

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Middle Park Pronghorn Herd (DAU PH-37)	GMUs: 15, 18, 26, 27, 28, 37, 181, 231 and 371
Post-hunt Population: Previous Objective: 630 pronghorn; Modeled estimate for 2019: 816	
Preferred Alternative: <u>Increase and widen population objective 600-800</u>	
Pre-hunt Sex Ratio (Bucks:100 Does): Previous Objective: 40. Pre-hunt observed (3-year average): 53	
Preferred Alternative: <u>Create range around previous objective 35-45 Bucks:100 Does</u>	

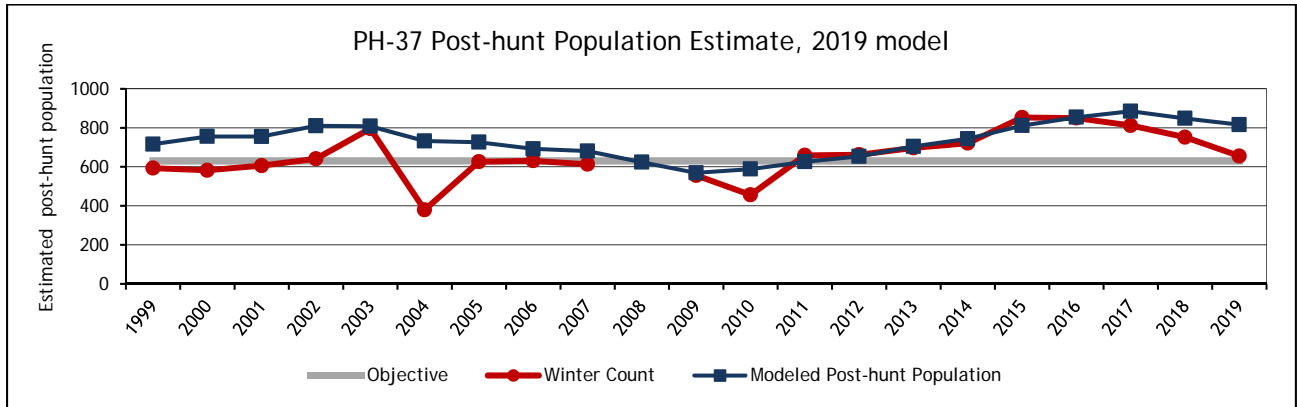


Figure 1. PH-37 Post-hunt modeled population estimate, objective and winter count 1999-2019.

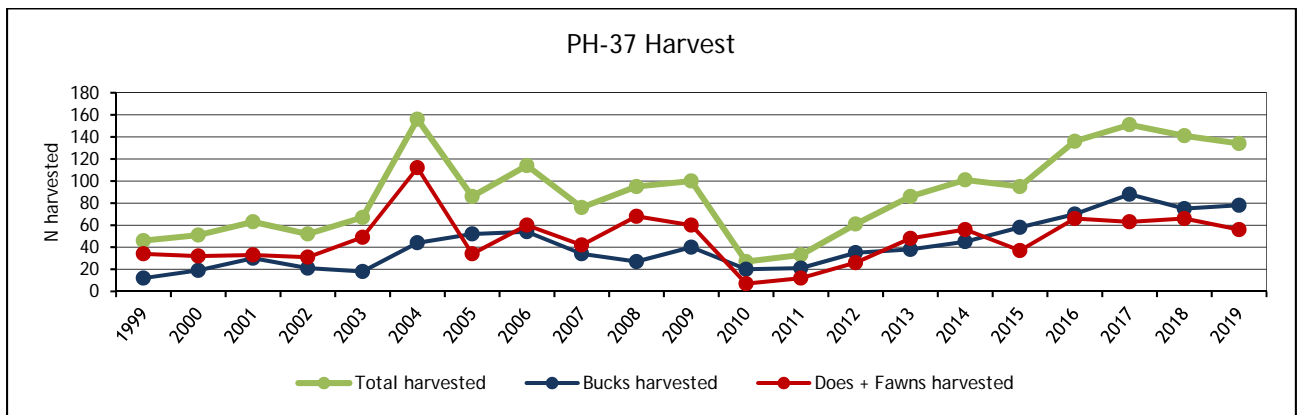


Figure 2. PH-37 total, buck and antlerless harvest 1999-2019.

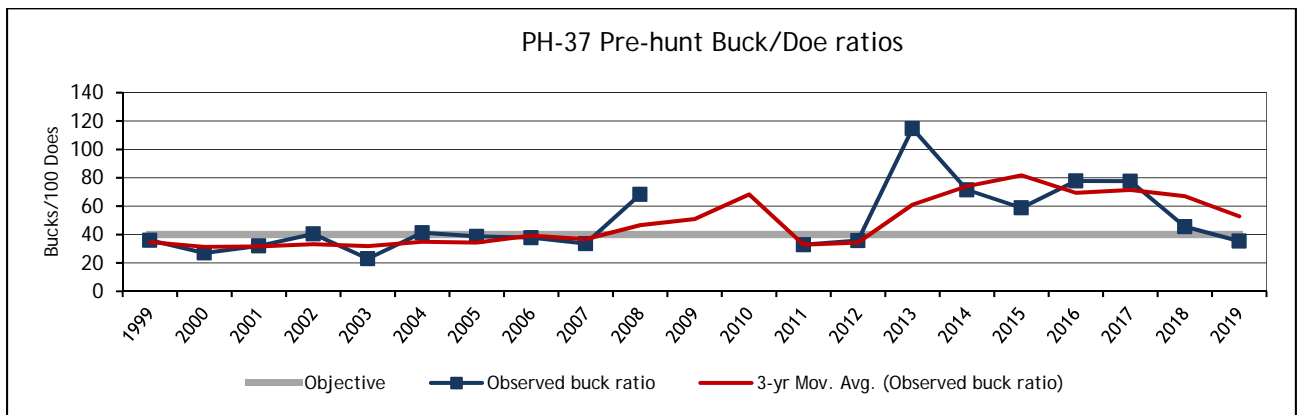


Figure 3. PH-37 observed pre-hunt sex ratio (bucks:100 does), and objective 1999-2019

Background

The majority of pronghorn in the Middle Park Pronghorn Data Analysis Unit (DAU PH-37) are located in Grand County, however there are also small groups that are a part of the DAU in Eagle, Garfield, Rio Blanco, Routt, and Summit Counties. The DAU is located in north-central Colorado, encompasses 3,298 square miles, and land ownership is 30% Private, 8% BLM, 53% USFS, 1% CPW, and 8% Other.

Although historical accounts indicate pronghorn in Middle Park were quite plentiful, by the 1920's pronghorn had been extirpated from the area. By the 1970's pronghorn naturally began to return to Middle Park and the current population estimate is 816 pronghorn. The most recent Herd Management Plan for the PH-37 DAU was completed in 1999 – at which time a population and sex ratio (bucks:100 does) objective of 630 and 40, respectively, were established.

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 affect habitat quality and quantity for the Middle Park pronghorn herd. Although Middle Park has not been impacted at the same rate as some other areas in CO, the concern remains high that if not kept in check, loss of quality habitat could eventually negatively affect this pronghorn herd. Vehicle traffic also continues to increase as the region's human population grows, and wildlife-vehicle collisions continue to be a concern.

In 2009, former Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) researcher Tom Pojar documented a spring migration of pronghorn from Middle Park to the Toponas area. As a result, discussions began in 2015 about the possible inclusion of GMUs 15, 26, and 231 into the PH-37 DAU. Historically, the small group of pronghorn in these units had not been managed as a part of a particular DAU. After much internal discussion it was determined in 2015 that as a result of documented movements (primarily winter) of pronghorn into Middle Park from GMUs 15, 26, and 231 that it is appropriate to include these pronghorn as part of the Middle Park Pronghorn Herd (i.e., PH-37). This plan reflects and addresses this inclusion.

Management Objective Recommendations

CPW recommends a new population objective range of 600-800. This alternative will create a range rather than a single objective number (1999 DAU Plan Objective is 630 pronghorn), and the upper end of the range will include current population estimates while keeping a lower end that reflects carrying capacity on severe winters.

CPW recommends a new sex ratio objective of 35-45. This alternative will create a range rather than a single objective number (1999 DAU Plan Objective is 40 bucks:100 does). This approach allows for flexibility when fluctuations in the number of bucks occurs.

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 pronghorn 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 and sex ratio objectives, 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 pronghorn densities at a level that encourages herd productivity, discourages conflict with landowners, and decreases the potential for habitat degradation.