

DRAFT
SOUTH PLATTE RIVER
DEER
MANAGEMENT PLAN
D-44

Game Management Units
91, 92, 94, 96, & 951



October 2020

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HERD MANAEMENT PLAN – D-44 (SOUTH PLATTE RIVER) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GMU's: 91, 92, 94, 96, and 951

Land Ownership: 98% Private, 2% Public

Post-Season Population:

Current Objective – 3,500–3,800; 2018 Estimate – 3,950; Future Objective – Pending

Post-Season Sex Ratio (Bucks/100 Does):

Current Objective – 35–40; 2018 Observed – 40; 2018 Modeled – 39; Future Objective – Pending

Figure I. D-44 Post-hunt Population Estimate

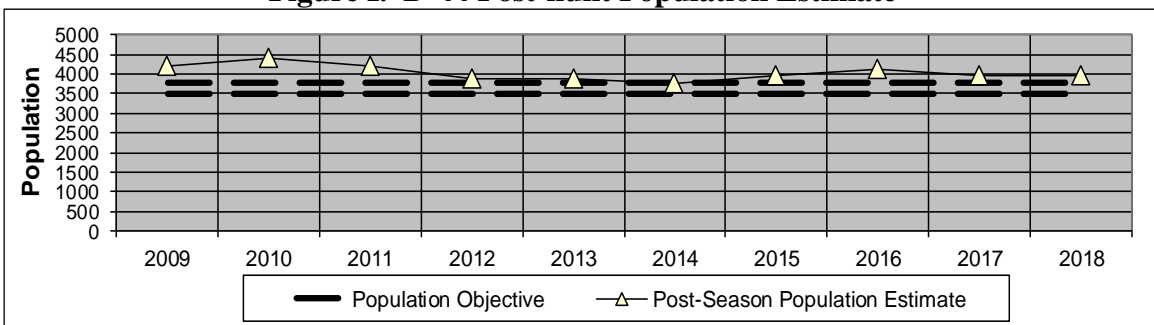


Figure II. D-44 Harvest

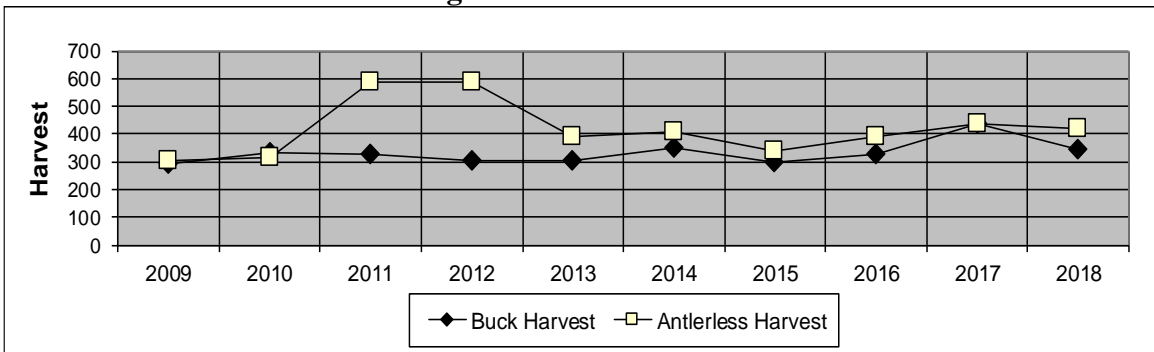
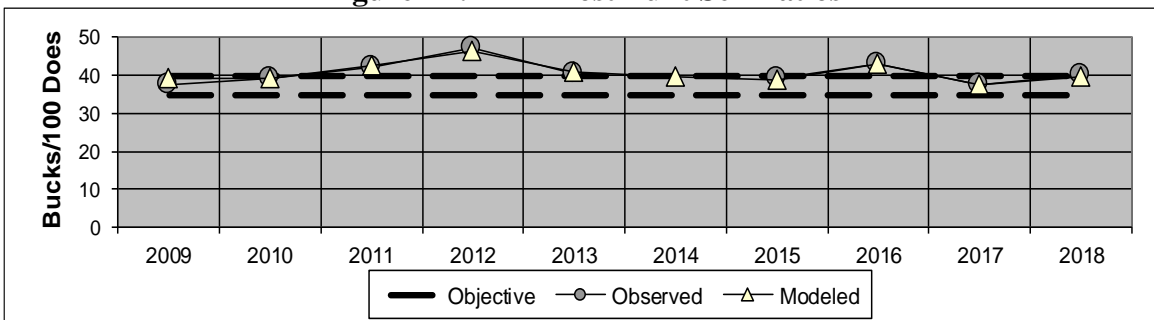


Figure III. D-44 Post-hunt Sex Ratios



Background

Over the past decade, the South Platte River deer herd has been managed under the current management plan objectives of 3,500–3,800 deer and 35–40 bucks/100 does that were established in 2009. This Herd Management Plan (HMP) and the population and sex ratio alternatives presented are the result of an update and revision of that plan.

Much of the focus in D-44, the South Platte River deer herd, has been to provide quality deer hunting opportunities by maintaining a high buck/doe ratio and a higher proportion of 3+ year-old bucks in the population. Over the past 10 years, estimated deer numbers have ranged from a high of 4,420 in 2010 to a low of 3,750 deer in 2014. The 5-year estimate average is 3,950 deer. Since 2009, the buck/doe ratio has ranged from a low of 37 bucks/100 does observed in 2009 to a high of 47 bucks/100 does observed in 2012. Over the last 5 years, the buck/doe ratio has averaged 40 bucks/100 does. Observed fawn/doe ratios have varied from a low of 52 fawns/100 does in 2011 to a high of 76 fawns/100 does in 2016 and has averaged 65 fawns/100 does over the past decade.

Significant Issues

The South Platte River is part of the endemic area for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) infection, which was first discovered in the South Platte River deer herd in 1997. In 2019, mandatory testing of harvested bucks and does revealed that CWD prevalence was 26% in mule deer bucks and 16% in whitetail bucks. Therefore, management changes will be implemented to address CWD in this herd in accordance with the CWD Response Plan. The management actions for the South Platte River deer herd may include reducing the age structure of the herd, reducing the deer density, or some combination of these management strategies.

Preferred Management Alternatives

The CPW preferred alternatives for D-44 are to manage for a post-hunt population of **3,500–4,000 deer** with an observed post-hunt sex ratio of **30–35 bucks/100 does**. Public comments supported maintaining the deer population near the current level and provide some quality buck hunting opportunities in the South Platte River deer herd. However, the public also supported implementing different management strategies to address CWD prevalence in mule deer and white-tailed deer. Therefore, the sex ratio objective will be 30–35 bucks/100 does with mule deer managed at the low end of the objective to address the higher CWD prevalence and whitetails managed at the upper end of the objective. Mule deer only buck licenses will be used to target and increase mule deer buck harvest, and general buck licenses will be increased to reduce and maintain whitetail bucks with the objective.

Other alternatives considered in this HMP are: 1) reduce the population objective to 2,800–3,200 deer, 2) increase the population objective to 4,000–4,500 deer, 3) maintain the current sex ratio objective of 35–40 bucks/100 does, and 4) reduce the sex ratio objective to 25–30 bucks/100 does.

SOUTH PLATTE RIVER DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN D-44 (GMU's 91, 92, 94, 96, & 951)

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) manages wildlife for the use, benefit, and enjoyment of the people of the state in accordance with CPW's Strategic Plan and mandates from the Parks and Wildlife Commission and the Colorado Legislature. Colorado's wildlife resources require careful and increasingly intensive management to accommodate the many and varied public demands and growing impacts from people. To manage the state's big game populations, CPW uses a "management by objective" approach (Figure 1).

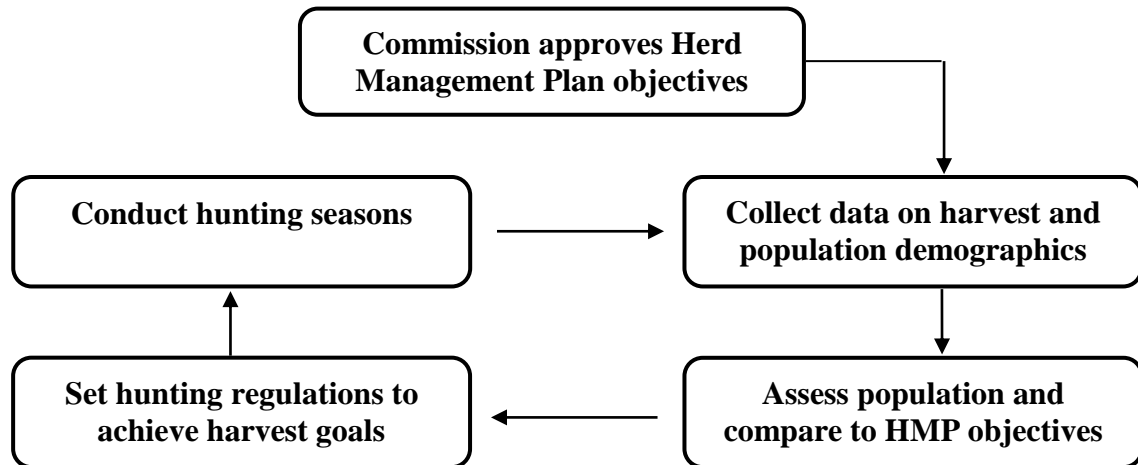


Figure 1. Management by objectives process used by CPW to manage big game populations.

Big game populations are managed to achieve population and sex ratio objective ranges established by Herd Management Plans (HMPs). The purpose of a HMP is to provide a system or process which integrates the plans and intentions of CPW with the concerns and ideas of land management agencies and interested publics in determining how a big game herd in a specific geographic area, or Data Analysis Unit (DAU), should be managed. In preparing a HMP, agency personnel attempt to balance the biological capabilities of the herd and its habitat with the public's demand for wildlife recreational opportunities. Our various publics and constituents, including the U.S Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, sports persons, guides and outfitters, private landowners, local chambers of commerce and the general public, are involved in determining the population and herd composition objectives and related issues. Public input is solicited and collected by way of surveys, public meetings, and comments to the Parks and Wildlife Commission.

A Data Analysis Unit or DAU is the geographic area that represents the year-around range of a big game herd and delineates the seasonal ranges of a specific herd while keeping interchange with adjacent herds to a minimum. A DAU includes the area where the majority of the animals in a herd are born and raised as well as where they die either as a result of hunter harvest or natural causes. Each DAU usually is composed of several game management units (GMUs) which are designed to distribute hunters within the DAU, but in some cases only one GMU makes up a DAU.

The primary decisions needed for an individual HMP are how many animals should exist in the big game herd and what is the desired sex ratio for the population of big game animals e.g., the number of males per 100 females. These numbers are referred to as the population and sex ratio objectives, respectively. Secondly, the strategies and techniques needed to reach these objectives also need to be selected. The selection of population and sex ratio objectives drive important decisions in the big game season setting process, namely, how many animals need to be harvested to maintain or move toward the objectives, and what types of hunting seasons are required to achieve the harvest objective.

The purpose of this HMP is to set population and sex ratio objectives for the South Platte River deer herd. HMPs are approved by the Parks and Wildlife Commission and is reviewed and updated approximately every 10 years.

SOUTH PLATTE RIVER DESCRIPTION

Location

The South Platte River encompasses 2,021 square miles in northeast Colorado and includes GMUs 91, 92, 94, 96, and 951 (Figure 2). This area is bounded on the north by Colorado Highway 14, Weld CRs 105, 74, Morgan CRs KK, 2, Colorado Highway 144, Morgan CRs W.5, 13.5, W, 28, W.5, Colorado Highway 71, 2nd street in Snyder, CO, Morgan CR W.7, Washington CR 58, Logan CRs 17.7 and 6, U.S. Highways 6 and 138 and the Nebraska border; on the east and south by Interstate 76 and Colorado Highway 7 and on the west by Interstate 25.

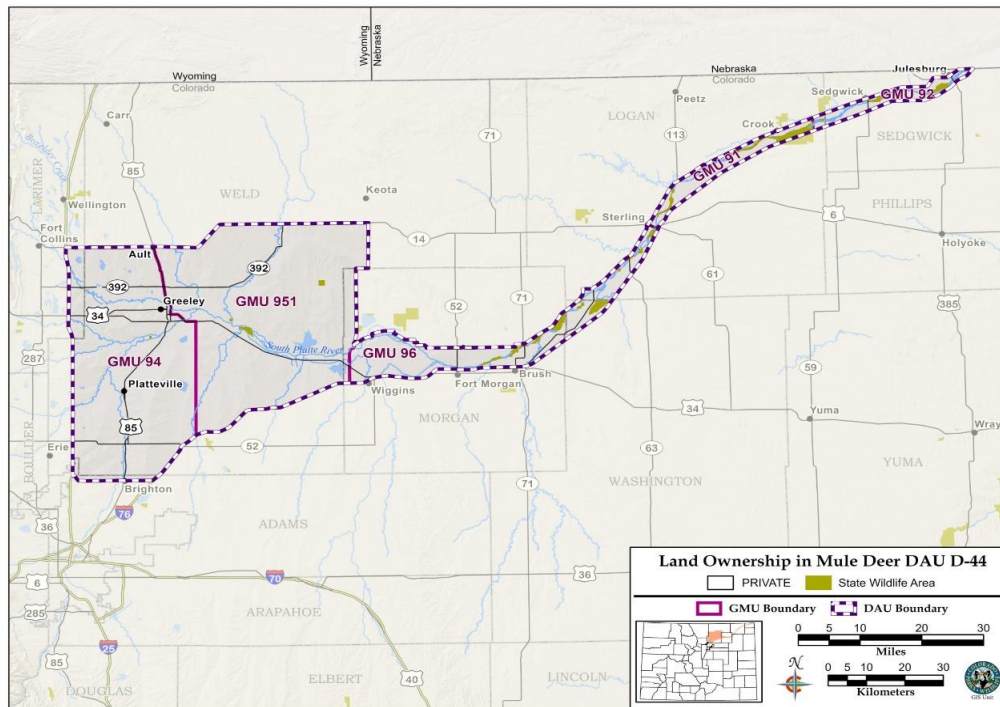


Figure 2. Geographic location of the South Platte River and its associated Game Management Units in northeast Colorado.

Habitat Composition

Three habitat types, irrigated cropland, sandsage/mid-grass prairie, and cottonwood riparian, dominate the landscape, comprising 65%, 20%, and 10% of the habitat composition, respectively, along the South Platte River. Other habitat types that can be found include dry cropland, short-grass prairie, and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands.

In GMUs 91, 92, and 96 in the central and eastern end, cottonwood riparian and adjacent irrigated cropland comprise 85-90% of the habitats. In the western GMUs of 94 and 951, irrigated cropland and sandsage/mid-grass prairie are the dominant habitat features, comprising 60% and 25% of the habitats, respectively. The South Platte River is the primary riparian drainage that extends through this management area. Other smaller drainages include Big Thompson and Cache La Poudre Rivers, Bijou Creek, Crow Creek, Lost Creek, and St Vrain Creek.

Climate

The climate along the South Platte River is characterized by hot, dry summers and relatively mild winters. Annual precipitation ranges from 13–16 inches with most occurring during intense summer thunderstorms. Snowfall can be variable in the area and recent winters have been moderate with seasonably colder temperatures.

Land Use

The majority of land within the South Platte River is in private ownership. Most of the public land is owned and managed by CPW, with the State Land Board and Bureau of Reclamation also having several small holdings. Public lands comprise about 2% of the South Platte, with 89% of the public acreage located in the central and eastern portion in GMUs 91, 92, and 96. Land use is a combination of agriculture and recreation. Frequently, private lands are purchased or leased for deer and waterfowl hunting, often to the exclusion of other uses. Both center pivot and flood irrigation occur throughout the area. Corn, alfalfa, and sugar beets are the primary crops under irrigation. On the western end in GMU 94, both commercial and residential development has steadily increased and is impacting deer habitat.

Deer Distribution

Both mule deer and white-tailed deer can be found throughout the South Platte River. The majority of mule deer are found in the open habitat settings in the western GMUs of 94 and 951, and the far western portion of GMU 96. White-tailed deer are more numerous in the central and eastern GMUs of 91, 92, and 96, which primarily encompass just the South Platte riparian corridor. While most white-tailed deer are residents of D-44, some move out into adjacent uplands, just prior to fawning season. As corn crops are harvested in the fall and winter approaches, many of those white-tailed deer return to the South Platte River corridor.

HERD MANAGEMENT HISTORY, ISSUES, and STRATEGIES

Post-hunt Population Size

Estimating the population of wild animals over large geographic areas is a difficult and approximate science. CPW recognizes this challenge in our management efforts and attempts to minimize this by using the latest technology and inventory methods available. Population estimates for deer are derived using computer model simulations that use estimates of mortality rates, hunter harvest, and annual production to align on measured post-hunt age and sex ratio classification counts.

CPW recognizes the limitation of the system and strives to do the best job with the resources available. As better information becomes available, such as new estimates of survival/mortality, wounding loss, sex ratios, density, or new modeling techniques and software, CPW will evaluate these new techniques and information and use them where appropriate. The use of new information may result in substantial changes in the population estimate or management strategies. Therefore, the population estimate presented in this document should be used as an index or as trend data and not as a completely accurate enumeration of the deer in this management area.

Deer are not evenly distributed among the GMUs along the South Platte River. CPW estimates that 60–65% of the deer population resides in GMUs 91, 92, and 96. These estimates are based on a combination of aerial survey data, historic harvest, and CPW field staff observations.

Estimated deer numbers for the South Platte River have remained fairly stable over the last decade from a low of approximately 3,750 in 2014 to a high of 4,420 deer in 2010 (Figure 3). The deer herd has experienced normal population fluctuations associated with weather conditions, hunting pressure, and population dynamics. The 5 and 10-year population estimated averages for the deer herd are 3,950 and 4,040 deer, respectively.

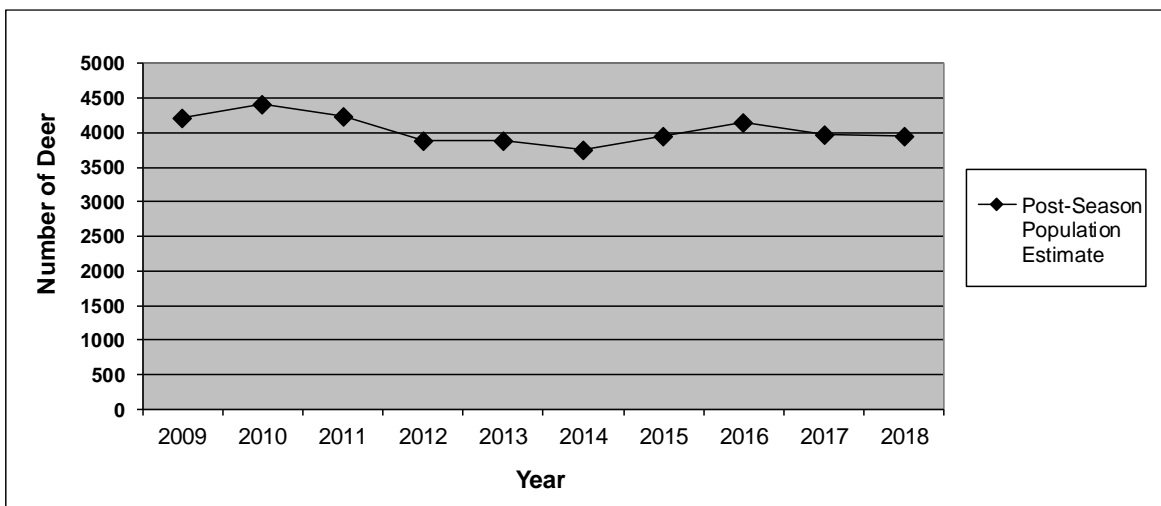


Figure 3. Post-hunt deer population estimates for the South Platte River deer herd, 2009–2018.

Post-hunt Herd Composition

Sex ratios, expressed as bucks per 100 does, and age ratios, expressed as fawns per 100 does, have been estimated by classifying deer using aerial and ground surveys. Ground surveys are used in GMU 94 where residential development and lower deer numbers make aerial surveying cost prohibitive to use. Over the past 10 years, 9 aerial surveys have been conducted, including 4 in the last 5 years.

Since 2009, the buck/doe ratio has averaged 40 bucks/100 does ranging from 37 bucks/100 does observed in 2009 and 2017 to 47 bucks/100 does observed in 2012 (Figure 4). Observed fawn/doe ratios have varied from a low of 52 fawns/100 does in 2011 to a high of 75 fawns/100 does in 2016 and has averaged 65 fawns/100 does over the past decade (Figure 4).

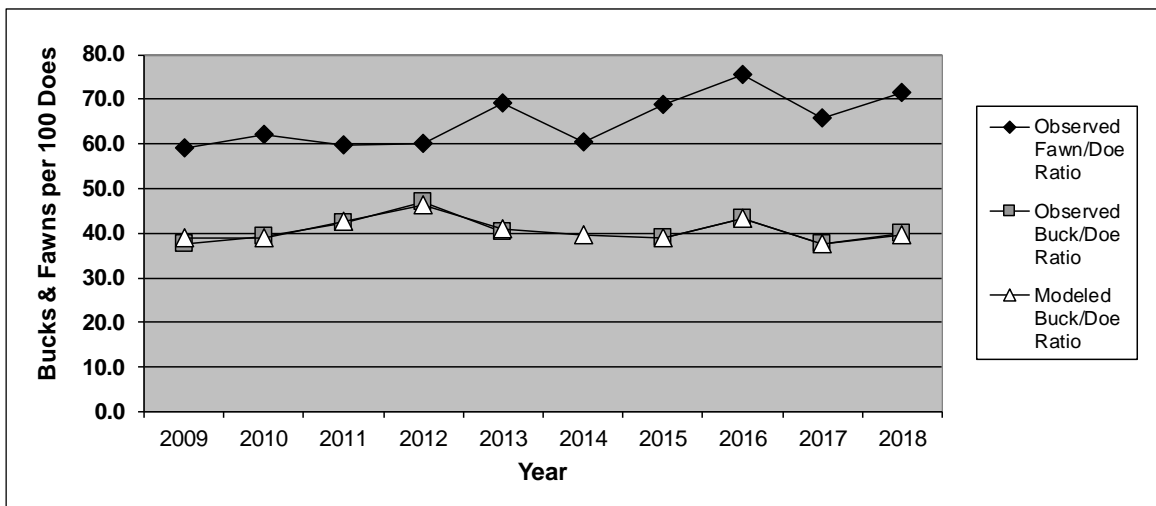


Figure 4. Observed post-hunt fawn/doe ratios estimates and observed and modeled buck/doe ratio estimates for the South Platte River deer herd, 2009–2018.

Harvest

Achieving harvest objectives in the South Platte River is dependent on the progression of corn harvest. In wet years, or when significant precipitation falls in October, corn harvest does not progress to the point of moving deer into the riverbottom, where they are more accessible to hunters during the regular plains rifle season. But in most years, corn harvest is well underway by the opening of the regular plains rifle season and good deer harvest is obtained. The late-plains rifle season is rarely impacted by corn harvest conditions and consistently results in good harvest. The two rifle seasons account for the majority of the deer harvest, with archery and muzzleloader seasons contributing significant opportunity (27%), but less harvest (23%).

Over the last 10 years, harvest has ranged from a high of 914 animals in 2011 to a low of 597 in 2009 (Figure 5). Average harvest for the past 10 years is 750 animals. Antlered harvest has ranged from a low of 294 bucks in 2009 to a high of 436 in 2017. Average buck harvest for the past 10 years is 334 animals. Antlerless harvest has ranged from a high of 588 does in 2011 and 2012 to a low of 303 in 2009. Average doe harvest for the past decade is 418 animals.

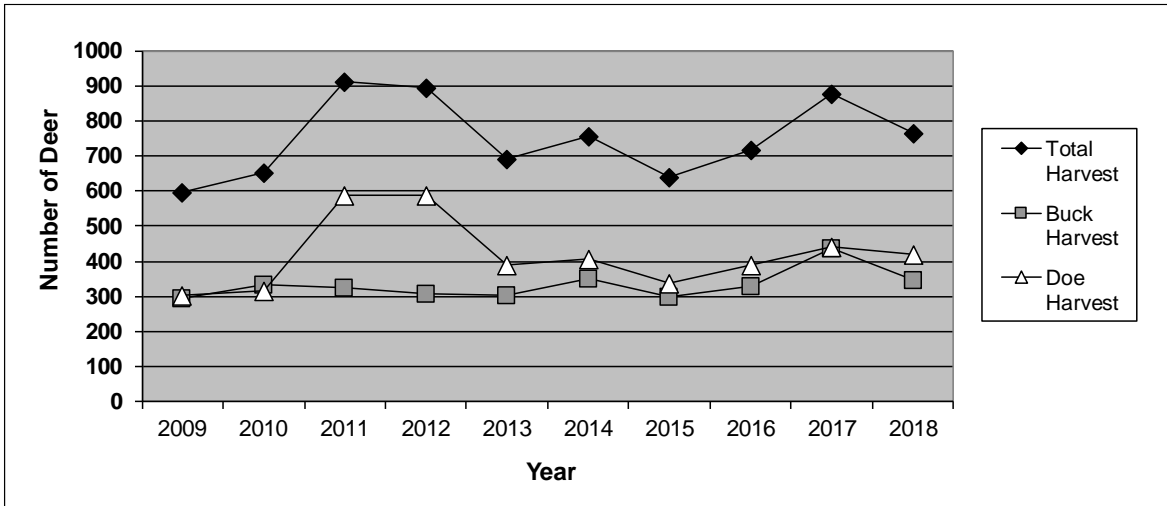


Figure 5. Total harvest and number of antlered and antlerless deer harvested in the South Platte River deer herd, 2009–2018.

Hunters

The South Platte River is a popular hunting destination, due to the amount of public land and the possibility of harvesting a mature buck. In 2018, regular and late season rifle buck licenses required 2 and 3 preference points, respectively, to draw in GMU 91 and 1 point for the regular season in GMU 96 (Figure 6). Private-Land-Only (PLO) rifle buck licenses, available only in GMUs 91, 92, and 96 for the late-plains season, have taken zero points to draw. Landowner preference licenses for bucks were over-subscribed in GMU 92 for the regular rifle season. Doe licenses are drawn with zero points. In 2018, either-sex archery licenses required 3 preference points to draw in GMU 91 and 2 points in GMU 96, while the other GMUs took zero points. Muzzleloader licenses are drawn with zero points.

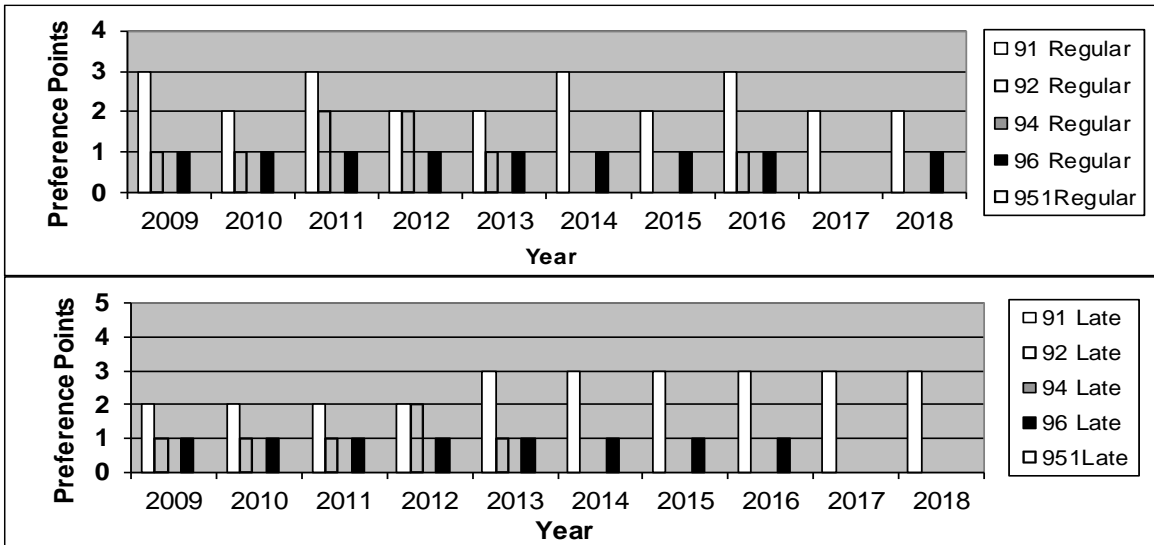


Figure 6. Number of preference points needed to draw a buck license for the regular and late-plains rifle seasons in the South Platte River, 2009–2018.

Over the last 10 years, the number of hunters has varied from 1345 in 2009 to 1,962 in 2012 depending on the number of limited licenses allocated (Figure 7). Since 2009, the number of rifle buck licenses has varied from 600 licenses in 2017 to 460 licenses in 2010–2012 (Figure 7). The number of rifle doe licenses ranged from 1,290 licenses in 2011 to 640 licenses in 2009 (Figure 7).

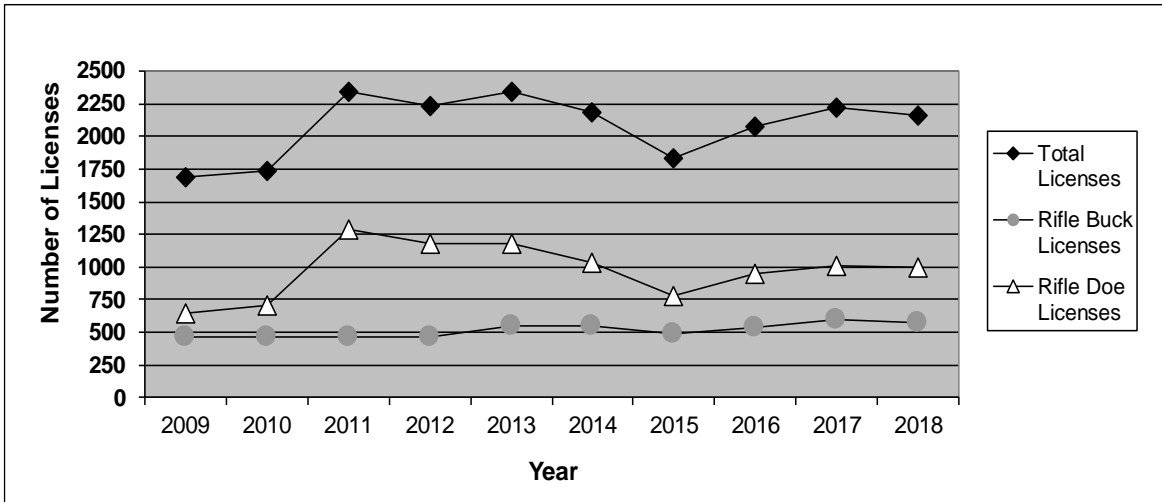


Figure 7. Total number of licenses and number of rifle buck and doe licenses allocated for the South Platte River deer herd, 2009–2018.

Harvest rates are based on the number of animals harvested/number of licenses allocated. Harvest rates for all methods of take generally approach 40%, but success varies with weather conditions and progression of crop harvest. Since 2009, harvest rates for rifle buck hunting have ranged from a high of 52% in 2017 to a low of 35% in 2018 (Figure 8). Harvest rates for antlerless deer have ranged from 45% in 2012 to 29% in 2013 (Figure 8).

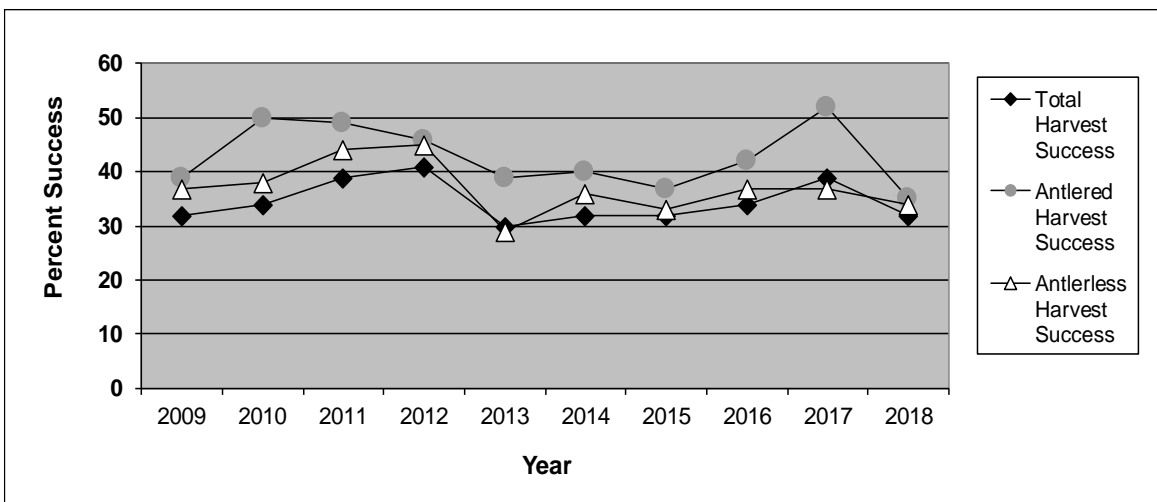


Figure 8. Total, antlered, and antlerless deer harvest success (%) in the South Platte River deer herd, 2009–2018.

Past Management Strategies

A limited number of licenses have been issued for the regular and late-plains rifle seasons since 1983. Since 1995, muzzleloader licenses have been limited in GMUs 91, 92, and 96, and in GMUs 94 and 951 since 1997. Either-sex archery licenses have been limited in number in GMUs 91, 92, and 96 since 1983, and in GMUs 94 and 951 since 1998.

The late-plains rifle season was established in 1983 to more effectively achieve harvest objectives and reduce crowding, especially on public lands. Prior to 1983, achieving harvest was largely dependent on the progression of corn harvest. Years in which the corn harvest was delayed resulted in lower hunter success and reduced deer harvest. Licenses have been allocated between the regular and late-plains deer seasons to meet harvest objectives and distribute hunting opportunities. In addition, PLO buck and doe licenses have been issued for the late-plains rifle season in GMU's 91, 92, and 96 since 2000 and 2005, respectively, to increase deer harvest on private land in those units. In 2009, the PLO doe licenses were changed to Season Choice (SC) PLO doe licenses to provide additional doe hunting opportunities for all methods of take and in 2011, the season was extended to January 31 to further increase doe harvest opportunities.

For the past 10 years, the management strategy for the South Platte River deer herd was based on providing quality buck hunting opportunities. Licenses were allocated to maintain a relatively high buck/doe ratio and a higher proportion of 3+ year-old bucks in the population.

Agricultural Conflicts

Irrigated and dryland corn fields provide an important food source for both deer species, which can result in high concentrations of animals and game damage complaints from landowners. Landowner intolerance of deer numbers from agricultural producers has been a concern in the central and eastern GMUs of 91, 92, and 96. At current population levels, deer damage in these GMUs has averaged 1–2 deer damage claims filed annually. Over the past 7 years, 22 deer damage claims have been filed with 10 of those being filed in 2012. After 2012, there have been 6 claims filed in GMU 96 and 5 in GMU 91 and one claim filed in GMU 94. No deer damage claims have been filed in GMUs 92 and 951 over the past 10 years.

In the past, privately owned lands were more accessible to the general hunter. Over the past 20 years, private hunting leases for ducks, geese, and deer along the South Platte River have increased and many of these lands are inaccessible to most hunters. Thus, nearly all public lands open to hunting have experienced an increase in the number of users. In an effort to increase deer harvest and provide a mechanism to reduce the concentrations of deer on private lands in GMUs 91, 92, and 96, PLO buck licenses were issued in 2000 followed by PLO doe licenses in 2005 for the late-plains rifle season. The PLO doe licenses were later changed to Season Choice PLO doe licenses and the season was extended to the end of January to further increase deer harvest on private lands in those units.

Chronic Wasting Disease

The South Platte River deer herd is part of the endemic area for CWD infection and CWD was a factor in the management of this deer herd from 2001–06. CWD has been found in both mule deer and white-tailed deer and local areas of CWD concentration are found in all GMUs. The first CWD positive deer were found in 1997 in GMUs 91, 96, and 951. In 2003, CWD prevalence was 10.9% in mule deer bucks, 5.0% in mule deer does, 3.7% in whitetail bucks, and 1.1% in whitetail does. From 2007-17, through voluntary hunter submissions, there were 18 mule deer and 27 white-tailed deer harvested that tested positive for CWD in this deer herd. In 2019, mandatory testing for rifle buck and doe hunters along the South Platte River revealed that from the 456 samples collected, CWD prevalence had increased to 25.6% in mule deer bucks, 12.2% in mule deer does, 15.9% in whitetail bucks, and 9.1% in whitetail does.

CWD Management Strategies

Given the increased prevalence of CWD in this herd, management strategies will be implemented to reduce the prevalence of CWD in the South Platte River in accordance with the CWD Response Plan. Because of the difference in CWD prevalence between mule deer and whitetail deer, differing management strategies will be implemented for each deer species. The management actions will include reducing the age structure of bucks in the South Platte River deer herd. Within the objective range, mule deer will be managed to the lower end of the objective while white-tailed deer will be managed at the upper end of the objective range. Therefore, additional management actions may be implemented in the future that may include reducing the age structure of the entire herd, reducing the deer density, or some combination of these management strategies.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public input for this planning process was solicited through a public survey. All first-choice deer license applicants from 2018–2019 for D-44 were notified by email and asked to complete an online survey. In addition, a virtual public meeting was held in August, 2020 to gather additional public input. Furthermore, a draft of this HMP was posted on the CPW website and copies were distributed to land management agencies and the Republican River HPP committee for review and comments.

A majority of public responses supported implementing different CWD management strategies for mule deer and white-tailed deer in the South Platte River deer herd. The public also supported maintaining the deer herd near the current population objective and provide some quality buck hunting opportunities. Feedback from the virtual public meeting also supported results from the online survey (Appendix A).

HERD MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES

Population Objective Ranges

The population objective is selected independently from the sex ratio objective. CPW acknowledges that estimating wildlife populations is an inexact science and habitat

conditions and carrying capacity vary with fluctuations in weather and trends in agriculture; therefore, the long-term population objective will be expressed as a range rather than a specific number.

Alternative 1: 2,800–3,200.

Reduce the long-term post-hunt population by 20% from the current estimate of 3,950 deer. Initially, this alternative would result in an increase in deer hunting licenses, but once deer numbers are reduced to objective, hunting opportunity would decline from the current level. This strategy would decrease hunting opportunities for both bucks and does in the long-term. Reducing the deer population to this objective would require substantial increases in antlerless licenses over the next 3–4 years. This alternative would markedly reduce deer density and age structure to address CWD prevalence in this deer herd.

Alternative 2: 3,500–4,000.

Maintain the post-hunt population at the current population level. Under this alternative, the demand for buck licenses will continue to be greater than the supply in some GMUs and the number of preference points needed to draw a license will continue at the current rate. Damage complaints are expected to remain low. This alternative would provide some flexibility to reduce the current deer density by up to 12% and manage the population at the low end of this objective to further address CWD prevalence in the South Platte River.

Alternative 3: 4,500–5,000.

Increase the long-term post-hunt population by 20% from the current estimate of 3,950 deer. This objective will provide more buck and doe hunting opportunities. However, achieving harvest objectives under this alternative may be difficult given the limitations in hunter access to private lands. This in turn could increase crowding on public lands and further concentrate deer on private lands. Furthermore, landowner intolerance in GMUs 91, 92, and 96 may not support more deer than are currently present, which may likely result in increased numbers of damage complaints in those areas.

Sex Ratio Objective Ranges

The following 3 sex ratio objectives are presented.

Alternative 1: 35–40 bucks/100 does.

Maintain the sex ratio objective at the current level of 35–40 bucks/100 does. The estimated sex ratio is within this range; therefore, no management actions are anticipated to maintain this objective. However, due to the high CWD prevalence rate, under this alternative, the herd would be managed to the low end of the objective per the CWD Response Plan to address CWD prevalence in this deer herd.

Alternative 2: 30–35 bucks/100 does.

Reduce the sex ratio objective to 30–35 bucks/100 does which is a 5–10 bucks/100 does reduction from the current objective. This would result in fewer bucks and a reduction in the number of mature bucks in the population. This alternative would allow for more buck

licenses to be issued because an increase in buck harvest would be necessary to maintain this objective. Fewer mature bucks in the population should reduce CWD prevalence along the South Platte River.

Alternative 3: 25–30 bucks/100 does.

Reduce the sex ratio objective to 25–30 bucks/100 does which is a 10–15 bucks/100 does reduction from the current sex ratio. This would result in significantly fewer bucks and a large reduction in the number of mature bucks in the population. This alternative would likely provide enough buck licenses to meet the current demand as substantial increases in buck harvest would be needed to achieve and maintain this lower objective. This alternative would significantly reduce the male age structure in the population and CWD prevalence in this deer herd.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVES

The CPW preferred alternatives for the South Platte River deer herd are to manage for a post-hunt population of **3,500–4,000 (Alternative 2)** with an observed post-hunt sex ratio objective of **30–35 bucks/100 does (Alternative 2)**.

Public comments supported maintaining the deer population near the current level at 3,500–4,000 deer in the South Platte River. However, landowner input from GMUs 91, 92, and 96 supported a slight reduction in the population because of the higher number of deer that reside in these units where landowner intolerance and game damage complaints are a concern. Therefore, doe licenses may be increased depending upon fawn recruitment to reduce deer numbers in the eastern GMUs while maintaining this objective. Game damage throughout the South Platte River is not expected to increase above current levels under this alternative.

Because CWD prevalence rates in mule deer bucks are nearly twice that of whitetail bucks, a majority of the public responses agreed that separate CWD management strategies should be implemented for mule deer and whitetail deer along the South Platte River. However, the majority of public responses also supported maintaining some quality buck hunting opportunities. Therefore, the preferred sex ratio objective will be 30-35 bucks/100 does, with mule deer to be managed at the low end of the objective and white-tailed deer managed at the upper end of the range. A mule deer specific buck license will be used to target and increase mule deer buck harvest to further reduce CWD prevalence. Likewise, general buck licenses will be increased to reduce and maintain whitetail bucks within the sex ratio objective. Quality mule deer buck hunting opportunities will be reduced once this objective is achieved, while some quality whitetail buck hunting will be available.

APPENDIX A

PUBLIC SURVEY

Dear Interested Citizen:

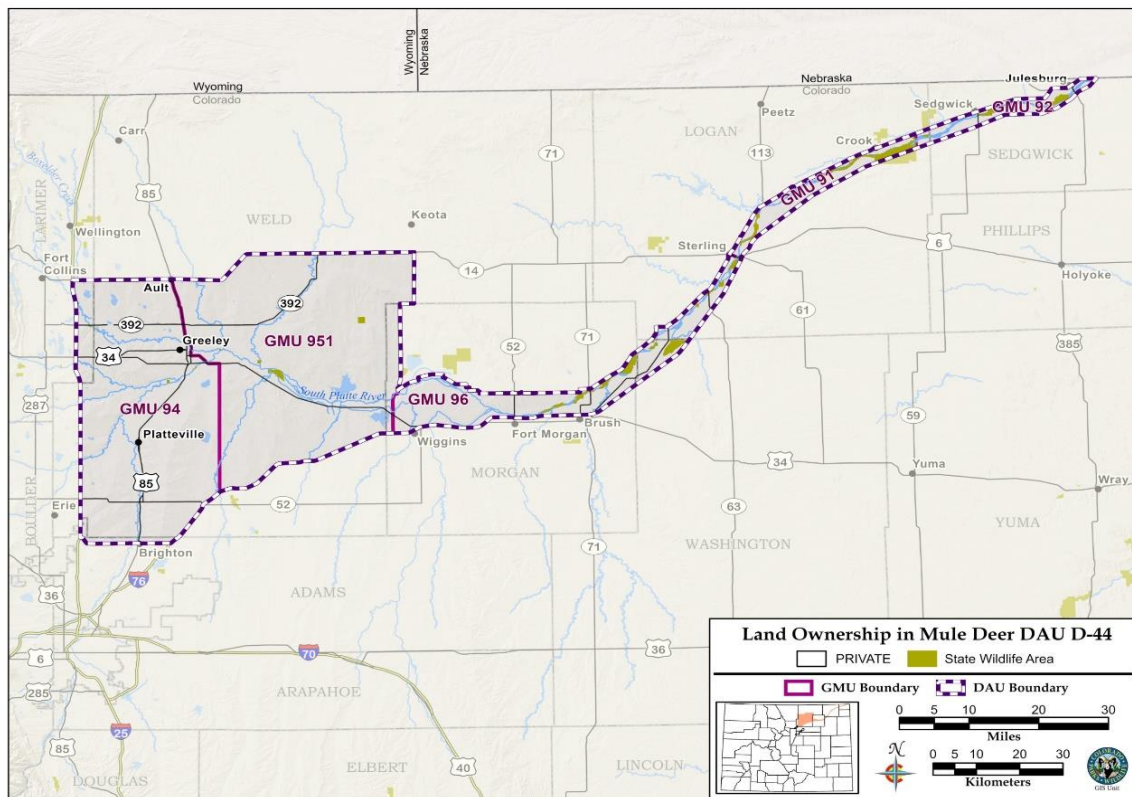
Wildlife managers have begun the process of updating the deer management plan for the South Platte River deer herd (GMU's 91, 92, 94, 96 & 951). Colorado Parks & Wildlife is seeking your input on the future management of this herd. We are gathering public input through a short online survey.

Surveys must be completed by September 30, 2019.

Please complete the following online survey and return it to:

Marty Stratman
Colorado Parks & Wildlife
122 E. Edison St., Brush, CO 80723

South Platte River (D-44) Deer Management Area



1. Do you own land in the South Platte River (D-44), If so, how much? **(757 Responses)**

- No – **83%**
- <160 acres – **8%**
- 160-319 acres – **3%**
- 320-639 acres – **2%**
- 640-999 acres – **2%**
- 1000+ acres – **2%**

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a disease of deer and elk that causes behavioral changes and progressive loss of body condition, eventually leading to death. There is no known treatment of the disease. In 2003, CWD prevalence in the South Platte River deer herd was 10.9% in adult mule deer bucks and 5.0% in mule deer does and 3.7% in adult whitetail bucks and 1.1% in whitetail does. In 2018, mandatory testing for rifle buck hunters revealed that CWD had increased to 26.2% in adult mule deer bucks and 12.6% in adult whitetail bucks. It is thought that high deer densities and a higher proportion of adult males in a population leads to higher disease prevalence rates. Maintaining a low density and younger age herd with fewer mature bucks may result in lower CWD rates in a population.

2. Should separate CWD management strategies be implemented for mule deer and white-tailed deer within the South Platte River deer herd? **(768 Responses)**

- Strongly Agree – **17%**
- Agree – **37%**
- Neither agree nor disagree – **28%**
- Disagree – **11%**
- Strongly disagree – **7%**

Population Objective:

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) strives to manage big game populations within both the biological and social carrying capacity of the herd. CPW has been managing the South Platte River deer herd at a target **population objective** of 3,500–3,800 deer. Currently, the population is **estimated** to be above the target objective at 3,950 deer.

3. Which population alternative would you prefer CPW use to manage the South Platte River deer herd for the next ten years? **(763 Responses)**

1. Reduce the population objective to 2,800-3,200 (18% reduction) AND reduce the current estimated population to 3,000 animals (24% reduction) – **18%**
2. Manage the population at an objective of 3,500-4,000 animals to maintain the current estimated population with the management flexibility to reduce deer numbers by up to 12% – **58%**
3. Manage the population at an objective of 4,000-4,500 animals to maintain the current estimated population with the management flexibility to increase deer numbers by up to 12% – **24%**

Male:Female Ratio Objective:

Currently, the South Platte River deer herd is managed to provide hunting **opportunity** for a relatively high number of mature/large bucks. However, some licenses require 3 or more years to draw a buck license and it is important to note that older, mature bucks have a significantly higher prevalence of CWD than younger bucks or does.

4. How would you like to see the number of buck licenses managed, for the South Platte River deer herd over the next ten years? (767 Responses)

1. Manage for moderate levels of **opportunity** and high quality of bucks (This is the current management strategy) – **47%**
2. Increase the number of buck licenses to increase hunting opportunity and reduce the number of mature bucks for CWD management – **34%**
2. Increase the number of buck licenses to significantly reduce the number of mature bucks by >50% for CWD management – **8%**
3. I am not sure – **11%**



October 9, 2019

Marty Stratman
Colorado Parks and Wildlife
122 E. Edison St.
Brush, CO 80723

RE: Republican Rivers Habitat Partnership Program Comments - DAU D-44

Dear Marty:

One of the initial reasons for creating the Habitat Partnership Program was to provide local landowners and other interests an opportunity for input into big game management in their areas. The diverse makeup of local HPP committees (3 livestock growers, Forest Service, BLM, CPW and sportsmen representatives) provide a good cross section of local interests to review DAU proposals and respond accordingly for CPW consideration.

HPP has two purposes; to resolve big game wildlife (deer, elk, pronghorn, moose) conflicts with agricultural landowners and to assist CPW to meet game management objectives for those same species. From those perspectives, the Republican Rivers HPP committee has discussed your presentation and reviewed the draft alternatives and offers these comments for consideration.

The Republican Rivers HPP committee is in agreement with the following comments pertaining to proposals for the population range and sex ratio objectives for the above DAU plan.

The Republican Rivers committee supports the draft alternative to increase the population objective within this DAU and within our committee area. The population is currently over objective, so increasing the objective will allow CPW to manage the herd as-is. The Republican Rivers committee does not believe this increase would create more conflicts and we also believe we have the resources necessary to address conflicts should they occur. The committee feels that the current deer population is optimal, and increasing objectives will allow CPW to maintain those numbers.

The Republican Rivers committee also discussed the proposed sex ratio alternative. We support lowering the current sex ratio objective to a number that, while still maintaining larger bucks, would ultimately increase the opportunity for more hunters in the field and decrease CWD prevalence rates. The committee agrees that based on the differing prevalence rates between mule deer and white tail deer, the two species should be managed differently. We trust that managing mule deer at the lower end of the sex ratio and white tail deer at the higher end will ultimately help to bring prevalence rates down.

As stated above, HPP is also directed by statute to assist the Division to meet game management objectives. The Republican Rivers committee has worked with both public land managers and private landowners to improve the quality and quantity of the habitat in DAU D-44. Adequate habitat is critical to meeting game management objectives and we remain committed to maintaining and improving habitat in this area.

Our committee is confident about CPW being able to achieve the proposed objectives for the following reasons:

We have worked with numerous landowners who want to implement positive improvements for big game on their property.

The committee and the public are happy with the current population. They feel that an increase will cause too many problems, but the current population is ideal. Hunter satisfaction has been high, but the committee is concerned about CWD prevalence rates. We are happy to see a management plan that will help to address the high prevalence rates while still maintaining some mature bucks.

Thank you for the presentation and the opportunity to provide these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dustin Wise". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal dashed line.

Dustin Wise, Chair
Republican Rivers HPP Committee