

E-31 San Juan Basin Elk Herd Executive Summary

GMUs: 75, 751, 77, 78, and 771

Land Ownership: 55% USFS, 30% private land, 12 % Southern Ute Tribal lands, and 2% BLM

Posthunt Population:

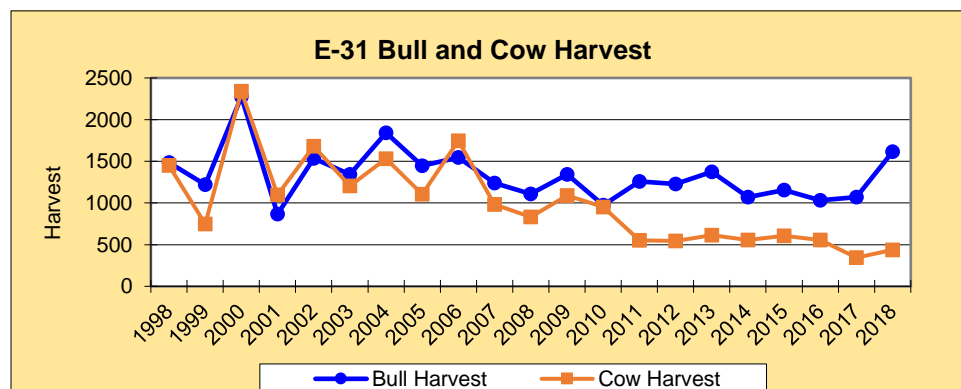
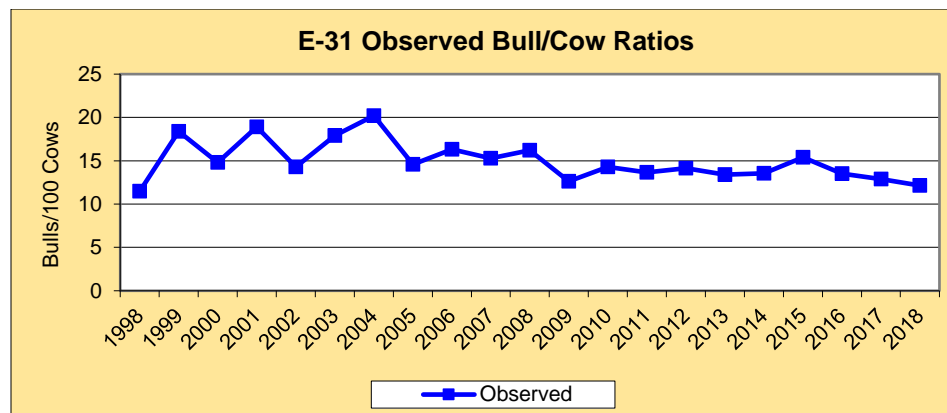
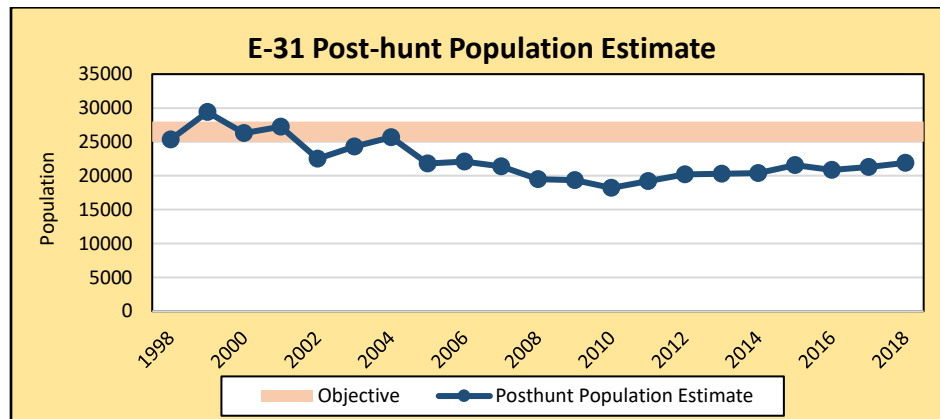
2018 Modeled Estimate: 22,000

Proposed Objective: 25,000 – 28,000

Posthunt Sex Ratio:

2018 Observed: 12 bulls:100 cows

Expected Ratio: 12-20 bulls:100 cows



Background

The San Juan Basin Elk Population is located in the southwest corner of Colorado and contains Game Management Units (GMU's) 75, 751, 77, 771, and 78. The DAU is 2,800 square miles and includes portions of La Plata, San Juan, Hinsdale, Mineral, and Archuleta 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 San Juan Basin 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 prior to the decrease was 41:100. 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 Archuleta and La Plata counties 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 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. The following three population objectives were proposed with alternative 2 being the preferred alternative.

Alternative 1: 22,000 to 25,000 (current population)

****Alternative 2: 25,000 to 28,000 (15% increase)**

Alternative 3: 27,000 to 30,000 (25% increase)

Sex Ratio

E-31 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: 12 to 20 bulls per 100 cows