2026 RANGE-WIDE STATUS OF BLACK-TAILED AND MULE DEER

Mule Deer Working Group Technical Committee. Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

The purpose of this document is to provide a general overview of the current population status and general abundance trends of mule deer, including their black-tailed deer subspecies (*Odocoileus hemionus*) throughout their range in North America. The Mule Deer Working Group Technical Committee (MDWG) consists of representatives from the 24 state, territorial, and provincial agencies that compose the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA). The overall purpose of the MDWG is to provide a collaborative approach to finding solutions to improve black-tailed and mule deer conservation and management. One of the most common types of information requested of the MDWG is regarding the general population status and trajectory of black-tailed and mule deer populations.

This species occupies a broad geographic range and diverse habitats from central Mexico to Canada's Yukon Territory and from the Pacific Coast to the eastern Great Plains. Their populations can fluctuate dramatically through time in response to changes in habitat, environmental conditions, disease, predators, and harvest management. Because of their popularity and wide distribution, mule deer are one of the most socially and economically important animals in western North America. The public expects wildlife agencies to maintain abundant populations of this charismatic species, with expectations often exceeding what their habitat will sustain.

Relatively little is known about deer populations in the West prior to the arrival of early pioneers in the mid-1800s, but it is generally accepted that mule deer populations prior to written records fluctuated with environmental changes as they do today. As western

settlement progressed, mule deer populations declined dramatically because of unregulated subsistence and market hunting, and excessive livestock grazing, accelerated by unfavorable weather patterns. Mule deer were hard to find in most areas and sightings became rare by the close of the 1800s.

Perhaps paradoxically, human-induced changes in many areas made the landscape *more* conducive to supporting large mule deer populations in the early to mid-1900s. Mule deer thrive on disturbed habitats (within reason) containing ample and diverse assemblages of plant species that serve as forage, browse, and cover. As a result of intense livestock grazing and wildfire suppression, the amount of shrubs within grasslands increased, thus increasing year-round browse available to mule deer. Widespread logging also opened canopies of densely forested areas and further promoted growth of beneficial shrubs and leafy forage. These land-use changes, coupled with aggressive predator control measures and increasingly effective harvest restrictions, allowed mule deer populations to rebound throughout the 1920s and 1930s and peak in different areas in the late 1940s through early 1960s. This period is thought of by many as "the good old days" for mule deer.

The second range-wide decline in recorded history started in the late 1960s. By the mid-1970s it was obvious mule deer had declined throughout most areas of the West, but apparently for different reasons. During this period, logging operations slowed and continued wildfire suppression allowed forest communities to mature and expand, thus reducing the amount of forage and browse available to mule deer and resulting in slow population declines in many areas. Weather further impacted mule deer populations as harsh winters in the north reduced some populations, while droughts in the desert regions lowered fawn recruitment.

Many mule deer populations increased in the 1980s in response to favorable weather conditions, but a west-wide drought and a few harsh winters in the late 1980s started yet another decline throughout mule deer range. By the mid-1990s and continuing into the early 2000s, it was obvious that mule deer were experiencing another decline not attributable to any single factor. This most recent range-wide decline in the 1990s resulted in WAFWA establishing the Mule Deer Working Group Technical Committee. Following this most recent low point in memory, most western mule deer populations rebounded to some degree, but

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some are still struggling and require our focus, funding, and hard work. Regardless of the degree of recovery from the 1990s, most remain below current management objectives for those jurisdictions.

The causes of mule deer population fluctuations vary by ecoregion. Therefore, when mule deer are declining everywhere, it is usually for different reasons and no single solution will improve mule deer populations everywhere. Currently, mule deer population goals and harvest rates cannot be set relative to the numbers some remember in the mid-1900s. That period was influenced by a combination of optimal habitat conditions on a less populated western landscape allowing for mule deer population abundance that would be difficult to replicate today. The current challenge for deer managers is to conserve and enhance habitat while maintaining populations within modern habitat capacities.

The last decline in the 1990s was so well-publicized it lives on in print and electronic media. Agencies still field questions about "the mule deer decline," but there is no range-wide decline in black-tailed and mule deer. However, that is not to say all is well for our favorite deer species. Some states in the Southwest were well on their way back only to suffer a setback in recent years from drought. With a few exceptions, Rocky Mountain states and provinces were improving after a number of mild winters before being hit with a terribly harsh winter in 2022-23 that resulted in a loss of a high percentage of adult deer and nearly all fawns in some local areas. These weather-induced population fluctuations play out annually against a backdrop of more subtle long-term habitat changes and continued threats in areas where abundant deer populations are in conflict with human land uses. The MDWG has many resources available that discuss the challenges western deer face (www.muledeerworkinggroup.com).

The purpose of this document is to provide a quick snapshot of the status of this species by having each agency MDWG representative provide a current population status, trends, as well as general survey and harvest information for their respective jurisdiction. All states, provinces, and territories use very different methods to survey and estimate population parameters and harvest. Some have more rigorous processes than others, based on their resources, management needs, and what their terrain and vegetation allow.

MDWG representatives were asked to include certain numbers in Tables 1 and 2, as well as indicate the recent trends in their statewide population. Because trends would be different depending on whether we look at the last 3, 10, or 50 years, we specifically asked representatives to note the trajectory of the population in the last 3 years. This was done to give an indication of what is happening to the population right now, compared to the last couple years. Because of this, some population trends may be recently "increasing" after a decade of decrease. Likewise, a population could be noted as declining, but only after 15 years of strong increase. Consult the information and graphs in each jurisdiction to get the full picture of that population trend through time. Black-tailed and mule deer populations are below agency goals in most jurisdictions but have been recovering to various degrees for the last decade or more. Of the 21 WAFWA member agencies with mule deer populations, 4 are increasing, 9 are stable, and 8 are declining.

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The MDWG is completing a spreadsheet of long-term trends in many population and harvest parameters to help us evaluate the past. This resource will allow us to look at trends in population abundance, population demographics, and other things like total harvest reaching back several decades. Until that project is finished, the only complete and consistently gathered range-wide population estimates start in 2014 as part of our annual status updates like this one. In the future we will be able to provide longer trends, but thought it would be valuable to include the range-wide population abundance trend we have to date (2014-2026). Note: California changed to a different method to estimate populations that resulted in such a different estimate the last 2 years we provide the range-wide trends with and without California.

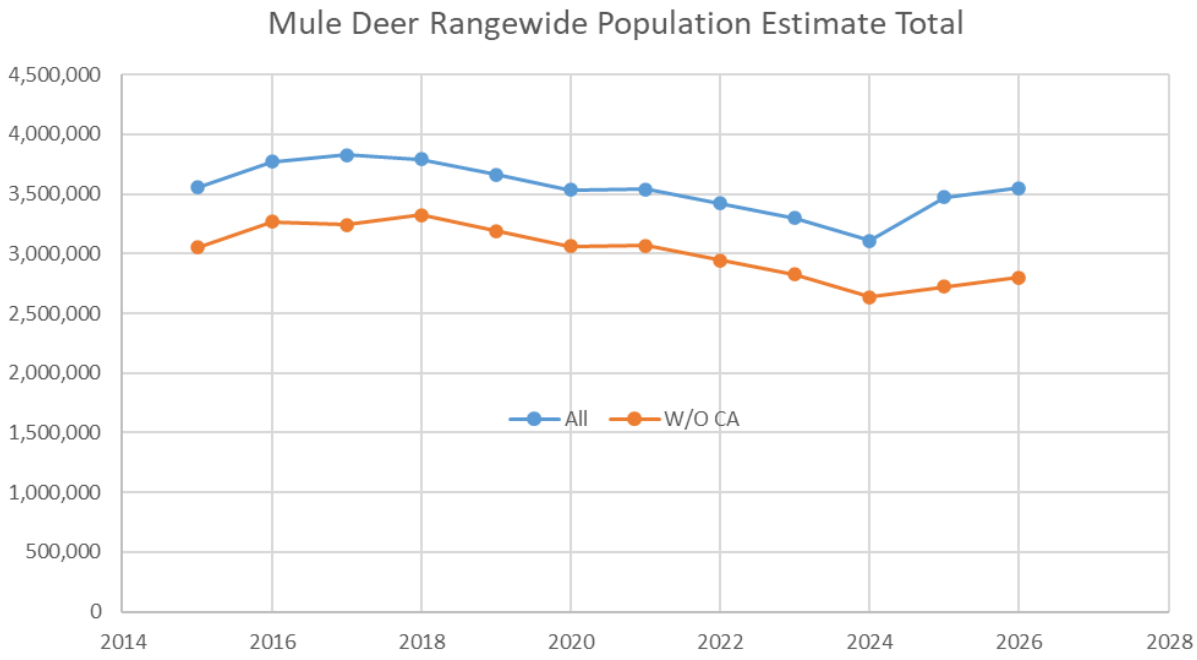

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Table 1. Range-wide estimation of mule deer population size, harvest, and hunter numbers provided by member agencies of WAFWA. **Click on a state/province/territory name to go directly to that jurisdiction.**

	Estimated Population[1]	3-year Population Trend	2025 Total Harvest	% Males in Harvest	Hunter Numbers
Alberta	141,000	Decreasing	7,216	64%	20,032
Arizona[2]	75,000 – 80,000	Decreasing	6,428	99%	31,271
British Columbia[3]	100,000 - 170,000	Stable	11,622	95%	48,683
California[4]	500,000-1,000,000[4]	Stable	40,844	99%	167,016
Colorado[5]	407,500	Increasing	33,205	80%	76,905
Idaho	260,000	Increasing	24,589	88%	73,748
Kansas	34,000	Decreasing	945	94%	17,329
Montana[6]	273,415	Stable	39,087	86%	147,857
Nebraska[7]	60,000-80,000	Stable	6,179	89%	79,736
Nevada	72,000-75,000	Stable	5,596	99%	10,163
New Mexico[5]	80,000 - 100,000	Decreasing	9,435	99%	30,974
North Dakota[8]	19,000 (Badlands)	Decreasing	9,116	61%	9,879
Oklahoma[9]	2,000-4,000	Stable	297	97%	NA
Oregon	162,733	Decreasing	14,026	94%	38,219
Saskatchewan[10]	40,000 – 60,000	Decreasing	2,055	94%	4,977
South Dakota[7,]	119,000	Stable	6,238	81%	67,916
Texas[2,3]	218,489	Decreasing	11,866	89%	30,893
Utah	327,570	Increasing	27,756	95%	84,092
Washington[11]	90,000 - 110,000	Stable	8,034	96%	84,441
Wyoming	237,700	Increasing	16,688	95%	37,078
Yukon	1,000	Stable	8	100%	20

[1] Estimated population may be presented as ranges to denote the difficulty and levels of uncertainty in gathering an estimate over a large spatial scale.
[2] Totals for mule deer hunting only.
[3] All data presented are from the most recent year available.
[4] Black-tailed and mule deer numbers combined. "Hunter Numbers" is "number of tags issued," actual number of hunters will be less. Population estimate from 2021.
[5] Estimated population, harvest, and hunters include mule deer and white-tailed deer. These estimates cannot be easily separated because most deer licenses are for either species (In Colorado, approximately 5% of the estimates are white-tailed deer. White-tailed deer comprise approximately 3% of the total harvest in New Mexico).
[6] Hunter Numbers is based on the proportion of all hunters who reported hunting mule deer.
[7] Hunter Numbers reflects total deer hunters including both mule deer and white-tailed deer hunters.
[8] Population estimate is determined for the Badlands, total harvest includes statewide gun and archery harvest, and number of hunters is based on mule deer licenses and any deer gun licenses within mule deer range.
[9] Numbers are difficult to estimate as many permits allow the take of mule deer or white-tailed deer.
[10] Estimates are from 2022 Report.
[11] General season only. Estimate of Hunter Numbers reflects all deer hunters; WA does not estimate hunters by species or subspecies.

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Table 2. Range-wide estimation of black-tailed deer population size, harvest and hunter numbers provided by WAFWA member agencies. **Click on a state/province/territory name to go directly to that jurisdiction.**

	Estimated Population[1]	3-year Trend	Total Harvest	% Males in Harvest	Hunter Numbers
Alaska[2]	326,200–335,200	NA	13,245	86%	12,858
British Columbia[3]	98,000 - 155,000	Stable	4,861	88%	10,570
Hawaii[4]	No Estimate	NA	30-50	50-60%	No Estimate
Oregon	No Estimate	Stable	30,563	91%	86,198
Washington[5]	No Estimate	Stable to increasing	13,302	92%	84,441

[1] Estimated populations may be presented as ranges to denote the difficulty and levels of uncertainty in gathering an estimate over a large spatial scale.
[2] The estimated population value is ADF&G's SBT deer population objective which was derived in 2000 by the Alaska Board of Game based upon habitat capability modeling and expert opinion. ADF&G does not estimate the statewide deer population on an annual basis and therefore the 3-year trend is non-applicable. Harvest data is from the 2024 regulatory season.
[3] All data presented are from the most recent year available.
[4] Estimates are reported for past seasons.
[5] General Season only. Estimate of Hunter Numbers reflects all deer hunters; WA does not estimate hunters by species or subspecies.

Alaska

Sitka black-tailed (SBT; *Odocoileus hemionus sitkensis*) deer are native to Southeast Alaska's temperate rainforests. Due to historic transplants during 1916–1934, SBT deer are established in Prince William Sound and Kodiak Island archipelago. Mule deer and white-tailed deer are not native to Alaska; however, mule deer sightings have been recorded in Alaska and white-tailed deer sightings have been reported nearby in the Yukon Territory.

SBT deer are an important big game species in Alaska. Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) requires hunters to submit hunt reports at the end of season which allow ADF&G to assess annual harvest and hunter effort. Hunter success and effort varies by location and year (Fig. 1). Federal and state hunting regulations vary by Game Management Units (GMU) based on perceived local SBT deer abundance. In some GMUs, federal regulations allow rural residents more liberal hunting regulations than non-rural resident hunters and non-resident hunters. Mule deer can be harvested in Alaska year-round, but harvesters must submit samples for disease monitoring efforts.

Deer densities differ across their range largely related to geography (e.g., differences in weather, habitat availability, logging activity, predator populations, hunter harvest) and ADF&G does not annually estimate the statewide population. However, population objectives were established in 2000 by the Alaska Board of Game based on expert opinion and constitute the best estimate of population levels. Based on these objectives, Alaska's SBT deer population ranges 326,200–335,200.

Deer monitoring is difficult in Alaska due to densely vegetated habitat, rugged terrain, and remoteness. ADF&G monitors deer populations primarily through hunter harvest reports but management biologists also use deer pellet surveys, post-winter mortality beach surveys, and spring body condition surveys in some locations. ADF&G is testing the efficacy of using cameras

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to monitor deer populations, and an integrated population model project is being conducted in one GMU.

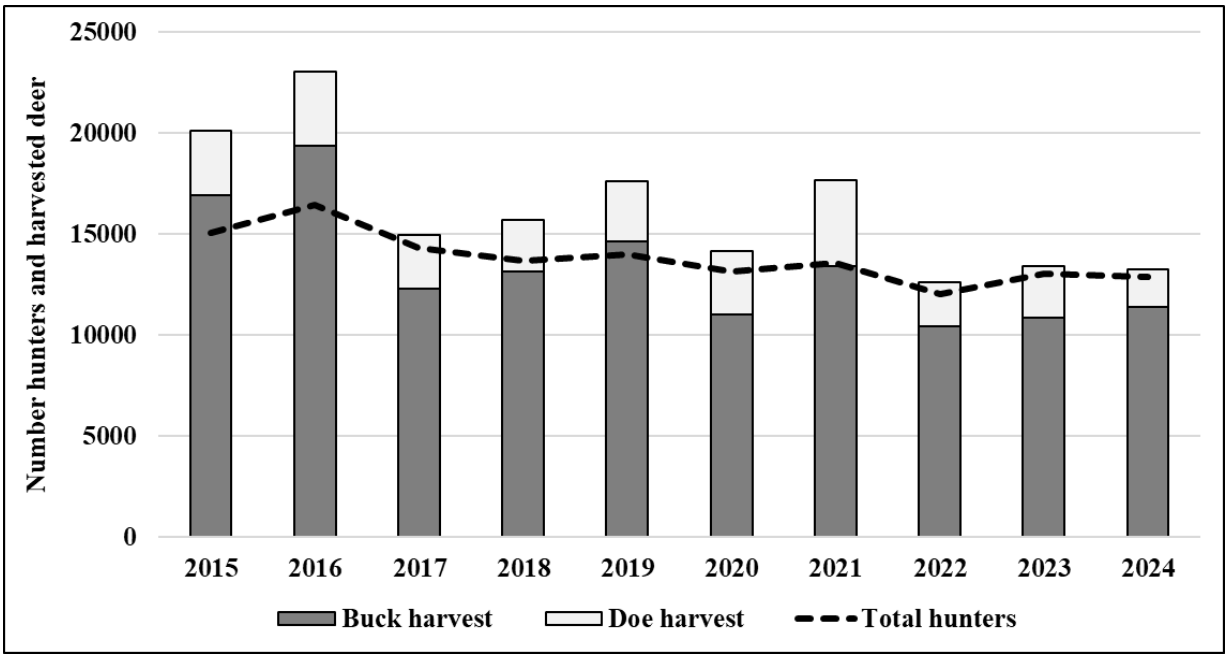

Fig. 1. Statewide Sitka black-tailed deer harvest for regulatory years 2015–2024, Alaska.

-Tessa Hasbrouck, Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Alberta

The 2025 pre-hunting season population estimate of mule deer in Alberta was ~141,000. This represents a continued decrease since the 2021 estimate of 193,000. The goal of mule deer management in Alberta is to recover populations above the 2021 estimate.

The number of antlered mule deer special license applicants decreased in 2025 to 91,239, down from the past 7 years, range of 93,000 to 102,000. Antlerless mule deer special license applicants decreased in 2025 to 42,553 from 43,199 in 2024. Antlerless mule deer special licence allocations have been reduced considerably in 2024 (8,200) and 2025 (6,000) from a range of 16,800 to 25,100 from 2017 to 2023. Based on hunter harvest surveys for the 2025 hunting season 20,032 mule deer hunters in Alberta directed an estimated 146,833 days hunting mule deer, producing an estimated harvest of 7,216 mule deer (~64% antlered deer), down from 7,825 in 2024 and 11,179 in 2023.

In 2022 Alberta confirmed the intent to manage mule deer in support of maintaining an older age-class structure and higher hunter success rates. This led to a decrease in total harvested antlered mule deer from over 8,200 in 2021 to over 4,609 in 2025. Additionally, certain Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) provide unlimited licenses to harvest mule deer where participation, success, and overall harvest is typically low (i.e. remote units and/or low-density mule deer units). Alberta also supports a commercial hunting industry, with approximately 1,500 antlered mule deer licenses available for non-residents through outfitter-guide allocations. There is an unknown number of rights-based hunters in Alberta that do not require a license to hunt for sustenance and thus information on effort and harvest by these groups are unknown.

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In 2025, in cooperation with several partners, Alberta launched a mule deer collaring program with 265 collars deployed in two study areas. As of March 28, 2026, 227 collars were active and transmitting. Thirty-three mortality investigations have been completed, and five collars are not transmitting with unknown fates. Pending confirmation of additional project funds, the collaring program expects to add another distinct study area in winter of 2027.

Data from the collaring component, including a geofenced highway corridor usage element, combined with mandatory harvest reporting, and coordinated aerial surveys, will be used to address five key objectives: 1) Adult female survival and cause specific mortality. 2) Adult male survival and cause specific mortality. 3) Statistically and financially efficient population monitoring methods/programs. 4) Seasonal movement, natural movement corridors, and seasonal habitat preferences. 5) Regional effects on mule deer abundance and body condition. Results from this program will improve population modelling, engage key stakeholders in mule deer management, and optimize mule deer harvest objectives.

Following a year of observations, survival of adult females in the southwest study area was 92.7% and 86% in the southeast study area. Adult male survival during the same time was 72.2% in both study areas combined (n=18). Alberta Environment and Protected Areas staff completed aerial surveys in both study areas and observations of collared deer were used to refine sightability estimates and confidence intervals. Movement of adult females was limited from January – April, very limited during fawning (peak fawning date of June 10), and adult male movement peaked during the rut (October 25 – November 25). Approximately 10% of deer were considered migratory with some movements between summer and fall-winter home ranges exceeding 70 km. Body condition of adult females was assessed during collaring activities in January and is relatively high, with the southwest deer in better condition than deer in the southeast study area where there have been recent drought years in a sagebrush shortgrass steppe desert environment.
Based on the most recent assessments, average buck to doe and fawn to doe ratios were calculated from surveys flown in Alberta (2024-2025, n=13). The average is 39.2:100 bucks to does (min 16:100, max 62:100; down from 50:100 in 2015-2020), and 61.5 fawns:100 does (min 41:100, max 78:100; down from 68:100 in 2015-2020).

Alberta is currently developing a novel integrated management system for mule deer, moose, pronghorn, elk, and white-tailed deer that incorporates integrated population modelling within the SpeedGoat platform. Big game surveys in winter of 2026 began a transition to surveying at the data analysis unit scale (multiple WMUs within a similar ecoregion and with similar management intent). Results from the collaring program and updated aerial surveys applied within the new integrated management system will enable game managers to optimize management and allocation for stakeholder preferences, disease management and risk, and ecological values.
Researchers from the University of Alberta have undertaken a structured decision making process with representative stakeholders, including government biologists, to model various stakeholder values and management strategies to address chronic wasting disease in Alberta.

Chronic wasting disease is present in Alberta. Originating along the eastern border, the disease has spread westward and northward and has now been found west of Calgary (in the Great Plains ecoregion), and North of Edmonton (in the Northern Forest Ecoregion). The CWD surveillance program has adapted in recent years resulting in fewer tested heads. The 2025 results are 9.7% positives (n=6744) and the discovery of CWD in seven additional WMUs. In 2025/26, 25.1% of mule deer tested positive, 3.7% of white-tailed deer, 9.7% of elk, and 4.3% of moose. Prevalence in male mule deer was ≥70% in 11 WMUs (max. 85%) in southeastern Alberta exacerbating recent population declines and management issues. Elk and moose submitted for

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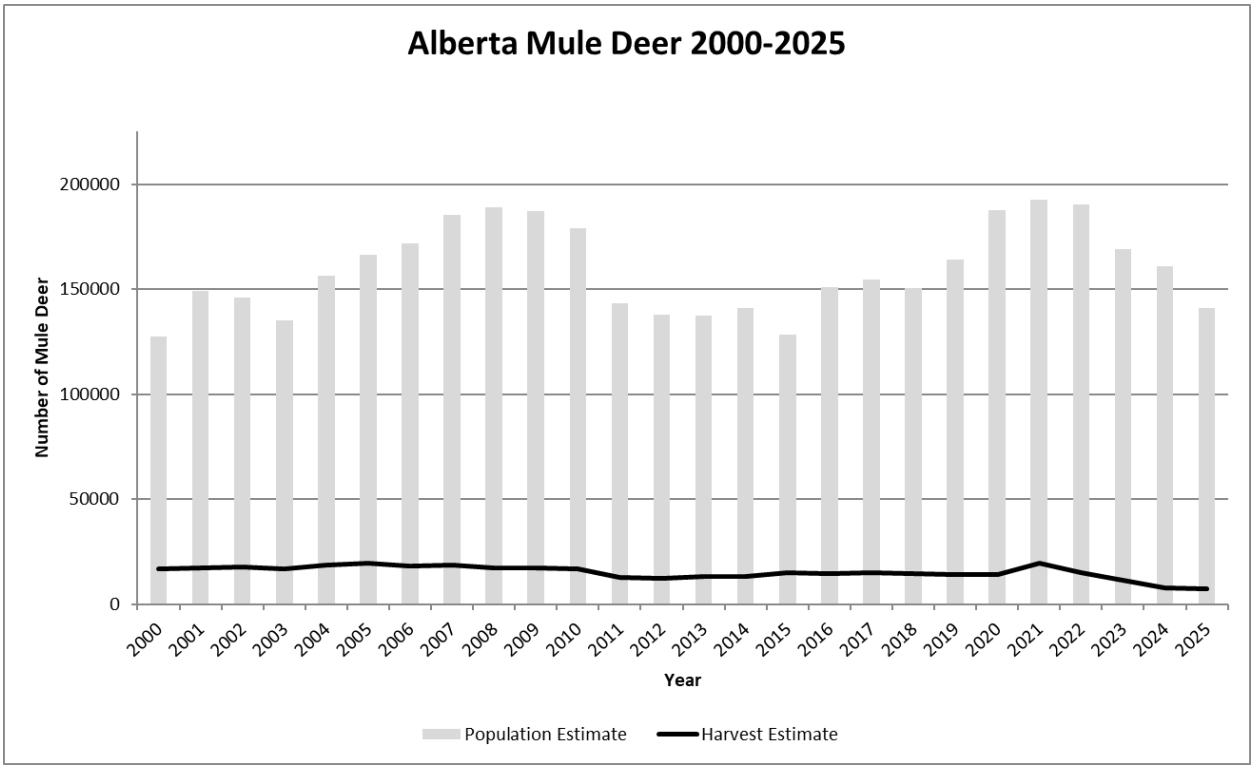
testing were primarily from hunter check stations on Canadian Forces Base hunts. In Alberta CWD occurs primarily in mule deer and in males. More information on CWD in Alberta is found at http://alberta.ca/cwd



-Justin Gilligan and Cassandra Hardie, Alberta Forestry and Parks– Hunting and Fishing Branch

Arizona

In 2025, 6,428 mule deer were harvested (all methods of take). Population parameters indicate the statewide populations are declining in some game management units; drought conditions are impacting recruitment. Most deer populations within the state are surveyed every other year using helicopter or fixed-wing aircraft; however, due to the severe environmental conditions that Arizona is experiencing, supplemental ground and aerial surveys are being conducted in off-cycle years to monitor population ratios and general population health. Mule deer are surveyed during the breeding season to estimate buck:doe and fawn:doe ratios.

The Arizona Hunter Harvest Questionnaire is back on track after experiencing declining response rates from 2016-2018 when the questionnaire changed to an online only response option. In 2018, the questionnaire was provided on the back of the hunt permit-tag and response rates dropped from a historic 40-45% voluntary response to less than 5% response. The 2018 mule deer harvest data was unusable because of wide confidence intervals. For 2025, hunter response rates were up from 47.8% to 49.9%, and hunter harvest was estimated using the voluntary mail questionnaire that allowed for an online response option or a mail-in option. Hunters that provided an email address also received a reminder email to submit their questionnaire. For the first time in 2024, hunters were able to opt-in to receive text message reminders for their hunter questionnaire; hunters who opted in to receive text messages also received their hunter questionnaire by text.

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Buck:doe ratios for mule deer were managed at 20–30 per 100 and currently the statewide average is 24. Alternative management units were managed at higher buck:doe ratios with added guidelines regarding the age structure of the harvest or hunter density. These units equal about 5% of the opportunity offered annually. The statewide number of fawns per 100 does is 34 which is below management guidelines (40-50).

Harvest reductions have been recommended for the last five years (2021 – 2025); limited draw permits for mule deer or any antlered deer hunts were reduced by 4,080 across the state, a 17% reduction over 5 years. Over-the-counter archery deer hunt opportunity also changed with (1) the establishment of harvest limits by unit and species for the 2022-2023 season and (2) the sale of non-resident over-the-counter archery deer tags was limited to 2,820 for the 2025 calendar year.

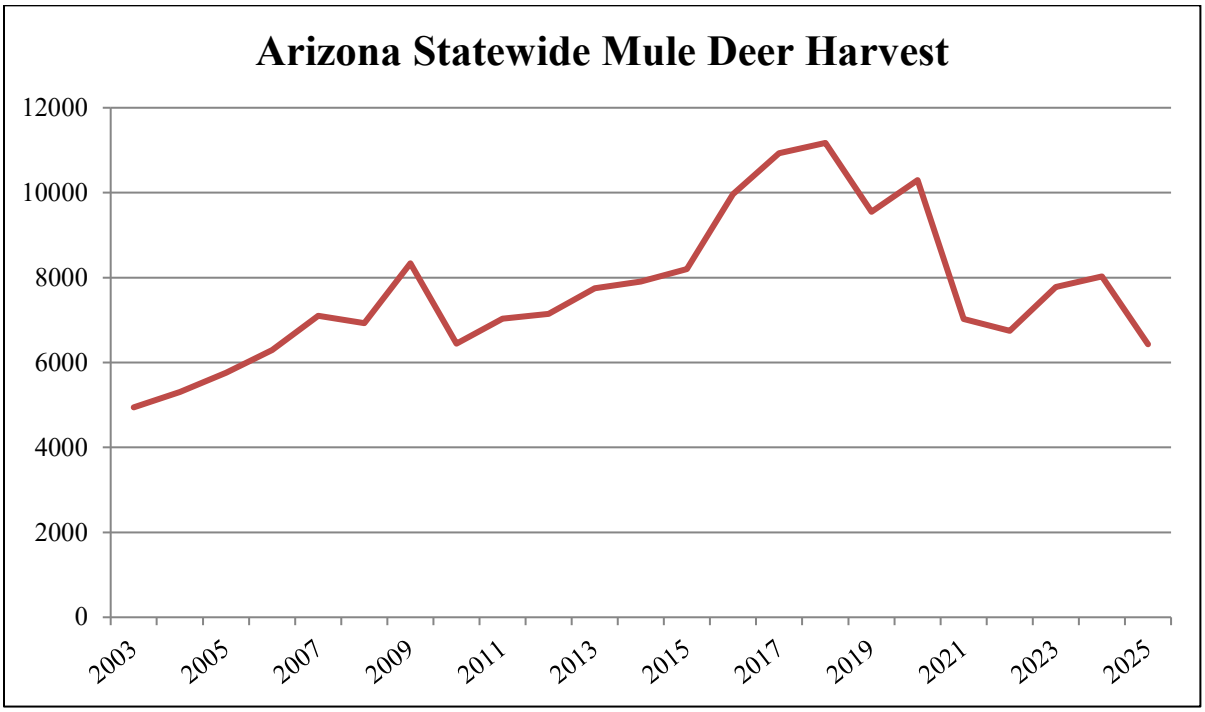

Figure 1. Statewide Mule deer harvest estimates in Arizona from 2003-2025.

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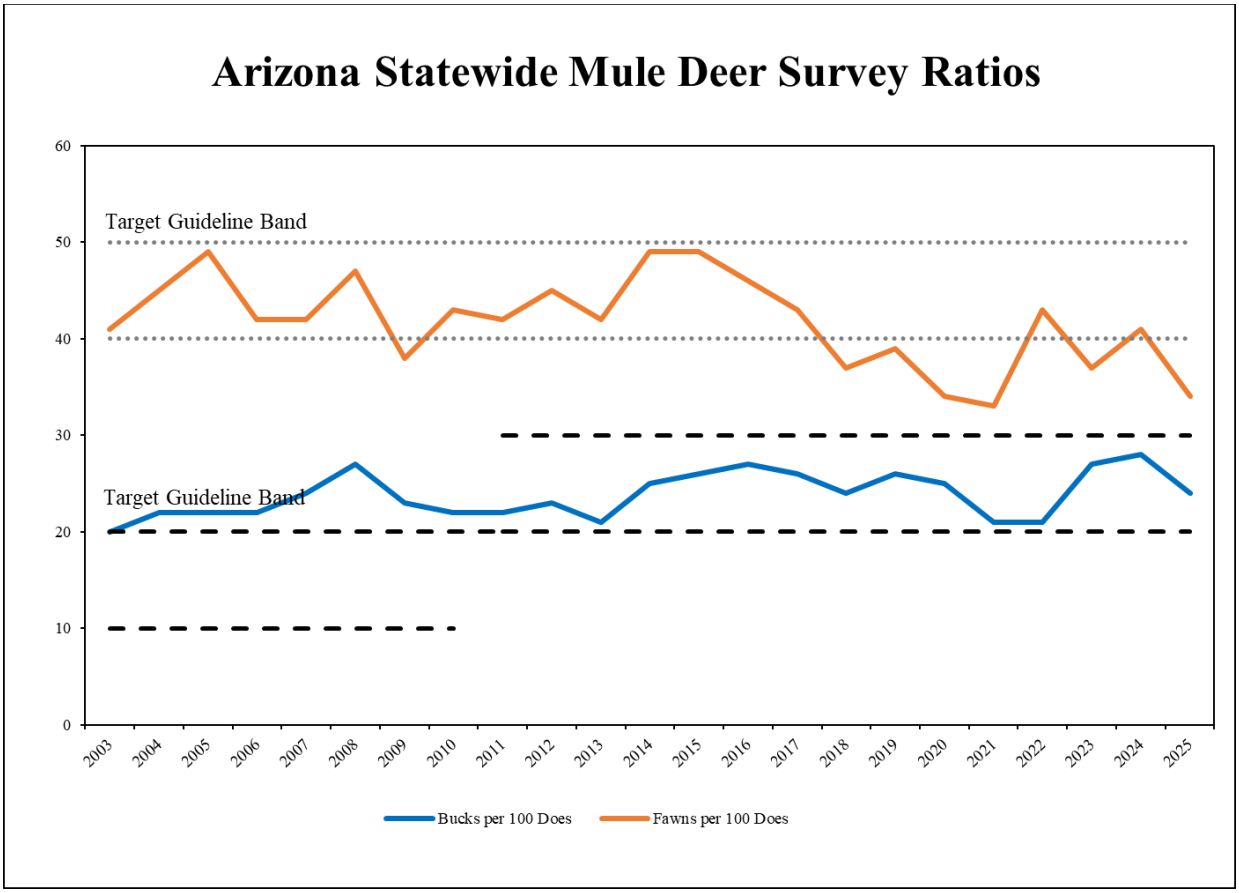

Figure 1. Statewide Mule deer buck to doe and fawn to doe ratios in Arizona from 2003-2025. Guidelines for buck to doe ratios target between 20-30 bucks per 100 does. Guidelines for fawn to doe ratios target between 40-50 fawns per 100 does.

-Erin Butler, Arizona Game and Fish Department

British Columbia

Mule deer abundance varies throughout the province due to localized differences in habitat quality, predation, winter conditions, and historical and contemporary land use. Extensive wildfires throughout central British Columbia in 2017, 2018, 2021 and 2023 had both positive and negative impacts on mule deer; forage availability increased in many areas especially on summer ranges, but the removal of forest canopies reduced the quality of some winter ranges due to the loss of snow interception and thermal cover. There are concerns that increasing road densities in burned areas could facilitate increased hunter harvest and disturbance. Mule deer hunter numbers and buck harvest had been dropping since a fifteen-year high in 2015 but both have increased since 2023. The province continues to manage buck harvest through general open seasons using a combination of antler point restrictions (i.e., 4-point or greater) and any-buck seasons. There are also restricted opportunities through a draw system for antlerless harvest.

A landscape-scale research project in the southern interior of British Columbia wrapped up in 2023 after 5-years of collaring and monitoring. Data suggested that deep snow and cold spring temperatures coupled with increasing access had the most negative effect on mule deer survival

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and population growth rates. Association with early seral habitat afforded by young burns and new cutblocks in the summer improved mule deer survival. The project has scaled back to focus on the proximate versus ultimate factors limiting mule deer populations with a focus on the roles of nutrition and competition in these northern forests.

Three years ago, Chronic Wasting Disease was confirmed in southeast British Columbia. To date, it has been detected in nine deer (8 white-tailed deer and one mule deer) in the Kootenay Region. A prevalence of 0.1% is estimated with most cases concentrated around the city of Cranbrook, with a potential new cluster near Jaffray, around 30km away. The positive mule deer is an isolated case away from both of those areas. These areas border the northwest corner of Montana and northern Idaho. Increased testing across the rest of the Province has yet to detect CWD. Targeted harvest, urban deer management, and orders on mandatory head submissions and transportation restrictions have been implemented in the areas around the detections.

The previous 3 winters (i.e. 2023/2024, 2024/2025 and 2025/2026) were considered relatively mild with below average snow depths and warmer temperatures in southern British Columbia and likely contributed to improved winter survival for all age classes of mule deer observed during these years. Data in northern British Columbia suggest that overwinter fawn survival was relatively good in 2023/24 with spring recruitment >40 fawns: 100 does. The winter of 2025/2026 has seen above average snowpacks and a delayed spring. Upcoming recruitment surveys should provide evidence on the severity of this winter. Recent composition surveys also indicate that buck to doe ratios are at or close to the provincial objective of 20 bucks per 100 does post hunt. Continued monitoring of mule deer relative to habitat selection, nutrition, relative competition, and risk of predation is intended to provide evidence of landscape-scale issues limiting mule deer populations in British Columbia.

Trends in Columbian black-tailed deer abundance vary with recent decreases in southern portions of Vancouver Island and stable populations on northern Vancouver Island. Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease (AHD) on Vancouver Island has reduced local resident deer populations on southern and central Vancouver Island in recent years and continues to be a factor influencing population trends. AHD, coupled with heavy snow and abnormally cold winters have impacted overwinter survival, particularly of juveniles from the winter of 2022/23 and 2023/24. Predation from wolves and cougars continues to affect black-tailed deer populations in many areas as well as the need for effective measures to conserve high quality habitat at the appropriate spatial scale. Black-tailed deer buck harvest has dropped by approximately 50% since the early 1990s despite a >30% increase in hunter effort. There are restricted opportunities for antlerless harvest, largely youth hunting on Southern Vancouver Island and the rural and agricultural areas. Licenced antlerless deer harvest is relatively low. In general, black-tailed deer numbers are thought to be most impacted by increased predation and reduced habitat quality. The latter being a major influence during years of high snow fall. Areas of intensive forestry activity have increased road densities and young successional forests. These are assumed to result in increased mortality rates on deer due to the creation of travel corridors for predators (including hunters) providing access to previously remote areas, and fragmenting or removing important habitat. A study initiated on Vancouver Island in 2023 aims to look at habitat use and mortality factors affecting deer survival. This is expected to be a five-year project with the aim at directing management decisions affecting populations. Maintaining or increasing deer populations will remain challenging given current predator densities and lack of adequate habitat supply at the appropriate scales. This research aims to identify measures to improve deer survival and reproduction.

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Sitka black-tailed deer are native to the north coast of mainland British Columbia and were introduced to Haida Gwaii, an archipelago off British Columbia's west coast, in the late 1800's and early 1900's as a source of sustenance and sport. The islands are remote and immigration and emigration of deer with the mainland does not occur. The only terrestrial predators are black bears, and the density of deer is high to very high, relative to most black-tailed deer populations in British Columbia. This has reduced both the biomass of understory plants and diversity of vegetation on most of the islands. Attempts to reduce numbers through controlled removals have been met with limited success. Hunters living on the islands or that are willing to travel to the islands are offered liberal bag limits and long seasons for bucks and antlerless deer to help manage the population.

British Columbia uses a harvest questionnaire to determine harvest and hunter effort for mule deer and black-tailed deer. Estimates of harvest and effort are generated for each Wildlife Management Unit.

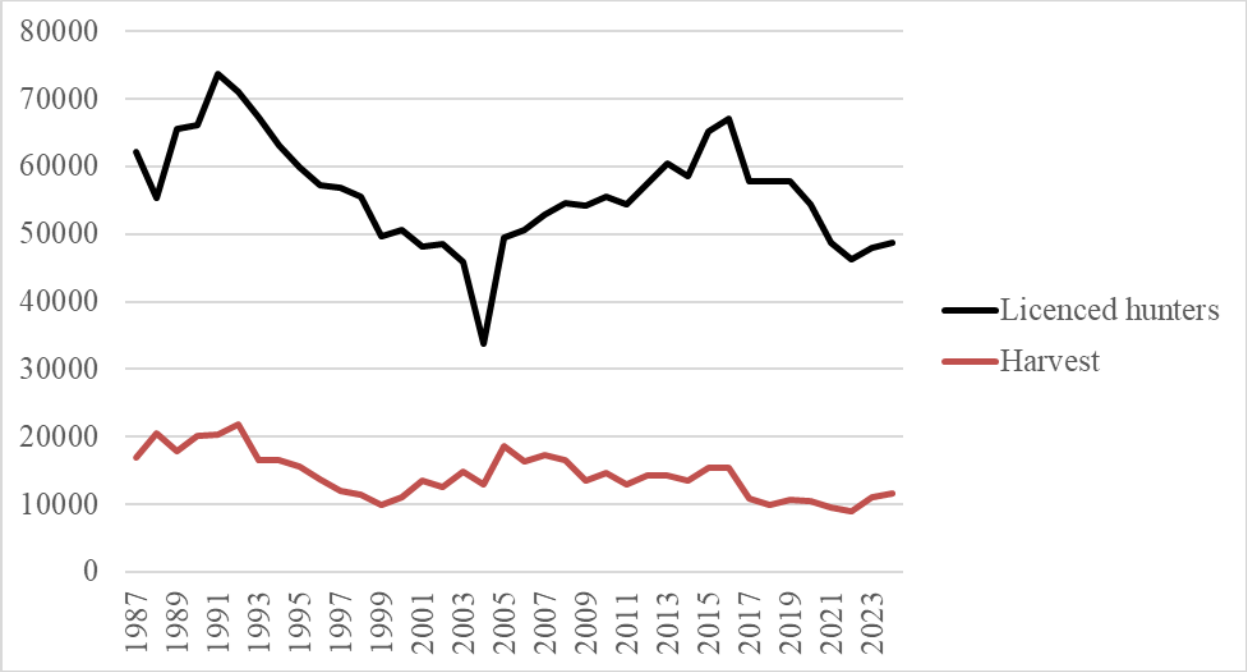

Figure 1. Mule deer hunter and harvest estimates in British Columbia from 1987-2024.

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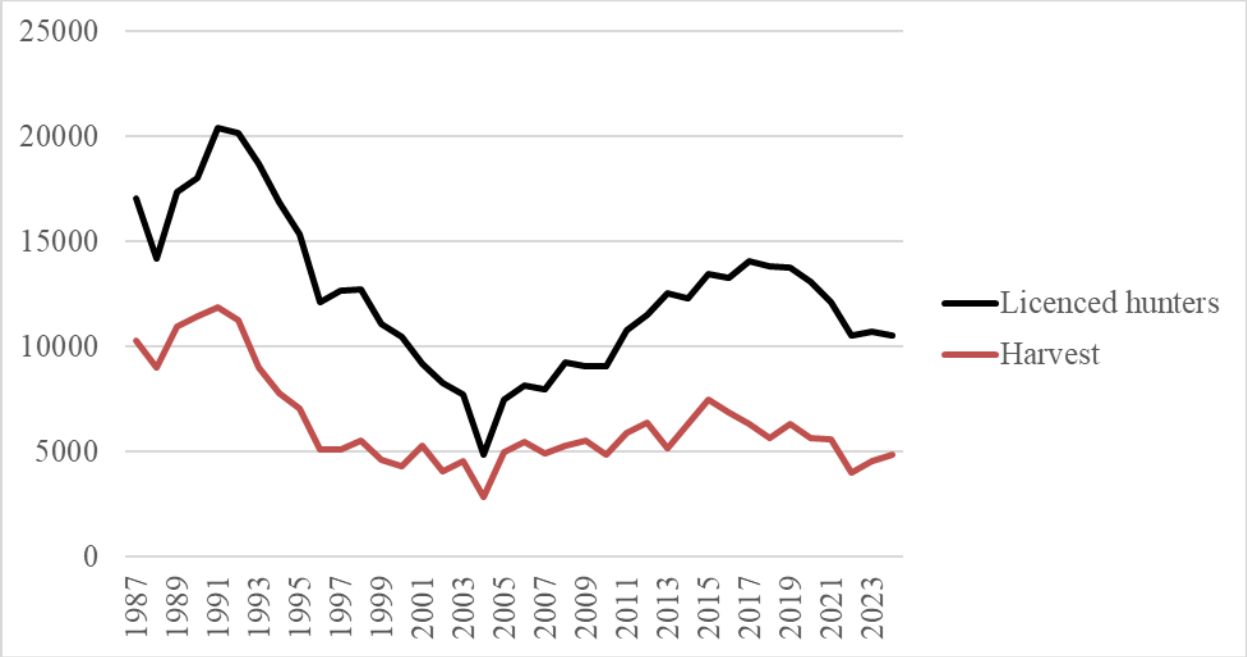

Figure 2. Black-tailed deer hunter and harvest estimates in British Columbia from 1987-2024.

- Andrew Walker, British Columbia Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

California

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is continuing development of the Deer Conservation and Management Plan for California (Plan), which will provide a science-based, adaptive framework for managing black-tailed and mule deer across California's diverse landscapes. The Plan emphasizes regionally specific management and is designed to improve how monitoring data are used to inform management decisions. Over the past several years, CDFW has expanded and refined its monitoring and analytical approach to better characterize deer populations across a wide range of ecological conditions.

CDFW has completed an updated statewide baseline abundance estimate derived from fecal DNA spatial capture-recapture and camera-based modeling approaches. Results are consistent with previous preliminary estimates, indicating a statewide population of approximately 500,000 to 1,000,000 deer. In Table 1, the 3-year population trend is identified as stable; however, this reflects limited information available to evaluate recent trends. Current information is being used to establish a baseline that will support evaluation of population trends moving forward. However, some preliminary data suggest that certain deer populations in California may be in decline. Additional detail will be provided in the forthcoming Plan, along with updated statewide analyses of survival. These efforts are intended to support more consistent evaluation of population change over time.

Environmental conditions over the past year were generally favorable in much of California, with a relatively mild winter that likely supported overwinter survival across many regions. GPS collar data indicate that in some populations, deer initiated spring migration earlier than average, moving off winter ranges in response to earlier green-up. However, as is typical in

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California, conditions and population performance vary considerably across the state due to differences in habitat quality, precipitation patterns, wildfire effects, and land use.

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) remains a key management concern in California. Three new positive detections were documented in 2025, bringing the total number of confirmed cases in the state to five. In response to these detections, CDFW implemented mandatory testing of hunter harvested deer in four deer hunt zones and research to better understand the populations affected, distribution of the disease, and inform management actions. CDFW continues to expand statewide surveillance to reach recommended sample sizes as outlined in the statewide CWD Management Plan.

Since 2001, the estimated statewide deer harvest in California has ranged from approximately 22,000 to 40,000 annually (Figure 1). Year-to-year variation is influenced by multiple factors, including fluctuations in deer abundance, weather conditions before and during the season (e.g., early snowstorms that push migrants out of the high country or arid conditions that concentrate deer at water sources), wildfire-related access restrictions, and uncertainty in harvest estimates due to unreported tags.

Overall, California is transitioning toward a more integrated and data-driven approach to deer management. The forthcoming Plan, along with updated baseline estimates of abundance and survival, will provide the foundation for evaluating population status and reporting trends in future updates.

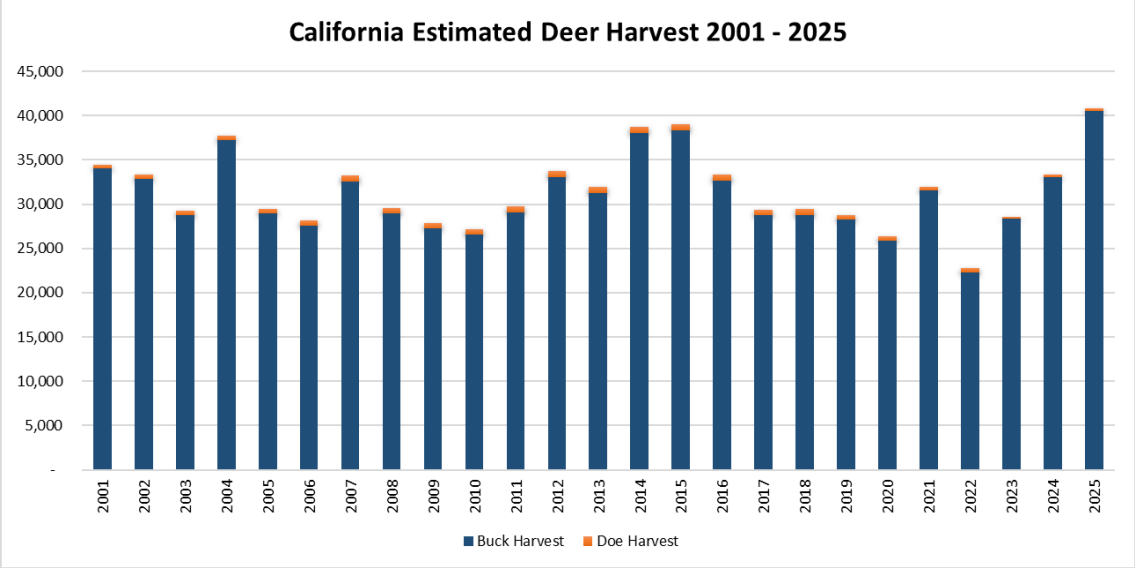

Figure 1. Harvest estimates of California deer 2001 - 2025.

- Brian Leo, California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Colorado

The Colorado statewide post-hunt 2025 deer population estimate is 408,000, up from 384,000 last year (Figure 1). Mule deer are recovering from the winter of 2022-2023, which was above average in severity on the entire Western Slope and was extremely severe in the Severe Winter Zone in the northwestern portion of the state.

Over the last 10 years, the population has averaged 411,000. The decade prior to that was marked by significant declines in some of the state's large westernmost herds. The sum of statewide

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population objective ranges is 387,000-496,000 for all 51 deer herds combined. Post-hunt 2025, 26 of 51 (51%) deer herds are within HMP population objective ranges, and 18 of 51 (35%) deer herds are below their HMP population objective ranges. For a variety of reasons, many mule deer populations are struggling west-wide. Population objectives that are appreciably higher than population estimates reflect CPW's desire to stabilize, sustain, and increase mule deer populations. Diverse habitat types and environmental conditions around the state create considerable geographic variability in population performance. Many deer herds on the plains and in the central mountains are performing well. There is reason for concern about declines, particularly in many of the large westernmost herds in Colorado.

CPW uses spreadsheet models to estimate population size. These models rely on data from age and sex classification, harvest surveys, and survival monitoring. Annual population and sex ratio estimates are compared with long-term Herd Management Plan population and sex ratio objectives for each herd to establish harvest quota recommendations for the next hunting season.

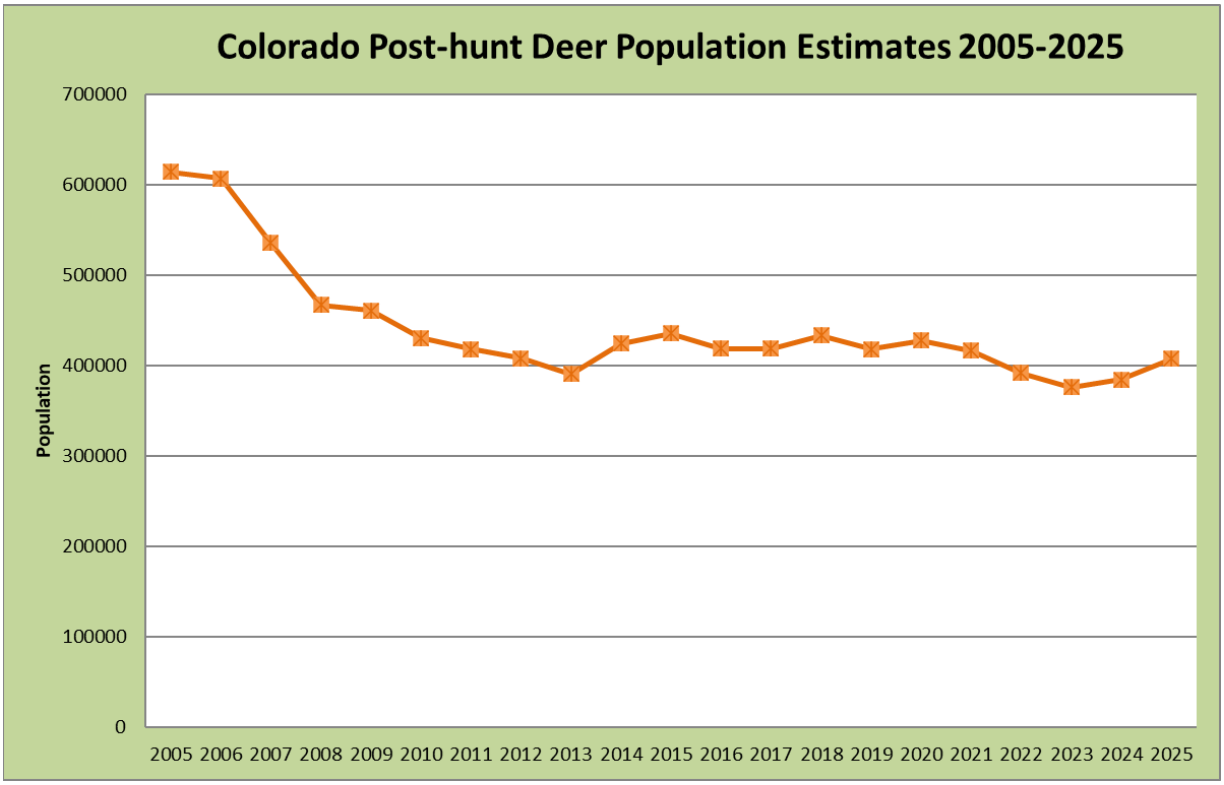

Figure 1. Colorado post-hunt deer population estimates from 2005-2025.

CPW intensively monitors annual adult doe survival and winter fawn survival in five mule deer sentinel herds. We also monitor buck survival in two of these herds. These herds were selected to ecologically and geographically represent mule deer west of Interstate I-25. CPW annually monitors well over 1,000 GPS-collared mule deer in the five intensive monitoring areas and other herds. Survival rates from these sentinel herds are used in deer population models for the rest of the herds west of I-25. Since 1997, annual adult doe survival has averaged 83%, and over-winter fawn survival has averaged 69%. Since 2008, annual buck survival in two of the five monitoring areas has averaged 78%.

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CPW conducts post-hunt herd inventories primarily with helicopters to estimate the sex ratios of males/100 females and the age ratios of fawns/100 females (Figure 2). The average of sex ratio objectives for deer herds statewide is approximately 30 bucks/100 does. During the post-hunt herd inventories in 2025, CPW staff classified 71,350 deer and observed an average sex ratio of 31 bucks/100 does. The statewide average observed age ratio from helicopter inventory was 58 fawns/100 does, compared to 59 in 2024. In addition to survival rates, these ratios are necessary to estimate population size using population models.

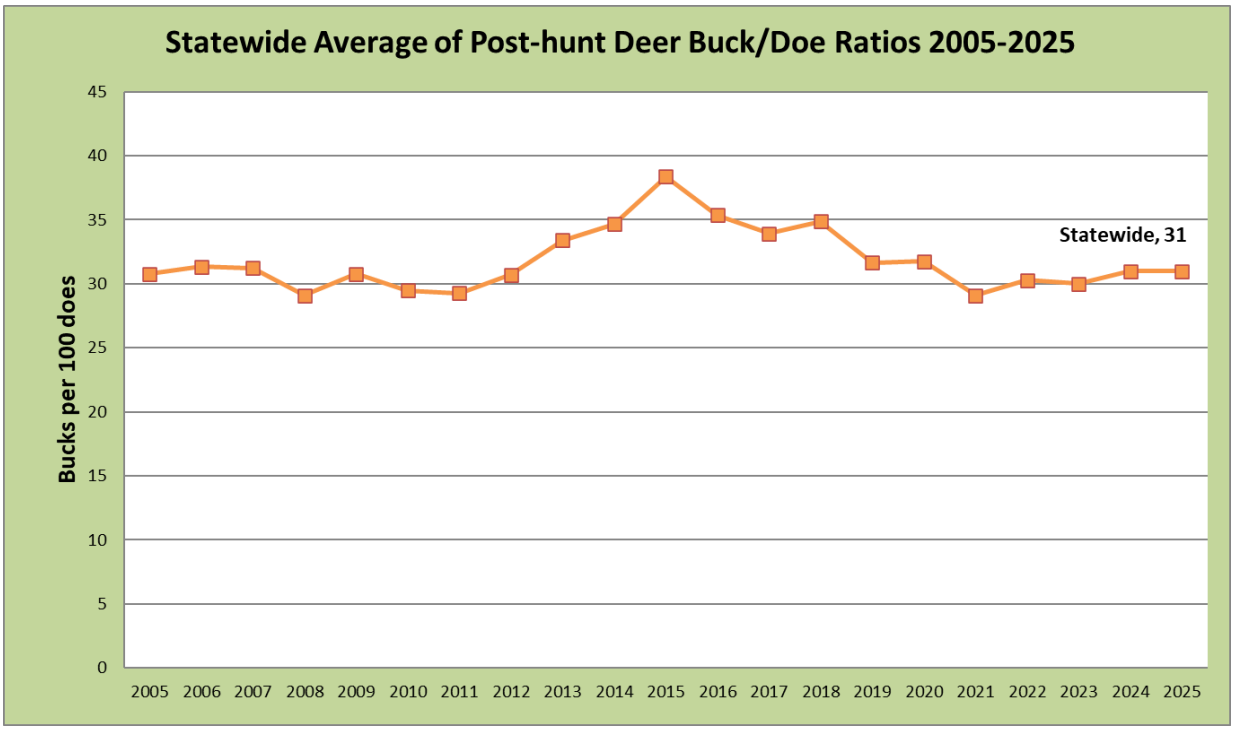

Figure 2. Colorado statewide average of observed post-hunt bucks/100 does for 2005-2025 weighted by herd population size.

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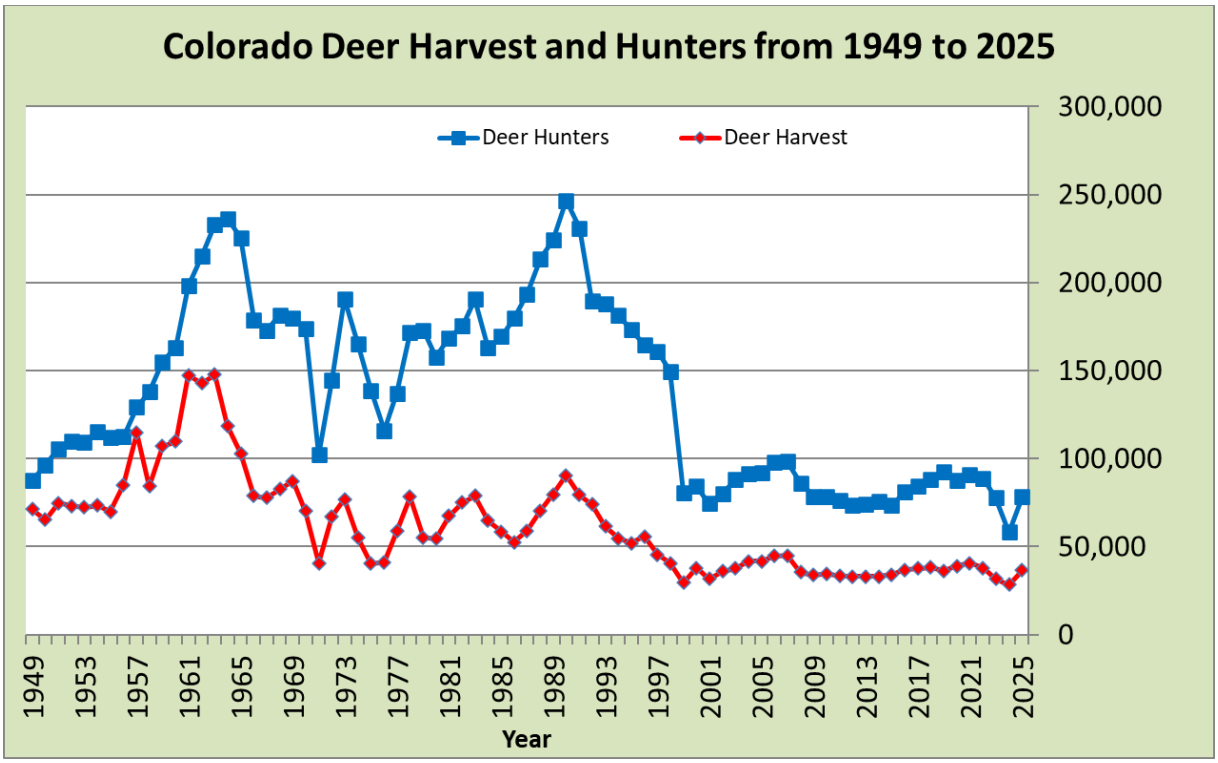

Figure 3. Colorado statewide hunters and harvest from 1949-2025.

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) continues to be a management issue of substantial concern in Colorado. CPW has detected CWD in 43 of our 51 deer herds. High CWD prevalence is a factor in license quota increases and in the structure and timing of hunting seasons in many herds. In summary, CWD prevalence decreased in 4 herds, increased in 17 herds, and remained about the same in 18 herds between the first and second rounds of mandatory CWD testing.

Since 1999, all mule deer hunting in Colorado is by limited license only. Since limitation license numbers and harvest are most stable, but at much lower levels (Figure 3). Based on observed post-hunt sex ratios and an average hunter success rate of 47% for all rifle seasons in 2025, deer hunting continues to be good, and Colorado remains a premier destination for mule deer hunters.

-Andy Holland, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Hawaii (Kauai Island: Introduced Black-tailed Deer)

Since the introduction of the Oregon black-tailed deer to west Kauai in 1961, its range has expanded to the south and east sections of the island. The deer population on Kauai's public hunting areas is estimated to be between 950 to 1050 animals. Population estimates on private lands are not known at this time. Kauai uses the Aldous (1944) browse survey method which was modified to better fit Hawaiian environments.

Kauai experienced 2 major wildfires in 2012, the Kokee forest fires consumed just over 1000 acres of State Forest Reserves and severely impacted much of the deer hunting range. The 2013 deer hunting season was restricted to portions of the range not impacted by the wildfires. In 2014, all black-tailed deer hunting units were re-opened.

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In July 2015, two hunting units underwent changes to include year-round hunting and increased bag limits. The changes were needed to address ungulate damage to native forest watershed and to protect threatened and endangered plants. Six deer hunting units remain seasonal during the fall months.

In 2003, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designated Critical Habitat for over 80 species of endangered plant species on Kauai. Between 2007 and 2016, three large watershed ungulate exclusion fences were constructed totaling thousands of acres of the Alakai Wilderness Preserve, Hono O Na Pali Natural Area, and Kuia Natural Area to protect endangered Hawaiian plant species from ungulate damage. Animals within the fences including feral pigs, feral goats, and black-tailed deer were removed through intensive hunting, trapping, and snaring.

Trends in harvest of black-tailed deer from 2003 to 2019 on Kauai public hunting areas.

Year	Buck	Doe	Total
2003	45	19	64
2004	39	12	51
2005	32	8	40
2006	32	2	34
2007	32	4	36
2008	51	2	53
2009	29	0	29
2010	26	0	26
2011	30	0	30
2012[1]	4	0	4
2013[1]	5	0	5
2014[2]	36	0	36
2015[3]	36	15	51
2016	37	33	70
2017	31	24	55
2018	25	7	32
2019	22	15	37

[1] Two units closed to deer hunting due to wildfires
[2] All units reopened to deer hunting
[3] Two units open to year-round deer hunting

-Thomas Ka'iakapu, Hawaii Division of Forestry and Wildlife

Idaho

Mule deer populations continue to rebound following the winter of 2022/2023 which was hard on populations across Idaho. Mule deer overwinter fawn survival for the 2024-2025 winter was 58% statewide which is near the long-term average (57%). Weather conditions during 2025 throughout southern Idaho were characterized by average for moisture and temperatures.

Annual mule deer abundance is estimated using an integrated population model that can incorporate data from different population monitoring techniques. Winter 2025 population levels

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increased to approximately 260,000 mule deer south of the Salmon River drainage compared to the estimated 245,000 mule deer of January 1, 2024, which is a 6% increase. Overall survival of radio-collared fawns from December 2025 through March 2026 has been high (88%). Fawn survival is measured through May 31st.

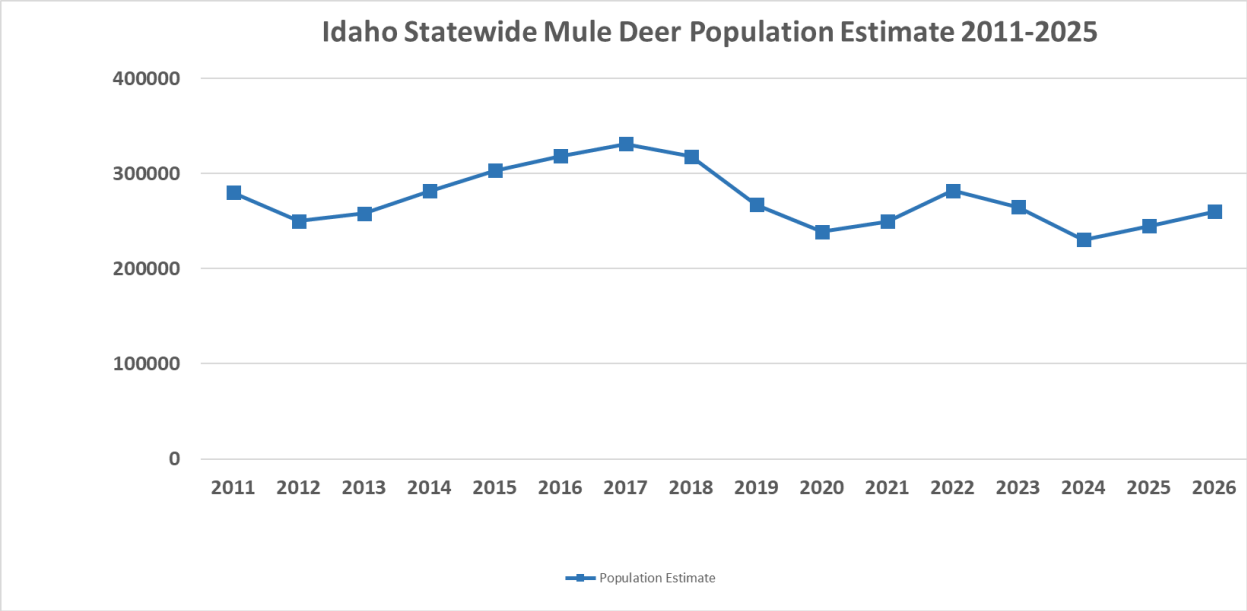

Figure 1. Mule deer population estimates from the Salmon River drainage south. Estimates are midpoint of confidence limits based on an integrated population model.

Short- and long-term objectives are to increase mule deer numbers. Post-season buck ratios averaged 24 bucks:100 does and December 2025 fawn ratios averaged 68 fawns:100 does.

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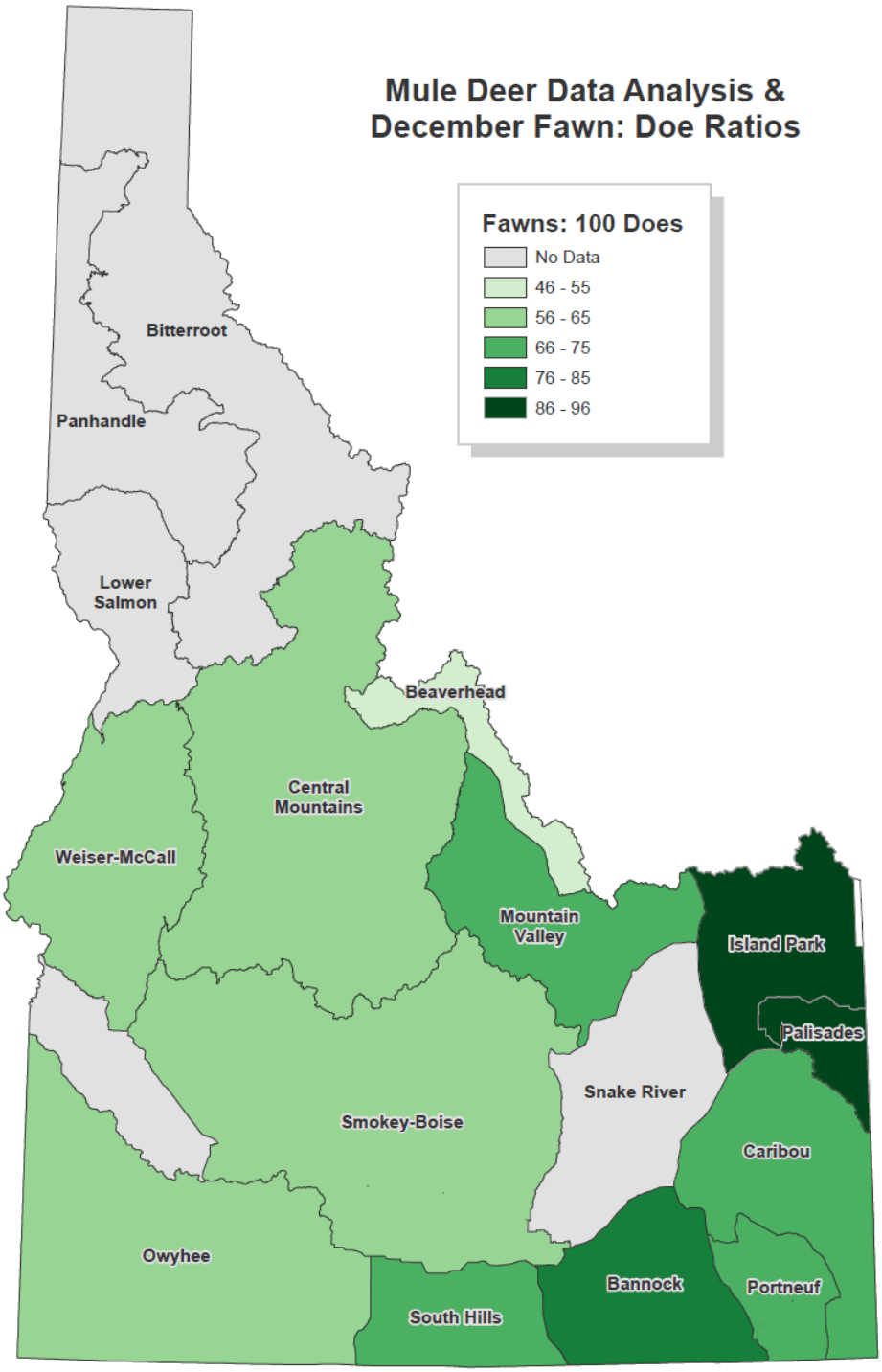

Figure 2. Most recent fawns:100 does by mule deer data analysis unit (2022-2023)

Mule deer harvest in Idaho has been relatively stable since the early 2000s with a notable increase in 2014-2016 corresponding to increased deer numbers during those years. Sales data indicate consistently high demand for mule deer tags from nonresident hunters wanting to come to Idaho. Percent bucks with 4-point-or-better antlers harvested in any weapon-controlled hunts have remained at or above 40% since 2010 and were 60% in 2025.

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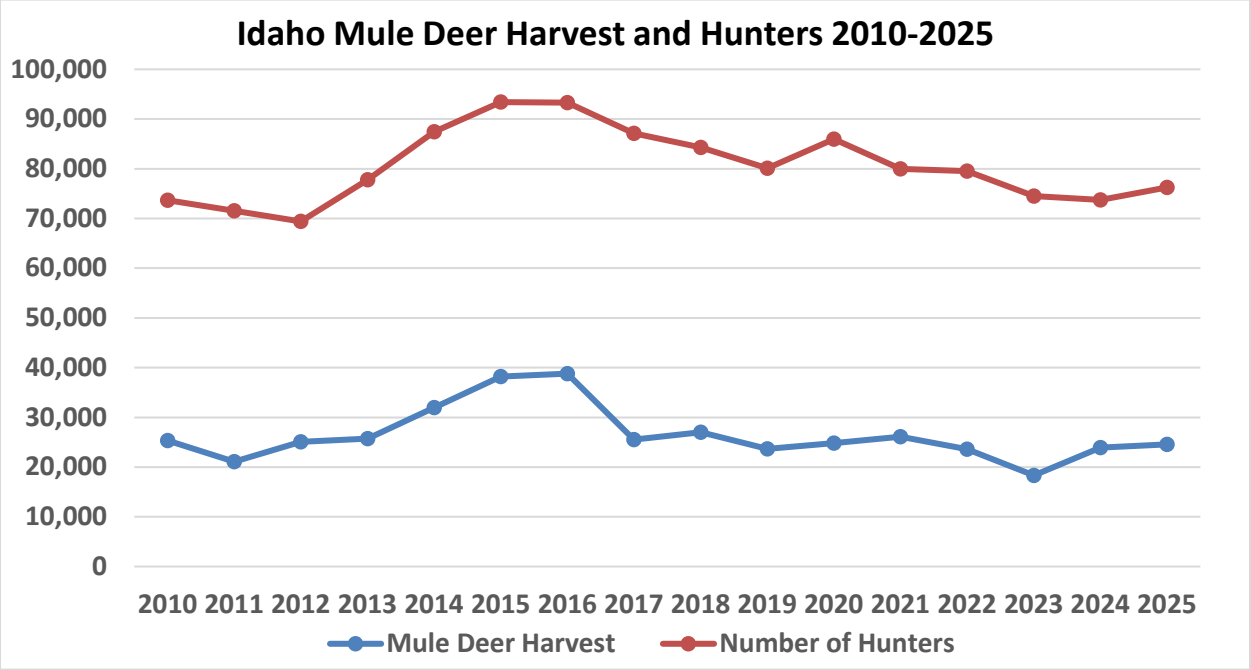

Figure 3. Total Idaho Mule Deer Harvest and Mule Deer Hunters, 2010 – 2025

Idaho detected its first case of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in November 2021 in two mule deer bucks in Unit 14. Since then, the department has identified additional positive cases in wild ungulates in units adjacent to the initial detection, indicating some degree of disease spread. Additionally, a new detection occurred in white-tailed deer in GMU 1 in northern Idaho in 2024, and in 2025 detections were confirmed at captive elk facilities in GMUs 63A, 64, and 69.

Since 2021, the department has taken proactive and aggressive measures to increase harvest in affected areas to improve surveillance and reduce disease prevalence and mitigate spread. These actions have included liberalizing hunting opportunities and targeted deer removals. To date, CWD has been detected in mule deer, white-tailed deer, and elk.

A total of 5,922 CWD samples have been collected statewide during the current sample year (July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026). Sample prevalences in white-tailed deer in GMUs 1 and 14 are 0.7% and 3.7% respectively. CWD has not been detected in hunter-harvested mule deer in GMUs 1 and 14 during the current sample year. Prevalence in hunter-harvested elk remains very low, with one confirmed detection statewide in 2025.

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission continues to prioritize CWD management by establishing mandatory sampling areas in response to new detections and by adjusting CWD management zones as necessary. Current efforts are focused across three management zones while maintaining heightened surveillance along the Wyoming and Montana borders, where CWD is present. Additional targeted surveillance is conducted in other regions of Idaho on a rotating basis. Idaho will continue to implement robust surveillance and adaptive management strategies to reduce prevalence in affected areas and limit further spread.

-Toby Boudreau, Idaho Department of Fish and Game

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Kansas

Mule deer populations continue to decline along the eastern tier of counties where mule deer occur in Kansas. A spotlight distance sampling survey was implemented in October - November to estimate density and population size of mule deer in the east and west mule deer hunting zones. The mule deer population in the west zone of Kansas in 2025 was estimated to be 1.3 mule deer/mile^2 (95% CI: 0.9 – 2.0) while the density in the eastern zone was unable to be estimated due to lack of mule deer observations, resulting in a pre-firearm season total population estimate of 34,000 ± 13,000 mule deer. In the west zone, the mule deer buck:doe ratio was 27.6B:100D. The fawn:doe ratio in the west zone was 38.2F:100D. Mule Deer abundance below observable levels along with poor reproductive rates of mule deer in Kansas is a critical concern of KDWP.

The major goal of deer management in Kansas is to maintain herd size at socially acceptable levels. This largely means minimizing landowner damage complaints and deer/vehicle accidents, while maintaining quality hunting opportunities in regard to hunter observations of deer and harvest opportunities. Currently, both hunters and landowners are expressing concern about the declining mule deer population in both zones, thus the current management goal is "more" mule deer and current population levels are below goals.

Management for mule deer receives enthusiastic support from deer hunters. Hunters want more mule deer and fewer hunters competing for permits and hunting locations. Hunting regulations in Kansas have been liberal for white-tailed deer while being restrictive for mule deer. Mule deer could be taken on 16.3% of the either sex deer permits issued in Kansas last year. Landowners received 53.5% of those permits. Each of those permits allowed only one deer to be taken but it could be either a mule deer or a white-tailed deer. By allowing either species to be taken, the permit system generally takes hunters out of the field earlier in the season as compared to a mule deer only permit system and takes pressure off mule deer while allowing approximately 17,000 people on average have the potential to pursue mule deer each year while keeping these hunters' satisfaction higher. Hunters have taken an average of 1,670 mule deer/year during the last 10 years while the average for the last 5 years of 1,395 is 17% lower. In an effort to expand and increase the mule deer population, reductions in the permit quotas have been made in recent years. In 2025, for the ninth consecutive year, no antlerless permits allowing the take of mule deer were issued.

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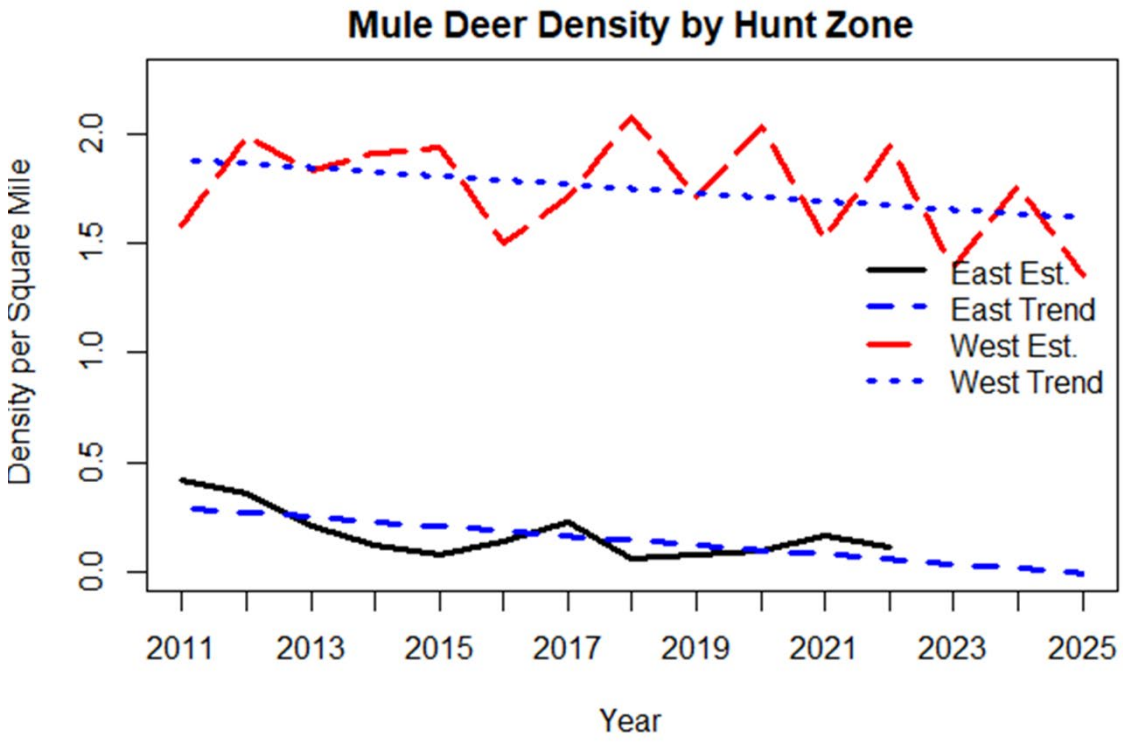

Little information is available on survival, reproductive rates and habitat use of mule deer in Kansas and much has been inferred from studies conducted in other locales. In February 2018, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks initiated a three-year study to investigate adult and fawn survival rates, reproductive rates, home range size, habitat use, harvest vulnerability, and inter-species interactions of mule deer and white-tailed deer in western Kansas. This study was completed in 2021. Adult male annual survival was 0.54 ± 0.05 and firearms hunting was the main source of mortality. Adult female survival was 0.78 ± 0.03. Mule deer fawn 10-week survival was 0.28 ± 0.06 with predation and exposure being the leading mortality factors. Habitat use preferences indicate that mule deer rely heavily on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) grasslands in all life stages and that higher-than-average landscape roughness and elevation were preferred. In the absence of the ability to increase landscape roughness and elevation conservation of mule deer will likely focus on providing high quality grasslands. In 2022 and in 2023, in response to severe drought, CRP grasslands were opened to haying and grazing. The widespread haying and grazing that then occurred is likely to have drastically and negatively altered important mule deer habitat in Kansas. Timely participation resulted in somewhat improved habitat conditions, particularly improvement in cover availability and structure, likely resulted in the population increase observed during annual surveys in 2024 and an increase of fawns per 100 does observed in 2025. Additional genetic analyses indicate that mule deer in western Kansas suffer from low genetic diversity and that there is some hybridization between mule deer and white-tail deer occurring.

Public interest and concern about chronic wasting disease (CWD) has been renewed recently. CWD prevalence is greatest in the western portion of Kansas where mule deer are endemic. To reduce CWD prevalence, KDWP has maintained elevated white-tailed deer antlerless

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only permits in deer management units (DMUs) around core CWD areas. Mule deer populations in these DMUs may be indirectly affected by increases in whitetail deer harvest pressure or directly through accidental harvest of mule deer.

-Levi Jaster, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

Montana

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks relies on harvest and population survey data for making mule deer management recommendations and decisions. Harvest data is collected through annual post hunting season phone surveys that randomly survey a sample of deer hunters that self-report success and effort. The survey provides an estimate of harvest within an 80% confidence interval. Population trend data are collected through aerial surveys of 74 trend survey areas across the state that represent deer across a diversity of habitat types. Additionally, the department is statutorily required to estimate the statewide mule deer population, annually. However, the estimate is based on a crude model and is not used for making management recommendations.

In 2024, 255,120 deer licenses and permits (LPTs) were issued statewide, comprising 219,553 LPTs for residents and 35,567 LPTs for non-residents. Mule deer hunting regulations for many years have included one antlered deer during a 6-week archery season followed by a 5-week rifle season. Antlered mule deer harvest has been viewed as an index of population size and trend. Statewide antlered mule deer harvest increased annually from 2010 through 2016 to a 22 year high of 45,564. In 2024, the statewide mule deer buck harvest estimate was 33,603; this was below the 1960–2023 average of 44,556 (Figure 1).

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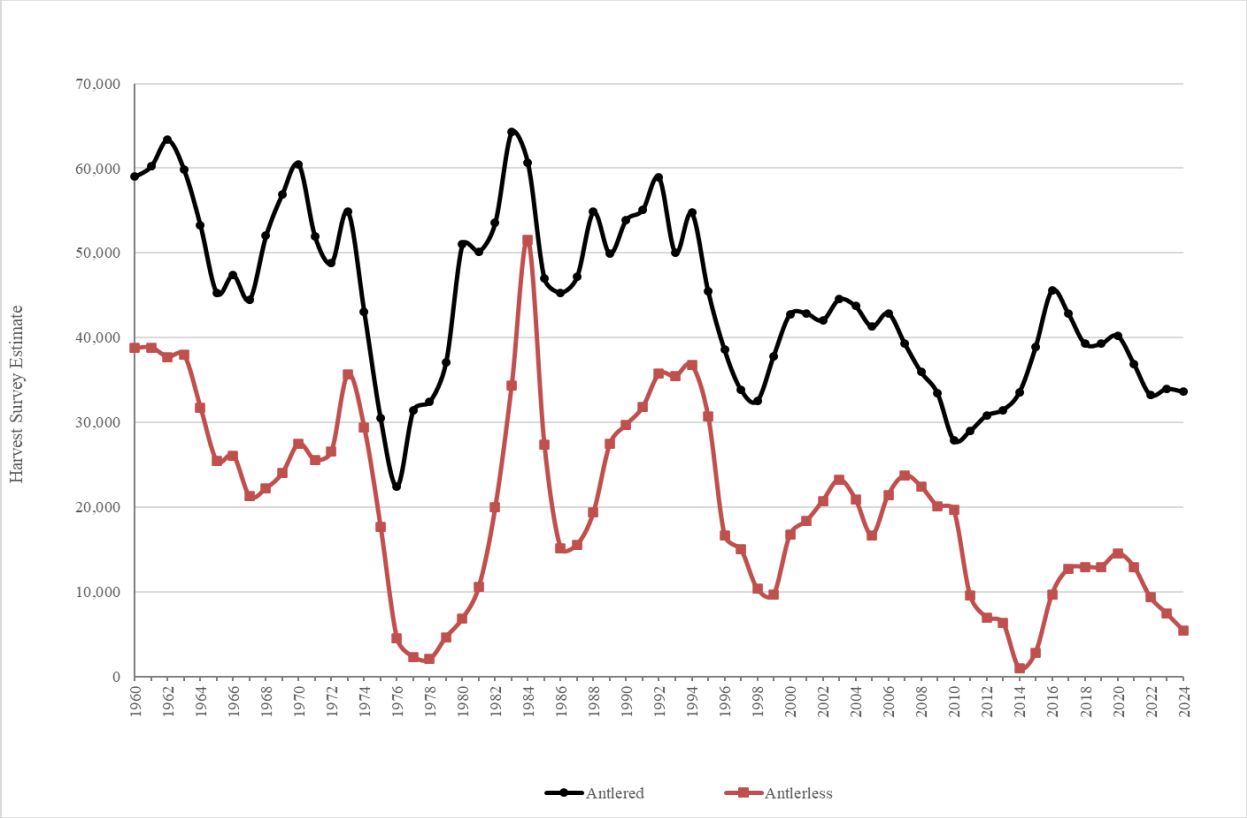

Figure 1. Montana statewide mule deer harvest, 1960–2024.

The antlered mule deer harvest (Figure 1) and statewide population estimate (Figure 2) suggest that the statewide mule deer population experienced a modern low within years 2010–2012. This low was influenced by severe conditions (extended cold temperatures and deep snow) across the eastern half of the state during winter periods 2009–2010 and 2010–2011. From 2011 through 2017, the statewide population estimate increased from 211,361 to 386,175 (Figure 2) and statewide antlered mule deer harvest increased from 28,985 to 42,851 (Figure 1), suggesting a population increase during that period. Survey and harvest data suggest a slight decline in mule deer statewide since 2017. This decline was likely the result of severe winter conditions across the state during 2018–2019 and from severe widespread drought conditions more recently.

Within the state, long-term mule deer populations have varied. Those across the western third of the state, in the mountain-foothill environments, have generally trended down and remain below historical highs and means. Habitat changes facilitated by conifer forest succession, overuse of browse resources by mule deer, and increased resource competition from growing populations of elk and white-tailed deer are believed to be primary influencers of mule deer trend across the mountain-foothill environments. Populations across the eastern two thirds of the state, in the prairie-breaks environments, have generally remained stable or decreased in response to drought and poor forage conditions.

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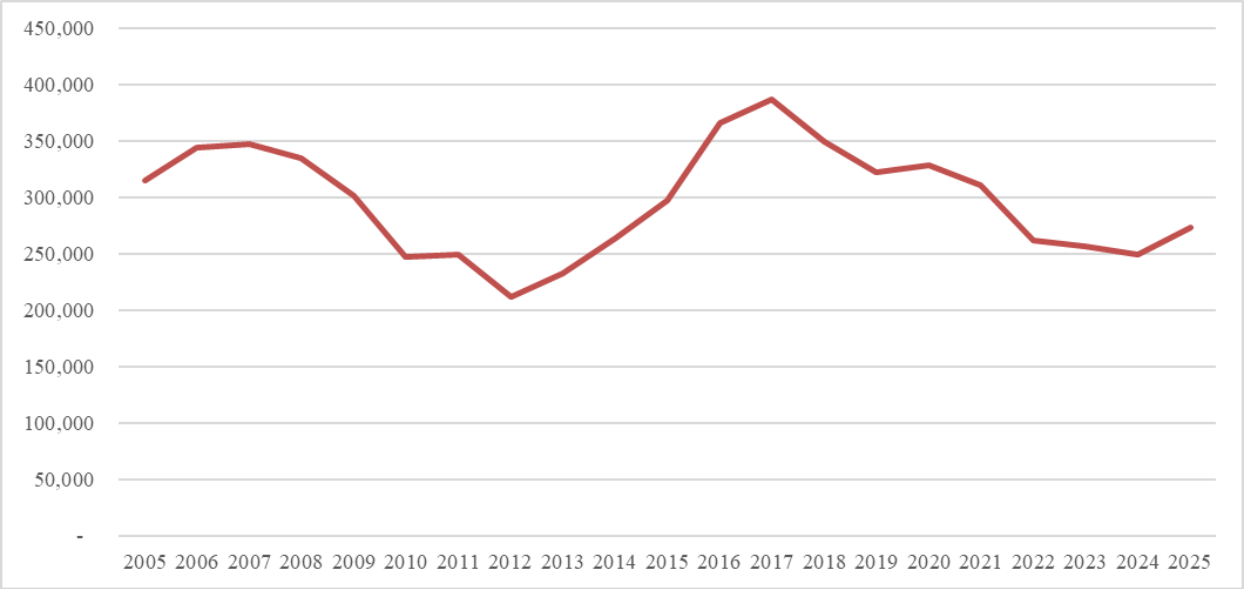

Figure 2. Montana statewide mule deer population estimate, 2006–2025.

The statewide estimate for deer (mule and white-tailed) hunters was 147,857 in 2024, slightly less than the previous 10-year average of 149,740. The average hunter spent 8 days afield. The number of deer hunters in Montana peaked at 201,576 in 1994, decreased to 148,461 in 1999, and has remained relatively stable since that time.

Since 2001, mule deer harvest regulations across Montana have been guided by the state's Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM) plan. This plan provides harvest regulation guidelines for antlered and antlerless mule deer based on recruitment, population surveys, and hunter harvest data for five population management units which were developed based on ecotype. Working within these guidelines, biologists have reduced antlerless harvest opportunity as modern populations have trended down (Figure 1).

In early 2024, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks initiated development of a new statewide Mule Deer Management Plan. Public concern regarding diminished mule deer populations and other contributing factors have highlighted the need for a comprehensive management approach that builds upon the current AHM strategy. The new Mule Deer Management Plan will guide management beginning with Montana's 2027 biennial season-setting process.

- Adam Kauth, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Nebraska

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's goal is "To manage big game populations at levels consistent with social and biological carrying capacities and provide opportunities for aesthetic enjoyment and hunting." Population estimates are not calculated or used at the Deer Management Unit (DMU) level. Staff have little confidence in the statewide estimate, which is generated via a basic model, which includes buck harvest, buck survival and herd composition dynamics. Staff bases management objectives and recommendations for each DMU on population trends, agricultural damage complaints, age of harvested bucks, buck harvest, permit demand, deer vehicle collisions, and public input. Mandatory check of all harvested deer is required. We

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typically collect age data on more than 4,500 mule deer annually. Population trends are based on total adult buck harvest at DMU level. Barring significant change in buck permit allocations these indices provide consistent indicators of annual population and age structure change at DMU level.

Harvest of mule deer bucks was 5,474 in 2025, a 4% increase from 2024 but 44% down from the high in 2017. Antlerless mule deer harvest was 705 in 2025. See Figure 1. Total deer harvest in 2025 was 37,060 in Nebraska, of which 18% were mule deer. Mule deer harvest exceeds white-tailed deer harvest in 3 of 18 DMUs and mule deer are abundant in 9 of 18 DMUs across Nebraska. Current management tactics are to increase mule deer populations above current levels.

Historically, buck to doe ratios have remained within desired ranges (20-30 per 100) and fawn production has remained at or above 60%. However, fawn rates have declined over the past 5 years and the buck ratio dropped below 20 in 2021 and has rebounded slightly since. See Figure 2.

From 2018-2020, we collared 240 mule deer does and subsequently caught their fawns to study mule deer doe and fawn survival rates, mortality factors and habitat use in southwest and northwest Nebraska. Preliminary results have shown poorer than expected adult doe (58%) and fawn (~25%) survival.

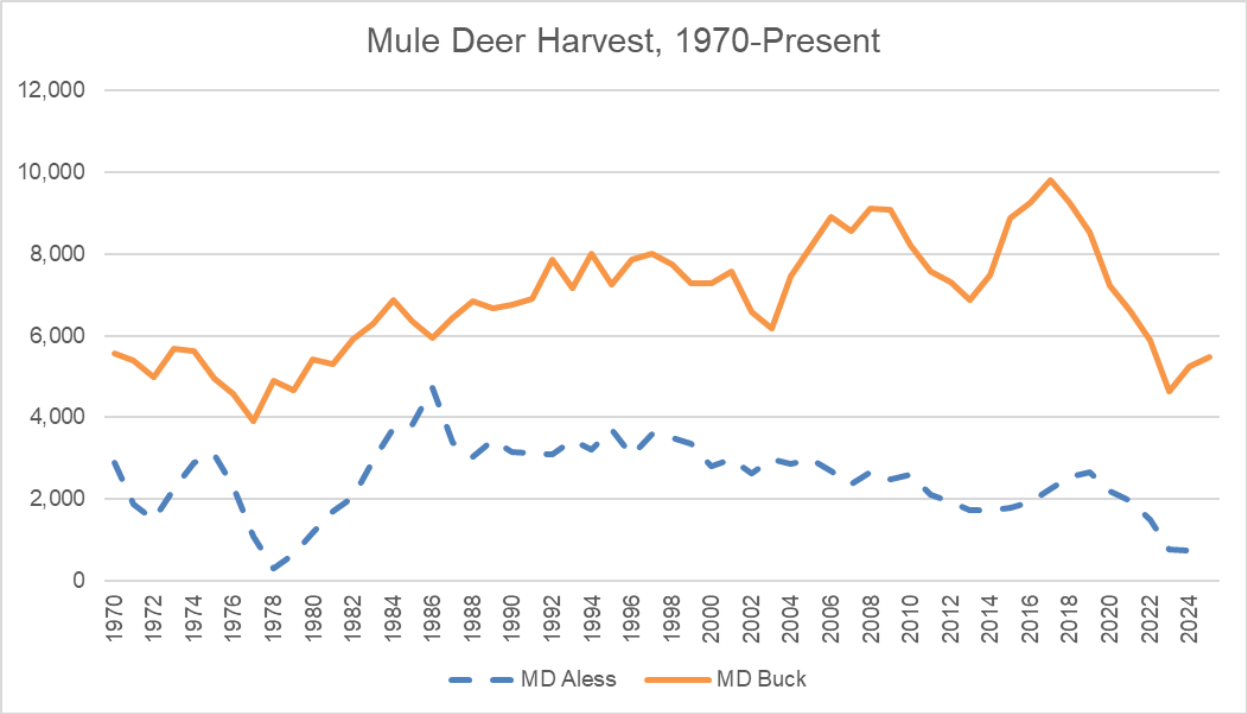

Figure 1. Mule Deer Harvest in Nebraska, 1970-2025.

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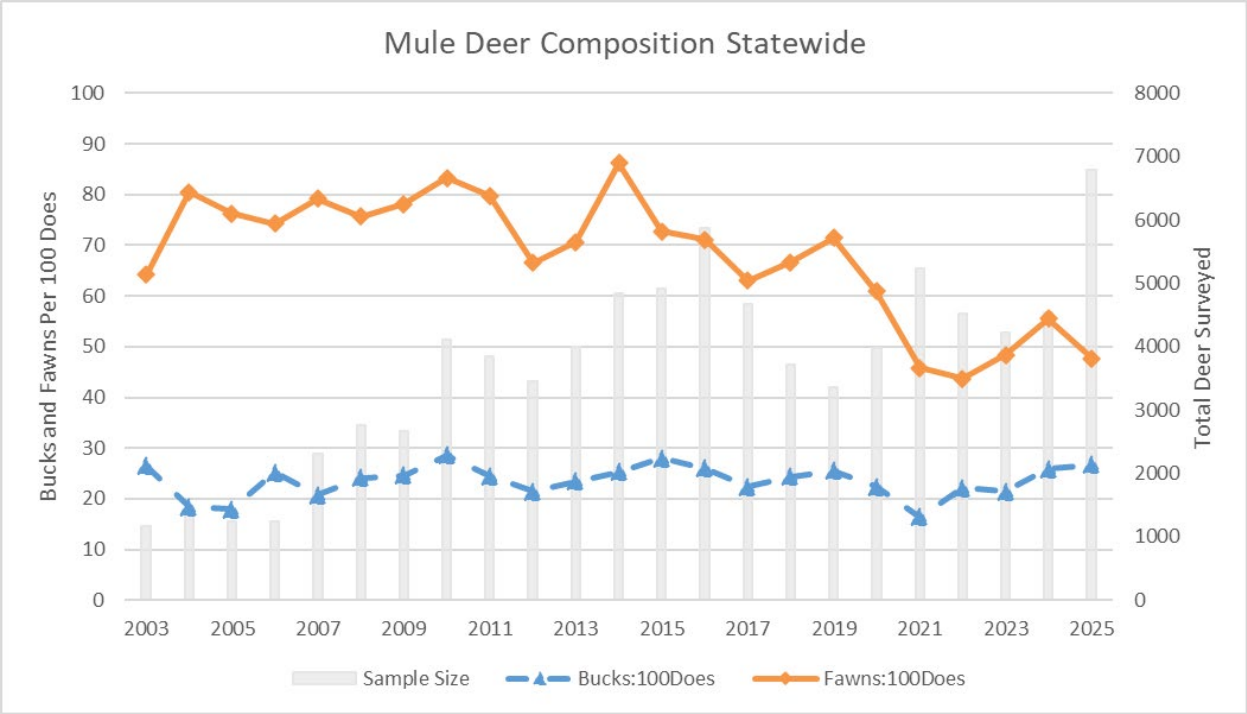

Figure 2. Nebraska Statewide Post Season Mule Deer Herd Composition Survey Results, 2003-2025.

-Luke Meduna, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Nevada

The Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) issued approximately 13,891 tags for the 2025 deer hunting season, including landowner compensation tags, PIW, junior, nonresident guided mule deer, and other specialty tags. A total of 60,877 unique applicants competed for 13,942 regular deer tags (excluding specialty tags) in the 2025 draw.

Of these applicants, 3,522 were juniors applying for 2,894 tags, resulting in a draw success rate of approximately 82%. Resident demand remained high, with 38,690 unique resident mule deer applicants competing for 10,163 tags in the 2025 Big Game Main Draw. This equates to a draw success rate of 26.2%, or approximately 1 in 3.8 applications. Nonresident demand was even more competitive, with 18,665 applications for 885 tags, yielding a draw success rate of approximately 4.7%, or about 1 in 21 applications.

Statewide harvest success for Any Legal Weapon seasons was 45%, slightly above the previous three-year average of 41%. Muzzleloader and archery success rates were 37% and 19%, respectively—both exceeding their previous three-year averages of 35% and 17%. Junior hunters achieved a 56% success rate in classic hunt units where all three weapon types (any legal weapon, muzzleloader, and archery) were allowed. In contrast, junior success for primitive weapon hunts (archery and muzzleloader only) was approximately 36% across 15 hunt units.

In total, approximately 5,596 bucks were harvested statewide, with 41% classified as 4-points or greater—consistent with the previous five-year range of 38% - 42%.

As of the reporting date, NDOW biologists classified 12,689 mule deer during post-season (fall) surveys. Statewide fawn production was 57 fawns per 100 does, compared to 63 fawns per

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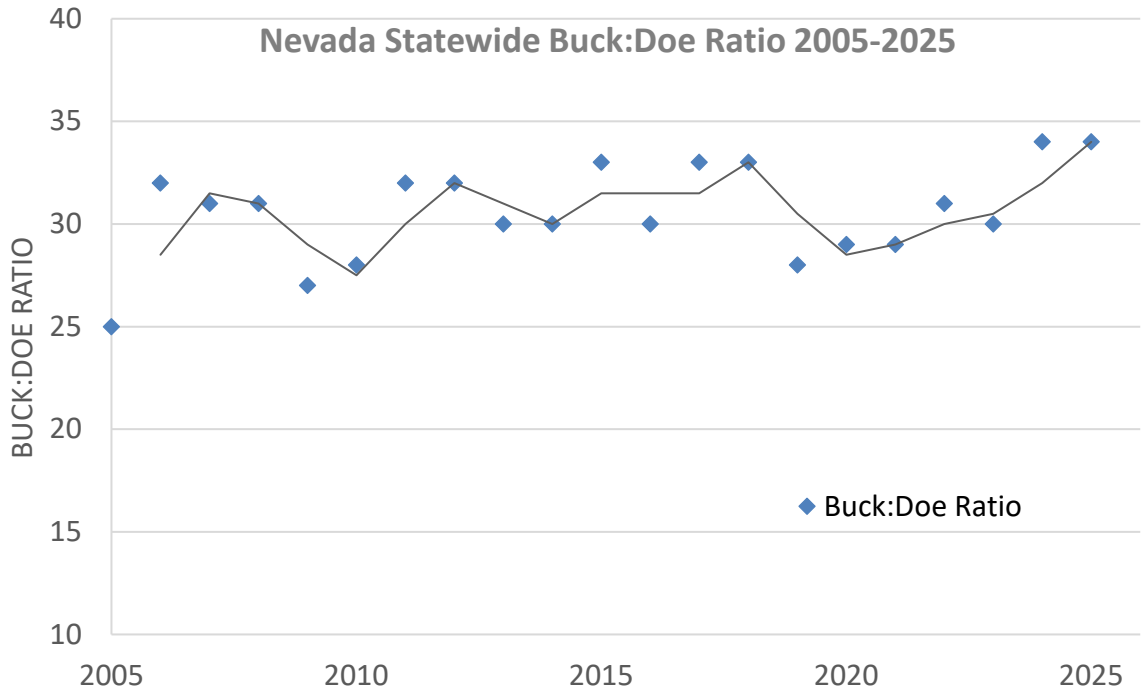
100 does observed in fall 2024. The post-season buck ratio was 34 bucks per 100 does in 2025, which is higher than the previous three-year average of 31. The observed spring fawn ratio was 36 fawns per 100 adults, also exceeding the five-year average of 33 fawns per 100 adults.

Precipitation during the 2025–2026 water year ranged from 80% to 160% of normal across most Great Basin watersheds in Nevada. However, Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) was well below average, ranging from 0% to 10% of median levels during the 2025–2026 winter. This apparent "snow drought" was driven by warmer-than-average winter temperatures and storm systems that produced rain rather than snow, particularly at lower elevations. These conditions could negatively affect mule deer body condition and antler growth heading into fall 2026.

The statewide mule deer population is currently being re-evaluated to assess annual variation trends using an Integrated Population Model. Previous models indicate a stable population ranging between 72,000 and 75,000 animals.



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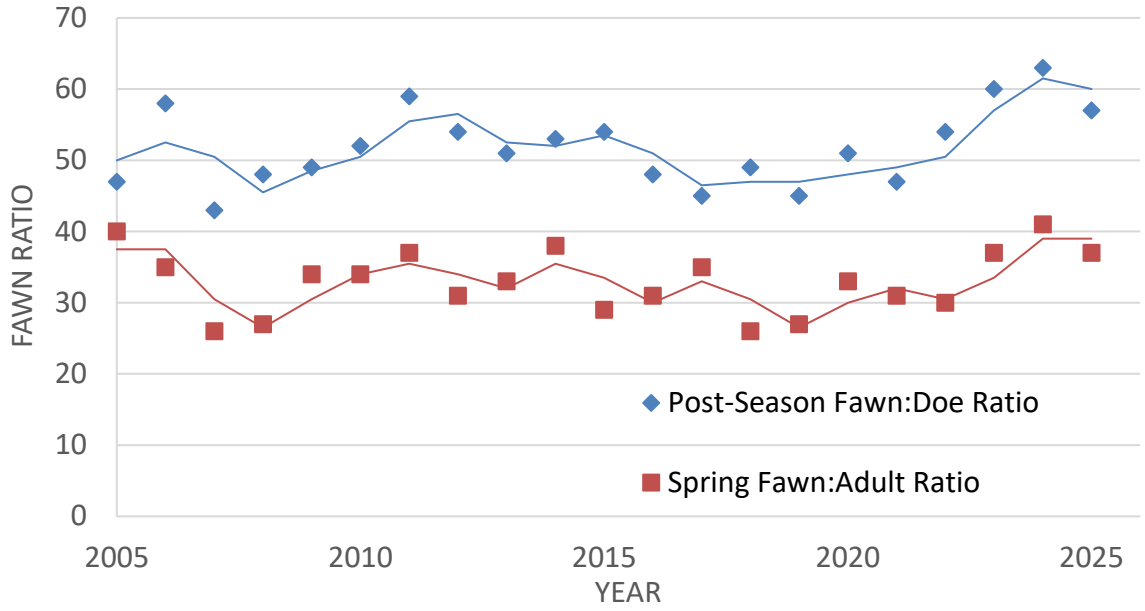

Figure 12. Summary of statewide observed buck:doe ratios in Nevada (top panel) and observed Fall and Spring fawn:doe ratios (lower panel).

Cody Schroeder Mule Deer Staff Specialist – Nevada Department of Wildlife

New Mexico

Mule deer population growth in New Mexico is highly dependent habitat conditions. This is influenced by the amount and timing of precipitation. If moisture levels and timing are appropriate, fawn survival and recruitment can increase, and consecutive years of good rainfall are important to grow a deer population. During periods of drought, or if the summer monsoon rains arrive late in the summer, fawn survival may be low resulting in declining populations.

New Mexico continued to experience severe to extreme drought conditions in 2025. As such, vegetative health, soil moisture, and streamflow were reduced. In addition, the 2025-2026 winter brought below average snowfall in New Mexico. New Mexico's long-term drought has resulted in reduced recruitment; as a result, populations are below objectives throughout most of the state. Despite recent poor recruitment, areas that burned in 2022 continue to see an increase in local deer populations.

Post-hunt aerial surveys are conducted annually in December for select Game Management Units (GMUs). The statewide buck to doe ratio was 25 bucks:100 does in 2025 (Figure 1); this is slightly above the long-term average and is within the social parameters set for deer hunting in New Mexico. Statewide fawn recruitment improved slightly last year with an estimated 33 fawns:100 does in 2025. Fawn recruitment indicates that the statewide population is slightly decreasing, likely from the long-term severe drought.

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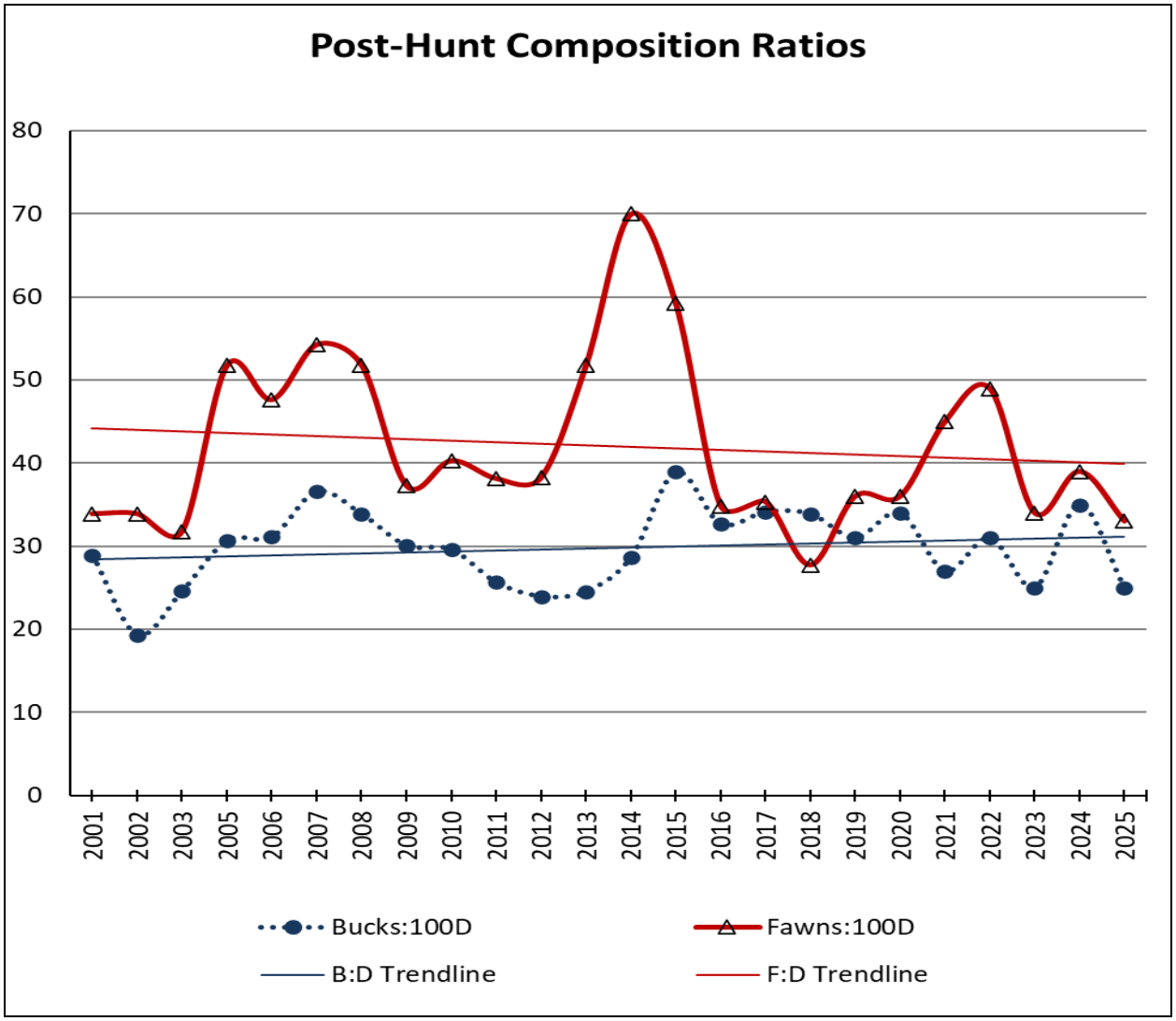

Figure 1. New Mexico statewide composition ratios obtained during post-hunt winter surveys from 2001-2025.

Deer hunting opportunities on public land are issued through the public draw; private land deer hunting opportunities are available over-the-counter with written permission in most areas of the state. Trends in composition ratios obtained from the aerial surveys and success rates are used to adjust the number of deer hunting licenses that are issued through the public draw.

Deer license holders are only permitted to harvest bucks in New Mexico except for a few specific instances where high deer densities occur near urban areas. An estimated 30,974 hunters harvested 9,435 deer in 2025 (Figure 2). The majority of deer harvested in New Mexico are mule deer with white-tailed deer comprising approximately 3% of the total harvest. Hunter success was approximately 30% during the 2025-2026 hunting season for all weapon types combined. This is equivalent to the long-term average success rate for deer hunters in New Mexico (31%; 2006-2025).

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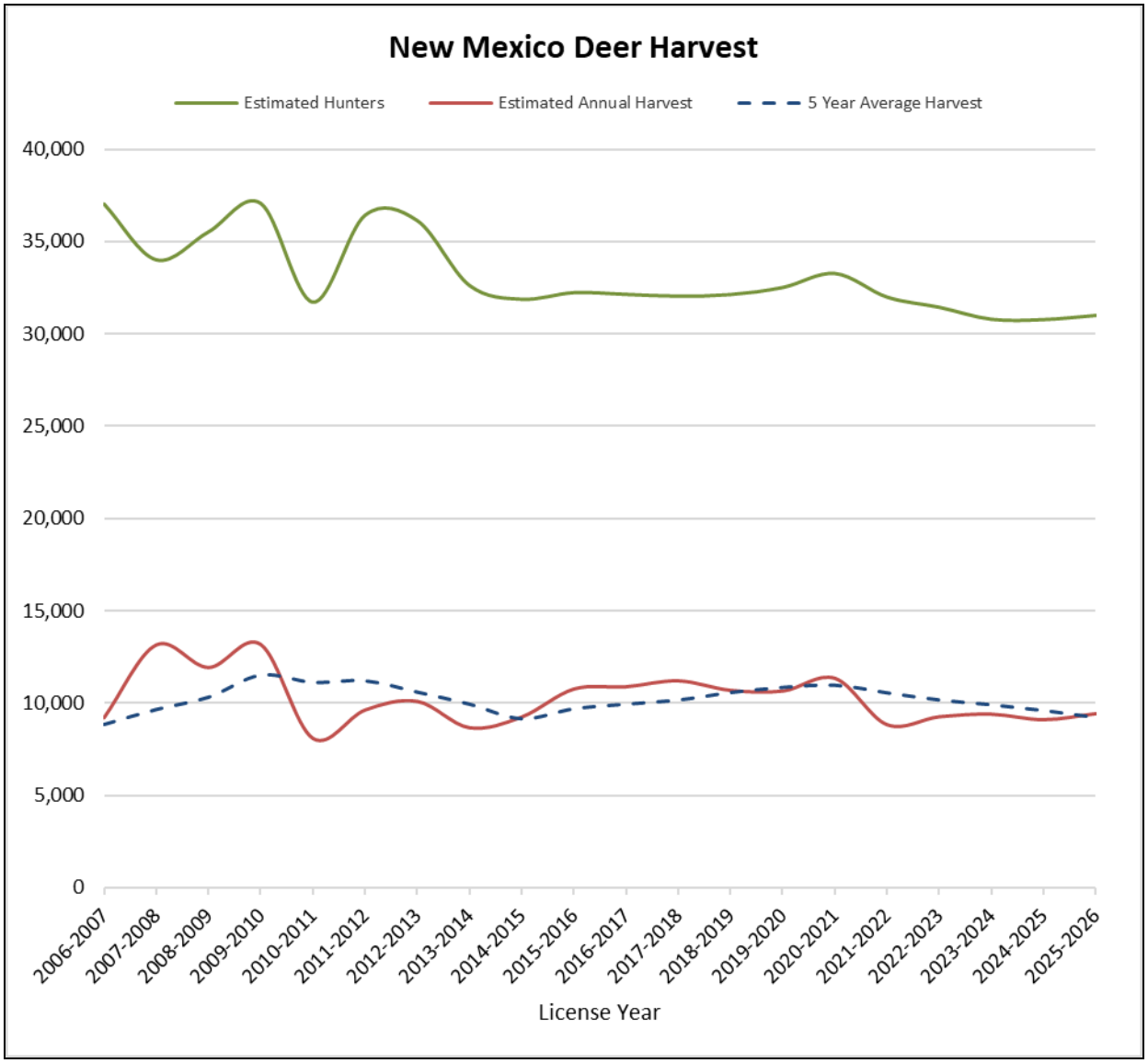

Figure 2. Estimated annual deer hunters and harvest in New Mexico 2006-2025.

-Orrin Duvuvuei, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish

North Dakota

Mule deer in the badlands are stable to increasing following a moderate winter in 2025/2026. Mule deer abundance in the badlands increased by 31% due to high over-winter survival despite below average fawn production. Mule deer abundance varied from a high of 9.2 mule deer/sq. mile in the northern badlands to a low of 5.3 mule deer/sq. mile in the extreme southwest badlands. The 2026 spring index was 31% higher than the 2025 index and 8% higher the long-term average (Figure 1). Mule deer outside of the badlands are stable to increasing based on hunter observations (Figure 2).

North Dakota has a limited quota license system and a goal of maintaining at least 30 bucks:100 does prior to the gun season and 6 mule deer per square mile in the badlands. A

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conservative harvest strategy with a limited number of antlerless licenses is being used to encourage population growth of mule deer in the badlands. Antlered mule deer gun licenses are a coveted license in North Dakota and currently only 1,200 licenses are available for the 2026 deer gun season.

Buck:doe ratio remains stable above objective level, while fawn:doe ratio has trended downward since 2020 due to drought conditions and an extreme winter during 2022/2023. Record low fawn production was observed in 2023. Normal precipitation is needed this spring and summer to improve habitat conditions needed for higher fawn production and recruitment.

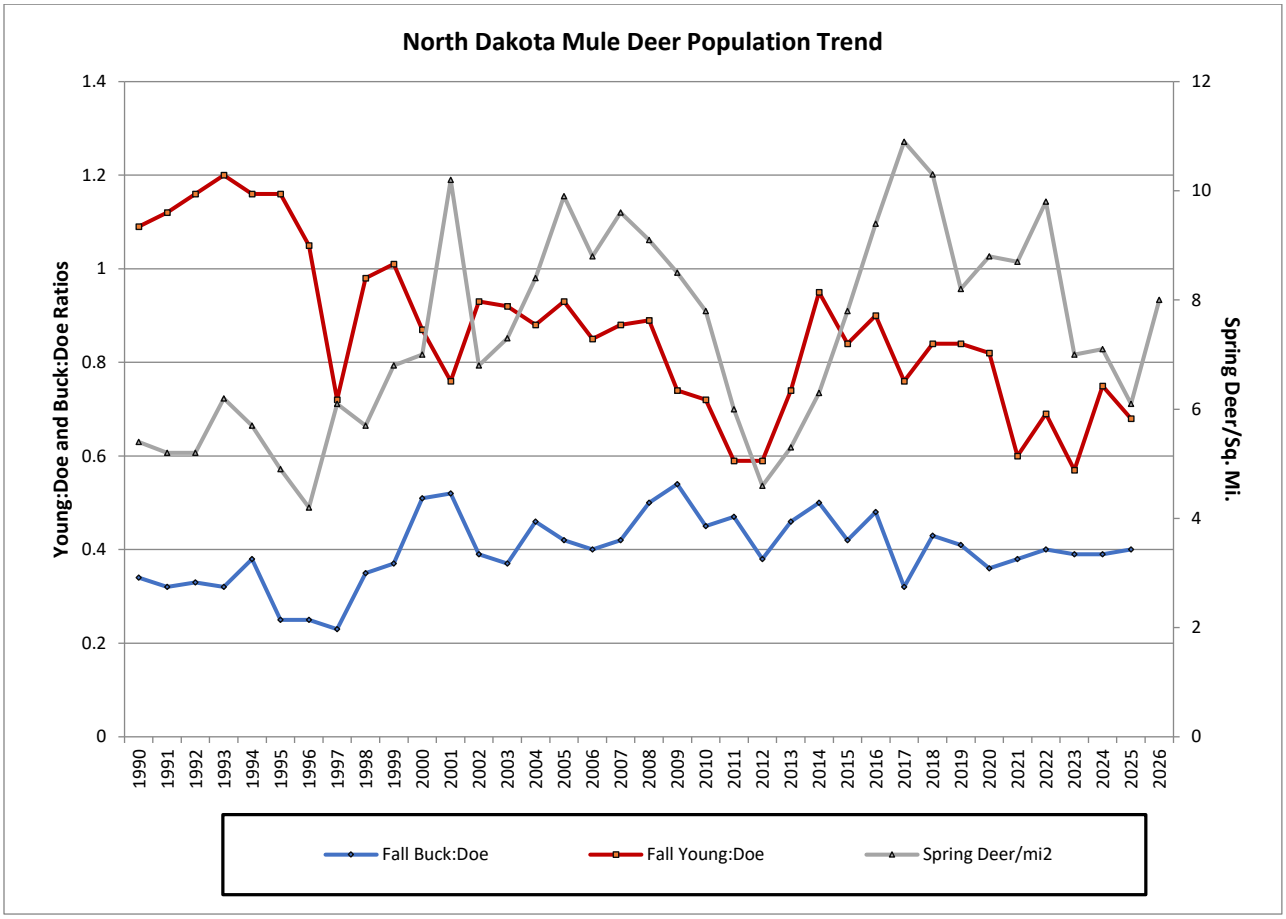

Figure 1. Population trends of badlands mule deer, 1990-2026.

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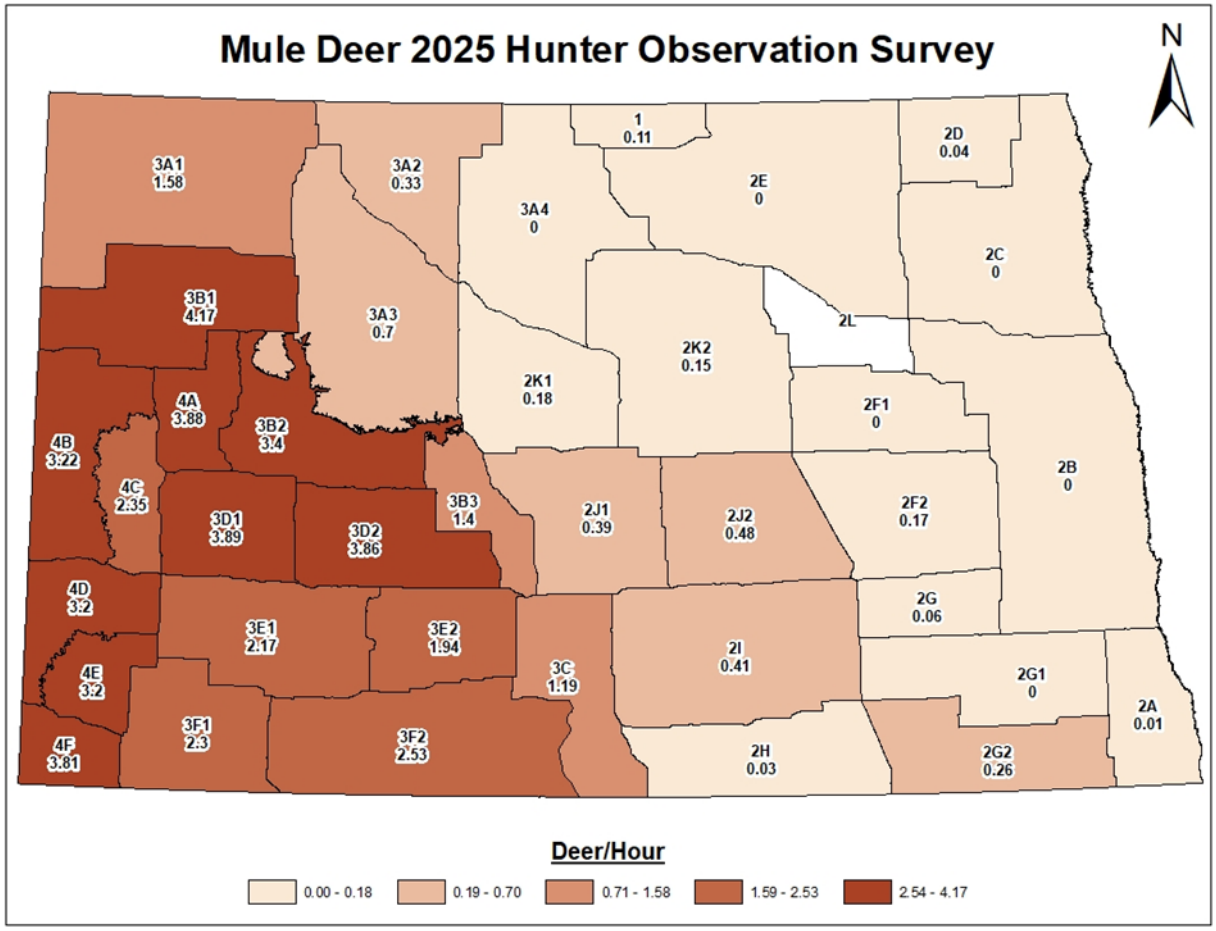

Figure 2. Mule deer sighted per hour based on hunter observations, 2025.

- Bruce Stillings, North Dakota Game and Fish Department

Northwest Territories

The population of mule deer in the Northwest Territories is unknown, but it is believed that there is no viable population. In the last four decades, there have only been two recorded sightings of mule deer, both of which occurred in the southeastern corner of the Nahanni National Park in 1979 and 2003. In 2018, a wildlife officer working for the Government of the Northwest Territories reported an unrecorded sighting of two mule deer just north of the British Columbia/Northwest Territories border near the Liard River. We consider mule deer observations in the Northwest Territories as vagrants because their habitat is probably marginal, and they are not commonly found in this area.

Mule deer were occasionally observed in the Northwest Territories from the 1920s to late 1960s, with white-tailed deer being the predominant species seen since then. It is unclear how long mule deer existed in the Northwest Territories, and their population has completely disappeared from their former range, except in the Nahanni-Liard area where sightings are rare. Mule deer are not hunted in the Northwest Territories, so there is no formal survey or collection of harvest data,

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nor any active research on this species. The decline of mule deer in the Northwest Territories may be caused by a complex of factors, which are not yet fully understood.

- Ève Lamontagne, Department of Environment and Climate Change, Government of the Northwest Territories

Oklahoma

With Oklahoma being the eastern edge for what is considered mule deer habitat, we estimate between 2,000 and 4,000 animals pre-hunting season in our panhandle, NW and far SW portions of the state. A slight increase from previous years. Most harvest occurs on private lands, but opportunities to harvest a mule deer does exist on some of our public hunting areas. Oklahoma does not differentiate between mule deer and white-tailed deer in our tagging system. A statewide deer permit allows the harvest of either species. In general, habitats are beginning to rebound from catastrophic drought conditions. This is aiding a slight increase in populations, with folks beginning to see mule deer in areas that have not held populations in quite some time. The 2024-25 season led to 210 mule deer being harvested

-Dallas Barber, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation

Oregon

With adoption of Oregon's revised Mule Deer Management Plan in June 2024, Oregon's Rocky Mountain mule deer management is in transition. The transition is guided by delineation of 22 relatively distinct herd ranges as defined by analysis of nearly 2,000 GPS collared animals. These herd ranges now direct all aspects of mule deer management including data collection, monitoring, modeling, and harvest allocation. Processes for biological data collection began changing as herds were defined. New and more rigorous integrated population models have been developed for each unique herd. Transitions in harvest allocation and monitoring will begin for the 2026 seasons with entirely new hunt areas within herd ranges (Figure 1).

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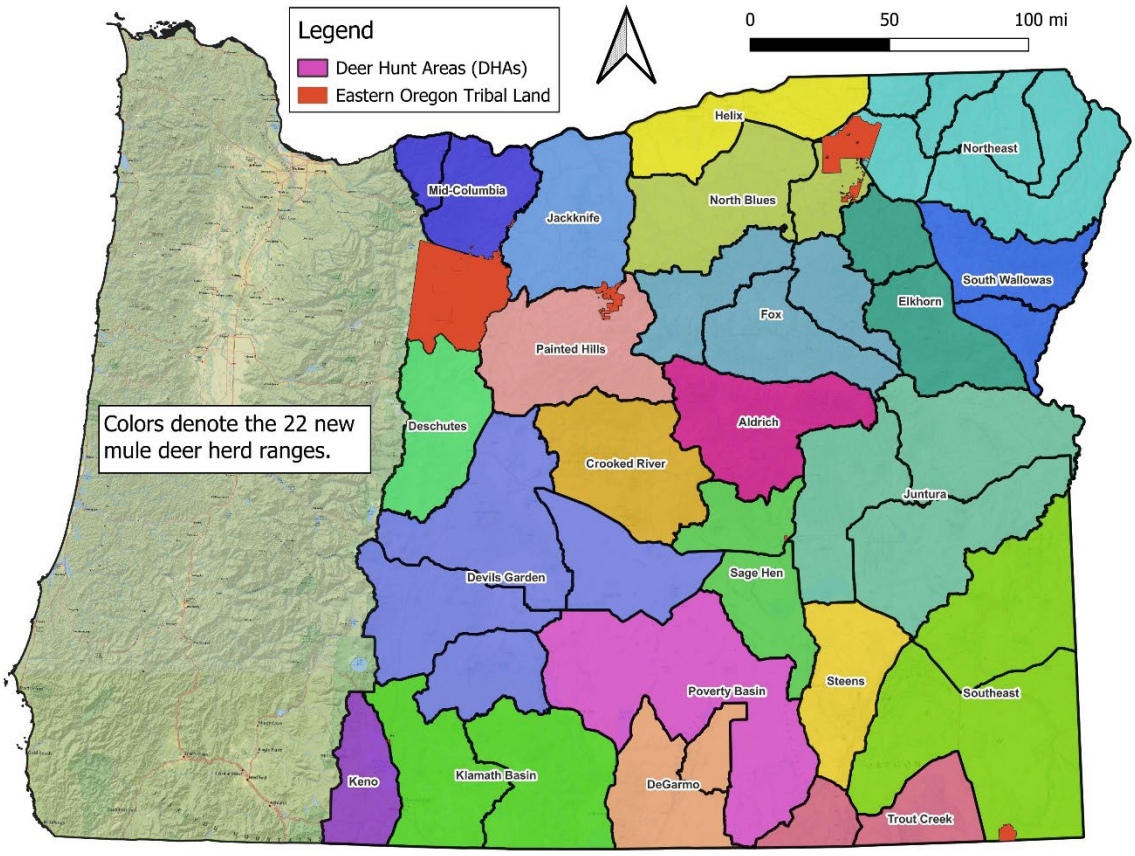
Figure 1. Mule deer herd ranges in Oregon.



Important to this new management model are new management objectives, and population performance (growth rate λ) has been added to population size as a specific objective. This addition provides a more rigorous assessment of the results from management actions. Additionally, population management objectives are evaluated in a tiered approach by level of concern that helps direct and prioritize management actions (Figure 2). At the herd range level in 2026, over 70% were at the Extreme or Very High Concern Level (Table 1). No herds were in the "Low Concern" category.

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Figure 2. Management Objective tier criteria and concern levels for Mule deer management in Oregon.

a) Management Tier Criteria

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Population	Extreme concern	1-25% above Tier 1	26-50% above Tier 1	>50% above Tier 1
Growth rate (lambda) over 5 years	≤ 0.97	≤ 0.98 to 1.0	≥ 1.01 to 1.03	> 1.03

b) Population Concern Matrix

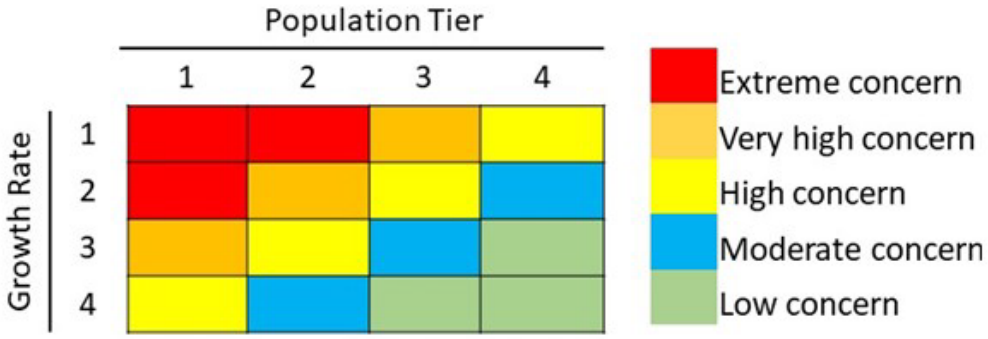

Table 1. 2026 Concern level for the 22 newly defined herd ranges in eastern Oregon.

Concern Level	# of Herd Ranges	% of Herd Ranges
Extreme	12	55%
Very High	4	18%
High	3	14%
Moderate	3	14%
Low	0	0%

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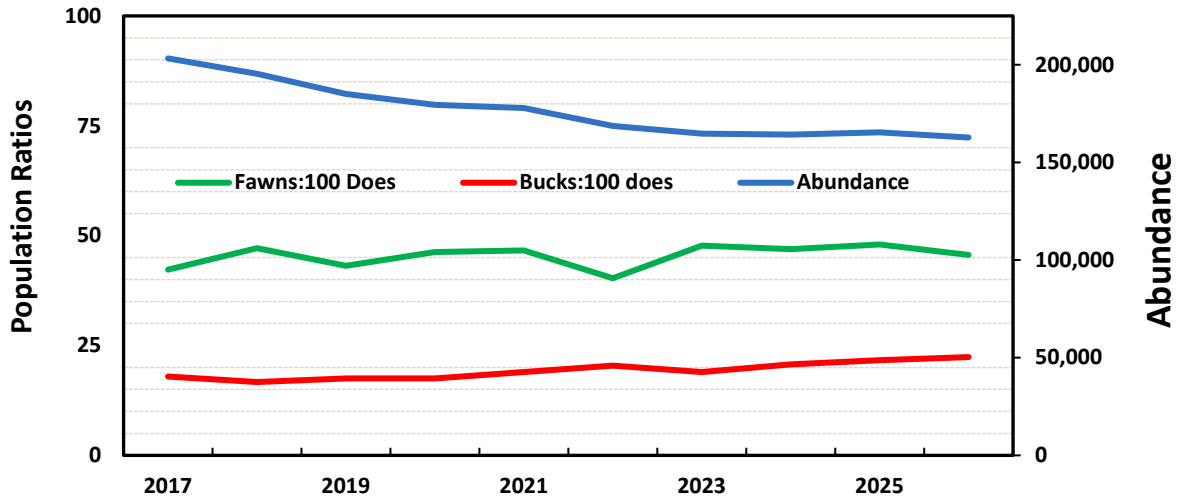
Oregon's Rocky Mountain mule deer population continues to persist at levels substantially below desired levels, declining about 11% since 2017 to an estimated 162,733 in spring 2026 (Figure 3). Average fawn ratio have hovered in the high 40s to low 50s with average buck ratios in the low 20s.

Figure 3. Trends in Oregon's mule deer population and average fawn and buck ratios.



Not surprisingly, the trend in hunter numbers and harvest mimics the declining population size (Figure 3). Since 2014, mule deer hunter numbers have declined 44% to 38,219 with associated harvest declining 42% to an estimated 14,026 in 2026. Oregon's mule deer harvest is overwhelmingly bucks (94%) with limited female harvest occurring in areas with relatively high levels of conflict.

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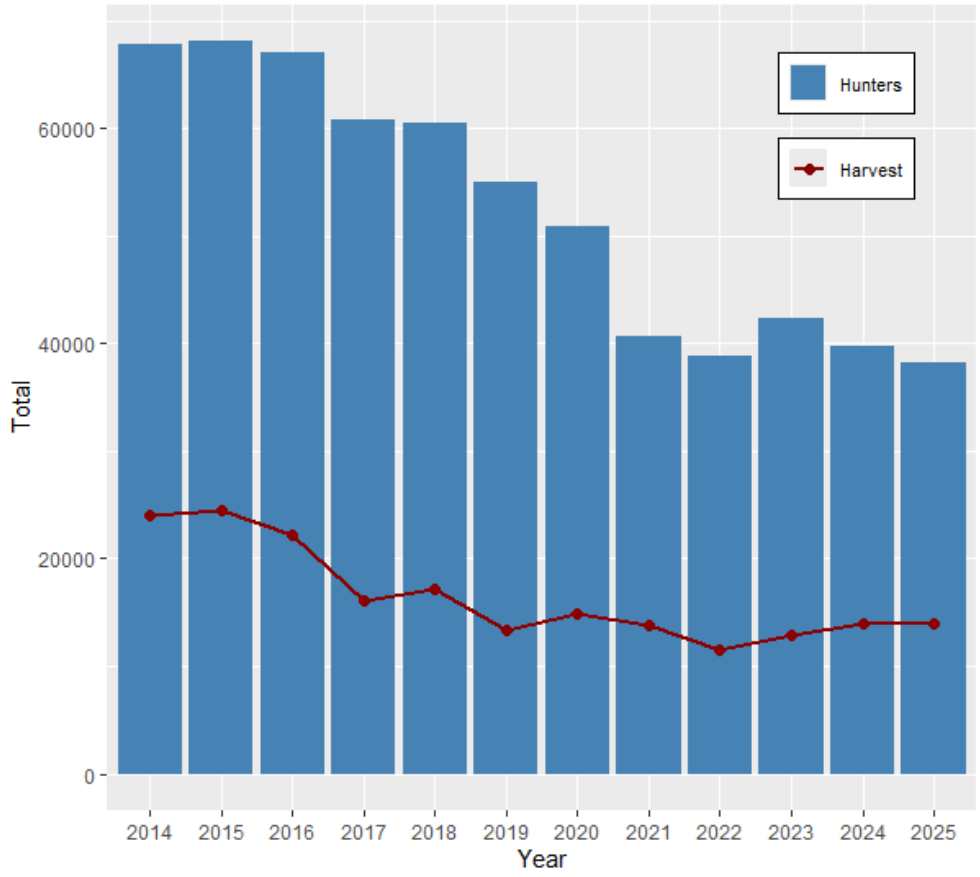

Figure 4. Recent trend in Oregon mule deer hunters and associated harvest, 2014 – 2024.

Oregon does not survey black-tailed deer in a way allowing development of annual population estimates. Density estimates and population modeling developed using non-invasive fecal DNA sampling suggests black-tailed deer populations have stabilized or increased slightly. Data also indicate the ratio of bucks:100 females is much higher than estimated using traditional survey methods. Since 2014, hunter numbers have declined to a low in 2016 (83,897) but have since increased to over 90,000 hunters in 2023 and 2024 (Figure 5). However, 2025 there was a slight decrease in the number of hunters. Associated harvest has increased from a 2018 low of 17,716 to about 30,000 since 2023. Generally, around 90% of the black-tailed deer harvest are males.

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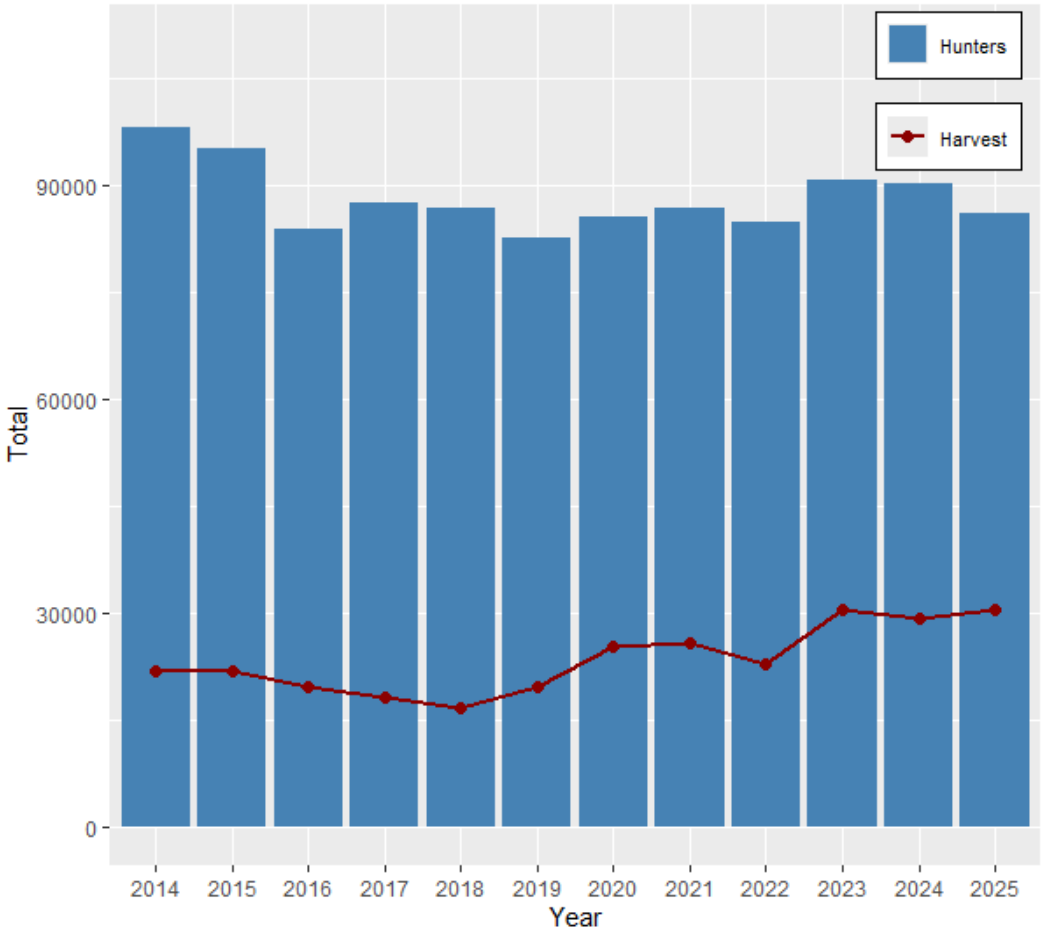

Figure 5. *Trend in black-tailed deer hunters and harvest in Oregon 2014 – 2024.*

-Josh Smith and Ray Dodd, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

Saskatchewan

Mule deer populations are monitored in Saskatchewan using annual spotlight surveys, hunter harvest surveys and intermittent aerial surveys. Mule deer density varies considerably in Saskatchewan, ranging from 0.05 deer/km^2 in the northern part of their range to > 2.0 deer/km^2 in the southwest portion of the province in average years. Annual spotlight surveys indicate that mule deer populations have declined substantially over the past five years, both in the core of their range across the grassland region (Figure 1) and in the peripheral parkland region. The decline is especially pronounced in the southwestern portion of the province, where spotlight and aerial surveys indicate an approximate decline of 60 per cent since 2021. This decline was driven by a combination of severe winters in 2021, 2022, and 2024 and ongoing drought conditions, as well as high prevalence rates of chronic wasting disease (CWD). CWD is increasing in prevalence and distribution across the province in an eastern bearing. In 2025, a combination of voluntary and mandatory hunter surveillance sampling resulted in a province-wide apparent prevalence rate of 48 per cent (i.e. 124 CWD positive/256 testable samples) in mule deer (primarily bucks). The total number of samples received in 2025 was the lowest in recent years, due to a substantial reduction in harvest quotas (including the near elimination of doe harvest) in response to population declines.

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The increase in prevalence from 2024 (39%) is likely due to the near absence of does in the 2025 sample, making this year's estimate primarily a male prevalence estimate compared to previous years' mixed-sex estimates. In the core of mule deer range within the province (grassland WMZs 1-7, 15-16, 18-29), an apparent prevalence rate of 54% (i.e., 83 CWD positive/153 testable samples) was observed among mule deer bucks in 2025. Hunting was closed in the WMZs where CWD prevalence is highest (WMZs 8-14), so no submissions were received from the highest-prevalence zones. Therefore, this prevalence estimate excludes several zones where CWD prevalence is known to be highest.

Mule deer hunting license sales and harvest numbers have declined in Saskatchewan over the past three years, due to a combination of recent mule deer population declines and subsequent quota reductions. A total of 5,780 mule deer hunting licenses (estimated 4,977 active hunters) were sold in 2025, consisting of 3,004 limited entry buck-only, 696 limited entry either-sex, 215 limited entry antlerless, and 1,865 over-the -counter archery-only mule deer licenses. An estimated 2,055 mule deer were harvested in the province in 2025 (Figure 2). Bucks made up 94 per cent of the total estimated harvest, with a total of 1,924 buck mule deer harvested in 2025. Hunters holding limited entry (buck or either-sex) licenses harvested 1,752 mule deer (1,707 bucks), with a province-wide average success rate of 53 per cent, which was below the previous five-year (2020–2024) average of 63 per cent. Limited entry antlerless mule deer hunters harvested 69 doe or fawn mule deer, with an average harvest success rate of 39 per cent. Hunters holding over the counter archery mule deer licenses harvested an estimated 230 mule deer (214 bucks), with a provincial average success rate of 16 per cent, which was lower than the previous 5-year average of 23 per cent (2020-2024).

Mule deer hunting seasons were closed throughout the South Saskatchewan River Valley (wildlife management zones 8-14) in 2025 due to low mule deer populations and high CWD prevalence which is expected to impair the capacity for the local population to recovery. This region will remain closed until such time that the population increases back to levels aligned with management objectives. Elsewhere, a change in harvest management which has largely eliminated doe harvest is anticipated to support population recovery.

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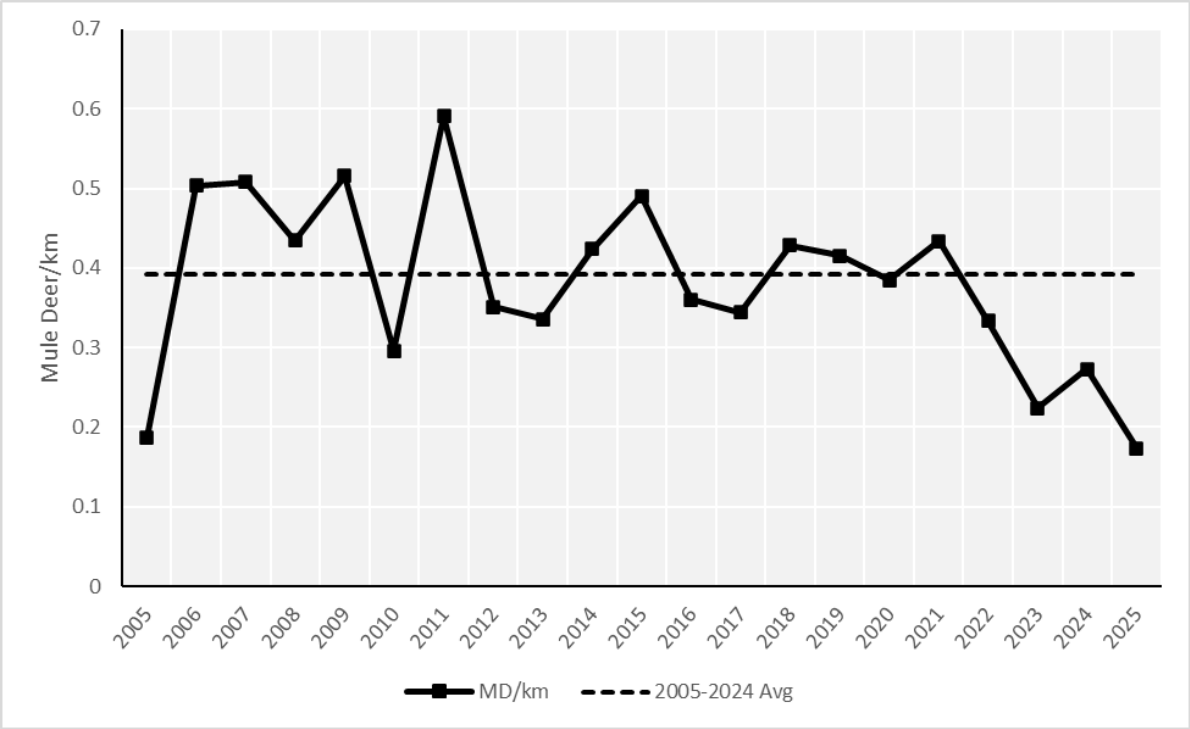

Figure 1. Mule deer observations per km driven from spotlight surveys in Saskatchewan's grassland region (WMZs 1-16, 18-29), 2005-2025.

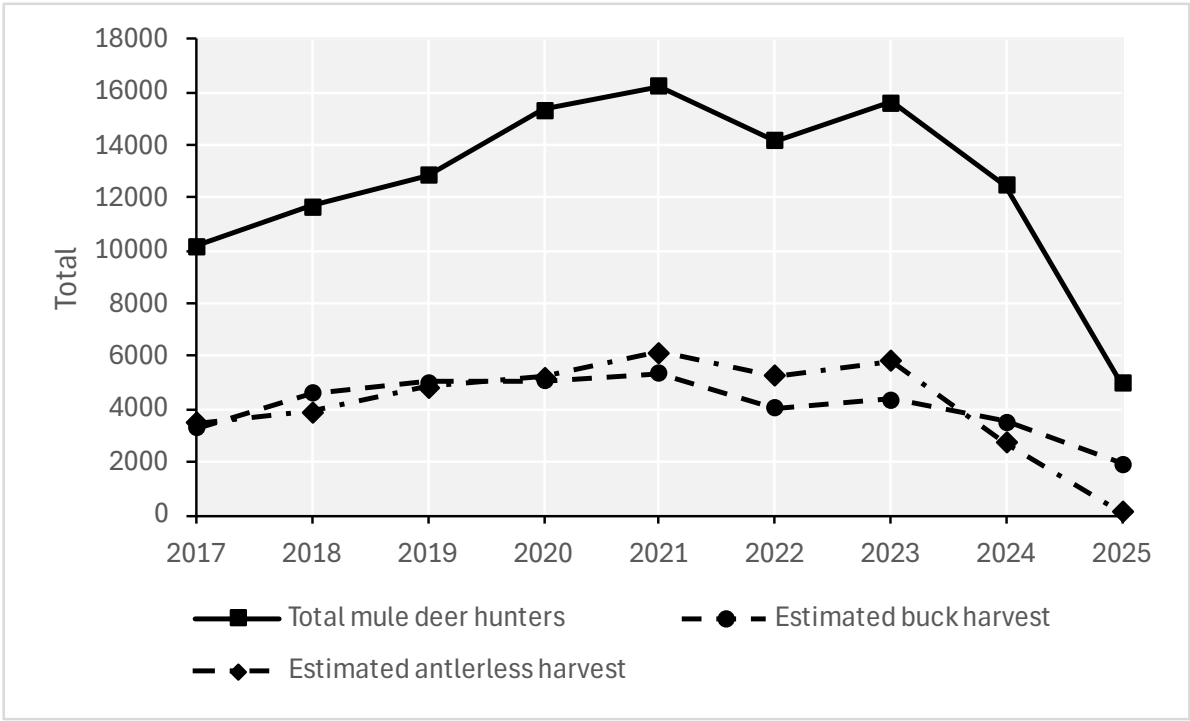

Figure 2. Estimated number of mule deer hunters and harvest in Saskatchewan, 2017-2024.

-Dale Barks, Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment

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South Dakota

Mule deer populations in South Dakota are slowly responding to reduced harvest rates in recent years, and results from several surveys provide evidence that populations are increasing. Most hunting unit population objectives are set to increase or substantially increase mule deer numbers; however, several unit objectives have recently been modified as populations approach desired densities (Figure 1). Objectives will be re-evaluated in 2027 during the SDGFP Commission season setting process. Pre-season herd composition ratios varied across Data Analysis Units (DAUs) in 2025 with overall statewide recruitment at 63 fawns:100 does compared to 74 fawns:100 does the previous year. The statewide pre-season sex ratio in 2025 was 36 bucks:100 does (Figure 2).

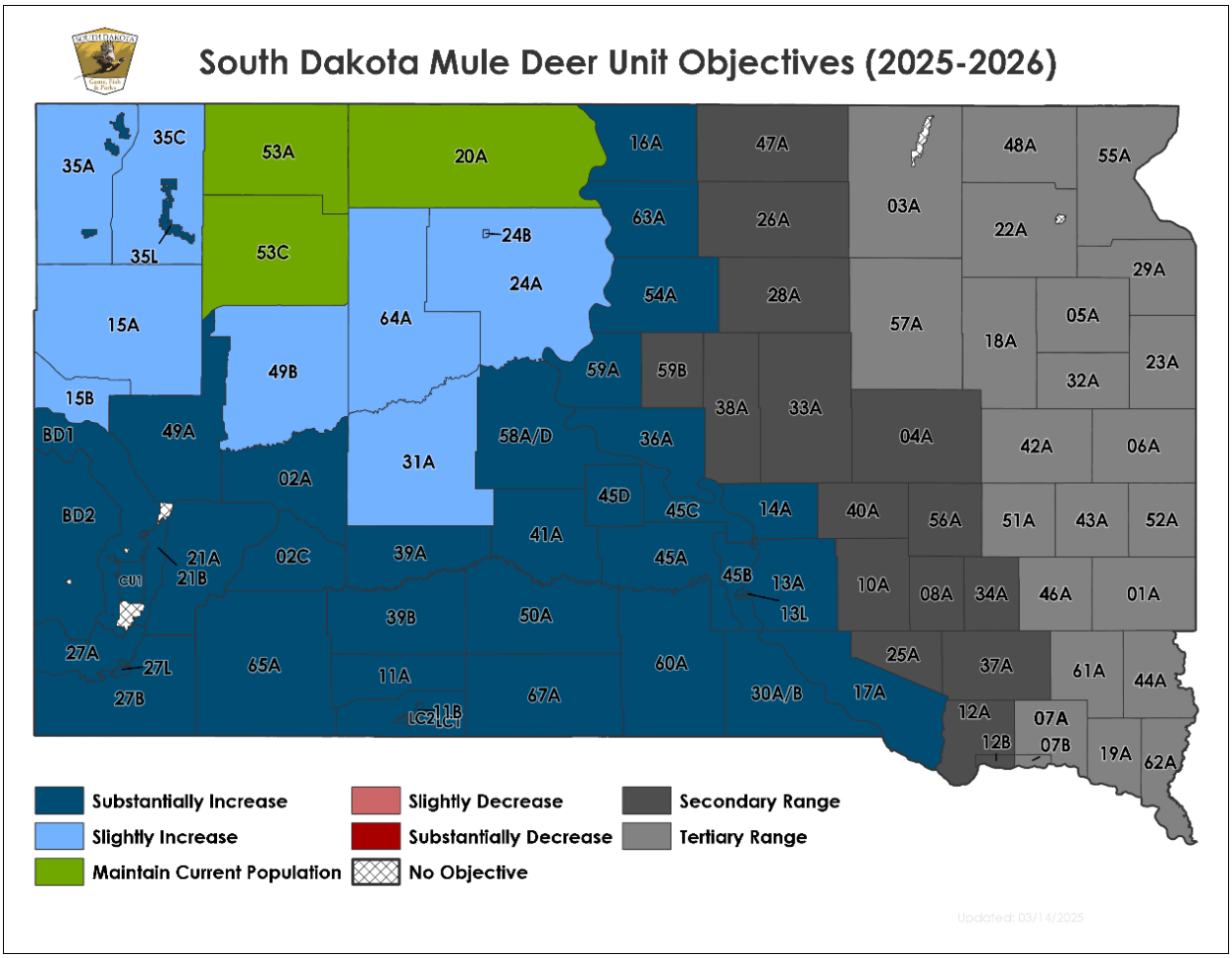

Figure 1. Mule deer population objectives for South Dakota hunting units, 2025-26.

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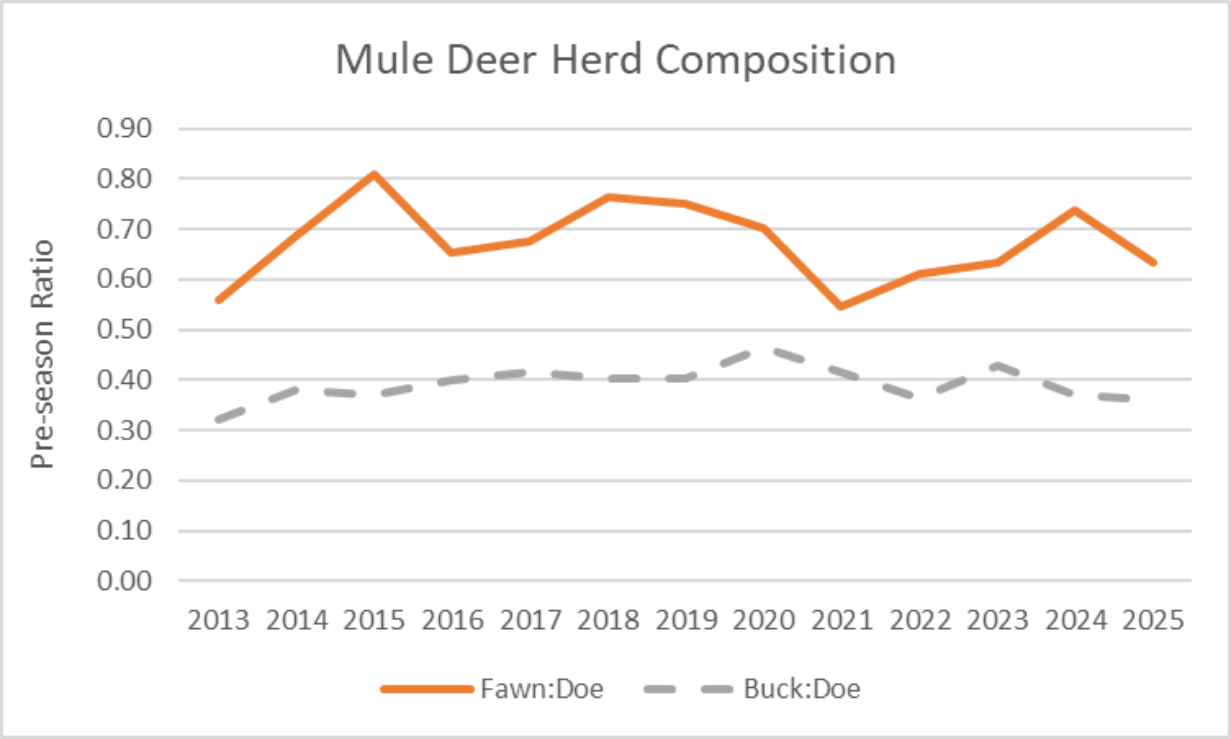

Figure 2. Statewide sex and age ratios from pre-season herd composition surveys in South Dakota, 2013-2025.

Currently all deer hunters are surveyed via email submission methods. Annual deer hunter surveys are conducted to estimate harvest at each management unit for each species and age/sex cohorts. Statewide mule deer harvest has slowly increased from a low of about 5,400 in 2014 to 6,238 in 2025, mostly due to increased buck harvest since doe harvest has been substantially restricted for the past 12 years (Figure 3). A consistently low mule deer doe harvest of approximately 1,000 – 1,500 has allowed some deer herds of the state to grow to more desirable levels although many areas are still substantially below objective (Figure 1 and Figure 3). The current harvest of antlerless mule deer occurs primarily from youth deer hunters, landowner-own-land hunters, and hunters with "any deer" licenses. Hunting season regulations were modified in 2021 to restrict youth doe harvest to improve growth rates in areas below objective. The GFP Commission also recently replaced "any deer" licenses with "any buck" licenses in firearm units where populations were below objective, and the Commission is currently considering this same license change for statewide archery and muzzleloader seasons.

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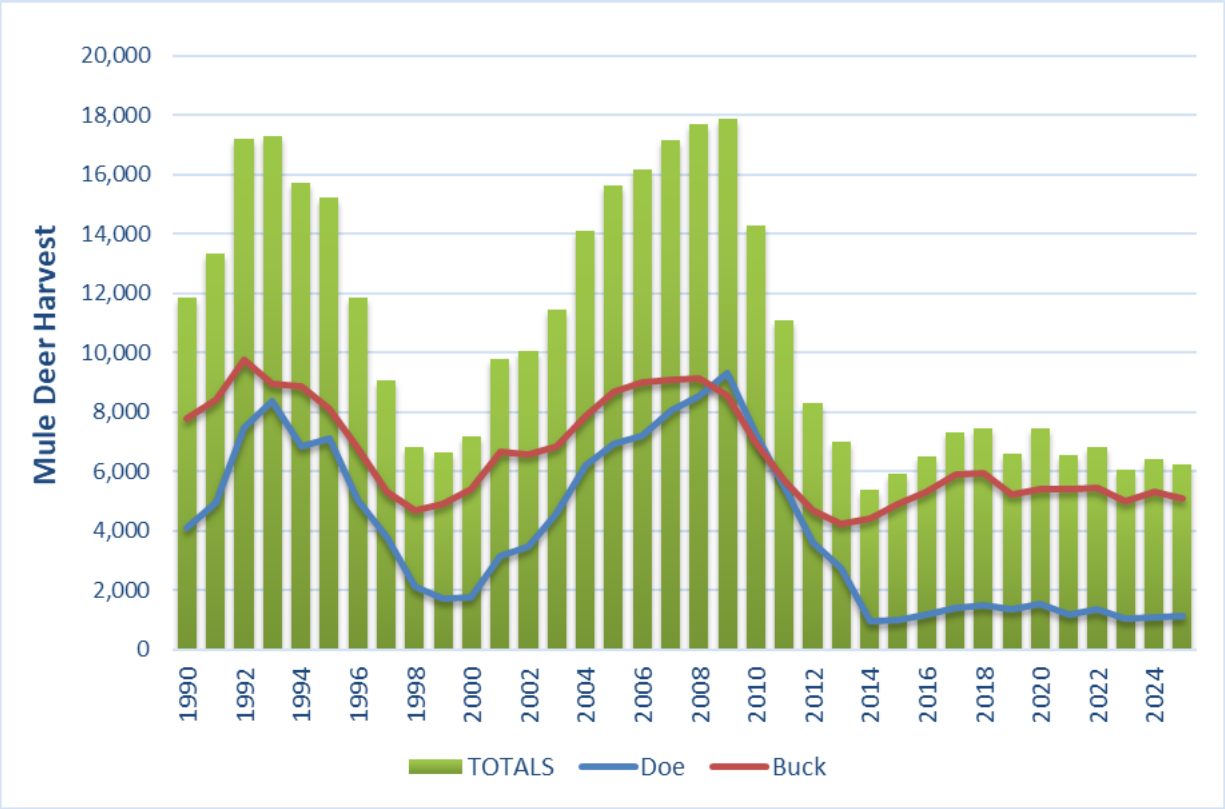

Figure 3. Mule deer harvest from all hunting seasons in South Dakota, 1990-2024.

There are currently no surveys conducted to estimate mule deer abundance or survival in South Dakota. Harvest-based population models are used to reconstruct the previous year's pre-hunting season population and project abundance to future years for each DAU. Estimating the harvest rate needed to reconstruct a population, however, is challenging due to low deer densities, limited harvest, and the lack of spatially and temporally representative data. Reliable DAU abundance estimates are lacking in most areas of the state. The statewide pre-season estimate was 119,000 for 2025.

-Andy Lindbloom, South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks

Texas

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) conducts post-season helicopter surveys for mule deer using a stratified random sampling design within monitoring units. In 2011, a sightability model was initiated to improve population estimates. The data are used to determine population trends, estimate population densities, and document herd composition to evaluate the impacts of regulations and management actions on mule deer at ecoregion and monitoring unit scales.

Trans-Pecos

In general, the Trans-Pecos population is on a decreasing trend because of drought conditions since 2020. In addition, aoudad and elk numbers have exploded over the last 10 years

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in the region and are more than likely compounding the impacts of drought on mule deer. The 2024 mule deer estimate of 90,052 is the lowest since 2011. Surveys were not conducted in 2007, 2010, and 2020. The estimated 2024 fawn crop of 29 fawns:100 does was lower than in 2022 (44 fawns:100 does) and the long-term average of 37 fawns:100 does. The sex ratio for 2024 was 36 bucks:100 does, lower than the 2011–2024 average of 43 bucks:100 does.

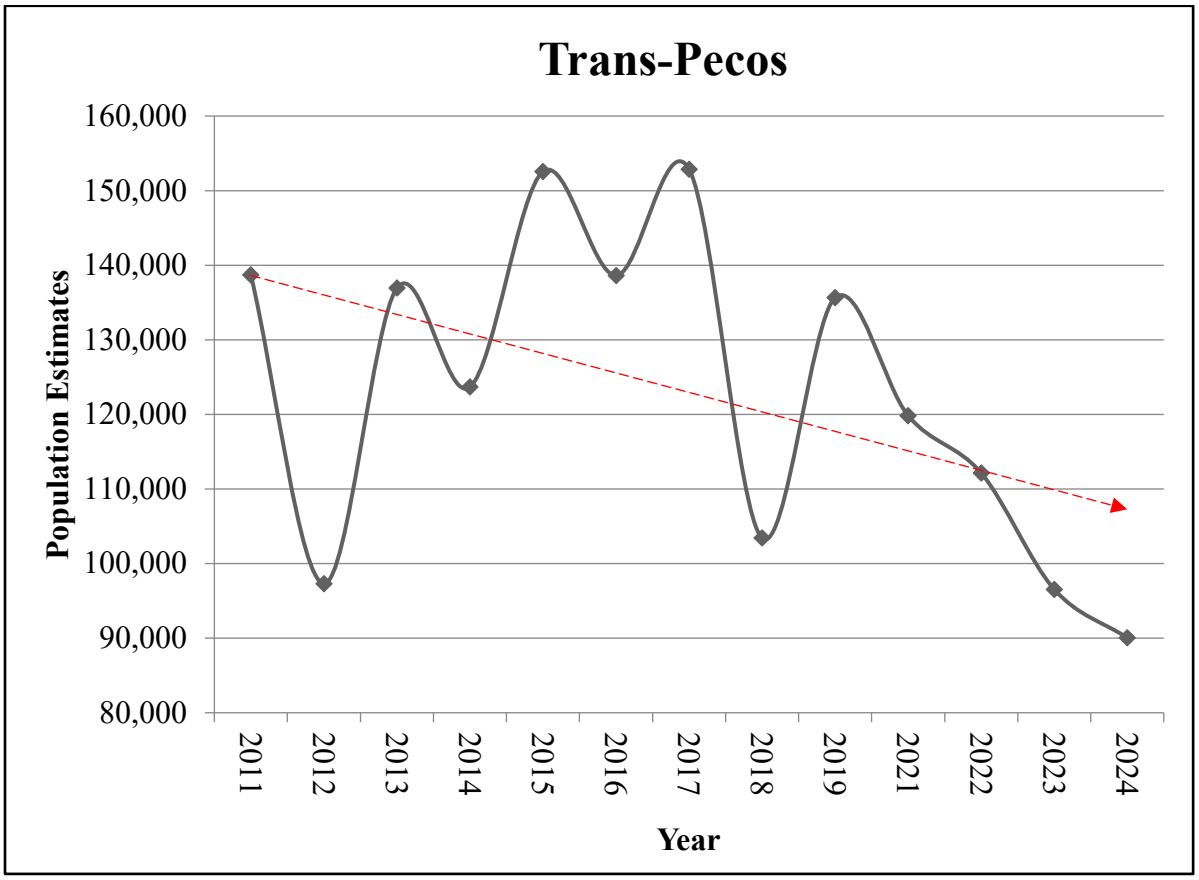

Figure 1. Trends in mule deer population estimates in Trans-Pecos, Texas, 2011–2024.

Panhandle

The Panhandle population trend is on an increasing trend since 2011. However, mule deer numbers have declined after the all-time high documented in 2017 until 2022 when the population seemed to stabilize and then increased in 2023 and 2024. Surveys were not conducted in 2015 and 2020. The 2024 population estimate of 128,437 was near the all-time of 133,048 documented in 2017. Fawn production was 37 fawns:100 does in 2024, which was above the 2023 estimate region average (29 fawns:100 does). The sex ratio for 2024 was 30 bucks:100 does, higher than 2023. Sex ratios have varied from 21 to 36 bucks:100 does since 2011. Sex ratio data indicate a higher harvest rate of mule deer bucks compared to the Trans-Pecos in almost every year, but the post-season sex ratio has been above 25 bucks:100 does 9 out of 12 survey years.

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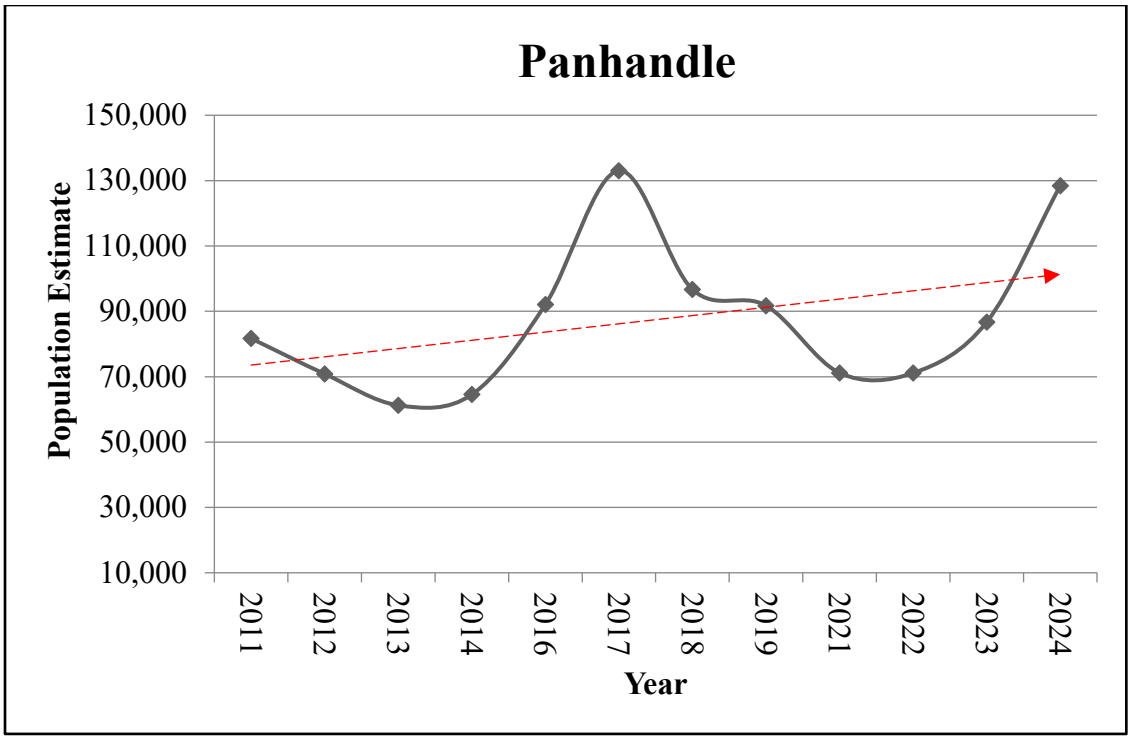

Figure 2. Trends in mule deer population estimates in the Texas Panhandle, 2011–2024.

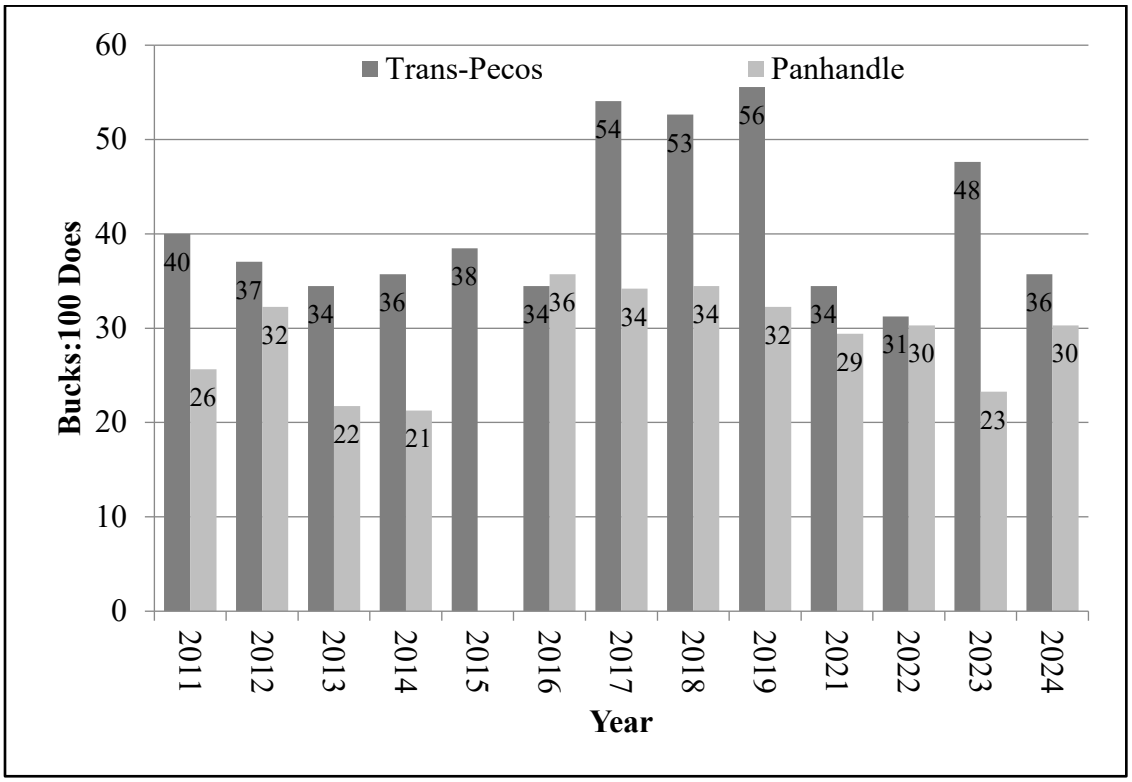

Figure 3. Trends in the number of mule deer bucks per 100 does in the Texas Panhandle and Trans-Pecos areas, 2011–2024.

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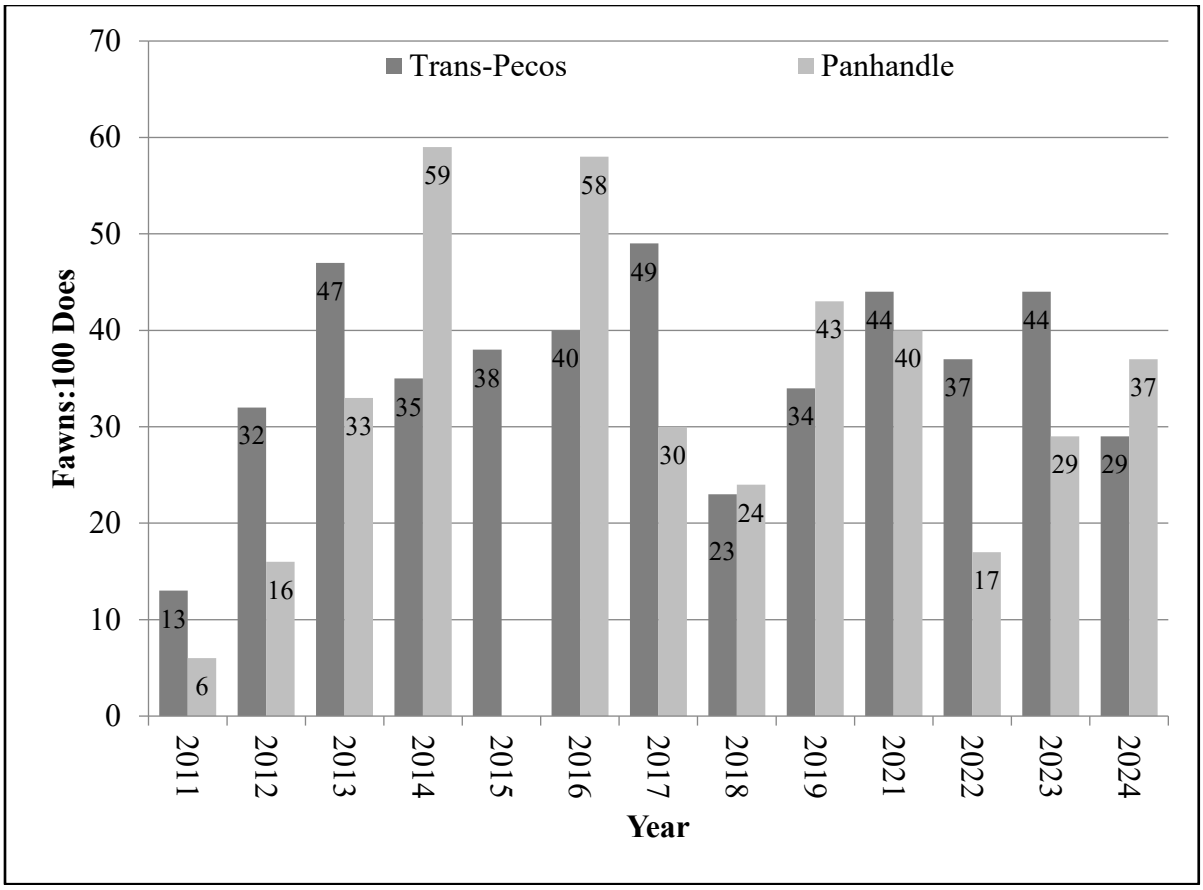

Figure 4. Trends in the number of mule deer fawns per 100 does in the Texas Panhandle and Trans-Pecos areas, 2011–2024.

-Shawn Gray, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Utah

Utah's current statewide mule deer population estimate is 327,570 with a statewide population objective of 421,800 (Figure 1). This is an increase of 32,370 deer from the previous year. While we saw deer population growth in 2025, numbers in Utah are still below recent population highs in the late 20-teens. Extreme drought followed by severe winter conditions during the winter of 2022/2023 resulted in a statewide decrease. Populations have rebounded in the past two years though, and are showing a growing trend. Post-season fawn-to-doe ratios have remained relatively stable at 59 fawns per 100 does in 2025 with a 3-year average of 61/100. Adult and fawn survival is estimated annually by radio-collaring approximately 500 deer on 7 representative units throughout the state. Statewide survival estimates from Dec. 2024 through Dec. 2025 was 81% for adult does and 63% for fawns. As of April 2026, over-winter survival looks very positive. Utah, like other western states has experience extreme drought during the winter of 2025/2026. While this has led to good over-winter survival, we are concerned about what the following year will hold for mule deer. If we get decent spring rain, and good monsoonal moisture in the fall, Utah is poised for another year of growth in 2026. If these drought conditions persist through the summer and fall, mule deer will not be able to pack on the fat reserves needed for next winter.

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The Utah Wildlife Board approved a new statewide deer management plan in Dec. of 2024. This plan is in place for 6 years and included significant changes to deer hunting in Utah. Notable changes included more general season units being managed at a lower buck-to-doe ratio of 15-17 to provide more hunting opportunity, decrease chronic wasting disease risk and to increase herd health and productivity. The new plan also explores the implementation of restricted weapon technology on some units including traditional archery equipment (longbows and recurve bows only) restricted muzzleloaders (no 209 primers, no optics) and restricted rifles (no scopes, no semi-autos). Currently these restrictions are implemented on four management units. These changes will be continue to be studied and evaluated for both potential impacts to deer herds and hunter success rates as well as the reception and attitudes of hunters. The statewide deer plan also directs the Utah DWR to make automatic annual adjustments to deer permit numbers based on plan objectives and observed data. Prior to this change, all permit number adjustments required Regional Advisory Council input and Wildlife Board approval. Now, any permit adjustment that doesn't exceed a 20% change from the previous year happens automatically and is presented as an informational item. If the change does exceed the 20% threshold, it is still presented as an action item for approval.

Utah manages for diverse hunting opportunities and attempts to balance quality and opportunity. We have 31 general-season units that are managed for hunter opportunity with a goal of 15-17 or 18-20 bucks per 100 does following the fall hunts. Utah also has limited-entry units that are managed for increased quality at 25-30 bucks per 100 does. In addition, we have 2 premium limited-entry units that are managed for 40-45 bucks per 100 does.

In 1994, Utah issued 97,000 public draw permits for general-season deer units, and the postseason buck-to-doe ratio was 8 bucks per 100 does. Since that time, buck-to-doe ratios have increased as a result of growing deer populations and decreased buck permits, peaking at 23 bucks per 100 does in 2015 (Figure 2). Buck-to-doe ratios on general season units were stable in 2025 compared to last year, at 22 bucks per 100 does with 81,772 public draw permits issued for the 2025 season. Utah DWR biologists' are recommending increasing permits for the 2026 hunting season to more than 88,000 deer permits, final permit numbers will be approved by the Utah Wildlife Board in May 2026.

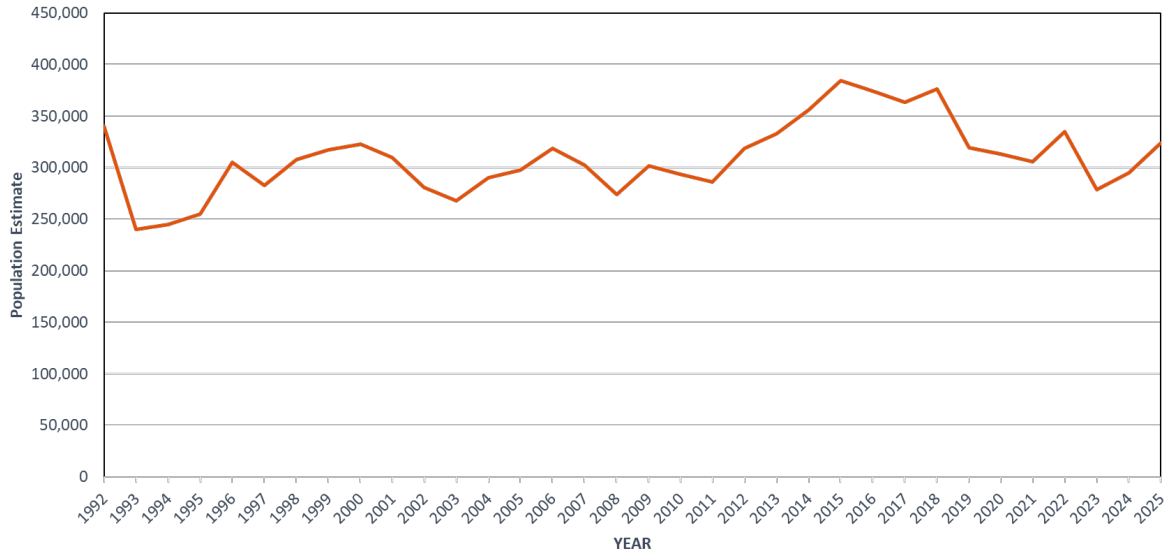

Figure 1. Mule deer population estimates from 1992-2025.

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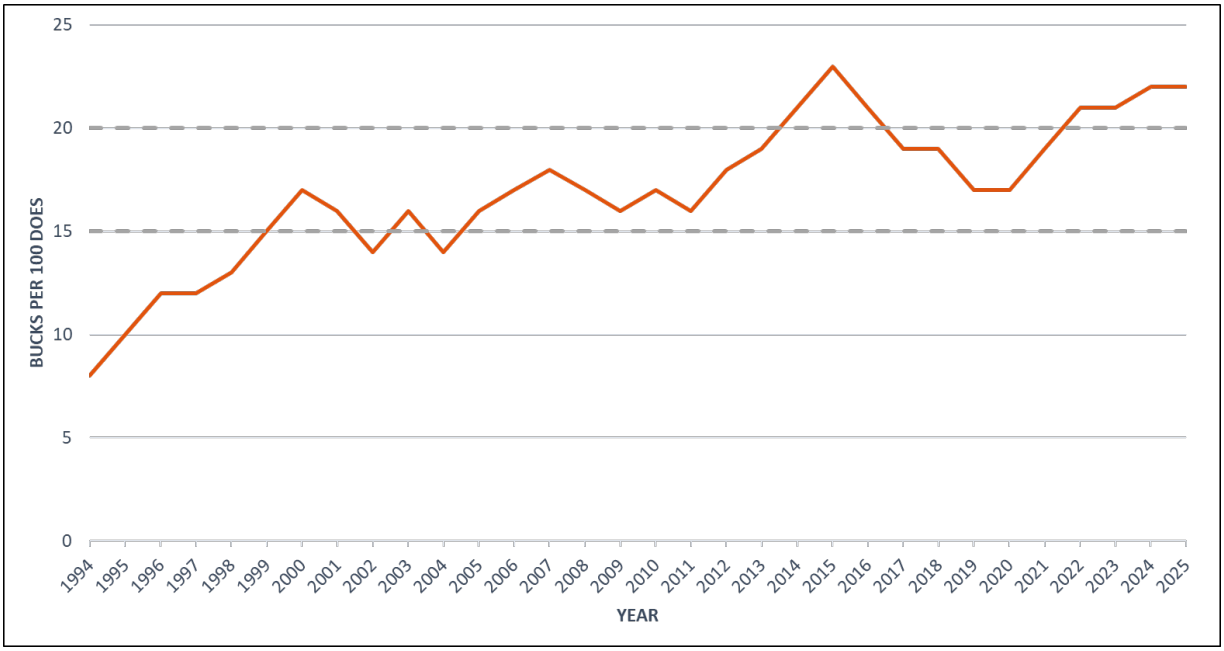

Figure 2. General season buck to doe ratios from 1993-2025.

-Mike Wardle, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

Washington

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) manages mule deer and black-tailed deer populations by geographic zones. Washington hunters enjoy over-the-counter general season opportunity for antlered deer for both species, with a 3-pt minimum for mule deer harvest. WDFW managers maintain conservative antlerless harvest opportunity for both species to promote population stability and growth. Antlerless harvest is primarily offered via limited-entry special permit and informed by abundance estimates via population reconstruction or aerial survey. Harvest statistics are a primary tool for tracking population status for both species, though aerial surveys are also conducted to estimate mule deer demographic composition and, when possible, abundance.

Black-tailed deer status is overall at objective with significant recent increases, as indexed via general season harvest (Figure 1). The 10-year black-tailed deer general season harvest trend points to stable to increasing populations, with 2025 being the second highest harvest in a 10-year period (12,990 general season total; Figure 1) and exceeding the 2005-2015 average of ~11,700 deer harvested. Limited entry special permit harvest in 2025 was 312 deer, down slightly from the 2016-2024 average of 376 deer and a peak of 442 deer in 2016. Primary challenges for black-tailed deer management include limited monitoring tools, disease (particularly adenovirus), limited hunter access, habitat loss via development, and forest management practices. Black-tailed deer abundance generally fluctuates in response to timber harvest frequency or other disturbances that generate early seral habitat.

Mule deer harvest was also stable in 2025 (7,267 general season total; Figure 2) but remains below the 2005-2015 average of ~9,300 deer harvested. Limited entry special permit harvest in

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2025 was 767 deer, continuing a gradual decline from 2016-2024's average of 960 deer and a 10-yr peak of 1,167 in 2016. In 2024, all seven mule deer management zones met agency buck:doe objectives (minimum 15:100 buck:doe), though some zones exhibited reduced fawn ratios or declining abundance (see: 2025 Status and Trend Report). WDFW staff are currently compiling winter 2025-2026 survey data for surveys for the agency's forthcoming annual status and trend report. While mule deer trends appear generally stable, populations remain considerably below historic levels. Major management concerns and stressors for mule deer include environmental conditions: frequent drought, periodically harsh winters, and intense wildfire; habitat loss: conversion to agriculture, energy development, urban expansion, migration barriers; and disease, namely EHD/bluetongue. Habitat management and restoration activities for mule deer are ongoing or in preparation, including movement corridor enhancement and conservation. Projects include restoration of areas impacted by unauthorized vehicle use, weed control, and restoration of native vegetation (e.g., Rx burn and reseeding) on both public and private lands. Continued effort is needed to address deer vehicle collisions, enhance gene flow among mule deer populations, improve crossing structures for irrigation canals (a source of deer mortality), post-fire restoration of shrub steppe habitat, and energy development impact mitigation.

Current mule deer and black-tailed deer collar deployments are small in scale and insufficient to derive statewide survival estimates, though future collar deployments are being considered to improve our understanding of mule deer migration routes – especially in the face of rapid energy development projects in eastern Washington – and to assist in population monitoring. In 2025, WDFW initiated an exciting monitoring project to investigate the use and integration of camera-trap image and GPS collar data to estimate population composition and, potentially, density. Initial results are expected in late 2026 or early 2027.

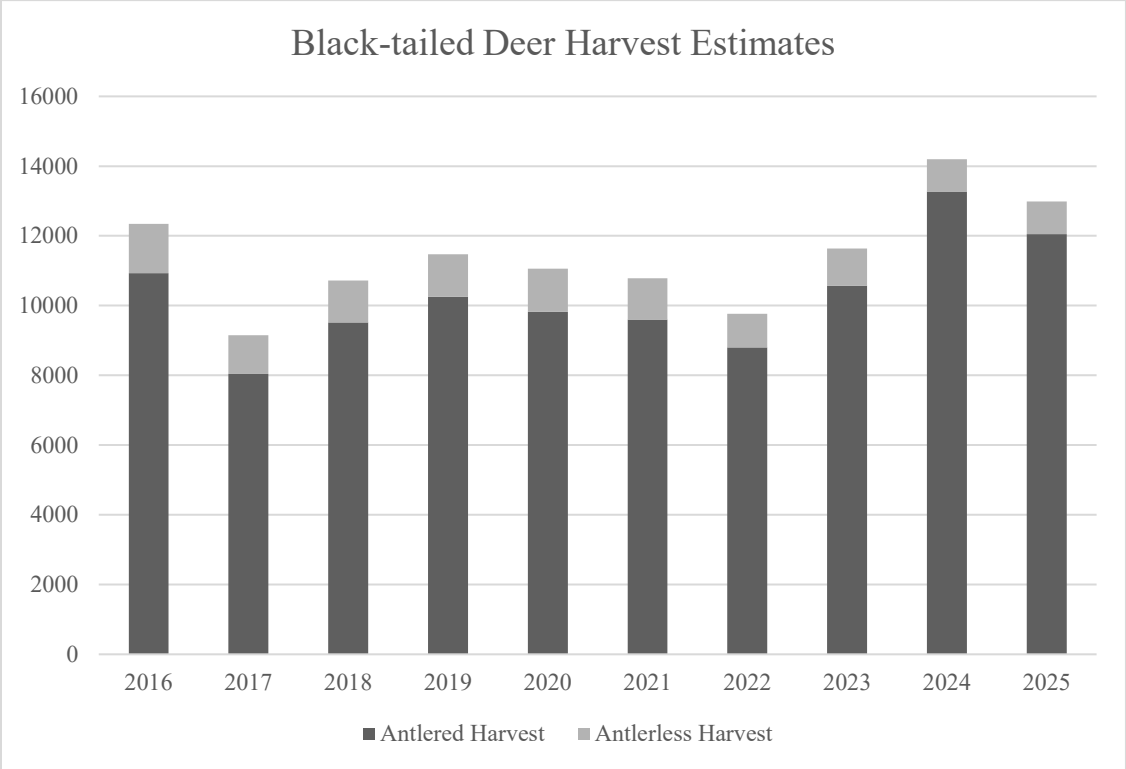

Figure 1. General season black-tailed harvest estimates, 2016-2025, Washington USA.

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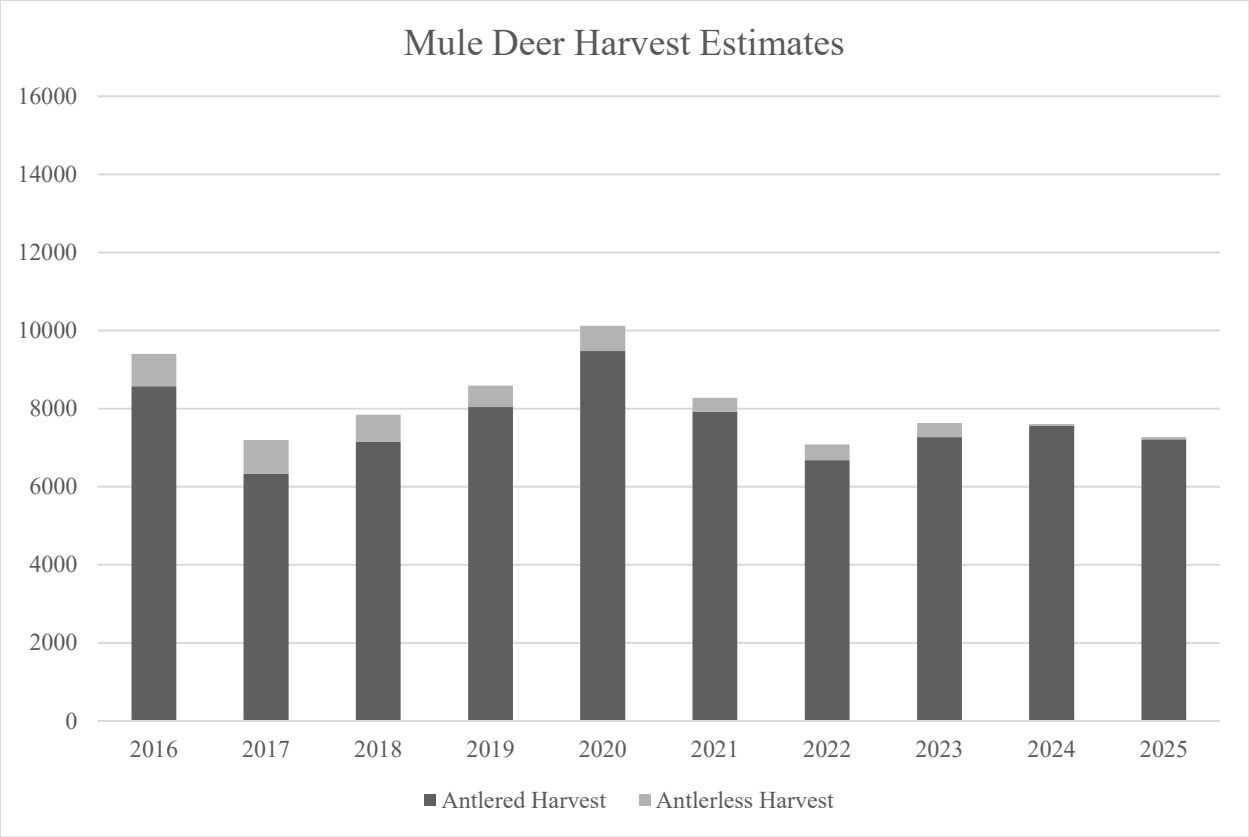

Figure 2. General season mule harvest estimates, 2016-2025, Washington USA.

-Kyle Garrison, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Wyoming

Mule deer populations across Wyoming have shown signs of recovery over the past three years; however, they remain below long-term averages. This trend appears to be largely influenced by density-dependent factors and the significant winter-kill event of 2022/23. Statewide fawn productivity has consistently fallen below the management objective of 66 fawns per 100 does in 19 of the past 26 years.

Survival estimates are derived from the Department's focal herd program, which includes five intensively monitored herds distributed across the state. For calendar year 2025, annual survival rates averaged 80% for adult females, 61% for adult males, and 70% for juveniles.

Despite the overall population decline, postseason buck-to-doe ratios have increased, ranging from 26 to 38 bucks per 100 does, with an average of 32:100 since 2000. However, the broader population trend remains concerning: an estimated 307,200 mule deer—a 56% decrease—have been lost since 2000. Correspondingly, mule deer harvest numbers have dropped 62% over the same period. Following the 2025 hunting season, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department estimated the statewide mule deer population at approximately 237,700 which is 46% below the management objective of 437,600. This decline reflects both long-term population reductions and a transition in estimation methodology. Since 2022, Wyoming has implemented Integrated Population Models (IPMs), which have produced estimates that differ substantially from previous spreadsheet-based approaches.

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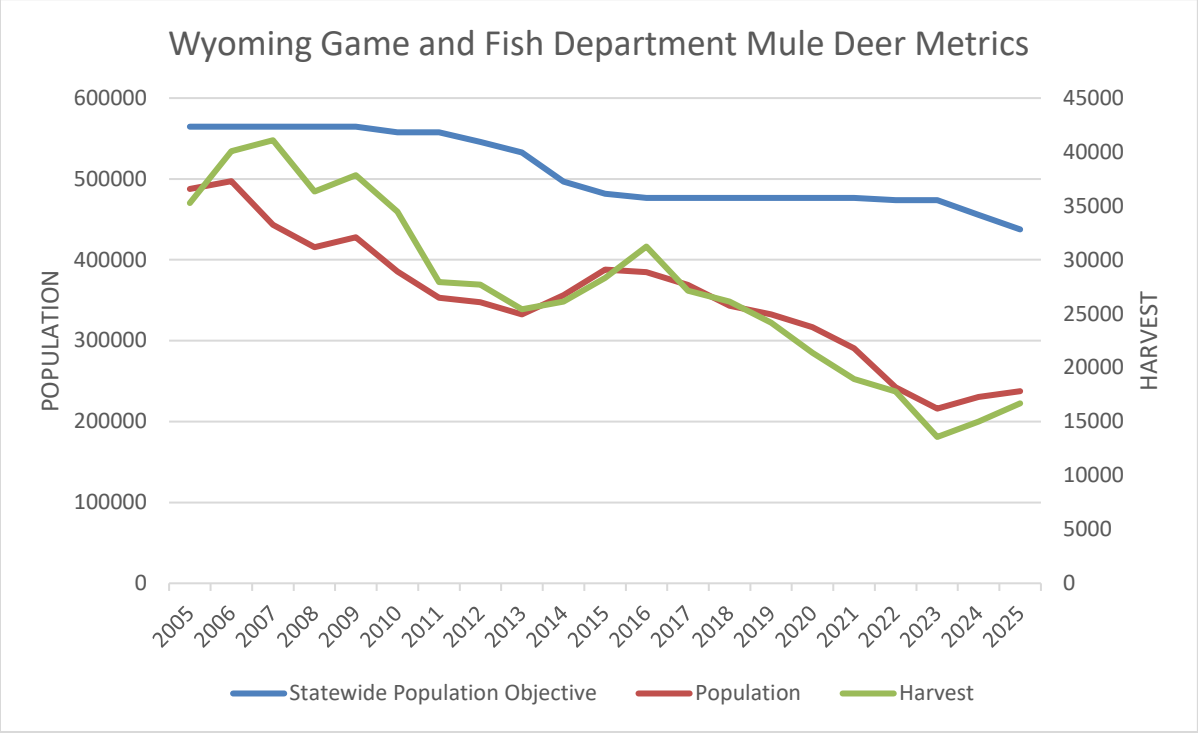
Of Wyoming's 37 mule deer herd units, only four (11%) are currently at objective, while 33 herds (89%) remain below objective; no herds exceed objective levels. In response, hunting opportunities in recent years have been largely limited to buck-only harvests.



- Ian Tator, Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Yukon

For the past 4 years, dedicated funding has supported a focused study in the agricultural–wilderness matrix north of Whitehorse—the area with the highest deer density in the Yukon and where most licensed hunters choose to hunt. The study has three main components: a long-term camera grid, a collaring program to study habitat selection and migration corridors, and aerial surveys to estimate population size and composition.

To date, a grid of 50 cameras has been deployed for long-term monitoring. More than 100 winter deer captures have been conducted (2024 and 2025), resulting in the collaring of 20 does with GPS collars (collecting location data every 4 hours), 6 does with solar-powered collars (fixing every 15 minutes under optimal conditions), and 3 bucks with solar cellular ear tags. Preliminary movement data continue to show that approximately half of collared deer remain within the study area year-round, while the other half migrate considerable distances to summer ranges before returning to winter range. Long-distance movements have been documented, with at least one individual traveling over 150 km. Ongoing monitoring of collared animals will continue to refine understanding of seasonal habitat use and movement patterns. Comprehensive collar data analyses are planned for 2027.

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In early-winter 2024, an aerial survey was conducted using a fixed-wing RPAS equipped with infrared and RGB sensors to document mule deer distribution and composition in southern Yukon. Survey effort covered approximately 415 km² of known and suspected winter range in the Whitehorse area. A total of 130 deer were observed, of which 100 were confidently classified, including 14 adult males, 6 yearling males, 67 females, and 13 fawns; 30 individuals were classified as unknown. Among classified animals, the observed buck:doe ratio was approximately 30:100. A limited sightability assessment based on collared individuals indicated high detection under survey conditions (8 of 9 collared deer observed; ~89% detection). These data represent the first systematic aerial assessment of mule deer in the Yukon and provide a baseline for future monitoring.

The first regulated deer hunting season was introduced in 2006. Licensed hunters must apply through a lottery system for one of ten male-only permits issued annually. Interest remains high, with approximately 400–500 applicants each year. Since 2010, two youth permits have been issued annually. More recently, in 2025 permit numbers have increased to 10 in the core area and 6 in the periphery with 4 youth permits than can be hunted in either zone. First Nation beneficiaries are entitled to harvest deer under their subsistence rights; however, harvest data are not currently available. In the 2025 season, the licensed harvest totaled 8 deer (including 3 youth harvested deer). Vehicle collisions involving deer continue to represent a notable source of mortality in the Whitehorse area, with 19 collisions documented in 2025. Annual licensed harvests have historically ranged from 4 to 10 bucks.

-Sophie Czetwertynski, Yukon Department of Environment

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