

Colorado Parks and Wildlife  
Habitat Partnership Program  
South Park



## DISTRIBUTION MANAGEMENT PLAN



Approved- Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission May 7, 2020  
This plan is valid for 10 years from approval date.

**2020-2030**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

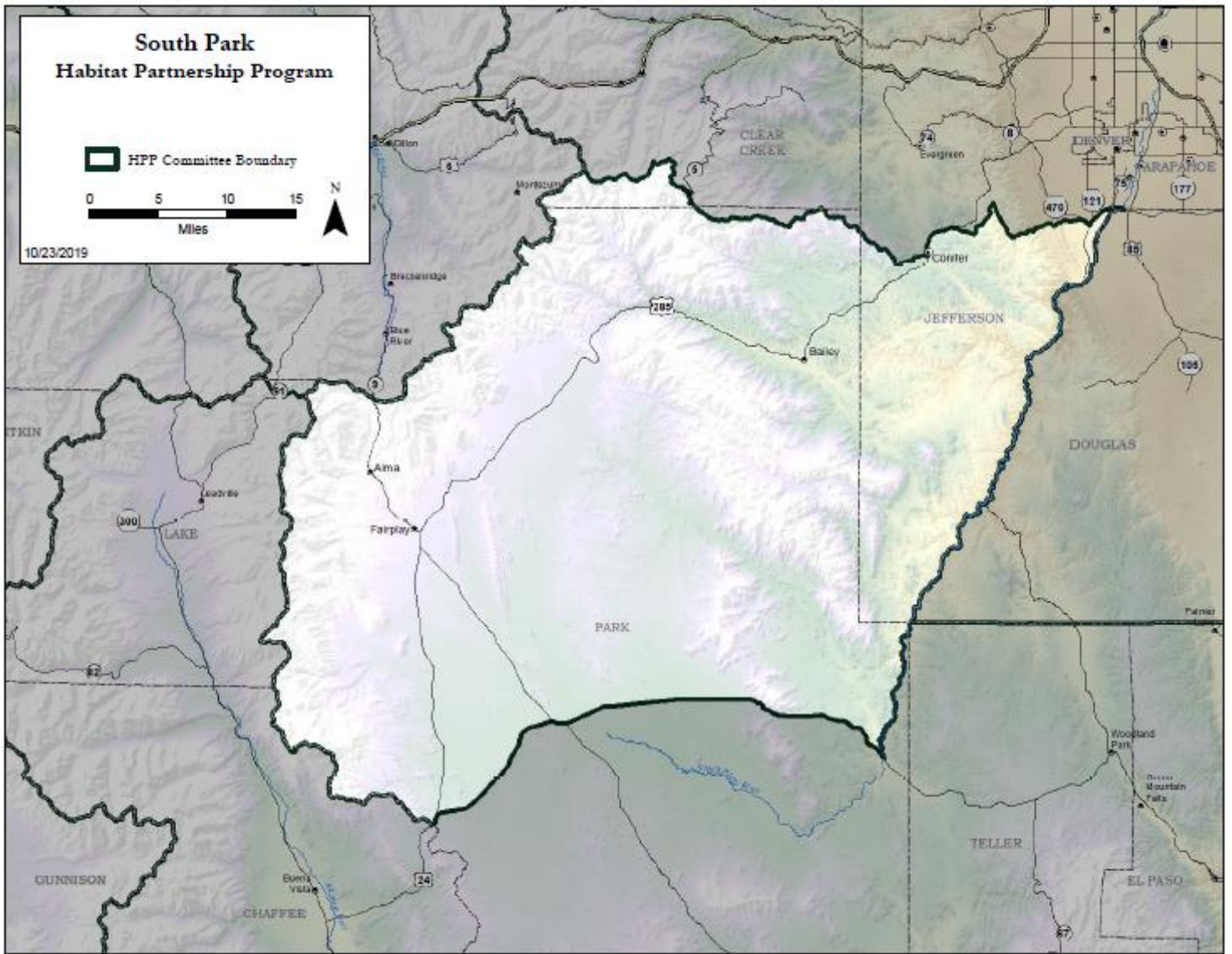
The Distribution Management Plan (DMP) provides guidance for the South Park Habitat Partnership Program (SPHPP) committee from 2020 to 2030. This updated plan, written by the SPHPP committee, is centered on four key aspects: big game/agricultural conflict resolution, assisting CPW in achieving game management objectives, promoting partnerships, and connectivity. The vision of the SPHPP 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 improve habitat, support healthy and sustainable rangelands, and assist CPW in achieving game management objectives.

The South Park HPP 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. 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 to achieve game management objectives.

The committee has had success resolving conflicts over the last ten years. As a result, impact areas have changed since the last plan was written. The committee values winter range and migration corridors and will continue to focus on conserving and improving that habitat for wildlife. The committee encourages projects that will effectively protect and improve these important areas, reduce or eliminate big game conflicts, and assist CPW in achieving game management objectives. This includes identification and mitigation of forage conflicts, developing and maintaining communication links, enhancing stewardship opportunities, and supporting habitat enhancement projects.

In the last 10 years, local issues have changed. Wide-range fence and forage conflicts have been eased, due in large part, to the successful implementation of HPP projects throughout the SPHPP committee area. The committee's focus for the next 10 years will be on preventing conflicts rather than reacting to conflicts. Now, the most critical issues are recreation pressure, development, and declining forest health (due to fire suppression, conifer encroachment, and wide-spread insect and disease infestations). Priority projects for the next 10 years will likely be focused on habitat improvement. Tools that can be used to meet habitat objectives include (but are not limited to): burning, interseeding, land-use planning, targeted grazing, fencing, vegetation manipulation, thinning, and noxious weed treatment. Strategies that improve distribution of livestock, such as rotational grazing, planned salting or supplement use, herding, and water development also improve distribution of big game animals and should be used extensively. Seasonal road closures and other restrictions can be used on public lands to control recreation use and provide improved habitat. An important goal is to help CPW meet game management objectives, while ensuring that agricultural interests and uses are protected.

# MAP OF SOUTH PARK HPP AREA



# COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- |                                                                |                             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. John Woodward, Livestock Grower Representative              | Started HPP Term: May 2003  |
| 2. Steve Allard, Livestock Grower Representative               | Started HPP Term: Nov. 2006 |
| 3. Webb Smith, Livestock Grower Representative                 | Started HPP Term: Jan. 2009 |
| 4. Randy Tingle, Sportsman Representative                      | Started HPP Term: Nov. 1992 |
| 5. Sheila Lamb, U.S. Forest Service Representative             | Started HPP Term: Nov. 2006 |
| 6. Christine Cloninger, BLM Representative                     | Started HPP Term: Mar. 2015 |
| 7. Tyler Stoltzfus, Colorado Parks and Wildlife Representative | Started HPP Term: Apr. 2016 |

# INTRODUCTION

The South Park Habitat Partnership Program Committee was established in 1992 to address conflicts between wildlife populations and livestock operators in the area. Changes in HPP statutes in 2002 expanded that purpose to include assisting CPW in meeting big game management objectives. Both conflicts and management objectives can be met through the wide variety of on-the-ground projects that SPHPP supports. Ultimately, the SPHPP recognizes the importance of active livestock operations and serves to provide assistance to these interests, while promoting healthy and sustainable rangelands and wildlife populations within the South Park HPP area.

The influence of state population growth on big game populations in the SPHPP area in the last ten years has created conflicts and pressures. When the SPHPP committee was established, there were 3.5 million people in Colorado. By 2010, when this plan was last updated, there were almost 5 million. Now in 2020, there are almost 6 million people in the state, with most of the population concentrated in Denver and the Front Range. From 2010 to 2018, there was a 13% increase in population of Park County, bringing the total population in the county to 18,000 people. The population has mostly increased due to immigration. The fastest-growing demographic is young people, heavily-focused on outdoor recreation and outdoor pursuits. Hunger for outdoor experiences has brought floods of people to the high country to build, hike, ski, mountain bike, and ride OHVs. There are more people in more places. Travel to and from these places puts additional pressure on migration corridors and highway crossings. Factor in declining forest health across the entire SPHPP area and the need for habitat improvement and conservation becomes clear.

The South Park HPP committee area is positioned closest to Front Range cities and is pressured in a way that other committee areas are not. Quality herds of elk, moose, deer, and antelope in the South Park area are feeling the squeeze. Impacts from expanded development and recreation use make high-quality habitat on large, contiguous parcels of public and private lands even more critical. This, in tandem with HPP's recently-expanded statute which focuses on assisting CPW in meeting game management objectives, makes habitat improvement paramount.

The South Park HPP committee is proud of the fact that local funding has been leveraged through partnerships with private landowners, livestock growers, agricultural producers, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Mule Deer Foundation, US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Trout Unlimited, Great Outdoors Colorado, Trust for Public Lands, Colorado Open Lands, The Front Range Board of District Grazing Advisors, and other local partners. These partnerships and others are expected to continue into the future. This cooperation allows HPP dollars to be multiplied many times over, which directly results in more work accomplished on the ground.

## 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

Objectives for the South Park HPP program area include:

- 1) **Big game/agricultural conflict resolution**- improving habitat and the quality of rangelands for all; Reduce conflicts with livestock interests resulting from damage by elk, deer, antelope or moose to forage and/or fences where impacts currently occur or where impacts develop in the future; Implement proactive solutions where feasible to prevent future conflicts.
- 2) Focus on assisting CPW in **achieving game management objectives** in addition to resolving conflicts; Improve big game distribution and harvest to help minimize conflicts with local agricultural producers; Provide input to Herd Management Plans (HMPs) concerning desired population objectives; Work with CPW as a partner in studies to determine big game habits and lessen conflicts with the agricultural community.
- 3) Promote **partnerships** between Colorado Parks and Wildlife, active livestock producers, ranchers, sports people, land users, and land management agencies to provide solutions to conflicts; Increase awareness of the HPP program; Conduct outreach and education where possible to promote good stewardship.
- 4) **Connectivity**- Increase effectiveness of habitat manipulation projects and implement a landscape-scale philosophy by increasing the scope and connectivity of projects.

**OBJECTIVE #1: Big game/agricultural conflict resolution. Improving habitat and the quality of rangelands for all; Reduce conflicts with livestock interests resulting from damage by elk, deer, antelope or moose to forage and/or fences where impacts currently occur or where impacts develop in the future; Implement proactive solutions where feasible to prevent future conflicts.**

**Strategies:**

- 1) **HABITAT IMPROVEMENT** - Projects designed to improve big-game habitat and move animals away from private agricultural lands and onto public lands.
  - Projects on federal, state or private lands will be considered as needed. Projects on private and state trust lands will be considered if the property is open to hunting.
  - Specific areas will be managed to increase their attractiveness to wintering elk and draw animals away from areas where they are causing problems.
  - Grazing management (including rotational grazing), fertilization and vegetative manipulation, such as burning, roller chopping, hydro-axing, interseeding, timber harvesting and noxious weed control will be conducted in areas where habitat improvements are likely to benefit targeted big-game animals and help with overall game management objectives.
  - Water development projects that improve distribution of grazing animals will be encouraged.
  - Seasonal restrictions and road closures can be used to improve the quality of habitats.
- 2) **FENCING** - The committee requires that projects use wildlife-friendly fence designs.
  - The committee may provide materials or reimbursements for replacement of fences to make them wildlife compatible.



- Fence-removal projects may also be considered in areas where habitats will be restored or improved by these projects.

3) **CONSERVATION EASEMENTS** - The committee may assist with transaction expenses related to conservation easements on large, private properties that provide valuable habitat. The committee supports the conservation of quality habitats, particularly as pressure is placed on agricultural lands due to population growth and changing values.

**OBJECTIVE #2: Focus on assisting CPW in achieving game management objectives in addition to resolving conflicts; Improve big game distribution and harvest to help minimize conflicts with local agricultural producers; Provide input to Herd Management Plans (HMPs) concerning desired population objectives; Work with CPW as a partner in studies to determine big game habits and lessen conflicts with the agricultural community.**

**Strategies:**

- 1) **HABITAT**- An important piece of big game management is habitat management. Habitat improvement projects on public lands can help to assist CPW in achieving game management objectives by increasing the amount of habitat available to big game.
- 2) **HERD MANAGEMENT PLANS** - Work with CPW to review and comment on draft HMPs for deer, elk, pronghorn, and moose.
- 3) **RESEARCH** - The committee may cooperate in studies to aid in the determination of migration patterns, seasonal use habitats, and fawn and calf recruitment to aid in maintaining healthy big game populations.

**OBJECTIVE #3: Promote partnerships between Colorado Parks and Wildlife, active livestock producers, ranchers, sports people, land users, and land management agencies to provide solutions to conflicts; Increase awareness of the HPP program; Conduct outreach and education where possible to promote good stewardship.**

**Strategies:**

- 1) **PARTNERSHIPS** - The committee will encourage partnership and participation from all parties involved in big game conflicts and management in the area.
- 2) **FENCING INFORMATION** - The committee will provide information on fences designed to reduce conflicts in areas with high impacts from wildlife movements, will share in the construction costs of replacement fences that are wildlife compatible and will assist with costs associated with repair of wildlife caused damages to existing fences.
  - The committee will make information available on alternative fence designs that reduce wildlife impacts or are more resistant to those impacts.
  - The committee may provide materials for replacement fences that are wildlife compatible in areas with high wildlife impacts to existing fences.
  - Qualifying landowners can receive an annual fencing voucher to provide materials at a level determined by the committee for small fence repairs where damage from big game has occurred.

- 3) **EDUCATION**- The committee will encourage projects involving educational efforts and will participate in forums and discussions that facilitate understanding and cooperation between landowners, agencies, and other interests, and that further CPW game management objectives and management practices.

**OBJECTIVE #4: Connectivity- Increase effectiveness of habitat manipulation projects and implement a landscape-scale philosophy by increasing the scope and connectivity of projects**

**Strategies:**

- 1) Develop and maintain a map depicting past, ongoing and prospective habitat projects.
- 2) Solicit and coordinate habitat treatments which incorporate public and private land, creating a link between past and future treatments on a landscape scale.
- 3) Increase percentage of external matching funds contributed to HPP projects.

## **SOUTH PARK HPP AREA DESCRIPTION**

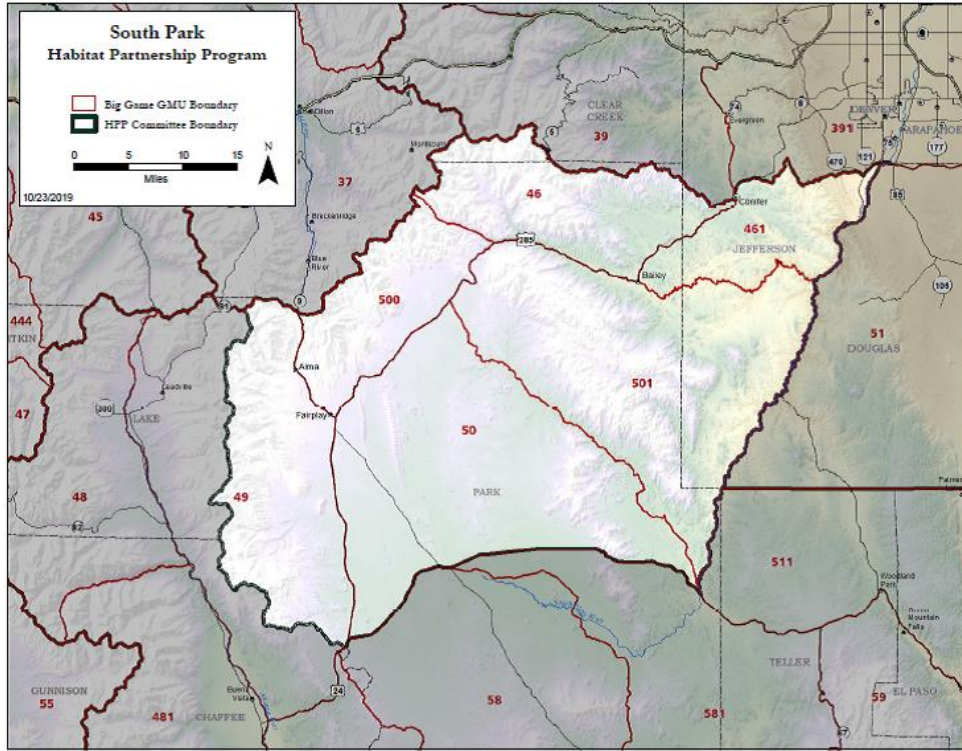
The South Park HPP area encompasses over one million acres in central Colorado. It includes Game Management Units 46, 461, 49 (east half), 50, 500, and 501 in Park, Clear Creek, and Jefferson counties. Ownership within the 1197 square miles of the program area is 56% U.S. Forest Service, 33% private, 5% NGO/other, 4% Bureau of Land Management, and 2% State of Colorado. The area ranges from 5,500 feet elevation at the South Platte River in the northeast corner to 14,286 feet at Mount Lincoln in the northwest corner.

The program area includes the towns (and populations) of Alma (289), Aspen Park (882), Bailey (10,202), Buffalo Creek (213), Como (500), Conifer (19,683), Fairplay (704), Grant (155), Hartsel (909), Jefferson (957), Pine (3395), Pine Junction (424), and Shawnee (33). Total resident population within the program area is 38,346. Most of these towns have central “downtown” areas with in-town housing but are surrounded by rural residential developments (subdivisions) with lot sizes ranging from .5 to 40 acres.

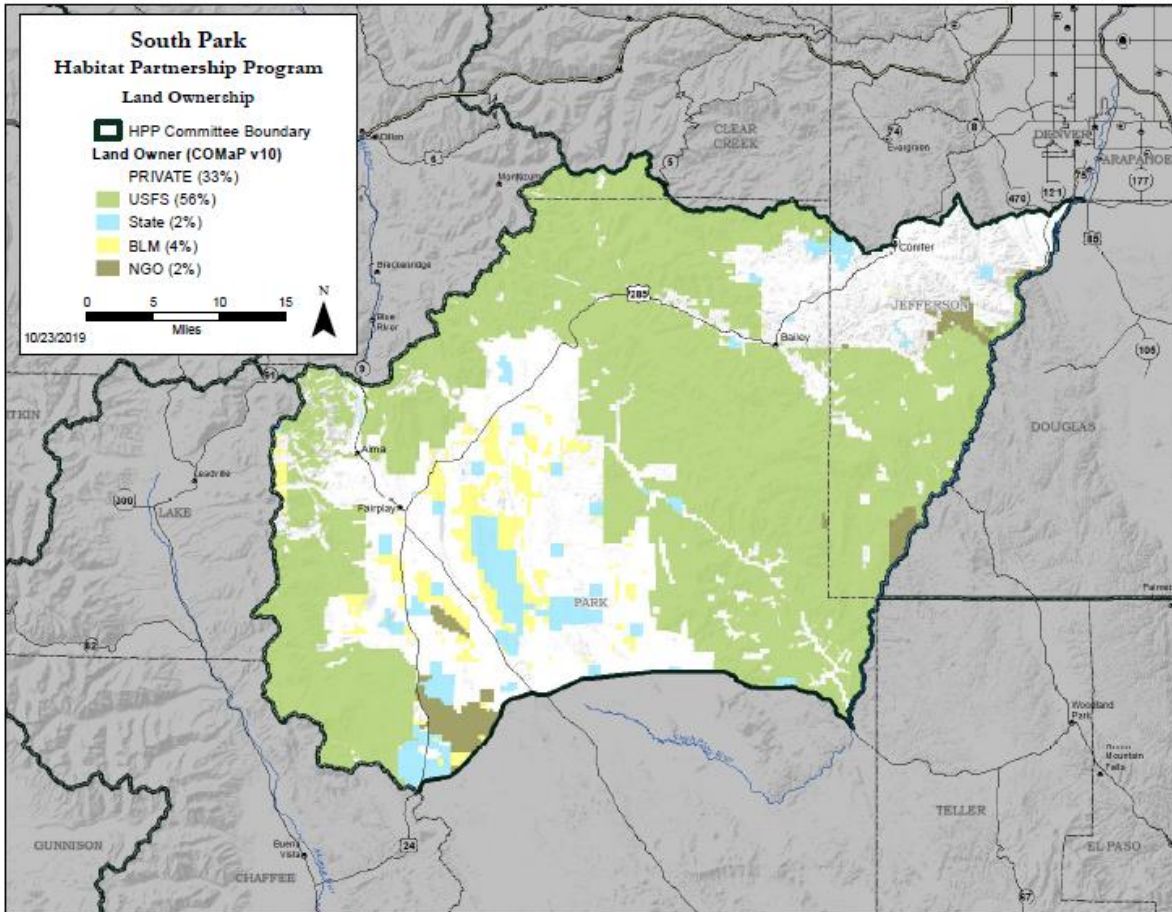
The geographic region known as “South Park”, a high mountain plain, occupies the south-central portion of the program area. This park is ringed by mountains. The northeast portion of the program area is considered Front Range, a short-distance outside of the Denver-metro area. Private lands are found mostly outside of the Front Range and within the interior of South Park. The Pike National Forest makes up the majority of the public lands in the region, separating South Park and the Front Range, and found along the Continental Divide to the west. BLM and State lands are found concentrated mostly in the very center of South Park.

The South Park Habitat Partnership Program area includes several State Wildlife Areas, including: James Mark Jones, Tomahawk, Tarryall Reservoir, 63 Ranch, and Teter. Habitat improvement projects have taken place on State Wildlife Areas to encourage big game use, enhance public hunting opportunities and reduce big-game conflicts. The majority of recreation use within the SPHPP area takes place on the Pike National Forest.

# SOUTH PARK HPP GMU BOUNDARY MAP



# SOUTH PARK HPP LAND OWNERSHIP MAP



# HABITAT DESCRIPTION

The SPHPP area is named for South Park, the highest of four mountain grassland parks in the state of Colorado. Ringed by the Mosquito, Park, Kenosha and Tarryall mountain ranges, South Park is home to a diverse set of ecosystems. The “park” itself is an open, grassy, mostly treeless valley bottom ranging from 8,000 to 10,000 feet in elevation with low, intermittent ridges occasionally supporting ponderosa pine, bristlecone pine, and aspen forest stands. The edges between the park and the higher mountains are a mix of forest types, shrublands, grasslands, and riparian habitats that support quality big game herds and other wildlife. Many of the shrub and forest ecosystems, particularly on public lands, are not as productive as they once were. Years of fire suppression and lack of timber and logging activities have allowed these habitats to become overgrown and/or infested with insects and disease.

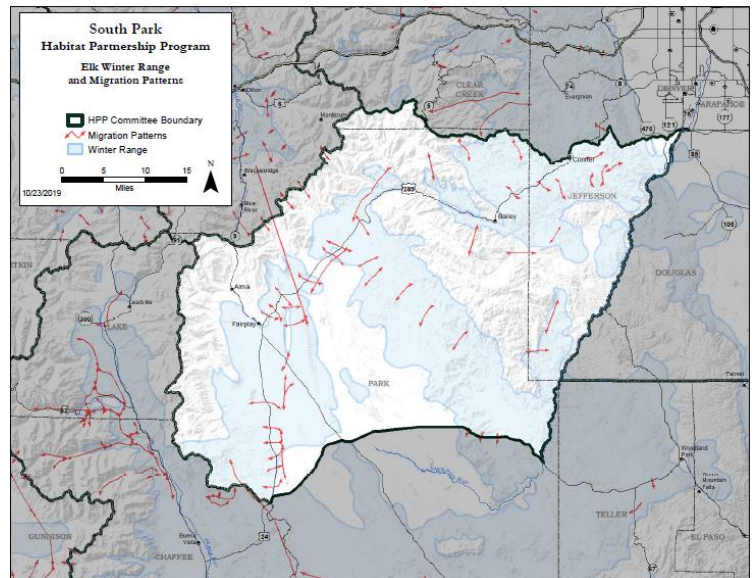
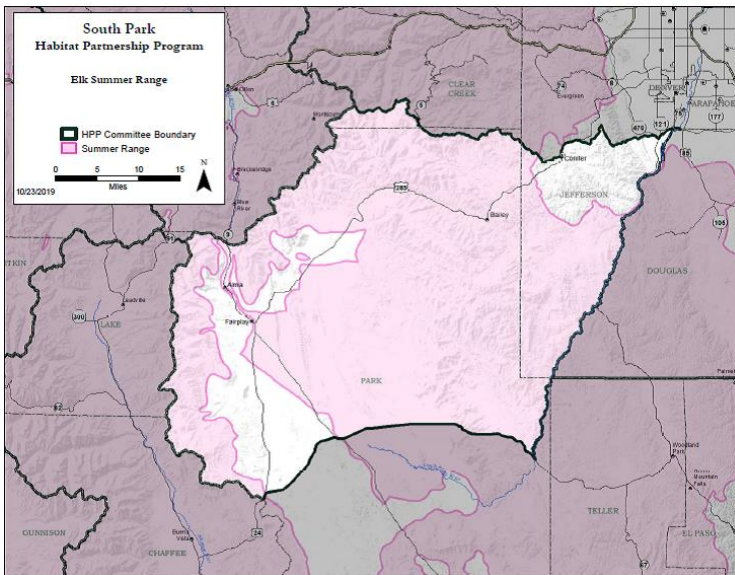
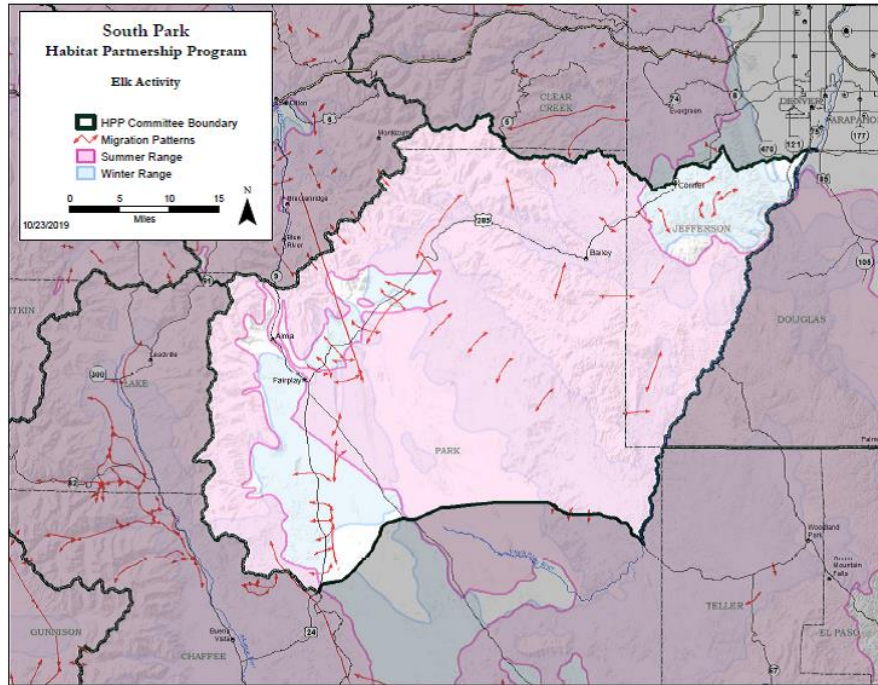
Another important aspect of the SPHPP area is that it includes the headwaters of South Platte River. This area sits at the top of the watershed and is responsible for the beginning flows that life downstream depends on. As water resources within the state are being squeezed and pressured, the value of these headwaters increases.

Land uses in South Park are also shifting due to population and use pressure. South Park was historically a rich, hay-producing grassland grazed by both cattle and sheep. Mining formed the basis of the economy and was supported by ranching and logging operations. Land uses now include recreation, ranching, residential development, mining, smaller agricultural uses, and commercial development. Many of the large ranching and haying operations in the park have gradually become more dry-pasture operations as water rights have been sold to downstream municipalities. Recognizing the value of water, an emerging trend in the last decade is the buy-back of water rights on some of the more affluent ranches. Agriculture continues to be an important land use in South Park and the area supports a solid base of livestock producers.



# BIG GAME POPULATION SUMMARY

## ELK RANGE MAPS



**ELK** - In the South Park Committee Area elk populations are managed in three different Herd Management Plans.

The Mount Evans HMP (E-39) covers Game Management Units 39, 391, 46, and 461. GMUs 46 and 461 are in the South Park Committee area. The elk in GMUs 46 and 461 have seen significant habitat fragmentation and loss due to residential growth. The elk in this area usually spend the summer in high elevations, on and around Mount Evans, and migrate down to lower elevation winter habitat. Most of the winter habitat in this area is private agricultural or residential land.

The Kenosha Pass HMP (E-18) covers GMUs 50, 500, and 501 all of which are in the South Park Committee area. Elk in the Kenosha Pass HMP mostly spend the summer in higher elevations in GMUs 500 and 501 and migrate to lower elevations to spend the winter in GMU 50, 500, and

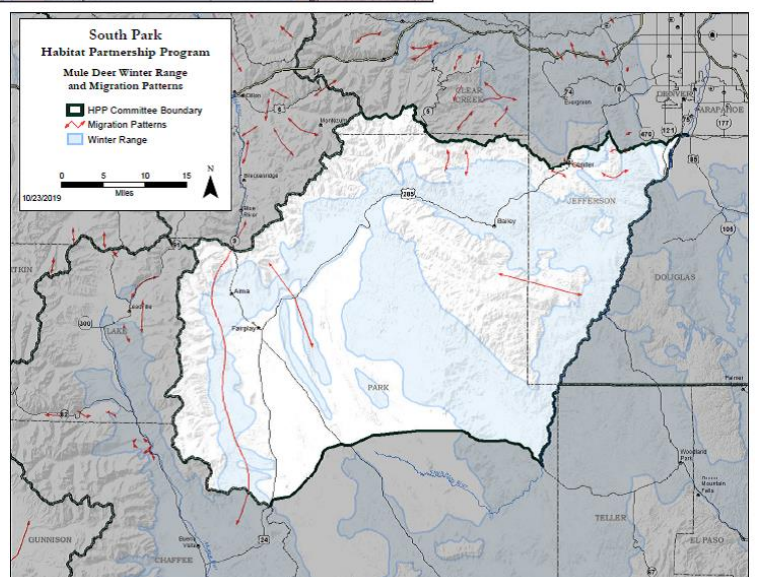
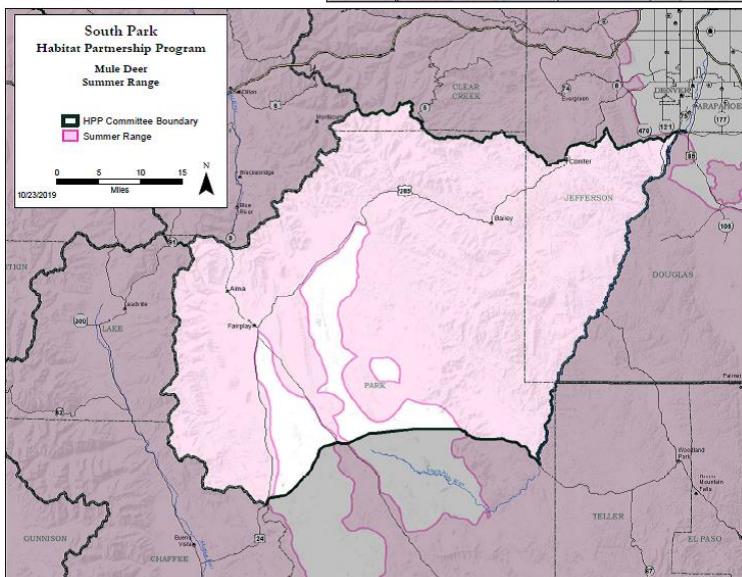
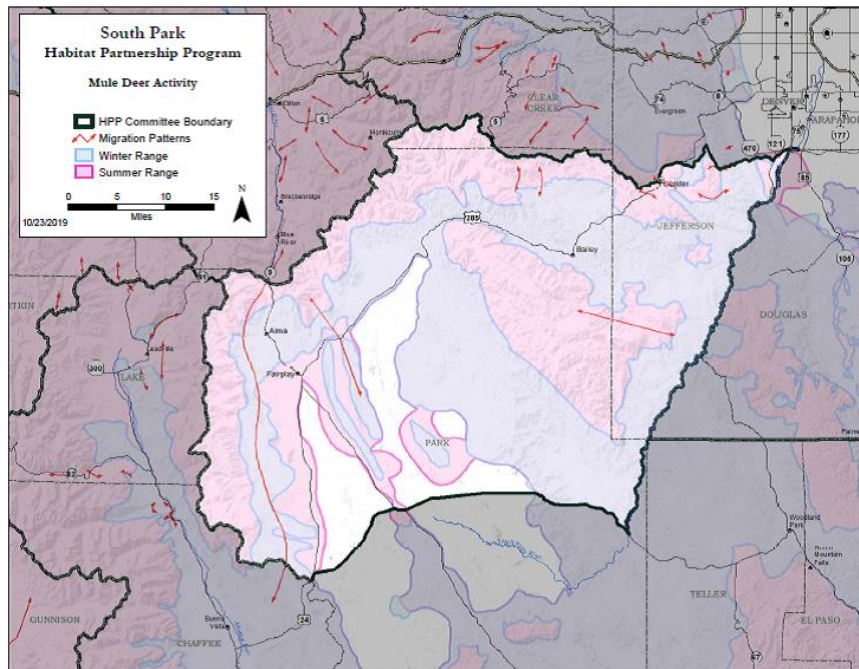


501. During most years elk from neighboring HMPs, E-37, E-22, and E-13, migrate into South Park and spend the winter in GMUs 50 and 500.

The Buffalo Peaks HMP (E-22) covers GMUs 49, 57, and 58. Only the eastern portion of GMU 49 is in the South Park Committee Area. Elk in this area again winter in higher elevations in the Buffalo Peaks and Mosquito Range and then migrate down to lower elevations in GMUs 49, and 50 for the winter.

A complicating factor is the immigration of elk into South Park from GMU's outside the SPHPP Program Area after the regular big game seasons are over. These elk are included in the current winter population estimate although many of them are not available for harvest in the program area during the regular big game seasons.

## DEER RANGE MAPS



**DEER-** In the South Park Committee Area mule deer populations are managed in three different Herd Management Plans.

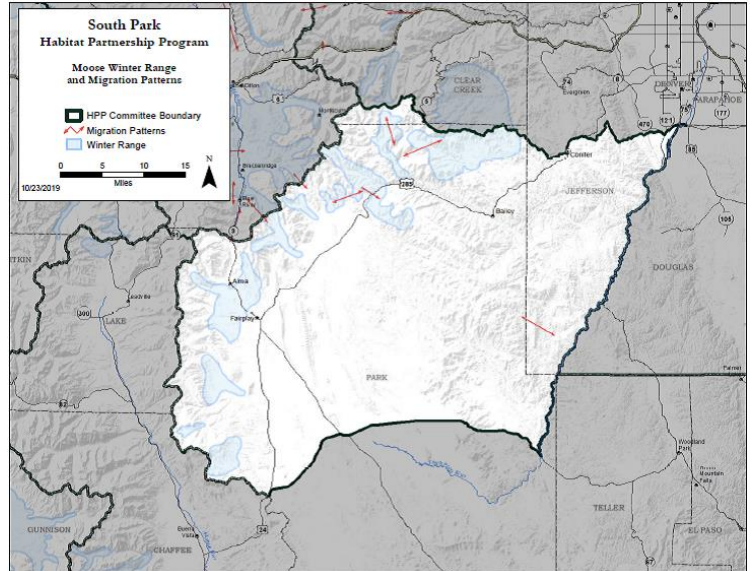
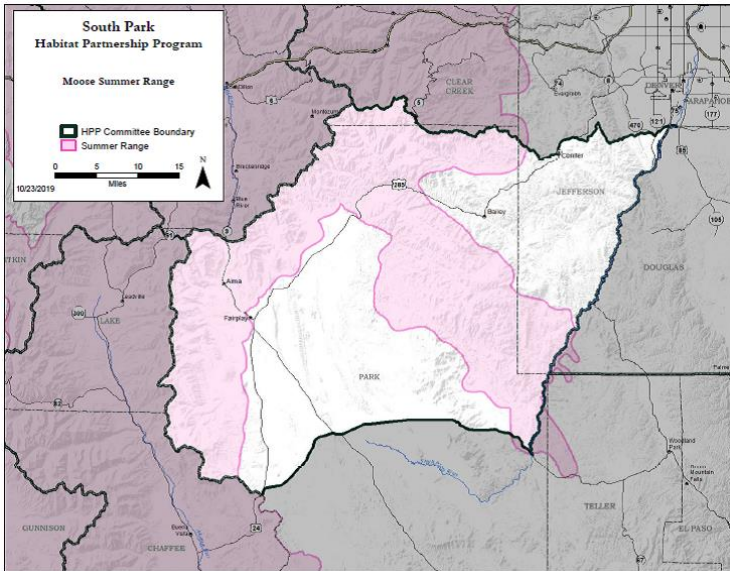
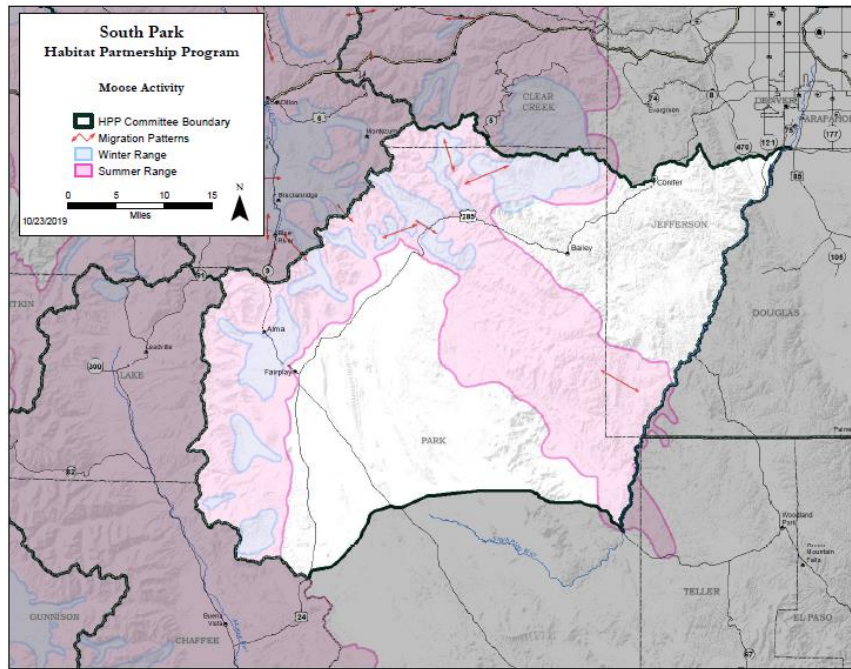
The Bailey HMP (D-17) covers GMUs 39, 391, 46, 461 and 51. GMUs 46 and 461 are in the South Park Committee area. The mule deer population in GMUs 46 and 461 have seen significant habitat fragmentation and loss to residential growth. Most of the populations are now found in residential subdivisions where hunters cannot access them.

The South Park HMP (D-38) covers GMUs 50, 500, and 501, all of which are in the South Park Committee area. The majority of the population in the South Park HMP is concentrated in old burn areas in GMU 501 and the southeast part of GMU 50. A small amount of the population migrates annually from GMU 500, during the summer months, to D-16 to winter around Buena Vista.

The Cripple Creek HMP (D-16) covers GMUs 49, 57, 58, and 581. Only the eastern portion of GMU 49 is in the South Park Committee area. Deer are mostly found in the eastern portion of GMU 49 during the summer. They generally migrate from Buena Vista and Salida in the spring to fawn and browse alpine shrubs before retuning back to the Arkansas valley to spend the winter.

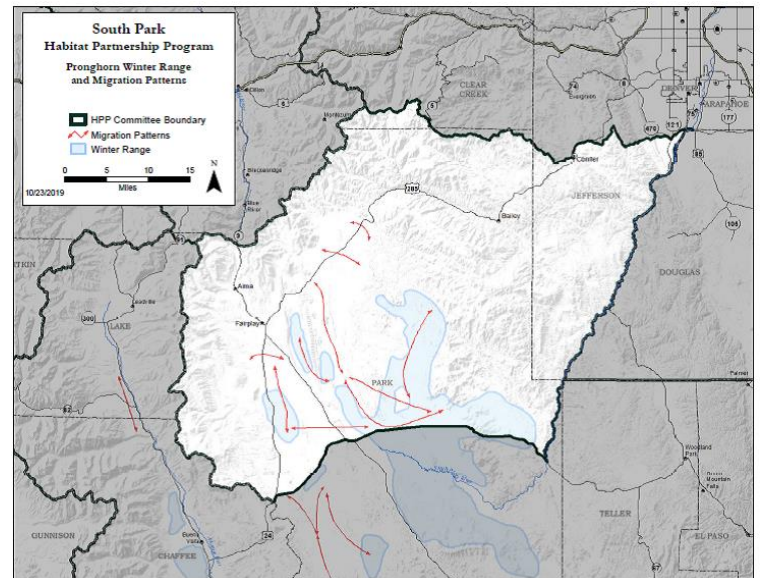
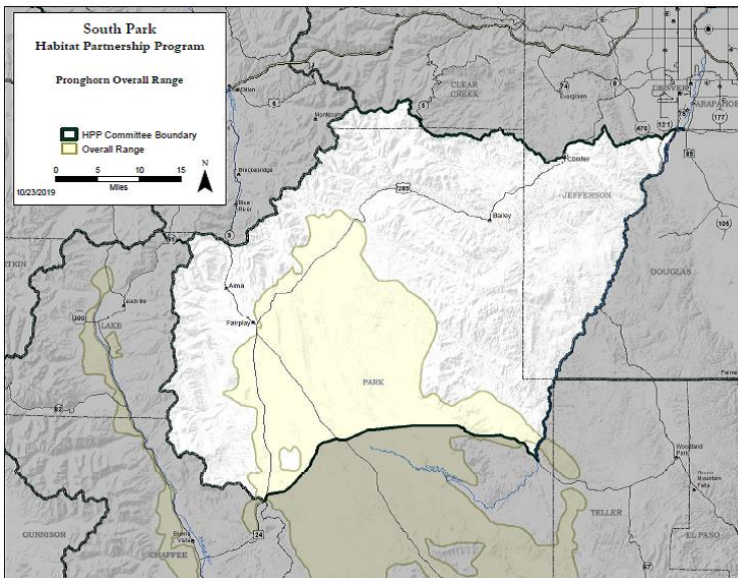
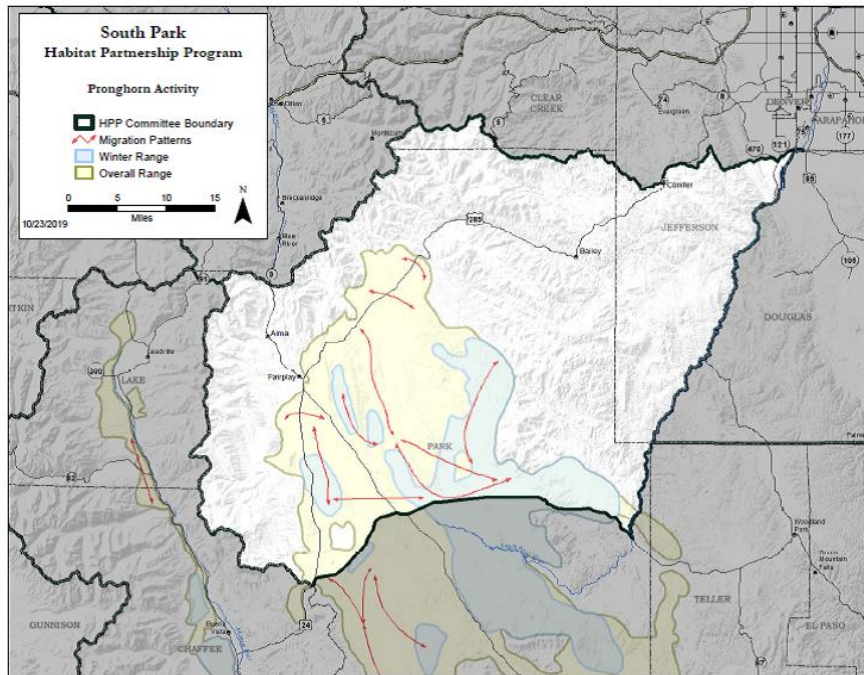


# MOOSE RANGE MAPS



**MOOSE-** The South Park Committee area lies in moose HMP M-8. Moose GMUs 49, 50, 500, 501, 46, and 461 are in the South Park Committee area. Moose were reintroduced into Colorado in North Park in 1978. Since then moose populations have been expanding and migrating south and west, which eventually established healthy populations in South Park making it a relatively young herd. Moose are mostly found along small creeks in dense willow covered riparian areas or using dark timber along those creeks for cover.

# PRONGHORN RANGE MAPS



**PRONGHORN-** The South Park Committee Area covers pronghorn GMUs 49, 50, 500, and 501 in Herd Management Plans A-30. Pronghorn in this area generally migrate from winter range near Highway 24 between Hartsel and Lake George to summer range around Jefferson and Como. This herd is the highest elevation herd of pronghorn in the state of Colorado. It is a relatively small herd that is generally limited by drought and severe winter conditions.



Table 1. Data Analysis Unit Summary for South Park HPP Area

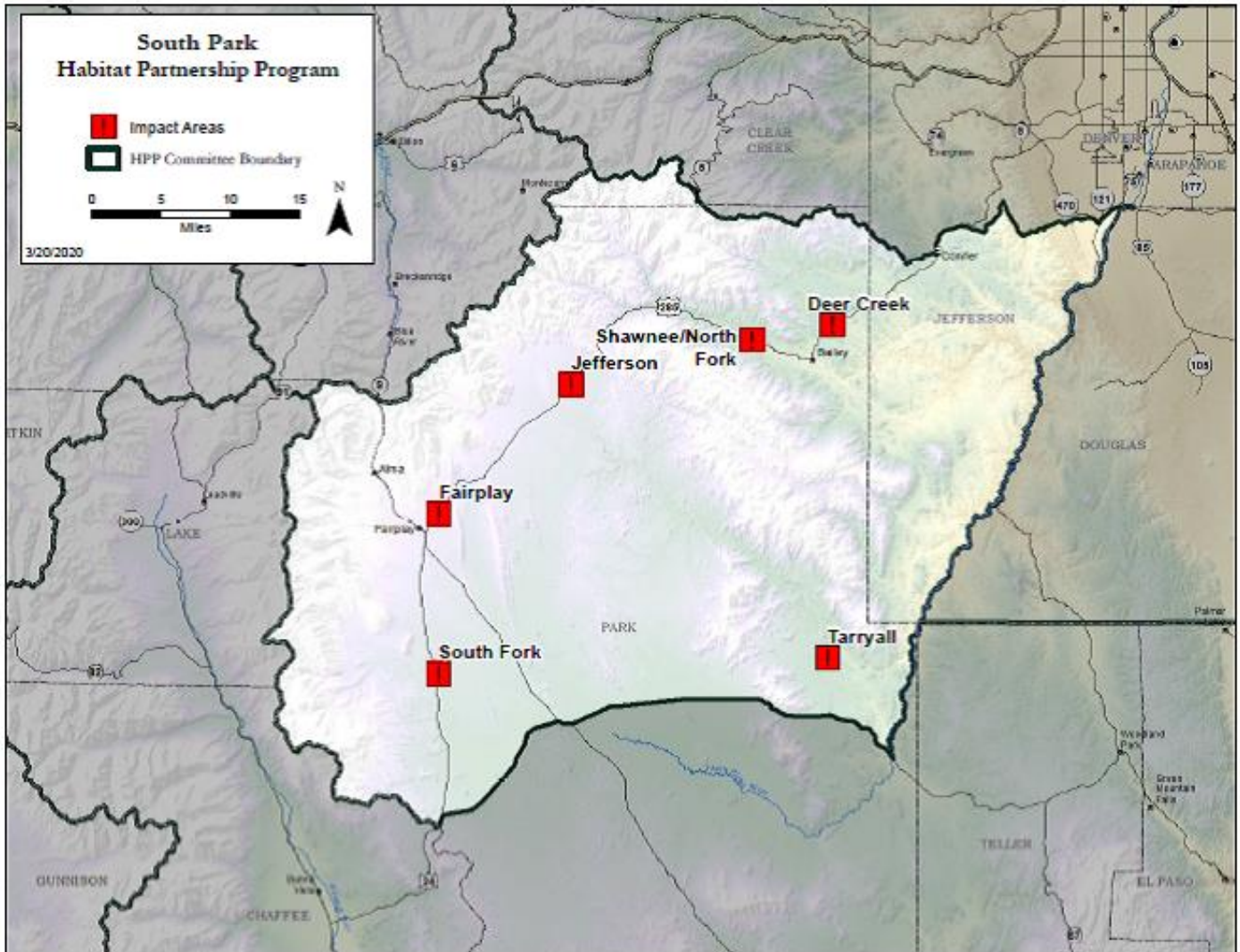
Management Herd	1990s Population Avg.	2000s Population Avg.	2010 - 2018 Population Avg.	Current Population Management Objective
Elk- Kenosha Pass E-18	3,600	2,700	2,200	2,000-2,400
<i>Game Management Units:</i>	<i>50,500,501</i>			
Elk- Mount Evans E-39	3,700	3,900	2,300	2,200-2,600
<i>Game Management Units*:</i>	<i>39,46,391,461</i>			
Elk- Buffalo Peaks E-22	4,400	3,600	3,500	3,150-3,500
<i>Game Management Units*:</i>	<i>49,57,58</i>			
Deer- South Park D-38	2,300	2,800	2,800	2,500-3,100
<i>Game Management Units:</i>	<i>50,500,501</i>			
Deer- Bailey D-17	7,000	8,000	7,400	7,500-8,300
<i>Game Management Units*:</i>	<i>39,46,51,391,461</i>			
Deer- Cripple Creek D-16	10,000	12,000	11,000	16,000-20,000
<i>Game Management Units*:</i>	<i>49,57,58,581</i>			
Moose- M-8	+	+	125	No objective established
<i>Game Management Units*:</i>	<i>36,46,49,50,51,391, 461, 500, 501</i>			
Pronghorn-South Park PH-30	1,000	1,000	1,100	1,000-1,200
<i>Game Management Units*:</i>	<i>49,50,57,58,500,501, 511, 581</i>			

*\*only 46, 50, 461, 500, 501, and the east side of 49 are in the SPHPP Committee area*

*+ Not enough information to model population*

# IMPACT AREAS

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 within the South Park HPP area. 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 following areas are considered impact areas for the South Park HPP committee.



## FAIRPLAY

The Fairplay impact area runs from Fairplay on the west to Reineker Ridge on the east and the USFS boundary south to the town of Garo. This area has impacts from elk wintering on cattle pastures and hay meadows. This area also sees damage to fences from migrating elk.

## **JEFFERSON**

The Jefferson area is from Kenosha Pass to Como and includes both sides of US 285. This area sees impacts from elk competing with cattle on pastures in the winter and spring.

## **TARRYALL**

The Tarryall Impact Area follows the Tarryall River from the Stage Stop subdivision to the north down to US 24. It also includes the Puma Hills and Badger Flats. . This area has impacts from elk wintering on cattle pastures and hay meadows. This area also sees impacts from elk on haystacks and damage to fences from migrating elk.

## **DEER CREEK**

This area is from the Harris Park Subdivision in the northwest, follows Deer Creek southeast to the Rolland Valley and Burland subdivisions. This area has impacts from elk wintering on cattle pastures and hay meadows. This area also sees impacts from elk on haystacks and damage to fences from migrating elk.

## **SHAWNEE/ NORTH FORK**

This area spans from the Roberts Tunnel to the northwest, follows the North Fork of the South Platte River southeast to Plate Cannon High School. This area has impacts from elk wintering on cattle pastures and hay meadows.

## **SOUTH FORK**

This area follows the South Fork of the South Platte River from the headwaters to Antero Reservoir. This area has impacts from elk wintering on cattle pastures and hay meadows. This area also sees impacts from elk on haystacks and damage to fences from migrating elk.

## **SOUTH PARK HPP AREA WILDFIRES**

Fire has significant impacts on wildlife habitat and herd distribution. Generally, fire will displace wildlife only while there is active burning and smoke production. Depending on fire severity, intensity and duration, vegetation often responds quickly. Low to moderate intensity fires increase availability of soil nutrients, redistribute them, and allow faster turn-over of nutrient cycles. In these cases, grasses and pioneering forbs flourish, attracting big game and other animals. High intensity fires usually decrease available nutrient pools. Since fires usually include a variety of intensities, the fire scar will often attract deer, elk and pronghorn in greater numbers than before. Large fire events typically occur in overgrown forests in the Bailey/South Park area where there are limited understories of grasses, forbs, and shrubs. After a fire event, grasses, forbs, shrubs, and trees all begin the process of regrowing or resprouting fairly quickly. However, sizeable growth on shrubs and trees takes time. In general, smaller fires are less disruptive to the distribution of animals and herd dynamics. Larger fires, especially if they have large areas of high-intensity or high-temperature burning, can have detrimental effects on herd distribution. Animals can be displaced to other lesser-quality habitats for periods of time spanning years.

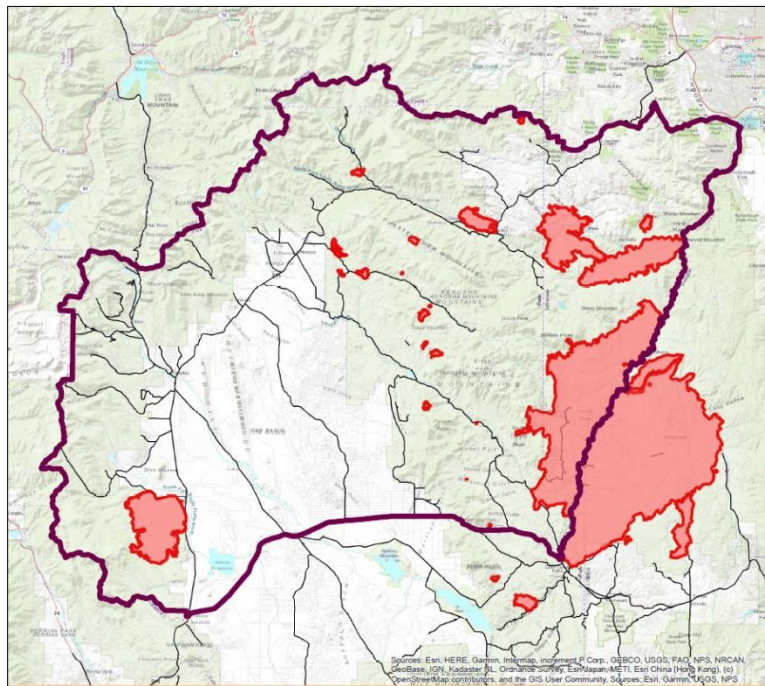
## South Park HPP Area - FIRE HISTORY

Impacts of fire:

95,000+ acres have burned in the SPHPP program area since its inception

Acres of some of the larger past fires within the SPHPP area:

- Weston Pass 2017 14,176 acres
- Snyder II & II 2015 506 acres
- Lime Gulch 2013 511 acres
- Hayman 2002 53,431 acres (just the acres inside the SPHPP area)
- Snaking Gulch 2002 2,312 acres
- High Meadows 2000 10,761 acres
- Buffalo Creek 1996 11,852 acres



## 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)

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

1. Has the applicant/landowner acted in good faith and cooperation with CPW? To maximize program effectiveness, applicants or landowners with a history of misconduct related to the HPP program shall be ineligible for program participation.
2. A current HPP project application specific to the type of project being requested is required. The most current applications can be found on the CPW website.
3. The committee prefers that the landowner have a minimum of 160 acres of agricultural zoned land, but projects on smaller properties will be considered on a case by case basis.
4. Applicants must allow a reasonable amount of hunting on their property if they are requesting funds from HPP. The reason for this is two-fold: 1) supporting hunting allows the private property owner to be part of the solution to big game conflicts; and 2) since HPP is funded by the sale of big game hunting licenses, hunting is a way of showing support to the program. The committee may ask for additional documentation regarding hunting on the property.
5. This is a partnership program, so the committee encourages applicants to have a 50/50 match for funding requests. This can be a cash match or an in-kind match. Project requests with less than 50% match will be considered on a case by case basis.
6. Any fences built using HPP funds must be wildlife-friendly, including the use of high visibility top wire.
7. All project applications require the review and signature of the local DWM before coming before the committee. DWM support ensures that projects are compatible with big game needs.
8. Project applicants (private landowners, public land representatives, and SLB lessees) must present their projects to the committee in person. In the case of private landowners, they may designate a manager (or the like) to represent their interests and present their proposal. The committee may confirm this delegation. If an applicant is unable to do so, the application may be tabled until the proponent can be present.
9. Applicants are expected to practice stewardship as part of any project.
10. HPP project evaluations are required upon completion of projects. The committee may choose to monitor progress or success of projects at any time.
11. Qualified landowners (160 acres or more, allows hunting) with fences damaged by big-game may request materials annually in an amount determined by the committee, when they document those losses. The committee will consider additional requests for fence damage repairs on a case-by-case basis.
12. Qualified landowners may request herbicide annually in an amount determined by the committee in the form of a voucher.

Monitoring of projects is critical for the long-term sustainability and credibility of the HPP program. Monitoring will be done on all projects to provide documentation of completion and evaluation of project effectiveness. The type of monitoring done will match the type of project. Monitoring data will be provided to the HPP local committee and administrative assistants as needed or requested.

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.

# 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 and public 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 provide education and 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. 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.
7. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CLEARANCE: Certain projects (particularly on public land) require that archaeological clearance be completed prior to implementation. When this is interfering with getting a quality project done, HPP may be involved.

# 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 South Park 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 South Park 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.

It is important to acknowledge that the budget allocation is based on past projects and projects that are likely to be proposed in the foreseeable future. This desired allocation reflects the SPHPP committee emphasis for supporting certain project types. While these are the 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. Our desired budget for the current ten-year term can be broken down as follows:

## **BASE BUDGET ALLOCATION:**

Habitat Improvement	60%
Fencing	20%
Monitoring and Research	5%
Conservation Easements & NEPA Related Activities	5%
Administration (allows the committee to function)	5%
Game Damage	2.5%
Information & Education	2.5%
<u>TOTAL ALLOCATION:</u>	<u>100%</u>

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

## RECREATION

Even in our wildest projections of the future, we could not have foreseen the current demand for outdoor recreation. Mention the word “Colorado” to anyone out-of-state and the mental images that emerge include snow, mountains, wildlife, and wild places. Yet, as more people go to more places in more seasons, they threaten the “wildness” they seek. Outside of the White River National Forest (Vail, Aspen, Breckenridge, Maroon Bells, Hanging Lake), nowhere is this trend more apparent than the Front Range forests. The SPHPP committee area is directly accessible from Denver and Colorado Springs. Public land within the SPHPP area is under heavy recreation pressure from adventure-seekers of all types. OHV-use, hiking, biking, backpacking, riding, skiing, snowmobiling, trekking, boating, hunting, fishing, camping, orienteering, mountaineering, and climbing have all experienced an explosion of growth. Technology advances in outdoor gear allow more people to go more places in more seasons than ever before. Motorized recreation vehicles and outdoor gear are now one of the fastest-growing sectors of business. Our landscapes are being loved to death. This use adds pressure to land, landowners, land managers, and wildlife.

## RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Ask someone in Denver about their idea of the perfect place to live and work and the answer will often be something like, “in the mountains, but close to the Front Range”. That’s the location of the SPHPP area. Demands for housing are currently high. The housing market has risen 7% over the last year and is predicted to rise an additional 5.6% in the coming year (2020). Business and commercial development has grown steadily throughout the program area in a variety of fields. The bottom line is that the US Hwy 285 corridor is a popular area and is only growing in popularity. While growth and development are good for the economy, they come at a cost. Rather than being reactive to the increased growth and demands on land, the SPHPP committee needs to be forward-thinking and support projects that improve and conserve lands for the future. One of the important aspects of buffering growth is making sure that working ranches continue to be viable by providing support and assistance to operators as needed. Conservation of other large acreages will continue to be an important aspect of future work.

## FOREST HEALTH

Several recent environmental assessments done by the Forest Service identify the South Park area at “high-risk” of negative impacts from wildfire. This is largely due to values at risk and declining forest health over time. There is a need to improve the resiliency of forest ecosystems to wildfire, insects, and disease. Most watersheds within the SPHPP area are rated as degraded. When natural areas are not functioning at levels of high productivity and vitality, the whole system suffers. Healthy habitats are more productive, support larger numbers of animals, and contribute natural values to an area. In the past, extensive logging, intensive livestock grazing, and use of fire contributed to a varied and dynamic landscape. Ecosystems respond best to periods of disturbance followed by periods of rest and recover. Most of our forested habitats have been in a “rest” state too long, leaving them overgrown, over-crowded, and weak. Almost all forest communities within the SPHPP area have become infested with insects and/or disease. Most of this area is in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile for risk of potential fire. The fire history map shows this risk.

## CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE (CWD)

Chronic wasting disease has been detected at very low rates (1-5%) in mule deer and elk in some of the northern units of the SPHPP area. The program area is surrounded on three sides by areas with high detection rates. CWD can be spread through social contact within herds or through the soil. Mule deer, elk, and moose are susceptible. Pronghorn are not. The South Park area is not part of any area in which mandatory testing is required because detection rates are so low. However, if this changes in the near future and the SPHPP area includes CWD affected game units, it could affect management. The effects of being in a CWD area may include a reduction of hunters, which is one of the main tools used in game management.

## MIGRATION CORRIDORS

There are no less than 15 major migration corridors identified within the SPHPP area. These migration corridors exist for deer, elk, and moose. Most of the migration pattern maps produced by CPW show movement between public and private lands throughout the SPHPP area. These are natural movements mostly influenced by season, but locally changed by weather, water availability, and forage conditions. US Highway 285 (78 miles in SPHPP) and State Highway 9 (28 miles in SPHPP) cross diagonally through the program area. Highway crossing maps produced by CPW show almost the full length of both of these highways as crossing areas for deer, elk, and pronghorn. While we have no data regarding motor vehicle accidents involving big game for this area, road kills are a common sight. More attention is being focused state-wide on safe highway crossing features for wildlife and the SPHPP committee should be aware of any emerging issues or opportunities related to this trend.

## NOXIOUS WEEDS

Noxious weeds are prevalent in all of our communities, across Colorado, and around the nation. It is easy to develop a general sense that weeds are a problem, but just part of all of our background noise. However, it should be noted, that within the SPHPP program area specifically, the number of acres infested by noxious weeds since 2000 has increased from approximately 350 acres to over 3076. This is a ten-fold increase in approximately 20 years. It is unrealistic to think that noxious weeds can be eradicated from our area, but a strategic plan for their identification and treatment is necessary. The SPHPP committee should focus on treatment in areas most likely to prevent spread or improve important habitat.