

## E-30 Hermosa Elk Herd Executive Summary

**GMUs:** 74 and 741

**Land Ownership:** 42% USFS, 33% private land, 17% Southern Ute Tribe, 5% BLM, and 3% state lands

**Posthunt Population:**

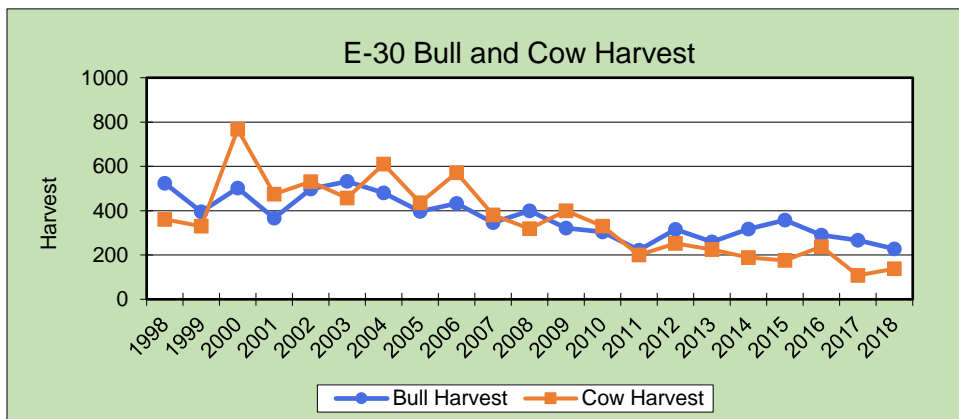
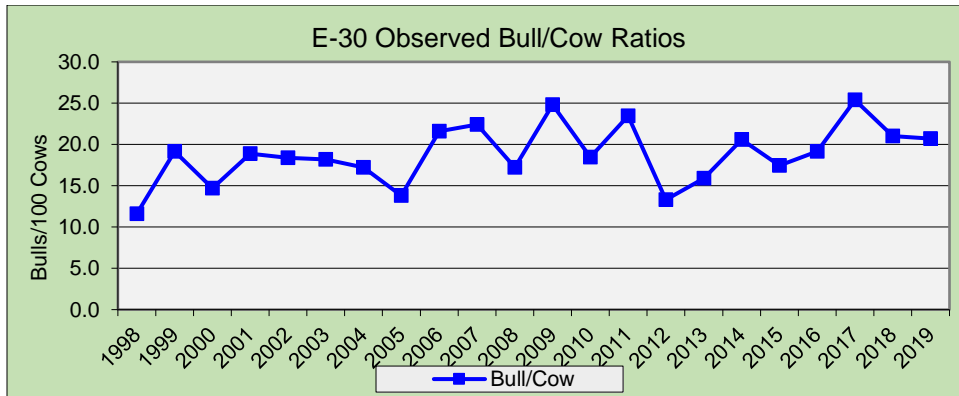
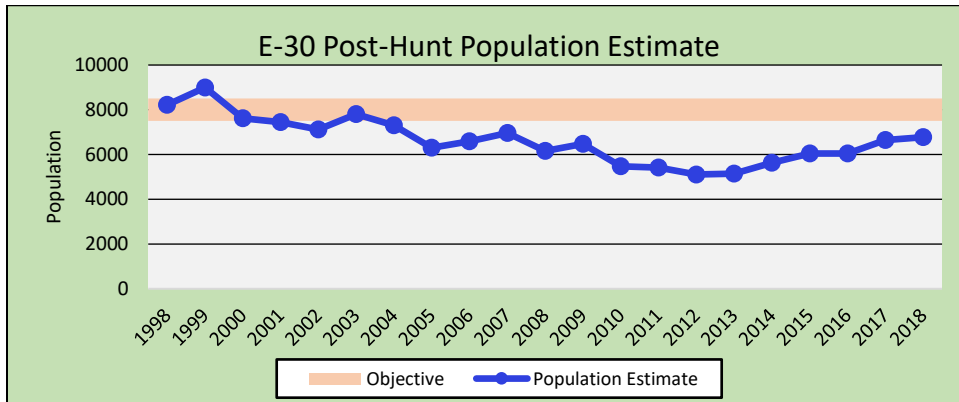
2018 Modeled Estimate: 6,770

**Proposed Objective: 7,500 – 9,000**

**Posthunt Sex Ratio:**

2018 Observed: 21 bulls:100 cows

**Expected Ratio: 15-25 bulls:100 cows**



## **Background**

The Hermosa Elk Herd is located in Southwest Colorado, west of Durango, and contains GMUs 74 and 741. The DAU is 1,000 miles<sup>2</sup> and includes portions of La Plata and San Juan counties. The elk population reached a high in the early 2000's and exceeded population management objectives. At that time cow harvest was increased through list "B" and "C" antlerless licenses, either-sex licenses, and late seasons to decrease the population. Since then the population has decreased and those tools to increase cow harvest have been removed.

## **Significant Issues**

The greatest issue that the Hermosa Elk Herd faces is the lack of recruitment. Calf to cow ratios have steadily decreased since 2006 and have been around 30 calves per 100 cows. The long-term average is 40:100. Low elk recruitment is experienced across southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. CPW is currently researching the issue with hopes of identifying the cause and possible remedies.

Cumulative impacts to critical habitat, including winter range, migration corridors, production areas, and high elevation summer range, due to human population growth is a concern in the DAU. Exurban development is occurring in La Plata County and homes are replacing open lands currently supporting wintering elk. Natural gas well development has also increased in elk habitat on private and public lands. Lastly, outdoor recreation continues to grow, placing more people into areas used by elk. Increased recreational trails and recreation use is decreasing the amount of effective habitat. Managers and the public are concerned over cumulative and prolonged impacts of development and recreation disrupting migration and decreasing quality and quantity of habitat. Actions to enhance and protect important elk habitat will be essential to increase the elk population.

## **Management Objectives**

### Population Objective Alternatives

Population objective alternatives were developed around the current population estimate and based on public input received from the meetings and survey. Ranges presented in each alternative allow for management flexibility to changing conditions or unknowns such as drought or disease. Any suggested increase in the population would require habitat improvement and protection to mitigate for the continual loss of habitat due to human population growth and encroachment. It is recognized that there are some modeling issues caused by a high sex ratio observed in 2017. The following three population objectives were proposed with alternative 2 being preferred.

Alternative 1: 6,500 – 8,000 elk post-hunt (current population)

**\*\*Alternative 2: 7,500 –9,000 elk post-hunt (15% increase)**

Alternative 3: 8,500 – 10,000 elk post-hunt (25% increase)

### Sex Ratio

E-30 is managed for maximum hunter opportunity with over-the-counter bull licenses in second and third rifle seasons. Because of this, the number of bulls in the populations is not dictated by a management action and sex ratio alternatives were not considered. Instead, an expected sex ratio was proposed.

**Expected observed sex ratio: 15 to 25 bulls per 100 cows**