



Mule Deer  
Working Group

# Fact Sheet

## TECHNOLOGY AND ITS EFFECT ON BLACK-TAILED AND MULE DEER HUNTING

### Fact Sheet #42

#### OVERVIEW

Advances in hunting technology have been substantial over the past 60 years. Advancements that increase hunting success can result in reduced hunting opportunities, season length, or timing. Even with consistent abundance, male-to-female ratios, and success rates, mule deer herds may have a younger average age of bucks because hunters can now locate and harvest more or older males.

Hunting technology includes clothing, weapons and ammunition, optics, backpacks, transportation methods, trail cameras, drones, hunting apps and mapping programs, social media, and communication devices. Advances in technology and equipment have changed mule deer hunting with the most significant changes occurring in weapons and accessories, transportation, cameras, and drones.

Just a couple generations ago, many hunters used weapons with open sights or basic scopes that limited effective ranges to under 200 yards. Hunting access was mostly using two-wheel drive trucks. Hunters often left the truck on foot and bulky, less efficient clothing limited the time they could be exposed to inclement weather. Handheld devices were mostly limited to a map, compass, and possibly a camera, but things have changed a lot since then.

#### HUNTING WEAPONS

The combination of modern rifles, more choices in calibers and ammunition, and improved optics enables hunters to easily shoot two to three times farther with more accuracy than in the past. Advanced scopes matched with cartridges take the guesswork out of long-range shots. Early archery equipment was recurves and longbows, but the invention of compound bows was a significant leap forward in technology. Continued advances in archery equipment also now enables archers to shoot much farther with more accuracy, which can result in more bowhunters in the field.

#### TRANSPORTATION

How hunters get to hunting areas has changed. Many hunters now use some form of a four-wheel drive vehicle. Off-highway vehicles are increasingly capable of carrying more passengers farther into the backcountry. Electronic bikes are emerging as a form of technology capable of getting



individuals and their gear deep into undeveloped areas with little effort. This evolution of off-highway vehicles, combined with increasing road and trail networks, has dramatically increased accessibility to mule deer hunting areas.

## **CAMERAS AND DRONES**

Many hunters scouted hunting areas on foot, or possibly horseback 60 years ago. Use of trail cameras for scouting increased in popularity in the early 2000s. Advancements in trail cameras have taken hunters from seeing a nice buck heading over a ridge to having a full series of photos through summer chronicling the habits and antler growth of individual deer. Remote cameras linked to smart devices now notify hunters in real time when an animal is in a specific area. This technology is making electronic scouting even more prevalent. Drone technology for use outside of the military wasn't readily available until after 2005. Now the affordability of camera-equipped drones has increased their use as a mule deer hunting tool.

## **WHAT'S ON YOUR PHONE**

Cell phones have evolved dramatically and are changing hunting forever. Phones are now handheld computers with satellite capabilities. Not just for communication, phones are mapping devices that include satellite imagery, land ownership information, and hunt unit boundaries. These applications make learning new areas and navigating property boundaries far easier. Data are shareable between users standing next to one another or around the world. Cell phone camera technology now links photos with GPS points and can make spotting scopes more convenient by capturing, enlarging, and enhancing images. Mature bucks rarely go unnoticed with pictures taken well before hunting seasons start. Some agencies even allow and promote checking in harvested animals remotely on your phone. The concept of a secret hunting or camping spot is now getting to be a thing that only the well-seasoned hunters remember.

## **MANAGING CHANGE**

Much of this change has been incremental, and most hunters using it feel the technology has always been available. However, these technological advances have accumulated over time and have caused substantial change for hunters, hunting, and ultimately success rates. New hunters may not give much thought to technological advances since the "old days" of 15 years ago! Hunters are naturally on a constant quest to improve their success. Being better prepared with quality gear lets hunters stay afield longer and harvest deer more humanely. Maximizing success is important for many hunters, but technological advances come with costs. Advances in hunting technology have undoubtedly increased hunter success rates, and this increased effectiveness can lead to restrictions in the number of tags available, season length, season timing, and allowable hunting weapons (archery, rifle, muzzleloader).

Some states intentionally limit use of technological advances, whereas others do not. Differences in limitations between jurisdictions affect hunters traveling from one jurisdiction to another. Hunting equipment legal in one jurisdiction may not be legal in another. Limiting technology after it is popular in the marketplace is difficult, and agencies may encounter resistance from hunters, guides, and manufacturers. Jurisdictions with limits on hunting technology are continually pressured to loosen restrictions. Despite these pressures, a variety of limitations is in place in many western states and provinces to manage the effects of increasing hunter success rates on mule deer.

## **SUMMARY**

Hunters must understand that improved hunting success from advances in technology may reduce future hunting opportunities. How agencies manage technological advancement will continue to be an issue for mule deer hunters across the West. In addition to what is legal, hunters must consider what is ethical and considered fair chase. With inevitable increases in technology, we will need to determine the right mix of hunting opportunity versus freedom to use technology.

More information on mule deer can be found at [muledeerworkinggroup.com](http://muledeerworkinggroup.com)