

Colorado Parks and Wildlife  
Habitat Partnership Program  
San Luis Valley



## DISTRIBUTION MANAGEMENT PLAN



Approved- Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission November 15, 2019  
This plan is valid for 10 years from approval date.

**2019-2029**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

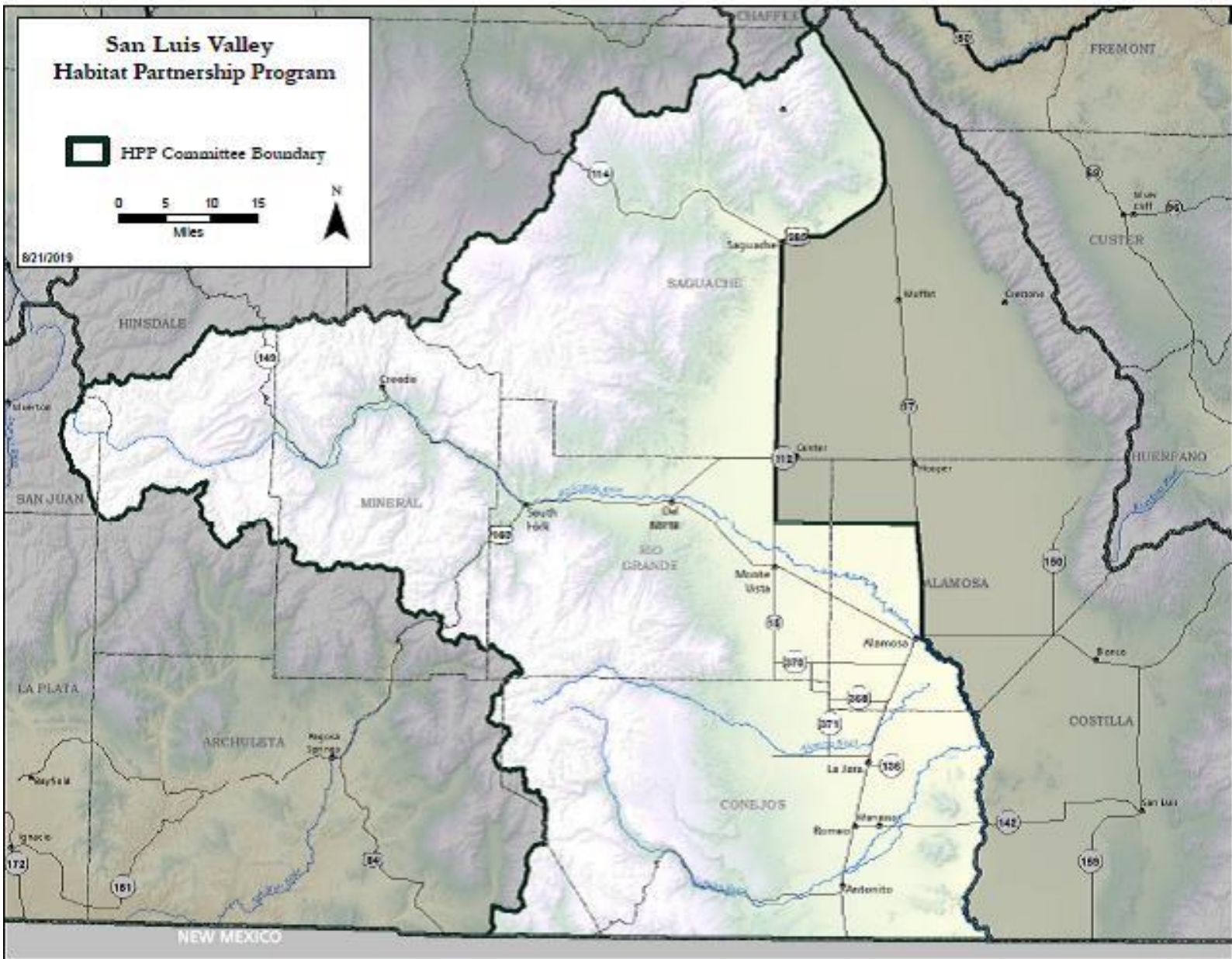
This Distribution Management Plan (DMP) is the basic framework for the San Luis Valley HPP Committee for the next ten years - 2019 to 2029. The updated plan drafted by the San Luis Valley Committee is centered on four key aspects including; conflicts, cooperation, stewardship and habitat development. The vision of the San Luis Valley Committee is to establish short-term management strategies to resolve immediate fence and forage conflicts caused by big game; and to identify adaptive, long-term management strategies that clearly define, evaluate and resolve conflicts by perpetuating the establishment of healthy and sustainable rangelands.

The San Luis Valley Committee area has seen many changes to wildlife habitat as a result of population growth, expansion of recreation, and subsequent habitat fragmentation. The committee will continue to monitor and adapt to these changes, and projects will be implemented wherever the committee believes that they will effectively reduce or eliminate big game conflicts and assist CPW in achieving game management objectives. Operating guidelines have been established to help inform funding decisions and prioritization of projects. Budget guidelines show likely allocations of funds based on past projects. Budget allocations may change as new opportunities arise. The committee has identified current and foreseeable issues for the area and has specified project types and management strategies that are aimed at adapting to these issues in order to continue reducing wildlife conflicts and helping CPW in achieving game management objectives.

Impact areas have been modified from the previous plan to better represent current challenges. Impact areas include the pronghorn population west of Center, elk on the Rio Grande River corridor between Del Norte and Alamosa, and elk associated with the Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge. The SLV HPP Committee continues to fund projects including pronghorn surveys, conservation easement transaction cost funding, and fencing to help resolve these issues.

The committee continues to focus on the protection and enhancement of wildlife habitat. This includes identification and mitigation of forage conflicts, developing and maintaining communication links, enhancing stewardship opportunities, and supporting habitat enhancement projects. The committee has three livestock growers, one US Forest Service representative, one BLM representative, one US Fish and Wildlife Service representative, one sportsman representative and one CPW representative.

# MAP OF SAN LUIS VALLEY HPP AREA



# COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- |  |                             |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. Mick Davis, Sportsman Representative, Chairman                    | Started HPP Term: May 1995  |
| 2. Carol Lee Dugan, Livestock Grower Representative                  | Started HPP Term: Nov. 2004 |
| 3. Richard Davie, Livestock Grower Representative                    | Started HPP Term: May 2006  |
| 4. Mark Bechaver, Livestock Grower Representative                    | Started HPP Term: Nov. 2011 |
| 5. Brent Woodward, Colorado Parks and Wildlife Representative        | Started HPP Term: Jun. 2003 |
| 6. Dale Gomez, United States Forest Service Representative           | Started HPP Term: Jan. 2000 |
| 7. Suzanne Beauchaine, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Representative | Started HPP Term: Sep. 2014 |
| 8. Eduardo Duran, Bureau of Land Management Representative           | Started HPP Term: Apr. 2017 |

# INTRODUCTION

The San Luis Valley is the largest high desert valley in the world and provides habitat for abundant populations of elk, deer, pronghorn, bighorn sheep, a small herd of moose and an occasional mountain goat. Agriculture is the largest industry in the San Luis Valley. There are many cattle growers in the Valley and the crops grown are diverse, ranging from dairy quality alfalfa and native grass hay, wheat, barley, sorghum, canola, spinach, lettuce, carrots and potatoes. In response to some of the conflicts between agriculture and big game wildlife, the Habitat Partnership Program Committee for the San Luis Valley area was established in May of 1995.

The committee began with work sessions in June 1994 familiarizing itself with the program, its processes and its flexibility. A letter explaining the partnership and questionnaire regarding fence and forage conflicts was sent to nearly 1000 landowners. The scope of the survey was limited to owners of 160 acres or more in agricultural tax status in the 6 counties of the San Luis Valley. Of those surveyed 43 responses were returned. There were 18 responses indicating no conflict or other conflicts that were outside the scope of the committee, while 25 responses described fence and/or forage conflicts of varying degrees. Following the survey the committee hosted meetings with local landowners in five areas where conflicts could be grouped to a geographic area. Meetings in Monte Vista and Antonito were unattended by landowners. At the time of the original plan the program area included the entire San Luis Valley. Because of diverse management needs, the area was split in 1998 with the east portion going into the newly established Mount Blanca HPP area.

## SAN LUIS VALLEY HPP COMMITTEE VISION:

To establish short-term management strategies to resolve immediate fence and forage conflicts caused by big game; and to identify adaptive, long term management strategies that clearly define, evaluate, and resolve conflicts by perpetuating the establishment of healthy and sustainable rangelands.

# HPP ORIENTATION

HPP was initially started to resolve fence and forage conflicts caused to agricultural operators by deer, elk, pronghorn and moose. While the law governing HPP was broadened in 2002 (“...reduce wildlife conflicts...game management objectives”) in 2017 the State Council and the NW Region Manager reaffirmed the intent and focus of HPP.

This direction provides for HPP participation, whether by local committees or the State Council, to be limited to those conflict resolution projects or game management objective projects that involve deer, elk, pronghorn and moose.

## HPP STATUTE - (C.R.S. 33-1-110)

(8) (a) The habitat partnership program is hereby created to assist the division of parks and wildlife by working with private land managers, public land management agencies, sports persons, and other interested parties to reduce wildlife conflicts, particularly those associated with forage and fence issues, and to assist the division of parks and wildlife in meeting game management objectives through duties as deemed appropriate by the director.

(b) The director, with the approval of the commission, shall have the authority to appoint a "habitat partnership committee", referred to in this section as a "committee", in any area of the state where conflicts between wildlife and private land owners and managers engaged in the management of public and private land exist.

(c) A committee shall consist of the following members: One sports person who purchases big game licenses on a regular basis in Colorado; three persons representing livestock growers in the area of the state in which the committee is being established; one person from each of the federal agencies that has land management responsibilities in such area of the state; and one person from the Colorado division of parks and wildlife. All persons on any such committee shall be residents of the state of Colorado.

(d) The duties of a committee are the following:

(I) To develop big game distribution management plans to resolve rangeland forage, growing hay crop, harvested crop aftermath grazing, and fence conflicts subject to commission approval;

(II) To monitor program effectiveness and to propose to the council changes in guidelines and land acquisition planning and review as appropriate;

(III) To request for the committee, on an annual basis, funds from the council consistent with the distribution management plan developed by any such committee;

(IV) To expend funds allocated by the council or acquired from other sources as necessary to implement distribution management plans;

(V) To make an annual report of expenditures and accomplishments of the committee to the council by August 15 of each year;

(VI) To nominate a person to act as a representative of agricultural livestock growers or crop producers to the habitat partnership council for the area of the state where such committee is organized;

(VII) To reduce wildlife and land management conflicts as the conflicts relate to big game forage and fence issues and other management objectives.

(e) The committee shall be authorized to procure from land owners, land managers, or other providers, materials or services necessary for carrying out activities identified in the distribution management plans pursuant to subparagraph (IV) of paragraph (d) of this subsection (8); except that all such procurements shall be certified as within the scope of the activities and funding levels authorized in such distribution management plans before any such procurement may be authorized.

# COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

**Objective 1: Resolve conflicts and minimize game damage on private lands** - Identify and mitigate forage and fence conflicts through a range of options to affect distribution and game harvest opportunities and reduce game damage on private lands.

## STRATEGIES:

1. Use habitat manipulation, water developments, dispersal hunts and other methods to improve herd distribution and reduce conflicts.
2. Cooperate with landowners on fence repair or replacement projects requesting that they consider wildlife friendly designs.
3. Recommend dispersal, management or Private Land Only hunts to disperse animals from conflict areas. Hunt coordinators may be contracted to supervise the hunt and hunters.
4. Work with USFWS and CPW to continue hunting elk on the Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge.
5. Work with landowners to assure tolerance for acceptable numbers of big game utilizing private lands.

**Objective 2: Protect big game habitat on private lands by promoting continued agricultural use of those lands** - especially in impact areas, critical winter range, migration corridors and other priority areas.

## STRATEGIES:

1. Support new conservation easements in important habitat areas by reimbursing transaction costs. These costs include land surveys, appraisals, legal fees and other administrative costs for the conservation easement.
2. Request that landowners work with CPW to manage big game species within the proposed conservation easement including allowing hunting.

**Objective 3: Improve habitat conditions on public and private lands to ensure properly functioning range lands, reducing conflicts between livestock and big game, and promoting healthy big game populations and better distribution of big game animals.**

## STRATEGIES:

Partner with landowners and agencies on projects including:

1. Prescribed burning
2. Mechanical or hand manipulation of certain species of plants
3. Water developments
4. Weed control, fertilization and seeding (although not previously used by this committee) may be options in certain cases

**Objective 4: Improve communication and cooperation between CPW, ranchers, farmers, land management agencies, sportsmen and women and various recreational groups regarding big game and the agricultural community conflicts.**

## STRATEGIES:

1. Participate in meetings with CPW and the DAU management process, giving recommendations for herd objectives within the committee boundary.
2. Keep lines of communication with all parties open.



3. If requested, provide input in various settings with the public to promote the HPP program.
4. Work with public land agencies to help identify and close illegal trails and roads in the interest of protecting big game habitat.

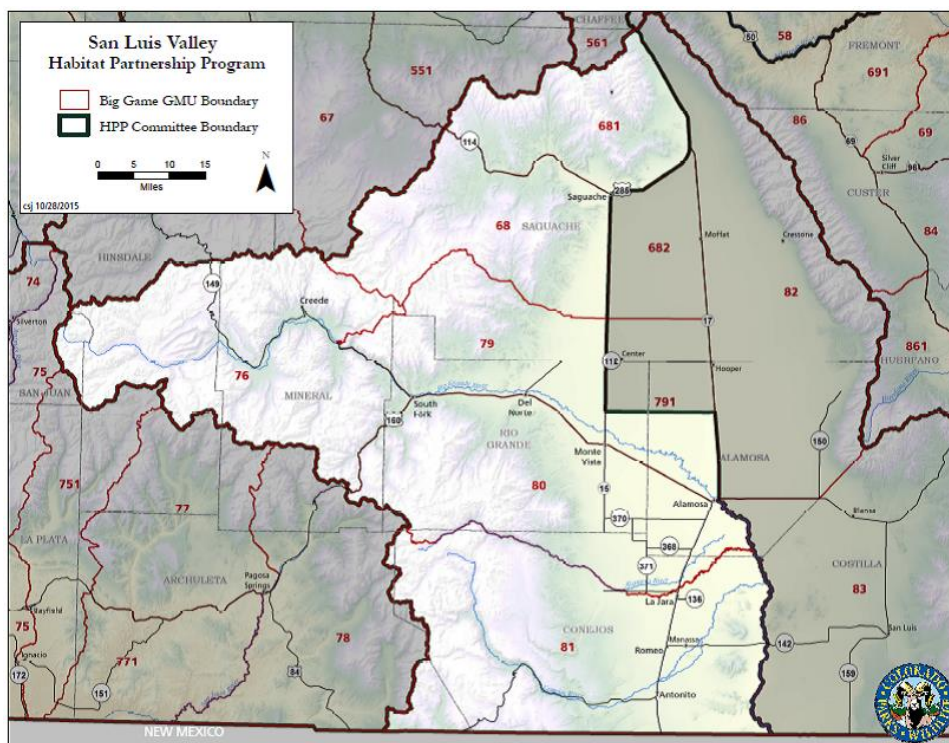
**Objective 5: Work with CPW as a partner in studies to determine big game habits and lessen conflicts with the agricultural community.**

**STRATEGIES:**

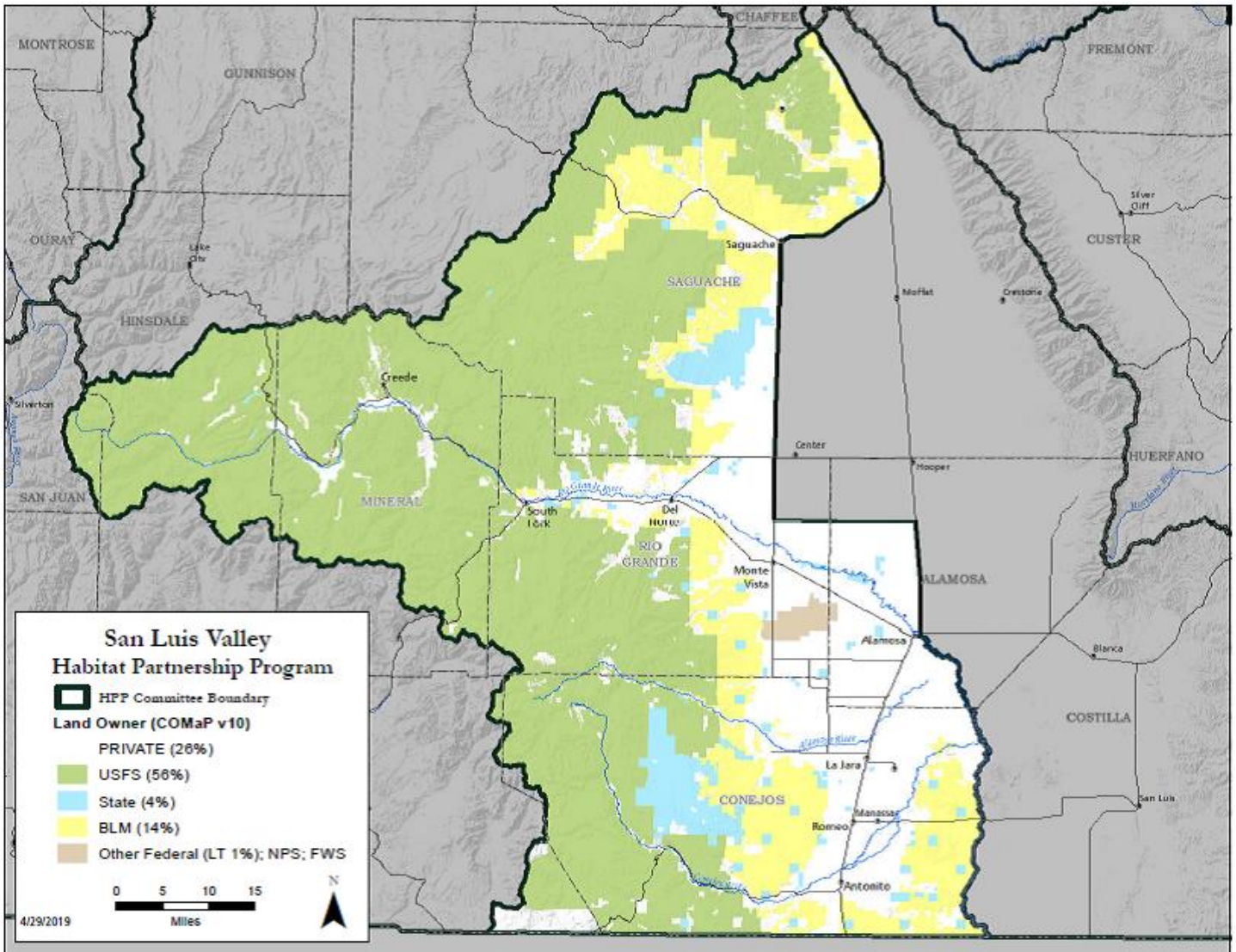
1. Conduct antelope census in the core area of pronghorn conflicts.
2. Cooperate in studies to aid in the determination of fawn and calf recruitment to aid in maintaining a healthy big game population.
3. Cooperate in studies to aid in determining migration patterns and seasonal use habits which may determine the need for future HPP projects.
4. Consult with District Wildlife Managers to determine need for projects to lessen the conflicts between the agricultural community and big game.

## SAN LUIS VALLEY HPP AREA DESCRIPTION

The San Luis Valley Habitat Partnership Program area includes all portions of the Rio Grande drainage basins within Colorado, including the Conejos River, covering an area of about 4,800 square miles. It covers all of Rio Grande and Conejos Counties and parts of Alamosa, Hinsdale, Mineral, Saguache and San Juan Counties. It includes game management units 68, 681, 76, 80, 81, 79, and fifty percent of 791. The area is bounded on the north by the Crest of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains at Poncha Pass, on the east by Hwy 285, County Road 5 and Hwy 17 to the Rio Grande River, on the south by the Colorado/New Mexico state line and on the west by the continental divide in the San Juan and LaGarita Mountains. Elevation ranges from a low of approximately 7,500 feet on the Valley floor to almost 14,000 feet in the peaks of the San Juan Mountains.



The SLV HPP Committee area encompasses 3,047,287 acres, of which 56% is US Forest Service, 14% is Bureau of Land Management, 4% is State of Colorado, <1% is local government and 26% is privately owned.



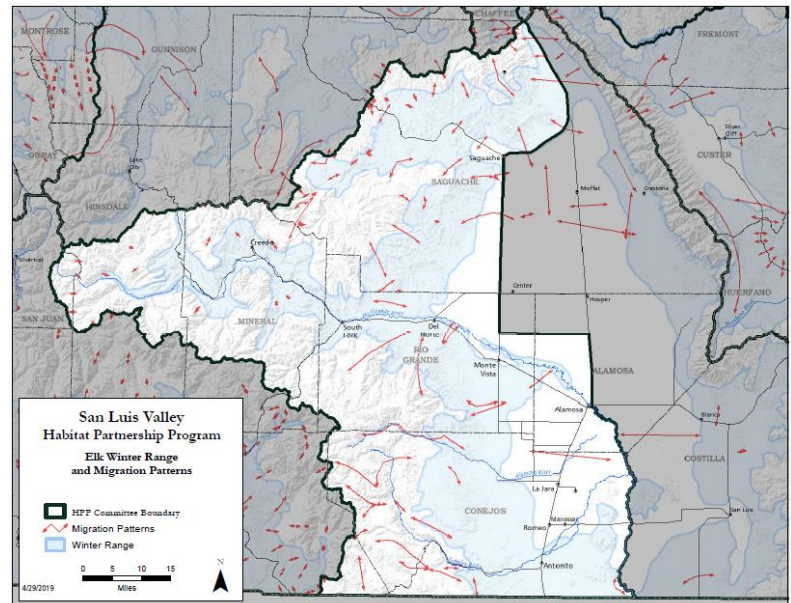
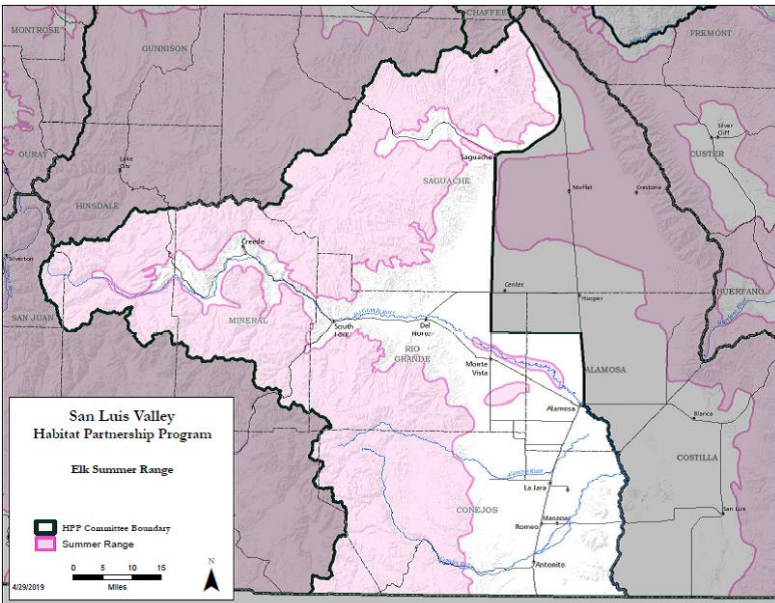
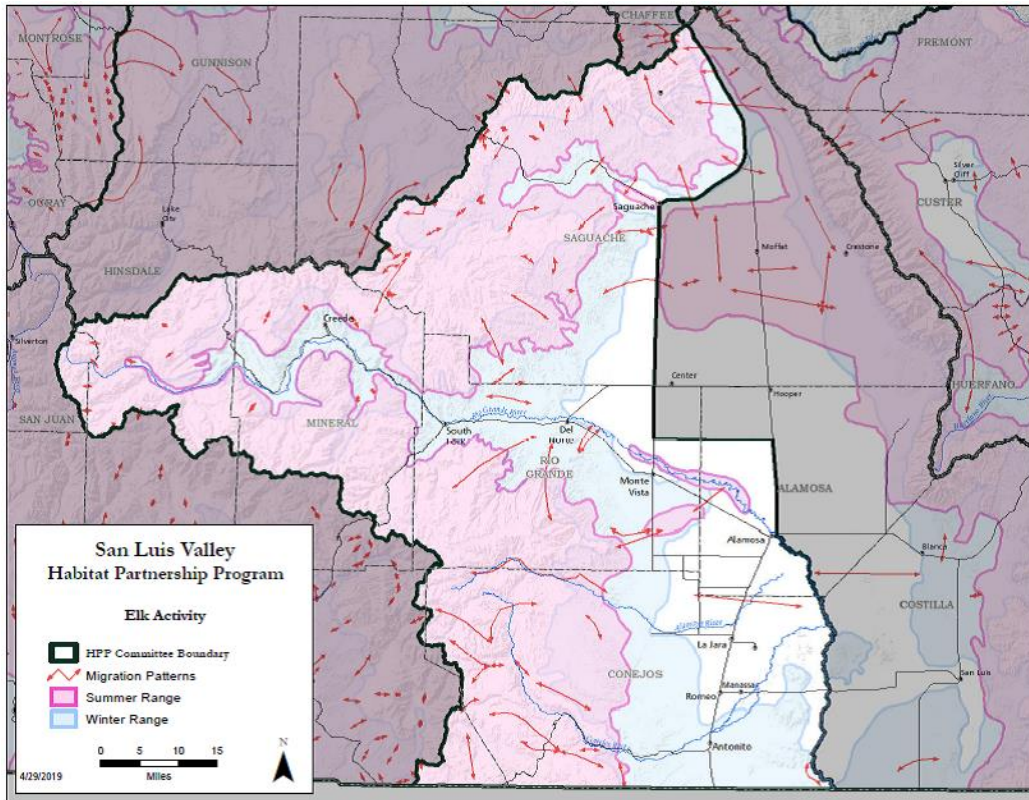
## HABITAT DESCRIPTION

The climate is a highland or mountain climate with cool summers and very cold winters with heavy snows. The higher elevations of the San Juan Mountains receive 50 inches of precipitation annually, while the foothills receive 12-16 inches. The valley floor gets only 7-8 inches a year and is considered a high desert.

The lower elevations between 7,500 and 8,200 feet are grassland/shrub and agricultural lands, but as elevation and precipitation increase, the vegetation changes to pinion-juniper, ponderosa pine and then Douglas fir and white fir combined with extensive stands of aspen. Between 9,500 and 12,500 feet, stands of Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir are predominant. Extensive areas of alpine tundra occur above 12,500 feet.

# BIG GAME POPULATION SUMMARY

## ELK RANGE MAPS



**ELK** - The San Luis Valley HPP area includes three different elk herds.

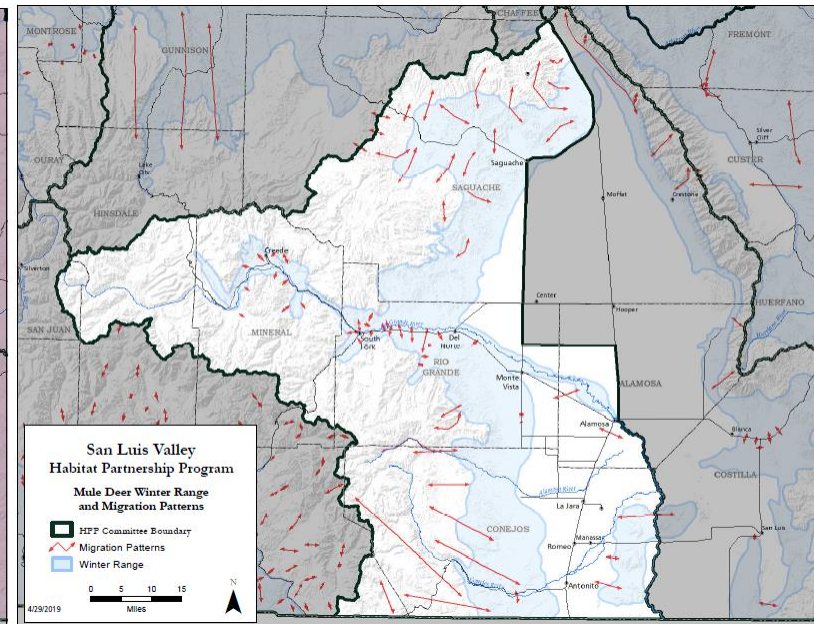
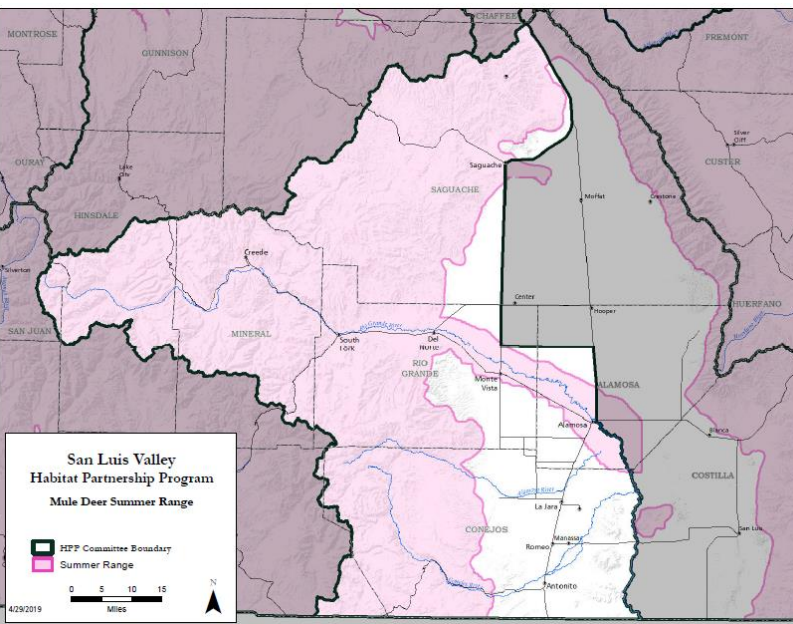
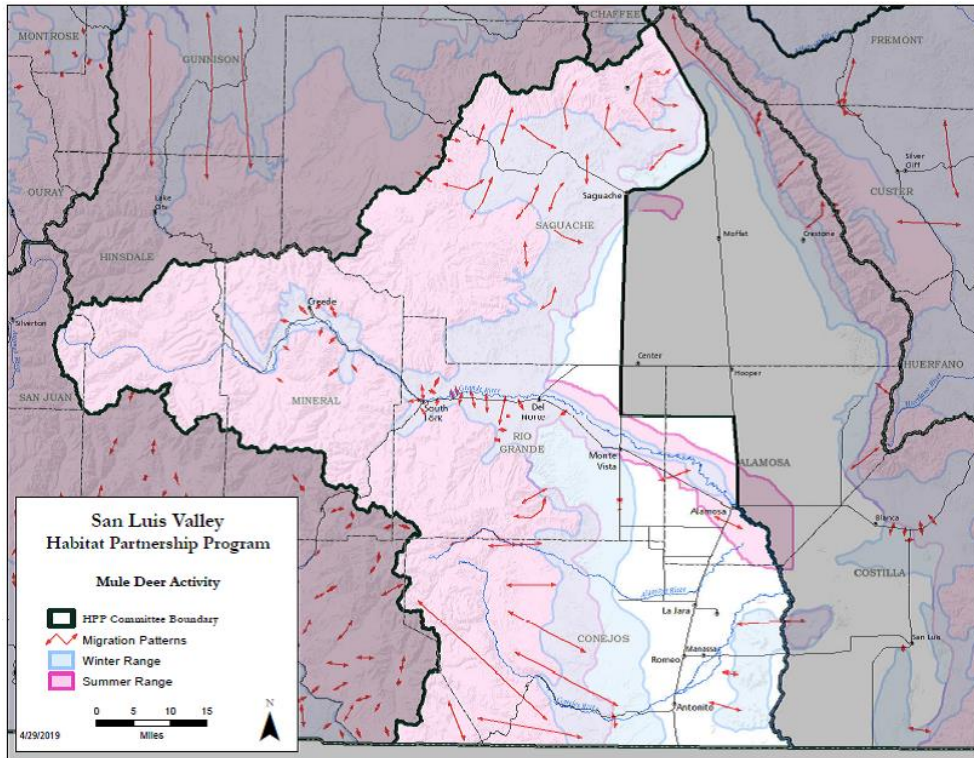
The Saguache elk herd (E-26) is located on the northern side of the San Luis Valley. It consists of GMUs 68 and 681. E-26 is approximately 670,000 acres in size and is entirely within Saguache County. Its primary drainages are Saguache Creek, Kerber Creek, and Carnero Creek. Landowner conflict with this herd generally occurs during the late winter and spring months, involving pasture

forage and fence damage. This herd is below the recently (2019) updated population objective range. Management strategies will attempt to increase the herd to numbers estimated in the late 2000's and within the new 2019 population objective range. Management at this level may have increased impact on agricultural interests, depending on elk distribution caused by potential winter severity or summer drought conditions. However, CPW has additional tools available to address any landowner conflicts, should they arise.

The Lower Rio Grande elk herd (E-32) is located on the southwest side of the San Luis Valley. It consists of GMUs 80 and 81. E-32 is approximately 1,344,000 acres in size and encompasses portions of Alamosa, Rio Grande, Conejos, Mineral, and Archuleta Counties. Its main drainages are the Rio Grande, Conejos, and Alamosa Rivers. Landowner conflicts in this area have reduced considerably from what they had been in the early 2000's. Of the conflicts that do occur, fence damage and foraging on agricultural crops are the focus, particularly around the Monte Vista Wildlife refuge area. This herd is below the 2018 objective range, and the management intent is to increase the herd. Any future conflicts that do occur will depend on elk distribution caused by potential winter severity or summer drought conditions. However, CPW has additional tools available to address any landowner conflicts, should they arise.

The Upper Rio Grande elk herd (E-34) is located on the western side of the San Luis Valley. It consists of GMUs 76 and 79. It is approximately 946,000 acres in size and encompasses portions of San Juan, Hinsdale, Mineral, Saguache, and Rio Grande Counties. The DAU consist of GMUs 76 and 79. The majority of elk conflicts that occur from this herd are in GMU 79, on agricultural land along the Rio Grande River. Of these conflicts, fence damage and foraging on agricultural crops are the focus. The herd population trajectory is running within the objective range, which was established in 2010. An updated herd management plan for this herd will be pursued in the next two to three years.

# DEER RANGE MAPS



**DEER-** The San Luis Valley HPP area includes three different deer herds.

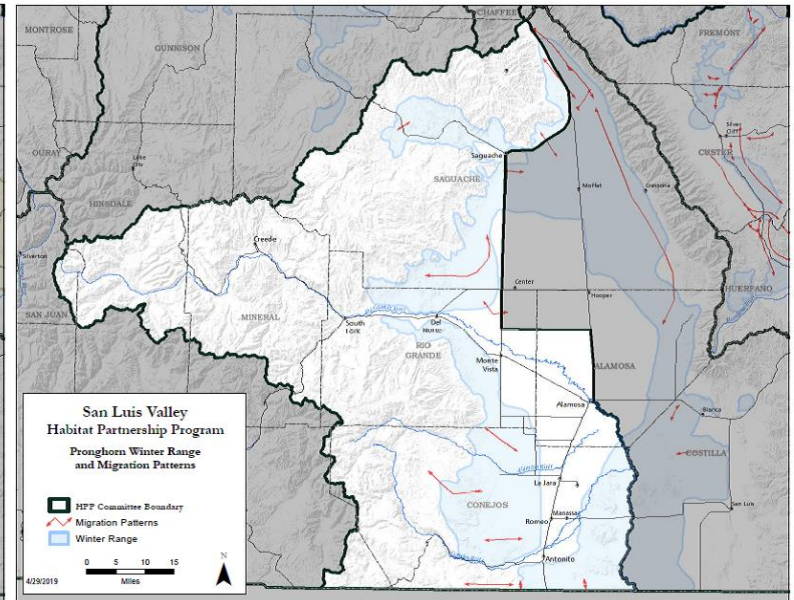
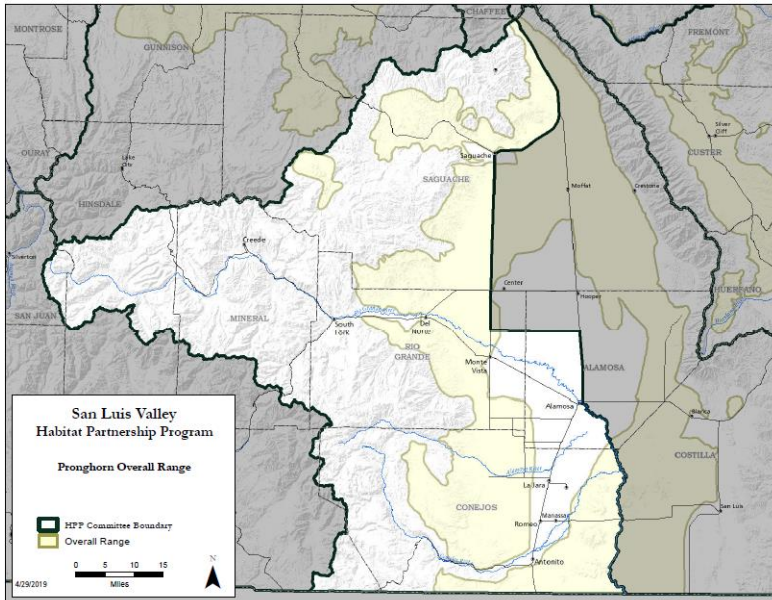
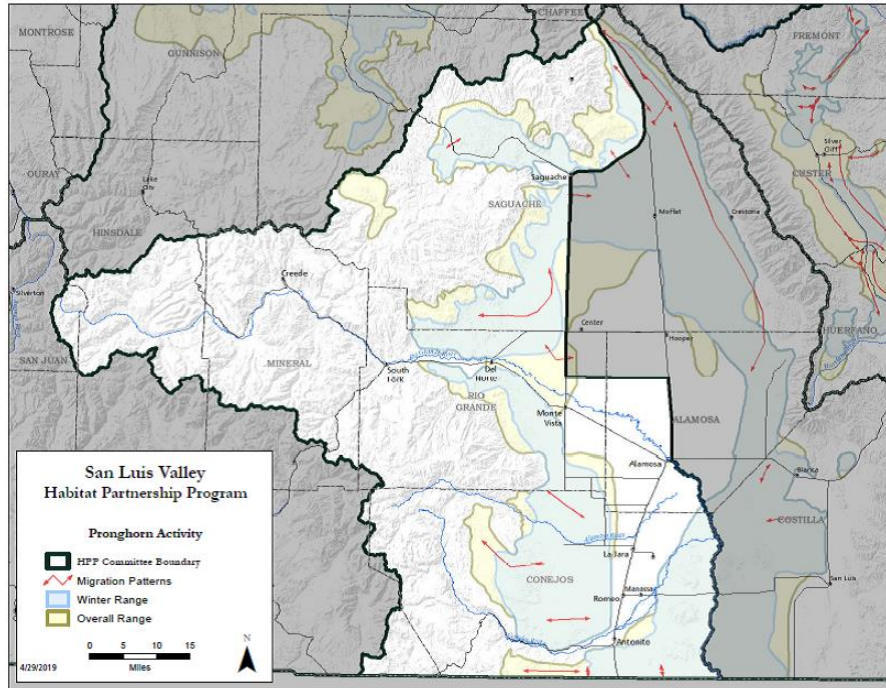
The Saguache deer herd (D-26) is located on the northwest side of the San Luis Valley. It consists of GMUs 68, 681 and 682. D-26 is approximately 833,000 acres in size and is entirely within Saguache County. Its primary drainages are Saguache Creek, Carnero Creek and Kerber Creek. Deer conflicts have generally occurred at lower elevations foraging on agricultural crops. Damage to fences caused by deer has been relatively low in the recent past, but this could increase depending on winter severity or drought conditions driving deer onto private irrigated land. This herd has been increasing steadily, but remains at the lower end of the newly (2019) updated

objective range. Fawn recruitment remains strong and the herd has the potential for modest growth in population. However, CPW has additional tools available to address any increased deer conflicts, should they arise.

The Lower Rio Grande deer herd (D-35) is located on the southwest side of the San Luis Valley. It consists of GMUs 80 and 81. D-35 is approximately 1,344,000 acres in size and encompasses portions of Alamosa, Rio Grande, Conejos, Mineral, and Archuleta Counties. Its primary drainages are the Rio Grande, Conejos and Alamosa Rivers. Deer conflicts in this DAU have been minimal. Any conflicts that do occur are at lower elevation on agricultural crops during the late winter or early spring months. The population trajectory of this herd is relatively stable but running within the objective range, which was established in 2017.

The Upper Rio Grande deer herd (D-34) is located on the western side of the San Luis Valley. It is approximately 1,153,000 acres in size and encompasses portions of San Juan, Hinsdale, Mineral, Saguache, Alamosa and Rio Grande Counties. The DAU contains GMUs 76, 79, and 791. Conflicts that occur with deer in this DAU are usually at lower elevations, on agricultural crops, in GMU 79 and 791. Damage to fences may occur if deer coalesce into larger groups during winter and early spring months, foraging on alfalfa or hay crops. The herd is estimated to be running within the population objective range and has done so since it was established in 2010. An updated herd management plan (HMP) will be pursued within the next two to three years. However, no significant management changes are expected.

# PRONGHORN RANGE MAPS



**PRONGHORN-** The San Luis Valley HPP area includes two different pronghorn herds.

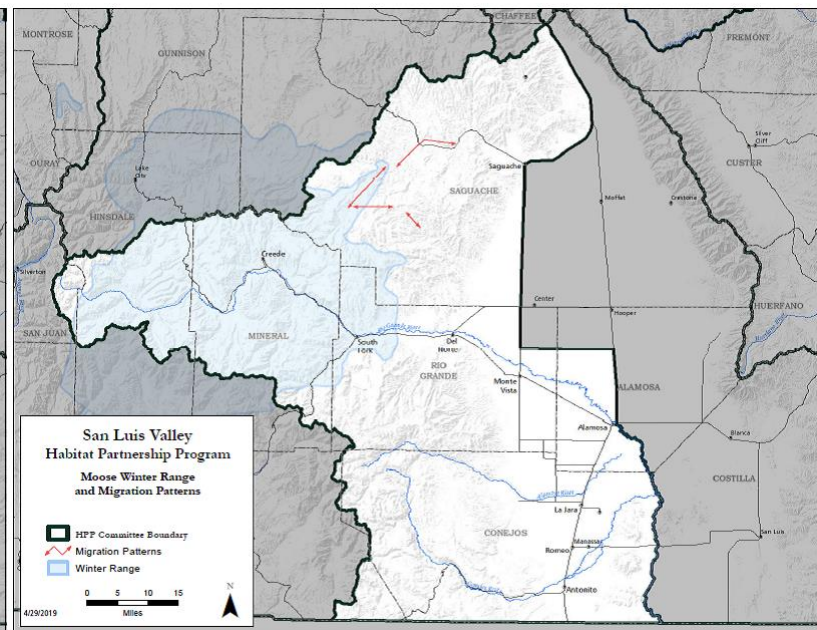
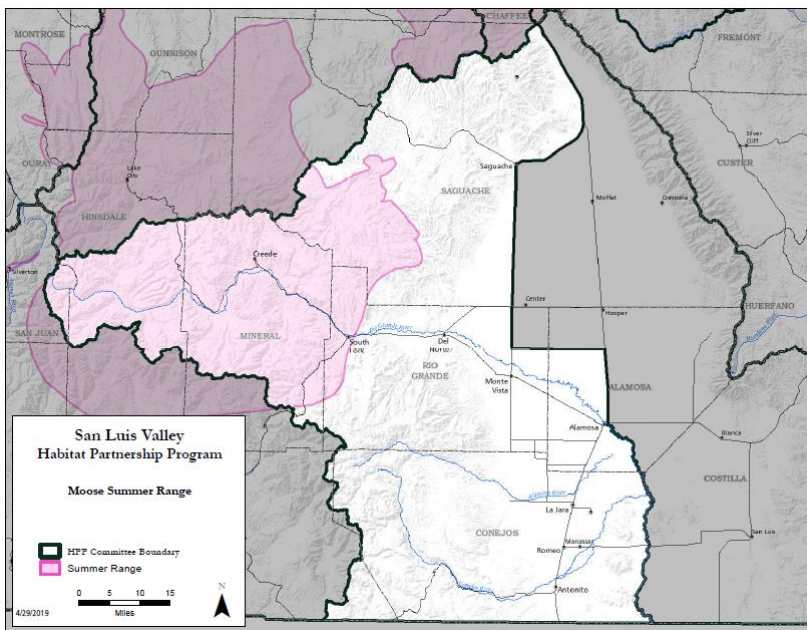
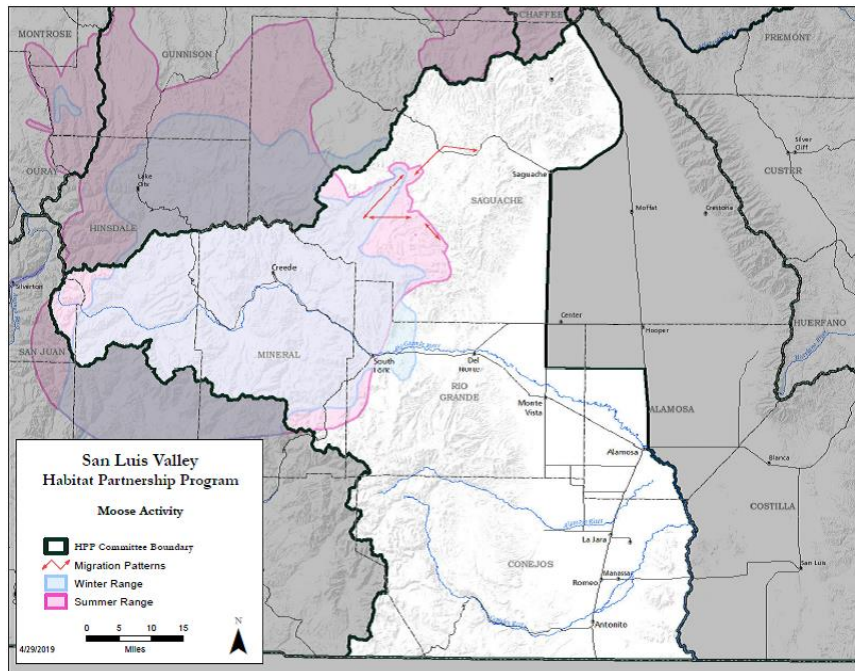
The Northern San Luis Valley pronghorn herd (PH-14) is located on the northern side of the San Luis Valley. It consists of GMUs 68, 79, 82, 681, 682, and 791. GMU 82 does not fall within the boundaries of the San Luis Valley HPP designated area. PH-14 is approximately 2,063,718 acres in size, of which only 1,517 square miles are considered pronghorn range. It encompasses portions of Rio Grande, Saguache, Alamosa, and Mineral Counties, although there are rarely any pronghorn in the Mineral County portion of the DAU. Its primary drainages are the Rio Grande River, Saguache Creek, Carnero Creek, Russel Creek, and San Luis Creek. Pronghorn conflicts in this area are generally related to animals foraging on agricultural land, but this has subsided considerably over recent years. During the severe drought years in the early 2000's and subsequent dry years thereafter, pronghorn have moved from non-irrigated habitat on public lands onto irrigated

agricultural fields; many of these pronghorn have become resident groups. Most of the areas that have conflicts are in GMU 79, north and northeast of Del Norte, west of Hwy 285, around Hwy 112, and in GMU 82 along the Villa Grove area. This has been a distribution dilemma more than an overpopulation problem. However, as with deer and elk conflict issues, CPW has additional tools available to address any increased pronghorn conflicts, should they arise. The HMP for this herd is currently being reviewed and updated, with expected completion and CPW Wildlife Commission approval by spring 2020. No significant management changes are expected to be made with the updated HMP.

The Southern San Luis Valley pronghorn herd is located on the southern side of the San Luis Valley. It consists of GMUs 80, 81, and 83. The DAU encompasses portions of Rio Grande, Conejos, Costilla, and to a lower degree Alamosa, Archuleta, and Mineral Counties. No known pronghorn are currently found in the Archuleta or Mineral County portions of the DAU. The area rarely has issues relating to pronghorn conflict. Any issues that do occur are usually at the lower elevations in GMU 80 or 81, and these are related to agricultural crop depredation. This pronghorn herd remains below the most recently established (2008) population objective range and has been relatively stable since the late 1990's. The HMP for this herd is currently being reviewed and updated, with expected completion and CPW Wildlife Commission approval by spring 2020. No significant management changes are expected to be made with the updated HMP.



# MOOSE RANGE MAPS



**Moose-** The San Luis Valley HPP area includes one herd.

The southwest Colorado moose herd M-4 is located over a large portion of south-central Colorado, on both sides of the Continental Divide. It runs from Alamosa west to Durango, then north to Silverton and northeast to Blue Mesa Reservoir, east to Gunnison then back south to Alamosa. It covers an area of approximately 5,642,000 acres, and contains approximately 1,920,000 acres of suitable moose habitat. Within the boundaries of the San Luis Valley HPP area, moose can be found in GMUs 68, 76, 79, 80, 81 and 681. The most significant habitat is within the Rio Grande and San Juan National forests. The area has rarely had any issues relating to moose conflict. If any should occur, they are usually relating to fence damage. There are no formal population objectives set for this herd. However, in reference to the 2005 HMP, the objectives are to: 1) Keep the population small enough to avoid excessive damage to willow stands; 2) maximize hunting

opportunity for cows and mature bulls by maintaining high productivity in the herd; and 3) provide adequate opportunities for viewing. Over the entire area of the DAU, the herd is estimated be between 400 and 500 animals and this has been increasing. With the population increase, comes increasing distribution of moose. This in turn, creates heightened potential for moose conflicts to occur, particularly on private land along the Rio Grande River and the Saguache Creek.

Table 1. Data Analysis Unit Summary for San Luis Valley HPP Area

Management Herd	1990s Population Avg	2000s Population Avg	2010 - 2018 Population Avg	Current Population Management Objective
Elk- Saguache E-26	7,900	5,400	3,700	4,000 - 4,800
<i>Game Management Units:</i>	68, 681			
Elk - Lower Rio Grande E-32	12,600	12,300	10,600	11,500 - 13,000
<i>Game Management Units:</i>	80, 81			
Elk - Upper Rio Grande E-34	7,400	6,500	4,800	4,000 - 5,500
<i>Game Management Units:</i>	76, 79			
Deer - Saguache D-26	5,200	4,200	4,800	5,500 - 6,000
<i>Game Management Units:</i>	68, 681, 682			
Deer - Lower Rio Grande D-35	5,500	5,100	5,200	5,500 - 6,500
<i>Game Management Units:</i>	80, 81			
Deer - Upper Rio Grande D-36	2,900	2,500	2,200	2,200 - 2,500
<i>Game Management Units:</i>	76,79			
Pronghorn - Northern San Luis Valley PH-14	3,000	2,100	1,500	2,000 - 2,500*
<i>Game Management Units:</i>	68, 79, 82+, 681, 682, 791			
Pronghorn - Southern San Luis Valley PH-16	1,400	700	700	1,000 - 1,500*
<i>Game Management Units:</i>	80, 81, 83+			
Moose - Southwest Colorado M-4	No Estimate	No Estimate	No Estimate	400-500^
<i>Game Management Units:</i>	68, 76, 79, 80, 81, 681			

*These numbers are only estimates based on the population models' predicted population numbers.*

*\*Herd Management Plan (HMP) being re-written in 2019- Objectives may change*

*+GMU in not within SLV HPP boundaries, but is within the DAU of this pronghorn herd*

*^This is an estimate only. There are no formal population objectives for this herd currently.*

# IMPACT AREAS

After talking with each of the District Wildlife Managers within the San Luis Valley HPP committee boundary, three major impact areas were determined to exist. Other areas where occasional conflicts occur have been dealt with using the large variety of tools available to CPW.

## **Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge:**

The concentration of elk on the National Wildlife Refuge has increased the need for fencing projects adjacent to the refuge. In 2016 the USFWS started a refuge hunting program on a limited basis, and so far the results have been beneficial. Culling has been used since 2007 to help curtail the elk numbers within the National Wildlife Refuge. The problem is that there is a resident herd and large numbers of elk moving onto the National Wildlife Refuge for the ample forage during winter months. The SLV HPP committee will continue to coordinate with CPW and USFWS in an effort to minimize damage to the National Wildlife Refuge and surrounding properties.

## **Rio Grande River Corridor:**

The river corridor contains a large population of deer, and elk populations along the river corridor from 2 miles east of Del Norte to 2 miles west of Alamosa have been increasing. The corridor has a number of properties that provide a safe haven for wildlife. The problem is that the elk in particular often cause fence and forage damage to neighboring properties. CPW does issue vouchers to landowners experiencing conflicts, but the problem is still likely to increase. Working with groups pursuing conservation easements along the river corridor has allowed HPP to promote the cooperation with CPW in managing the herd populations as well as hunting opportunities. The San Luis Valley HPP Committee has identified the Rio Grande River corridor from approximately 20 miles west of Creede to the New Mexico border as a priority area for the acquisition of conservation easements and payment of conservation easement transaction costs.

## **Center West Antelope Area:**

An area southeast of La Garita to Center received a number of complaints in the past. About 200 antelope were observed in 2002, when the committee first began to conduct a census. Since then the numbers have been stabilized at 40 to 60 for a number of years based on the following actions:

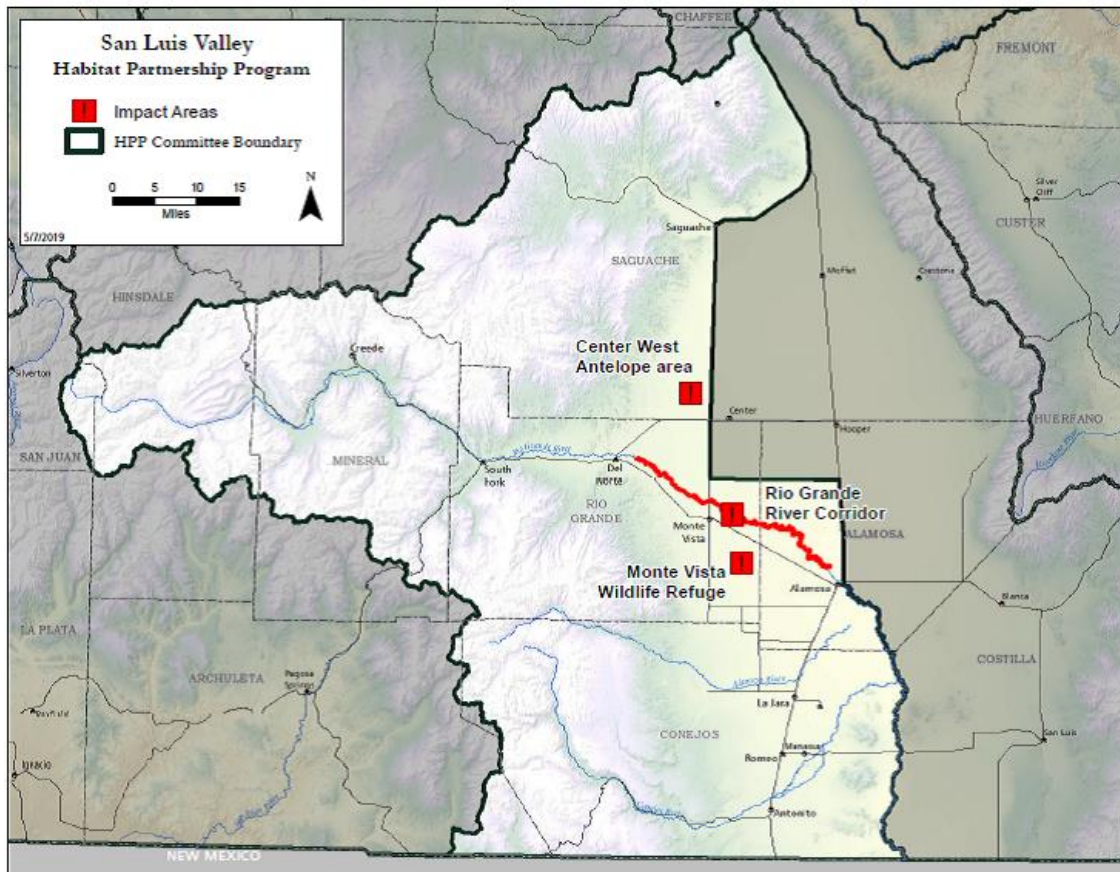
1. Initially a large number of landowner vouchers were issued to bring the overall population in the area down.
2. Habitat manipulation by the USFS. They have burned approximately 2,000 acres and are planning another 1,200 acre burn to increase habitat on public land.
3. A water development and distribution system was installed in a traditional area most often frequented by the antelope. The area lacked water sources due to an extended drought cycle.
4. Establishment of a private land only season focused on the area most heavily impacted.
5. Use of landowner vouchers to break up and move higher concentrations of antelope.
6. Continuation of census taking to provide CPW numbers throughout the growing season on the location and numbers of antelope in the area. This provides a continuous on the ground picture of the population which is not always available to CPW due to limited flight time.

Continued actions by the committee will be required to keep landowner complaints down and not allowing the antelope population to increase dramatically in future years.

The San Luis Valley HPP Committee has also identified big game winter range in the South Fork/Del Norte area as a priority for habitat manipulation. This area has been greatly impacted by development and urban sprawl.

### Future Impact Areas

The committee understands that changing land use patterns, recreational pressures on wildlife habitat, and other new challenges may affect these impact areas as well as create new impact areas in the future. These issues may also create the need for projects intended to achieve/maintain desired management objectives. The committee will make every attempt to address smaller geographic problems as they arise to try and prevent a larger scale problem.



## GAME MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

In addition to resolving wildlife conflicts, HPP is also statutorily directed to “assist the division in meeting game management objectives....” This assistance will be directed towards a) maintaining/increasing the population in a given area primarily by habitat manipulation projects; b) maintaining/decreasing the population in a given area primarily by habitat manipulation projects and/or pursuing hunting opportunities; and c) participating in research activities aimed at habitat, population, disease, and/or movement factors that influence big game populations.

# PROJECT TYPES & PRIORITIES

## Habitat Manipulation: (including but not limited to)

- Prescribed burning
- Water developments
- Weed control
- Herbicide Vouchers
- Fertilization
- Seeding
- Hand thinning
- Mechanical treatment (chaining, roller chopping, hydro axing, etc.)

## Fencing Projects: (including but not limited to)

- Fence vouchers for fence repair materials
- Construction of new fences (usually > ¼ mile in length)
- Landowner reimbursement for purchased fencing materials
- Prototype or experimental fence designs
- Wildlife crossings or retrofitting fences to be more wildlife-friendly

## Game Damage Projects: (including but not limited to)

- Stackyards- materials and/or labor
- Distribution hunts
- Hunt coordinators for distribution hunts, youth hunts, etc.
- Forage purchases
- Baiting

## Information/Education Projects: (including but not limited to)

- Seminars
- Workshops
- Brochures
- Electronic media: websites, etc.
- Comment letters
- Travel management: signage, temporary fencing, etc.

## Research/Monitoring Projects: (including but not limited to)

- Habitat
- Population
- Inventory
- Movement

## Conservation Easements (transaction costs only)

## Archaeological Clearances (and other NEPA required clearances, Agency Preferred)

HPP projects may be undertaken on public lands, private lands or a combination of both as needed wherever the local committee believes the project has the best chance to effectively reduce, minimize or eliminate the big game/agriculture conflict or assist CPW in meeting big game management objectives. Higher consideration will be given to projects proposed in/near past project areas.

# OPERATING GUIDELINES

In order to accomplish the goals and objectives of this plan, the San Luis Valley HPP committee will utilize the project types listed above in accordance with the following operating guidelines.

1. Habitat improvement projects on public land that may benefit multiple adjacent landowners will be given higher priority.
2. Habitat improvement projects on private land may be granted, when:
  - a. The cooperator is willing to tolerate reasonable occupation of big game on their land or designate non-conflict areas.
  - b. The projects have good potential for alleviating conflict for adjacent landowners.
3. Vegetative treatment projects should be a minimum of 200 acres in size. Smaller projects may be considered if they are experimental areas or are predicted to have desired results without excessively concentrating big game.
4. In funding these types of efforts the committee will strive toward a 50/50 cost share between the SLV HPP committee and federal resource management agencies, state wildlife agencies, grazing permittee associations, landowners, or other sources as may be available.
5. The project applicant or a representative must attend the meeting to present the project and answer questions. An HPP application is required for all new project requests.
6. Dispersal hunts will be recommended to the AWM for cooperators that are willing to help achieve harvest objectives. Cooperators must be willing to work with the committee in seeking and implementing efforts to resolve any recurrent big game damage problems, including but not limited to, alternate fence designs, harvest on animals responsible for the damage, and/or habitat improvement efforts. The committee will consider, but may or may not recommend, hunts when the cooperator charges more than \$500 per hunter during regular hunting seasons for access to big game causing the conflict. Except for the cost of the license no fee may be charged for hunters.
7. Fence projects should be designed to reduce fence damage and facilitate natural wildlife movements. The committee will share the construction costs of fence replacement and/or improvement that are wildlife compatible and assist with costs associated with repair of deer, elk, pronghorn, and moose damage to existing fences.
8. Payment of conservation easement transaction costs has proven to be an effective tool to retain agricultural land and prevent fragmentation of wildlife habitat. Preference will be given to those projects in identified impacts areas and/or adjacent to other conserved or public lands.
9. Water developments will be considered when aiding in the reduction of conflict or dispersal of big game and livestock. In the case of a dry hole the committee will limit its responsibility to one half of all expenses incurred for a dry hole up to 400ft.
10. Fencing vouchers can be issued to address small fence repairs. Requests for vouchers will be reviewed on a case by case basis by the CPW committee representative. DWMs will advise the committee representative on the need for vouchers and the committee representative will evaluate and approve as needed up to \$500.

In an effort to be consistent and fair to all applicants, the committee has established operating guidelines that detail priorities, eligibility requirements, project rules and limits, and other policies. The committee retains the authority to review and update these guidelines as necessary to meet the changing needs of the area; however, these standard rules should apply to most HPP projects and will be enforced by the committee with few exceptions.

Monitoring projects are critical for the long term sustainability of the HPP program. To provide documentation, determine treatment effectiveness, and be able to convey results, monitoring will

be done on all projects. Specific monitoring methodology shall be matched to the treatment. Monitoring data will be submitted to the HPP local committee and admins.

## MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Management strategies were developed to achieve the committee's objectives. Strategies primarily involve resolving big game conflicts through habitat manipulation, fencing, and game damage projects; or achieving big game management objectives through information and education, research and monitoring, or conservation easements. Most HPP projects will fall into one of the following management strategy categories.

1. **HABITAT MANIPULATION:** Improving habitat on private, public, and tribal lands draws big game away from impact areas; improves big game distribution; holds big game for longer periods of time on public lands; or improves forage abundance, availability, or palatability such that it reduces competition between big game and livestock.
2. **FENCING PROJECTS:** Repair of existing fences and/or construction of new fences help alleviate ongoing big game damage, and offset the financial burden to landowners. Fences will be wildlife-friendly to HPP specifications. Maintenance of fences will be the responsibility of the landowner.
3. **GAME DAMAGE PROJECTS:** Providing stack yards for landowners otherwise ineligible for them and using hunt coordinators and forage purchases address pending damage problems that CPW may be financially liable for.
4. **INFORMATION AND EDUCATION:** Producing and distributing informative materials helps public land agencies and private land managers educate the public and provides information about the programs, agencies, conflicts and user responsibilities. Travel management may include signage or education on closures or activities that will benefit big game.
5. **RESEARCH & MONITORING:** Projects will include, but not be limited to, those focusing on habitat condition, populations, and inventory and movement patterns. While these types of projects may be funded, the committee's primary focus will be on conflict resolution between big game and livestock.
6. **CONSERVATION EASEMENTS:** Conservation easements help to protect a property's conservation values, particularly agricultural productivity, wildlife habitat, and hunting access.

# BUDGET GUIDELINES

The base-operating budget for the State HPP program is based on 5% of total annual revenues for big game license sales in Colorado. The HPP State Council then allocates funding to the individual HPP committees. The San Luis Valley HPP budget was developed to best meet the goals and objectives outlined earlier in the plan, while maintaining the flexibility to deal with emergencies and take advantage of opportunities.

Within certain parameters, the statewide HPP financial system allows local HPP committees to carry specific project dollars over from year to year if the project is ongoing or the funds have been committed. This allows us to better address long-term management and larger, more complicated projects as well as giving us the flexibility to more efficiently prioritize our projects.

Additional funds are also available through the HPP State Council for special projects or unforeseen opportunities outside of the capacity of the committee. These dollars supplement our existing budget and allow us to take on special projects from time to time.

The San Luis Valley HPP Committee has developed a budget allocation in line with our vision, which allows for short-term strategies to deal with immediate fence and forage conflicts caused by big game, but concentrates on adaptive, long-term management strategies leading to the establishment of healthy and sustainable rangelands. Our budget for the ten-year period has been broken down as follows:

## BASE BUDGET ALLOCATION:

Habitat Manipulation	60%
Conservation Easements & NEPA Related Activities	20%
Fencing & Game Damage	10%
Research/Monitoring	5%
Information & Education	4%
Administration	1%

TOTAL ALLOCATION: 100%

It is important to acknowledge that the budget allocation is based on past projects, future projects that are likely to be proposed as well as committee emphasis in funding certain project types. While these are desired and/or likely allocations, the committee retains the ability to shift funds as needed between categories as projects and opportunities arise or as situations dictate.



# CURRENT & FORESEEABLE ISSUES

The San Luis Valley HPP committee recognizes that land ownership, land use and social policies will continue to change. This will result in new conflicts and challenges, but the SLVHPP committee intends to remain flexible and seek out creative solutions to continue to reduce wildlife conflicts and to assist CPW in achieving game management objectives. Current and foreseeable issues for the committee include, but are not limited to:

## DEVELOPMENT AND RECREATION

Much of the private lands on the western portion of the San Luis Valley are subject to increased development on lands bordering public lands as well as inholdings within the public lands. These areas are becoming increasingly popular among summer home seekers. Recreational pressures including legal and illegal trails for motorized and non-motorized use are increasing. Both of these can contribute to moving wildlife populations from habitual areas to less desirable areas or to private lands.

## CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

While no CWD has been determined to exist within the wildlife populations of the San Luis Valley, its occurrence is creeping increasingly closer with some cases being seen in areas where part of the local elk herds winter with adjoining herds who, in turn, winter with herds where CWD has been determined to exist.

## BIG GAME RECRUITMENT ISSUES

Low calf elk recruitment within the committee boundary has been reported in recent years, and has become a matter of concern which directly impacts current management objectives.

**\*The impacts of change due to the following three issues will require some adaptations to how the committee deals with competition between wildlife and the agricultural community. The resulting impact of the three trends has yet to be determined in regards to migration corridors, calving areas, and summering and wintering areas.**

## DROUGHT

The San Luis Valley has some of the lowest precipitation totals in Colorado, and the sustained drought has created vast landscapes where ample water to ensure greater distribution of livestock and wildlife has been greatly diminished. In the extreme cases of both 2002 and 2018 the area received less than half of normal precipitation.

## LARGE SCALE FOREST FIRES

In 2003 the Million Fire burned approximately 10,000 acres south of South Fork in GMU 80, and in 2013 100,000+ acres were burned west of South Fork, mainly in GMU 76. Larger sized forest fires may become more frequent in the future. These fires may have short term negative impacts on big game habitat, but in the longer term will be beneficial due to the increase in grasses, forbs and aspen.

## LARGE SCALE LOSS OF MATURE FORESTS

All forest types have their own diseases and insect pests at endemic levels which, at times, may become epidemic for a variety of reasons. The most prevalent and noticeable pest is the spruce beetle which has occurred at epidemic levels throughout the Rio Grande National Forest and has resulted in substantial Engelmann spruce mortality. This infestation has killed in excess of 90% of the mature Engelmann spruce on the forest for a total of 617,000 acres. The understory in the majority of these Engelmann stands has seen a significant increase in grasses, forbs and small trees. Other forest pests which are endemic but not yet having the same large impact as the spruce beetle include: Douglas fir beetle, Mountain Pine beetle (Ponderosa Pine), the western spruce budworm (Douglas fir and White fir), Ips beetle (impacts and often kills pinyon trees), and tent caterpillars which defoliate aspen trees and, if consistent year after year, can kill aspen stands.