

Wyoming Game and Fish Department's Implementation Plan

For the Lander/Green Mountain Mule Deer Working Group's
Recommendations for the South Wind River and
Sweetwater Mule Deer Herd Units



May 18, 2016

Table of Contents

Preface.....2

Research and Monitoring3

Adaptive Management.....4

Hunting Season Structure.....5

Habitat Management 10

Education and Public Outreach 14

All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs)..... 16

Predator Management..... 18

Wildlife Law Enforcement and WGFD Field Presence..... 20

Appendix A. Responses to Recommendations from the Lander/Green Mountain Mule Deer Working Group that will not be implemented..... 22

Preface

The Lander/Green Mountain Mule Deer Initiative was started in 2014 in response to extensive and growing public concern about mule deer numbers and mule deer hunting opportunity in the South Wind River and Sweetwater herd units. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) is aware of public desire to consider change(s) in mule deer hunting season structure and management direction to improve mule deer populations in these two herd units.

The Lander/Green Mountain Mule Deer Working Group (Working Group) was established by WGFD in June 2014 and was comprised of 13 citizens representing the public at large, landowners/livestock producers, hunters (one was a youth), outfitters, area business persons, and WGFD Lander Region field level wildlife managers. The purpose of the Working Group was to “assist the WGFD’s Lander Region in an analysis of the South Wind River mule deer herd unit (Deer Hunt Areas 92, 94, and 160) and the Sweetwater mule deer herd unit (Deer Hunt Areas 96 and 97)” and “to provide WGFD with recommendations that may be used in developing short and long-term herd management recommendations for mule deer in Deer Hunt Areas 92, 94, 96, 97, and 160.” The Working Group met over the course of a year and half, and presented WGFD with mule deer management recommendations in August 2015. Some of these recommendations were also presented to the public in December 2014, during the hunting season setting process in spring 2015, and again in December 2015.

WGFD is very appreciative of the time and effort the Working Group expended developing their recommendations. WGFD has and will continue to review and consider their recommendations as this plan is implemented.

This plan serves as a response to and “implementation plan” for the Working Group’s recommendations. This plan addresses management issues as prioritized by the Working Group including: 1) Research and Monitoring, 2) Adaptive Management, 3) Hunting Season Structure, 4) Habitat Management, 5) Education and Public Outreach, 6) All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs), 7) Predator Management, and 8) Wildlife Law Enforcement and WGFD Field Presence. In this plan, WGFD presents strategies, actions, and proposed timelines for implementation considering WGFD resources and statutory authorities. These responses are listed in the same order as the objectives and strategies as presented in the “Lander/Green Mountain Mule Deer Working Group’s Recommendations for the South Wind River & Sweetwater Herd Units” (August 2015).

A critical component of this plan is an explanation of those recommendations WGFD is not implementing. These responses and explanations are included in *red italics* throughout the body of the plan and also in Appendix A.

Research and Monitoring

A. Improve our understanding of mule deer ecology and movement patterns and utilize this gained knowledge to affect management responses.

- The Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) has partnered with The Nature Conservancy and the Wyoming Migration Initiative (WMI) through the Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit to fit mule deer with satellite collars to map their migration corridors in detail for the first time in the South Wind River herd unit. The study will identify movement timing and routes/corridors, stopover areas, and seasonal uses of other habitats, which will be useful in guiding private and public land conservation opportunities and inform management decisions for mule deer in the Lander area. This work will complement ongoing work by WMI to document big game migrations across Wyoming. *(Mule deer capture to deploy 30 satellite collars will occur in March 2016, with a similar number in March 2017)*
- WGFD will develop a similar project proposal to deploy radio collars to garner similar movement and habitat use data for the Sweetwater herd unit. *(Spring 2016)*
- WGFD will work with personnel from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) who have proposed a study in the Green Mountain area intended to identify impacts to wildlife and livestock from free-ranging horses. WGFD will provide guidance to USGS regarding desired outcomes relevant to mule deer in the Sweetwater herd unit. *(Coordination in Spring/Summer 2016, uncertain timeline for actual implementation)*
- WGFD will continue to work with the Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative and Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) and other agencies or organizations to evaluate mule deer mortality from vehicle collisions and develop recommendations to ameliorate those risks wherever possible and feasible. *(Ongoing)*
- WGFD will continue to annually monitor and evaluate the prevalence, transmission, and spread of chronic wasting disease (CWD). WGFD will continue to monitor the occurrence of other diseases such as epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD). *(Ongoing)*

B. Improve our knowledge how various vegetation management techniques affect mule deer and their habitat.

- WGFD utilizes a number of techniques to monitor habitat conditions across Wyoming, both in treated sites as well as undisturbed habitats. Recently, WGFD developed “Rapid Habitat Assessments” to prioritize areas for treatment and to develop a baseline from which to gauge overall habitat condition across the landscapes of the South Wind River and Sweetwater mule deer herd units and will continue throughout the coming years. *(Ongoing, additional emphasis added upon completion of habitat management plans)*
- Once vegetation treatments are designed, pre- and post-treatment monitoring transects are initiated based on treatment type. Vegetation and mule deer use monitoring techniques will be identified in the upcoming habitat management plans and will be designed to meet a specific set of monitoring needs for each treatment. *(Ongoing, additional emphasis added upon completion of habitat management plans and as movement data are received)*

Adaptive Management

A. Review the status of the South Wind River and Sweetwater herd units and adjust management of hunting seasons and populations based on sound and scientific research and management data.

- The management objectives were revised for both the South Wind River and Sweetwater mule deer herd units in 2015. Assuming moisture and habitat conditions continue to improve and average fawn recruitment and harvest is achieved, it seems reasonable both mule deer herds will reach the new objectives by 2019, based on current population trends.
(Next objective reviews in 2020)
- To reduce damage on private lands, especially to standing crops, doe/fawn harvest will continue when necessary. Doe/fawn harvest will also be considered in response to declining habitat conditions and to maintain mule deer populations at objective.
(Evaluated annually)
- In the past, mule deer population decline and hunter crowding have created **strong** public opposition to continued general license hunting. In 2015, the Working Group recognized the need to address hunter crowding while maintaining maximum hunter opportunity and recommended WGFD implement a split limited-quota license season in these herd units. This recommendation was offered to the public for input using a web-based survey during fall 2015 and was presented at the 2015 post-season public meetings. Based on these data and public input it is clear hunter crowding, while a continued concern for some, is no longer a major concern for many. This is likely due to mule deer population increase the past two years. WGFD anticipates if this trend continues, general license hunting will be both appropriate and publicly supported. *Therefore, WGFD is not proposing the recommended changes to hunting season structure at this time. WGFD is committed to hearing from the public through the 2016 season setting process. WGFD will also continue to evaluate the need for implementing a limited-quota license structure in these herd units, if and when the circumstances described in the “Hunting Season Structure” section change.*
- WGFD will utilize processes within our current framework to respond to unexpected circumstances resulting in mule deer declines to minimize impact of hunting seasons. This includes: withdrawing unsold licenses and utilizing the “emergency regulation” process to change hunting season structure. *(Ongoing throughout the year)*

Hunting Season Structure

A principal basis for creation of the Lander/Green Mountain Mule Deer Initiative was to collaboratively develop strategies to improve mule deer populations and mule deer hunting opportunity in the South Wind River and Sweetwater herd units. As the Working Group met, they gathered information about mule deer ecology, mule deer populations, habitats, past hunting seasons, and many other issues impacting mule deer in these herd units. In August 2015, the working group presented WGFD with mule deer management recommendations, including several recommended changes to the existing hunting season structure. The hunting season structure recommendations were presented to the public in December 2015, following extensive outreach during fall 2015.

The Working Group's primary goal for recommended changes to hunting season structure was to "Balance Hunting Opportunity with Reduced Hunter Crowding." Input received at a workshop held in April 2014, as well as responses to an initial hunter survey regarding these herd units indicated hunters were concerned about increasing hunter densities and decreasing quality of their hunting experience.

To address this goal the Working Group recommended a split limited-quota season structure for both herd units, a Type 9 archery only license valid for all 5 deer hunt areas, and continued General Deer Youth license any deer seasons. In fall 2015, the Working Group and WGFD embarked on an extensive outreach effort to engage the public and gauge their responsiveness on these recommended changes. A survey was developed and mailed to hunters in the Lander, Riverton, Jeffrey City, and Casper areas known to hunt mule deer in the South Wind River and/or the Sweetwater herd unit. The survey was also distributed during WGFD field contacts/game check stations and by email.

Approximately 1,900 contacts were made to solicit survey responses from those who hunt in these areas. Of the 217 responses received, 92 (42%) supported the recommendations, 82 (38%) did not support the recommendations and 43 (20%) partially supported the recommendations (Figure 1).

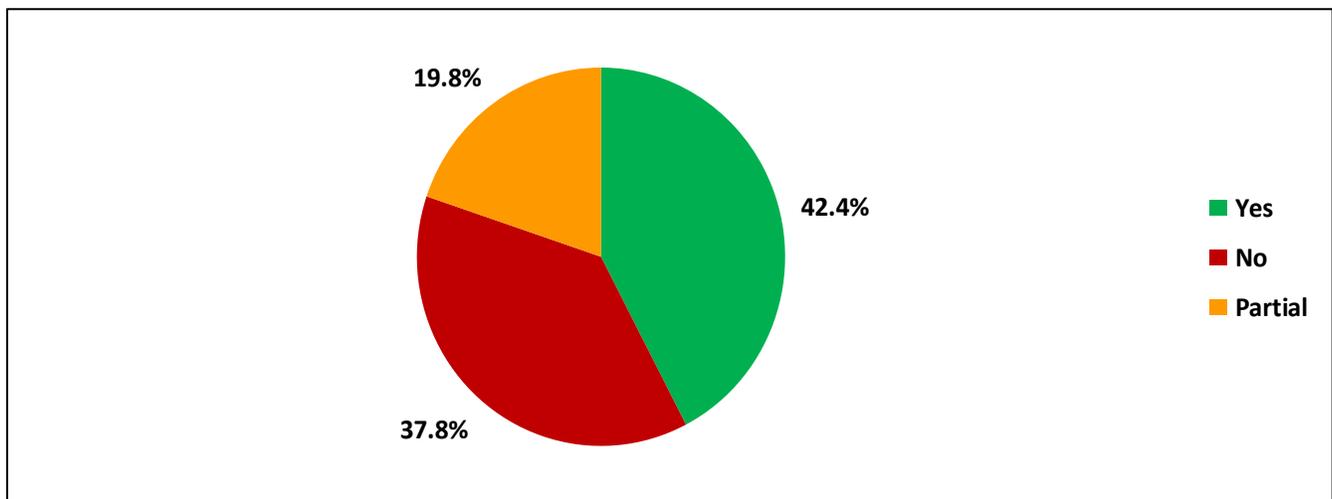


Figure 1. Survey results for the Lander/Green Mountain Mule Deer Working Group's recommendations to implement split limited-quota seasons, a type 9 archery license, and maintain General Deer Youth License any deer seasons.

“Partial support” was selected by 43 individuals when they only supported portions of the recommendations. Of those 43 responses, 24 supported limited-quota license seasons and 17 did not (for 2 responses, it was unclear whether or not they supported limited-quota license seasons and are not included in any further analyses). When assimilating these responses back into the survey as a whole, overall support for the limited-quota license season structure recommendation was almost evenly split with 116 (54%) in support and 99 (46%) in opposition (Figure 2).

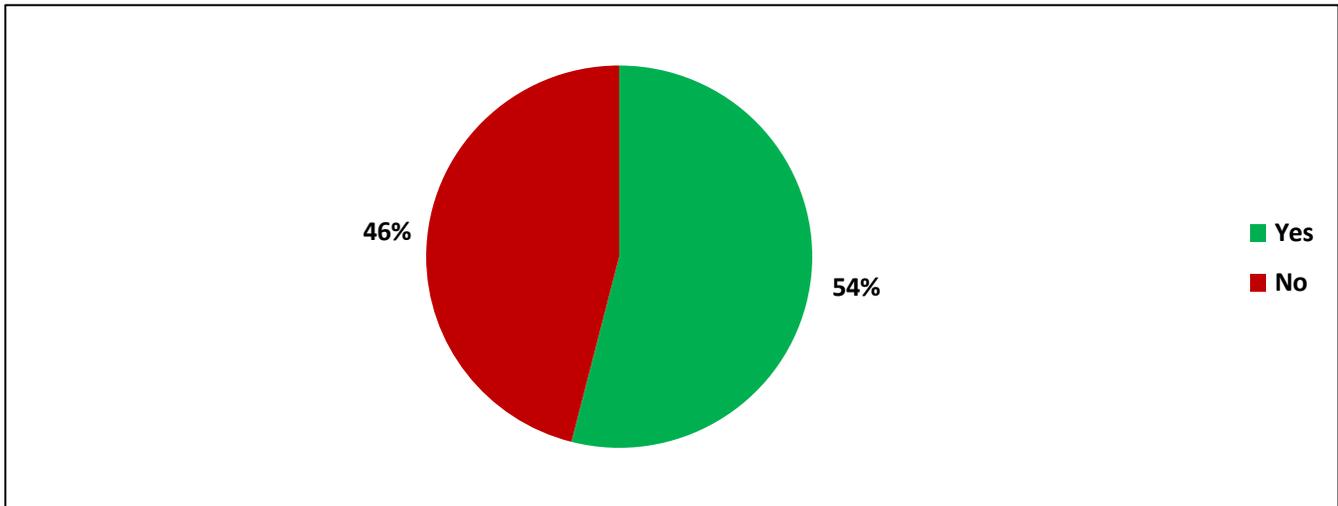


Figure 2. Survey results for the Lander/Green Mountain Mule Deer Working Group’s recommendation to implement split limited-quota license seasons.

The Working Group also presented their recommendations at WGFD post-season public meetings in Lander and Riverton in late-November and early-December, 2015. WGFD personnel presented the Working Group’s recommendations in Rawlins and Casper. Overall, public input received at these meetings mirror that from the survey. Some supported the limited-quota license season recommendation and some didn’t. There was general support in Lander and Riverton and, in contrast, opposition in Rawlins and Casper.

Based on survey data, along with input received at the public meetings and WGFD field contacts it is clear there is not over-whelming support to implement limited-quota license seasons in these herd units. Perhaps most importantly, a good number of people who were either contacted or filled out the survey continue to misunderstand the reason limited-quota license seasons were recommended. Many incorrectly assume limited-quota license seasons will increase mule deer numbers and thus tended to support the idea. Regardless, there remains a lot of confusion among the public what limited-quota license seasons will do, what they won’t do, and how they will or will not affect hunting opportunity.

A. Minimize the extent to which competing ungulates impact mule deer populations.

- WGFD manages big game species based on Wyoming Game and Fish Commission (Commission) approved population objectives. Other big game populations such as white-tailed deer or elk may limit mule deer. WGFD believes impacts from other wildlife species across the range of the South Wind River and Sweetwater herd units are important on a localized level. WGFD will continue to manage all big game populations towards the population objective to

avoid negative habitat impacts and minimize competition between wildlife species. (*Annual reviews*)

- WGFD will continue to coordinate and cooperate with federal and state agency partners and private landowners/public land grazing permittees to provide input on grazing plans throughout the herd units and Coordinated Resource Management teams in Red Canyon and the Antelope Hills.

(Annual coordination with other agencies and private landowners/public land permittees)

- Free-ranging horses are managed by the Bureau of Land Management and WGFD supports management goals of maintaining horse numbers within the Appropriate Management Levels for each Herd Management Area.

(Annual coordination with other agencies and private landowners/public land permittees)

B. Balance Hunting Opportunity with Reduced Hunter Crowding

- *WGFD is not recommending implementation of limited-quota license mule deer seasons in the South Wind River or the Sweetwater herd units at this time for these reasons:*

1. There simply is not enough support to shift to a limited-quota license season structure to address hunter crowding. It is clear hunter crowding, while a continued concern for some, is no longer a major concern for many.
2. There remains a significant amount of confusion and misunderstanding the effect limited-quota license seasons will have on mule deer populations and hunting opportunity. It is WGFD's perspective based on the survey and public input that many who support limited-quota license seasons simply do so because they believe it will result in increased numbers of mule deer in these herd units. Limited-quota license seasons will **not** bring mule deer back. As such, it would be a disservice to the public and to the resource for WGFD to unnecessarily restrict hunting opportunity. WGFD will continue to evaluate the need for implementing a limited-quota license structure in these herd units if and when the circumstances described in the "Hunting Season Structure" section change.
3. The mule deer populations have increased the past two years in both herd units and, correspondingly, there are increased numbers of bucks available for harvest. This is likely alleviating complaints and perceptions of hunter crowding.
4. Because limited-quota license seasons in these herd units would have far reaching statewide implications, WGFD needs to consider those implications and other options (i.e., "resident regions").

- The Working Group favored the statewide "resident region" concept to any other season structure including the split limited-quota license season recommendation. But, because the resident region concept would require change statewide, the Working Group focused on management in the South Wind River and Sweetwater herd units. The Lander Region will request Wildlife Division and Department administration re-examine the "resident region" concept for statewide implementation.

(March-April 2016)

- WGFD will carry forward the working group’s recommendation regarding opening dates for white-tailed deer seasons under the existing Type 3 (Any White-tailed Deer) and Type 8 (Doe or fawn White-tailed Deer) license structure. The proposed opening dates of October 1 for these license types in Deer Hunt Areas 92, 94, 160 and October 15 in Deer Hunt Area 97, will be presented via the standard 2016 season setting process, and if supported by the public, will be implemented in the 2016 seasons. *(March-April 2016)*
- WGFD will continue to propose General License seasons for youth hunters in each herd unit during the 2016 season setting process. *(March-April 2016)*
- *The Type 9 archery-only license recommendation is a component of the limited-quota license recommendation and is unnecessary in the absence of limited-quota license seasons.*
- WGFD will continue to consider how timing of deer hunting seasons may impact hunting for other species (and vice versa), with regard to hunter crowding and influence on harvest. This is particularly important in the South Wind River and Sweetwater herd units with respect to deer and elk hunting overlap, and which current seasons are designed to minimize conflicts. *(Annually, especially during season setting)*

C. Limit unneeded and unregulated doe/fawn harvest

- WGFD is proposing to change the archery hunting regulation by not allowing the harvest of “any deer” by archery hunters in a General License area. This proposal will be taken to the public in March and April 2016. *(March-April 2016)*
- *WGFD will not implement a restriction limiting youth hunters to “antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer”. This was discussed on a statewide level and was decided youth opportunity to take “any deer” is important to recruit youth hunters. Also, the number of mule deer does or fawns taken by youths in these herd units, and statewide, is minimal and has no effect on population change.*
- When damage to crops occurs on privately owned land, WGFD will analyze these situations and recommend an appropriate number of doe/fawn licenses to minimize mule deer (as well as white-tailed deer or pronghorn, where appropriate), while considering population objectives. *(Annual considerations during season setting process, objective reviews, and damage management reviews)*

D. Ensure those who choose to archery hunt are properly educated to best ensure safety and ethical behavior similar to those who hunt with a rifle.

- *There are very few instructors certified to teach the voluntary bowhunter education classes currently available. More instructors would be needed to meet the demand of a required course to ensure all who wanted to hunt with archery would meet the training requirements. Also, to make bowhunter hunter education mandatory would require statutory action by the Wyoming State Legislature.*

- WGFD continues to encourage archery hunters to participate in the voluntary bowhunter education courses currently offered.

Habitat Management

A. Implement vegetation management practices and treatments to enhance and or protect mule deer habitat on a landscape scale, while considering ecological and economic effects and impacts on other species.

- WGFD will develop and/or update habitat management plans for each herd unit, including protocols for design and implementation of treatments to maintain healthy and productive mule deer seasonal ranges with emphasis on late-summer and transition habitats. Each mule deer herd unit's plan will be updated as additional information comes to light due to collaring efforts and research (*Summer 2016*). Components of these plans will include:
 - WGFD will provide a summary of projects completed, projects ongoing, and projects proposed. In 2016, WGFD will be continuing work on the South Pass Aspen project and is initiating a similar aspen project on Green Mountain and additional cheatgrass control work in Red Canyon. (*Summer 2016 and beyond*)
 - WGFD will continue to design and implement habitat projects to maintain and enhance productive mule deer seasonal ranges. (*Ongoing*)
 - When developing habitat improvement projects WGFD will utilize the recently published "Recommendations for Managing Mule Deer Habitat in Wyoming" and will adhere to WGFD Protocols for Treating Sagebrush.
 - WGFD will provide a map of protected mule deer habitat and important areas to consider for additional protection and conservation for each herd unit. WGFD will continue to seek long-term protection of important mule deer habitats through land acquisitions, conservation easements, cooperative agreements and land-use management plans. (*Summer 2016 – Ongoing*)
 - WGFD will coordinate with state and federal land management agencies to discuss fire management plans/policies that, under appropriate conditions, may allow natural ignition wildfires to burn when they will benefit mule deer. (*Winter 2016-2017*)
 - WGFD will coordinate with state and federal land management agencies to discuss timber management activities designed to maintain and improve mule deer habitat, specifically including clear-cuts, stand thinning, and aspen and cottonwood enhancement. (*Winter 2016-2017*)

B. Improve habitats in crucial areas as determined by movement research.

- WGFD will utilize mule deer movement and habitat use studies to refine and improve our knowledge of important migration corridors, and habitats. This information will be utilized to conduct migration corridor risk assessments and development and/or modification of habitat management plans and enhancement projects as outlined in the preceding subsection. (*Implementation will begin as data are received from collar studies and other sources*)

- WGFD will continue collaboration with other agencies and land managers to develop and implement habitat management plans. *(Spring/Summer 2016)*

C. Reduce spread of noxious and invasive species to improve habitat.

- In conjunction with weed and pest districts and land management agencies, WGFD will map areas where non-native invasive plants threaten mule deer habitat in the South Wind River and Sweetwater herd units and evaluate the risk of invasive species establishment in mule deer habitats. Once mapped, WGFD and partners will work to aggressively treat non-native invasive plants using chemical, mechanical, biological, and grazing techniques. *(Mapping of invasive plants is being done and should be completed Spring 2017 and will be updated annually)*
- WGFD will continue with on-going invasive treatments and work with private landowners and public land managers to prioritize and treat new areas. *(Ongoing and included in mapping exercise above)*
- WGFD will cooperate with multi-agency partnerships, including county weed and pest districts, to develop coordinated approaches to identify and prioritize cheatgrass infestations and fund and implement control programs on public and private lands. The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) has new guidelines for cheatgrass treatments which will be helpful when working with private landowners. Fremont County recently declared cheatgrass a noxious weed, which should be helpful in securing additional funds for treatments. *(Ongoing)*
- WGFD will cooperate with other agencies and non-governmental organizations to increase public awareness about invasive plant species and measures they can take to reduce their spread. WGFD will continue to work with Fremont County Weed and Pest District to promote their Play, Clean, Go Initiative. *(Ongoing)*

D. Improve our knowledge how vegetation management affects mule deer and other species.

- WGFD will use Rapid Habitat Assessments to identify problem areas and assess vegetative production/utilization. The Eastern Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem mule deer project will help prioritize important habitats. Conducting vegetation assessments and monitoring requires additional man-power. WGFD will seek opportunities through joint ventures to provide seasonal personnel to increase assessment and monitoring efforts. *(Ongoing, additional emphasis added upon completion of habitat management plans)*
- WGFD will continue assessment and monitoring to better understand changes in vegetation communities as a result of management actions and how mule deer and other herbivores use those communities. *(Ongoing)*
- WGFD will follow “Recommendations for Managing Mule Deer Habitat in Wyoming” when designing habitat improvement projects, and follow habitat guidelines for other wildlife which may be influenced by treatments designed to enhance mule deer habitat. Similarly, when habitat treatments are planned in areas such as shrub-dominated winter and transitional ranges or aspen communities, but the treatments are intended primarily to benefit other wildlife species, proponents should evaluate short and long-term effects on mule deer before treatments are

implemented. *(WGFD currently follows these recommendations and protocols, and will continue to do so)*

- WGFD will advocate appropriate management actions to ensure sustainable utilization levels where other herbivores contribute to excessive forage utilization. *(Ongoing)*

E. Avoid or minimize impacts to mule deer migration routes and remove existing barriers to mule deer movement.

- WGFD will conduct a risk assessment (analysis of existing threats, potential for threats and opportunities for conservation actions) for each designated Ungulate Migration Corridor. WGFD will work with stakeholders to review existing information and collect additional data to help determine risks, existing protections and appropriate management actions.
- WGFD will work closely with WYDOT, county road departments, irrigation districts, railroads, energy companies, and other entities to design projects that eliminate or minimize barriers to migrating mule deer and incorporate features (e.g., over- and underpasses, right-of-way fences, project layout, etc.) that restore or improve migration over/through existing roads, highways, ditches, and other projects. *(Ongoing, but will increase emphasis and coordination once the mule deer movement study is initiated/completed)*
- WGFD will encourage WYDOT and county road departments to establish less palatable vegetation in highway rights-of-way to reduce vehicle/mule deer collisions and to mow rights-of-way as far off the roadway as possible to enhance motorists' ability to see wildlife. *(Ongoing)*
- WGFD will recommend fence designs compatible with mule deer passage and minimize entanglements. Provide fencing configuration guidelines most suitable to mule deer movement to land management agencies, private landowners, WYDOT and others. *(Ongoing)*
- WGFD will collaborate with housing developers, housing associations, and county commissions to avoid fence construction to the greatest extent possible. Where fences are necessary, construct or modify existing fences most suitable to mule deer movement and that minimize entanglement. *(Ongoing)*
- WGFD will identify and prioritize fences that impede mule deer movement and work with NRCS, conservation districts, land management agencies, landowners, and others to identify and modify or remove existing fences and other barriers that impede mule deer movement. NRCS already requires that all new fencing follow wildlife friendly designs. Utilize volunteers to implement fence removal projects. *(Ongoing, and in conjunction with the mule deer movement study)*
- WGFD will identify migration corridors throughout the South Wind River herd unit and assess risks to these migration routes, and develop solutions to potential conflicts. Identification of similar risks and solutions will be completed as much as possible in the Sweetwater herd unit in the absence of migration research. *(Implementation will begin as data are received from collar studies and other sources)*

F. Form partnerships with Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), private landowners, and non-governmental organizations.

- WGFD will continue to work cooperatively with land management agencies to implement monitoring programs that will detect and document potential decline or conversion of important habitats, especially on winter, summer and transitional ranges, and take appropriate action to avoid, minimize, or mitigate the impact. *(Ongoing)*
- WGFD will continue to work cooperatively with private landowners to provide technical and financial assistance to enhance mule deer habitat. *(Ongoing)*
- WGFD will work with land management agencies and private landowners to incorporate deer habitat assessments or monitoring in their programs. *(Ongoing)*
- WGFD will encourage the NRCS to develop a Mule Deer Initiative similar to their sage-grouse and black-footed ferret initiatives to leverage federal money to implement mule deer habitat improvement projects. *(Winter 2016/17)*
- WGFD will continue to work with non-governmental organizations such as the Muley Fanatic Foundation, Mule Deer Foundation, and others to fund and implement needed research, monitoring, and project implementation. *(Ongoing)*

G. Consider the impacts other species have on the landscape and on mule deer and their habitats.

- WGFD will utilize Rapid Habitat Assessments in the South Wind River and Sweetwater herd units to gather habitat condition information. Where additional monitoring is deemed necessary, production and utilization transects, or project monitoring transects will be set up. *(Ongoing, additional emphasis added upon completion of habitat management plans)*
- WGFD will coordinate closely with land management agencies and private landowners to encourage changes in habitat management and land uses to improve habitats when data indicate habitats are in poor condition. *(Ongoing)*
- Population management objectives were revised for both the South Wind River and Sweetwater mule deer herd units in 2015 and will be reviewed every 5 years. We will use WGFD Rapid Habitat Assessments in the herd objective review process to gauge habitat conditions and trends, and make recommendations accordingly. *(Next objective reviews in 2020, with Rapid Habitat Assessments conducted in all prior years)*

Education and Public Outreach

A. Ascertain the public's current knowledge and awareness of important issues affecting mule deer management in the South Wind River and Sweetwater herd units. Understand the public's opinions and expectations regarding mule deer management and hunting in these herd units.

- WGFD has conducted public opinion surveys specific to the South Wind River and Sweetwater herd units to gauge the overall preferences of affected interests as management plans are being developed and implemented. Public meetings will continue on a semi-routine basis, particularly during the annual season setting process (March) and post-season meetings normally held in early December. WGFD will conduct additional surveys to periodically assess public concerns and desires.

(Ongoing, with future surveys when need arises)

B. Actively involve the public in management decisions.

- WGFD will work with the Working Group as a functional citizen based working group to assess management progress in the South Wind River and Sweetwater herd units. *(Ongoing)*
- WGFD will continue to utilize the “Collaborative Learning” process to involve all stakeholders when addressing issues related to mule deer and their management and when developing management strategies for the South Wind River and Sweetwater herd units. *(Ongoing)*
- WGFD will continue to actively involve the public and the Working Group in the decision making process for management actions in these two herd units. *(Ongoing)*

C. Increase information available via written media (i.e., news releases, social media, website, articles, and brochures) and/or through direct public contact to engage hunters and other mule deer advocates on issues affecting mule deer populations in the Lander/Green Mountain areas.

- WGFD will work with other interests (Muley Fanatic Foundation, local businesses, etc) to create a public presentation/workshop to inform all interested individuals on mule deer biology and WGFD management processes. WGFD will pursue opportunities to work with the Muley Fanatic Foundation, the Mule Deer Foundation and others to do a fact of the week on their website addressing some of these information and education topics.

(TBD – 2016 or 2017, details uncertain at this time)

- WGFD will continue to disseminate information about mule deer management in the South Wind River and Sweetwater herd units through brochures and reports, via WGFD website and social media updates, during routine public contacts, check stations and public forums including public season setting and information gathering meetings.

(WGFD will continue to provide information regarding mule deer management)

- WGFD will continue to emphasize the value of hunter participation in harvest and/or hunter satisfaction surveys, and check stations. WGFD will increase this emphasis via all available outlets. (*Ongoing*)

D. Establish a timeline and process for review of the Working Groups' recommendations.

- WGFD will reconvene the Working Group, at least once annually through the implementation of this plan, to review the plan and discuss accomplishments and additional needs. (*Start in February 2016; annually*)

All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs)

A. Protect important wildlife habitat and areas from ATV use.

- WGFD will work with land management agencies to identify areas or zones of protection for important mule deer habitats (i.e., fawning, transition, and wintering areas), migration corridors, and important habitats for other wildlife. Where necessary, WGFD will recommend special management considerations for motorized and non-motorized use, such as mountain bikes, climbing, hiking, horse use, etc., which could include permanent or seasonal closures. *(WGFD is currently or will be participating in Shoshone National Forest and Lander BLM Field Office travel management planning)*

B. Improve ATV users' land use ethic to minimize resource damage and conflict with other land users.

- WGFD will participate in BLM and Shoshone National Forest Travel Management planning to develop recommendations addressing site specific prescriptions. Through these processes, WGFD will engage agency personnel, along with hunter and ATV user groups to develop better understanding and provide guidance toward solutions to the rising ATV use issues and concerns. *(Ongoing in concert with USFS and BLM travel management planning)*
- WGFD will coordinate with land management agencies and ATV organizations, such as the Fremont County ATV Association, to develop new or further promote existing education programs to explain regulations and rules, why the rules are necessary, and promote proper use of ATVs that respect non-ATV and other ATV users. *(Ongoing in concert with USFS and BLM travel management planning and outreach)*
- WGFD will coordinate with land management agencies and user groups to promote awareness of the importance of proper, ethical, and considerate ATV use at all times, especially during hunting seasons including promoting and assisting with education programs. *(Ongoing)*

C. Enhance law enforcement capability and effectiveness.

- WGFD will enforce travel restrictions and regulations on state lands and will report violations of ATV rules on federal lands whenever WGFD encounter them. *(Ongoing)*
- *WGFD agrees the need exists for increased and improved enforcement of existing ATV regulations on federal lands. However, WGFD enforcement of ATV use regulations on federal lands is not an undertaking WGFD will pursue.*
- WGFD agrees with the need for increased patrols/presence by all agency personnel to reduce violations and promote proper use of ATVs and compliance with state and federal regulations. *(Ongoing)*

- *Since WGFD does not have any enforcement authority of federal land rules and regulations, it is not appropriate for WGFD to recommend higher penalties or fines for violations of those rules.*
- WGFD does make annual bond amount recommendations for statutes and regulations we do enforce, including off-road violations on Commission owned lands and State Trust Lands. *(Ongoing)*
- *Similarly, since WGFD doesn't enforce ATV regulations on federal lands, it is beyond our scope to make recommendations to County or District Attorneys regarding prosecution of such.*
- WGFD will contact Wyoming State Parks, Historic Sites and Trails and advise them of the recommendation to improve identification methods, such as increased ATV sticker size (possibly require numbering similar to boats) or require all ATVs to have license plates. (Existing sticker numbers are too small for detection unless the ATV is stopped). *(Spring 2016)*
- WGFD will continue to promote user reporting of violations by providing information that is needed by an agency to enforce regulations (description of user and vehicle, photographs, time of occurrence, etc.) and associated criminal prosecutions. WGFD will work with land management agency enforcement personnel to develop a list of pertinent violation reporting information in a handout card or pamphlet so users can easily carry it with them. *(Ongoing and Spring/Summer 2016)*
- *Establishment of a "1-800" line to be used for reporting ATV violations may not be necessary. WGFD will assess whether the public can report an ATV violation or issue via SALECS through the Stop Poaching Hotline (1-877-WGFD TIP).*

Predator Management

A. Implement predator management to maintain or increase mule deer populations when predation is determined the cause of a population decline or is suppressing mule deer population recovery in either South Wind River or Sweetwater herd units.

- WGFD will, at minimum, use annual fawn productivity measures (fawn/doe ratios) and population estimates and, when feasible, data collected from radio-collared mule deer to assess impacts related to predation and potential impacts of coyote reductions. If the 5-year average for mule deer fawn/doe ratios falls below 66/100 and the mule deer population estimate is below the management objective and perceived habitat carrying capacity, WGFD will initiate discussions with county predator management districts (PMDs), Animal Damage Management Board (ADMB) and United States Department of Agriculture-Wildlife Services (WS) to implement coyote control programs intended to increase fawn survival and promote mule deer population growth toward objective. *(Annual evaluation of fawn/doe ratios and other data as available, Coyote control programs implemented as per criteria above)*
- WGFD will utilize telemetry data from upcoming research in the South Wind River herd unit (and any future research in the Sweetwater herd unit) to identify parturition habitats to the extent possible. Following criteria outlined in the preceding action, predator control programs would be targeted to improve mule deer fawn survival in those parturition habitats where predator control is likely to be the most beneficial. *(Mapping of parturition habitats will begin as data are received from collar studies and other sources)*

B. Maintain a dialogue and ongoing information exchange between WGFD, the Animal Damage Management Board (ADMB), County Predator Management Districts, and the public with regard to predator management issues.

- WGFD will continue to work cooperatively with the PMDs, ADMB, and WS to develop coyote control projects for the benefit of mule deer, in accordance with Commission Policy VIIQ – Predatory Animal and Predacious Bird Management Recommendations for the Benefit of Wildlife. *(Ongoing)*
- As a part of the education and outreach efforts described earlier, WGFD will disseminate information through public forums, reports, research findings, and peer-reviewed publications to explain and support WGFD's decisions and actions regarding predator management strategies. *(Ongoing)*

C. Address information gaps in our understanding of the interactions between mule deer, other ungulates, and predators.

- The upcoming mule deer collaring and migration project may reveal information regarding localized predator impacts. If so, WGFD will analyze the information, and if appropriate, make recommendations for future research proposals and predator management actions. *(Pending research project results)*

- WGFD will evaluate any predator control actions taken, as prescribed in preceding sections, for effectiveness of increasing fawn recruitment and survival, with consideration of environmental influences on fawn survival and populations. (*As needed during predator control*)

Wildlife Law Enforcement and WGFD Field Presence

A. Increase field presence of WGFD and/or other agency personnel, especially during hunting seasons.

- WGFD will pursue opportunities to enhance check station coverage, including alternative locations and dates in lieu of the “standard” check stations operated on mule deer hunting season opening dates and weekends. Also running them later in evening will allow increased data collection and presence. *(Summer/Fall 2016)*
- WGFD will provide coverage of closed deer hunt areas, to the extent possible without reducing presence in open deer hunt areas. *(Ongoing)*
- *WGFD will not consider coordination with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide prize raffles for individuals who check animals into a check station or WGFD office. We are uncertain this would provide enough incentive to increase data collection or reliability.*
- *State personnel rules do not allow for additional overtime pay for personnel, regardless of time of the year. Additional personnel, such as seasonal employees would be advantageous, but budgets, at will employment contract cap limits and the current hiring freeze limit the potential for additional personnel.*
- WGFD will coordinate with other agencies to encourage their presence during hunting seasons to the extent possible. *(Spring coordination meeting, March 2016)*
- *WGFD will do everything possible to avoid disruption of hunters and their hunting pursuits, but WGFD personnel will continue to patrol and be present when hunting is occurring. WGFD does not agree WGFD personnel presence contributes to hunter crowding.*

B. Increase compliance with wildlife laws designed to protect mule deer populations and habitats.

- WGFD has and will continue to assist federal land management agencies, to the extent currently allowed, with enforcement of travel management and seasonal closures on federal lands. *(Ongoing)*
- WGFD has and will continue to enforce laws and regulations on Commission owned and Wyoming State Trust lands. *(Ongoing)*
- WGFD will make educational materials, including ATV rules and regulations, more accessible to the public via brochure dissemination and on WGFD website. *(Ongoing)*
- WGFD will evaluate and implement special enforcement task forces to protect mule deer when they are most vulnerable to harassment and illegal take especially on winter ranges. We will publicize high profile enforcement cases that are successfully prosecuted. *(Summer 2016 task force planning; ongoing)*

- WGFD will continue to develop, conduct and improve operations to address the illegal take of mule deer and continue to use advanced enforcement technologies and techniques. (*Ongoing*)
- WGFD maintains field enforcement presence to the highest extent possible throughout the year. (*Ongoing*)
- WGFD will continue to work with the public, prosecutors, judges, and legislators to build support for adequate fines and penalties and for stronger laws to provide an effective deterrent as it pertains to the illegal take of mule deer. (*Ongoing*)

Appendix A. Responses to Recommendations from the Lander/Green Mountain Mule Deer Working Group that will not be implemented.

Research and Monitoring

All recommendations are being considered for implementation.

Adaptive Management

“Review the status of the South Wind River and Sweetwater herd units and adjust management of hunting seasons and populations based on sound and scientific research and management data.”

- *Therefore, WGFD is not proposing the recommended changes to hunting season structure at this time. WGFD is committed to hearing from the public through the 2016 season setting process. WGFD will also continue to evaluate the need for implementing a limited-quota license structure in these herd units, if and when the circumstances described in the “Hunting Season Structure” section change.*

Hunting Season Structure

“Balance Hunting Opportunity with Reduced Hunter Crowding”

- *WGFD is not recommending implementation of limited-quota license mule deer seasons in the South Wind River or the Sweetwater herd units at this time for these reasons:*
 1. There simply is not enough support to shift to a limited-quota license season structure to address hunter crowding. It is clear hunter crowding, while a continued concern for some, is no longer a major concern for many.
 2. There remains a significant amount of confusion and misunderstanding the effect limited-quota seasons will have on mule deer populations and hunting opportunity. It is WGFD’s perspective based on the survey and public input that many who support limited-quota licenses simply do so because they believe it will result in increased numbers of mule deer in these herd units. Limited-quota licensees simply will **not** bring mule deer back. As such, it would be a disservice to the public and to the resource for WGFD to unnecessarily restrict hunting opportunity and limit resources used to support the mule deer management program. WGFD will continue to evaluate the need for implementing a limited-quota license structure in these herd units if and when the circumstances described in the “Hunting Season Structure” section change.
 3. The mule deer populations have increased the past two years in both herd units and, correspondingly, there are increased numbers of bucks available for harvest. This is likely alleviating complaints and perceptions of hunter crowding.
 4. Because limited-quota license seasons in these herd units would have far reaching statewide implications, WGFD needs to consider those implications and other options (i.e., “resident regions”).

- *The Type 9 archery-only license recommendation is a component of the limited-quota license recommendation and is unnecessary in the absence of limited-quota license seasons.*

“Limit un-needed and unregulated doe/fawn harvest”

- *WGFD will not implement a restriction limiting youth hunters to “antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer”. This was discussed on a statewide level and was decided youth opportunity to take “any deer” is important to recruit youth hunters. Also, the number of mule deer does or fawns taken by youths in these herd units, and statewide, is minimal and has no effect on population change.*

“Ensure those who choose to archery hunt are properly educated to best ensure safety and ethical behavior similar to those who hunt with a rifle.”

- *There are very few instructors certified to teach the voluntary bowhunter education classes currently available. More instructors would be needed to meet the demand of a required course to ensure all who wanted to hunt with archery would meet the training requirements. Also, to make bowhunter hunter education mandatory would require statutory action by the Wyoming State Legislature.*

Habitat Management

All recommendations are being considered for implementation.

Education and Public Outreach

All recommendations are being considered for implementation.

All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs)

“Enhance law enforcement capability and effectiveness”

- *WGFD agrees the need exists for increased and improved enforcement of existing ATV regulations on federal lands. However, WGFD enforcement of ATV use regulations on federal lands is not an undertaking WGFD will pursue.*
- *Since WGFD does not have any enforcement authority of federal land rules and regulations, it is not appropriate for WGFD to recommend higher penalties or fines for violations of those rules.*
- *Similarly, since WGFD doesn’t enforce ATV regulations on federal lands, it is beyond our scope to make recommendations to County or District Attorneys regarding prosecution of such.*
- *Establishment of a “1-800” line to be used for reporting ATV violations may not be necessary. WGFD will assess whether the public can report an ATV violation or issue via SALECS through the Stop Poaching Hotline (1-877-WGFD TIP).*

Predator Management

All recommendations are being considered for implementation.

Wildlife Law Enforcement and WGFD Presence

“Increase field presence of WGFD and/or other agency personnel, especially during hunting seasons”

- *WGFD will not consider coordination with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide prize raffles for individuals who check animals into a check station or WGFD office. We are uncertain this would provide enough incentive to increase data collection or reliability.*
- *State personnel rules do not allow for additional overtime pay for personnel, regardless of time of the year. Additional personnel, such as seasonal employees would be advantageous, but budgets, at will employment contract cap limits and the current hiring freeze limit the potential for additional personnel.*
- *WGFD will do everything possible to avoid disruption of hunters and their hunting pursuits, but WGFD personnel will continue to patrol and be present when hunting is occurring. WGFD does not agree WGFD personnel presence contributes to hunter crowding.*