

DRAFT
SOUTH TABLELANDS
DEER
MANAGEMENT PLAN
D-54

Game Management Units
93, 97, 98, 99, & 100



October 2020

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HERD MANAGEMENT PLAN – D-54 (SOUTH TABLELANDS) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GMUs: 93, 97, 98, 99 and 100

Land Ownership: 99% Private, 1% State

Post-Season Population:

Current Objective – 2,900–3,100; 2018 Estimate – 3,884; Future Objective – Pending

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

Current Objective – 35–40; 2018 Observed – 43; 2018 Modeled – 42; Future Objective – Pending

Figure I. D-54 Post-hunt Population Estimate

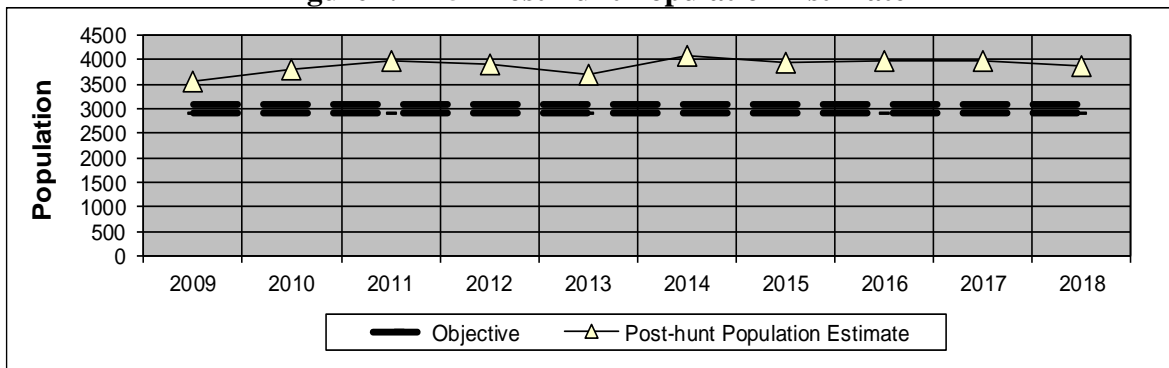


Figure II. D-54 Harvest

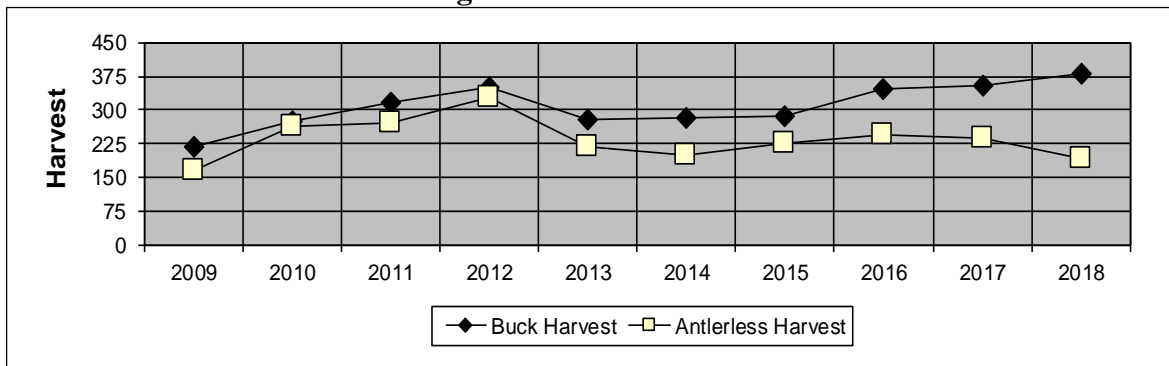
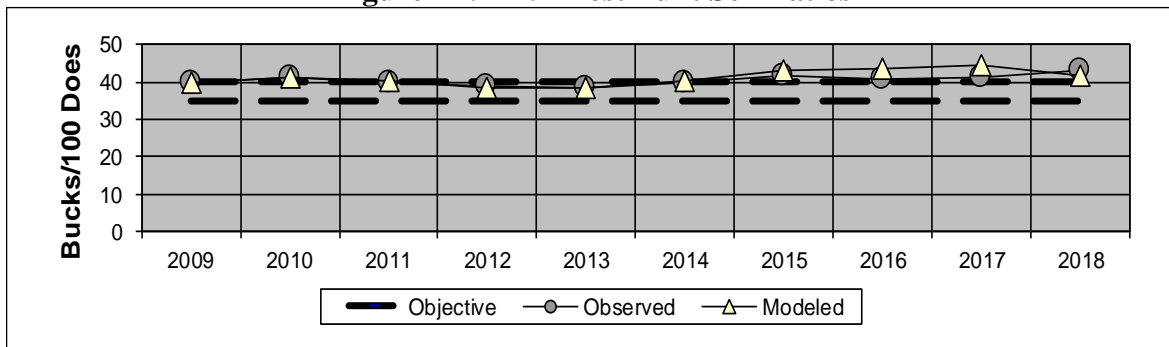


Figure III. D-54 Post-hunt Sex Ratios



Background

Over the past decade, the South Tablelands deer herd has been managed under the current management plan objectives of 2,900–3,100 deer and 35–40 bucks/100 does that were established in 2007. This Herd Management Plan (HMP) and the population and sex ratio alternatives presented are the result of an update and revision of that plan.

Since 2007, the South Tablelands deer herd, has been managed to provide quality mule deer hunting opportunities by maintaining a high buck/doe ratio and a higher proportion of 3+ year-old bucks in the population. For the past 10 years, the buck/doe ratio has averaged 40 bucks/100 does ranging from 38 bucks/100 does observed in 2012 and 2013 to 43 bucks/100 does observed in 2018. Estimated mule deer numbers for the South Tablelands deer herd has increased since 2009 from a low of approximately 3,567 in 2009 to a high of 4,072 in 2014. The 5-year population estimate average for this deer herd is 3,970 mule deer. Observed fawn/doe ratios have varied from a low of 55 fawns/100 does in 2018 to a high of 69 fawns/100 does in 2009 and 2014 and has averaged 63 fawns/100 does over the past decade.

Significant Issues

The South Tablelands deer herd has been managed to maintain mule deer numbers within the current population and sex ratio objectives. To address white-tailed deer in the South Tablelands, Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife (CPW) created a special white-tailed deer only season in 2003. Today, season choice white-tailed deer only licenses are used in D-54 to provide additional hunter recreation without the risk of over harvesting mule deer.

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) infection was first discovered in the South Tablelands deer herd in 1999. In 2019, mandatory testing of harvested bucks and does revealed that CWD prevalence was 21% in mule deer bucks. Thus, management changes will be implemented to address CWD in this herd in accordance with the CWD Response Plan. Management actions may include reducing the male age structure, reducing the deer density, or some combination of both.

Management Alternatives

The CPW preferred alternatives for D-54 are to manage for a post-hunt population of **3,500–4,000 mule deer** with an observed post-hunt sex ratio of **30–35 bucks/100 does**. Public comments strongly supported maintaining the South Tablelands mule deer herd at the current population level and continue to provide quality buck hunting opportunities. However, CWD prevalence was found to exceed the statewide threshold, therefore, the South Tablelands deer herd will be managed at a lower sex ratio objective.

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

SOUTH TABLELANDS DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN D-54 (GMUs 93, 97, 98, 99, & 100)

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) manages big game 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).

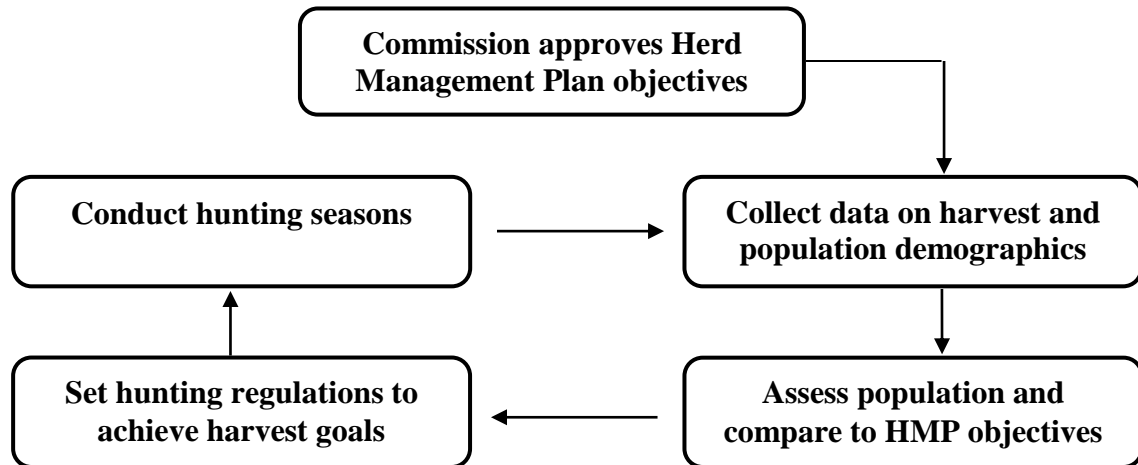


Figure 1. Management by objectives process used by Colorado Parks and Wildlife to manage big game populations.

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 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 sex ratio 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 needs 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 the population and sex ratio objectives for the South Tablelands mule deer herd. HMPs are approved by the Parks and Wildlife Commission and are reviewed and updated approximately every 10 years.

SOUTH TABLELANDS DESCRIPTION

Location

The South Tablelands encompasses approximately 6,042 mi² in northeast Colorado and includes GMUs 93, 97, 98, 99, and 100 (Figure 2). This area is bounded on the north by I-76 and the Nebraska border; on the east by the Nebraska border; on the south by US Highway 34, Colorado Highway 61, and US Highway 36; on the west by Colorado Highway 79, 144th Avenue, Adams County Road 25N, and 152nd Avenue.

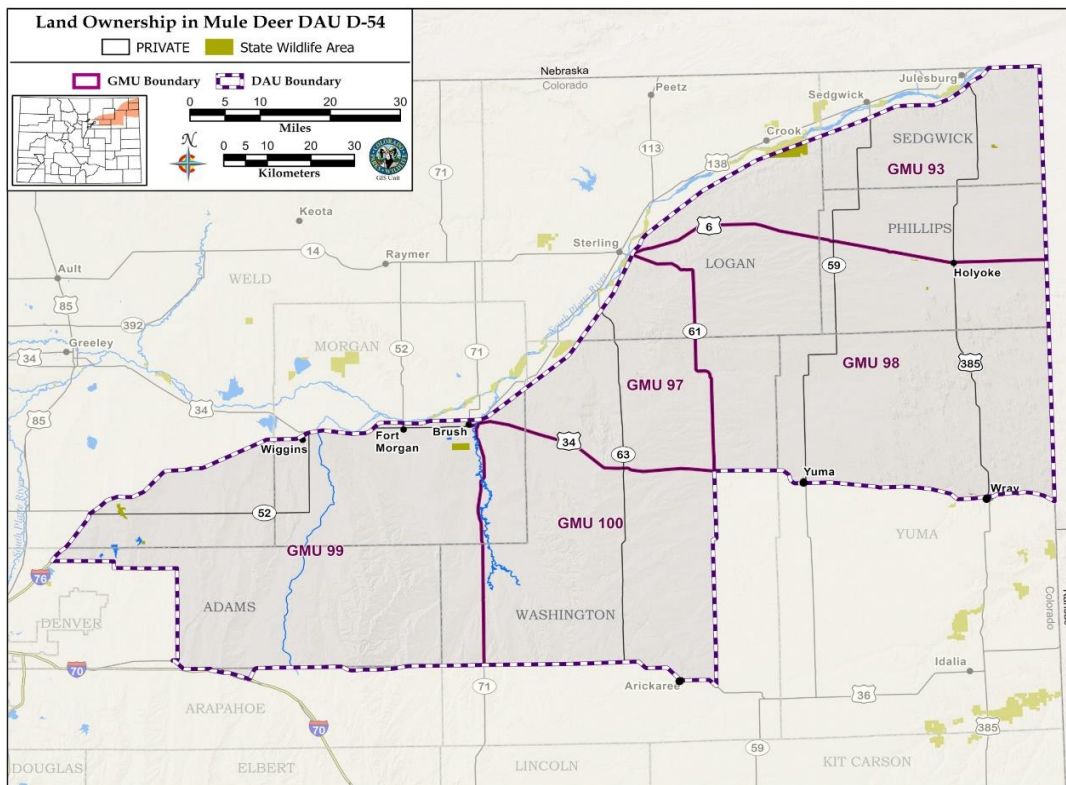


Figure 2. Geographic location of the South Tablelands and its associated Game Management Units in northeast Colorado.

Habitat Composition

There are several habitat types within the South Tablelands, including dry cropland, irrigated cropland, tall-grass prairie, sandsage/mid-grass prairie, short-grass prairie, and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands. Nearly 30% of the South Tablelands is comprised of two sandsage/mid-grass prairie sandhill complexes. One extends along the entire northern boundary and the other is located in the southeastern portion adjacent to the Nebraska border. The South Tablelands is also comprised of 10–15% short-grass prairie. The largest blocks of short-grass prairie are located in the central and extreme northeast portions of the area. Habitat quality has remained stable to increasing across large portions of the area due to CRP lands, managed grazing systems within the sandsage and short-grass rangelands, and changing cropping practices that emphasize dryland and irrigated corn. There are 4 small riparian drainages within the South Tablelands; Beaver Creek, Bijou Creek, Frenchman Creek, and Kiowa Creek.

Climate

The climate in the South Tablelands is characterized by hot, dry summers and recently, 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

Land ownership in the South Tablelands is typical of eastern Colorado, with the majority of the area being private land. Notable exceptions include the South Tamarack State Wildlife Area and several smaller parcels owned by CPW, which comprise <1% of the South Tablelands. Land use is almost exclusively agricultural based. Center pivot irrigation occurs throughout the area, including the sandhill complexes, with the majority occurring on the eastern end of the South Tablelands. Corn, wheat, and alfalfa are the primary crops produced. On the western end, residential development is encroaching into GMU 99, although impacts to deer habitat have not been significant.

Deer Distribution

Both mule deer and white-tailed deer can be found in the South Tablelands. Mule deer are commonly found in all habitat types, although densities are highest in the sandsage rangeland, irrigated cropland settings, and within large complexes of CRP lands. White-tailed deer can also be found throughout the South Tablelands, with the highest concentrations occurring in GMU 98 on the east end and along Bijou Creek in GMU 99 on the west end.

HERD MANAGEMENT HISTORY, ISSUES, and STRATEGIES

Previously, the South Tablelands, D-54, D-55, and D-5 were managed as one deer herd, bisected by the South Platte River. In 2001, the GMUs north of the South Platte River were designated as D-5 and the GMUs south of the river (93, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, & 102) were designated as D-54. In 2002, D-54 was further reduced in size by designating

GMUs 101 and 102 as a separate deer herd to further improve harvest management and computer modeling for both areas. This South Tablelands (D-54) HMP addresses the deer herd within GMUs 93, 97, 98, 99, and 100.

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 involve estimates of mortality rates, hunter harvest, and annual production. These simulations are then adjusted to align on measured post-hunt age and sex ratio classification counts and, in some cases, population estimates derived from line transect and quadrat surveys.

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.

Estimated mule deer numbers for the South Tablelands has increased over the last decade from a low of approximately 3,567 in 2009 to a high of 4,072 deer in 2014 (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 estimate averages for the deer herd are 3,970 and 3,880 deer, respectively.

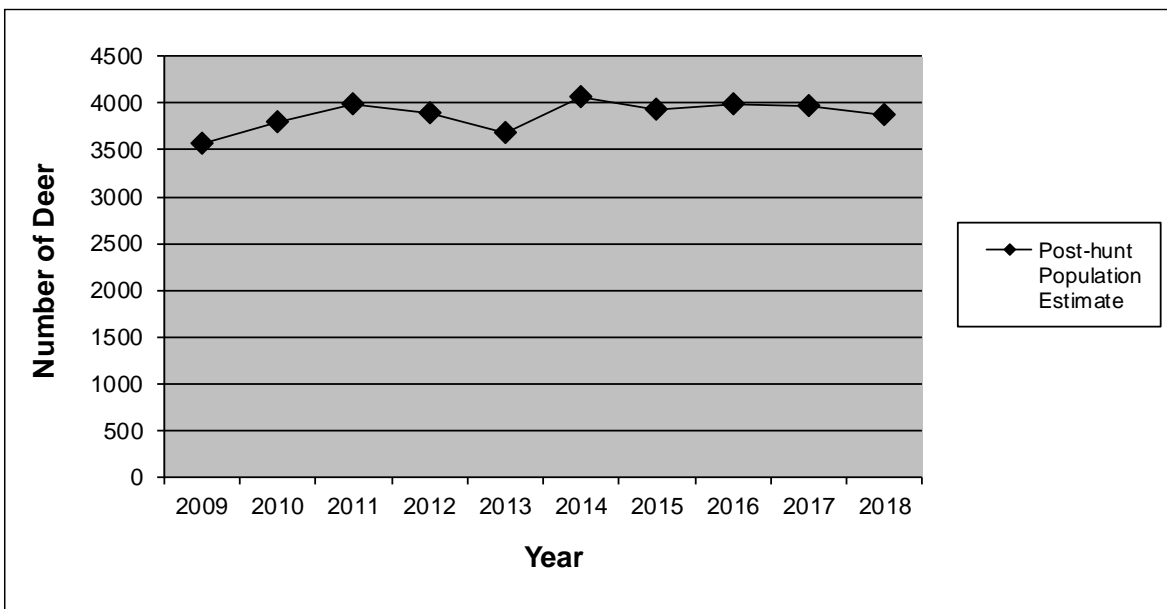


Figure 3. Post-hunt mule deer population estimates for the South Tablelands deer herd, 2009–2018.

White-tailed Deer Management

Until the mid-1900s, Colorado's eastern plains were almost exclusively populated by mule deer. White-tailed deer became established in eastern Colorado in the late 1950s and have continued to increase in numbers and distribution. During this time, while white-tailed deer numbers were increasing, hunters continued to prefer mule deer. Also, the preference for open habitat and the escape behavior of mule deer make them more vulnerable to harvest by hunters using high-powered rifles than white-tailed deer.

The added hunting pressure on mule deer resulted in deer species composition shifting in favor of white-tailed deer in some areas within the South Tablelands. Commonly, white-tailed deer are observed miles from traditional whitetail habitat. Over the past decade, the largest increase in white-tailed deer numbers has occurred along the Bijou Creek in GMU 99. In 2015, the proportion of mule deer to white-tailed deer classified during ground and aerial surveys in GMU 99 was 76% mule deer and 24% white-tailed deer. The 5 and 10-year averages for this deer herd is 89% mule deer and 11% white-tailed deer. However, these proportions could be biased due to differing sighting probabilities between the two species and may be associated with ground-based surveys.

To address the expanding white-tailed deer population, CPW created a white-tailed deer only season in 2003. The primary objective of this special whitetail only season was to increase the harvest of white-tailed deer to minimize further expansion into traditional mule deer habitats. Since 2012, season choice white-tailed deer only licenses have been issued in all GMUs in the South Tablelands, which incorporates all seasons and methods of take. The season choice whitetail only licenses have been a success by providing additional hunting opportunities and whitetail harvest to reduce white-tailed deer numbers in the South Tablelands deer herd.

Post-hunt Herd Composition

Sex ratios, expressed as bucks per 100 does, and age ratios, expressed as fawns per 100 does, have primarily been estimated by classifying deer from ground surveys. Generally, aerial surveys using a helicopter are too cost prohibitive on the eastern plains due to low deer densities. However, aerial surveys using a fixed-wing aircraft were successfully used in 2014 and 2015 when snow conditions and sightability were optimal. Surveys are conducted annually by district wildlife managers and biologists during a specified time frame in January after the hunting seasons have ended. Observed sex and age ratios, along with harvest estimates are used in computer simulation models to estimate deer numbers, predict population trends, and assess impacts of reported harvest. The Division recognizes that ground-based surveys for any species, although cost-effective, can be biased. However, aerial surveys using a fixed-wing aircraft will be used to augment ground surveys when snow conditions and sightability are optimal.

Much of the focus in the South Tablelands has been to provide quality mule deer buck hunting opportunities by maintaining a high buck/doe ratio and a higher proportion of 3+ year-old bucks in the population. The current post-hunt management objective is to maintain this deer herd at a sex ratio objective of 35–40 bucks/100 does. Since 2009, the buck/doe ratio has averaged 40 bucks/100 does ranging from 38 bucks/100 does observed in 2012 and 2013 to 43 bucks/100 does observed in 2018 (Figure 4). Observed fawn/doe

ratios have varied from a low of 55 fawns/100 does in 2018 to a high of 69 fawns/100 does in 2009 and 2014 and has averaged 63 fawns/100 does over the past decade (Figure 4).

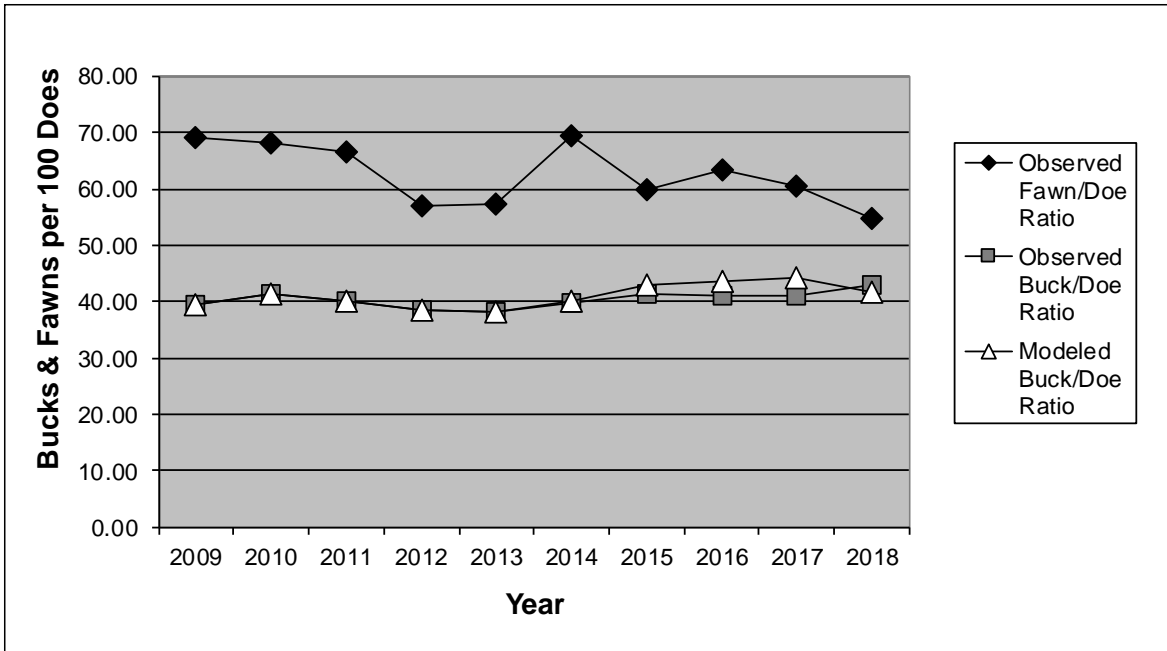


Figure 4. Observed post-hunt fawn/doe ratios and observed and modeled buck/doe ratio estimates for the South Tablelands deer herd, 2009–2018.

Harvest

Over the last 10 years, mule deer harvest has ranged from a high of 680 animals in 2012 to a low of 383 in 2009 (Figure 5). Average mule deer harvest for the past 10 years is 545 animals. Antlered mule deer harvest ranged from a low of 217 bucks in 2009 to a high of 381 in 2018. Average mule deer buck harvest for the past 10 years is 281 animals. Mule deer doe harvest has ranged from a high of 327 does in 2012 to a low of 166 in 2009. Average mule deer doe harvest for the past 10 years is 310 animals. The two rifle seasons account for the majority of the mule deer harvest in this deer herd, with archery and muzzleloader seasons contributing significant opportunity (21%), but less harvest (13%). In some years, corn harvest is delayed resulting in large acreages of standing corn during the regular plains rifle deer season. Delayed corn harvest reduces hunter access to deer resulting in lower than average success rates and deer harvest. In contrast, the late-plains rifle season consistently produces good mule deer harvest, as well as, increased opportunities for hunters to take large, mature bucks. Most if not all crops have been removed from fields by this time, which makes the late-plains season very popular with hunters and landowners.

In 2003, hunters harvested a total of 36 white-tailed deer in the first year of the special whitetail only season. Over the past decade, the harvest of white-tailed deer in this deer herd has increase from a low of 62 in 2009 to a high of 178 in 2012 (Figure 5). The 5 and 10-year average annual harvest of white-tailed deer is 128 and 127 animals, respectively. Since 2009, the number of white-tailed deer harvested has averaged 18% of the total deer

harvested in the South Tablelands. Overall, the season choice whitetail only licenses have been a success by providing additional hunter recreation and harvest without placing additional hunting pressure on mule deer.

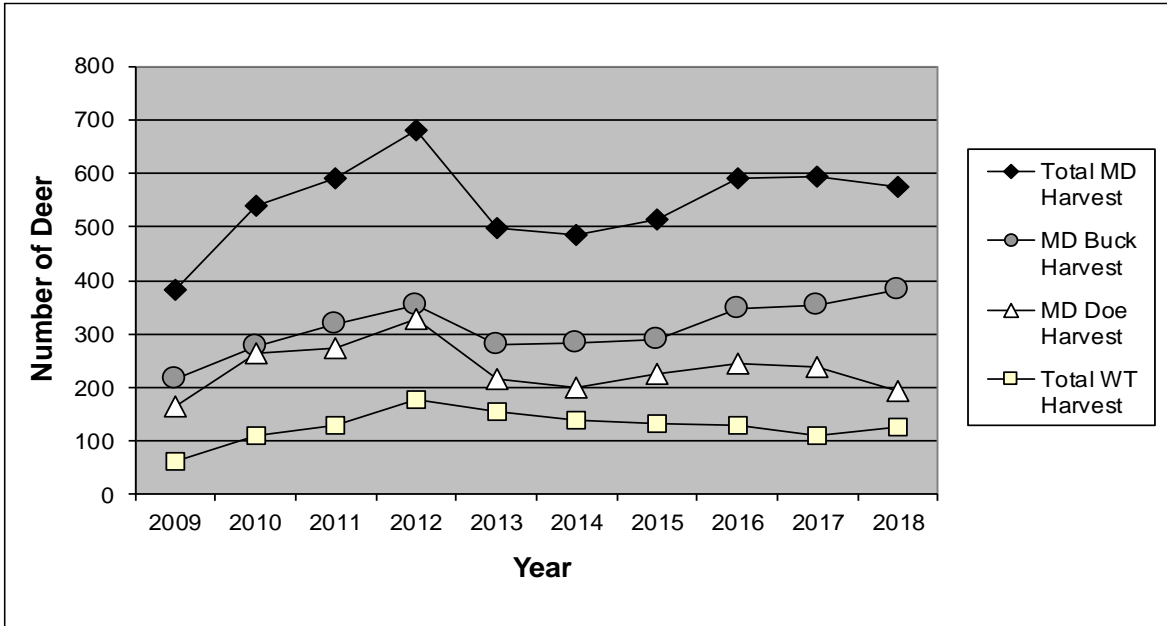
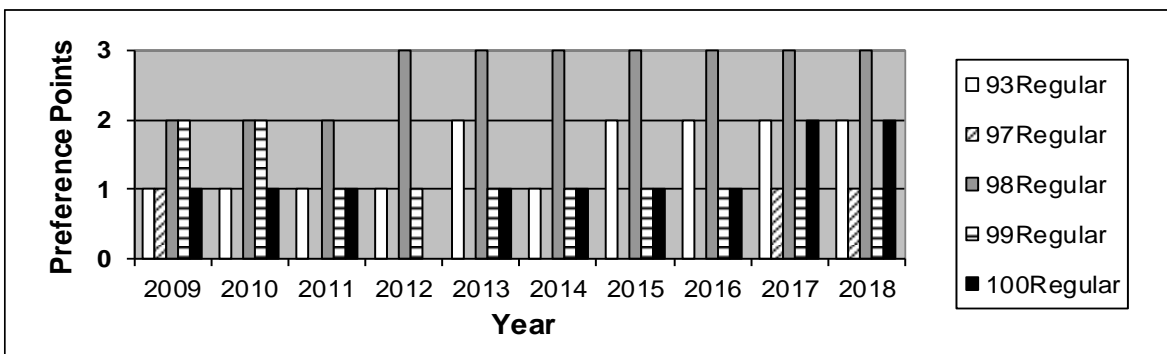


Figure 5. Total mule deer and white-tailed deer harvest and number of antlered and antlerless mule deer harvested in the South Tablelands deer herd, 2009–2018.

Hunters

In 2018, regular season rifle buck licenses required 3 preference points in GMU 98, 2 preference points in GMU 93 and 100, and 1 preference point in GMUs 97 and 99. Late season rifle buck licenses required 4 preference points in GMU 98, 3 points in GMU 99, 2 points in GMUs 93 and 100, and 1 preference point in GMU 97 (Figure 6). Doe licenses for either season are drawn with zero points. Archery, muzzleloader, and season choice white-tailed deer licenses were all drawn with zero points. Landowner preference licenses for bucks are over-subscribed in all GMUs, but landowner applicants for doe licenses are under-subscribed in all units.



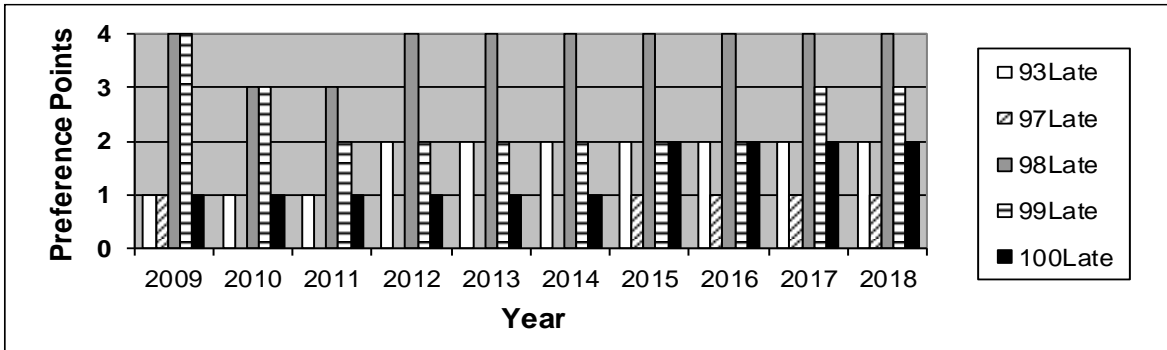


Figure 6. Number of preference points needed to draw a mule deer buck license for the regular and late-plains rifle seasons in the South Tablelands, 2009–2018.

The number of hunters has varied from 851 in 2009 to 1,426 in 2012 depending on the number of limited licenses allocated (Figure 7). The number of buck licenses since 2009 has varied from a high of 820 buck licenses in 2012 to a low of 590 buck licenses in 2009 (Figure 7). The number of doe licenses ranged from a high of 760 licenses in 2012 to a low of 455 licenses in 2009 (Figure 7).

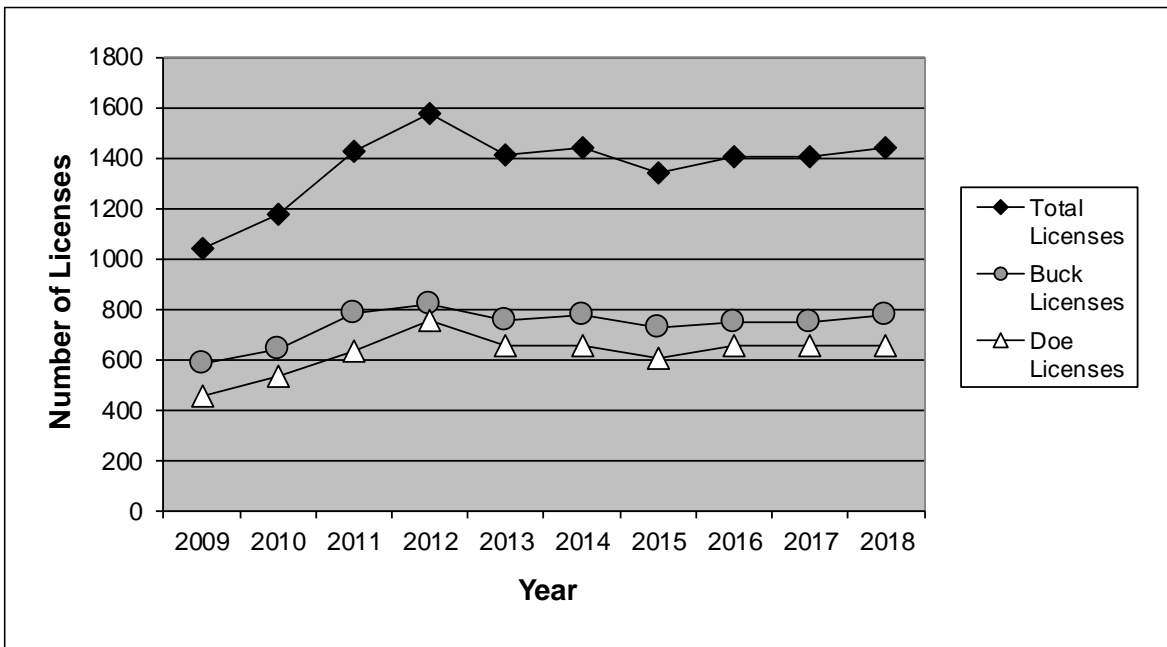


Figure 7. Total number of licenses and number of buck and doe licenses allocated for the South Tablelands deer herd, 2009–2018.

Harvest rates are based on the number of animals harvested/number of licenses allocated. These rates are used to determine license allocations because they account for both hunter success and the number of license holders that did not hunt. Thus, harvest rates are generally lower than hunter success rates and provide a more appropriate measure for predicting harvest. Therefore, only harvest rates are presented.

Harvest rates for all methods of take generally approach the 60% mark, ranging from a high of 62% in 2010 to a low of 46% in 2013 (Figure 8). The 10-year average harvest rate for all methods of take was 52%. The 5 and 10-year average harvest rates for antlered deer are 58% and 57%, respectively. The 5 and 10-year average harvest rates for antlerless deer are 44% and 47%, respectively (Figure 8).

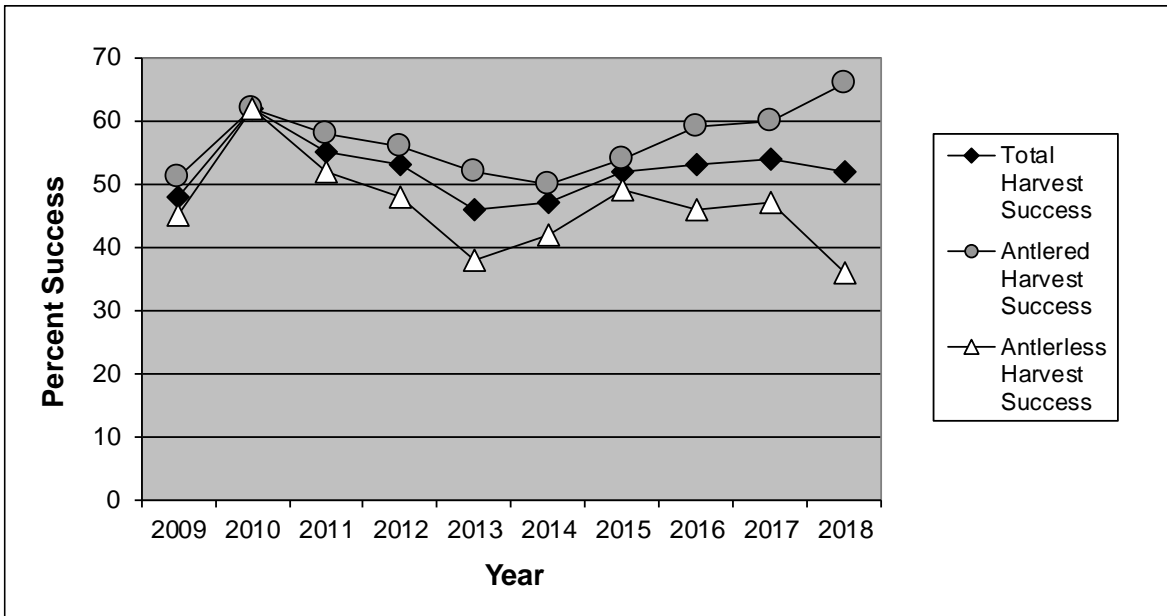


Figure 8. Total, antlered, and antlerless deer harvest success (%) in the South Tablelands deer herd, 2009–2018.

Past Management Strategies

In D-54, a limited number of licenses have been issued for the regular rifle season since 1985 and the late-plains rifle season since 1993. Over-the-counter archery and muzzleloader licenses were available until 1996. Since 1996, all deer hunting licenses for all methods of take have been limited in number in GMU 99, while the remaining GMUs in the South Tablelands continued to offer over-the-counter archery and muzzleloader licenses until 1999. Since 1999, all deer hunting licenses for the South Tablelands deer herd have been limited in number. In 2003, whitetail only licenses were issued in GMUs 93 and 98 and continued until 2012. Since 2012, season choice whitetail only licenses have been issued in all GMUs in the South Tablelands to increase the harvest of white-tailed deer and minimize further expansion into traditional mule deer habitats.

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 adequate harvest was largely dependant upon the progress of corn harvest. Years in which the corn harvest was delayed resulted in lower hunter success and reduced deer harvest, as well as, an increase in conflicts between landowners and hunters. Licenses have been allocated between the regular and late-plains deer seasons to meet harvest objectives, reduce conflicts with agricultural producers, and provide quality mule deer hunting opportunities.

For the past 10 years, the management strategy for the South Tablelands deer herd was based on providing quality mule deer buck hunting opportunities. Licenses have been allocated to maintain a high buck/doe ratio and a higher proportion of 3+ year-old mule deer bucks in the population. In addition, strategies were implemented to increase the hunting opportunities and harvest of white-tailed deer where they have expanded their range.

Agricultural Conflicts

Irrigated corn and alfalfa fields provide important food sources for both deer species, which can result in high concentrations of animals and game damage complaints from landowners, primarily in GMUs 98 and 99. Over the past 20 years, deer damage has not been an issue with only three deer damage claims being filed. If habitats continue to improve, CPW will need to closely monitor population responses along with game damage complaints and adjust license numbers accordingly.

Chronic Wasting Disease

The first Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) positive deer was found in GMU 93 in 1999. From 2007-18, there have been six mule deer and one white-tailed deer that have tested positive for CWD in this deer herd. In 2019, mandatory testing for buck and doe rifle hunters was conducted in the South Tablelands for the first time. From the 513 samples collected, CWD prevalence was 21.4% in mule deer bucks, 2.8% in mule deer does, 18.0% in whitetail bucks, and 6.1% in whitetail does.

CWD Management Strategies

Because of the high CWD prevalence in this herd, management strategies will be implemented to reduce the prevalence of CWD in the South Tablelands in accordance with the CWD Response Plan. The management actions will initially include reducing sex ratio objective to reduce the age structure of bucks in the South Tablelands mule deer herd. Additional management actions may also 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, depending on the level of CWD in this deer herd in the future.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public input for this herd management planning process was solicited through a public survey. All first-choice deer license applicants from 2018–2019 for D-54 were notified via postcards and encouraged 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 respondents supported maintaining the mule deer herd at the current estimated population level. The public also demonstrated strong support to continue to manage for quality buck hunting opportunities in this mule deer herd.

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 herd composition 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: 2,100–2,500.

Reduce the long-term post-hunt mule deer population objective by 25% from the current objective of 2,900–3100 animals. Initially, this alternative would result in an increase in deer hunting licenses, but once deer numbers are reduced to objective, hunting opportunity would decline. This strategy could substantially decrease hunting opportunities for both bucks and does in the long-term unless there was a strong density dependent response resulting in increased fawn production and survival. Reducing the mule deer population to this objective would require substantial increases in antlerless licenses over the next 3–5 years.

Alternative 2: 3,000–3,500.

Maintain the post-hunt mule deer population near the current objective level at 3,000–3,500. Under this alternative, an increase in antlerless licenses will be necessary to reduce the population to this objective. The demand for buck licenses will continue to be greater than the supply and the number of preference points needed to draw a license will increase at the current rate. Damage complaints are expected to remain negligible. This alternative would reduce the current deer density by 15–25% to address CWD prevalence in the South Tablelands if needed.

Alternative 3: 3,500–4,000.

Increase the post-hunt mule deer population objective by 25% to 3,500–4,000 deer. Under this alternative, no management action would be necessary to maintain the current estimated population at this objective. This objective will maintain the current buck hunting opportunities that are obviously in demand. Deer damage complaints are expected to remain negligible. This alternative would provide the flexibility to reduce the current deer density by nearly 15% and manage the population at the low end of this objective to further address CWD prevalence in the South Tablelands if necessary.

Sex Ratio Objective Ranges

The following 3 sex ratio objectives are presented.

Alternative 1: 35–40 bucks/100 does.

Maintain the sex ratio at 35–40 bucks/100 does. The current estimated sex ratio is slightly above this objective, however, the 5-year average falls within this range; therefore, no management action is anticipated to maintain this sex ratio objective. However, if CWD prevalence is found to be above the statewide threshold, under this alternative, the herd would be managed to the low end of the objective per the CWD Response Plan.

Alternative 2: 30–35 bucks/100 does.

Reduce the sex ratio objective to 30–35 bucks/100 does which is a 10 bucks/100 does reduction from the current sex ratio. This would result in fewer bucks and a large reduction in the number of mature bucks in the population. The demand for buck licenses may decline because quality buck hunting opportunities will decrease. This alternative would require more buck licenses to be issued because an increase in buck harvest would be necessary to achieve and maintain this objective.

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 substantial reduction in the number of mature bucks in the population. Quality buck hunting opportunities would be significantly reduced. 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.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVES

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

The majority of public comments support maintaining the mule deer population at the current level in the South Tablelands. Game damage complaints have not been an issue thus far, and are not expected to change under this alternative. Doe licenses would remain at current levels depending upon fawn recruitment to maintain this objective.

A majority of the public responses strongly support managing the South Tablelands mule deer herd for quality buck hunting opportunities. However, CWD prevalence is above the statewide threshold, therefore, the sex ratio objective will be reduced from its current level to 30–35 bucks/100 does in an effort to reduce CWD prevalence in this mule deer herd. Buck licenses will be increased over the long-term to achieve and maintain this sex ratio objective. Quality buck hunting opportunities will be reduced once this objective is achieved.

APPENDIX A

PUBLIC SURVEY

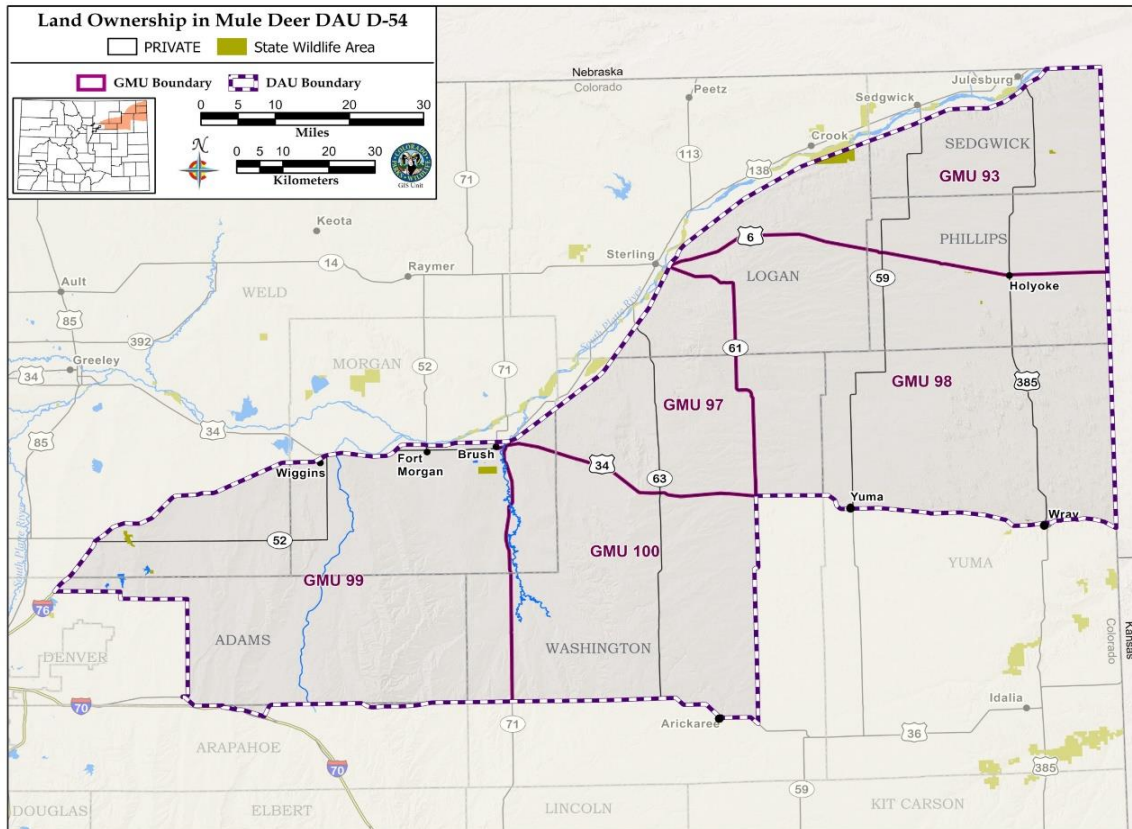
Dear Interested Citizen:

Wildlife managers have begun the process of updating the deer management plan for the South Tablelands deer herd (GMU's 93, 97, 98, 99, & 100), which is the area south of the South Platte River drainage. 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 November 15, 2019.**

Please complete the following survey and return it to:

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

South Tablelands (D-54) Deer Management Area



1. Do you own land in the South Tablelands (D-54), If so, how much? (222 Responses)

- No – 60%
- <160 acres – 12%
- 160-319 acres – 3%
- 320-639 acres – 7%
- 640-999 acres – 3%
- 1000+ acres – 15%

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 Tablelands deer herd at a target **population objective** of 2,900–3,100 mule deer. Currently, the population is **estimated** to be above the target objective at 3,800 mule deer.

2. Which population alternative would you prefer CPW use to manage the South Tablelands mule deer herd for the next ten years? (225 Responses)

1. Reduce the population objective to 2,100-2,500 (25% reduction) AND reduce the current estimated population to 2,500 animals (33% reduction) – 8%
2. Manage the population near the current objective at 3,000-3,500 animals AND reduce the current estimated population by 10-15% – 44%
3. Increase the population objective to 3,500-4,000 to maintain the current estimated population – 48%

Male:Female Ratio Objective:

Currently, the South Tablelands mule deer herd is managed to provide hunting **opportunity** for a relatively high number of mature/large bucks. However, some licenses require 4 or more years to draw a buck license and it is important to note that older, mature bucks have a significantly higher prevalence of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) (a fatal neurological disease) than younger bucks or does (generally two times higher).

3. How would you like to see the number of buck licenses managed, for the South Tablelands mule deer herd over the next ten years? (222 Responses)

1. Manage for moderate levels of **opportunity** and high quality of bucks (This is the current management strategy) – 56%
2. Increase the number of buck licenses to increase hunting opportunity and reduce the number of mature bucks for CWD management – 37%
3. I am not sure – 7%



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-54

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 believe the current sex ratio is a good balance and provides ample hunting opportunity while also providing for a reasonable number of mature animals for those hunters who want to take a larger buck. This accommodates sportsmen's desires and maintains local economic benefits.

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-54. 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.

Mandatory testing for CWD is in place this year. The results from this hunting season will give us more information on CWD prevalence in the area. If prevalence rates are higher than expected, we feel that managing at the lower end of the proposed sex ratio will help to reduce CWD prevalence. We are confident that CPW is prepared to address the results of the mandatory testing through their management objectives.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dustin Wise".

Dustin Wise, Chair
Republican Rivers HPP Committee