

Colorado Parks and Wildlife  
Habitat Partnership Program  
San Juan Basin



## DISTRIBUTION MANAGEMENT PLAN



Approved - Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission: May 4, 2018  
This plan is valid for 10 years from approval date.

**2018- 2028**

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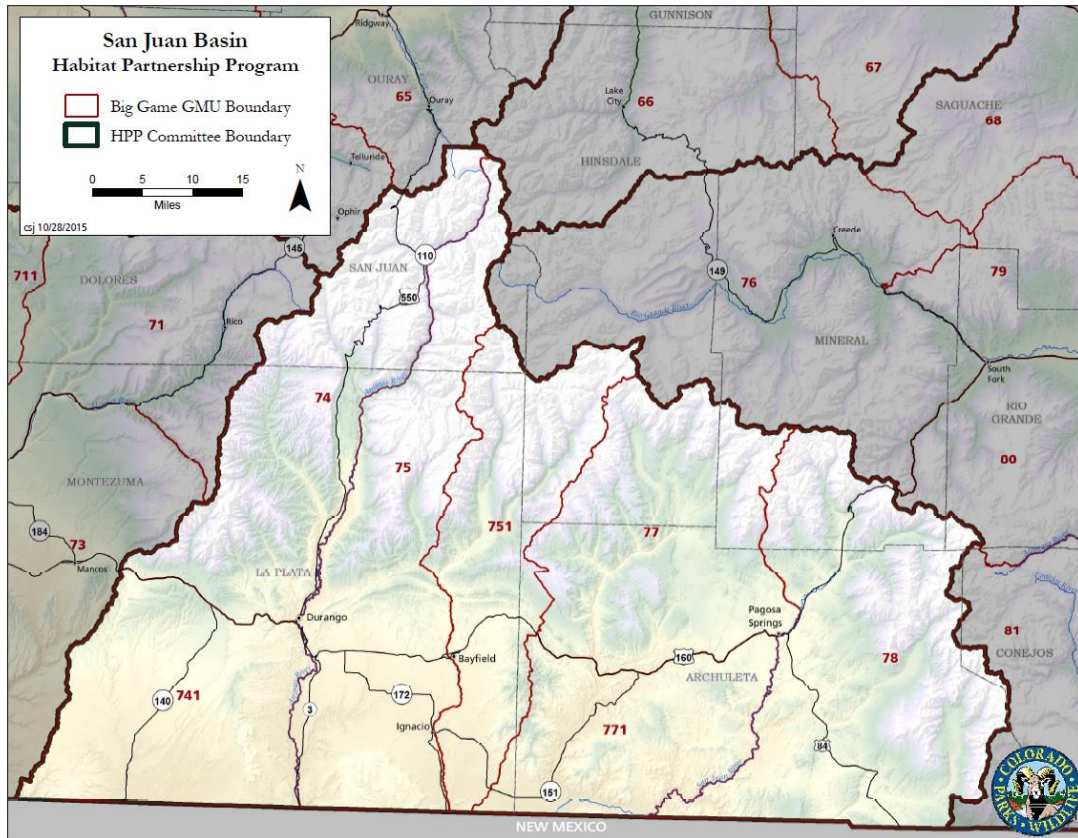
# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The San Juan Basin HPP Committee was formed in March 1994 to help landowners and habitat managers resolve big game conflicts with fences and forage and, in later years, to also help achieve game management objectives. This Distribution Management Plan was developed to guide the activities of the committee in meeting their stated objectives, which include establishing local partnerships to implement both short term and long term solutions.

The committee area includes a diverse mix of public, private, and tribal lands; and consists of a variety of habitat types and land use patterns. Deer and elk populations in the area peaked before the turn of the century, and in recent years have been at or below objective. Agricultural operations and the loss of habitat for housing and recreational development have resulted in specific impact areas that the committee has identified as high priority zones. However, projects will be implemented wherever the committee believes they will effectively reduce or eliminate big game conflicts and assist CPW in achieving management objectives.

Operating guidelines have been established to help direct funding decisions and project implementation, and to ensure that the committee's policies and procedures are clear and consistent for all applicants. Management strategies relative to the committee's objectives have been developed, and most projects will fall into the prescribed categories for big game conflict resolution or management objectives. The updated budget guidelines reflect the desired funding allocation and prioritization of projects.

## MAP OF SAN JUAN BASIN HPP AREA



# COMMITTEE MEMBERS

As of July 2018, the SJB HPP committee currently has the following members: two members representing sportspersons, three members representing local livestock growers, one member representing Bureau of Land Management (BLM), one member representing the Southern Ute Tribe, one member representing U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and one member representing the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW).

## MEMBERS

- |   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| 1. George Malarsie, sportsman representative (chairman) | Started HPP Term: Mar. 1994  |
| 2. John Gardner, sportsman representative               | Started HPP Term: Sep. 2001* |
| 3. Phil Craig, livestock grower representative          | Started HPP Term: Mar. 1994  |
| 4. Dan Huntington, livestock grower representative      | Started HPP Term: Mar. 1994  |
| 5. Sandy Young, livestock grower representative         | Started HPP Term: Nov. 2005* |
| 6. Michael Schmidt, BLM representative                  | Started HPP Term: Mar. 2015  |
| 7. Aran Johnson, Southern Ute Tribe representative      | Started HPP Term: Jun. 2005  |
| 8. Anthony Garcia, USFS representative                  | Started HPP Term: Mar. 2012  |
| 9. Adrian Archuleta, CPW representative                 | Started HPP Term: Jul. 2012  |

\* Former members of the liaison committee established in 1994 to provide interested community members an opportunity to participate in HPP discussions. This liaison committee is no longer in existence.

# INTRODUCTION

As human population continues to grow in Colorado, wildlife habitat is increasingly converted to human-dominated landscapes. Winter range is particularly affected by land use changes, which increases pressure on wildlife species and the potential for conflicts on private, public, and tribal lands. Public perceptions and interests in wildlife management are often conflicted, as many wish to see wildlife populations expanded in spite of diminishing habitat availability and the resulting agricultural conflicts.

Historically, Colorado had experienced a statewide increase in elk populations, with deer populations remaining stable. As big game populations grew with concurrent loss of habitat, wildlife conflicts with livestock and agricultural producers increased. To help mitigate these conflicts, particularly those associated with fencing and forage, the Wildlife Commission and the Division of Wildlife created the Habitat Partnership Program (HPP). HPP Committees work in partnership with local landowners and land managers to help resolve wildlife conflicts with agriculture.

The San Juan Basin HPP Committee selection process began in December 1993 and was concluded with appointments made on February 1, 1994 by Wildlife Director Perry Olson and confirmed by the Wildlife Commission in March 1994.

The San Juan Basin HPP Committee has been highly successful in resolving many big game conflicts within La Plata and Archuleta Counties. More importantly, the program has improved landowner relationships with CPW. The committee will continue to build on past successes, create new partnerships, reduce big game conflicts, and improve habitat for the benefit of wildlife, landowners, and sportsmen.

## 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... assist in meeting 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.

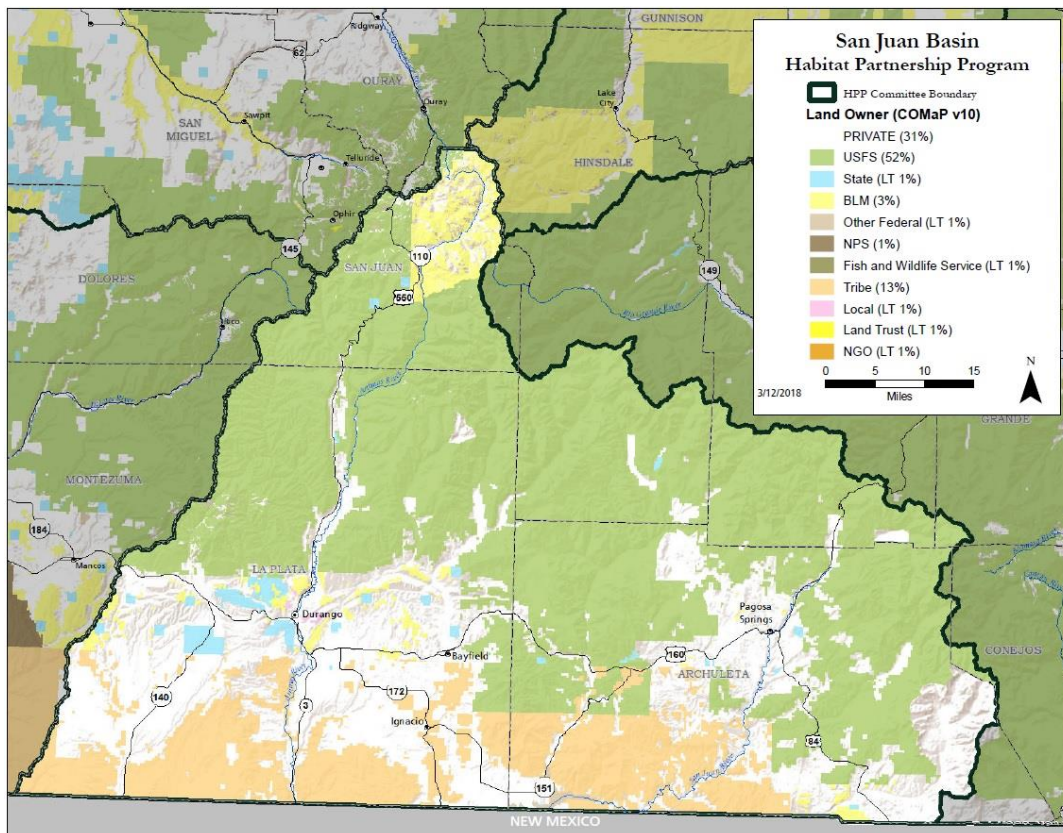
## COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES

1. To encourage an atmosphere of partnership between wildlife managers, habitat managers, livestock growers, and sportsmen.
2. To ensure appropriate public involvement in identifying conflicts between big game and livestock, and recommending short-term and long-term solutions.
3. To provide funding to implement solutions in a timely and cost-effective manner.
4. To ensure that private land habitat issues and agricultural interests are considered in the management plans for big game populations.
5. To encourage additional harvest of big game animals that are causing agricultural conflicts.
6. To facilitate communication between landowners, sportsmen, CPW, and other agencies.
7. To improve big game habitat, distribution, and population sizes in accordance with CPW management objectives.

## AREA DESCRIPTION

The San Juan Basin HPP area consists of CPW Game Management Units 74, 75, 77, 78, 741, 751, and 771. A total of approximately 3,775 square miles is contained within the committee boundary, including portions of La Plata, San Juan, Hinsdale, Mineral, and Archuleta counties. The area is bounded on the west by the La Plata County line, on the north and east by the Continental Divide, and on the south by the New Mexico state line.

This area ranges in elevation from 5,975 feet in the lower La Plata and Piedra River valleys to 14,083 feet at the peak of Mt. Eolus in the Weminuche Wilderness. Of the approximate 3,775 square miles in the program area, 31% is privately owned land, 13% is owned by the Southern Ute Tribe, 52% is managed by the United States Forest Service, 3% is managed by the Bureau of Land Management, and the remaining 1% is owned or managed by various state and federal agencies.



## HABITAT DESCRIPTION

The climate is a highland or mountain climate; characterized by cool springs and autumns, warm summers, and moderately cold winters. The average annual precipitation is 18.1 inches in Durango, and is well-distributed throughout the year. Snowfall occurs from October through April and averages 63 inches per year. At higher elevations near the Continental Divide, annual snowfall can total 250-300 inches. Extended drought conditions periodically occur.

Vegetative types include high alpine meadows above 12,000 feet; spruce/fir stands above 10,000 feet; aspen/conifer stands mixed with shrubland communities of oak brush and serviceberry above 7,000 feet; and piñon/juniper stands with sagebrush and open agricultural fields of grass, alfalfa and clover below 8,000 feet.

Winter range is the limiting factor for big game in this area. In normal winters, big game winter range extends into southern areas of the San Juan Basin to include Southern Ute Tribal Lands. During severe winters, deer and elk migrate further south into New Mexico. Transition range is also important habitat for big game, especially during seasonal migration.

Big game habitat is also being severely impacted by increasing human activity. These effects are observed along the Animas, Florida, La Plata, Piedra, Pine, and San Juan River valleys; as well as along highway corridors 160, 550, 84, 172, 140, and 151. Cumulative impacts from housing and road developments, as well as recreation on public lands in these areas, will continue to negatively affect deer and elk populations.

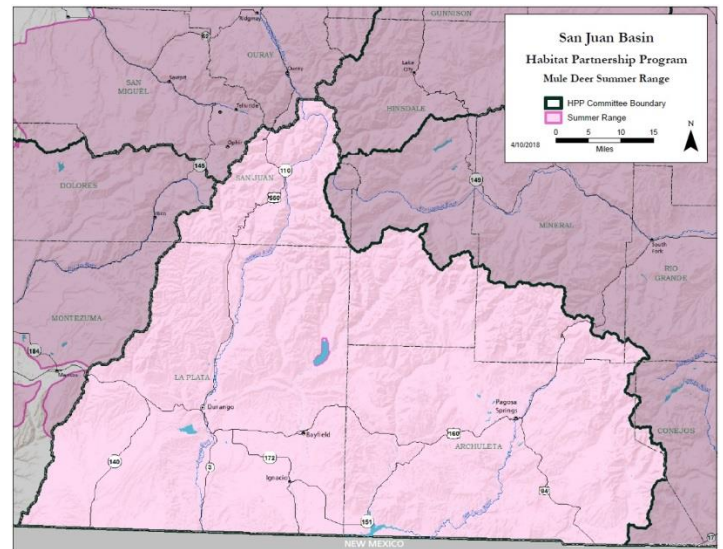
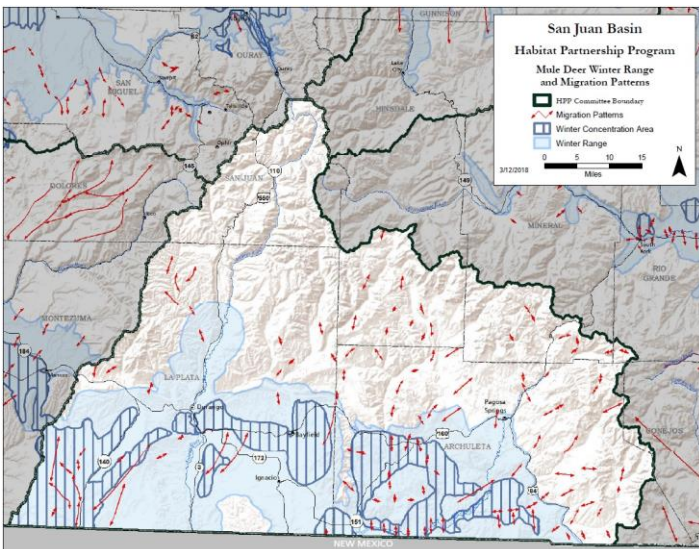
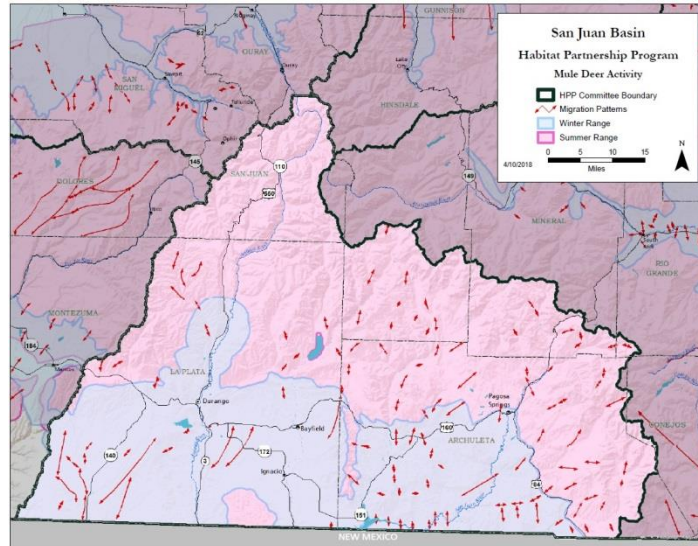


# BIG GAME POPULATION SUMMARY

DEER - Deer populations in southwestern Colorado have been depressed over the last two decades, well below the historic population highs in the 1960's-70's. The cause of this is unknown and most likely influenced by a number of factors. It appears that the low part of this population cycle has concluded, as there have been signs in recent years that populations are increasing. Public input generally supports increased deer numbers, and game damage complaints relative to the current population are insignificant.

The population in the Hermosa Deer Herd (D52) is within the lower portion of the management objective range, with ongoing attempts to increase the population to the mid-range point. The San Juan Deer Herd (D30) is below the management objective, and current efforts are to increase the population. There are Private Land Only doe licenses available in both DAUs to help reduce conflicts on private lands. The current D30 Herd Management Plan is due for revision in 2018/19.

## DEER RANGE MAPS





ELK - Elk were present throughout the San Juan Basin in the 1970's, but were not common. Populations grew to a high by the late 1990's, at which point elk were over management objectives. In an effort to reduce populations, wildlife managers aggressively increased harvest by issuing more antlerless licenses, creating either-sex licenses, and creating late season hunting opportunities. Elk populations were successfully reduced by 2007, but many people felt that the decrease was too severe. In response, limited antlerless and either-sex licenses were reduced in an attempt to stabilize, and later increase, elk populations.

The Hermosa Elk Herd (E30) population has been below management objective; however the population is currently on a slow upward trend. The San Juan Elk Herd (E31) has been at the lower portion of the management objective, and efforts are being made to increase that population. The E31 management plan is due for revision in 2018/19.

## ELK RANGE MAPS

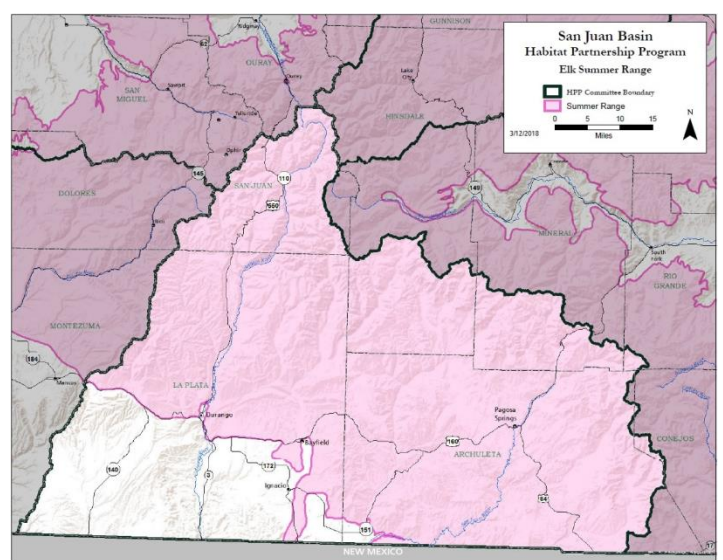
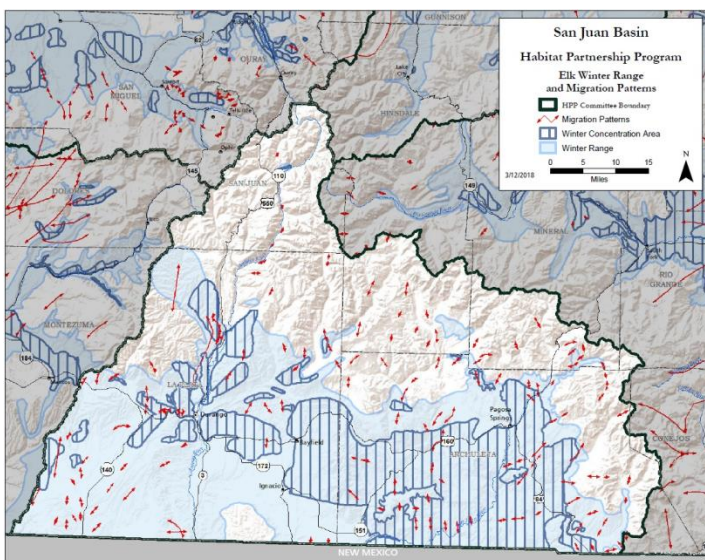
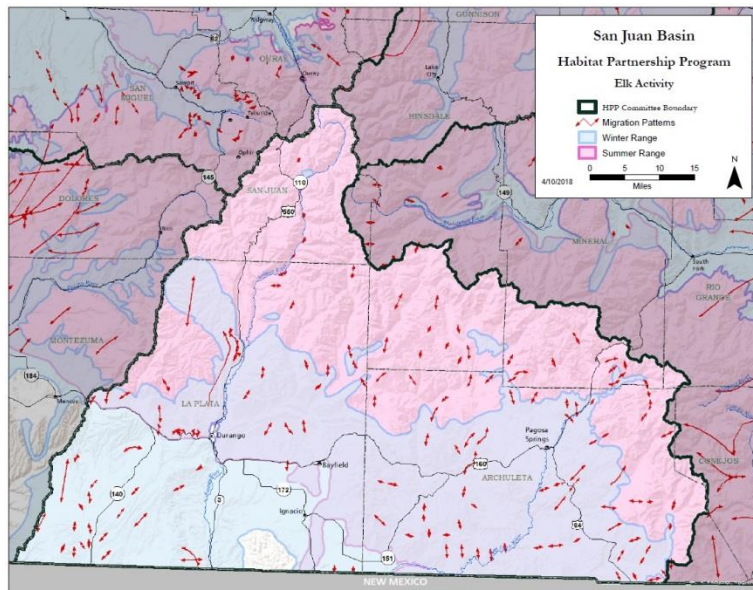


Table 1. Data Analysis Unit Summary for San Juan HPP Area

Management Herd	1990s Population Average	2000s Population Average	2010 - 2018 Population Average	Current Population Management Objective
Deer - San Juan (D30)	20,500	21,000	23,000	27,000
Deer - Hermosa (D52)	8,500	5,900	4,900	4,000-6,000
Elk - Hermosa (E30)	6,500	5,700	4,700	5,000-6,000
Elk - San Juan (E31)	20,800	18,600	18,300	17,000-21,000

*Hermosa Herd Game Management Units include 74 and 741  
San Juan Herd Game Management Units include 75, 77, 78, 751, and 771*

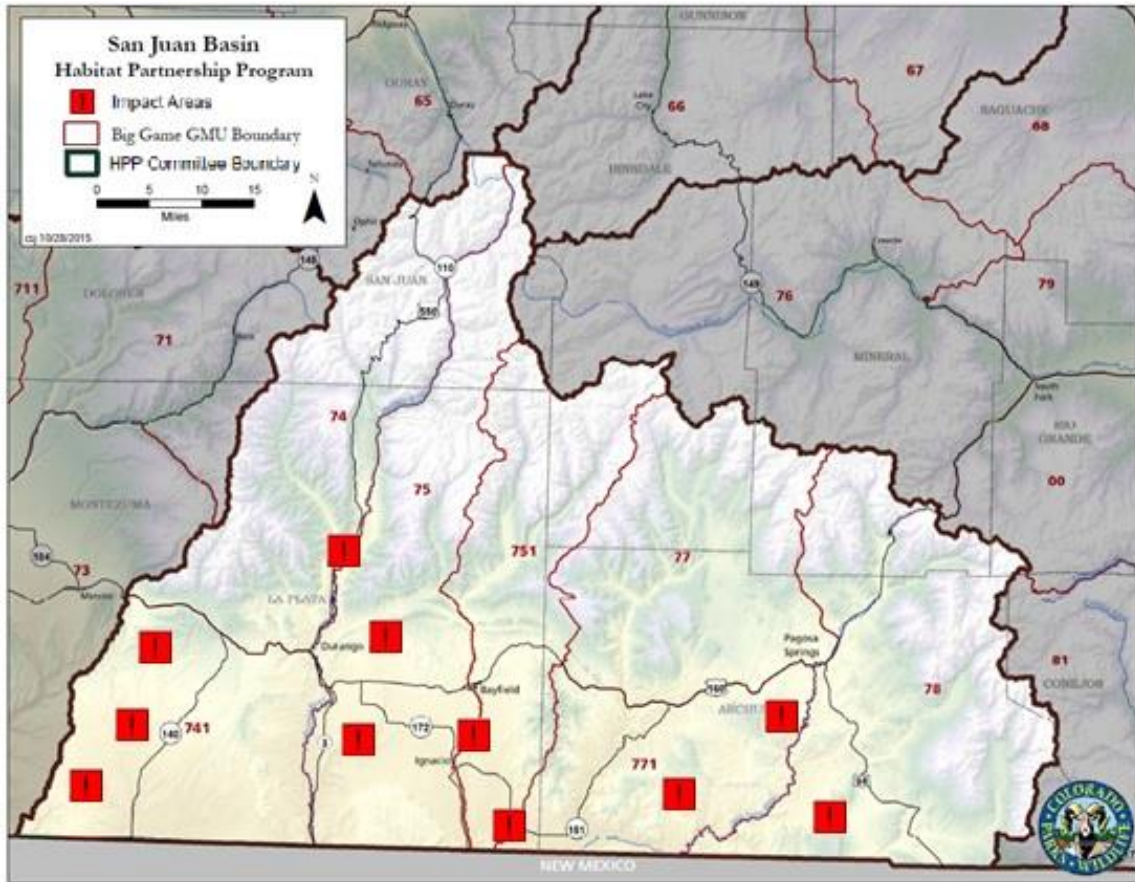
## IMPACT AREAS

Most big game conflicts in the area involve elk, although deer conflicts also exist at a more localized level. While overall elk and deer numbers are generally within (or below) management objectives, the distribution of big game across the landscape can be uneven, which causes inadequate harvest and conflicts with agricultural operations in certain areas. The committee has identified specific areas where the majority of big game conflicts currently exist. Projects may be implemented on public, private, or tribal lands within these impact areas; or wherever the committee believes the project will effectively reduce conflicts or achieve management objectives within the entire San Juan Basin HPP area.

Current impact areas include (not necessarily in order of priority):

- Unit 741, particularly west of State Highway 140.
- Animas Valley north of Durango.
- Grandview and Florida Mesa areas in Unit 75
- Unit 75 and 751 from Bayfield south to Ignacio along the Pine River, including the Spring Creek drainage.
- Allison and Arboles areas in Unit 771
- Units 771 and 78, south of Highway 160 between Highways 84 and 151

# IMPACT AREAS MAP



While these areas are currently targeted for conflict resolution work, conflicts exist throughout the SJB area. It is likely that patterns of land ownership and land use will continue to change, resulting in new conflicts and challenges in the future. These may affect which areas the committee considers to be higher priority impact areas.

## 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 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

## PROJECT TYPES (TO INCLUDE, BUT NOT LIMITED TO):

### Habitat Manipulation:

- Prescribed burning
- Water developments
- Weed control, including herbicide vouchers
- Fertilization
- Seeding
- Hand thinning
- Mechanical (chaining, roller chopping, hydro axing, etc.)

### Fencing Projects:

- 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:

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

### Information/Education Projects:

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

### Research/Monitoring Projects:

- Habitat
- Population
- Inventory
- Movement

Conservation Easements (transaction costs only)

Archaeological Clearances (and other NEPA required clearances)

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/livestock conflict or assist CPW in meeting big game management objectives.



# OPERATING GUIDELINES

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.

The committee encourages all landowners experiencing big game conflicts to participate in partnership with HPP. 50%-50% partnerships will be required in most cases, and project applicants are encouraged to seek additional cooperators besides HPP when possible. Hunting access on private lands is required in order to be eligible for funding. Additionally, the committee encourages all landowners within the HPP area to help meet the overall game management and distribution objectives by allowing hunting access.

Monitoring projects are critical for the long term sustainability of HPP. 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 local HPP committee and administrative assistant.

# 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 attracts 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. Fence projects should result in the reduction of damage claims, overall habitat improvement, and improved distribution of big game. Fences will be wildlife-friendly to HPP specifications. Maintenance will be responsibility of the landowner.
3. **GAME DAMAGE PROJECTS:** Providing stackyards 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, inventory and movement patterns; or those that assist CPW in meeting management objectives. 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 protect a property's conservation values, particularly agricultural productivity, wildlife habitat, and hunting access. Improving access to public and private lands improves harvest of big game animals in impact areas, and helps disperse problem animals.

The committee recognizes that future changes in human and big game populations, as well as habitat condition and availability, will require flexibility in dealing with new conflicts and management challenges. Any projects that are outside of these categories, but still meet the scope and purpose of HPP, may be submitted to the committee and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. These "non-typical" projects should utilize creative approaches to conflict resolution or management objectives.

# BUDGET GUIDELINES

The operating budget for HPP is based on 5% of the total annual revenues from big game license sales in HPP areas. The HPP State Council allocates annual funding to the local HPP committees. Additional funds are also available through the State Council for special projects or unforeseen opportunities that are beyond the capacity of the local committee. These funds supplement the existing budget and allow committees to occasionally participate in larger-scale special projects.

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 Juan Basin HPP Committee has developed a target budget allocation that allows for short-term solutions to deal with immediate fence and forage conflicts with big game, but concentrates on adaptive, long-term strategies resulting in healthy and sustainable rangelands. It is important to acknowledge that the budget is intended to be flexible. While these are desired allocations based upon the priority level for different types of projects, the committee retains the ability to shift funds as needed between categories to meet the needs of the area in resolving big game conflicts.

Habitat Manipulation.....	50%
Game Damage.....	20%
Fencing.....	20%
Other (-Includes research/monitoring, information/education, etc).....	10%
<b><u>TOTAL ALLOCATION</u></b> .....	<b>100%</b>

# CURRENT & FORESEEABLE ISSUES

The committee anticipates that multiple factors will influence big game populations and distribution in the future, which will drive conflicts with agriculture and may change management objectives. These may include, but are not limited to, the following:

## RECREATION

Many forms of outdoor recreation take place on public lands in important big game habitats, and have increasingly become year-round activities. Motorized and non-motorized recreation influences big game distribution and movement patterns, as human activity tends to drive deer and elk onto private land refuges where there is greater potential for conflicts. As recreational access on public lands continues to expand and the number of users increases, wildlife conflicts may be exacerbated in existing areas and begin to occur in new areas.

## DEVELOPMENT

The majority of the San Juan Basin HPP area is experiencing dramatic housing and road development as the human population continues to expand. Much of this development is occurring in big game winter range, and replaces former agricultural fields as well as impacting river bottoms and other big game habitat resources. Habitat fragmentation and loss as a result of development will continue to change big game movement and distribution in existing and new areas.

## OIL & GAS

Historically, oil and gas development in this HPP area has not been a major source of conflicts with big game. However, economic challenges and changes to the industry may result in the area being more heavily utilized for oil and gas production in the future, with the potential to displace big game and create conflicts in new areas.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

It is common for this area to experience periods of drought or other natural phenomena that reduce natural habitat quality for big game, resulting in conflicts with agricultural operations. Current climate change models indicate that drought periods are likely to become more frequent and/or more severe with increased risk for wildfires. These weather events may affect the long-term movement and distribution patterns of big game, which could create conflicts in new areas.

## THREATENED & ENDANGERED SPECIES

This HPP area does not currently have threatened or endangered (T&E) species concerns that significantly impact HPP operations. However, with continued changes in development, land use patterns, and climate/weather events, it is possible that other wildlife may become species of concern in the future.

## DISEASE

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has not yet been detected within the San Juan Basin HPP area. However, given the prevalence of the disease within Colorado and its evident spread towards the southwest, it is highly probable that CWD will become endemic in this area in the future. CWD and other big game diseases may impact CPW management objectives for deer and elk.