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2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Pronghorn

PERIOD: 6/1/2025 - 5/31/2026

HERD: PR745 - RATTLESNAKE

HUNT AREAS: 70-72

PREPARED BY: KYLIE SINCLAIR

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	11,565	10,270	10,563
Harvest:	989	975	948
Hunters:	1,086	1,086	1,045
Hunter Success:	91%	90%	91%
Active Licenses:	1,210	1,204	1,196
Active License Success:	82%	81%	79%
Recreation Days:	3,644	3,830	3,862
Days Per Animal:	3.7	3.9	4.1
Males per 100 Females	59	34	
Juveniles per 100 Females	61	63	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) : 12000 (9600 - 14400)

Management Strategy: Recreational

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -14.4%

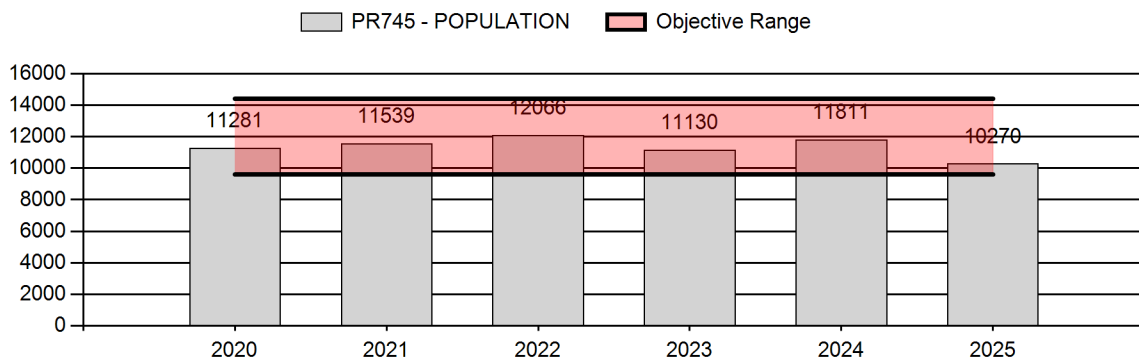
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 3

Model Date: 02/14/2026

Proposed harvest rates (percent of pre-season estimate for each sex/age group):

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	5%	4%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	22%	25%
Proposed change in post-season population:	6%	3%

Population Size - Postseason



**2026 HUNTING SEASONS
RATTLESNAKE PRONGHORN HERD (PR745)**

Hunt Area	Type	Special Archery Dates		Regular Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
70	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 14	Sep. 15	Oct. 31	100	Any antelope
	6	Aug. 15	Sep. 14	Sep. 15	Oct. 31	50	Doe or fawn
71	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 14	Sep. 15	Oct. 31	75	Any antelope
72	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 14	Sep. 15	Oct. 31	800	Any antelope
	6	Aug. 15	Sep. 14	Sep. 15	Oct. 31	300	Doe or fawn

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 77% Satisfied, 14% Neutral, 9% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

The severe winter of 2011 caused a drastic decline in this herd, which has since grown back to objective. Despite difficult conditions from 2018-2022, including drought and harsh winters, the Rattlesnake Herd continues to maintain itself around objective. The winter of 2022-2023 was extremely harsh, but pronghorn went into this winter in good body condition and winter mortality was near normal as indicated by managers' observations, good yearling buck ratios, and high harvest success in 2023. However, there was some impact on fawn production in 2023, suggesting these pronghorn were stressed during the harsh winter and produced fewer fawns or fawns born in poor body condition leading to lower survival. The growing season in 2023 was exceptional with great spring and summer precipitation with mild temperatures. The winters of 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 were mild and followed by dry summers. Even with the drought, fawn production was excellent in 2024 at 86 fawn to 100 does, the highest since 2003, but dropped back to 63 fawns per 100 does in 2025. Some of this drop may be explained by the high fawn numbers in 2024 resulting in more yearling does that aren't reproducing, as well as the continued drought conditions reducing nutritional availability on the landscape.

In 2025, hunter success was similar across hunt areas within the herd unit. Area 70 saw a drop in Type 1 success to 78%, Area 71 Type 1 success remained similar with a slight increase to 78%, and success on the Area 72 Type 1 license dropped slightly to 82% with slightly increased days per harvest. A three-year (2023-2025) analysis indicated the mean percentage of harvested males ≥ 1 year old in the herd unit was 19% of the preseason buck population, below the management goal of 20-30% male harvest for recreational herds. Harvest in 2025 was at 22% of the preseason buck population. Buck ratios were lower in 2025 at 34 bucks per 100 does and an abundance

survey in 2025 indicated the population may be lower than previously modeled (Table 1). Management goals are to continue to provide good buck harvest opportunity based on the recreational management strategy while maintaining this herd near the population objective. Type 6 success was at 81%, on par with the 5-year average (excluding 2023 when the Type 6 was dropped). As this herd is near objective and harvest success was acceptable there will be no changes to license quotas in 2026.

2020 - 2025 Preseason Classification Summary

for Pronghorn Herd PR745 - RATTLESNAKE

Year	Pre Pop	MALES				FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot CIs	CIs Obj	Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	Adult	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%			Ylg	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
2020	0	103	325	428	31%	622	45%	336	24%	1,386	1,995	17	52	69	± 7	54	± 6	32
2021	0	99	284	383	28%	561	42%	407	30%	1,351	2,355	18	51	68	± 7	73	± 7	43
2022	13,919	98	244	342	25%	614	45%	396	29%	1,352	2,398	16	40	56	± 6	64	± 6	41
2023	12,244	119	267	386	27%	740	51%	316	22%	1,442	0	16	36	52	± 5	43	± 4	28
2024	13,454	45	127	172	21%	345	42%	296	36%	813	0	13	37	50	± 7	86	± 11	57
2025	11,735	100	125	225	17%	663	51%	418	32%	1,306	0	15	19	34	± 4	63	± 6	47

Table 1. Postseason classification summary for PR745.

Objective Review

The objective and management strategy for the Rattlesnake Pronghorn herd was last evaluated and approved in 2025. The objective and management strategy will be reviewed again in 2030.

Population Modeling

There have been five independent line-transect surveys completed in this herd resulting in greatly varied population abundance estimates. The most recent line-transect survey for the herd was conducted in 2025, resulting in an end-of-bioyear abundance estimate of 8,347 (CI=7,915-8,804) pronghorn (Appendix A). Managers used an Integrated Population Model (IPM) with constant adult survival and fixed effects for reproduction and juvenile survival. This model estimates a lower population estimate in 2025 at 10,270 (CI=9,564-10,956) than in 2024. Weather conditions during the survey were not desirable, with periods of fog, thunderstorms, and overcast conditions. Based off field observations, managers believe the line-transect estimate is likely a little low and the actual population is likely closer to the high end of the confidence interval. The low line-transect estimate may explain the slightly lower IPM population estimate.

Appendix A

2025 PR745 – Rattlesnake Pronghorn Line-Transect Summary

Survey Dates: 5/20-21/2025, 5/24-25/2025

Survey Cost: \$7532

Flight Service: Flightline LFS

Aircraft: Aviat Husky

Observers: Sinclair

Weather Conditions:

Temperature (F): 37°-68°

Cloud Cover (%): 0-80%

Wind Speed (MPH): 4-18

Transect Limits: 106° 27' to 107° 22'

Transect Direction: North/South

Transect Interval (Minutes of Longitude): 2.14km

Transect Length (Miles): 624

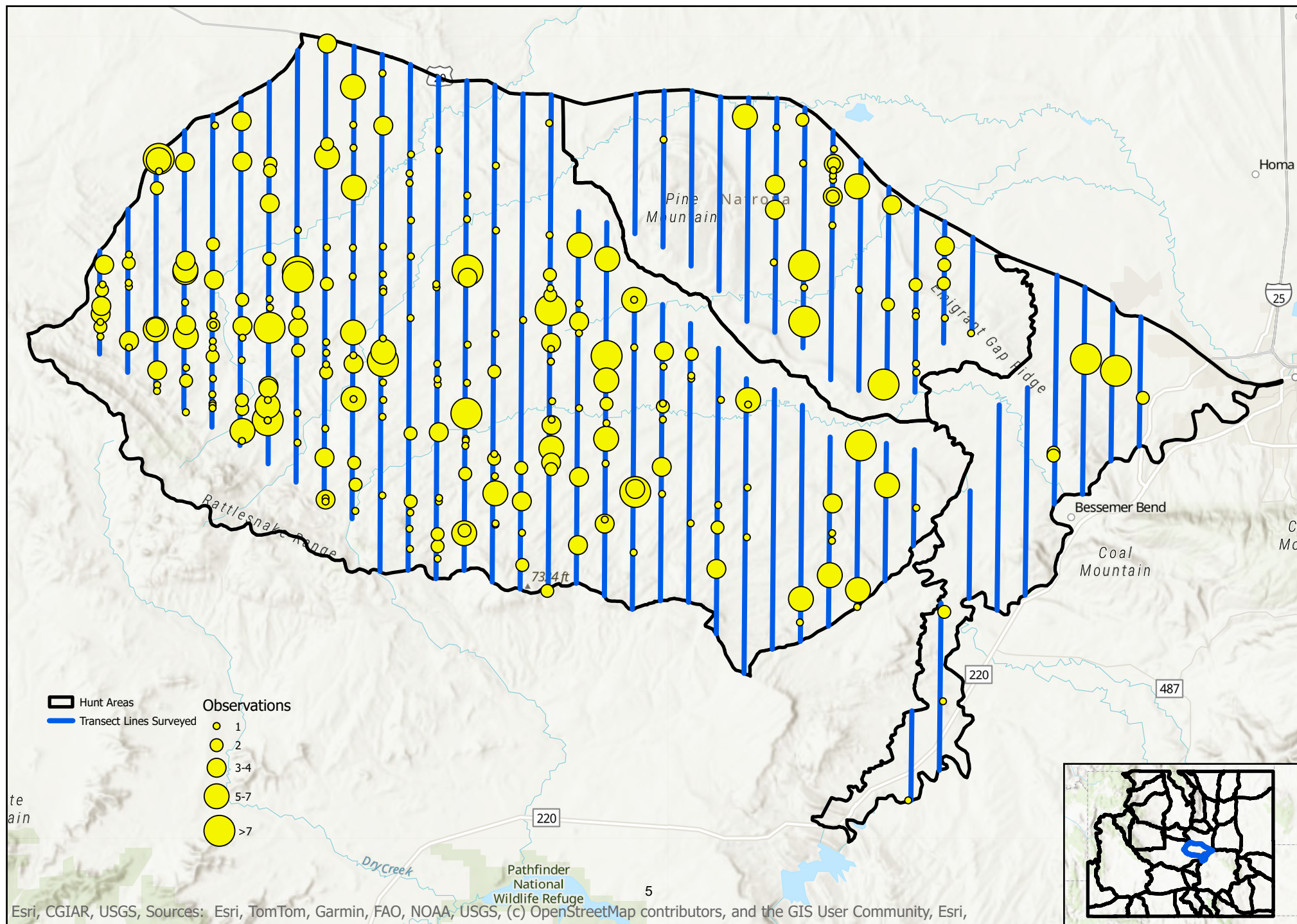
Transect Altitude (AGL): 300 ft

Occupied Habitat (mi²): 884

Density Estimate (Animals/mi² with confidence intervals): 9.83 (7.82-11.72)

Population Estimate (with confidence intervals): 8,687 (6,917-10,363)

2025 Rattlesnake Pronghorn Line Transect Survey



2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Pronghorn

PERIOD: 6/1/2025 - 5/31/2026

HERD: PR746 - NORTH NATRONA

HUNT AREAS: 73

PREPARED BY: KYLIE SINCLAIR

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	10,938	10,515	10,634
Harvest:	892	307	439
Hunters:	1,054	375	478
Hunter Success:	85%	82%	92%
Active Licenses:	1,096	380	479
Active License Success:	81%	81%	92%
Recreation Days:	3,517	1,012	1,350
Days Per Animal:	3.9	3.3	3.1
Males per 100 Females	59	49	
Juveniles per 100 Females	69	62	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) : 15000 (12000 - 18000)

Management Strategy: Recreational

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -29.9%

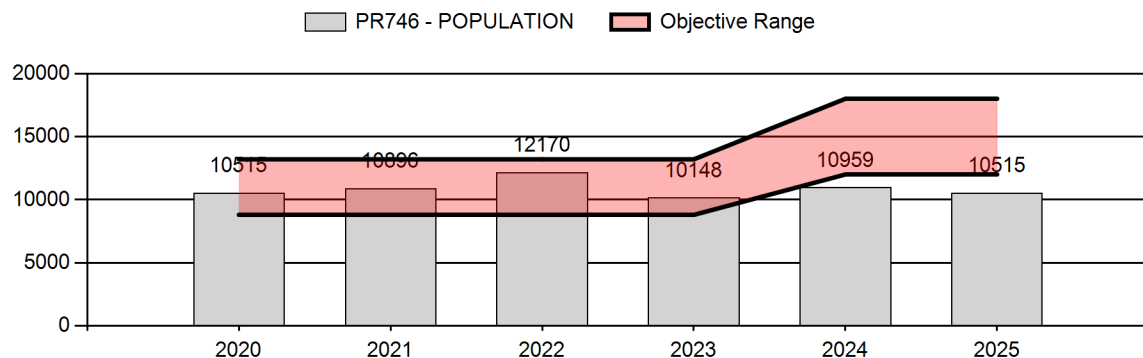
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 3

Model Date: 03/14/2026

Proposed harvest rates (percent of pre-season estimate for each sex/age group):

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	1%	1%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	11%	15%
Proposed change in post-season population:	3%	1%

Population Size - Postseason



2026 HUNTING SEASONS
NORTH NATRONA PRONGHORN HERD (PR746)

Hunt Area	Type	Special Archery Dates		Regular Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
73	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 14	Sep. 15	Oct. 31	500	Any antelope
73	7			Aug. 15	Oct. 31	25	Doe or fawn valid east of the Bucknum Road (Natrona County Road 125) and south of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad right-of-way

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 83% Satisfied, 13% Neutral, 4% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

The model for this herd depicts substantial growth from 2013-2015, when harvest pressure was low and fawn production/survival were exceptional. Harvest pressure had since increased significantly, reducing this population incrementally each year. Both trends and population estimates seem to be well represented by the model for this herd. Severe winters in both 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 resulted in higher mortality rates. In addition, drought was present in this herd during 2020, 2021, 2024, and 2025 resulting in poor habitat conditions. Classification survey totals have yielded lower numbers of pronghorn since 2021. Low rates of production combined with higher rates of harvest caused a decline in the population around 2019. In response, license issuance was reduced dramatically. The winter of 2022-2023 was very harsh, which led managers to be even more conservative for the 2023 season by eliminating all Type 6 licenses. This herd dipped below the population objective in 2023 while buck ratios dropped to the bottom end of the recreational management threshold at 38 bucks per 100 does. As a result, buck harvest opportunity was reduced to increase buck ratios. In 2025, buck ratios were at 49 to 100 does (Table 1). Climatic conditions throughout 2023 were optimal for pronghorn survival with excellent precipitation coupled with mild temperatures. Following a mild winter in 2024, fawn production increased substantially despite a drought to a record 94 fawns per 100 does. Despite another mild winter in 2025, fawn ratios dropped back to 62 fawns per 100 does.

2020 - 2025 Preseason Classification Summary

for Pronghorn Herd PR746 - NORTH NATRONA

Year	Pre Pop	MALES				FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot CIs	Cls Obj	Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	Adult	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%			Ylg	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
2020	0	120	341	461	33%	590	43%	335	24%	1,386	2,017	20	58	78	± 8	57	± 6	32
2021	0	55	178	233	25%	429	47%	256	28%	918	1,961	13	41	54	± 7	60	± 7	39
2022	13,341	47	120	167	25%	266	40%	224	34%	657	2,640	18	45	63	± 10	84	± 12	52
2023	10,911	38	96	134	19%	355	51%	201	29%	690	0	11	27	38	± 6	57	± 8	41
2024	11,761	80	135	215	21%	428	41%	404	39%	1,047	0	19	32	50	± 7	94	± 10	63
2025	11,292	77	135	212	23%	429	47%	268	29%	909	0	18	31	49	± 7	62	± 8	42

Table 1. Postseason classification summary for PR746.

A three-year (2023-2025) analysis indicated the mean percentage for harvested males ≥ 1 year old was 13% of the preseason buck population. This is below the management goal of 20-30%. From 2014 – 2020, Type 1 license success averaged 90%. From 2021 – 2023 average success was 73% with success being 69% in 2023, an all-time low. After dropping license numbers, harvest success has increased the last two years, with 83% success in 2025. This is a public land dominated herd unit and success should be high.

The 2026 hunting season continues to conservatively manage the North Natrona Pronghorn Herd to allow growth toward objective. This herd remains under objective due to the population objective being raised in 2024 from 11,000 to 15,000. The current license framework allows for population growth. There will be 100 additional licenses for the Type 1 quota in 2026 for a total of 500 licenses to allow additional opportunity given the high buck ratio. The Type 7 license will remain the same in 2026 at 25 licenses as a resource for reducing agricultural damage.

Management Objective Review

This herd is not up for an objective review in 2026. In 2024, managers raised the population objective from 11,000 to 15,000. After consulting with sportsmen, landowners, and non-government agencies it was deemed there was adequate support and habitat to increase the objective. When the population was at the previous objective of 11,000 pronghorn, hunter satisfaction and success were still low.

Population Modeling

Six line-transect surveys provide independent abundance estimates which help align trends and improve population estimates in the model. A line-transect was conducted in 2021, resulting in an end-of-bioyear abundance estimate of 9,543 pronghorn with a standard error of 1,284. Another line-transect was flown in 2023 with an end-of-bio-year population estimate of 13,368 (CI=11,135-16,161). Managers believe this number is either an overestimate, or some pronghorn being counted in May/June migrate into other hunt areas in the southern Bighorn Mountains to summer range and are thus unavailable during fall hunting seasons. The bio-year 2025 postseason population estimate for this herd unit was 10,515 (CI=9,086-12,037) pronghorn using the PopR

Integrated Population Model. A fixed effects model was run with reproduction and adult survival set as constant. The model shows a population decline from 2015-2023, then stabilizing through 2025. Managers believe this to be accurate based on low fawn production/survival, harvest success, and an obvious continued decline in pronghorn densities until recent years. The model did well with incorporating the harsh winter of 2022-2023. A line-transect survey will be flown in 2026.

Additional Surveys

In 2019, this herd became part of a harvest study conducted by WGFD and the University of Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit. Goals of the project were to quantify average pronghorn horn size relative to changes in buck ratios, buck age structure, population size, and environmental variables. In total 1,789 male pronghorn were studied in this project (Tafelmeyer et. al 2024). It was found that at 3.5 years old pronghorn reach 95% of their horn growth potential. The study also found that snow depth on the year of birth positively influenced horns size and that changes in buck ratios had little to no affect on horn growth.

Reference

Tafelmeyer, L. E., T. N. LaSharr, J. Binfet, M. Bredehoft, G. Hiatt, D. Lutz, C. D. Mitchell, and K. L. Monteith. 2024. Cannot outrun the past: age, nutrition, and cohort influence horn size in pronghorn. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 88:e22653.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Pronghorn

PERIOD: 6/1/2025 - 5/31/2026

HERD: PR748 - NORTH CONVERSE

HUNT AREAS: 25-26

PREPARED BY: KYE HICKS

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	23,764	25,173	25,838
Harvest:	1,633	1,193	1,239
Hunters:	1,840	1,416	1,500
Hunter Success:	89%	84%	83 %
Active Licenses:	1,926	1,423	1,750
Active License Success:	85%	84%	71 %
Recreation Days:	5,574	4,211	4,380
Days Per Animal:	3.4	3.5	3.5
Males per 100 Females	62	56	
Juveniles per 100 Females	74	79	

Population Objective (± 20%) : 28000 (22400 - 33600)

Management Strategy: Recreational

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -10.1%

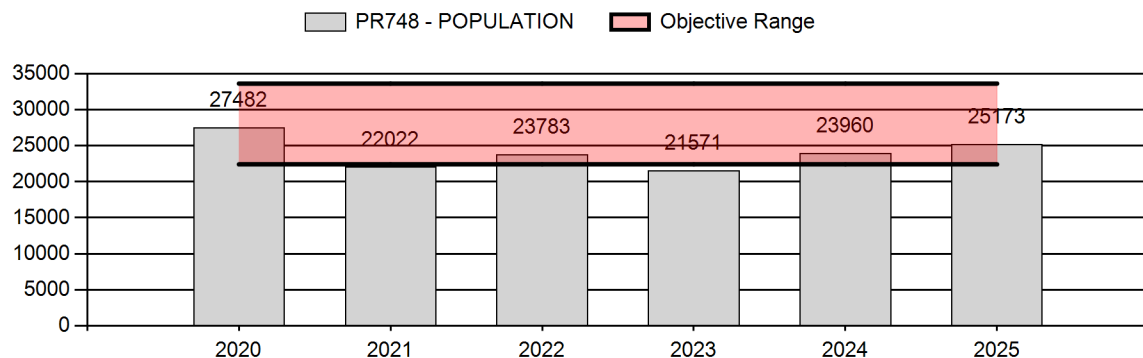
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 15

Model Date: 3/16/2026

Proposed harvest rates (percent of pre-season estimate for each sex/age group):

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	3%	.005%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	19%	15%
Proposed change in post-season population:	1.8%	1.03%

Population Size - Postseason



2026 Hunting Seasons
North Converse Pronghorn Herd Unit (PR748)

Hunt Area	Type	Special Archery Dates		Regular Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
25	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14	600	Any antelope
26	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 23	Sep. 24	Oct. 14	1100	Any antelope
26	7	Aug. 15	Sep. 23	Sep. 24	Oct. 31	50	Doe or fawn valid on or within (1) mile of irrigated land

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 92% Satisfied, 0% Neutral, 8% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

Pronghorn numbers have fluctuated in recent years and remain below management objectives. The population rose from 2013–2018 but then declined due to subsequent drought, low fawn-to-adult ratios, a widespread Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) outbreak in 2021, and elevated winter mortality in 2022 and 2023. Above-average moisture in 2022–2023 alleviated the prior drought. The herd faced drought in winter 2023–2024; however, fawn survival was not severely affected because adult body condition improved following abundant 2023 forage. Increasing energy development and other disturbances have degraded habitat across the herd unit, potentially reducing long-term carrying capacity. The herd experienced continued drought in winter 2024–2025, but timely spring rains produced abundant summer forage, preserving fawn survival. Preseason classification surveys for 2024 and 2025 indicated improved fawn and yearling survival and a higher buck ratio (Table 1.). With this, Area 25 Type 1 quota was increased by 50, and the Area 26 Type 1 quota was increased by 100 for the 2026 season. However, an additional EHD outbreak occurred in 2025; its effects are under evaluation and may influence future management. This herd is under the recreational management strategy, under this management strategy managers strive to harvest a minimum of 20-30% of available bucks equal to or greater than one year old each year. However, due to the potentially significant EHD outbreak and landowner concern over low populations the estimated buck harvest is 15% for 2026.

Table 1. Preseason classification summary

2020 - 2025 Preseason Classification Summary

for Pronghorn Herd PR748 - NORTH CONVERSE

Year	Pre Pop	MALES				FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot Cts	Cls Obj	Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	Adult	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%			Ylg	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
2020	30,086	144	348	492	29%	725	43%	477	28%	1,694	2,954	20	48	68	± 6	66	± 6	39
2021	20,247	140	300	440	27%	726	44%	475	29%	1,641	2,406	19	41	61	± 6	65	± 6	41
2022	27,079	182	318	500	26%	785	41%	612	32%	1,897	2,344	23	41	64	± 6	78	± 7	48
2023	25,480	155	236	391	27%	616	42%	462	31%	1,469	2,716	25	38	63	± 7	75	± 7	46
2024	26,475	120	200	320	22%	603	42%	523	36%	1,446	2,656	20	33	53	± 6	87	± 8	57
2025	28,393	102	166	268	24%	475	42%	376	34%	1,119	0	21	35	56	± 7	79	± 9	51

Objective Review

The objective and management strategy for the North Converse Pronghorn Herd was last evaluated and approved in 2025 and will not be reviewed again until 2030.

Population Modeling

The Integrated Population Model (IPM) was used to model this herd. The fixed effect structure for pronghorn, i.e. constant adult and juvenile survival, fixed effect reproduction survival was used. The active licenses variable was selected by managers to best represent the most predictable annual harvest. With these settings in place the observed data for the IPM included twenty-one years of harvest and ratio data along with abundance estimates from surveys conducted in 2004, 2012, 2021, and 2025. IPM convergence was acceptable, with the max Rhat value being 2.0.

A Line Transect (LT) survey was flown for this herd unit in June 2025 (Appendix A). This provided an abundance estimate of approximately 26,000 pronghorn (CI = 20,145-32,070). This estimate aligns with the modeled population estimate, and managers are confident that the LT and modeled population estimate provide similar, reliable estimates of population size.

The total post-season population estimate for 2025 is 25,173 pronghorn (CI = 23,018-27,033), which represents an increase of about 5% (or + 1,000 pronghorn) from the previous year. This coincides with the perceptions of managers and landowners that this herd is indeed continuing to trend up.

Additional Information

In 2023, horn length measurements (N=119) were collected from harvested adult male pronghorn, with average horn length being 10.7 inches. A total of 8.4% of bucks were ≥ 13 inches. Managers can use these measurements to evaluate horn growth trends over time as this dataset grows.

Appendix A. 2025 PR 748 North Converse Aerial Line Transect Results

Surveyors: Kye Hicks, Kylie Sinclair

Date: 5/25/2025 - 5/27/2025

Vendor/Plane: Flight Line LFS, WY (Chris Bonter) / Aviat Huskey

Total Transects Surveyed: A total of 57 transect lines were flown.

Total Survey Time: 8 flight hours.

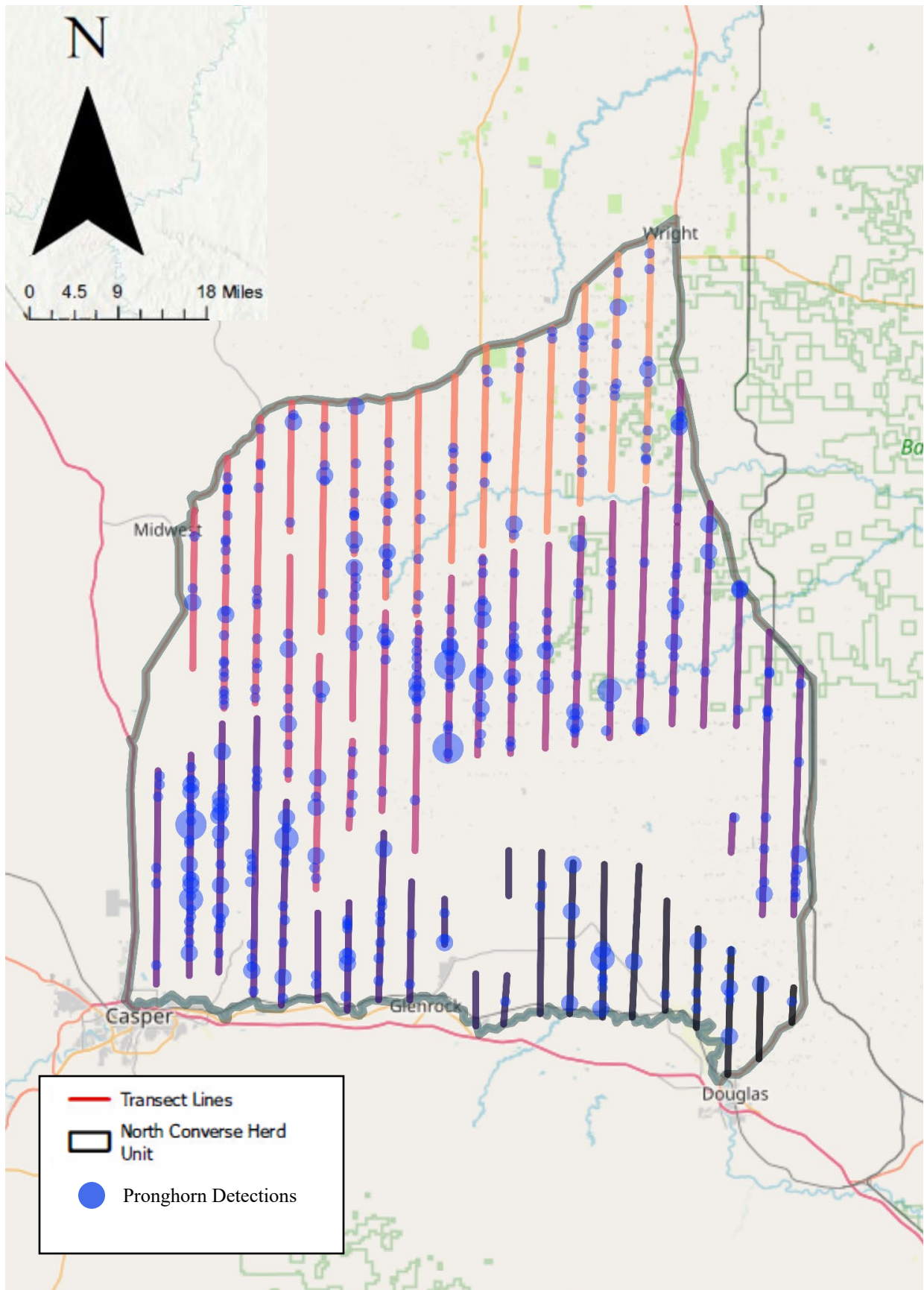
Costs: The total cost for this project was \$4,875.00

Weather: The weather was ideal throughout the project. Temperatures were around 50°F in the mornings and in the 60s in the afternoons. There was little to no wind on all flight days. Spring moisture produced a strong green-up, making detection fairly easy.

Results: This survey resulted in a population estimate of 25,765 pronghorn (CI = 20,145 – 32,070). This estimate aligns with the modeled population estimate, and managers are confident that the LT and modeled population estimate provide similar, reliable estimates of population size.

2025 PR748 Line Transect Results			
Raw Count	Total Estimate	LCI	UCI
991	25,756	20,145	32,070

2025 North Converse Line Transect Survey



2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Pronghorn

PERIOD: 6/1/2025 - 5/31/2026

HERD: PR750 - BLACK THUNDER

HUNT AREAS: 4-9, 24, 27, 29

PREPARED BY: MATT
HUIZENGA

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	31,821	37,977	38,866
Harvest:	2,318	1,915	1,963
Hunters:	2,575	2,225	2,250
Hunter Success:	90%	86%	87 %
Active Licenses:	2,746	2,283	2,350
Active License Success:	84%	84%	84 %
Recreation Days:	7,945	6,773	6,700
Days Per Animal:	3.4	3.5	3.4
Males per 100 Females	42	34	
Juveniles per 100 Females	68	62	

Population Objective ($\pm$ 20%) :

49000 (39200 - 58800)

Management Strategy:

Recreational

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective:

-22.5%

Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend:

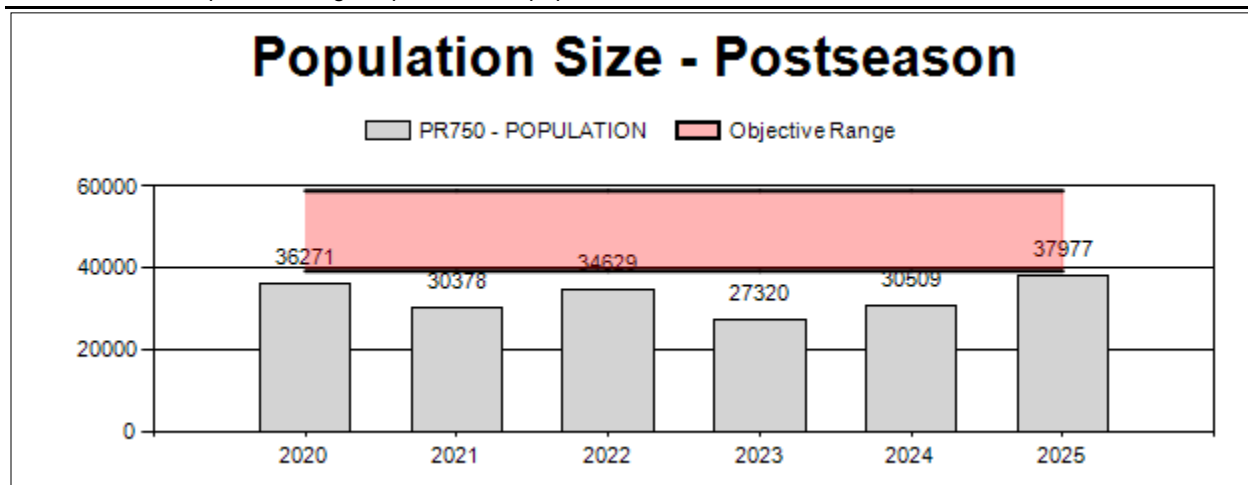
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Model Date:

02/25/2026

Proposed harvest rates (percent of pre-season estimate for each sex/age group):

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females $\geq$ 1 year old:	2.0%	1%
Males $\geq$ 1 year old:	23%	20%
Proposed change in post-season population:	0%	2%



**2026 Hunting Seasons
Black Thunder Pronghorn (PR750)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
4	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov. 20	100	Any antelope
5	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov. 20	125	Any antelope
6	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 15	175	Any antelope
7	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 15	400	Any antelope
8	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 15	225	Any antelope
9	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	250	Any antelope
9	7			Nov. 1	Nov. 30	50	Doe or fawn valid on private land
24	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 20	250	Any antelope
24	2	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 20	425	Any antelope valid on private land
24	6	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 20	25	Doe or fawn
24	7	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 20	25	Doe or fawn valid on private land
27	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 15	150	Any antelope
29	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 15	75	Any antelope
29	2	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	300	Any antelope valid on private land
29	7	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	50	Doe or fawn valid on private land

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 88% Satisfied 8% Neutral 4% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

After a low point in 2012, this herd grew steadily through 2018, and then declined substantially into 2022, before beginning to recover in 2023. The recent decline was due to persistent low recruitment (preseason fawn:doe ratios 2018-2022 averaged 63 fawns per 100 does), increased mortality of all age classes during the 2018-19 winter, increased spring mortality in 2019 and 2020, continued drought since the spring of 2020, and losses to both Blue Tongue Virus (BTV) and Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease Virus (EHDV) in 2021 and 2022. To address the decline, harvest was reduced 20% in 2020, another 33% in 2021, and 20% more in both 2022 and 2023. Harvest reductions resulted in active license success and effort remaining stable during the population decline, with success averaging 83% and effort at 3.5 days per harvest. Harvest improved in 2023, with average success increasing to 94% and effort decreasing to 3.0 days per harvest. Consequently, hunter satisfaction increased and dissatisfaction dropped significantly in 2023.

Licenses were increased in multiple hunt areas in 2024 and 2025. This resulted in a moderate decrease in hunter success and increase in days per harvest.

A Line Transect (LT) survey (Appendix 1, Figure 1) was completed in May 2025 resulting in an abundance estimate of ~67,800 (CI =59,900 - 76,400). Given the lower harvest rates for the past four years and slightly higher doe:fawn ratios (Table 1), managers expected population growth, however that estimate is significantly higher than expected and managers believe the population growth is occurring at a slower rate than shown.

To encourage continued population growth towards objective and provide hunter opportunity without compromising buck:doe ratios, 50 more any-antelope licenses and 50 more doe/fawn licenses were issued for 2026. Twenty-five Type 1 licenses were added in both Hunt Area (HA) 6 and HA 7, and 25 Type 1 licenses were added for HA 27.

To address harvest reporting issues with licenses valid in multiple hunt areas, HA 6 licenses are no longer valid in the Weston County portion of HA 8 and HA 9 licenses are no longer valid in the Converse or Niobrara County portion of HA 11. With this change, 50 Type 1 licenses were removed from HA 9 to prevent over-harvest while a modest increase was still warranted in HA 6. To continue to address late-season damage concerns, 25 Type 7 licenses were added in HA 9 valid on private land in November.

Table 1. 6-Year Classification Summary

2020 - 2025 Preseason Classification Summary																		
for Pronghorn Herd PR750 - BLACK THUNDER																		
Year	Pre Pop	MALES				FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot Cts	Cls Obj	Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	Adult	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%			Yling	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
2020	40,266	204	657	861	21%	2,025	49%	1,235	30%	4,121	2,781	10	32	43	± 3	61	± 3	43
2021	34,181	239	633	872	22%	1,944	48%	1,233	30%	4,049	2,165	12	33	45	± 3	63	± 4	44
2022	42,177	174	490	664	17%	1,936	49%	1,325	34%	3,925	2,358	9	25	34	± 2	68	± 4	51
2023	30,590	312	755	1,067	20%	2,459	47%	1,703	33%	5,229	2,087	13	31	43	± 2	69	± 3	48
2024	33,525	306	673	979	20%	2,246	46%	1,698	34%	4,923	2,223	14	30	44	± 3	76	± 4	53
2025	42,236	157	435	592	18%	1,716	51%	1,072	32%	3,380	0	9	25	34	± 3	62	± 4	46

Management Objective Review

The objective and management strategy for the Black Thunder Pronghorn Herd was last evaluated in 2024, and will not be reviewed again until 2029.

Population Modeling

The best performing model this year using Time-Varying Reproduction, Time-Varying Juvenile Survival, and Constant Adult Survival yielded a 2025 post-season estimate of about 38,000 (CI = 34,200 – 41,400) pronghorn. There are several data points that have made modeling this population difficult. First, reconciling the relatively high 2014, 2016, and 2024 Bio-year LT estimates given the low 2019 and 2021 LT results is problematic. In addition, the model does not align well with the fluctuations in observed buck:doe ratios since 2020 given reported harvest. Despite these concerns, the population trend produced by the current model comports well with

herd performance and harvest statistics since 2014. The model has moderated with continued data and does not exhibit the extreme high and low estimates previously shown. While the significantly higher LT estimate flown in 2025 is believed to be high, the increase in population from the 2024 modeled estimate is likely accurate and managers speculate previous estimates may have been low. The projected abundance estimates beyond 2025 are starting to capture the lower harvest and increased fawn ratios from the past several years and managers believe there will be higher population growth than projected.

Concerns with this population

There has been a general decline in observed fawn:doe ratios over the past 30+ years in this herd, which will likely continue with reductions in habitat quality and quantity due to aging sagebrush stands, increased invasive grass cover, and unrelenting industrialization of pronghorn habitat by energy development. Recruitment and survival of adults may continue to decline due to increased losses to disease if drier and warmer weather patterns persist.

Appendix 1

2024 PR750 - BLACK THUNDER Pronghorn Line-Transect Summary

Survey Dates:	5/27/2025 - 5/30/2025
Survey Cost:	\$ 7,300.00
Flight Service:	LAIRD FLYING SERVICE
Aircraft:	HUSKY
Observers:	Kye Hicks, Brandon Werner, Erika Peckham Note: ~ 8.3 km spacing of diagonal lines

Weather Conditions:

Temperature (Degrees Fahrenheit):	N/A
Cloud Cover (%):	N/A
Wind Speed (MPH):	0 - 0

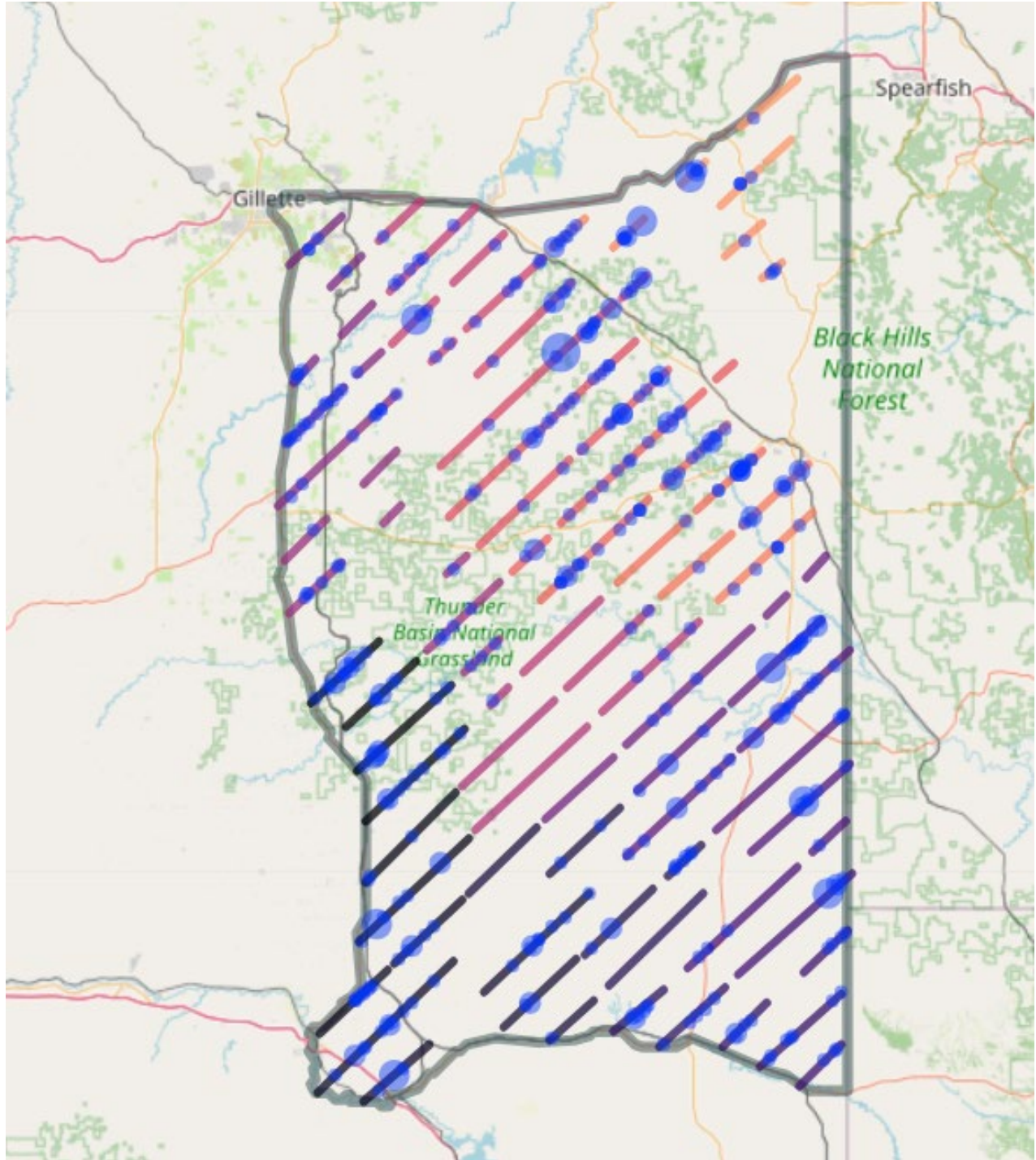
Transect Limits:	N/A to N/A
Transect Direction:	North/South
Transect Interval (Minutes of Longitude):	8.3
Transect Length: (Mi.):	1,638
Transect Altitude (AGL):	0 ft.

Occupied Habitat (mi²):	16,353
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Density Estimate (Animals/mi² with Confidence Intervals):	4.1486 (3.6616 - 4.6700)
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Population Estimate (with Confidence Intervals):	67,842 (59,878 - 76,369)
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Figure 1. Map of Line Transects and Pronghorn Observations



2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Mule Deer

PERIOD: 6/1/2025 - 5/31/2026

HERD: MD740 - CHEYENNE RIVER

HUNT AREAS: 7-14, 21

PREPARED BY: MATT
HUIZENGA

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	13,445	11,113	13,077
Harvest:	960	763	750
Hunters:	1,912	1,664	1,600
Hunter Success:	50%	46%	47 %
Active Licenses:	1,936	1,664	1,600
Active License Success:	50%	46%	47 %
Recreation Days:	8,449	7,981	7,600
Days Per Animal:	8.8	10.5	10.1
Males per 100 Females	32	35	
Juveniles per 100 Females	56	76	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) :

27000 (21600 - 32400)

Management Strategy:

Private Land

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective:

-58.8%

Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend:

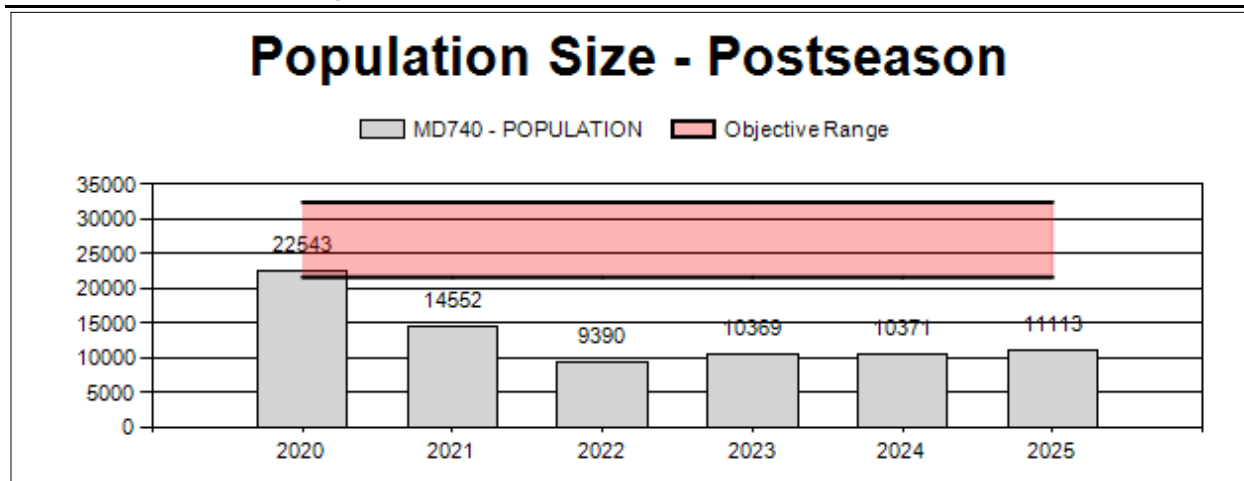
5

Model Date:

02/23/2026

Proposed harvest rates (percent of pre-season estimate for each sex/age group):

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	0.0%	0.0%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	32%	22%
Proposed change in post-season population:	3.0%	18.0%



**2026 Hunting Seasons
Cheyenne River Mule Deer (MD740)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
7	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 15		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
8	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 15		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
9	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 15		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
10	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 21	75	Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
11	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 15		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
12	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 15		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
13	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 15		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
14	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 15		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
21	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 15		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer

2026 Region B Nonresident Quota: 700 licenses

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 57% Satisfied 23% Neutral 20% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

With excellent productivity and survival in 2014 and 2015, this herd experienced noteworthy growth following a low point in 2012. However, between 2016 and 2022 productivity and survival generally declined, and Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) and Blue Tongue Virus (BTV) outbreaks increased adult mortality in 2021 and 2022. The 2022-23 winter was fairly severe in the southern half of the herd unit as well. Consequently, this mule deer population has dropped since 2019. Buck:doe ratios also waned during the first years of the current population decline as harvest remained fairly consistent. Hunting seasons then became more conservative beginning in 2021. With reductions in harvest, the buck:doe ratio has begun to increase, and it was anticipated the herd would grow slightly in 2023, however the post-season population actually dropped 2% in 2023. Due to the relatively severe 2022-23 winter in the southern half of the herd unit and a 2023 post season fawn:doe ratio of 65 per 100 does, the Region B and the HA 10, Type 1 license quotas were cut 20 and 25%, respectively. With this season structure in place, the Integrated Population Model (IPM) indicated 32% of the adult bucks would be harvested, which was identical to the estimated figure for the past four years. That framework and quotas were retained in 2024 and

2025 to continue to foster herd growth and maintain post-season buck:doe ratios. Mild winters and more average precipitation years in 2024 and 2025 have contributed to fawn ratios (Table 1) trending higher in recent years which has benefitted the slowly increasing population. The fawn:doe ratio of 76 per 100 does in 2025 is the highest fawn ratio recorded since 2014.

Managers continue to see a declining trend in hunter success, satisfaction and increased days to harvest. This is attributed to lower deer numbers as well as decreased hunter access in recent years. Nonresident harvest success has declined over the years from 70.6% in 2016 to 51.4% in 2025. Nonresident days per harvest has increased from 5.7 days in 2016 to 9.1 days in 2025. For 2026 seasons, the Region B license quota was decreased from 800 to 700 to reduce hunter pressure and increase hunter success and satisfaction.

While the age of harvested bucks in HA 10 decreased, post-season classifications showed an increasing number of older age class bucks in the population. (Appendix 1)

Table 1: 6-Year Classification Summary

2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary																					
for Mule Deer Herd MD740 - CHEYENNE RIVER																					
Year	Post Pop	MALES							FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot CIs	CIs Obj	Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	2+ CIs 1	2+ CIs 2	2+ CIs 3	UnCIs	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%			Ylg	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
2020	22,543	121	219	92	9	0	441	22%	1,127	55%	465	23%	2,033	1,416	11	28	39	± 3	41	± 3	30
2021	14,552	80	114	31	1	0	226	15%	838	55%	453	30%	1,517	926	10	17	27	± 2	54	± 4	43
2022	9,390	120	182	73	4	0	379	15%	1,359	53%	807	32%	2,545	1,046	9	19	28	± 2	59	± 3	46
2023	10,369	136	143	52	12	0	343	16%	1,122	51%	730	33%	2,195	1,219	12	18	31	± 2	65	± 4	50
2024	10,371	90	82	37	2	42	253	19%	684	51%	417	31%	1,354	1,076	13	24	37	± 3	61	± 5	45
2025	11,113	98	146	62	9	0	315	17%	903	47%	686	36%	1,904	1,099	11	24	35	± 3	76	± 4	56

Management Objective Review

The objective and management strategy for the Cheyenne River Herd was last evaluated in 2024, and will not be reviewed again until 2029.

Chronic Wasting Disease Monitoring and Management

The Cheyenne River Herd was prioritized for CWD sampling beginning in 2025 and will continue through 2026. The five-year annual and average prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled for CWD are presented below (Table 2). The previous years with small sample sizes equate to extremely wide confidence intervals and don't accurately represent actual prevalence. Yearling male prevalence, although a very small sample size, is much higher than expected. To date, no CWD management actions have occurred in this herd unit due to the private land nature of this herd.

Table 2. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested mule deer in the Cheyenne River Mule Deer Herd, 2021-2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) - <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>			Percent of Harvested Adult Males Sampled
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	
2021	8% (n=26)	0% (1)	0% (2)	2.6
2022	8% (n=12)	0% (0)	0% (0)	1.4
2023	8% (n=12)	0% (0)	0% (0)	1.7
2024	36% (n=14)	0% (0)	0% (1)	1.6
2025	23% (n=70)	50% (4)	0% (1)	9.3
2021-2025	19% (n=134)	80% (5)	0% (4)	3.5

Population Modeling

The 2025 IPM model using Time Varying Reproduction, Time Varying Juvenile Survival and Constant Adult Survival and using Days per Harvest as an effort variable provided a post-season population estimate of ~11,100 (CI =10,100-12,100). This fits well with models from 2022-2024 showing a slow, increasing population trend. Future projections show a sharper increase, however managers don't feel that will be the case and will most likely continue with the slower recovery that has been seen in recent years.

Appendix 1

Mule Deer Hunt Area 10

Post-Season Buck:Doe Ratios and Antler Classification Data
&
Tooth Age and Antler Data from Harvested Mule Deer

Year	Post Season Buck : Doe Ratio	Post-Season Buck Classification Percentages				Harvested Bucks			
		Ylg.	CLS 1	CLS 2	CLS 3	Median Age	Mean Antler Spread	Median Pts. Left	Median Pts. Right
2017	41 : 100	32%	54%	13%	1%	4.5	20.0	4	4
2018	134 : 100	7%	69%	22%	2%	4.5	19.9	4	4
2019	44 : 100	9%	43%	47%	0%	4.5	19.8	4	4
2020	59 : 100	15%	44%	30%	11%	5.5	19.1	4	4
2021	31 : 100	22%	56%	22%	0%	5.5	19.1	4	4
2022	34 : 100	20%	53%	28%	0%	6.5	18.4	5	4
2023	37 : 100	31%	42%	23%	4%	5.5	21.0	4	4
2024	74 : 100	15%	85 % 2+ Years Old			5.5	20.6	4	3.5
2025	38 : 100	14%	25%	50%	11%	4.0	16.6	4	4

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Mule Deer

PERIOD: 6/1/2025 - 5/31/2026

HERD: MD751 - BLACK HILLS

HUNT AREAS: 1-6

PREPARED BY: MATT
HUIZENGA

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	15,550	12,901	15,561
Harvest:	1,473	1,308	1,308
Hunters:	4,077	3,452	3,450
Hunter Success:	36%	38%	38 %
Active Licenses:	4,189	3,452	3,450
Active License Success:	35%	38%	38 %
Recreation Days:	12,871	10,562	10,500
Days Per Animal:	8.7	8.1	8.0
Males per 100 Females	20	20	
Juveniles per 100 Females	59	66	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) :

30000 (24000 - 36000)

Management Strategy:

Recreational

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective:

-57.0%

Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend:

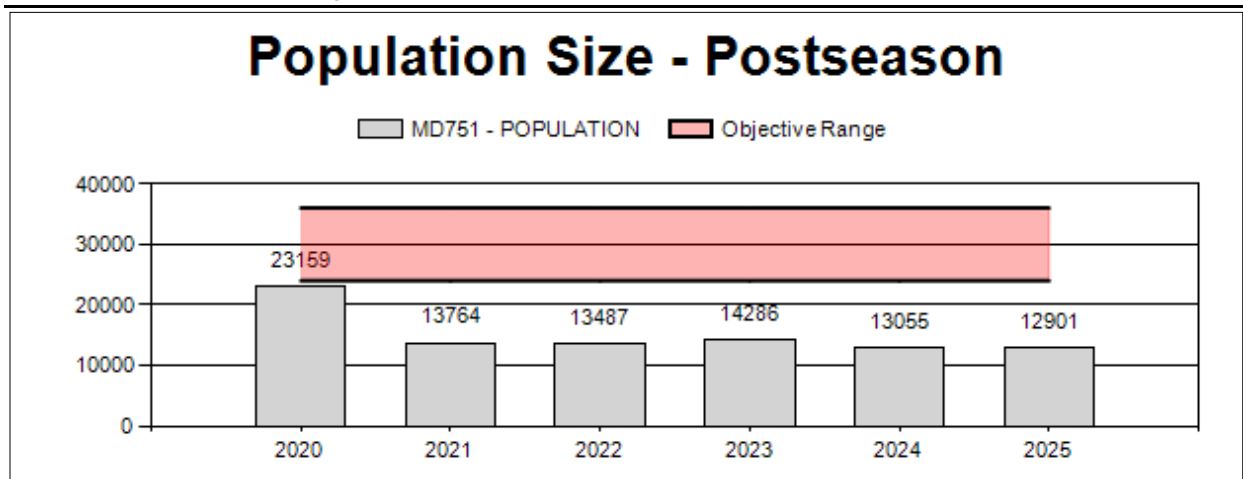
6

Model Date:

02/24/2026

Proposed harvest rates (percent of pre-season estimate for each sex/age group):

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	0%	0%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	24%	37%
Proposed change in post-season population:	+10.0%	+21.0%



**2026 Hunting Seasons
Black Hills Mule Deer (MD751)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
1	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 20		Antlered deer valid in the entire area; any white-tailed deer valid on private land
1, 2, 3	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 20	350	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer valid on private land
2	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 20		Antlered deer valid in the entire area; any white-tailed deer valid on private land
3	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 20		Antlered deer valid in the entire area; any white-tailed deer valid on private land
4	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 20		Antlered deer; except the lands of the State of Wyoming's Ranch A property shall be closed
4	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 20	25	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer valid on private land
5	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 20		Antlered deer
6	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 20		Antlered deer

2026 Region A Nonresident Quota: 2,000

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 62% Satisfied 22% Neutral 16% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

This herd exhibits regular population cycles. Following a low in 2012, it rebounded due to excellent productivity and survival, most notably in 2014 and 2015. It then peaked in 2016. Over the same period, post-season buck to doe ratios climbed above historic values. Between 2016 and 2022, the population declined substantially due to low recruitment, increased over-winter mortality in 2018, low fawn production between 2020 and 2022 (53 fawns:100 does), and losses to Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) and Blue Tongue Virus (BTV) in 2021 and 2022. Because hunting seasons remained fairly consistent as the population initially dropped, post-season buck to doe ratios returned to long-term values (~23 bucks per 100 does) between 2018 and 2020. In response to the declining population and buck to doe ratio, more conservative hunting seasons were implemented each year from 2020 through 2023. Even with a conservative hunting season in place, the post-season buck to doe ratio dropped to 16 bucks per 100 does in 2022, a level not seen

in 10 years. In 2023, the most restrictive hunting season in many years was implemented, with no doe mule deer hunting and a General License season that allowed only antlered deer to be taken with a closing date of November 17. In 2023, the post-season fawn to doe ratio increased to 72 fawns per 100 does, the post-season buck to doe ratio climbed to 20 bucks per 100 does, and the estimated, post-season population increased 8%, while the preseason trend count was up 20%. In 2024, License issuance and limitations were unchanged and the season was extended to November 20, which was largely supported by landowners, outfitters, and hunters. An aerial post-season composition survey was completed in December 2025. (Appendix 1, Figure 1) Post-season fawn to doe ratios (Table 1) increased again to 86 fawns per 100 does in 2024, however dropped to 66 bucks per 100 does in 2025. Buck ratios were slightly lower at 17 bucks per 100 does in 2024, but increased back up to 20 bucks per 100 does in 2025.

In 2026, there will be no change in the license framework affecting mule deer to promote increased buck ratios and overall population numbers.

Table 1. 6-Year Classification Summary

2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary																					
for Mule Deer Herd MD751 - BLACK HILLS																					
Year	Post Pop	MALES							FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot CIs	CIs Obj	Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	2+ CIs 1	2+ CIs 2	2+ CIs 3	2+ UnCIs	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%			YIng	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
2020	23,159	65	99	38	7	0	209	14%	884	58%	425	28%	1,518	1,462	7	16	24	± 2	48	± 4	39
2021	13,764	52	38	8	0	0	98	11%	497	57%	276	32%	871	942	10	9	20	± 3	56	± 5	46
2022	13,487	67	66	12	0	0	145	10%	869	58%	478	32%	1,492	905	8	9	17	± 2	55	± 4	47
2023	14,286	37	35	6	0	0	78	10%	392	52%	283	38%	753	1,409	9	10	20	± 3	72	± 7	60
2024	13,055	23	37	5	0	0	65	9%	373	49%	319	42%	757	1,074	6	11	17	± 3	86	± 8	73
2025	12,901	22	46	7	0	0	75	11%	369	54%	245	36%	689	0	6	14	20	± 3	66	± 7	55

Management Objective Review

The objective and management strategy for the Black Hills Mule Deer Herd was last evaluated and approved in 2025, and will not be reviewed again until 2030.

Chronic Wasting Disease Monitoring and Management

The Black Hills Mule Deer Herd was prioritized for CWD sampling from 2021 to 2023. The five-year annual and average prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled for CWD are presented below (Table 2). To date, no CWD management actions have occurred in this herd unit. Although, managers should continue to monitor the “hot spots” in Hunt Area 3 and within the municipalities in the Black Hills as future management actions are considered. The Black Hills Mule Deer Herd was prioritized for CWD sampling again in 2026.

Table 2. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested mule deer in the Black Hills Mule Deer Herd, 2021-2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) - <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>			Percent of Harvested Adult Males Sampled
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	
2021	7% (n=89)	0% (8)	0% (24)	7.8
2022	0% (n=27)	20% (5)	0% (4)	2.3
2023	11% (n=44)	0% (12)	0% (12)	4.5
2024	9% (n=22)	0% (3)	8% (13)	1.9
2025	0% (n=16)	0% (0)	0% (4)	1.2
2021-2025	7% (n=198)	4% (27)	2% (57)	3.4

Population Modeling

The best producing 2025 Integrated Population Model used Fixed Effect for Reproduction, Juvenile Survival, and Adult Survival with Days per Harvest as an effort variable. This model utilized data from 2011-2027 produced a post-season population estimate of ~12,900 mule deer (CI = 9,700-16,600). This estimate is congruent with the 2024 estimate showing a stable population since the dramatic decline in 2021. The model shows an increasing population and higher fawn ratios suggest that to be the case, however managers suspect the population will not increase as swiftly as modeled based off lower pre-season spotlight trend count numbers and probable EHD mortality in 2025 that the model doesn't account for.

Appendix 1

2025 MD751 Deer Composition & Abundance Survey

Date: December 3 & 4, 2025

Surveyors: Matt Huizenga, Nate Holst

Vendor/Helicopter: Bighorn Flying Company / Bell Jet Ranger

Total Flight Hours: 10.2

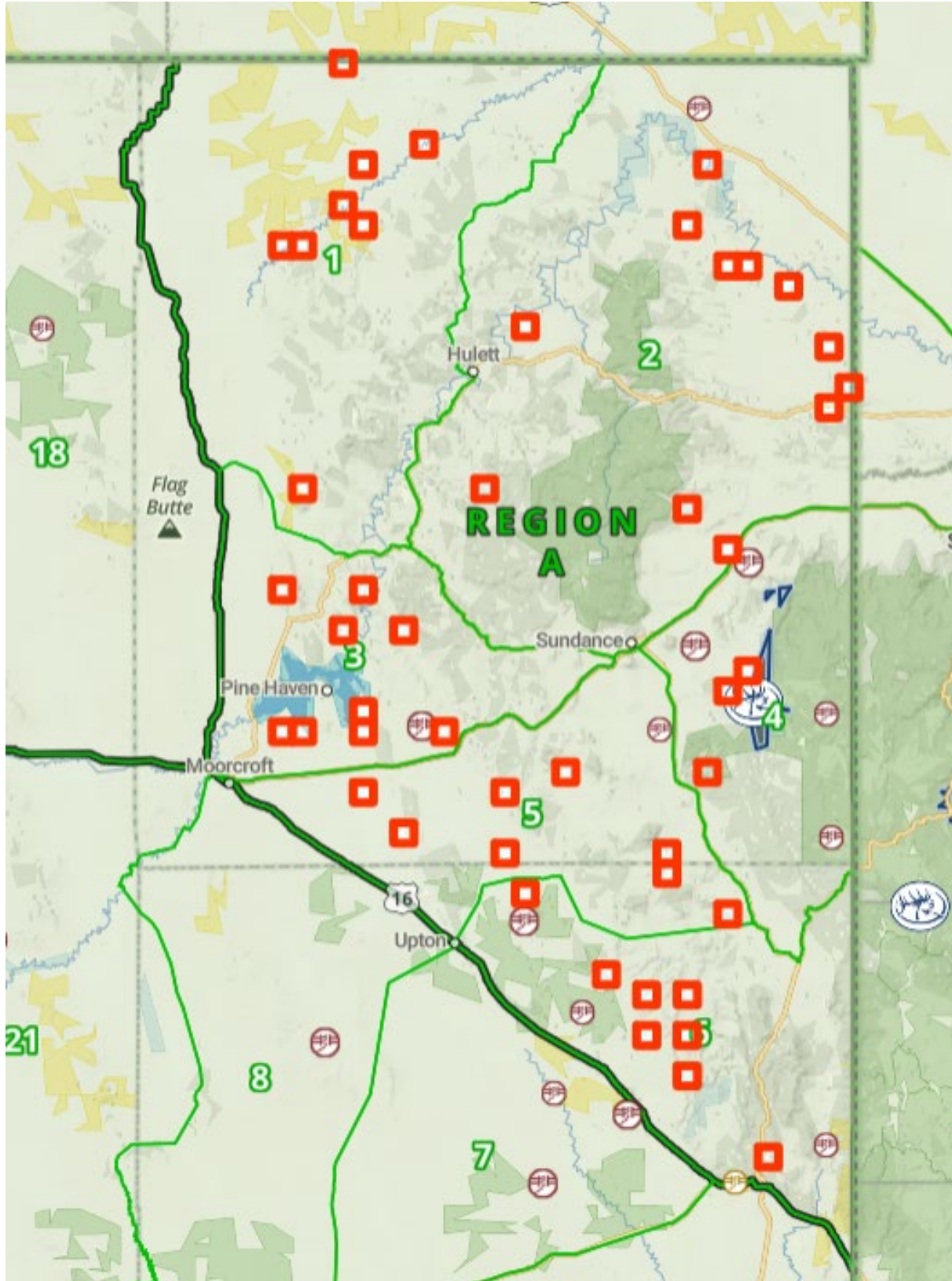
Cost: \$13,311

Weather: Clear to partly cloudy both days. 0% snow cover throughout the survey area. Temps 18-38 degrees F

Results: Surveyed 24 low density and 24 high density polygons. Deer were located in 35 of the 48 polygons. Total number of deer physically counted was 689 and produced a low-precision abundance estimate of ~11,600 deer (CI = 7,615-15,565)

Hunt Area	Does	Fawns	Yearling Bucks	Class 1 Bucks	Class 2 Bucks	Class 3 Bucks	Total Adult Bucks		Fawn Ratio	Yearling Ratio	Mature Buck Ratio	Total Buck Ratio
1	121	82	6	18	2	0	20		68	5	17	21
2	90	63	6	15	4	0	19		70	7	21	28
3	61	36	0	2	0	0	2		59	0	3	3
4	56	37	8	6	1	0	7		66	14	13	27
5	3	2	0	2	0	0	2		67	0	67	67
6	38	25	2	3	0	0	3		66	5	8	13
Herd Unit												
751	369	245	22	46	7	0	53		66	6	14	20

Figure 1. Polygons flown for Composition Survey



2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Mule Deer

PERIOD: 6/1/2025 - 5/31/2026

HERD: MD755 - NORTH CONVERSE

HUNT AREAS: 22

PREPARED BY: KYE HICKS

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	5,728	5,206	6,934
Harvest:	234	204	212
Hunters:	357	322	400
Hunter Success:	66%	63%	53 %
Active Licenses:	357	321	350
Active License Success:	66%	64%	61 %
Recreation Days:	1,525	1,231	1,200
Days Per Animal:	6.5	6.0	5.7
Males per 100 Females	43	43	
Juveniles per 100 Females	58	72	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) : 9000 (7200 - 10800)

Management Strategy: Special

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -42.2%

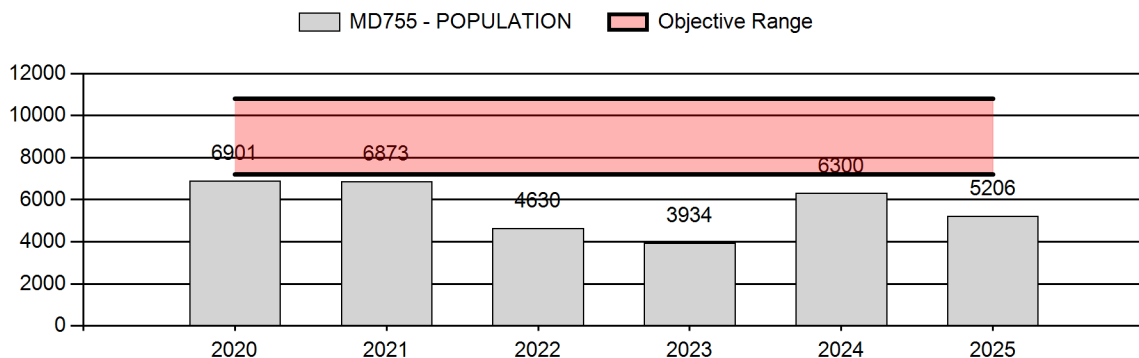
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 17

Model Date: 2/12/2026

Proposed harvest rates (percent of pre-season estimate for each sex/age group):

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	0%	0%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	14%	12%
Proposed change in post-season population:	.83%	1.19%

Population Size - Postseason



2026 Hunting Seasons
North Converse Mule Deer Herd Unit (MD755)

Hunt Area	Type	Special Archery Dates		Regular Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
22	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14	400	Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 63% Satisfied, 18% Neutral, 19% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

The North Converse Herd Unit experienced a dramatic reduction in population through 2011 likely caused by years of drought, culminating in a harsh winter and habitat loss due to anthropogenic disturbance. This herd unit has been subjected to a very high level of energy development disturbance over the past decade. Impacts from this development on the long-term carrying capacity of mule deer habitats are unknown, but potentially significant. The population showed a slight upward trend through 2018, but has remained below objective and declined from 2019 to 2023. Fawn production/survival has generally been poor, which contributed to population decline and stagnation. However, in 2024 and 2025, fawn ratios increased to 72 fawns per 100 does, which is above the five-year average of 63 (Table 1.). Buck ratios have been consistently high in this herd and have averaged 42 bucks per 100 does over the past three years, which follows the special management strategy criteria.

The 2026 season structure will be conservative to encourage population growth and maintain buck ratios within special management parameters. This hunt area is predominantly private land, with much public land inaccessible or difficult to reach; public-land mule deer hunting is therefore very limited. Many large landowners are concerned about the low population of mule deer and restrict hunter access. License issuance is largely based on private-land access and limited to avoid saturating available public lands. In 2024, managers created a Type 2 license valid only in the eastern portion of Area 22 to concentrate hunting pressure where deer densities are higher and reduce crowding on public lands. In 2025, mule deer harvest increased to 204 (compared with 180 in 2024 and a five-year average of 220). With the continued use of the Type 2 license, harvest success matched the five-year average of 65%. However, over the past two years managers and landowners have observed a significant increase in hunter pressure on the limited public land where the Type 2 license is valid. After the first draw there were 175 leftover Type 2 licenses, many of which were purchased by nonresidents who were unaware of how limited the applicable public land is. Because of this, the Type 2 license will be eliminated for the 2026 season in an effort to redistribute hunting pressure and enhance public-land hunting quality. With the dissolving of the Type 2 license, the Type 1 quota will now be 400.

Table 1. Postseason classification summary

2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary																					
for Mule Deer Herd MD755 - NORTH CONVERSE																					
Year	Post Pop	MALES							FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot CIs	Cls Obj	Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	2+ CIs 1	2+ CIs 2	2+ CIs 3	UnCls	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%			Ying	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
2020	6,901	25	82	41	2	0	150	23%	326	50%	173	27%	649	1,240	8	38	46	± 6	53	± 6	36
2021	6,873	7	22	14	0	0	43	17%	138	55%	72	28%	253	964	5	26	31	± 7	52	± 10	40
2022	4,630	14	45	13	1	0	73	23%	148	46%	99	31%	320	0	9	40	49	± 9	67	± 11	45
2023	3,934	9	22	7	0	0	38	20%	100	53%	52	27%	190	0	9	29	38	± 9	52	± 11	38
2024	6,300	23	26	14	1	0	64	21%	141	46%	102	33%	307	0	16	29	45	± 9	72	± 12	50
2025	5,206	24	24	14	0	0	62	20%	143	46%	103	33%	308	0	17	27	43	± 8	72	± 12	50

Objective Review

The objective and management strategy for the North Converse Mule Deer Herd was last evaluated and approved in 2025 and will not be reviewed again until 2030.

Chronic Wasting Disease Management

The five-year annual and average prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) are presented below (Table 2.). The North Converse Herd Unit was selected as a priority surveillance area in 2023. A total of 39 hunter harvested adult male mule deer and were tested with four testing positive for CWD. In 2024, Area 22 was selected as a mandatory surveillance area. This action was taken due to the low number of samples received in 2023. A total of 100 samples were taken from adult male mule deer with 12 testing positive. In both 2023 and 2024 letters were sent out to all license holders to inform them of the CWD sampling requests.

Table 2. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested mule deer in the North Converse Mule Deer Herd, 2021 - 2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>			Percent of Harvested Males Sampled
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	
2021	14% (n=7)	0% (0)	0% (1)	2.7
2022	0% (n=4)	0% (0)	0% (0)	1.7
2023*	10.3% (n=39)	0% (7)	0% (1)	19.5
2024*	12% (n=100)	0% (3)	0% (1)	57.7
2025	16.7%(n=6)	0% (2)	0% (0)	2.9
2021-2025	11.5% (n=156)	0% (12)	0% (3)	14.1

*Mandatory or Priority CWD sampling effort

Population Modeling

The Integrated Population Model (IPM) was used to model this herd. The default structure for mule deer, i.e. constant adult survival, time-varying reproduction and juvenile survival was selected. The licenses variable was selected to best represent the most predictable annual harvest. In addition to this data was selected from 2014-2027 to best represent this herd. With these settings in place, the observed data for the IPM included eleven years of harvest and ratio data along with abundance estimates from surveys conducted in 2021, 2022, and 2023. IPM convergence was acceptable, with the max Rhat value being 1.29.

A sightability survey was flown for this herd unit in January 2025. This provided an abundance estimate of approximately 10,692 mule deer (CI = 6,938-14,445). As with past sightability's flown in this herd unit, the estimated abundance exceeded modeled population estimates. Through observations both managers and landowners feel that this is a high estimate.

The estimated total post-season population for 2025 is 5,206 mule deer (CI = 3,722–7,192), a slight decrease from 2024. The three-composition abundance surveys and one sightability survey aligned with the model, indicating the estimate is reasonable. The IPM projects a significant population increase for 2026, driven by very productive fawn production and high survival over the past two years. Managers expect above-average yearling ratios and an increase in younger-age-class does.

Additional Information

In 2023, antler spread measurements (N=46) were collected from harvested adult male mule deer. Class II bucks (20"-25") represented only 11% of all bucks sampled, while Class I bucks (< 20") represented the other 89%. The average width was 16 inches and the average age was 4.4. Again in 2024, antler spread measurements (N=71) were collected from harvested adult male mule deer. Of all bucks sampled, 56% were Class I bucks (<20"), 38% were Class II bucks (20"-25"), and 6% were Class III bucks (>25"). The average width was 18.58 inches and the average age was 4.6.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Mule Deer

PERIOD: 6/1/2025 - 5/31/2026

HERD: MD756 - SOUTH CONVERSE

HUNT AREAS: 65

PREPARED BY: KYE HICKS

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	4,353	3,962	4,590
Harvest:	280	367	350
Hunters:	764	909	800
Hunter Success:	37%	40%	44 %
Active Licenses:	764	910	805
Active License Success:	37%	40%	43 %
Recreation Days:	3,211	4,300	3,768
Days Per Animal:	11.5	11.7	10.8
Males per 100 Females	34	38	
Juveniles per 100 Females	56	61	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) : 12000 (9600 - 14400)

Management Strategy: Private Land

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -67.0%

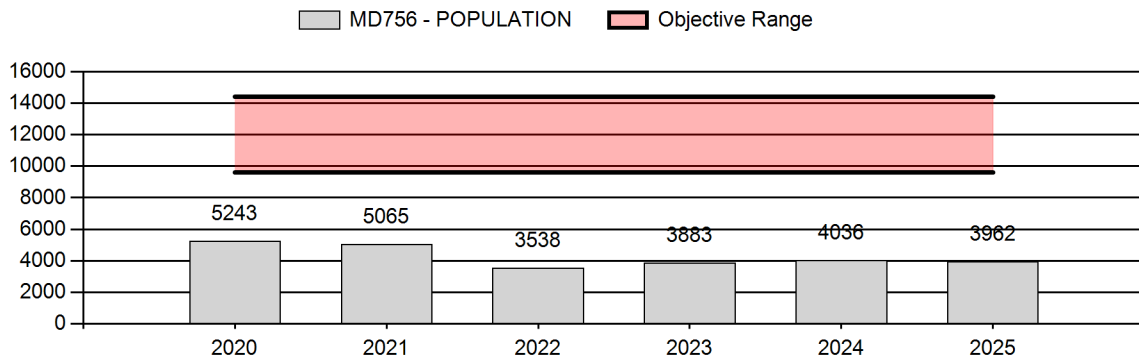
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 19

Model Date: 2/11/2026

Proposed harvest rates (percent of pre-season estimate for each sex/age group):

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	0%	0%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	25%	27%
Proposed change in post-season population:	.98%	1.16%

Population Size - Postseason



2026 Hunting Seasons
South Converse Mule Deer Herd Unit (MD756)

Hunt Area	Type	Special Archery Dates		Regular Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
65	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 20	Oct. 31		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer

2026 Region J nonresident quota: 750 licenses

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 59% Satisfied, 27% Neutral, 14% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

This area historically has maintained high buck ratios and high Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) prevalence. After hitting a low point in 2012, mule deer numbers grew through 2017 due to favorable environmental conditions, and have since remained stagnant. Therefore, seasons are more conservative due to low population size and significant landowner concerns with longer season dates.

This herd unit was hit with a significant spring storm in March 2021, which resulted in elevated winter mortality. Above-average snowfall and prolonged periods of frigid temperatures during the winter of 2022–2023 likely contributed to additional winter losses. Between 2023 and 2024, the area experienced a drought. However, any does that survived the severe 2022-2023 winter were able to produce an above-average fawn crop in 2024, with 67 fawns per 100 does (Table 1.). This increased recruitment is thought to have occurred due to improved forage availability during the 2023 growing season. The herd experienced another drought-affected winter in 2025. However, mild winter conditions combined with timely spring moisture helped maintain increased productivity, fawn production remained acceptable. In addition, with the mild winters and productive spring forage, adult survival has remained consistent.

A stratified random composition/abundance survey was conducted in December 2025 (Appendix A.). Managers classified 478 mule deer, resulting in a fawn ratio of 61 fawns per 100 does and 38 bucks per 100 does. The observed buck ratio was above the five-year average of 33 bucks per 100 does. Stratification and survey efforts will continue in future years to ensure consistent and high-quality classification results.

Harvest in 2025 was a five-year high, with 367 mule deer bucks harvested in Area 65. Managers attribute this increased harvest primarily to the exceptionally mild fall, which allowed sportsmen consistent access across the entire area throughout the season. In addition, Area 64, located immediately south of Area 65, implemented a change to its 2025 hunting season dates, running from October 20 through October 31. This adjustment created a five-day offset between the opening dates of the two areas. Because Areas 64 and 65 are both within Nonresident Region J, the staggered opening dates likely contributed to increased hunter participation in Area 65. Total hunter numbers rose from 792 in 2024 to 910 in 2025. In an effort to redistribute hunting pressure

and enhance public land hunting quality for the 2026 season, the season dates will be changed to match Area 64. The regular season dates will now be October 20 through October 31.

Table 1. Postseason classification summary

2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary																						
for Mule Deer Herd MD756 - SOUTH CONVERSE																						
Year	Post Pop	MALES								FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot CIs	CIs Obj	Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	2+ CIs 1	2+ CIs 2	2+ CIs 3	2+ UnCIs	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Ylg			Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult	
2020	5,243	52	70	25	2	0	149	21%	388	55%	167	24%	704	1,030	13	25	38	± 4	43	± 5	31	
2021	5,065	17	16	4	0	0	37	13%	167	59%	79	28%	283	794	10	12	22	± 5	47	± 8	39	
2022	3,538	33	15	23	1	0	72	19%	175	46%	130	34%	377	0	19	22	41	± 7	74	± 10	53	
2023	3,883	9	15	7	0	0	31	16%	104	55%	55	29%	190	0	9	21	30	± 8	53	± 11	41	
2024	4,036	48	38	12	1	0	99	17%	293	50%	197	33%	589	0	16	17	34	± 5	67	± 7	50	
2025	3,962	28	45	18	0	0	91	19%	241	50%	146	31%	478	0	12	26	38	± 6	61	± 8	44	

Objective Review

The objective and management strategy for the South Converse Mule Deer Herd was last evaluated and approved in 2023, and will not be reviewed again until 2028.

Chronic Wasting Disease Management

The South Converse mule deer herd was prioritized for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) sampling beginning in 2022 and continued through 2023. The five-year annual and average prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled for CWD are presented below (Table 2.). Mandatory CWD testing was required in the South Converse Herd Unit in 2022. Observing that prevalence has remained around 22% in adult males over the past five years, CWD is likely impacting adult male survival.

Table 2. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested mule deer in the South Converse Mule Deer Herd, 2021 - 2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>			Percent of Harvested Males Sampled
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	
2021	36.8% (n=19)	0% (0)	0% (1)	6.3
2022*	22.4% (n=147)	11% (9)	50% (2)	59
2023*	25% (n=16)	33.3% (3)	0% (1)	7.2
2024	0% (n=10)	0% (1)	0% (0)	3.0
2025	21.1% (n=19)	0% (1)	100% (1)	5.0
2021-2025	22.7% (n=211)	14.3% (14)	50% (5)	15.4

*Mandatory or Priority CWD sampling effort

Population Modeling

The Integrated Population Model (IPM) was used to model this herd. The default structure for mule deer, i.e. constant adult survival, time-varying reproduction and juvenile survival was selected. The license variable was selected to best represent the most predictable annual harvest. In addition to this, data was selected from 2004-2027 to best represent this herd. With these settings in place the observed data for the IPM included twenty-one years of harvest and ratio data along with abundance estimates from surveys conducted in 2022, 2023 and 2025. The IPM convergence was acceptable, with the max Rhat value being 1.48.

Managers flew a sightability survey in January 2023 which produced an abundance estimate of 4,682 (CI=3,368-5,996) mule deer. While estimates are variable between composition/abundance surveys, sightability surveys, and modeled populations, the overall stagnant trend is believed to be accurate.

The estimated total post-season population for 2025 is 3,962 mule deer (CI=3,307–4,628), a slight decrease from 2024. Managers attribute the decline to lower fawn production in 2025. With fawn ratios of 61 fawns per 100 does and yearling buck ratios of 12 yearling bucks per 100 does, managers expect to see a slight increase in population for 2026. The herd remains well below objective.

Additional Information

In 2022, managers collected antler spread measurements (N=112) from adult male mule deer harvested in the South Converse Herd Unit. Of all bucks sampled, 68% were Class I bucks (<20"), 29% were Class II bucks (20"-25"), and 3% were Class III bucks (>25").

Appendix A. 2025 MD 756 South Converse Aerial Composition Abundance Results

Surveyors: Kye Hicks, Cody Bish

Date: 12/01/2025

Vendor/Helicopter: Helicopter Solutions, MT (Kent Potter) / Bell Jet Ranger

Total Polygons Surveyed: Thirty-One polygons were flown.

Total Survey Time: 7 flight hours.

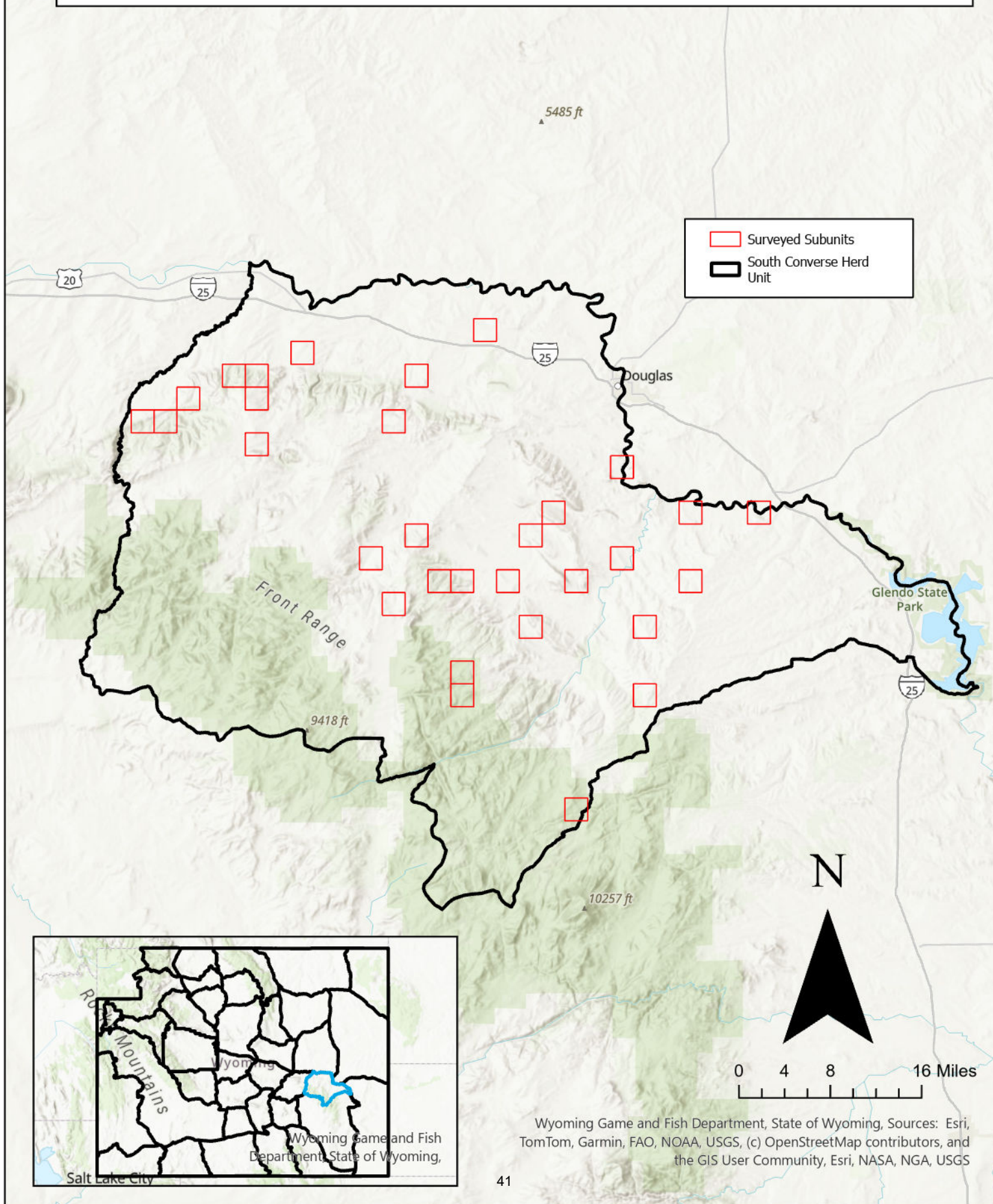
Costs: The total cost for this project was \$13,574.85

Weather: The weather was ideal for the duration of the project. While the temperature was below freezing the sun was out with minimal cloud cover. There was light to no wind on the day that the survey was flown. Snow was present across the entire hunt area and made detection easy.

Results: During this survey a total of 478 mule deer were observed. These observations resulted in a fawn ratio of 61 fawns per 100 does and 38 bucks per 100 does. This also resulted in a low precision abundance estimate of 3,634 (CI=1,293-5,974) mule deer.

2025 MD756 Composition Abundance Results			
Raw Count	Total Estimate	LCI	UCI
478	3,634	1,293	5,974

2025 South Converse Composition Abundance Survey



2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Mule Deer

PERIOD: 6/1/2025 - 5/31/2026

HERD: MD757 - BATES HOLE/HAT SIX

HUNT AREAS: 66-67

PREPARED BY: KYLIE SINCLAIR

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	3,264	3,757	4,287
Harvest:	272	365	368
Hunters:	797	963	904
Hunter Success:	34%	38%	41%
Active Licenses:	797	963	904
Active License Success:	34%	38%	41%
Recreation Days:	2,677	3,647	3,044
Days Per Animal:	9.8	10.0	8.3
Males per 100 Females	30	36	
Juveniles per 100 Females	70	74	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) : 8000 (6400 - 9600)

Management Strategy: Special

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -53.0%

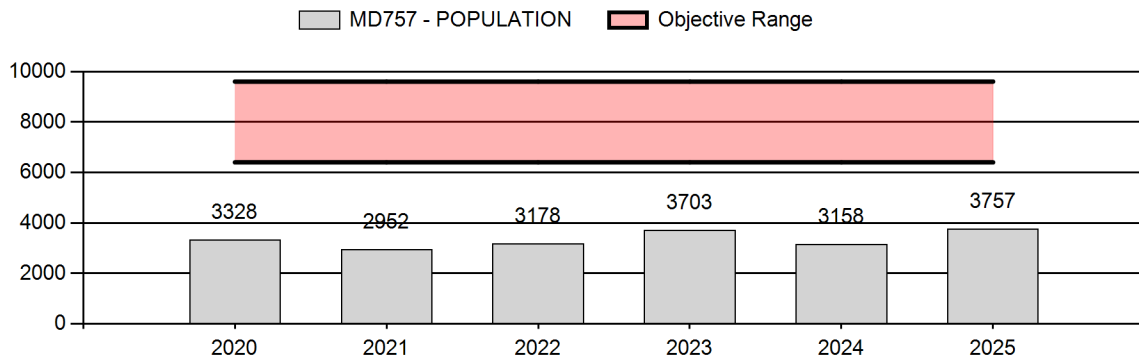
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 25

Model Date: 02/11/2026

Proposed harvest rates (percent of pre-season estimate for each sex/age group):

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	1%	0%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	36%	36%
Proposed change in post-season population:	1%	14%

Population Size - Postseason



2026 HUNTING SEASONS
BATES HOLE / HAT SIX MULE DEER HERD (MD757)

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
66	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 21		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer

2026 Region D Nonresident Quota: 300

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 50% Satisfied, 28% Neutral, 22% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

For the last 15 years this population has been experiencing cycles of growth and decline. The winter of 2022-2023 was harsh in most of this herd unit although core winter ranges were not as severely affected. Collar data indicated over-winter survival in adult females was near normal. Postseason classifications have yielded mediocre fawn ratios in the 60s per 100 does for most of the last decade until 2024 (Table 1). There was a vast improvement in 2024 to 85 fawns per 100 does, the highest since 1996. In 2025, classifications were still at a respectable 74 fawns per 100 does. This is thought to be from the incredible forage production from 2022-2023 followed by mild winters in 2024 and 2025. Below average spring and summer moisture with warm temperatures also occurred in 2024 and 2025 (Appendix A). Antler-point restrictions (APRs) of three (3) points or more on either antler were used from 2019-2022, with the goal of conserving younger age-class bucks and reducing harvest pressure in years when the buck ratio is low. The APR was removed in 2023 as buck ratios remained strong, and managers wanted to distribute harvest across all male age classes. Buck ratios jumped to 36 bucks per 100 does in 2025, the highest ratio in a decade. In 2025, a total of 399 deer were classified, which is within the 300-500 sample goal and increases confidence in the ratio data (Table 2).

Overall hunter success in 2025 matched success in 2024 with 38%, above the five-year average of 34%. Nonresident harvest success was 70%, similar to 2024 success and higher than the five-year average of 45%. An estimated 362 mule deer bucks were harvested in 2025, higher than the previous five-year average of 265. Improved success rates likely stem from mild weather conditions during the 2024 and 2025 seasons, which allowed hunters to easily access all of the hunt area. In addition, the continued removal of the APR led to more yearling bucks being harvested, increasing overall harvest. Tooth samples and antler measurements were collected from 23 harvested mule deer bucks in 2025. The average cementum annuli tooth age of those sampled was 3.7 years old, and average antler spread of 14.5 inches.

2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary

for Mule Deer Herd MD757 - BATES HOLE/HAT SIX

Year	Post Pop	MALES							FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot CIs	CIs Obj	Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		YIng	2+ CIs 1	2+ CIs 2	2+ CIs 3	UnCIs	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%			YIng	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
2020	3,328	43	41	6	0	0	90	16%	278	50%	187	34%	555	1,070	15	17	32	± 5	67	± 7	51
2021	2,952	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0	0	0	0	± 0	0	± 0	0
2022	3,178	34	30	15	0	0	79	16%	260	51%	170	33%	509	906	13	17	30	± 5	65	± 8	50
2023	3,703	15	17	3	0	0	35	14%	127	52%	81	33%	243	0	12	16	28	± 7	64	± 11	50
2024	3,158	26	18	8	1	0	53	13%	191	47%	163	40%	407	0	14	14	28	± 5	85	± 11	67
2025	3,628	23	31	15	0	0	69	17%	190	48%	140	35%	399	0	12	24	36	± 6	74	± 10	54

Table 1. Postseason classification summary for MD757.

Bio-Year	Total Class N for HA	# Bucks Classified					Buck Ratios per 100 Females					
		YIng	Class I	Class II	Class III	Total	YIng	Class I	Class II	Class III	All Adult	Total
2016	1,836	132	198 (85%)	31 (13%)	4 (2%)	365	15	22	3	1	26	41
2017	1,165	54	108 (80%)	23 (17%)	4 (3%)	189	9	18	4	1	22	31
2018	734	32	59 (89%)	7 (11%)	0 (0%)	98	8	15	2	0	17	26
2019	1,050	55	89 (86%)	10 (10%)	4 (4%)	158	10	17	2	1	19	29
2020	555	43	41 (87%)	6 (13%)	0 (0%)	90	15	15	2	0	17	32
2021	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2022	509	34	30 (66%)	15 (33%)	0 (0%)	79	13	11	5	0	17	30
2023	243	15	17 (85%)	3 (15%)	0 (0%)	35	12	13	2	0	16	28
2024	407	26	18 (67%)	8 (30%)	1 (3%)	53	14	9	4	0	14	28
2025	399	23	31 (67%)	15 (33%)	0 (0%)	69	12	16	8	0	24	36

Table 2. Antler Classification analysis for Area 66 within the Bates Hole/Hat Six Mule Deer Herd Unit, 2016-2025.

For the 2026 hunting season, managers prescribed a seven-day general license season, which is typical for the herd.

Management Objective Review

The objective and management strategy for the Bates Hole/Hat Six Mule Deer Herd was last evaluated and approved in 2025, and will not be reviewed again until 2030.

Mule Deer Initiative Habitat Information

As part of the Mule Deer Initiative, managers collect Rapid Habitat Assessment (RHA) data throughout the herd unit in some years. RHA data was collected within the Bates Hole – Hat Six Mule Deer Herd during the 2025 reporting period. Numerous habitat treatments are ongoing and

being planned including sagebrush treatments, noxious weed control, juniper removal, and wildlife friendly fence conversions.

Chronic Wasting Disease Management

Elevated Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) surveillance efforts have occurred in this herd in recent years due to ongoing CWD research (Table 3). From 2020-2022, a total of 162 adult male mule deer were sampled, which is below the sample goal of 200. This herd is exhibiting a high prevalence of CWD (30%) in adult bucks, which has been sustained over the past five-years of CWD surveillance. Managers believe this high prevalence is contributing to poor adult survival in this herd. To date, no meaningful CWD management actions have occurred in this herd unit. In 2019, a multi-year research project was initiated in this herd by WGFD in collaboration with the University of Wyoming. This study focused on interactions between mountain lion predation, mule deer and CWD. This study concluded in 2025 and analysis will be forthcoming.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>			Percent of Harvested Males Sampled
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	
2021*	28% (n=29)	0% (1)	0% (2)	15
2022*	32% (n=72)	100% (1)	0% (5)	32
2023	23% (n=30)	14% (7)	50% (2)	7
2024	32% (n=25)	18% (11)	0% (0)	7
2025	29% (n=28)	20% (5)	0% (1)	8
2021-2025	29.3% (17.4-36.5%, n=184)	20% (25)	10% (10)	12

*Years with mandatory or priority sampling

Table 3. 2021-2025 CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested deer in MD757.

Population Modeling

The PopR Integrated Population Model (IPM) seems to model this population well. Managers chose to model this herd using the default structure for mule deer (i.e. constant adult survival, time-varying reproduction and juvenile survival) in the IPM. Days per harvest was selected as the most related to annual harvest. Twenty-six years of harvest and ratio data were included in the model, as well as five annual survival estimates for adult female mule deer stemming from research along with five abundance estimates (Table 4). Chronic low survival (73% in 2017, 66% in 2021, 72% in 2022, 65% in 2023, and 78% in 2024) of adult does is largely responsible for this population remaining stagnant. These independent estimates will improve model performance over time.

A composition abundance survey was flown in 2025 (Appendix B) and resulted in a low precision population estimate of 2,803 (CI=1,398-4,208). The 2025 postseason population estimate for this herd from the IPM is 3,757 (CI=3,440–4,102) mule deer, which is well below objective. Based on the composition/abundance and sightability survey estimates, the 2025 population estimate produced by the IPM is believed to be accurate.

	2018	2022
Survey Result	3,512 (CI = 3,238 – 3,786)	3,686 (CI = 2,575 – 4,797)
IPM Estimate	3,067 (CI = 2,782 – 3,351)	3,164 (CI = 2,786 – 3,582)

Table 4. MD757 sightability survey results compared to IPM estimates for survey years 2018 and 2022.

Appendix A

Weather Data for the Bates Hole/Hat Six Mule Deer Herd Unit

Precipitation

From October 2024 through September 2025 (Water Year 2024), precipitation in the Bates Hole/Hat Six Mule Deer Herd Unit was 1.5 inches lower than the 30-year average for the same water year timeframe (Figure 1). The growing season (April-June) precipitation in 2025 (5.3 inches) was also about 0.7 inches lower than the 30-year growing season average. Precipitation during this time of year is extremely important for shrubs because this is when the majority of annual growth occurs. July and August of 2025, the driest months during the summer, received 1.0 inch of precipitation which is 0.9 inches below the 30-year average for July and August. The herd unit received 1.8 inches of precipitation during September and October 2024, which is below the 30-year average by 0.9 inches. Precipitation received during this timeframe is beneficial to help jumpstart plant growth the following growing season. The overall precipitation for water year 2025 was below normal, which is not ideal for creating adequate fall green up conditions to assist with mule deer body condition going into winter. The 2026 water year precipitation thus far has been below average.

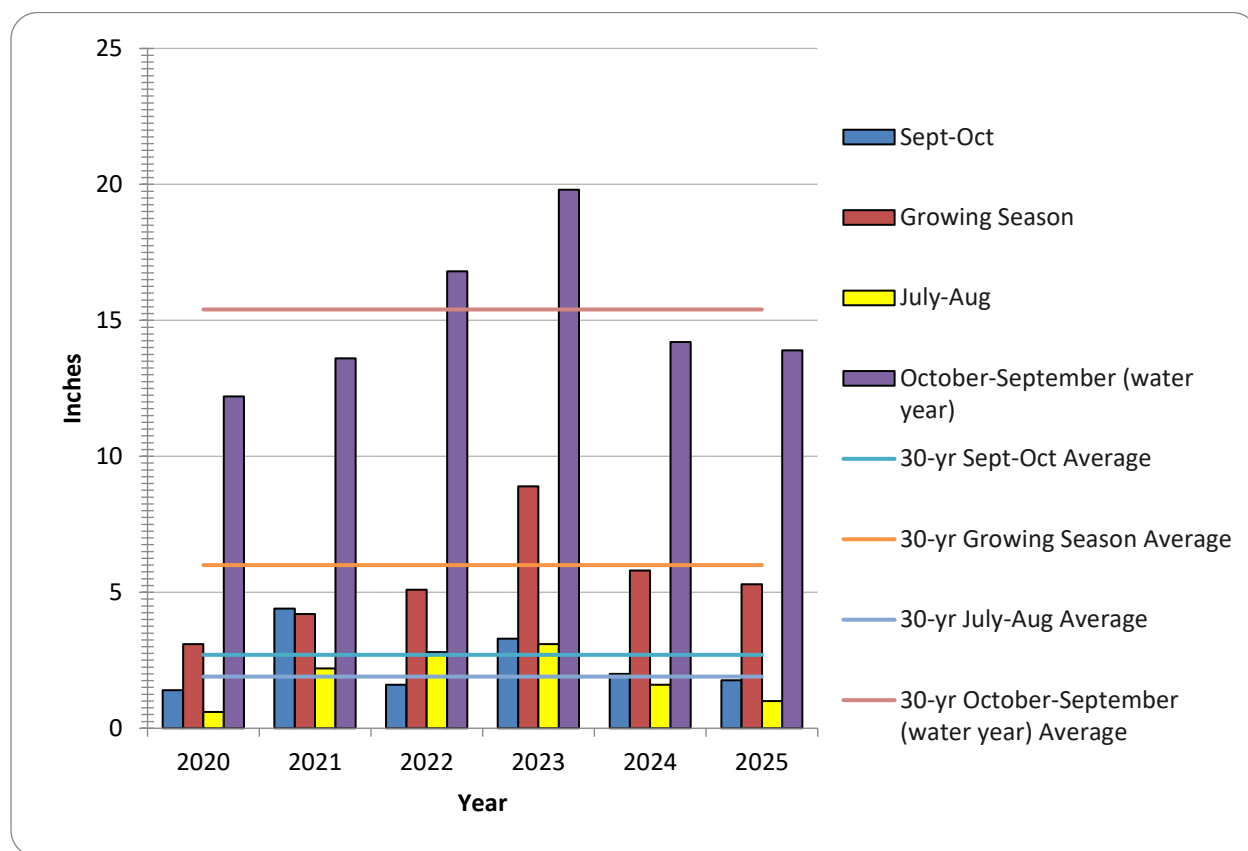


Figure 1. Seasonal precipitation received compared to 30-year averages within the Bates Hole/Hat Six Mule Deer Herd Unit.

Appendix B

2025 MD757 Bates Hole/Hat Six Aerial Classification Results

Date: 12/1/2025 - 12/3/2025

Survey Time: 6.8 hours

Surveyors: Kylie Sinclair, Sean Cotteleer, Wyatt Yapoujian

Vendor/Helicopter: Helicopter Solutions, MT (Kent Potter) – Bell Jet Ranger

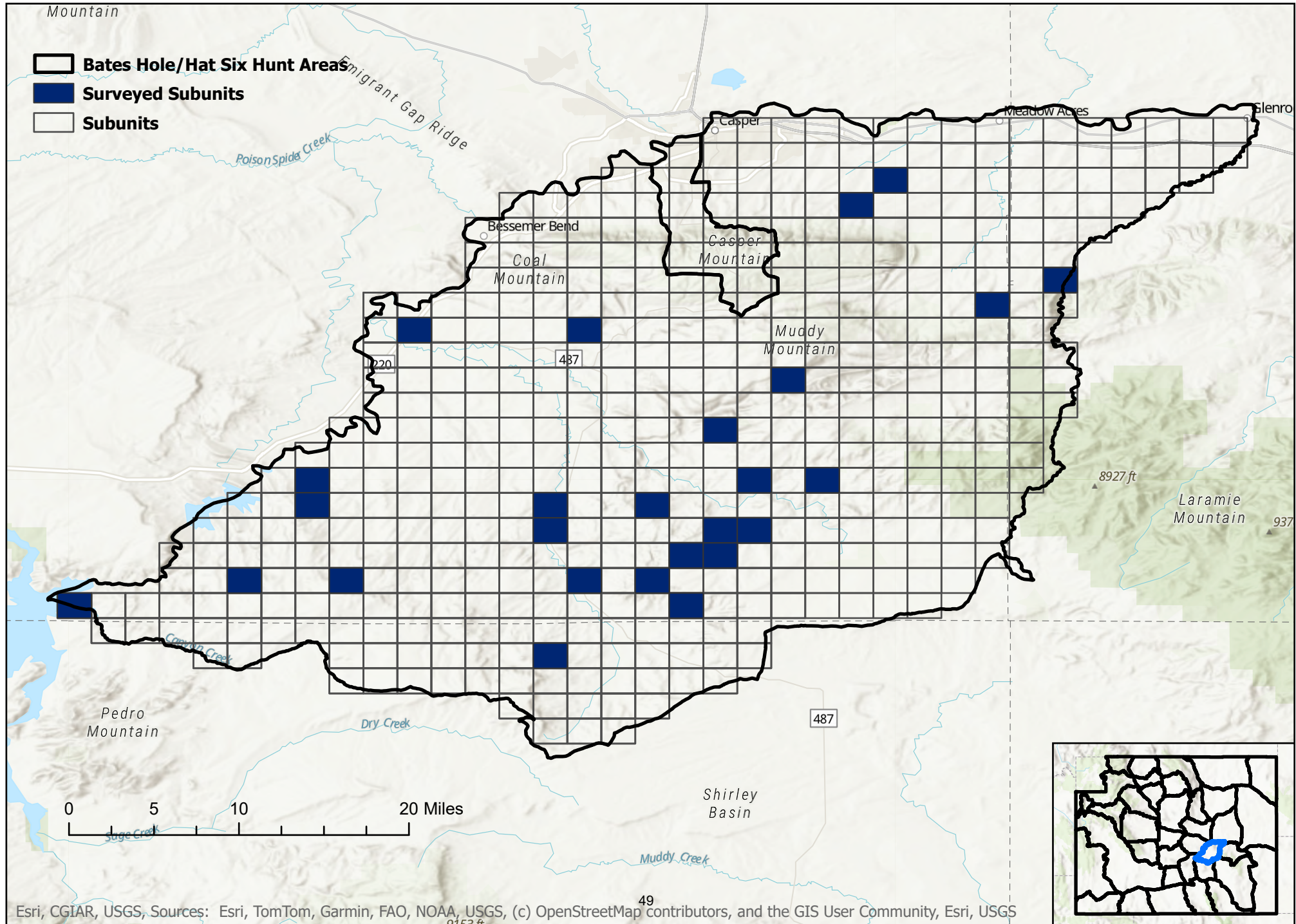
Cost: \$12,256.10

Weather: Clear to cloudy with little snow cover, 10-37°F

Results: Twenty-six polygons were surveyed, 21 of which were considered high density and five of low density. The total number of deer counted for this classification survey was 399, from which a low precision abundance estimate of 2,803 was produced (CI = 1,398-4,208).

2025 MD757 Classification Results			
Raw Count	Total Estimate	LCI	UCI
399	2,803	1,398	4,208

2025 Bates Hole/Hat Six Composition Abundance Survey



2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Mule Deer

PERIOD: 6/1/2025 - 5/31/2026

HERD: MD758 - RATTLESNAKE

HUNT AREAS: 88-89

PREPARED BY: KYLIE SINCLAIR

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	2,037	2,269	2,496
Harvest:	191	229	225
Hunters:	412	473	478
Hunter Success:	46%	48%	47%
Active Licenses:	417	496	500
Active License Success:	46%	46%	45%
Recreation Days:	1,489	1,879	1,765
Days Per Animal:	7.8	8.2	7.8
Males per 100 Females	36	50	
Juveniles per 100 Females	59	75	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) : 5500 (4400 - 6600)

Management Strategy: Special

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -58.7%

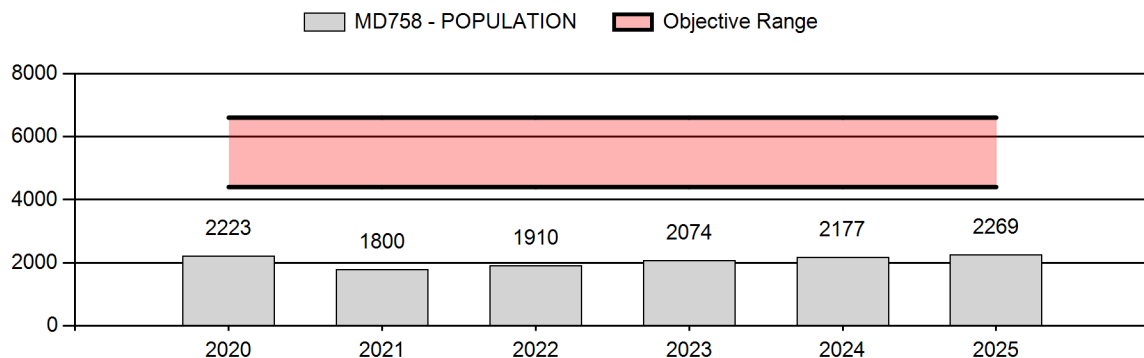
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 20

Model Date: 02/11/2026

Proposed harvest rates (percent of pre-season estimate for each sex/age group):

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	3%	3%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	30%	26%
Proposed change in post-season population:	1%	10%

Population Size - Postseason



**2026 HUNTING SEASONS
RATTLESNAKE MULE DEER HERD (MD758)**

Hunt Area	Type	Special Archery Dates		Regular Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
88	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 21		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
88	7	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Dec. 15	75	Doe or fawn valid on private land
89	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 31	150	Antlered deer

2026 Region D Nonresident Quota: 300

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: Herd Unit: 63% Satisfied, 20% Neutral, 17 % Dissatisfied

HA 88: 58% Satisfied, 21% Neutral, 21% Dissatisfied

HA 89: 76% Satisfied, 16% Neutral, 8% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

The model for this herd depicts a population that declined until 2021, then grew from 2021 to 2025 during years of improved fawn production and overwinter survival. Fawn production for the whole herd unit has been increasing each year since 2022. After two years of assessing the extreme winter of 2022-2023, it is apparent that losses in this herd were minimal. The increased moisture from the harsh winter, as well as from summer 2023, resulted in more available forage. This, in addition to the mild winters of 2023-2024 and 2024-2025, resulted in good body condition in does which in turn increased fawn production despite the dry summers of 2024 and 2025. In 2025, fawn production reached the highest level since 2015 at 75 fawns per 100 does (Table 1). Buck ratios also rose to 51 bucks per 100 does, exceeding the special management goal of 30-45 bucks per 100 does. Postseason classification data was collected using a stratified random-sample survey design via helicopter in 2025. The resulting sample size (N=262) was below the sample goal of 300-500 deer. Typically, this survey is conducted when deer are more concentrated on winter range. The fall of 2025 was extremely mild which resulted in less deer being observed in the survey area due to them being more disbursed. The proportion of larger mature bucks improved in 2025 with 17 Class II (antler width 20-25”) or III (antler width >25”) bucks per 100 does, above the previous five-year average of 9 per 100 does (Table 2). Even with mild weather conditions in the fall that

typically reduce deer movement, harvest success on Area 89 Type 1 licenses jumped to 79% in 2025, an increase from the five-year average of 69%. General license success in Area 88 decreased for the second year in a row to 28%, which is now below the five-year average of 34%. Overall hunter satisfaction in Area 89 was noticeably higher in 2025 at 76%, while satisfaction in Area 88 remained similar at 58%.

2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary

for Mule Deer Herd MD758 - RATTLESNAKE

		MALES								FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot Cls Obj		Males to 100 Females				Young to		
Year	Post Pop	Ylg	2+ Cls 1	2+ Cls 2	2+ Cls 3	2+ UnCls	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Yling			Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult	
2020	2,223	24	45	25	4	0	98	20%	248	51%	139	29%	485	881	10	30	40	± 5	56	± 7	40	
2021	1,800	3	23	9	1	6	48	22%	124	56%	48	22%	220	786	2	31	39	± 8	39	± 8	28	
2022	1,910	14	14	16	1	0	45	17%	133	51%	84	32%	262	803	11	23	34	± 7	63	± 10	47	
2023	2,074	24	17	7	0	0	48	16%	154	51%	101	33%	303	0	16	16	31	± 6	66	± 10	50	
2024	2,177	12	26	9	1	0	48	17%	136	48%	99	35%	283	0	9	26	35	± 7	73	± 11	54	
2025	2,269	14	25	18	2	0	59	23%	115	44%	88	34%	262	0	12	39	51	± 10	77	± 13	51	

Table 1. Postseason classification summary for MD758.

Bio-Year	Total Class N for HA	# Bucks Classified					Buck Ratios per 100 Females					
		Ylng	Class I	Class II	Class III	Total	Ylng	Class I	Class II	Class III	All Adult	Total
2016	717	45	78 (74%)	25 (24%)	3 (2%)	151	13	22	7	I	30	42
2017	762	31	53 (39%)	78 (58%)	4 (3%)	166	10	16	24	I	42	51
2018	620	46	64 (73%)	22 (25%)	2 (2%)	134	21	29	10	I	40	61
2019	281	13	37 (79%)	9 (19%)	1 (2%)	60	9	26	6	I	34	43
2020	485	24	45 (61%)	25 (34%)	4 (5%)	98	10	18	10	2	30	40
2021	190	3	23 (64%)	9 (25%)	1 (3%)	36	3	20	9	I	29	32
2022	262	14	14 (45%)	16 (52%)	1 (3%)	45	11	11	12	I	24	34
2023	200	20	15 (71%)	6 (29%)	0 (0%)	41	22	16	7	0	24	54
2024	192	5	23 (77%)	6 (20%)	1 (3%)	35	6	26	7	1	34	40
2025	262	14	25 (56%)	18 (40%)	2 (4%)	59	12	22	16	2	39	51

Table 2. Antler classification analysis for Area 89 within the Rattlesnake Mule Deer Herd Unit, 2016-2025.

Tooth samples and antler measurements were also collected from 29 harvested adult male mule deer from Area 89 in 2025 (Table 3). The average cementum annuli tooth age of those sampled was 5.4 years, near the long term mean for the hunt area, with the median age being 5.5. The average antler spread was 22 inches, which is typical. With the high buck ratio and hunter success, 25 licenses will be added to the Area 89 Type 1 license in 2026. For Area 88, managers continue to offer a 7-day general license season with licenses valid for antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer. In 2023, managers prescribed a Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) management hunt in Area 88 with Type 7 licenses valid for doe or fawn on private land. The Type 7 license will stay at 75 licenses in 2026 to put continued pressure on CWD “hotspot” areas.

Management Objective Review

The objective and management strategy for the Rattlesnake Mule Deer Herd was last evaluated and approved in 2025 and will be up for objective review again in 2030.

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Average Tooth Age	5.83	5.88	5.67	5.4	5.09	5.18	5.05	5.41	6.1	5.6	5.3	5.3
Median Tooth Age	6.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	4.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5
Average Antler Spread	23	23	23	23	20	21	20	21.25	22.9	20	20	21.9
Total Sample Size (N)	13	8	12	20	54	20	28	24	18	55	44	28

Table 3. Hunter-submitted tooth age and antler measurement data from Area 89 deer, 2014-2025.

Chronic Wasting Disease Management (CWD)

This herd was not a priority area for CWD surveillance in 2025. This herd was under mandatory surveillance in 2023 and 2024 for the General, 88-7, and 89-1 licenses (Table 4). Due to the low sample size in does, the 88-7 license remained under mandatory surveillance in 2025 (Table 4). Hunter compliance for mandatory sampling in 2025 was low with a total of 19 hunter harvested doe mule deer sampled of 46 harvested. An additional 25 mule deer bucks were also sampled. CWD prevalence from hunter harvested mule deer in the five-year prevalence rates continued to be considerably higher in adult bucks in Area 88 (34%) compared to Area 89 (9%). According to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department CWD Management Plan, a potential way to reduce CWD on the landscape is to identify “hot spots”, or areas where CWD is concentrated, and reduce deer densities. An analysis of harvest locations from CWD-positive deer in Area 88 indicated many agricultural fields are CWD hot spots. Managers therefore implemented doe mule deer harvest in Area 88 in 2023, which contains both irrigated landscapes and riparian habitats. This may provide a focused and meaningful way to reduce CWD prevalence while limiting the spread to adjacent Area 89. Due to the slow progressing nature of CWD, the plan recommends any management actions are implemented for at least 5-10 years to draw meaningful inference of impacts. The three-year CWD prevalence in Area 88 does is 17% (N=53). Increased buck harvest is not warranted in Area 88 due to low buck ratios of resident deer.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>			Percent of Harvested Males Sampled
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	
2021	33% (n=12)	0% (1)	0% (0)	8.8
2022	7% (n=13)	0% (0)	25% (4)	9.7
2023*	11% (n=102)	22% (18)	25% (12)	78
2024*	27% (n=104)	7% (14)	23% (22)	63
2025*	32% (n=25)	0% (0)	5% (19)	14
2021-2025	20.3% (12.8-25.8%, n=256)	18% (33)	24% (53)	36.6

*Years with mandatory or priority sampling

Table 4. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested mule deer in the Rattlesnake Mule Deer Herd 2021-2025.

Population Modeling

The trends depicted by the model are reasonable and results from six low precision abundance estimates help align the model for more accurate population estimates. The most recent low precision abundance estimate from a composition abundance survey was 3,375 (CI=1,036-5,713) in 2025 (Appendix A). The postseason population estimate for this herd unit from the Integrated Population Model was approximately 2,269 (CI=1,982-2,496) mule deer, which is well below objective. Time varying reproduction and juvenile survival and constant adult survival structure was used to model this herd. Managers believe the model estimate is reasonable and reflects expected growth given recent mild winters.

Appendix A

2025 MD758 Rattlesnake Aerial Classification Results

Date: 12/2/2025 - 12/3/2025

Survey Time: 7.4 hours

Surveyors: Kylie Sinclair, Brandon Werner, Sean Cotteleer, Wyatt Yapoujian

Vendor/Helicopter: Helicopter Solutions, MT (Kent Potter) – Bell Jet Ranger

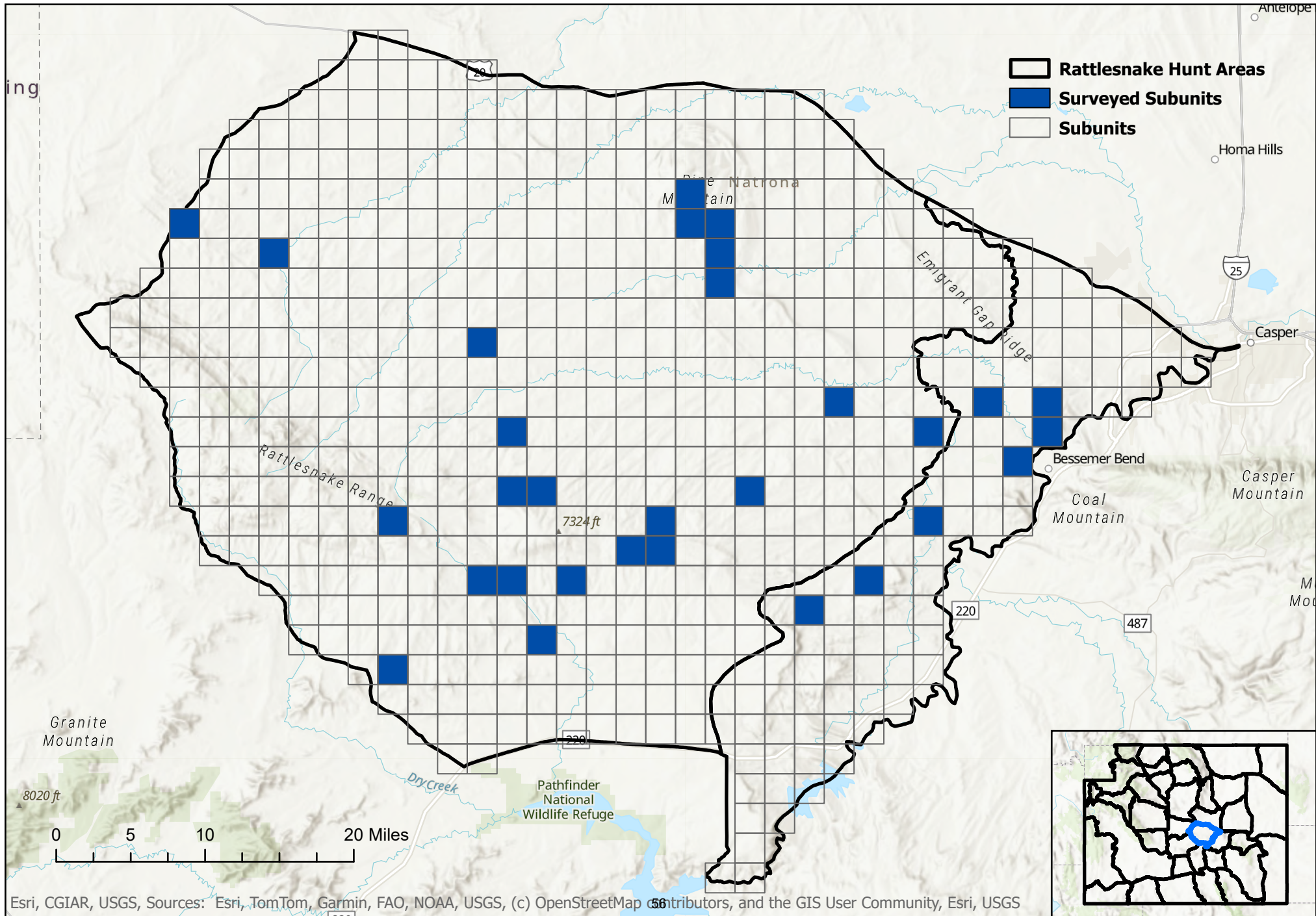
Cost: \$14,141.65

Weather: Clear to cloudy with little snow cover, 25-36°F

Results: Thirty polygons were surveyed, 24 of which were considered high density and six of low density. The total number of deer counted for this classification survey was 262, from which a low precision abundance estimate of 3,375 was produced (CI = 1,036-5,713).

2025 MD758 Classification Results			
Raw Count	Total Estimate	LCI	UCI
262	3,375	1,036	5,713

2025 Rattlesnake Composition Abundance Survey



2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Mule Deer

PERIOD: 6/1/2025 - 5/31/2026

HERD: MD759 - NORTH NATRONA

HUNT AREAS: 34

PREPARED BY: KYLIE SINCLAIR

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	1,386	1,448	1,608
Harvest:	137	101	101
Hunters:	194	131	138
Hunter Success:	71%	77%	73%
Active Licenses:	207	132	145
Active License Success:	66%	77%	70%
Recreation Days:	931	694	702
Days Per Animal:	6.8	6.9	7.0
Males per 100 Females	39	43	
Juveniles per 100 Females	56	70	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) : 4700 (3760 - 5640)

Management Strategy: Special

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -69.2%

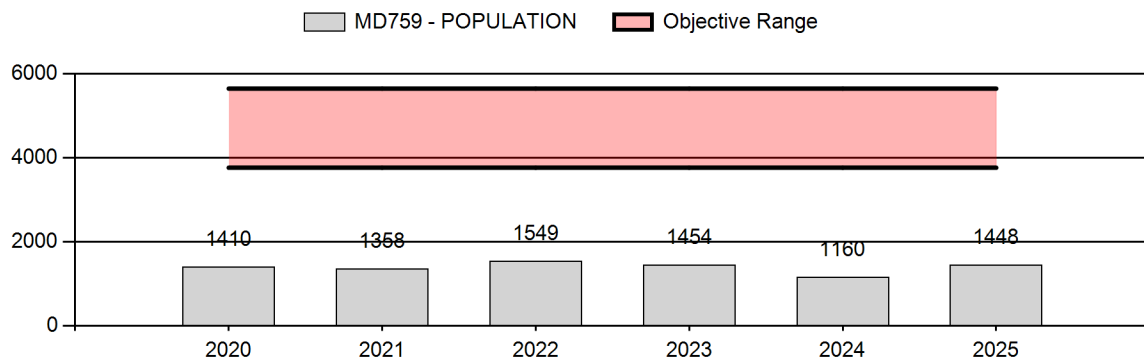
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 11

Model Date: 02/16/2026

Proposed harvest rates (percent of pre-season estimate for each sex/age group):

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	2%	1%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	34%	21%
Proposed change in post-season population:	4%	11%

Population Size - Postseason



2026 HUNTING SEASONS
NORTH NATRONA MULE DEER HERD (MD759)

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
34	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 31	125	Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
34	7			Aug 15	Dec. 15	25	Doe or fawn valid east of Bucknum Road (Natrona County Road 125) and south of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad right-of-way

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 73% Satisfied, 18% Neutral, 9% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

After experiencing a severe winter in 2011, this herd suffered critical losses but was able to recover and gradually increase its population until 2017. The preceding three years (2017-2019) yielded only moderate fawn production and survival rates which led to a drop in the herd's total population. This trend of declining herd numbers continued until 2021. Though far from objective, improved fawn production occurred starting in 2022 with an average of 73 fawns per 100 does from 2022-2025. This has resulted in a stable and now increasing population in this herd. Yearling buck ratios improved as well averaging 20 bucks per 100 does since 2023 (Table 1). Above average moisture in 2023 and mild winters in 2023 and 2024 contributed to increased fawn production and survival.

2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary

for Mule Deer Herd MD759 - NORTH NATRONA

Year	Post Pop	MALES								FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot Cls	Cls Obj	Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	2+ Cls 1	2+ Cls 2	2+ Cls 3	UnCls	Total	%		Total	%	Total	%			Ylg	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
2020	1,410	21	81	24	1	0	127	20%		370	59%	125	20%	622	1,096	6	29	34	± 3	34	± 3	25
2021	1,358	8	18	5	0	0	31	15%		125	60%	51	25%	207	479	6	18	25	± 6	41	± 8	33
2022	1,549	23	27	11	1	0	62	16%		192	49%	137	35%	391	743	12	20	32	± 5	71	± 9	54
2023	1,454	41	32	19	1	0	93	24%		177	46%	116	30%	386	0	23	29	53	± 7	66	± 9	43
2024	1,160	42	35	15	3	0	95	21%		193	43%	163	36%	451	0	22	27	49	± 6	84	± 9	57
2025	1,448	27	37	12	1	0	77	20%		178	47%	125	33%	380	0	15	28	43	± 6	70	± 9	49

Table 1. Postseason classification for the North Natrona Mule Deer Herd, 2020-2025.

This herd was ground classified in 2025 yielding a total number of 340 mule deer. Buck ratios were down from 49 to 43 bucks per 100 does, but still above the previous five-year average of 39

and within the special management target range of 30 to 45 bucks per 100 does. Mature bucks (Class II & III) were at 10 bucks to 100 does in 2025, down slightly from the previous three-year average of 12 bucks per 100 does (Table 2). Class II bucks have an antler width 20-25 inches and Class III bucks are greater than 25 inches. The fawn ratio was 74 fawns per 100 does. This is a drop from 84 fawns per 100 does in 2024, the highest it has been since 2015, but still above the five-year average of 71 fawns per 100 does. Success on a Type 1 license in 2025 was 78%, higher than the five-year average of 70%. In 2025, teeth and antler measurements were collected from 56 harvested male mule deer. Both the average and median cementum annuli tooth age of those sampled deer was 4.5 years old with an average antler spread of 19.4 inches (Table 3).

Bio- Year	Total Class N for HA	# Bucks Classified					Buck Ratios per 100 Females					
		Ylng	Class I	Class II	Class III	Total	Ylng	Class I	Class II	Class III	All Adult	Total
2016	1,208	68	105 (73%)	36 (25%)	3 (2%)	144	12	18	6	1	26	37
2017	924	57	124 (78%)	34 (21%)	2 (1%)	217	14	31	8	1	40	54
2018	745	56	116 (86%)	17 (13%)	2 (1%)	191	16	32	4	1	38	53
2019	234	11	27 (90%)	3 (10%)	0 (0%)	41	10	23	3	0	26	36
2020	622	21	81 (76%)	24 (23%)	1 (1%)	127	6	22	6	0	29	34
2021	207	8	18 (78%)	5 (22%)	0 (0%)	31	6	10	4	0	18	25
2022	391	23	27 (69%)	11 (28%)	1 (3%)	62	12	14	6	1	20	32
2023	386	41	32 (79%)	19 (19%)	1 (2%)	93	23	14	8	1	29	53
2024	451	42	35 (66%)	15 (28%)	3 (6%)	95	22	18	8	2	27	49
2025	380	27	37 (74%)	12 (24%)	1 (2%)	77	15	29	9	1	28	43

Table 2. Antler classification analysis for the North Natrona Mule Deer Herd Unit, 2016-2025.

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Average Age	5.27	5.27	4.85	4.6	4.7	4.8	5.1	5.25	5.34	5.38	4.5	4.5
Median Age	4.5	4.5	5.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.0	4.5	4.5
Average Antler Spread	20	20.9	21.5	20.7	19.9	18.1	18.1	18.5	19.8	20.2	18.3	19.4
Sample Size (N) =	44	32	40	51	49	58	72	33	29	26	28	52

Table 3. Hunter-submitted tooth age and antler measurement data from Area 34 deer, 2014-2025.

There will be a total of 125 Type 1 licenses, valid for antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer, and 25 Type 7 licenses, valid for a doe or fawn east of Bucknum Road (Natrona County Road 125) and south of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad right-of-way, allotted for the 2026 hunting

season. No changes have been made following the 2025 hunting season due to Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) concerns, high buck ratios, and low herd numbers.

Management Objective Review

The objective and management strategy for the North Natrona Mule Deer Herd was last evaluated and approved in 2024, and will not be reviewed again until 2029.

Chronic Wasting Disease Management

The North Natrona mule deer herd was a mandatory surveillance hunt area for CWD in 2025. It was last a priority area in 2019-2020. Seventy-one adult mule deer bucks were sampled in 2025 with a prevalence of 8.5%, an increase from 6.7% in 2020 (Table 4). Positive detections occurred throughout the unit, with the heaviest concentration in the southeast corner of the unit near agricultural lands. To get a better sample size, mandatory CWD surveillance for this unit will occur again in 2026.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>			Percent of Harvested Males Sampled
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	
2021	16.7% (n=12)	0% (1)	33.3% (3)	12.5
2022	12.5% (n=8)	0% (0)	50% (4)	7.8
2023	12.5% (n=8)	0% (0)	0% (1)	8.2
2024	12.5% (n=8)	0% (0)	0% (0)	10
2025*	8.5% (n=71)	0% (1)	25% (4)	74
2021-2025	12.1% (5.9-19.9%, n=107)	0% (2)	33% (12)	22

Table 4. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested deer in the North Natrona deer herd, 2020-2025. * indicates mandatory CWD sampling effort.

Population Modeling

The 2025 postseason population estimate for this herd from the PopR Integrated Population Model (IPM) used time varying reproduction, time varying juvenile survival, and constant adult survival structure. The model estimated a postseason population of approximately 1,448 (CI=1,212-1,717) mule deer. In 2021, a composition abundance survey was flown which resulted in a low confidence population estimate of 2,670 (CI=0-7,741). A sightability survey was conducted in this herd in 2025. The survey results estimated 1,821 (CI=1,337-2,304) deer (Appendix A). Managers believe the 2024 modeled population estimate of 1,160 was lower than the actual population based on the results from the 2025 sightability survey. The 2025 model estimate is more in line with managers' observations, landowner feedback, and herd dynamics in recent years. This estimate is significantly below the objective of 4,700 deer.

Appendix A

2025 MD759 North Natrona Sightability Results

Date: 1/13/2026 – 1/15/2025, 1/17/2026-1/18/2026

Survey Time: 26.3 hours

Surveyors: Kylie Sinclair, Sean Cotteleer, Brandon Werner, Simon Martinez, Austin Swingholm, Wyatt Yapoujian

Vendor/Helicopter: Bighorn Flying Company – Bell Jet Ranger

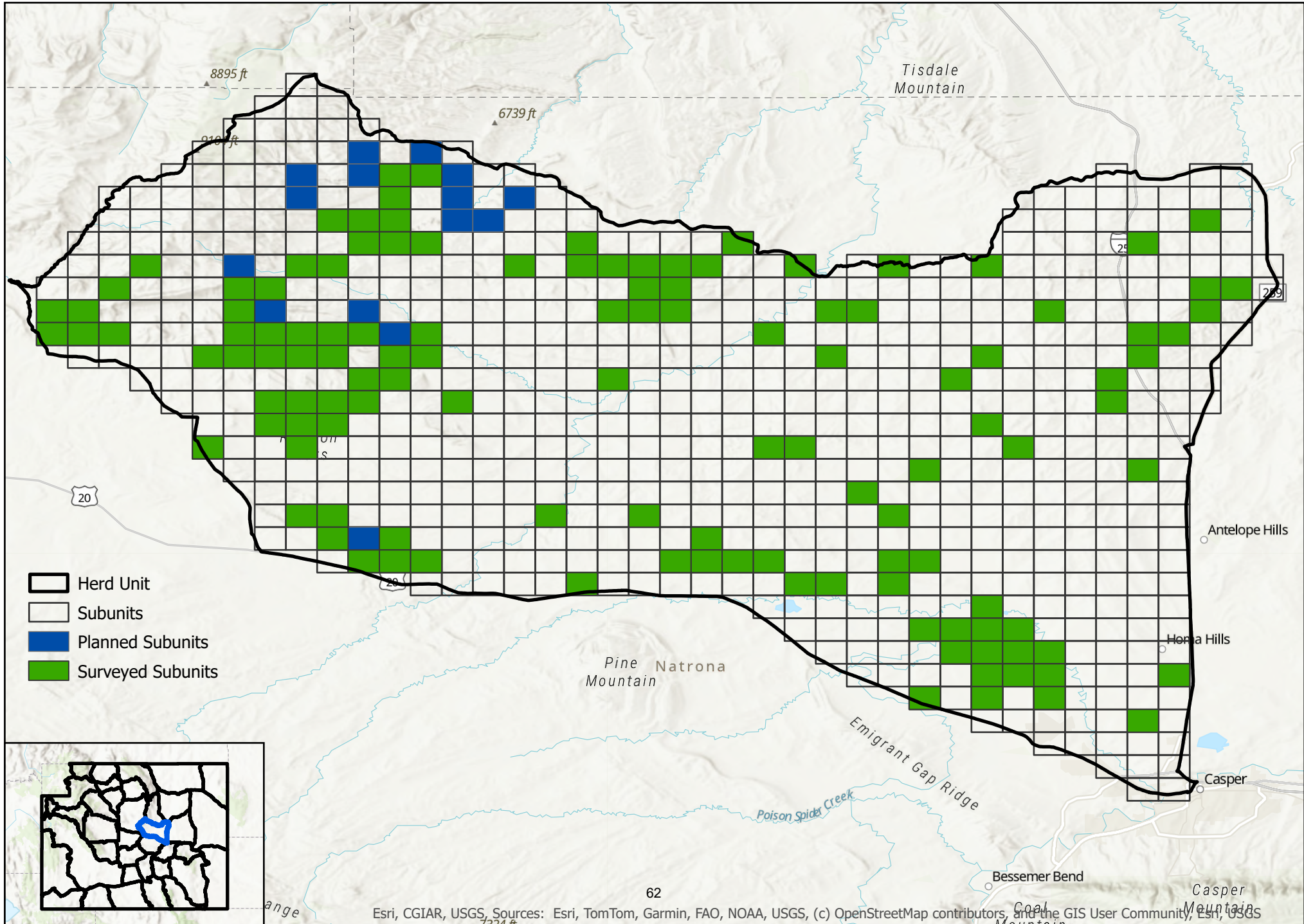
Cost: \$35,685

Weather: Clear to cloudy with little snow cover, 3-57°F

Results: One hundred twenty-five polygons were surveyed, 96 of which were considered high density and 29 of low density. The total number of deer counted for this classification survey was 785, from which a low precision abundance estimate of 1,821 was produced (CI = 1,337-2,304).

2025 MD757 Classification Results			
Raw Count	Total Estimate	LCI	UCI
785	1,821	1,337	2,304

2025 North Natrona Mule Deer Sightability Survey



2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: White tailed Deer
 HERD: WD706 - BLACK HILLS
 HUNT AREAS: 1-6

PERIOD: 6/1/2025 - 5/31/2026

PREPARED BY: MATT
 HUIZENGA

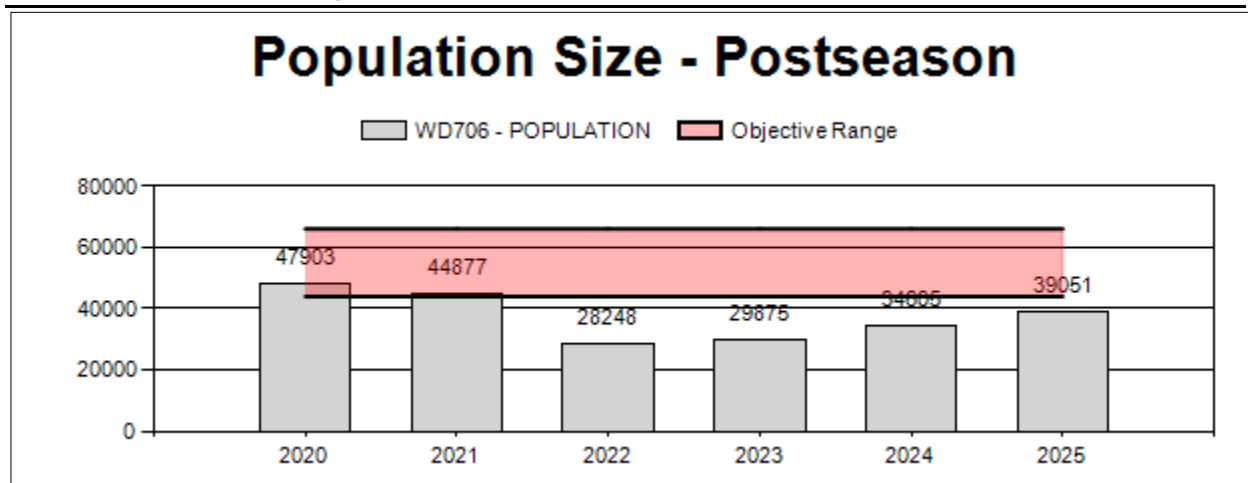
	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	37,102	39,051	44,467
Harvest:	3,503	2,405	2,500
Hunters:	6,771	5,513	5,000
Hunter Success:	52%	44%	50%
Active Licenses:	7,056	5,667	5,000
Active License Success:	50%	42%	50 %
Recreation Days:	27,936	22,924	22,000
Days Per Animal:	8.0	9.5	8.8
Males per 100 Females	20	38	
Juveniles per 100 Females	57	61	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) : 55000 (44000 - 66000)

Management Strategy: Recreational
 Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -29.0%
 Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 5
 Model Date: 02/25/2026

Proposed harvest rates (percent of pre-season estimate for each sex/age group):

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	1.5%	2.5%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	30.3%	23%
Proposed change in post-season population:	+14.8%	+13.0%



**2026 Hunting Seasons
Black Hills White-Tailed Deer (WD706)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
1	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 20		Antlered deer valid in the entire area; any white-tailed deer valid on private land
1, 2, 3	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 20	350	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer valid on private land
2	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 20		Antlered deer valid in the entire area; any white-tailed deer valid on private land
3	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 20		Antlered deer valid in the entire area; any white-tailed deer valid on private land
4	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 20		Antlered deer; except the lands of the State of Wyoming's Ranch A property shall be closed
4	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 20	25	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer valid on private land
5	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 20		Antlered deer
6	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 20		Antlered deer

2026 Region A Nonresident Quota: 2,000

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 63% Satisfied 23% Neutral 14% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

This herd experiences cyclic population fluctuations due to weather, changes in harvest, and periodic disease outbreaks. Following a population low in 2012, the population grew steadily, peaking about 25% above objective in 2017. It then began to decline due to increased harvest and reduced recruitment. This decline was exasperated by considerable mortality during the 2018-19 winter and a truly significant die off from Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) and Blue Tongue Virus (BTV) in 2021, followed by further EHD and BTV mortalities in 2022. As a result of these two back to back years of EDH / BTV outbreaks, some ranches reported losing in excess of 75% of their resident white-tailed deer, most particularly in the northern half of the herd unit.

As this population declined, hunting seasons became more conservative between 2020 and 2023. However, even with changes to hunting seasons, hunter success steadily dropped from an average of 65% between 2014 and 2020 to 53% in 2021, and then to 45% in 2022. Similarly, hunter effort, which averaged 6.2 days per harvest between 2014 and 2020 increased to 7.8 and 9.3 days per

harvest in 2021 and 2022, respectively. These changes in harvest statistics were borne out in hunter satisfaction, which fell from about 80% in 2017-2018 to around 70% in 2019-2020, then to 55% in 2021, and just 49% in 2022. In 2023, with the most conservative hunting season in decades, hunter success and satisfaction increased a couple percentage points, and effort declined about 0.5 days per harvest.

Region A, Non-Resident General license issuance dropped 27% in 2022, and the hunting season closed November 20 in all hunt areas. Type 7 license issuance was also cut substantially, and 864 unsold Type 7 licenses were pulled from sale prior to the start of the hunting season. In 2023, the Region A quota was reduced another 27% to 2,000 and the hunting season closed November 17. That year, doe-fawn license issuance was reduced an additional 88%, and all doe/fawn licenses converted to Type 8, which allowed only harvest of antlerless white-tailed deer on private land. In 2024, as this herd appeared to have begun to rebound, the Region A quota remained unchanged, while the season closing date returned to November 20 which was largely supported by landowners, outfitters, and hunters and an additional 100 type 8 licenses were issued. Total buck harvest increased by 23%, hunter satisfaction increased to 63%, however days/harvest stayed consistent. As this population is still recovering, managers left the 2025 season framework unchanged from 2024.

Due to personnel changes, pre-season white-tailed deer classifications were not conducted in the Black Hills in 2024. Fawn ratios increased from 52 fawns per 100 does in 2023 to 61 fawns per 100 does in 2025 (Table 1). Buck ratios increased from 28 bucks per 100 does in 2023 to 38 bucks per 100 does in 2025. Winter conditions were fairly mild through that time period with above average precipitation in 2025.

While not confirmed by the laboratory, managers again saw evidence of EHD in 2025. This likely accounted for a lower number of bucks in the field than classified pre-season and was evidenced in reduced success rates and increased days to harvest. Season dates were left unchanged again in 2026, however to address localized higher densities of deer, doe white-tailed deer were added to the limitations to allow to be harvested on private land in Hunt Areas 1-3. This will allow harvest on private lands where needed, but not increase the licenses available for a herd that is slowly recovering.

Table 1. 6-Year Classification Summary

2020 - 2025 Preseason Classification Summary																	
for White tailed Deer Herd WD706 - BLACK HILLS																	
Year	Pre Pop	MALES				FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot CIs	CIs Obj	Males to 100 Females			Young to		
		Ylg	Adult	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%			Ylg	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	100 Adult
2020	53,763	137	286	423	18%	1,239	53%	680	29%	2,342	1,039	11	23	34	± 0	55	± 0
2021	49,541	80	210	290	14%	1,124	56%	601	30%	2,015	936	7	19	26	± 0	53	± 0
2022	30,560	62	110	172	14%	702	57%	368	30%	1,242	892	9	16	25	± 0	52	± 0
2023	32,100	49	134	183	16%	645	55%	336	29%	1,164	909	8	21	28	± 0	52	± 0
2024	37,369	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0	0	0	0	± 0	0	± 0
2025	41,696	45	90	220	19%	580	50%	356	31%	1,156	0	8	16	38	± 0	61	± 0

Management Objective Review

The objective and management strategy for the Black Hills White-Tailed Deer Herd was last evaluated and approved in 2025, and will not be reviewed again until 2030.

Chronic Wasting Disease Monitoring and Management

The Black Hills White-Tailed Deer Herd was prioritized for CWD sampling in 2021. The five-year annual and average prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled for CWD are presented below (Table 2). To date, no CWD management actions have occurred in this herd unit. Although, managers should continue to monitor the “hot spots” in Hunt Area 3 and within the municipalities in the Black Hills as future management actions are considered. The Black Hills White-Tailed Deer Herd was prioritized for CWD sampling again in 2026.

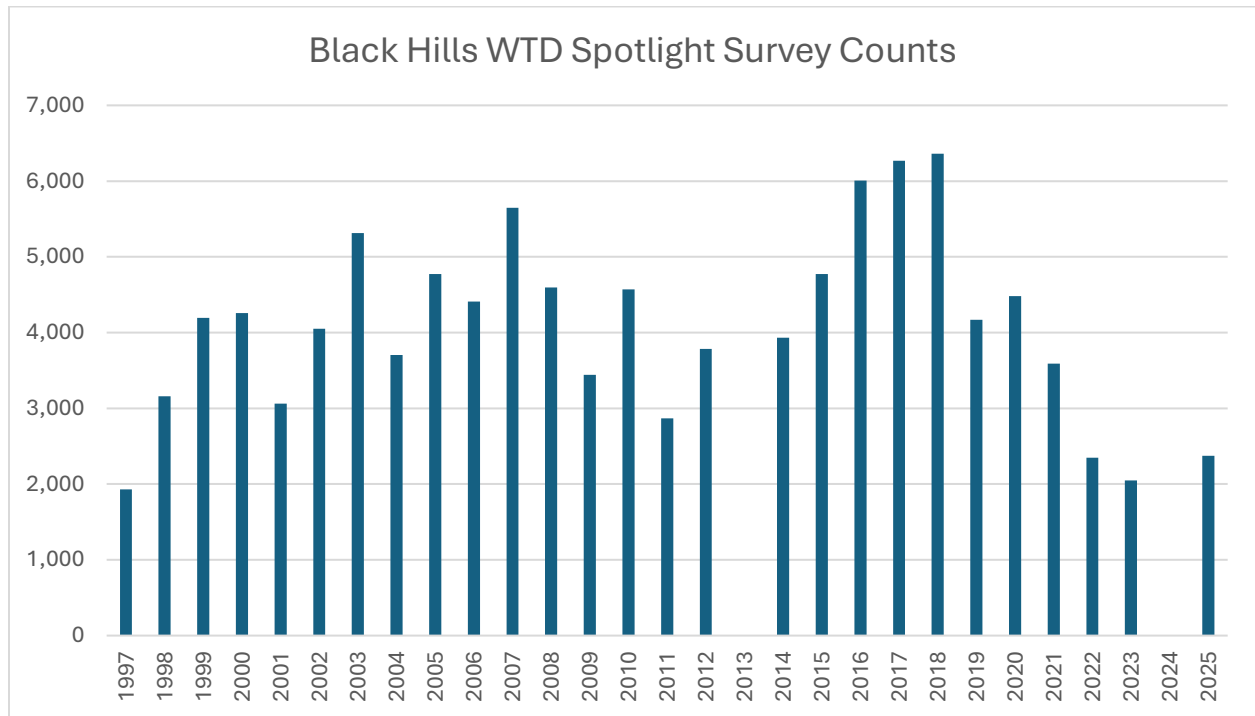
Table 2. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested white-tailed deer in the Black Hills White-Tailed Deer Herd, 2021-2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) - <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>			Percent of Harvested Adult Males Sampled
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	
2021	7% (n=217)	0% (16)	9% (58)	7.5
2022	4% (n=56)	7% (14)	11% (38)	2.9
2023	19% (n=21)	33% (6)	0% (8)	1.2
2024	5% (n=21)	0% (1)	0% (0)	0.9
2025	29% (n=7)	0% (3)	0% (2)	0.3
2021-2025	8% (n=322)	8% (40)	9% (106)	2.9

Population Modeling

Population estimates for this herd continue to rely on the spreadsheet system which provided a post-season population estimate of 39,100 white-tailed deer. This model purposely inflates the number of bucks observed during pre-season classifications by 30%, as historically this seems to be about the number of bucks missed on average during classification efforts. The model also accounts for archery harvest that occurs prior to these classifications. However, estimates produced by the model are tenuous at best. This is because the herd does not represent a closed population; sightability of bucks during pre-season classifications can vary widely; and estimated survival rates are not realistic in some years. However, generally pre-season population estimates are well correlated with pre-season spotlight trend counts along with hunter effort and success. The pre-season spotlight trend count showed a 16% increase from the most recent survey in 2023 (Figure 1). Therefore, the trends produced by the model seem realistic.

Figure 1. Black Hills WTD spotlight survey results



2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: White tailed Deer

PERIOD: 6/1/2025 - 5/31/2026

HERD: WD707 - CENTRAL

HUNT AREAS: 7-14, 21-22, 34, 65-67, 88-89

PREPARED BY: KYE HICKS

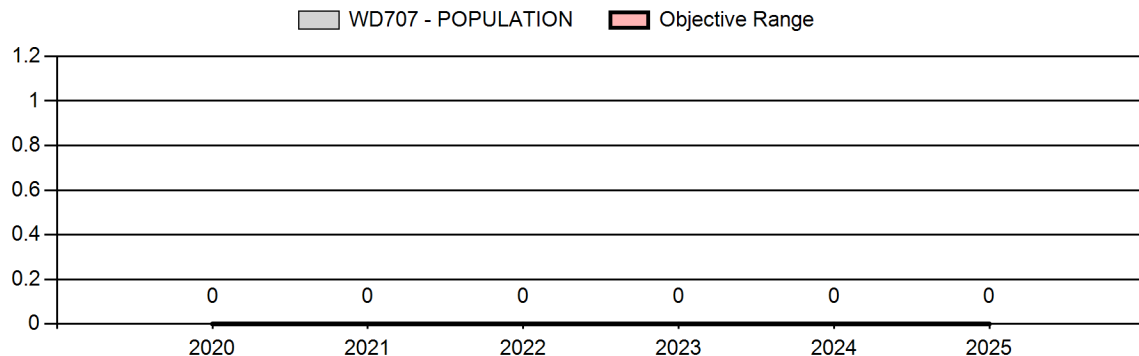
	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	0	N/A	N/A
Harvest:	1,277	1,128	900
Hunters:	2,541	2,677	2,000
Hunter Success:	50%	42%	45%
Active Licenses:	3,024	3,096	2,500
Active License Success:	42%	36%	36 %
Recreation Days:	12,234	13,851	12,800
Days Per Animal:	9.6	12.3	14.2
Males per 100 Females	36	38	
Juveniles per 100 Females	57	59	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) :	0 (0 - 0)
Management Strategy:	Recreational
Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective:	N/A%
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend:	0
Model Date:	None

Proposed harvest rates (percent of pre-season estimate for each sex/age group):

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	0%	0%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	0%	0%
Proposed change in post-season population:	0%	0%

Population Size - Postseason



2026 Hunting Seasons
Central White-tailed Deer Herd Unit (WD707)

Hunt Area	Type	Special Archery Dates		Regular Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
8	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov. 30	50	Any white-tailed deer
8	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov. 30	50	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
10	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov. 30	25	Any white-tailed deer
10	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov. 30	25	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
11	Gen			Oct. 16	Nov. 30		Any white-tailed deer
11,12,13,14	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov. 30	200	Any white-tailed deer
11,12,13,14	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov. 30	150	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
12	Gen			Oct. 16	Nov. 30		Any white-tailed deer
13	Gen			Oct. 16	Nov. 30		Any white-tailed deer
14	Gen			Oct. 16	Nov. 30		Any white-tailed deer
21	Gen			Nov. 1	Nov. 15		Any white-tailed deer
21	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	50	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer valid on private land.
22	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov. 30	75	Any white-tailed deer
22	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov. 30	100	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
34	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 30	50	Any white-tailed deer
34	8			Aug. 15	Dec. 15	75	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
65	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 30	300	Any white-tailed deer, also valid in that portion of Area 66 in Converse County

65	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Dec. 31	500	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer, also valid in that portion of Area 66 in Converse County
66,88,89	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 30	75	Any white-tailed deer
66,88,89	8			Aug. 15	Oct. 14	75	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer only valid in Area 88
66,88,89	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 30		Doe or fawn white-tailed deer

Note: The above season limitations are restricted to only those lines in the Chapter 6 Regulation that directly affect white-tailed deer hunting. Additional general and limited quota seasons occur in Hunt Areas 7-14, 21, 34, 65-66, 88, and 89 but are not captured here.

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 57% Satisfied, 27% Neutral, 26% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

The 2025 season structure was kept somewhat liberal to allow for high hunter opportunity within the recreational management strategy. White-tailed deer numbers had grown substantially from a low in 2013 through 2020, harvest also increased each year through 2020. Due to a massive Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) die-off in 2021, managers were forced to reduce licenses in 2022 given the sharp reduction of white-tailed deer. Continued documentation of EHD in 2022 led to slow population recovery. For most of the herd unit white-tailed deer populations are beginning to rebound with fawn production being high across the herd unit, but are still not where they were 10 years ago. The majority of white-tailed deer classifications occur in Areas 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, and 65. Managers observed increased numbers of white-tailed deer in most Areas in the herd unit and therefore increased license quotas in multiple Areas in 2025. The Area 65 Type 8 license was increased to 800 and Type 3 license to 400 to address the population increase and any potential crop damage. However, the herd experienced another significant EHD outbreak in 2025. Managers observed mortality across multiple areas, with Hunt Area 65 thought to be impacted the most. The full effects of the outbreak are still being evaluated and may influence future management decisions. In response to the observed mortality, the quotas will be decreased in several hunt areas for the 2026 hunting season. The Area 65 Type 3 license was reduced to 300 and Type 8 license to 500. The Area 66, 88, and 89 Type 3 and Type 8 licenses were decreased to 75 to address impacts from the EHD outbreak. In Areas 11, 12, 13, and 14, Type 8 hunter success was 36%, resulting in a reduction of Type 8 licenses to 150. Conversely, Area 34 reported relatively high numbers and good harvest success; therefore, the Type 8 license in Area 34 was increased to 75. Public comments showed interest in having a later white-tailed deer only season in private-land

dominated Hunt Area 21. A General License, any white-tailed deer season will run from November 1 through November 15. Managers will continue to monitor the effects of the 2025 EHD outbreak and adjust future management strategies accordingly.

Chronic Wasting Disease Management

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) sample sizes within the Central White-Tailed Deer Herd Unit were not sufficient to report an accurate prevalence for most hunt areas. Increased sampling effort was put forth in Hunt Areas 22 and 65 in conjunction with priority mule deer surveillance in 2023 and 2024. In Hunt Area 65, from 2021-2025 managers were able to obtain 124 CWD samples from white-tailed deer. Of those samples, 11 were positive for a prevalence of 8%. In Hunt Area 22, from 2021-2025 managers were able to collect 51 CWD samples from white-tailed deer. Of those samples, seven were positive for a prevalence of 13%. Managers are working on a small-scale CWD project in Hunt Area 65 tracking CWD status within an area known for high densities of white-tailed deer northwest of Douglas.

Population Modeling

There is no population model constructed for this herd unit.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Elk

PERIOD: 6/1/2025 - 5/31/2026

HERD: EL740 - BLACK HILLS

HUNT AREAS: 1, 116-117

PREPARED BY: MATT HUIZENGA

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Hunter Satisfaction Percent	58%	57%	60%
Landowner Satisfaction Percent	53%	0%	0%
Harvest:	986	1,213	1,250
Hunters:	2,198	2,901	2,900
Hunter Success:	45%	42%	43 %
Active Licenses:	2,418	3,081	3,000
Active License Success:	41%	39%	42 %
Recreation Days:	22,867	30,887	30,000
Days Per Animal:	23.2	25.5	24
Males per 100 Females:	0	0	
Juveniles per 100 Females	0	0	

Satisfaction Based Objective

60%

Management Strategy:

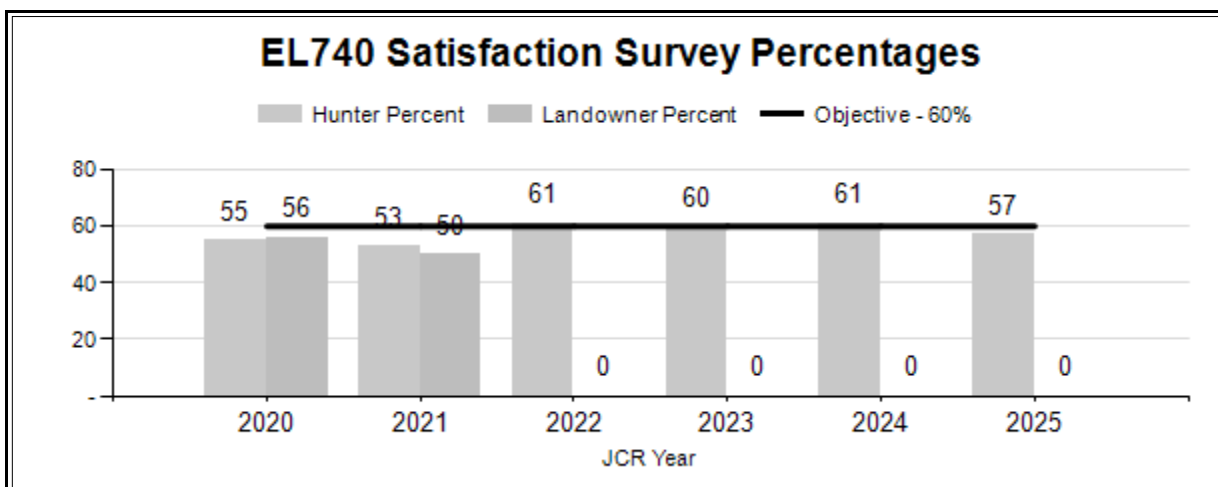
Private Land

Percent population is above (+) or (-) objective:

N/A%

Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend:

0



**2026 Hunting Seasons
Black Hills Elk (EL740)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
1	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 30	100	Any elk
1	4	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 25	Nov. 30	75	Antlerless elk
116	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 20		Any elk
116	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Dec. 31	100	Any elk valid off national forest
116	8			Aug. 1	Jan. 31	Unlimited	Cow or calf valid on private land
117	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 30	500	Any elk
117	1			Dec. 1	Jan. 31		Antlerless elk
117	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Jan. 31	350	Spike or antlerless elk
117	6	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Jan. 31	150	Cow or calf
117	8			Aug. 1	Jan. 31	Unlimited	Cow or calf valid on private land

2026 Region E Nonresident Quota: 1000

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 57% Satisfied 25% Neutral 18% Dissatisfied

Landowner Satisfaction JCR¹ 18% Below 49% At 34% Above
Landowner Satisfaction Surveyed² 43% Satisfied 14% Neutral 43% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

The harvest strategy for this herd continues to be harvesting as many elk as possible on private land given the limited access afforded to hunters. Changes to the 2024 hunting season were structured to give landowners more flexibility to reduce elk numbers, while maintaining bull quality and attempting to diminish hunter crowding on accessible public land. To these ends, 2024 changes included: Increasing Hunt Area (HA) 116 Type 7 license issuance 33%; decreasing HA 117 Type 1 license issuance 17%; eliminating HA 117 Type 2 and Type 4 licenses and replacing those license types with a Type 3 license valid for spike or antlerless elk; dropping the lowest success license - HA 117 Type 6 issuance by 50 licenses; eliminating HA 117 Type 7 licenses; and issuing unlimited HA 117 Type 8 licenses valid on private land, along with the ability for hunters to have an unlimited number of these licenses. The reduction in HA 117 Type 1 licenses (despite 2023 reported harvest success being 63%) was enacted because local managers believe the harvest estimate is biased high, especially given that issuance of this license type was increased 50% in 2023 and resulted in significant crowding on accessible public land and complaints from

¹ Bio-Year 2021. This was the last year these data were collected. Landowner response when asked if elk numbers are below, at, or above desired level.

² Bio-Year 2021. This was the last year these data were collected. These figures are from landowner survey asking specifically about satisfaction in the same manner as the harvest survey of hunters.

Type 1 license holders regarding crowding and the lack of access to private land. In HA 117, antlerless license sales and harvest increased significantly, however with the reduction in Type 1 licenses and removal of Type 2 licenses, bull harvest decreased a similar amount resulting in the overall harvest dropping slightly from 2023. These changes resulted in a harvest of about 1,360 elk from the herd unit in 2024. To continue with previous changes and allow for more flexibility for harvest on private lands in 2025, the HA 116 Type 7 license was eliminated and a Type 8 license was added valid on private land. The southern boundary of HA 117 was also changed to Highway 16 from the South Dakota border to Newcastle. This moved the portion of HA 117 south of Highway 16 into HA 126.

With the increases in license quotas, utilization of Chapter 34 auxiliary seasons, and unlimited Type 8 licenses, HA 116 and HA 117 have seen an increasing amount of harvest over the past five years. However, unseasonably warm weather, limited access, logging, and hunter crowding on public land combined in 2025 to reduce overall harvest in the Black Hills by ~150 elk and also extended the days/harvest from 19.7 in 2024 to 25.5 in 2025.

Hunter success in HA 1 continued to be well above the statewide average of 47.8% . Considering the mostly public land hunt, managers left license allocation unchanged to retain a quality hunt in that area. The Type 4 opening date was moved back to October 25 to spread out the hunting pressure in the small area. In HA 116, the regulations were simplified by removing the late antlerless seasons on both the General license and Type 1. In addition, the General any-elk season was extended to November 20th and the HA 116 Type 1 license opening date was also moved to October 15th to coincide with the General license season. The HA 117 season structures were unchanged for 2026.

Management Objective Review

This herd has been slated for an objective review in 2026. The Department will develop recommendations for a revised objective in May of 2026 in conjunction with a public review process. This proposed change will be presented to the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission at the September 2026 meeting.

Chronic Wasting Disease Monitoring and Management

The Black Hills Elk Herd has limited CWD prevalence data available, and no CWD management actions have occurred. Despite limited data, the five-year annual and average prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled for CWD are presented below (Table 1). This herd has not been prioritized for CWD surveillance because of low CWD prevalence in surrounding herds.

Table 1. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested elk in the Black Hills Elk Herd, 2021-2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) - <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>	Percent of Harvested Adult Elk Sampled
	All Adult Elk	
2021	0% (n=20)	2.6
2022	2% (n=55)	7.3
2023	0% (n=8)	0.8
2024	0% (n=9)	0.8
2025	0% (n=11)	0.9
2021-2025	2% (n=113)	2.6

Population Data

In late February of 2024, a trend count in HA 117 was conducted. The survey was done along eighteen, north-south transects spaced about 2 miles apart. Some deviation from the set lines (up to about ½ mile) was allowed to augment sightability of elk and increase efficiency. Just over eight hours of total survey time were expended with a total of 1,702 elk counted. Observers were familiar with elk distribution, and conjectured that sightability of cow and calf groups was about 90%, that of spike elk 85%, and mature bulls only 25%. Consequently, there was an estimated 2,100 elk wintering in HA 117.

In mid-January of 2025, a sightability survey was conducted in HA 117. The survey sampled 54 polygons, with 34 high density polygons and 20 low density. A total of 531 elk were counted in the polygons, however an additional 1,598 elk were counted in two groups outside selected polygons. Adjustments were made to the model to incorporate these groups as estimates without them were not realistic. Managers currently estimate a total of ~2,500 wintering elk in HA 117.

In mid-January of 2026, a sightability survey was conducted in HA's 1 and 116 (Appendix 1). The survey sampled 137 unstratified polygons (Figure 1). A total of 514 elk were counted in the polygons. The sightability model provided a low-precision estimate of ~4,000 elk (CI= 981 - 10,000). With the size of the area and manager's knowledge of herd sizes and locations, this estimate is likely fairly accurate. Combining survey estimates from all three HA's surveyed between the two years, provides an overall estimate of ~6,500 post-season elk in the herd unit.

Appendix 1

2026 HA 1 & 116 Elk Sightability

Date: January 6 & 7, 2026

Surveyors: Matt Huizenga, Kenny Wolfley, Wyatt Yapoujian

Vendor/Helicopter: Bighorn Flying Company / Bell Long Ranger

Total Flight Hours: 15.6

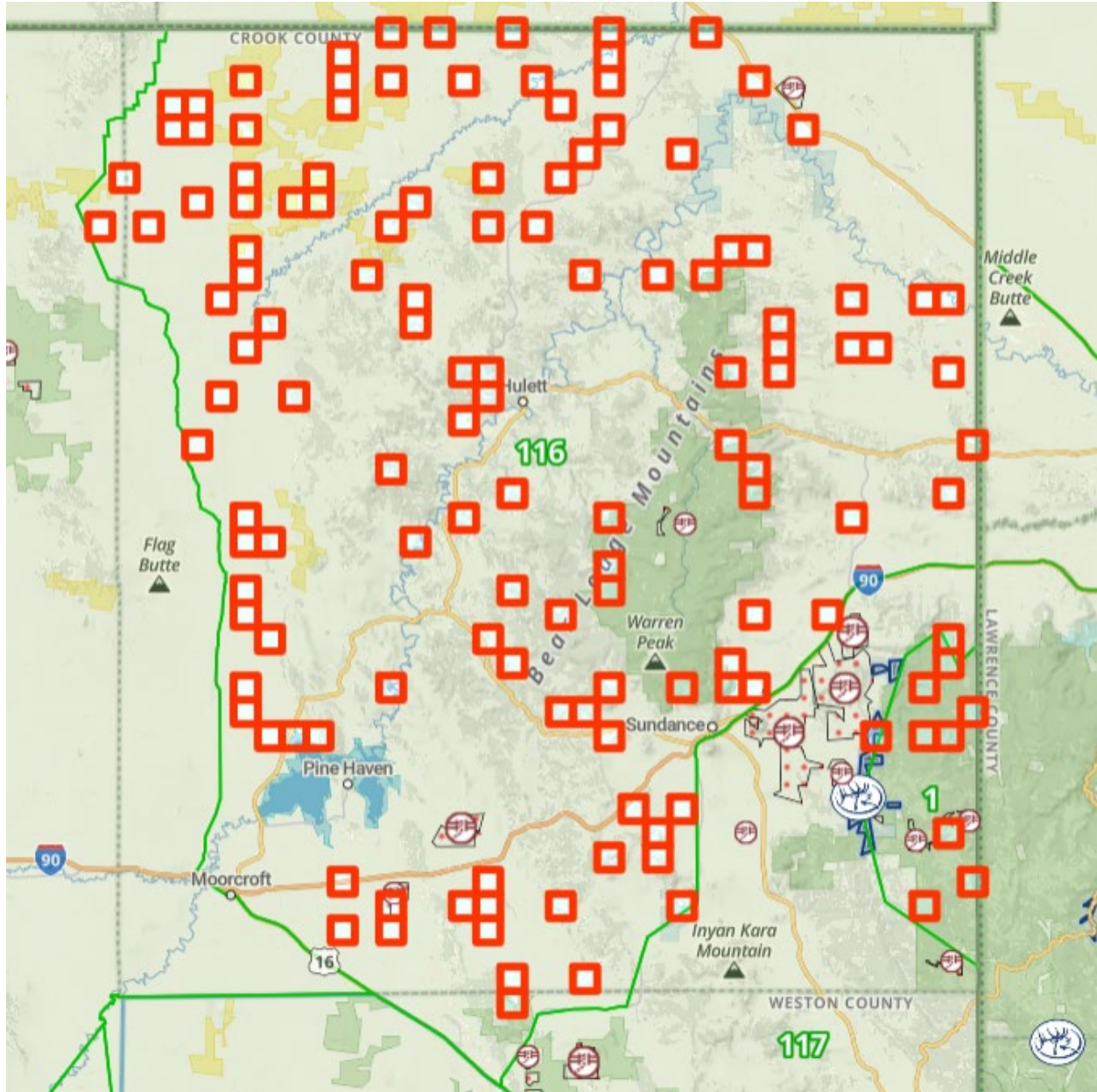
Cost: \$19,354

Weather: Clear to partly cloudy both days. Almost 0% snow cover throughout the hunt area. Temps 15-28 degrees F

Results: Surveyed 137 unstratified polygons. Elk were located in 19 of the 137 polygons. Total number of elk physically counted was 514 which produced a low-precision estimate of 4,012 (CI= 0 – 9,979) elk in HA 1 & 116.

Hunt Areas	Year	Raw Count	Total Estimate	LCI	UCI	Total Inflation	Total Variance	Sampling Variance	Sightability Variance	Model Variance
1, 116	2025 - 2026	514	4012.121489	0	9979.448901	7.80568383	9269313.942	9267853.546	1347.8964	112.4992632

Figure 1. Polygons flown in sightability survey



2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Elk

PERIOD: 6/1/2025 - 5/31/2026

HERD: EL741 - LARAMIE PEAK/MUDDY MOUNTAIN

HUNT AREAS: 7, 19

PREPARED BY: KYE HICKS

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	11,626	10,586	7,869
Harvest:	2,353	2,673	3,038
Hunters:	4,752	5,778	5,800
Hunter Success:	50%	46%	52 %
Active Licenses:	5,114	6,158	6,200
Active License Success:	46%	43%	49 %
Recreation Days:	41,957	53,660	53,900
Days Per Animal:	17.8	20.1	17.7
Males per 100 Females	23 * * Not Accurate	56	
Juveniles per 100 Females	36 Ratios	29	

Population Objective (± 20%) : 5000 (4000 - 6000)

Management Strategy: Special

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: 112%

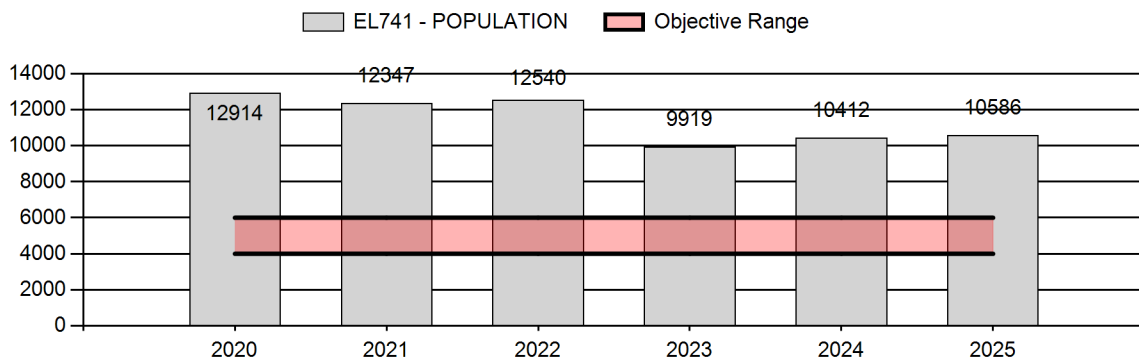
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 26

Model Date: 2/25/2026

Proposed harvest rates (percent of pre-season estimate for each sex/age group):

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	24.2%	30.5%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	27.6%	40.7%
Proposed change in post-season population:	-25.7%	-26%

Population Size - Postseason



2026 Hunting Seasons
Laramie Peak/Muddy Mountain Elk Herd Unit (EL741)

Hunt Area	Type	Special Archery Dates		Regular Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
7	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 20	1500	Any elk
7	1			Nov. 21	Dec. 31		Antlerless elk
7	2			Nov. 21	Dec. 31	500	Any elk
7	6	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Dec. 31	2000	Cow or calf
7	8			Aug. 15	Oct. 14	Unlimited	Cow or calf valid on private land in Albany and Carbon counties; also valid in all of Platte County; not valid in Converse or Natrona counties or on Commission owned lands
7	8			Oct. 15	Jan. 31		Cow or calf valid on private land in Converse County; also valid off national forest in the remainder of the area
19	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14	150	Any elk
19	1			Dec. 1	Dec. 14		Any elk
19	1			Dec. 15	Jan. 31		Antlerless elk
19	2	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 30	175	Any elk
19	2			Dec. 15	Jan. 31		Antlerless elk
19	4	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14	125	Antlerless elk
19	4			Dec. 1	Jan. 31		Antlerless elk
19	5	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Jan. 31	125	Antlerless elk
19	6	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14	225	Cow or calf
19	6			Nov. 1	Jan. 31		Cow or calf

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 58% Satisfied, 20% Neutral, 22% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

The 2025 season structure remained liberal in an effort to maximize harvest and reduce the elk population toward objective. Elk numbers in this herd unit continue to remain well above objective despite generous license issuance and extended season lengths. Weather conditions in Area 7 during the 2025 season was very mild, which contributed to a lower overall harvest and success rate compared to 2024. Elk were more dispersed and observed in smaller groups throughout the season. With little to no snow accumulation, elk movement was limited compared to other years, resulting in decreased hunter opportunity and reduced harvest. However, despite less favorable hunting conditions, the continued use of the unlimited Type 8 license contributed to a higher cow-calf harvest. Overall harvest remained similar to 2024, representing an increase of approximately 500 antlerless elk compared to 2022 and 2023. The Type 8 license achieved a 50% success rate in 2025 with 1,079 elk harvested. Harvest success for both Type 1 and Type 2 bull licenses declined compared to 2024. The Type 1 license success was 53%, which is below the five-year average of approximately 60%. The Type 2 license success decreased from 54% in 2024 to 41% in 2025. Similarly, the Type 6 license success declined from 41% in 2024 to 27% in 2025. These decreases can likely be attributed to an increase in overall license quota, mild weather conditions, as well as the availability of the Type 8 license. The Chapter 34 and 56 permits continued to increase harvest outside the regular season, which resulted in an estimated 297 additional elk taken.

The weather in Area 19 in 2025 was also extremely mild, which led to many elk taking refuge on one large private ranch with limited hunting access. Due to an overall lack of snow and cold weather, many of these elk remained on this ranch throughout much of the season and made for difficult hunting conditions. In addition to the mild weather, a power line project in the area brought in heavy traffic and disturbance in 2023, 2024, and 2025. This project is wrapping up and minimal disturbance is expected in 2026. The limited elk movement resulted in only 287 elk being harvested, below the previous five-year average of 301. The Type 1 harvest success dropped from 66% in 2024, which was the highest since 2015, to 59% in 2025. The Type 2 license also saw a drop in success to 55%. Harvest success on the Type 1 license in October is usually good as bulls are more dispersed at the end of the breeding season and 2025 saw most success occur in early October. November and December seasons still offer opportunity for bulls as bachelor groups often leave the safety of the private land refuge and move onto public lands. Success on Type 4, 5, and 6 licenses also dropped in 2025, seeing some of the lowest success rates in five years (27%, 20%, and 35%).

For the 2026 hunting season, there will be minimal changes. The Area 7 Type 2 license will now be valid area-wide for any elk. Season dates will remain the same; however, the quota has been increased to 500 to address high bull ratios (currently 56 bulls per 100 cows). To address damage concerns and the overabundance of elk, the Type 8 license will remain unlimited and maintain the same structure as in 2025. Managers will continue to address chronic elk damage issues as needed through Chapter 34 Auxiliary Management Seasons outside of the standard season dates. There will be no changes for Area 19.

In 2018, an elk-specific aerial composition/abundance survey for this herd was conducted. During this survey managers classified 9,359 elk, resulting in high bull ratios (51 bulls per 100 cows) and high calf ratios (42 calves per 100 cows). Since that time, bull ratios have primarily been estimated using harvest data and the Time-Specific Juvenile & Constant Adult Survival (TSJ, CA) spreadsheet model. In 2023, managers were able to classify a substantial number of elk in conjunction with aerial mule deer surveys. All classifications were conducted by helicopter, resulting in 2,336 elk classified (Table 1.). While managers obtained a strong sample size of cows and calves to calculate juvenile ratios, limited observations of mature bulls skewed the male-to-female ratios.¹ In January 2026, a large stratified random composition and abundance survey was conducted by helicopter (Appendix A). The survey required approximately 28.5 flight hours and included 193 randomly selected polygons. A total of 1,490 elk were classified, producing a low precision abundance estimate of 8,772 elk (SE = 5,661). Observed ratios from this survey indicated high bull ratios (56 bulls per 100 cows) and lower calf ratios (29 calves per 100 cows).

Table 1. Postseason classification summary

2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary

for Elk Herd EL741 - LARAMIE PEAK/MUDDY MOUNTAIN

Year	Post Pop	MALES				FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot CIs	Cls Obj	Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	Adult	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%			Ylg	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
2020	12,914	132	130	262	14%	1,153	60%	518	27%	1,933	898	11	11	23	± 2	45	± 3	37
2021	12,347	120	202	322	25%	638	51%	303	24%	1,263	745	19	32	50	± 4	47	± 4	32
2022	12,540	212	368	580	15%	2,331	61%	923	24%	3,834	630	9	16	25	± 1	40	± 2	32
2023	9,919	170	101	271	12%	1,572	67%	493	21%	2,336	0	11	6	17	± 1	31	± 2	27
2024	10,412	21	73	94	8%	997	80%	148	12%	1,239	0	2	7	9	± 1	15	± 2	14
2025	10,586	105	344	449	30%	807	54%	234	16%	1,490	0	13	43	56	± 4	29	± 3	19

Objective Review

The objective and management strategy for the Laramie Peak/Muddy Mountain Elk Herd was last evaluated and approved in 2023 and is not scheduled for review again until 2028. This herd has remained above population objective for decades. Managers continue to prioritize increased female harvest while maintaining public land hunting quality through carefully structured license quotas and limitations. The addition of the Type 8 license will further support these efforts by providing greater flexibility to maximize harvest and minimize elk-related damage on private lands.

¹ Despite a lack of accurate ratio data, an analysis of harvest metrics between 2020 and 2024 indicated high bull ratios (40 bulls per 100 cows).

Chronic Wasting Disease Management

The Laramie Peak Muddy Mountain elk herd was prioritized for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in 2022. The five-year annual and average prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled for CWD are presented below (Table 2.). Robust sampling (N=751) over the last five years has provided a more confident and precise estimate of CWD prevalence for the Laramie Peak Muddy Mountain elk herd. CWD prevalence has averaged 3.9% in adult elk over the past five years. Considering aggressive harvest strategies designed to reduce this elk population, coupled with a prevalence of 3.9%, indicates CWD is likely not a significant driver of this population at this point. To date, no meaningful CWD management actions have occurred in this herd unit.

Table 2. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested elk in the Laramie Peak/Muddy Mountain Elk Herd, 2021 - 2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>	Percent of Harvested Adult Elk Sampled
	All Adult Elk (CI = 95%)	
2021	3.3% (n=91)	4.6
2022*	4.9% (n=223)	10.7
2023	1.9% (n=103)	4.4
2024	2.9% (n=210)	7.0
2025	5.6% (n=124)	4.6
2021-2025	3.9% (2.5-5.5%, n=751)	6.3

*Mandatory or Priority CWD sampling effort

Population Modeling

The Time-Specific Juvenile & Constant Adult Survival, Male Survival Coefficient (TSJ, CA, MSC) Spreadsheet model was used to estimate the post-hunt population of 10,586 in 2025. The additional 297 elk harvested on the Chapter 34 and 56 permits were placed in the model. A large sightability was conducted in 2023 producing a population estimate of 9,563 (SE = 1,438) elk. A composition/abundance survey was flown in January of 2026. This survey provided a low precision estimate of 8,772 (SE = 5,661) elk for this herd. These estimates increase confidence in the model estimates going forward. This herd unit will remain above objective for the foreseeable future. The model estimates 7,869 elk for the post hunt population in 2026. Based on aerial surveys and field observations, managers believe this population is trending downward. However, several years of sustained high harvest will be required for the population to reach objective.

Chapter 34 & 56

During the 2025 hunting season, there were four authorizations for auxiliary elk harvest in this herd unit under the Chapter 34 Regulation and two Chapter 56 permits. In total, a minimum of 260 elk and an estimated 297 elk were harvested under these authorizations in addition to totals reported in the harvest survey. Details are as follows:

- **AUX2025-F – Elk Hunt Area 7**
 - Converse County – 21 participating landowners
 - Season Dates: July 15, 2025 – October 14, 2025
 - 2025 Area 7 – Type 8 license authorized
 - Minimum harvest = 81 elk
 - Estimated harvest = 90 elk

- **AUX2026-F – Elk Hunt Area 7**
 - Converse County – 26 participating landowners
 - Season Dates: February 1, 2026 – March 15, 2026
 - 200 Auxiliary licenses authorized
 - Minimum harvest = 3
 - Estimated harvest = 5

- **AUX2025-G – Elk Hunt Area 7**
 - Platte County – 1 participating landowner
 - Season Dates: July 25, 2025 – August 14, 2025
 - 2025 Area 7 – Type 8 license authorized
 - Minimum harvest = 3 elk
 - Estimated harvest = 3 elk

- **AUX2025-J – Elk Hunt Area 7**
 - Albany County – 1 participating landowner
 - Season Dates: July 31, 2025 – August 14, 2025
 - 2025 Area 7 – Type 8 license authorized
 - Minimum harvest = 0 elk
 - Estimated harvest = 0 elk

- **Chapter 56 Permit – Elk Hunt Area 7**
 - Converse County – 1 participating landowner
 - Permit Dates: July 25, 2025 – March 15, 2026
 - Authorization for removal of up to 50 antlerless elk
 - Total harvest = 11 elk

- **Chapter 56 Permit – Elk Hunt Area 7**

- Converse County – 1 participating landowner
- Permit Dates: July 25, 2025 – March 1, 2026
- Authorization for removal of up to 250 antlerless elk
- Total harvest = 188 elk

Additional Information

Antler classification data has also been collected since 2008 during postseason classification surveys. The percentage of Class II bulls being classified is showing a downward trend while the percentage of Class I bulls is increasing. This contradicts tooth age data which shows the average age of harvested bulls is increasing (Table 3.).

Beginning in February 2024, managers began capturing and deploying GPS tracking collars on 60 cow elk in the southern portion of Area 7. The main objective of this study is to observe interactions with sympatric collared mule deer. These collars will be also used to document elk survival and movements. This study is ongoing and the results will be reported in future years.

In December 2025, a large-scale sportsperson survey was sent to 12,000 people. This survey was sent out to anyone who applied for an Area 7 Type 1 or Type 2 license in the past three years. The survey sought input on possible season date changes and overall season structure. A total of 2,150 people responded (81% resident, 19% nonresident). Survey results showed 60% supported a split season structure, with two separate any-elk seasons.

Table 3. Hunt Area 7 Post-Season Bull Classifications² and Tooth Age Data 2016-2025

Calendar Year	Spike Bull: 100 Cows	Adult Bull: 100 Cows	Total Bull: 100 Cows	% Class I	% Class II	Average Age Harvested Bull
2016	14	19	33	70	30	6.3
2017	12	20	32	71	29	6.4
2018	18	34	52	59	41	6.1
2019	12	20	32	56	44	6
2020	10	13	24	73	27	6.1
2021	19	32	50	66	34	7.0
2022	9	15	23	56	44	6.7
2023	10	7	17	68	32	6.3
2024*	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	6.7
2025	11	42	53	65	35	7.25

² Not accurate ratios due to low sample sizes in some years.

Appendix A. 2026 EL 741 Laramie Peak Muddy Mountain Aerial Composition Abundance Results

Surveyors: Kye Hicks, Kenny Wolfley, Brandon Werner, Sean Cotteleer, Simon Martinez, Kylie Sinclair, Keaton Weber, Marina McCampbell, Daniel Tisi, Nate Rykerd

Date: 1/8/2026 – 1/30/2026

Vendor/Helicopter:

Bighorn Flying Co, Wy (Matt Volf) / Jet Ranger
307 Aviation, Wy (Dave Stinson) / Robinson R66

Total Polygons Surveyed: One-hundred and ninety-three polygons were flown.

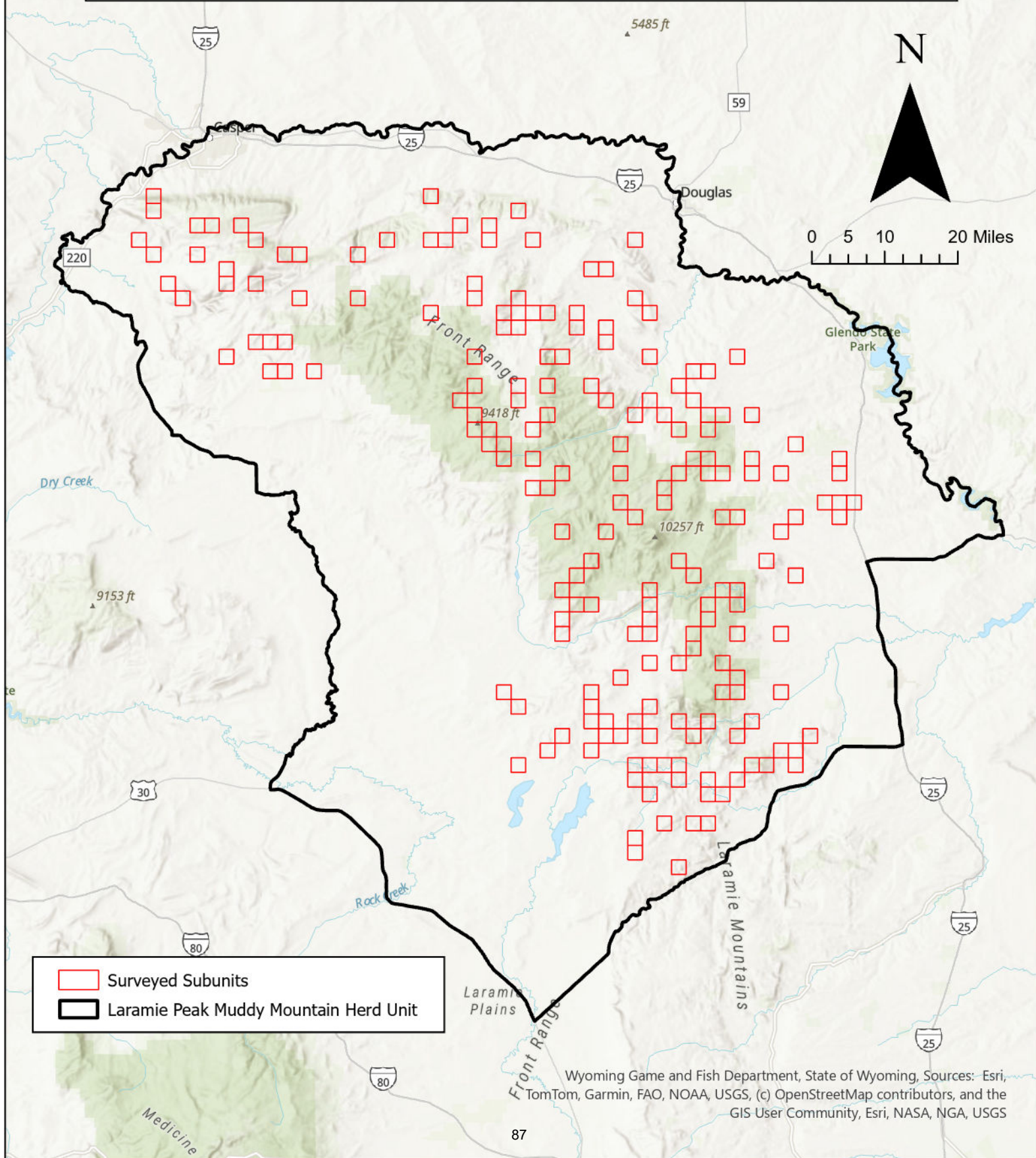
Total Survey Time: 28.5 flight hours.

Costs: The total cost for this project was \$48,396.75

Weather: The weather was less than ideal throughout the project. Above-average temperatures resulted in little to patchy snow cover, which made detection difficult. High winds also made afternoon flights challenging.

Results: For this survey 193 randomly selected polygons were flown and a total of 1,490 elk were classified. Observed ratios from this survey indicated high bull ratios (56 bulls per 100 cows) and lower calf ratios (29 calves per 100 cows). The survey also produced a low precision abundance estimate of 8,772 elk (SE = 5,661).

2026 Laramie Peak Muddy Mountain Composition Abundance Survey



2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Elk

PERIOD: 6/1/2025 - 5/31/2026

HERD: EL742 - RATTLESNAKE

HUNT AREAS: 23

PREPARED BY: KYLIE SINCLAIR

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	1,283	1,506	1,542
Harvest:	204	204	252
Hunters:	412	479	503
Hunter Success:	50%	43%	50%
Active Licenses:	470	544	560
Active License Success:	43%	38%	45%
Recreation Days:	4,277	4,666	4,664
Days Per Animal:	21.0	22.9	18.5
Males per 100 Females	16	16	
Juveniles per 100 Females	38	22	

Population Objective ($\pm$ 20%) : 1000 (800 - 1200)

Management Strategy: Recreational

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: 51%

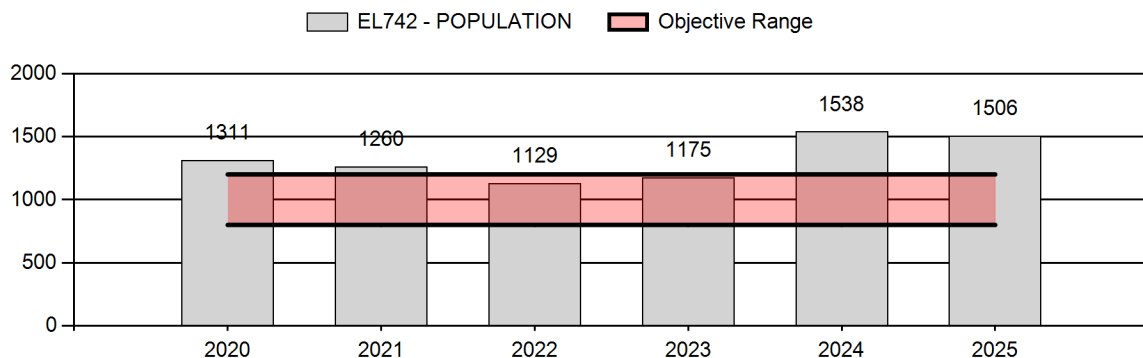
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 34

Model Date: 02/20/2026

Proposed harvest rates (percent of pre-season estimate for each sex/age group):

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females $\geq$ 1 year old:	8%	11%
Males $\geq$ 1 year old:	33%	34%
Proposed change in post-season population:	1%	2%

Population Size - Postseason



**2026 HUNTING SEASONS
RATTLESNAKE ELK HERD (EL742)**

Hunt Area	Type	Special Archery Dates		Regular Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
23	1			Oct. 1	Oct. 21	175	Any elk
23	1			Nov. 1	Nov. 21		Any elk; Also valid in Area 128
23	1			Dec. 1	Dec. 15		Any elk; Also valid in Area 128
23	4			Oct. 1	Oct. 21	200	Antlerless elk
23	4			Nov. 1	Nov. 21		Antlerless elk; Also valid in Area 128
23	4			Dec. 1	Dec. 15		Antlerless elk; Also valid in Area 128
23	6			Oct. 1	Oct. 21	200	Cow or calf
23	6			Nov. 1	Nov. 21		Cow or calf; Also valid in Area 128
23	6			Dec. 1	Dec. 15		Cow or calf; Also valid in Area 128
23	9			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	50	Any elk, archery only

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 52% Satisfied, 18% Neutral, 30% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

The 2025 season structure was modified compared to what it has been for the last several years with the goal to maximize cow harvest in an over-objective herd with constrained public access. In 2025, 204 elk were harvested, right at the previous five-year average and a drop from the record 291 elk harvested in 2024. Type 1 success remained high at 64%. Harvest on females is consistently poor due to large numbers of cows and calves taking refuge on one property that does not allow hunting access. Weather often plays a role in elk movement. Fall of 2025 was dry and warm, and without the weather to incentivize the elk to move, cows and calves rarely left the private land sanctuary this season. This lack of movement resulted in poor success on both the Type 4 and 6 licenses, the lowest in five years.

A Type 9 archery-only license was added in 2025. Harvest success on this license was 27% with the added benefit of reduced traffic and hunter pressure during the archery season. In addition to the Type 9 license, season breaks were added in 2025. Reduction in pressure and human presence

may make elk more available after each break occurs. Past season breaks in this area have been beneficial, as removing human pressure allows elk to often move out of the private land sanctuary and onto public land. Harvest is typically good the first couple of days after the season reopens. In 2025, a small bump in harvest was observed the first week of each month following the season breaks. However, the mild weather reduced elk movement and harvest was down overall. Hunter satisfaction was much lower in 2025 than previous years and feedback was mixed on the addition of the Type 9 and the season breaks. Type 1 success remained high and 25 licenses will be added in 2026. Additional hunting opportunity in Area 128 will be offered in November and December, removing the previous restriction of east of Castle Gardens Road, east of Wyoming Highway 136, east of Ore Road, and north of Beaver Rim Road to simplify regulations.

Management Objective Review

The objective and management strategy for the Rattlesnake Elk Herd was last evaluated and approved in 2023, and will not be reviewed again until 2028.

Chronic Wasting Disease Monitoring and Management

This herd was not up for priority Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) sampling in 2025. This herd was a priority in 2023 but the sample size was minimal at 13. From 2021-2025, 53 elk were CWD sampled in this herd. CWD was first detected in this elk herd in 2024 and no new detections occurred in 2025. Managers will be continuing to monitor this disease.

Population Modeling

Small herd size, disparate harvest of males versus females, skewed classification data, and an open population make accurate modeling of this herd difficult. The addition of an abundance estimate for the 2019 bio-year helped to better align the model. Trends from consecutive years of surveys have also helped to align the model. An Integrated Population Model (IPM) was used to model this herd. The 2025 post hunt population estimate is 1,506 and is projected to remain stable over the next year. This appears to be accurate based off a postseason minimum count of 1,276 elk with 1,070 classified (Table 1) and the low hunter success in 2025. Managers presume this herd is reaching carrying capacity and elk are dispersing into adjacent herd units.

2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary

for Elk Herd EL742 - RATTLESNAKE

Year	Post Pop	MALES				FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot Cts	Cls Obj	Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	Adult	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%			Ylg	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
2020	1,311	27	59	86	20%	275	63%	76	17%	437	481	10	21	31	± 4	28	± 4	21
2021	1,260	52	2	54	7%	476	60%	267	34%	797	512	11	0	11	± 1	56	± 3	50
2022	1,129	47	64	111	14%	476	59%	215	27%	802	483	10	13	23	± 2	45	± 3	37
2023	1,175	51	67	118	11%	775	69%	224	20%	1,117	0	7	9	15	± 0	29	± 1	25
2024	1,538	14	117	131	8%	1,047	68%	373	24%	1,551	0	1	11	13	± 0	36	± 0	32
2025	1,506	46	77	123	11%	775	72%	172	16%	1,070	0	6	10	16	± 1	22	± 1	19

Table 1. Postseason classification summary for EL742.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Elk

PERIOD: 6/1/2025 - 5/31/2026

HERD: EL743 - PINE RIDGE

HUNT AREAS: 122

PREPARED BY: KYE HICKS

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	0	1,583	1,535
Harvest:	207	288	326
Hunters:	285	392	390
Hunter Success:	73%	73%	84%
Active Licenses:	312	449	455
Active License Success:	66%	64%	72%
Recreation Days:	1,178	1,739	1,750
Days Per Animal:	5.7	6.0	5.4
Males per 100 Females	40	28	
Juveniles per 100 Females	42	25	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) : 1500 (1200 - 1800)

Management Strategy: Private Land

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: 6%

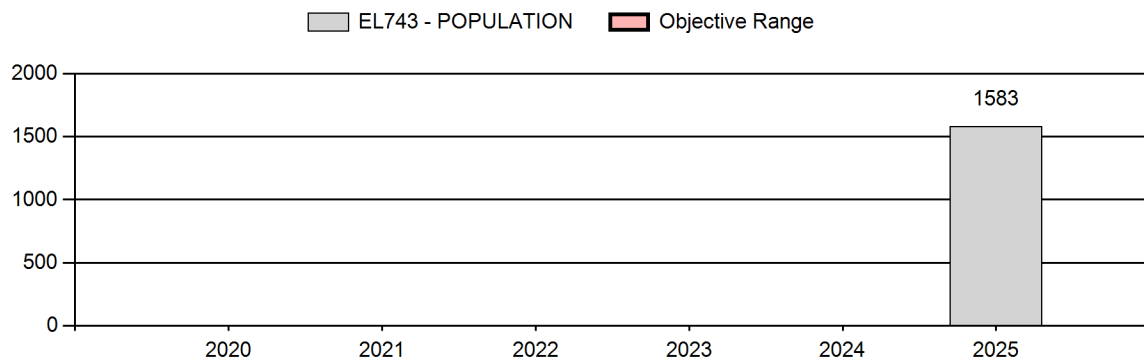
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 1

Model Date: 2/25/2026

Proposed harvest rates (percent of pre-season estimate for each sex/age group):

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	12%	16%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	28%	43%
Proposed change in post-season population:	.82%	.97%

Population Size - Postseason



**2026 Hunting Seasons
Pine Ridge Elk Herd Unit (EL743)**

Hunt Area	Type	Special Archery Dates		Regular Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
122	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov. 30	150	Any elk
122	1			Dec. 1	Dec. 31		Antlerless elk
122	2			Oct. 10	Nov. 30	150	Antlered elk five (5) points or less on either antler
122	6	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Dec. 31	150	Cow or calf
122	8			Aug. 1	Jan. 31	Unlimited	Cow or calf valid on private land

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 73% Satisfied, 16% Neutral, 11% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

The majority of elk in this hunt area are on private or difficult-to-access public land, so licenses are issued primarily based on landowner access. Over the past five years, overall success has been high, averaging 64% with an average of 5.1 days per harvest. Weather in Area 122 during the 2025 season was very mild, contributing to a lower overall harvest and success rate compared to 2024; elk were more dispersed and observed in smaller groups throughout the season, though bull harvest did not appear affected. Type 1 success rose from 63% in 2024 to 66% in 2025, and Type 2 success rose from 60% to 66%. Type 6 success declined from 71% to 57%, and Type 8 success fell from 91% to 67%. Managers attribute the Type 8 decline to increased license sales; 131 Type 8 licenses were sold in 2024 versus 162 in 2025.

In 2025, the Pine Ridge herd objective transitioned from a landowner Satisfaction-Based objective to a Population-Based objective. In April 2025, managers conducted a large sightability survey by helicopter, requiring approximately 18 hours of flight time and covering 110 polygons. Of these, 34 were classified as high-stratum and 76 as low-stratum. During the survey, 542 elk were observed, resulting in an abundance estimate of 2,030 elk (CI = 1,199–2,861). Based on survey results and landowner input, a Post-Season Population Objective of 1,500 elk was established.

The 2026 season structure was designed to address landowner concerns about a growing population, elevated bull ratios, and overcrowding on limited public land. To reduce bull ratios while maintaining bull quality, the Type 2 license season will run from October 10 through November 30. The Type 8 unlimited license will remain in place to help address potential damage concerns expressed by landowners.

Objective Review

The objective and management strategy for Pine Ridge Elk was evaluated and approved in 2025. This herd will not be up for review again until 2030.

Chronic Wasting Disease Management

This herd has not been prioritized for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) surveillance because historically harvest has been too low to obtain an adequate sample size for a statistically valid prevalence estimate. The five-year annual and average prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled for CWD are presented below (Table 1.).

Table 1. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested elk in the Pine Ridge Elk Herd, 2021 - 2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>	Percent of Harvested Adult Elk Sampled
	All Adult Elk (CI = 95%)	
2021	0% (n=2)	1.2
2022	0% (n=6)	2.9
2023	16.7% (n=6)	3.2
2024	0% (n=7)	2.2
2025	14.3% (n=7)	2.4
2021-2025	7.1% (0.8%-23.5%, n=28)	2.4

Population Modeling

The Integrated Population Model (IPM) was used to model this herd. The default structure for elk, i.e. constant adult survival, time-varying reproduction and juvenile survival was selected. The license variable was selected by managers to best represent the most predictable annual harvest. In addition to this, managers selected data from 2018-2027 to best represent this herd. With these settings in place the observed data for the IPM included eight years of harvest and ratio data along with abundance estimates from surveys conducted in 2025. The IPM convergence was acceptable, with the max Rhat value being 1.85.

A sightability survey was flown in April 2025 which produced an abundance estimate of 2,030 elk (CI = 1,199–2,861) elk. In addition to this survey, a composition/abundance survey was completed in February of 2026 (Table 2.). During this survey managers were focused on obtaining quality ratios. A total of 746 elk were classified, resulting in a calf ratio of 25 calves per 100 cows and 28 bulls per 100 cows. The total post-season population estimate for 2025 is 1,583 elk (CI=1,116-2,126).

Table 2. Postseason classification summary

2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary																		
for Elk Herd EL743 - PINE RIDGE																		
Year	Post Pop	MALES				FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot Cts	Cls Obj	Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	Adult	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%			Ylng	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
2020	0	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0	0	0	0	± 0	0	± 0	0
2021	0	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0	0	0	0	± 0	0	± 0	0
2022	0	56	143	199	22%	508	57%	180	20%	887	0	11	28	39	± 0	35	± 0	25
2023	0	20	67	87	22%	199	49%	118	29%	404	0	10	34	44	± 0	59	± 0	41
2024	0	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0	0	0	0	± 0	0	± 0	0
2025	1,583	51	87	138	18%	488	65%	120	16%	746	0	10	18	28	± 3	25	± 2	19

Additional Information

In 2024, antler beam length and base circumference measurements (N=31) were collected from harvested adult male elk. The average beam length was 41 inches, the average base circumference was eight inches and the average age was 6.5. Again in 2025, antler beam length and base circumference measurements (N=30) were collected from harvested adult male elk. The average beam length was 43 inches, the average base circumference was eight inches and the average age was 6.4. This data will be used to see if a reduction in bull ratios affects antler morphology overtime.

**2026 Hunting Seasons
Elk Hunt Area 126 (EL999)**

Hunt Area	Type	Special Archery Dates		Regular Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
126	Gen			Sep. 1	Sep. 30		Any elk valid in Weston County
126	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31		Any elk valid in the entire area
126	Gen			Nov. 1	Dec. 31		Antlerless elk
126	8			Aug. 1	Oct. 15	Unlimited	Cow or calf valid on private land
126	8			Oct. 16	Jan. 31		Cow or calf valid in the entire area

2026 Region E Nonresident Quota: 1,000 licenses

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 56% Satisfied, 25% Neutral, 19% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

The 2025 season structure continued to be liberal in an effort to maximize harvest. Elk numbers in this area continue to grow causing landowner concern. From observations, managers and landowners estimate this population to be a minimum of at least 750 elk. This area has low densities of elk and is quite expansive, which leads to difficulty when estimating population abundance. This area is also a non-herd unit and is managed for low elk numbers. With this area being dominated primarily by private land, success and harvest remained around the five-year average. The Type 8 license was first implemented in 2024 and had a 31% success rate, harvesting 106 antlerless elk. For 2025 the Type 8 had a 41% success rate, harvesting 161 antlerless elk. The resident General license sales decreased from 2024 and saw a subtle decrease in success with 35% in 2024 to 34% in 2025. Total harvest matched that with 216 elk harvested in 2024 and 206 elk harvested in 2025 on General licenses. In total, 367 elk (182 bulls, 151 cows, 10 calves) were harvested in Area 126, which is well above the five-year average of 273 elk. Managers believe that because of growing landowner concern regarding elk numbers, landowners were more aggressive in harvesting elk compared to past years. In total, 1,006 Region E Nonresident licenses were purchased in 2025 with a total of 719 elk harvested.

The general deer seasons within elk Hunt Area 126 run from October 1 through October 15. To distribute hunting pressure on public lands, the Type 8 season will now run from August 1 through October 15 with a private land only limitation. The second segment of the Type 8 season will now run from October 16 through January 31 and will be valid area wide.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Bighorn Sheep

PERIOD: 6/1/2025 - 5/31/2026

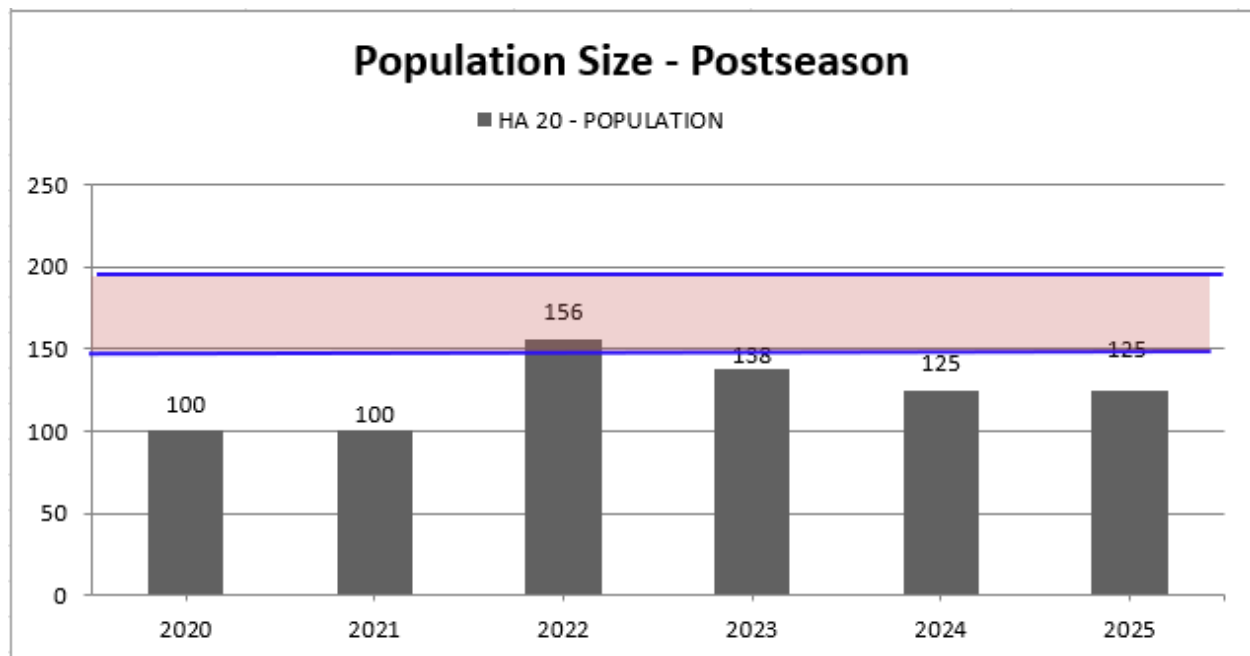
HERD: BS720 (Non-Herd Unit)

HUNT AREAS: 20 (Kouba Canyon)

PREPARED BY: MATT HUIZENGA

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	154	125	125
Harvest:	2.2	1	3
Hunters:	2.2	1	3
Hunter Success:	100%	100%	100%
Active Licenses:	2.2	1	3
Active License Success:	100%	100%	100%
Recreation Days:	10	18	15
Days Per Animal:	6.6	18	5.0
Males per 100 Females	95	119	
Juveniles per 100 Females	38	8	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) :	150 – 200
Management Strategy:	<i>Joint Management with South Dakota</i>
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend:	3
Model Date:	No Model (Pop. Est. from ground Survey)



2026 HUNTING SEASONS
KOUBA CANYON BIGHORN SHEEP (BS720)

NON-HERD UNIT

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
20	1	Aug. 15	Aug. 31	Sep. 1	Nov. 30	3	Any ram

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: *Bighorn Sheep (BHS) Hunters Not Surveyed*

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

At the start of the 2021 bio-year, there were 21 ewes and 17 rams with active VHF radio collars in this herd. In addition, there were at least three active VHF collars on ewes collared as part of a previous project. Over the next 12 months, five of the collared ewes and eight of the collared rams died, yielding an annual mortality rate 21% for collared ewes and 47% for collared rams, with two of the collared rams being harvested by hunters. Bighorn sheep observations during the 2021-22 winter indicated a large proportion of radio-collared sheep in the herd and virtually no lambs. Poor lamb survival and lower numbers of observed sheep suggested this herd had declined, perhaps as a result of an Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) die-off that had affected area deer and antelope herds significantly. A sightability flight flown in 2022 detected 75 total sheep, including 22 of the 23 collared sheep known to be in the survey area. However, it did not produce a useable population estimate. In November, 2022 South Dakota Game Fish and Parks (SDGF&P) ran multiple ground-based sightability surveys in this herd. The fifth and final survey produced the best results. A total of 76 bighorn sheep were observed producing a population estimate of 156 sheep (CI = 96-254) and a ratio of 47 lambs:100 ewes:58 rams, while the mean of all the classifications made during the surveys yielded 60 lambs:100 ewes:98 rams. In November of 2023, SDGF&P again conducted their ground-based survey using radio-collared sheep yielding an estimated population of 138 sheep (CI = 56-340). The minimum count produced during the 2023 effort was 25 rams, 21 ewes, and 14 lambs, for a total minimum count of 60 sheep residing in both states. The average, observed sex/age ratio of all five surveys was 58 lambs:100 ewes:92 rams, with about 45% of the rams being classified as Class IV (trophy class), compared to about 60% in 2022. A helicopter classification flight flown in Wyoming in February, 2024 detected 56 sheep, with an observed lamb:ewe:ram ratio of 15:100:93. Ground counts were again completed by SDGF&P in 2024. From these counts, the minimum count produced 28 rams, 25 ewes, and 17 lambs, for a total minimum count of 70 sheep. The observed ratio was 68 lambs:100 ewes:112 rams. Ram classification data was not obtained in 2024. Due to a lack of observed collared sheep, managers were not able to produce a valid mark-remark estimate, however managers estimated a total population of approximately 125 sheep in 2024.

Following the perceived population decline in bio-year 2021, this hunt area went from three Wyoming licenses available to one for the 2022 season, while SDGF&P continued to issue three

licenses. After discussions with SDGF&P, it was decided to issue two Wyoming licenses for the 2023 hunting season, and both hunters harvested mature rams. There were possibly up to eight radio-collared rams available to hunters at the beginning of the 2023 hunting season, but two of these collars had not been detected since 2021. Of the five rams hunters harvested in 2023 (2 WY, 3 SD), four were collared. This high proportion of collared rams in the harvest, coupled with the fact that days to harvest a ram increased from an average of 2.8 between 2015 and 2020 to an average of 5.1 days since 2021, had local managers concerned about the availability of trophy class rams. Because of this, and what seemed to be a declining herd, Wyoming issued one any-ram license in 2024 and 2025. In addition, three rams were harvested in South Dakota due to the number of licenses they are required to issue. Using average classification counts and the 2023 population estimate produced by South Dakota's fall survey, the data suggest there were about 50 mature rams in the population, of which perhaps 20 were Class IV rams.

Surveys in 2025 indicated an overall population size similar to the previous year. However, the extremely low ratio of 8 lambs:100 ewes indicates there may be a disease die-off occurring which will need to be closely monitored. It could also be an artifact of the low sample size with only 59 total sheep classified. Opposite those low numbers, the ram ratio was 119 rams: 100 ewes, which indicates an excess of rams. Minimum counts of 14 Class III rams and 10 Class IV rams indicate good availability of trophy class rams. Due to the higher numbers of trophy rams currently in the population, the license allocation was increased to three resident licenses for 2026. If the combined interstate harvest objective of six rams is again met in 2026, it likely will meet the management objective of harvesting no more than 10% of the rams, or 50% of the Class IV rams.

Management Objective

In 2012, joint management criteria for this herd were agreed upon with SDGF&P. This management framework includes an interstate population objective of 150 to 200 sheep. Additionally, hunting seasons are to be implemented when there is a combined Wyoming and South Dakota population of at least 75 to 100 sheep. These seasons are intended to provide trophy ram hunting, such that harvest of rams in relation to population demographics allows for replacement of Class IV ($\frac{3}{4}$ curl) rams taken. To this end, harvest should not normally exceed 50% of known number of Class IV rams, and annual harvest should not exceed 10% of the total rams.

Population Estimation and Research Projects

Garnering an accurate population estimate of this herd is vital to its management, and three methods have been tried, all with limited success:

A ground-based mark-resight survey relying on radio-collared BHS was developed as part of a graduate student project in 2013. Most years, this method has produced estimates with very wide confidence intervals due to the limited number of radio-collared sheep available. Mark-resight data have been analyzed using a modified Lincoln-Peterson estimate, and one based upon a Poisson distribution, along with a detection rate function. Completing these surveys as designed in recent years has become difficult due to more restricted access to private land.

A forward-looking infrared (FLIR) survey was attempted in June, 2018. However, the FLIR system was not able to effectively detect BHS.

Between December 2019 and February 2022, a project was conducted to develop a helicopter-

based sightability model for this herd in conjunction with radio-collared sheep. This study was conducted in tandem with SDGF&P. In mid-February of 2022, a sightability flight was flown. However, detection of sheep on set transects not relying on radio collar signals was extremely low, resulting in an estimate with exceedingly wide confidence intervals. It appeared that the bighorn sheep were very sensitive to the presence of a helicopter and sought hiding cover to avoid detection. As such, this method was deemed untenable for producing a reliable population estimate.