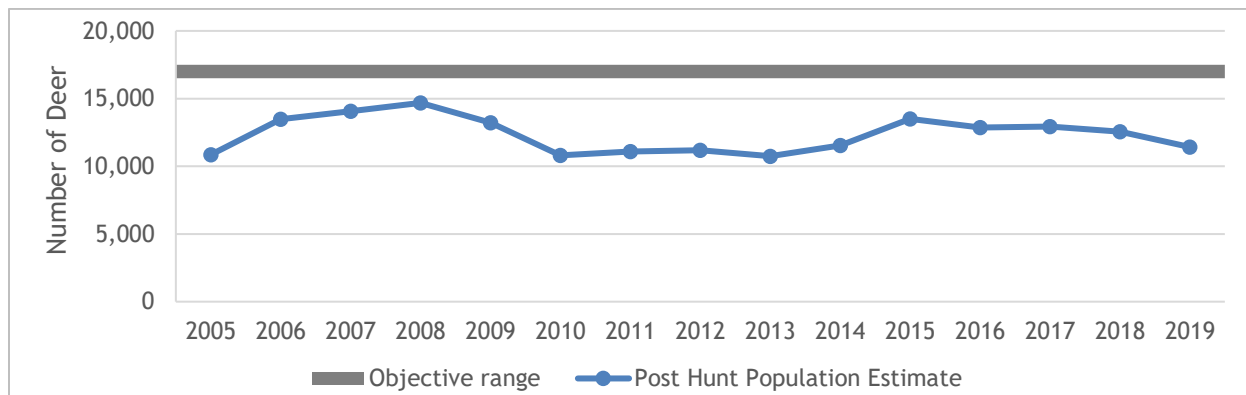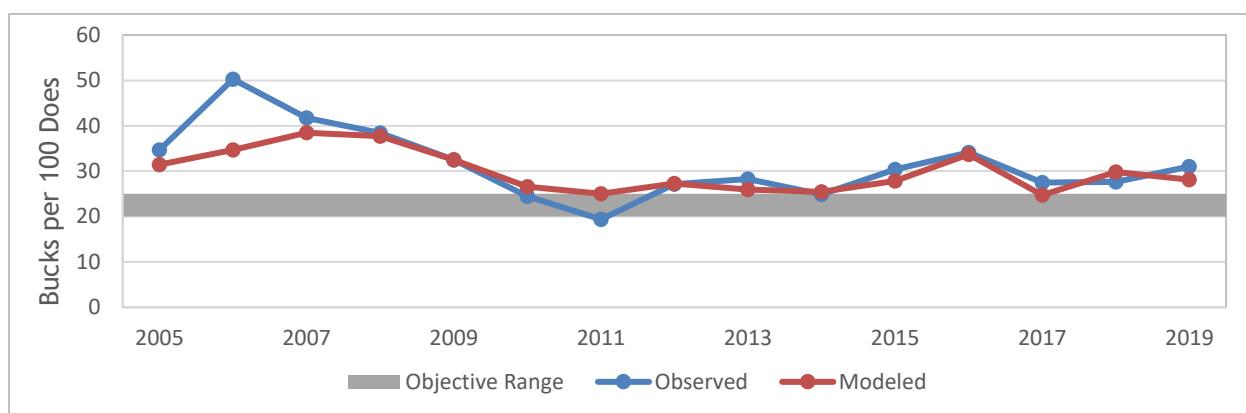
Figure 1. D-34 Post-hunt population estimate since 2005

Figure 2. D-34 observed and predicted post-hunt bucks:100 does since 2005.
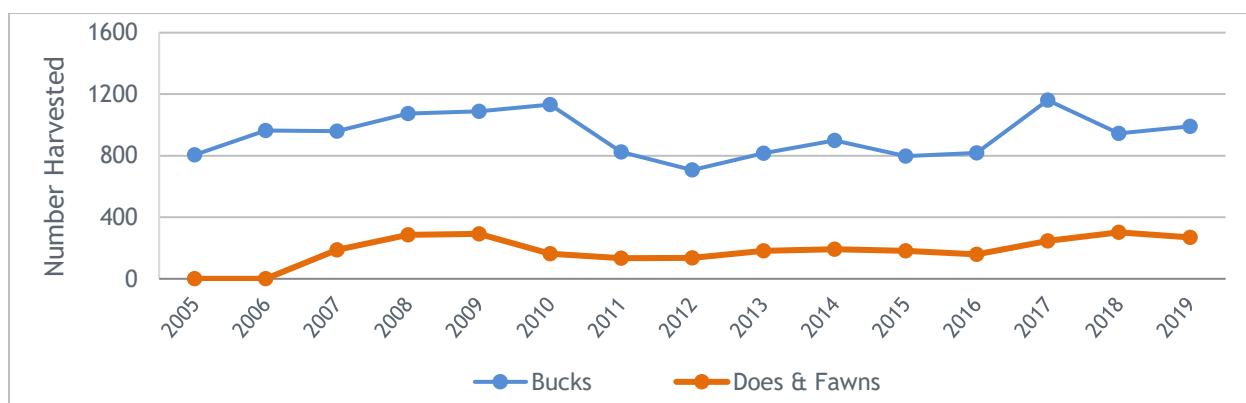

Figure 3. D-34 harvest since 2005.

D-34 Background

The Wet Mountain (D-34) deer herd is an important resource for SE Colorado because it offers a significant deer population in close proximity to the towns of Pueblo and Colorado Springs. The management area has significant amounts of public lands to hunt and view deer.

The first population objective, adopted in 1987, for D-34 was 22,000 deer. At that time, the estimated post-season population was close to 15,000 deer. This objective was then revised in 2005 to our current objective of 16,500-17,500 deer with a sex ratio objective of 20-25 bucks per 100 does. Prior to 2005, we had limited funding for inventory flights in D-34, but since then, CPW has made it a priority to consistently collect data in D-34 and we now have a more defensible population model for the management area. The 2019 post season population estimate was 11,400 deer with a modeled estimate of 28 bucks per 100 does.

In the winter of 2016/2017, a nine-year research project was initiated in D-34, and the Cripple Creek (D-16) deer herd to the north, to examine the mule deer population response to changes in cougar density. In 2017, the first sample of cougars, does, and fawns were captured and fitted with GPS radio collars for this study. This project will provide a better understanding of how cougar harvest could be used as a deer management tool. In addition, it will provide valuable information on deer body condition, deer movements and neonate fawn mortality, which can better refine our population model and objectives in the future.

In developing this Herd Management Plan (HMP) Extension, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) sought input from the Sange De Cristo Habitat Partnership Program (HPP) Committee, and posted the draft HMP Extension on the CPW website for a 30-day comment period.

D-34 Significant Issues: 1) Ongoing deer/cougar research study, 2) Housing development and habitat fragmentation, 3) Conversion of farmland and rangeland to marijuana cultivation & 4) Urban deer issues

CPW Recommendation to the Wildlife Commission

Population and Sex Ratio Objectives: The CPW recommendation is to extend the current population objective of 16,500-17,500 deer and a sex ratio of 20-25 bucks per 100 does for the life of the plan. This will allow CPW to evaluate the results of the deer/cougar study before suggesting management changes.

Strategies for Addressing Management Issues and Achieving Objectives

CPW has limited ability to affect several of the management issues identified in D-34, including housing development and conversion of farmland and rangeland. However, we will seek opportunities to conserve land through fee title purchase of conservation easements. We will seek opportunities, working with land management agencies and private landowners, to improve habitat. For urban deer issues, local wildlife managers are working with each community to establish methodologies that will attempt to alleviate residential concerns.

Annually, we will evaluate where the D-34 deer herd is relative to the population and sex ratio objectives set forth in this plan. We will set hunting licenses numbers with the goal of moving the population towards the objectives.