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2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Pronghorn	PERIOD: 6/1/2025 - 5/31/2026
HERD: PR201 - COPPER MOUNTAIN	
HUNT AREAS: 76, 79, 114-115	PREPARED BY: ASHLEIGH RHEA

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	5,706	5,773	6,220
Harvest:	482	383	383
Hunters:	562	457	407
Hunter Success:	86%	84%	94%
Active Licenses:	619	500	450
Active License Success:	78%	77%	85%
Recreation Days:	2,353	1,904	1,904
Days Per Animal:	4.9	5.0	5.0
Males per 100 Females	43	58	
Juveniles per 100 Females	58	72	

Population Objective (± 20%) : 4800 (3840 - 5760)

Management Strategy: Recreational

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: 20%

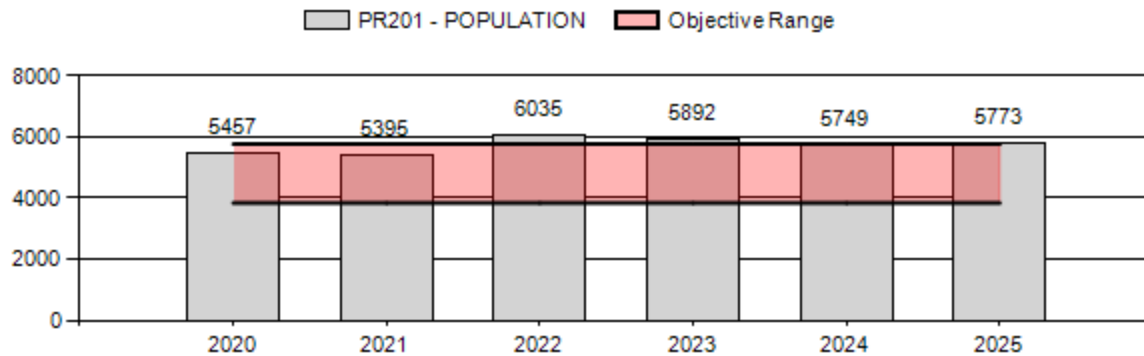
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 4

Model Date: 02/18/2026

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%	2%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	15%	17%
Proposed change in post-season population:	-9%	8%

Population Size - Postseason



2020 - 2025 Preseason Classification Summary

for Pronghorn Herd PR201 - COPPER MOUNTAIN

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	66	261	327	26%	618	50%	302	24%	1,247	0	11	42	53	± 5	49	± 5	32
2021	0	55	151	206	22%	502	53%	239	25%	947	0	11	30	41	± 5	48	± 5	34
2022	7,000	56	160	216	20%	522	47%	365	33%	1,103	0	11	31	41	± 5	70	± 7	49
2023	6,620	57	127	184	16%	606	52%	366	32%	1,156	0	9	21	30	± 4	60	± 6	46
2024	6,487	101	204	305	24%	614	47%	374	29%	1,293	0	16	33	50	± 5	61	± 6	41
2025	6,513	138	199	337	25%	585	43%	424	32%	1,346	0	24	34	58	± 6	72	± 7	46

**2026 Hunting Seasons
Copper Mountain Pronghorn (PR201)**

Hunt Area	Type	Special Archery Dates		Regular Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
76	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	100	Any antelope
79	1			Oct. 1	Oct. 15	25	Any antelope valid on or within one-half (1/2) mile of irrigated land
79	7			Sep. 1	Nov. 30	75	Doe or fawn valid on or within one-half (1/2) mile of irrigated land
79	9			Aug. 15	Sep. 30	50	Any antelope, archery only
79	0			Oct. 1	Oct. 31	25	Any antelope, muzzle-loading firearms only
114	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	50	Any antelope
114	7	Aug. 15	Aug. 31	Sep. 1	Nov. 30	25	Doe or fawn valid on or within one-half (1/2) mile of irrigated land
115	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	150	Any antelope
115	7	Aug. 15	Aug. 31	Sep. 1	Nov. 30	50	Doe or fawn valid east of the Nowood River or south of the Nowater Stock Trail (B.L.M. Road 1404)

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 78% Satisfied, 14% Neutral, 9% Dissatisfied

2026 Hunt Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

The Copper Mountain Pronghorn Herd has been a stable or even slightly increasing trend since 2021, with excellent fawn ratios (four-year average = 66:100) and the total number of animals classified steadily increasing from a low of 947 animals in 2021. Managers still chose to implement a relatively conservative season structure given the herd unit's history of drought, declining habitat conditions related to cheatgrass expansion, and a localized EHD (epizootic hemorrhagic disease) outbreak south of Worland and Ten Sleep in the fall of 2025. Surveyed prior to the fall hunting season, 2025 classification totals reflected a five-year high of 1,348

animals counted. Both buck and fawn ratios increased in 2025 to 58:100 and 73:100, respectively. The 2025 fawn ratio was the highest in the herd since 2016. Managers want to caution that these numbers likely do not reflect herd numbers post-hunting season due to an EHD outbreak that occurred during the fall hunting season and persisted into December. Hunter success was 84% in 2025, which is comparable to the 86% hunter success reported in 2024. Days per harvest were slightly elevated in 2025, at 5 days/harvest, compared to 4.4 days/harvest in 2024 and hunter satisfaction decreased from 84% in 2024 to 78% in 2025.

Warm and dry conditions during the late summer, fall, and even early winter allowed for a localized but extended EHD outbreak in both Hunt Areas 114 and 115. Managers' response was to remove the Type 6 license in Hunt Area 114 from the 2026 hunting season structure, and instead merged the season dates from the Type 6 license with the Type 7 license, to still allow for some limited doe/fawn harvest in the hunt area. The Hunt Area 115 Type 6 license was reassigned as a Type 7 license to more accurately depict the more stringent hunt area limitations placed on this license type. The Hunt Area Type 6 license was also reassigned as a Type 7 license for the same reasons listed above.

The Copper Mountain Herd Unit currently only allows enough licenses to harvest 15% of the herd's mature bucks. For a recreational management strategy herd, managers strive to harvest between 20–30% of mature bucks. Given the recent EHD outbreak and how frequently this herd has experienced EHD die-offs in the past, managers feel that the addition of licenses to meet this recommendation would have negative impacts on hunter success and satisfaction as buck numbers are likely lower than the ratios collected during preseason surveys indicate.

As warm and dry conditions persist, reductions in the quantity and quality of forage and more frequent and intense EHD outbreaks continue to be major concerns around the management of the Copper Mountain Pronghorn Herd.

Management Objective Review

The Copper Mountain Pronghorn herd unit objective was reviewed in 2022, with no changes. The herd unit objective will be evaluated again in 2027.

Population Modeling

Given the large population fluctuations observed in this herd unit, managers opted to deviate from the default and use a fixed effect model structure. Best fit models incorporated constant adult survival in addition to constant reproduction and juvenile survival. Furthermore, managers incorporated a wide timespan (2000–2027) to better capture these unpredictable population changes. This timeframe also allowed managers to include abundance estimates conducted in 2000, 2004, and 2007, and most recently in 2024.

IPM convergence was excellent, with all Rhat values less than or equivalent to 1.1. This model tracked population and harvest changes relatively well compared to other models tested, however, there remains a certain degree of mismatch in both age and sex ratios, but most significantly in the modeled sex ratios. A potential explanation may be found in how buck ratios have seen somewhat extreme fluctuations over time, while fawn ratios have tended to experience an increase or decrease and then level off.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Pronghorn

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

HERD: PR204 - FIFTEENMILE

HUNT AREAS: 77, 83, 110

PREPARED BY: ASHLEIGH
RHEA

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	5,467	5,969	5,800
Harvest:	459	626	676
Hunters:	485	640	690
Hunter Success:	95%	98%	98%
Active Licenses:	541	737	787
Active License Success:	85%	85%	86%
Recreation Days:	1,451	1,855	1,755
Days Per Animal:	3.2	3.0	2.6
Males per 100 Females	40	50	
Juveniles per 100 Females	68	61	

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

4600 (3680 - 5520)

Management Strategy:

Recreational

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

30%

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

4

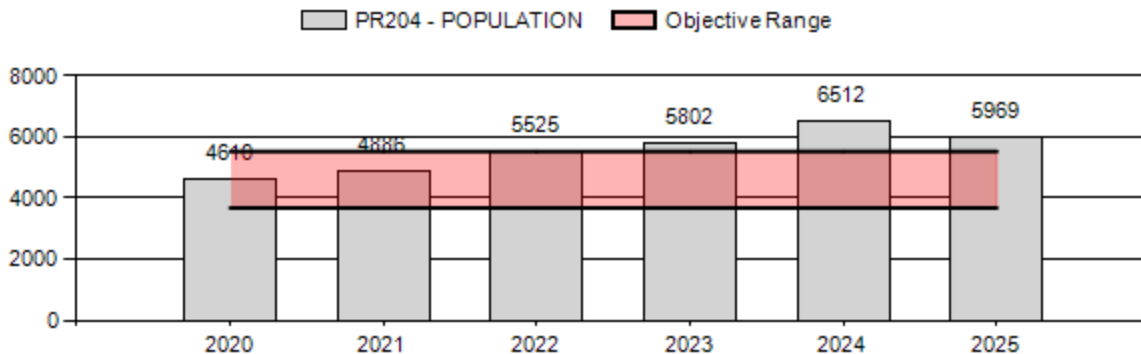
Model Date:

02/19/2026

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%	7%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	24%	25%
Proposed change in post-season population:	-9%	-3%

Population Size - Postseason



2020 - 2025 Preseason Classification Summary

for Pronghorn Herd PR204 - FIFTEENMILE

Year	Pre Pop	MALES				FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot Cls	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	64	173	237	20%	591	49%	381	32%	1,209	0	11	29	40	± 4	64	± 6	46
2021	0	89	182	271	21%	631	49%	392	30%	1,294	0	14	29	43	± 4	62	± 5	43
2022	0	106	151	257	19%	627	47%	441	33%	1,325	0	17	24	41	± 4	70	± 6	50
2023	6,547	100	156	256	22%	556	49%	327	29%	1,139	0	18	28	46	± 5	59	± 6	40
2024	7,262	114	222	336	17%	950	47%	746	37%	2,032	0	12	23	35	± 3	79	± 5	58
2025	6,937	237	307	544	24%	1,079	47%	661	29%	2,284	0	22	28	50	± 4	61	± 4	41

**2026 Hunting Seasons
Fifteen Mile Pronghorn (PR204)**

Area	Type	Special Archery Dates		Regular Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
77	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 19	Sep. 20	Oct. 14	125	Any antelope
77	6	Aug. 15	Aug. 31	Sep. 1	Oct. 14	25	Doe or fawn valid on or within one-half (1/2) mile of irrigated land
77	7	Aug. 15	Aug. 31	Oct. 15	Nov. 30	25	Doe or fawn valid on or within one-half (1/2) mile of irrigated land
77	8			Aug. 15	Oct. 31	25	Doe or fawn valid north of Wyoming Highway 30 or within one-half (1/2) mile south of Wyoming Highway 30
83	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 19	Sep. 20	Nov. 7	200	Any antelope
83	6	Aug. 15	Aug. 31	Sep. 1	Nov. 30	150	Doe or fawn valid on or within one-half (1/2) mile of irrigated land
83	7	Aug. 15	Aug. 31	Sep. 1	Oct. 14	50	Doe or fawn valid on or within one-half (1/2) mile of irrigated land within Gooseberry drainage
83	8	Aug. 15	Aug. 31	Oct. 15	Dec. 15	50	Doe or fawn valid on or within one-half (1/2) mile of irrigated land within Gooseberry drainage
110	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 19	Sep. 20	Oct. 14	150	Any antelope
110	6	Aug. 15	Sep. 19	Sep. 20	Oct. 14	75	Doe or fawn

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 83% Satisfied, 5% Neutral, 6% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

The 2025 season structure for the Fifteen Mile herd unit is once again, relatively conservative due to declines in pronghorn numbers prior to 2021. A 2018–2019 significant winter loss and subsequent years of drought conditions have facilitated this greater population decline. Despite these losses both population and harvest metrics have been trending positively with a few fluctuations the past four years from the population's low point in 2020/2021. The largest number of animals classified in more than 10-years were counted in 2025 with a total of 2,284. This data point was largely driven by high numbers of pronghorn counted in Hunt Area 83, while

minimal to significant declines in total animals classified were seen in Hunt Areas 77 and 110. Fawn ratios have been favorable the past three years, however, the 2025 fawn ratio (61:100) was significantly lower than the previous year's high of 79:100. Modeled estimates of this population suggest that the Fifteen Mile Pronghorn Herd is down from last year's high population estimate of 6,512 but remains just above the population objective of 4,600. Hunter success remained consistent compared to 2024 with a 98% harvest success in 2025 and an average of 3 days/harvest. Overall, habitat conditions continue to decline in this herd due to increases in cheatgrass prevalence and expansion. Under these scenarios, pronghorn numbers will continue to decline and exhibit population fluctuations when dry weather patterns occur.

Damage issues associated with dry weather patterns will continue to be a management concern for this pronghorn herd, especially in those agricultural areas surrounding Thermopolis and along both Owl Creek and Gooseberry Creek in Hunt Areas 77 and 83. Adjusting doe/fawn licenses will be considered annually to allow for crop damage prevention, regardless of population trends. In response to the high counts in Hunt Area 83 and private landowner engagement, managers increased the Hunt Area 83 Type 6 license quota by 50. In Hunt Area 77, season dates were adjusted on the Type 8 license to increase early season hunting opportunity and create a larger timeframe to address a fluctuating damage scenario.

Management Objective Review

The Fifteen Mile Pronghorn herd unit objective was last reviewed in 2022 and is next scheduled to undergo review in 2027.

Population Modeling

Managers chose to model this herd using the default structure for pronghorn; incorporating constant adult survival and time-varying juvenile survival and reproduction. Furthermore, managers incorporated a wide timespan (2010–2026) to better capture long-term and varying population fluctuations. The 2025 postseason population estimate for this herd from the PopR IPM was 5,969 (CL = 5,248–6,787). A line-transect abundance survey was conducted in the spring of 2023 for the Fifteen Mile herd and calculated an approximate herd abundance estimate of 9,941 (CL = 5,831–14,051) pronghorn.

Despite differences between estimates, the PopR model estimate does fall within the confidence levels estimated from the line-transect abundance. With an Rhat of 1.06, IPM convergence was suitable and fawn ratio estimates produced by the IPM aligned well with recorded data for this herd. One drawback of the model can be seen in the alignment of observed buck ratios with the IPM modeled ratio. A potential explanation may be found in how buck ratios have seen somewhat extreme fluctuations over time, while fawn ratios have tended to experience an increase or decrease and then level off. With more regular abundance estimates throughout time, we expect the model to reach a more accurate estimate in the future. Given the recent increases in the number of animals classified and higher fawn ratios, managers agree that this herd unit has undergone a population increase that is now leveling off.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Pronghorn

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

HERD: PR205 - CARTER MOUNTAIN

HUNT AREAS: 78, 81-82

PREPARED BY: SAM STEPHENS

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	7,248	7,389	8,397
Harvest:	930	792	780
Hunters:	952	820	800
Hunter Success:	98%	97%	98%
Active Licenses:	1,098	936	900
Active License Success:	85%	85%	87%
Recreation Days:	3,526	2,918	2,900
Days Per Animal:	3.8	3.7	3.7
Males per 100 Females	48	39	
Juveniles per 100 Females	53	48	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) : 7000 (5600 - 8400)

Management Strategy: Recreational

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

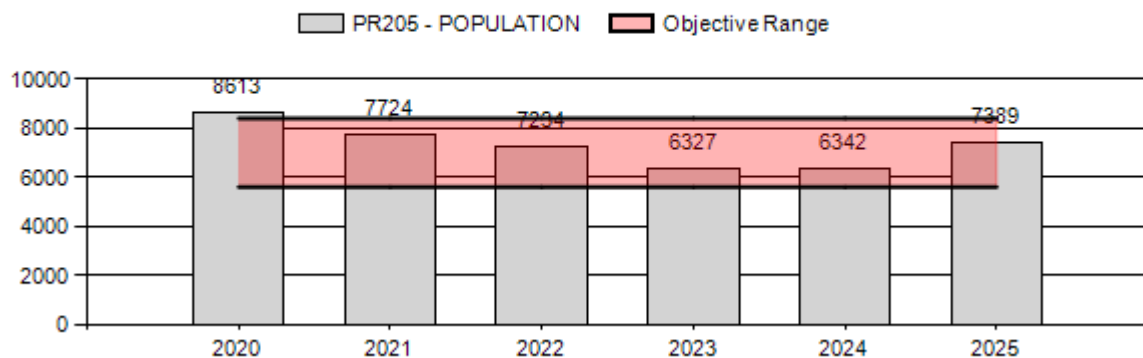
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 1

Model Date: 01/29/2025

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

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	7%	7%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	20%	23%
Proposed change in post-season population:	98%	97%

Population Size - Postseason



2025 HUNTING SEASONS
CARTER MOUNTAIN PRONGHORN HERD (PR205)

Hunt Area	Hunt Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
78	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 19	Sep. 20	Oct. 31	100	Any antelope
78	7			Aug. 15	Nov. 30	100	Doe or fawn valid on irrigated land
78	8			Oct. 15	Nov. 30	50	Doe or fawn valid on irrigated land in Big Horn County
81	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 19	Sep. 20	Nov. 15	175	Any antelope
81	6	Aug. 15	Sep. 19	Sep. 20	Nov. 15	150	Doe or fawn
82	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 19	Sep. 20	Oct. 14	175	Any antelope
82	2	Aug. 15	Sep. 19	Oct. 15	Nov. 15	100	Any antelope valid east of Wyoming Highway 120
82	6	Aug. 15	Sep. 19	Sep. 20	Oct. 14	200	Doe or fawn
82	8	Aug. 15	Sep. 19	Oct. 15	Nov. 30	25	Doe or fawn valid in Big Horn County

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

2025 Management Summary

1.) Hunting Season Evaluation:

Quota reductions were made in 2024 in response to a decreasing population and lack of recruitment from the 2023 biological year. In 2025, fawn recruitment decreased again to 48 fawns per 100 does. However, the post-season population estimate (7,389) increased to the upper limit of the 20% of the population objective (7000). This is likely attributable to a line-transect survey flown in 2025 which estimated a significantly higher population (9,154) which influenced the model output. Harvest and hunter satisfaction have remained stable in the Carter Mountain Herd despite moderate changes to license quotas in the past three years. Increased harvest from 2021-2022 paired with significant winter mortality were likely responsible for bringing the herd to the lower end of the objective range in 2023 and 2023. Crop damage concerns have emanated from increased concentrations of pronghorn in the eastern portion of Hunt Area 78. Migratory animals are congregating in late October and early November. From 2021-2023 this issue was addressed with doe/fawn licenses restricted to private lands in Bighorn County. This license type was removed in 2024 due to a lack of damage concerns but then installed again in 2025 due to drought conditions which triggered increased damage. Landowners were reportedly satisfied with these changes and the season structure in 2025. In 2026 a moderate increase was made to the Hunt Area 82 Type 6 license quota where managers intend to offer more doe/fawn hunting opportunity.

2.) Herd Unit Objective Review:

In 2026, managers in the Cody Region propose to change the pronghorn management boundary for the Carter Mountain Herd Unit to include the western portion of Hunt Area 110 by shifting the southern boundary to follow the Wood River above the confluence with the Greybull River. These proposed changes are based on substantial GPS collar data collected from November 2019 to November 2021. This proposal is based on the seasonal ranges documented from approximately 14% (n=18) of pronghorn collared between November of 2019 and 2021 (n=128) which established winter ranges within the current Carter Mountain Pronghorn Herd Unit and summer ranges within the northwestern portion of the Fifteenmile Herd Unit. This proposal would effectively divide Hunt Area 110 along the Wood River where everything North and West would be added to Hunt Area 82 and the Carter Mountain Herd Unit and everything South and East would be added to the Hunt Area 77 and the Fifteenmile Herd Unit. We anticipate this change will impact the following:

- A. Data collected during the spring and summer months such as Line-Transect Surveys or Classification Surveys will contribute to any data processing or analysis for the appropriate herd unit.
- B. License quotas will be increased in Hunt Areas 77 and 82 to account for the dissolving of Hunt Area 110 but which will not take effect until 2027.
- C. Herd Unit population based objectives will be adjusted to account for the addition of new animals and new area which will be included in future Line-Transect Surveys.

Using the Wood River as the new herd unit boundary complies with the +/- 10% interchange definition since only 2% (n=3) of collared pronghorn crossed this boundary from Summer to Winter Range.

3.) Line Transect Sampling:

Line transect sampling efforts were conducted in the Carter Mountain Pronghorn Herd Unit over 15.3 hours between June 5-6th. Flying conditions were calm and weather was warm. Conditions for spotting pronghorn were good due to early green-up in May. The flights were conducted using Wyoming Aero Photo and pilot Jamie Burgess. A total of 84 transects were flown to cover the 1,514 sq. miles of occupied habitat. This resulted in 256 observations along 812 miles of transects at an average of 300ft AGL. An estimate of 9,154 pronghorn with 95% confidence intervals ranging 7,581 to 10,828 was produced from these survey results.

3.) Population Modeling:

Managers chose to model this herd using constant adult survival, time-varying reproduction and juvenile survival. Based on visual comparison of the available effort variables, “licenses” was selected by managers as the variable most predictably related to annual harvest. The 2025 post season population estimate for this herd unit from the PopR IPM is 7,389 (CL=6,459 – 8,302) pronghorn. This was selected as the most accurate model after multiple iterations were attempted with varied effort variable and analysis year combinations. While convergence was not achieved, this model produced the lowest rhat value (1.22). Additionally, it tracks well with an apparent decrease in abundance since the population peaked in 2019 when the last Line-Transect Density Survey was conducted and rendered an estimate of approximately 8,600 pronghorn.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Pronghorn

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

HERD: PR207 - BADGER BASIN

HUNT AREAS: 80

PREPARED BY: TONY MONG

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Trend Count:	368	420	415
Harvest:	144	188	190
Hunters:	152	188	190
Hunter Success:	95%	100%	100%
Active Licenses:	178	223	225
Active License Success	81%	84%	84%
Recreation Days:	681	807	850
Days Per Animal:	4.7	4.3	4.5
Males per 100 Females:	44	33	
Juveniles per 100 Females	36	41	

Trend Based Objective ($\pm 20\%$)

400 (320 - 480)

Management Strategy:

Recreational

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

5%

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

5

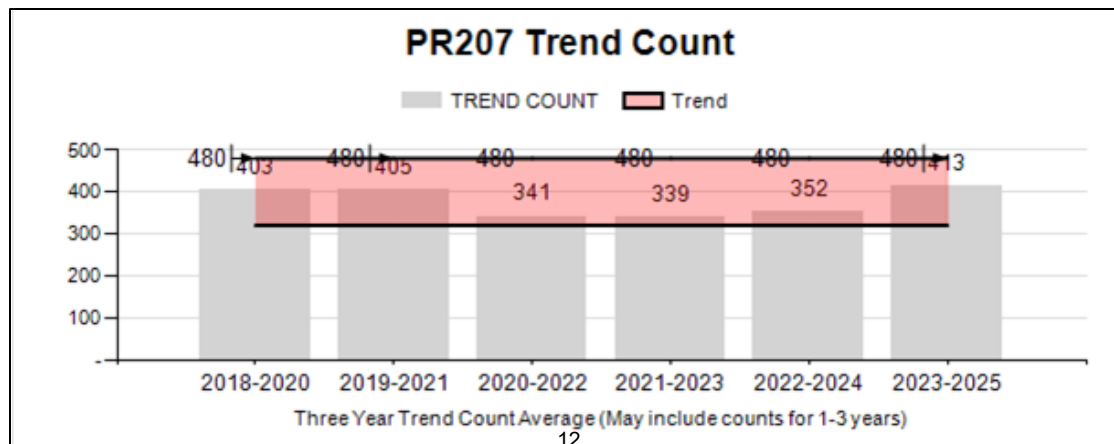
Proposed harvest rates (percent of pre-season estimate for each sex/age group):

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	n/a%	n/a%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	n/a%	n/a%
Juveniles (< 1 year old):	n/a%	n/a%
Total:	n/a%	n/a%

Proposed change in post-season population:

n/a%

n/a%



2020 - 2025 Preseason Classification Summary																		
for Pronghorn Herd PR207 - BADGER BASIN																		
Year	Pre Pop	MALES				FEMALES		JUVENILES				Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	Adult	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Tot	Cls	Ylng	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
										Cls	Obj							
2020	0	39	84	123	27%	252	55%	85	18%	460	0	15	33	49	± 0	34	± 0	23
2021	0	27	58	85	26%	168	52%	73	22%	326	0	16	35	51	± 0	43	± 0	29
2022	0	6	31	37	16%	145	61%	55	23%	237	0	4	21	26	± 0	38	± 0	30
2023	0	20	74	94	20%	283	61%	85	18%	462	0	7	26	33	± 0	30	± 0	23
2024	0	15	94	109	30%	181	50%	74	20%	364	0	8	52	60	± 0	41	± 0	26
2025	0	21	59	80	19%	243	58%	99	23%	422	0	9	24	33	± 0	41	± 0	31

**2026 Hunting Seasons
Badger Basin (PR207)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
80	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 19	Sep. 20	Oct. 31	100	Any antelope
80	2	Aug. 15	Sep. 19	Sep. 20	Oct. 31	25	Any antelope valid on private land east of Wyoming Highway 120
80	7	Aug. 15	Sep. 19	Sep. 20	Nov. 15	75	Doe or fawn valid on private land
80	8	Aug. 15	Sep. 19	Sep. 20	Nov. 15	75	Doe or fawn valid on private land east of Wyoming Highway 120

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 76% Satisfied, 16% Neutral, 8% Dissatisfied

2025 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

We have seen the number of pronghorn on irrigated meadows in the Heart Mountain and Clark areas stabilize and did not make any changes to seasons for 2026. The numbers of pronghorn throughout the herd seem to be stable despite lower fawn ratios (5-year average: 37:100). Fawn ratios have traditionally been low in this herd unit with a 20-year average of 37 (range = 16 to 50). This year fawn ratios (41) were higher than the previous 5-year average (38). Despite the low fawn ratios over the last several years, we have had mild winters which most likely lead to higher fawn survival. The Type 2 and 7 licenses were effective at decreasing higher densities of pronghorn in areas where we are having private land damage issues, with 94% success and 87% success respectively. Overall landowners and hunters are happy with the licenses designed to address damage in the areas east of Wyoming Highway 120. The lower success of the Type 1 license (79%) may be more indicative of a selective group of hunters as satisfaction overall remained high this year.

Management Objective Review

The objective and management strategy for the Badger Basin Pronghorn Herd was last evaluated and approved in 2022, and will not be reviewed again until 2027.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Mule Deer

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

HERD: MD207 - PAINTROCK

HUNT AREAS: 41, 46-47

PREPARED BY: SAM STEPHENS

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	6,777	5,488	6,271
Harvest:	616	643	643
Hunters:	1,326	1,246	1,146
Hunter Success:	46%	52%	56 %
Active Licenses:	1,399	1,280	1,180
Active License Success:	44%	50%	54 %
Recreation Days:	5,989	6,341	6,000
Days Per Animal:	9.7	9.9	9.3
Males per 100 Females	26	29	
Juveniles per 100 Females	66	55	

Population Objective (± 20%) : 8000 (6400 - 9600)

Management Strategy: Recreational

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -31.4%

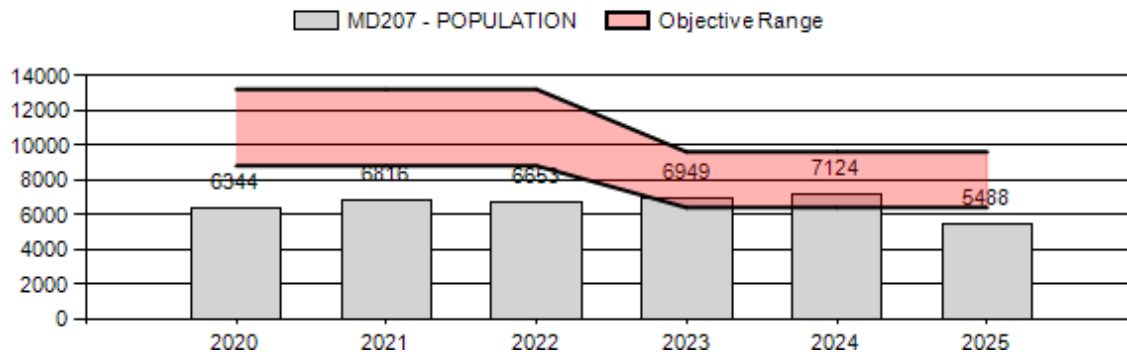
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 2

Model Date: 02/18/2026

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%	1%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	34%	32%
Proposed change in post-season population:	101%	114%

Population Size - Postseason



2026 HUNTING SEASONS PAINTROCK MULE

DEER HERD (MD207)

Hunt Area	Hunt Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
41	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 24		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
41	Gen			Oct. 25	Oct. 31		Any deer valid on or within one-half (1/2) mile of irrigated land
41	7	Sep.1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 15	25	Doe or fawn valid on or within one-half (1/2) mile of irrigated land
46	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 24		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
47	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 24		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
47	Gen			Oct. 25	Oct. 31		Any deer valid on or within one-half (1/2) mile of irrigated land
47	7	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 15	25	Doe or fawn valid on or within one-half (1/2) mile of irrigated land

2026 Region R nonresident quota: 500 licenses

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 62% Satisfied, 20% Neutral, 18% Dissatisfied

2024 Management Summary

1) Hunting Season Evaluation:

Mule deer buck harvest showed a significant increase in 2025. Warmer weather and a lack of snowfall degraded hunting conditions. This was slightly offset by an abundance of younger bucks in the yearling to 3 y.o range. Buck harvest increased from 377 (2024) to 462 in 2025, which was largely driven by increased harvest from Hunt Area 47 (223). General season success rates in Hunt Area 47 increased to 53%, a significant increase from the previous three year average of 39%. Increased success combined with recent changes to decreases the nonresident quota in an effort to reduce hunter crowding, could be responsible for a slight increase in hunter satisfaction from 48% in 2023 to 56% in 2024 and 62% in 2025. The 2025 abundance estimate showed a 23% decrease in population from 2024 to 2025. A decrease following successive years of growth is not unusual, however, this significant of a decrease is unlikely given the above

average fawn recruitment and adult survival seen in recent years. Fawn recruitment dipped slightly in 2025 to 55 fawns per 100 does. This could be an indication of future population stagnation following sequential years of growth where recruitment averaged 71:100 (2021-23). Consecutive years of good fawn recruitment has also contributed to increased buck ratios. In spite of higher buck ratios (29:100) hunters continue to raise concerns with a lack of “trophy” bucks, however, the median age of harvested bucks in 2024 and 2025 was 3.5, with this age class accounting for approximately 49% of tooth aged bucks checked during the season, a significant increase from 31% (2020-23 average). Younger (2.5 y.o) bucks are consistently harvested and historically accounted for approximately 10% of the bucks checked in the field from 2020 to 2024, however, this younger cohort only accounted for approximately 2% of bucks checked in the field in 2025. The lack of 2.5 y.o bucks represented in the harvest could be an indication of decreased recruitment from the 2023 cohort of fawns. Survival data collected from GPS collared fawns in 2023 showed a 62% over-winter survival (Table 3). Low sample size bias could be responsible for this higher estimate. In 2025, antler class data once again shows that bucks develop antlers at a slower rate in the Paintrock Herd. Bucks averaged an outside antler spread of 19, 20, and 21 inches at ages 4.5, 5.5, and 6.5 respectively compared to a 2024 statewide average of 20, 22, and 23 inches respectively. Post season classifications showed bucks with an antler spread exceeding 20 inches composed 19% of all bucks classified in 2025, which was slightly down from the previous five year average (22%). Model derived harvest rates suggest 34% of bucks are harvested annually. Maintaining a liberal harvest rate could be beneficial in reducing the transmission of chronic wasting disease (CWD). Given the reversal of positive trends in fawn recruitment and subsequent population growth, managers are intend to reduce doe harvest through the removal of “Any Deer” general seasons and a reduction in Type 7 quotas. Alternatively “Any Deer” seasons should be maintained during the one week general season extension to continue efforts to combat CWD within hot-spots located near irrigated land. Doe harvest within the Paintrock Herd should continue to be considered as a management tool to mitigate population density and disease.

2) Herd Management Objective Review:

The Paintrock herd is managed with a population based objection of 8,000 deer. This objective was reviewed in 2023 and is scheduled to a reviewed again in 2028.

3) Chronic Wasting Disease Management:

The Paintrock mule deer herd was prioritized for CWD sampling in 2021 and 2022. The five-year annual and average prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled for CWD are presented below (Table 1). Adult males consistently show the highest CWD prevalence rates with the most recent five-year average of 17%. There is a fluctuation within years, with 2021 showing the highest percentage of positive adult males and the largest sample size. Yearling males and adult females show lower prevalence estimates than adult males but this data should be interpreted cautiously due to a small sample size. Sampling rates are relatively high, generally exceeding 25% of the harvested adult male population. Overall, the Paintrock mule deer herd has shown a concerning rise in CWD prevalence among adult males since 2015-17 with recent estimates remaining at or below 20%. In 2021, public surveys and meetings specifically held for the Paintrock mule deer herd on CWD management indicated support for targeting hotspots of CWD positive animals, increasing harvest of male mule deer relative to females or overall population reduction, and increasing adult male harvest with later hunting seasons (Table 2). In response, management actions within the Paintrock herd have included extended general seasons near irrigated lands, liberal white-tailed deer quotas, and continued doe mule deer harvest through

a late “any deer” season focused near irrigated lands, all aimed at reducing the spread of CWD in order to prevent future increases in prevalence.

Table 1. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested mule deer in the Paintrock Mule Deer Herd, 2021 - 2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>			
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	Percent of Harvested Males Sampled
2021	20% (n=140)	5% (20)	8% (37)	31.5
2022	19% (n=107)	0% (14)	9% (35)	29.7
2023*	12% (n=126)	11% (19)	19% (31)	27.7
2024	17% (n=89)	17% (12)	0% (27)	26.8
2025	19% (n=119)	7% (14)	7% (29)	28.8
2021-2025	17% (12-21%, n=581)	8% (79)	9% (159)	29.0

*Mandatory CWD sampling effort

Table 2. Proportion of survey responses supporting various harvest strategies aimed at reducing CWD in the Paintrock herd unit, 2021.

Proportion of Responses in Support of Each Harvest Strategy within Category of Respondent									
Respondents	Address Hotspots	Mule Deer			White-Tailed Deer			Male Late Season	Do Nothing
		Male Harvest	Female Harvest	Population Reduction	Male Harvest	Female Harvest	Population Reduction		
All ^a	78	54	39	19	62	50	30	69	8
Hunters	70	44	35	9	52	44	17	83	9

4) Population Modeling:

In 2021, WGFD biologists began using PopR integrated population models (IPM) to estimate population indices for pronghorn and mule deer. The 2025 postseason population estimate for the Paintrock Herd is 5,488 (CL=4,627-6,549). Convergence was achieved with an Rhat value of 1.02 indicating that modeled and observed values were in agreement.

5) GPS Collaring:

In December of 2022, 100 GPS collars were deployed on doe mule deer throughout the Paintrock and Southwest Bighorn Herd Units. The objective of this project is to collect baseline movement and survival data with the goal of improving our understanding of seasonal use, movement, and

herd unit interchange to better monitor and manage for CWD. Determining cause-specific mortality is also an important function of collaring animals. Mortality signals are sent remotely and a prompt response is necessary to determine what the cause of death was for each animal. Compiling this data over a two year period will help managers establish whether or not CWD is a significant cause of decline at the population level. This data also helps managers better define herd-unit boundaries and determine what level of interchange between neighboring herd units could be contributing to CWD transmission. Additionally: maintaining a robust sample of marked individuals will help inform managers what the harvest rates of adult females is for each herd unit and whether or not it's significant to broader population declines. The total sample of collared mule deer in the Paintrock Herd includes 53 collared does, 18 fawns, and 10 bucks. Annual survival and cause specific mortality has been estimated since collars were initially deployed in 2021 during a research project focusing on the neighboring North Bighorn Herd.

Table 3. Proportion of marked does that survived from January 1st-December 31st in the Paintrock Herd 2021-24.

Year	Female Survival	Juvenile Survival (<i>Est</i>)
2021	0.83 (n=12)	0.61
2022	0.88 (n=24)	0.72
2023	0.86 (n=58)	0.62
2024	0.82 (n=60)	0.70

Table 4. Cause specific mortality of collared mule deer (does) in the Paintrock Herd from January- April 2025.

Paintrock CWD- 75 collared, 15 mortalities documented (2024-25)				
Cause-of-death		CWD-Positive	CWD - Not Detected	CWD - Unknown
Clinical CWD		3		
Predation	<i>Coyote</i>		3	1
Predation	<i>Lion</i>	1	2	
Harvest			1	
Poaching			1	
Malnutrition			2	
Unknown			3	
Total mortalities		4	12	1

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Mule Deer

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

HERD: MD208 - SOUTHWEST BIGHORNS

HUNT AREAS: 35-37, 39-40, 164

PREPARED BY: ASHLEIGH
RHEA

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	8,065	9,190	10,341
Harvest:	573	702	702
Hunters:	1,247	1,187	1,187
Hunter Success:	46%	59%	59 %
Active Licenses:	1,291	1,250	1,250
Active License Success:	44%	56%	56 %
Recreation Days:	5,591	5,322	5,275
Days Per Animal:	9.8	7.6	7.5
Males per 100 Females	32	30	
Juveniles per 100 Females	67	58	

Population Objective ($\pm$ 20%) :

16000 (12800 - 19200)

Management Strategy:

Recreational

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

-42.6%

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

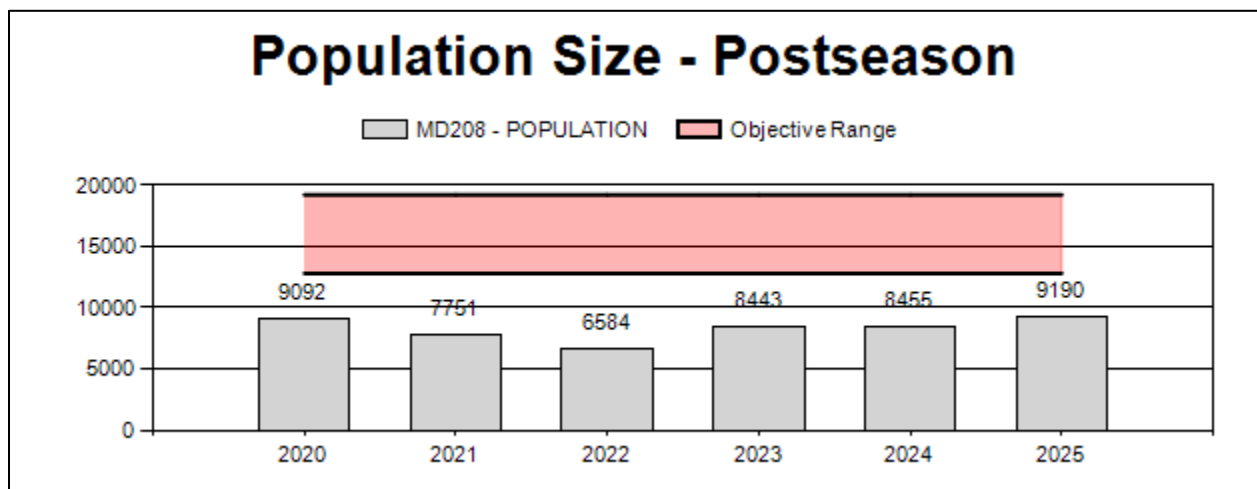
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Model Date:

02/19/2026

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%	2%
Males $\geq$ 1 year old:	23%	22%
Proposed change in post-season population:	+4%	+12%



2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary

for Mule Deer Herd MD208 - SOUTHWEST BIGHORNS

Year	Post Pop	MALES								FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot CIs	CIs Obj	Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	2+		2+		UnCIs	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%			Ylng	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
			CIs 1	CIs 2	CIs 3																	
2020	9,092	43	65	54	7	0	169	15%	582	53%	353	32%	1,104	0	7	22	29	± 3	61	± 5	47	
2021	7,751	21	23	16	2	0	62	21%	150	50%	86	29%	298	0	14	27	41	± 8	57	± 10	41	
2022	6,584	54	56	28	11	0	149	16%	490	52%	298	32%	937	0	11	19	30	± 3	61	± 5	47	
2023	8,443	69	88	34	6	0	197	16%	603	49%	432	35%	1,232	0	11	21	33	± 3	72	± 5	54	
2024	8,455	60	94	57	17	0	228	17%	656	48%	492	36%	1,376	0	9	26	35	± 3	75	± 5	56	
2025	9,190	70	109	52	1	0	232	16%	769	53%	443	31%	1,444	0	9	21	30	± 3	58	± 4	44	

**2026 Hunting Seasons
Southwest Bighorns Mule Deer (MD208)**

Hunt Area	Type	Special Archery Dates		Regular Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
35	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 24		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
36	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 31	125	Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
37	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 31	50	Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
37	7	Sep. 1	Sep. 14	Sep. 15	Nov. 30	25	Doe or fawn valid on or within one-half ½ mile of irrigated land within the Buffalo Creek Drainage
39	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 24		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
40	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 24		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
164	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
164	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 15	Nov. 30	50	Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer within one (1) mile of irrigated land
164	6	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14	50	Doe or fawn valid on or within one-half (1/2) mile of irrigated land
164	7	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 15	Nov. 30	50	Doe or fawn valid on or within one (1) mile of irrigated land

2026 Region M nonresident quota: 400 licenses

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 59% Satisfied, 25.3% Neutral, 15% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

The Southwest Bighorns Mule Deer herd has experienced significant population declines over the past few years, beginning around 2016. A significant winter mortality event in 2018–2019, multiple drought years, high CWD prevalence, persistent EHD, and reduced habitat quality associated with cheatgrass invasion and expansion have all been contributing factors in this decline. The past three years have shown positive trends in harvest and population metrics,

however, given the multitude of variables that structure this herd, the 2026 hunting season structure will remain relatively conservative. This past year hunter success increased to 59%, compared to 51% hunter success in 2024. Days per harvest remained consistent at 9.1 days/harvest. Fawn ratios experienced a low point from 2018–2022, with an average of 57:100 does. This trend began to reverse in 2023 (72:100), with continued improvement in 2024 with a fawn ratio of 75:100. Fawn ratios declined to 58:100 in 2026, which managers attribute to the high number of yearling/non-reproductive females produced with previous high fawn ratios. In 2025, managers counted a total of 1,444 deer which is the highest count since the 10-year low count of 298 in 2021. Buck ratios remain consistent with an average of 32:100 over the past four years. Despite current positive trends, managers expect this herd unit to fluctuate with CWD prevalence and desirable growing conditions for forages critical for population growth and maintenance.

Given the recreational status of this herd unit, recent increases in hunter success, and high buck and fawn ratios at the hunt area level, the quota for the Hunt Area 36 Type 1 license increased by 25 licenses. To reflect a season limitation that has a public land restriction, the Hunt Area 37 Type 6 license will be renamed as a Type 7 license. The Hunt Area 40 Type 6 license was removed due to low harvest success (18% success and harvest of 3 animals) and the absence of the agricultural damage situation it was designed to address. To increase separation between mule deer doe/fawn licenses in Hunt Area 164, managers pushed the season closing date from November 15 to October 14, for the Type 6 license in this hunt area. By changing the closing date, the Type 6 season will align better with the general season and focus harvest on resident deer, while the Type 7 license will focus harvest on the more migratory portion of the population.

Management Objective Review

The Southwest Bighorns Mule Deer herd unit objective was last reviewed in 2024 and is next scheduled to undergo review in 2029.

Chronic Wasting Disease Monitoring and Management

The Southwest Bighorns mule deer herd was prioritized for CWD sampling from 2019-2021 and again starting in 2024 continuing through 2026. The five-year annual and average prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled for CWD are presented below (Table 1). Adult males consistently show the highest CWD prevalence rates with the most recent five-year average of 31%. Additionally, adult males have been trending up in prevalence, with noticeable spikes of 38% in 2023 and 2025. While sample sizes remain limited overall, adult males consistently provide the largest sample sizes across years and demographic groups. Consequently, prevalence estimates for adult males are the most reliable. Yearling males and adult females, with smaller sample sizes, exhibit lower prevalence and confidence in estimates. Sample dispersion is broad across the unit, with concentrations of detections around Worland and along the Bighorn River tributaries, especially in Hunt Area 164 (Figure 1 & 2). Management efforts have previously been focused on maintaining low deer densities among CWD hotspots, including for white-tailed deer. To better understand deer movement and inform

future CWD management, 60 radio collars were deployed on adult doe mule deer in Hunt Area 164 in December 2022. This data will be used to assess and direct further CWD management effectiveness within this herd. In 2021, public surveys and meetings regarding CWD management were held for the Southwest mule deer herd, particularly for hunt area 164. Feedback from these outreach surveys and meetings indicated support for targeting hot-spots of CWD positive animals, increasing harvest of male mule deer relative to females or overall population reduction, and increasing adult male deer harvest with later hunting seasons (Table 2). In response to these scoping efforts and the rise in CWD prevalence trends, the 2025 season included harvest management focused near hunt area 164 with the creation of a two-week limited quota season in Hunt Area 164 with Type 1 and Type 7 licenses. During this two-week hunting season in 2025, field personnel recorded a total of 33 buck mule deer (Type 1 license) and 13 doe mule deer (Type 7 license) harvested. While the buck harvest is considered accurate, doe harvest is suspected to be underreported on the Type 7 licenses. Mandatory sampling for the Type 7 licenses revealed a 0% prevalence rate (n=12 tested) and the Type 1 licenses prevalence 58% (positive n = 19, total n = 33). The buck prevalence is notably higher than the herd unit-wide averages of 38% in 2023 and 24% in 2024, highlighting a success implementing targeted CWD management. The Hunt Area 164 Type 1 and Type 7 licenses remained in the 2026 hunting season framework in an effort to further CWD management in the Southwest Bighorns Herd Unit and will expand the current mandatory CWD testing requirements to the Hunt Area 164 general season and Type 6 license.

Table 1. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested mule deer in the Southwest Bighorns Mule Deer Herd, 2021 - 2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>			
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	Percent of Harvested Males Sampled
2021	19% (n=21)	0% (1)	21% (14)	5.1
2022	20% (n=35)	0% (7)	13% (8)	11.4
2023	38% (n=29)	0% (5)	25% (4)	8.5
2024	24% (n=59)	15% (13)	7% (14)	15.8
*2025	38% (n=99)	17% (6)	5% (21)	17.9
2021-2025	31% (19-37%, n=243)	9% (32)	12% (61)	12.3

*Mandatory CWD sampling effort

Table 2. Proportion of survey responses supporting various harvest strategies aimed at reducing CWD in the Southwest Bighorns herd unit, 2021.

Proportion of Responses in Support of Each Harvest Strategy within Category of Respondent									
Respondents	Address Hotspots	Mule Deer			White-Tailed Deer			Male Late Season	Do Nothing
		Male Harvest	Female Harvest	Population Reduction	Male Harvest	Female Harvest	Population Reduction		
All ^a	78	54	39	19	62	50	30	69	8
Hunters	71	50	33	17	63	50	33	58	13

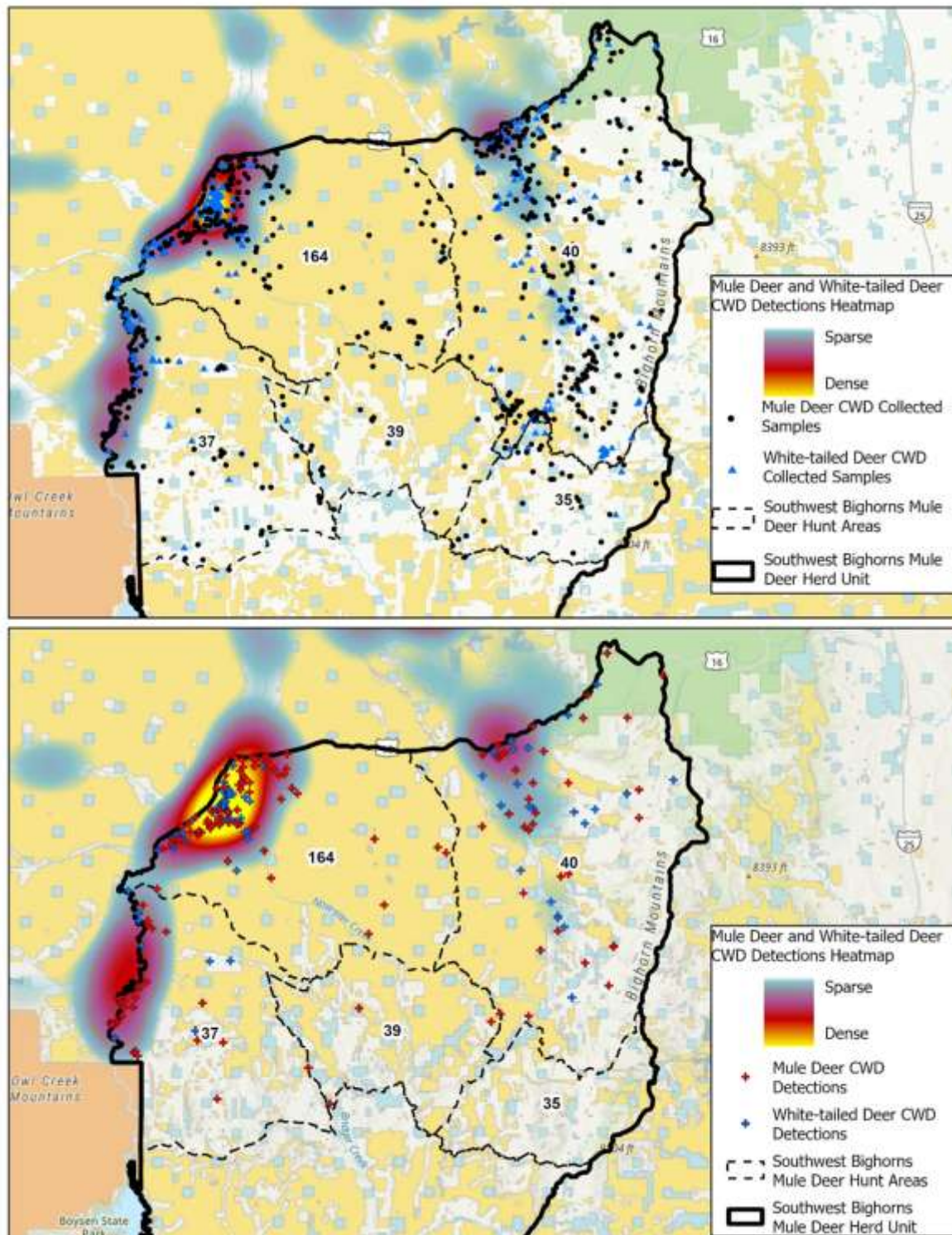


Figure 1 & 2. Total CWD samples collected and heatmap of detections (top) and total CWD detections and heatmap (bottom) for mule deer and white-tailed deer in the Southwest Bighorns Mule Deer Herd, 2014-2024.

Population Modeling

Given several large population fluctuations and abundance surveys conducted in 2017 and 2021, managers opted to incorporate a somewhat narrow (2016–2027) timeframe to reflect the most recent conditions that this herd is experiencing. Managers maintained the default model structure for mule deer, incorporating constant adult survival and time-varying reproduction and juvenile survival. The 2025 postseason estimate from the PopR IPM was 9,190 (CI=7,536–11,666). With an Rhat value of 1.05, IPM convergence was suitable and ratio estimates, particularly for fawns, produced by the IPM were relatively well aligned with recorded data for this herd. Last year's postseason estimate for the Southwest Bighorns Mule Deer herd was 8,455 (CI=7,648–9,302) mule deer and an abundance/composition survey conducted in 2021 estimated that there were 7,700 deer in the herd unit. Considering the similarities in number of deer classified, harvest, and both buck and fawn ratios from 2023 to 2025, and that 2021 was a recent low point in the population, field personnel concur that this population is slowly increasing.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Mule Deer

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

HERD: MD209 - BASIN

HUNT AREAS: 125, 127

PREPARED BY: ASHLEIGH
RHEA

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	970	771	861
Harvest:	65	70	70
Hunters:	197	179	180
Hunter Success:	33%	39%	39%
Active Licenses:	197	179	180
Active License Success:	33%	39%	39%
Recreation Days:	776	721	715
Days Per Animal:	11.9	10.3	10.2
Males per 100 Females	32	38	
Juveniles per 100 Females	66	65	

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

3600 (2880 - 4320)

Management Strategy:

Recreational

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

-78.6%

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

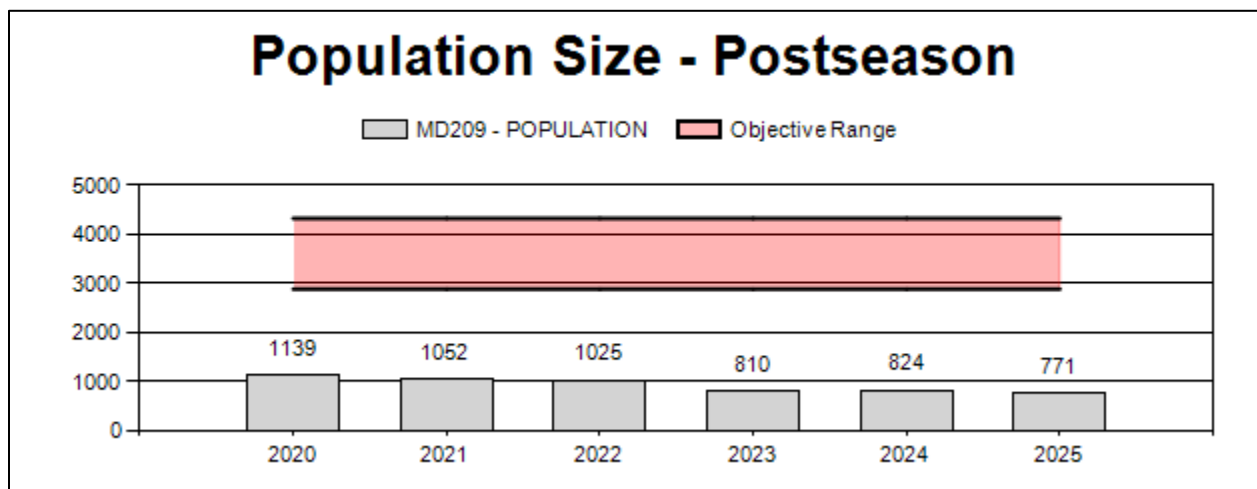
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Model Date:

02/18/2026

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:	31%	32%
Proposed change in post-season population:	-6%	-4%



2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary

for Mule Deer Herd MD209 - BASIN

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	2+ UnCls	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%			Ying	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
2020	1,139	17	27	16	1	0	61	16%	191	52%	118	32%	370	0	9	23	32	± 5	62	± 8	47
2021	1,052	10	7	2	0	0	19	16%	63	52%	40	33%	122	0	16	14	30	± 10	63	± 15	49
2022	1,025	26	19	12	1	0	58	17%	176	52%	105	31%	339	0	15	18	33	± 5	60	± 8	45
2023	810	18	22	3	2	0	45	15%	153	51%	103	34%	301	0	12	18	29	± 5	67	± 9	52
2024	824	13	28	10	3	0	54	16%	164	48%	124	36%	342	0	8	25	33	± 5	76	± 9	57
2025	771	22	29	4	1	0	56	19%	148	49%	96	32%	300	0	15	23	38	± 6	65	± 9	47

**2026 Hunting Season
Basin Mule Deer (MD209)**

Hunt Area	Type	Special Archery Dates		Regular Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
125	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 15	75	Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
125	1			Nov. 16	Dec. 15		Any white-tailed deer
127	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 24		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer

2026 Region X nonresident quota: 100 licenses

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 47% Satisfied, 23% Neutral, 32% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

Recent hunting seasons for the Basin Mule Deer herd unit have been very conservative due to low deer numbers throughout the herd unit. Even under these conservative hunting seasons, growth of this herd has been minimal to nonexistent. Habitat conditions continue to decline throughout the Basin Mule Deer herd unit, largely due to cheatgrass prevalence and expansion, but chronic drought and the lack in available water resources besides cropland may also be contributing to these declines. High prevalence of CWD persists within this herd and will influence the potential for population growth in the future.

Despite these challenges, managers recorded a buck ratio of 38:100 during post-hunting season classifications, the highest buck ratio since 2016. Despite a decline in fawn ratios between 2024 (74:100) and 2025 (65:100), the three-year average (69:100) still indicates a population undergoing moderate recruitment. A total of 70 mule deer bucks were harvested in 2025, which is an improvement from the 66 bucks harvested in 2024 and an all-time low buck harvest of 53 in 2023. Commensurate with the increase in buck harvest, hunter satisfaction in 2025 increased to 47% from the 40% satisfaction reported in 2024. No changes regarding mule deer harvest will be implemented for the 2026 hunting season.

Management Objective Review

The Basin Mule Deer herd unit objective was last reviewed in 2024 and is next scheduled to undergo review in 2029.

Chronic Wasting Disease Monitoring and Management

The Basin mule deer herd has not been prioritized for CWD sampling due to low deer numbers and insufficient hunting licenses to realistically achieve the target sample size of 200 adult males within a three-year timeframe. Despite limited sampling, the five-year annual and average prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled for CWD are presented below (Table 1). CWD prevalence in adult males is high, with a five-year average of 40%.

However, the confidence intervals are wide (18-54%) due to small sample sizes. This herd is experiencing continuous population declines, and CWD is likely a contributing factor. The only CWD management action implemented in this herd unit has been the reduction of white-tailed deer densities through increased harvest.

Table 1. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested mule deer in the Basin Mule Deer Herd, 2021–2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>			
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	Percent of Harvested Males Sampled
2021	30% (n=10)	0% (0)	0% (0)	15.6
2022	11% (n=9)	0% (0)	0% (0)	14.1
2023	50% (n=6)	0% (0)	33% (3)	11.3
2024	54% (n=13)	0% (1)	0% (0)	21.2
2025	47% (n=15)	0% (0)	33% (3)	21.4
2021-2025	40% (18-54%, n=53)	0% (1)	33% (6)	17.0

Population Modeling

Managers chose to model this herd using the default structure for mule deer, incorporating constant adult survival and time-varying juvenile survival and reproduction. Managers also incorporated a wide timespan (2010–2027) to exclude the most extreme population changes while including relevant annual fluctuations. With an Rhat value of 1.03, model convergence is considered excellent and both buck and fawn ratios exhibit a close relationship to the modeled estimate. The 2025 postseason population estimate for this herd from the PopR IPM was 771 (CL = 574–1,085). A comp/abundance survey was conducted in 2021 with a population estimate of 2,100 deer. Given low harvest, low classification totals, and generally stagnant buck ratios field personnel agree that the IPM more accurately captures mule deer numbers for this herd. IPM convergence was suitable and ratio estimates produced by the IPM aligned well with recorded data for this herd.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Mule Deer

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

HERD: MD210 - GREYBULL RIVER

HUNT AREAS: 124, 165

PREPARED BY: SAM STEPHENS

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	1,398	643	754
Harvest:	175	106	106
Hunters:	477	348	348
Hunter Success:	37%	30%	30 %
Active Licenses:	509	357	357
Active License Success:	34%	30%	30 %
Recreation Days:	1,654	1,323	1,323
Days Per Animal:	9.5	12.5	12.5
Males per 100 Females	33	44	
Juveniles per 100 Females	57	66	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) : 4000 (3200 - 4800)

Management Strategy: Recreational

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -83.9%

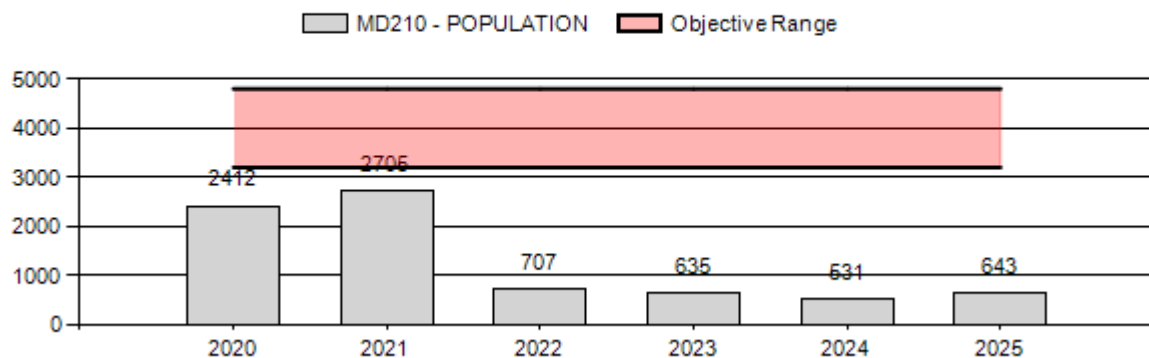
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 11

Model Date: 2/17/2026

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:	54%	60%
Proposed change in post-season population:	94%	117%

Population Size - Postseason



2026 HUNTING SEASONS

GREYBULL RIVER MULE DEER HERD (MD210)

Hunt Area	Hunt Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
124	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 10		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
124	7	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 30	25	Doe or fawn valid on or within one-half (1/2) mile of irrigated land
165	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 31	50	Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer

2026 Region X nonresident quota: 100 licenses

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 37% Satisfied, 24% Neutral, 39% Dissatisfied

2025 Management Summary

1) Hunting Season Evaluation:

Mule deer abundance and subsequent harvest have continued to decline in the Greybull River Herd. General season hunter success remained low at 24% in 2025 relative to 25% in 2024. This negative trend in success has occurred in spite of efforts made to reduce harvest and hunter crowding with the reduction of the Nonresident Region X quota in 2024. Depressed fawn recruitment rates have impacted population growth since 2017 but has seen a slight increase in the past two years: to 70:100 and 66:100 in 2024 and 2025 respectively. Habitat degradation from invasive species (cheatgrass) is likely the primary driver behind long-term population declines for mule deer herds living in low elevation arid environments, however high rates of chronic wasting disease (CWD) appear to be having a more immediate and significant population level impact. In 2025 hunters experienced another significant decline in mule deer harvest (-40%) from the 2020-24 average. This could partially be due to changes which restricted hunters to only harvest mule deer bucks in Hunt Area 124 and decreased hunter numbers. Notably, the raw number of deer counted during annual classification surveys increased for the first time since 2019, approximately a 30% increase from the previous five-year average. However post-season classification data elucidates a consistent and negative trend with mature buck recruitment. From 2015 to 2019, class 2 and 3 bucks ($\geq 20''$) accounted for approximately 29% (range: 22-43%) of the total bucks counted during post-season surveys. In 2020 this proportion decreased to 12%, and increased slightly to 18% in 2021 (Figure. 1). In recent years this proportion has decreased to an average of 12% (2023-25). This is likely being driven by CWD decreasing buck survival.

2) Herd Unit Objective Review

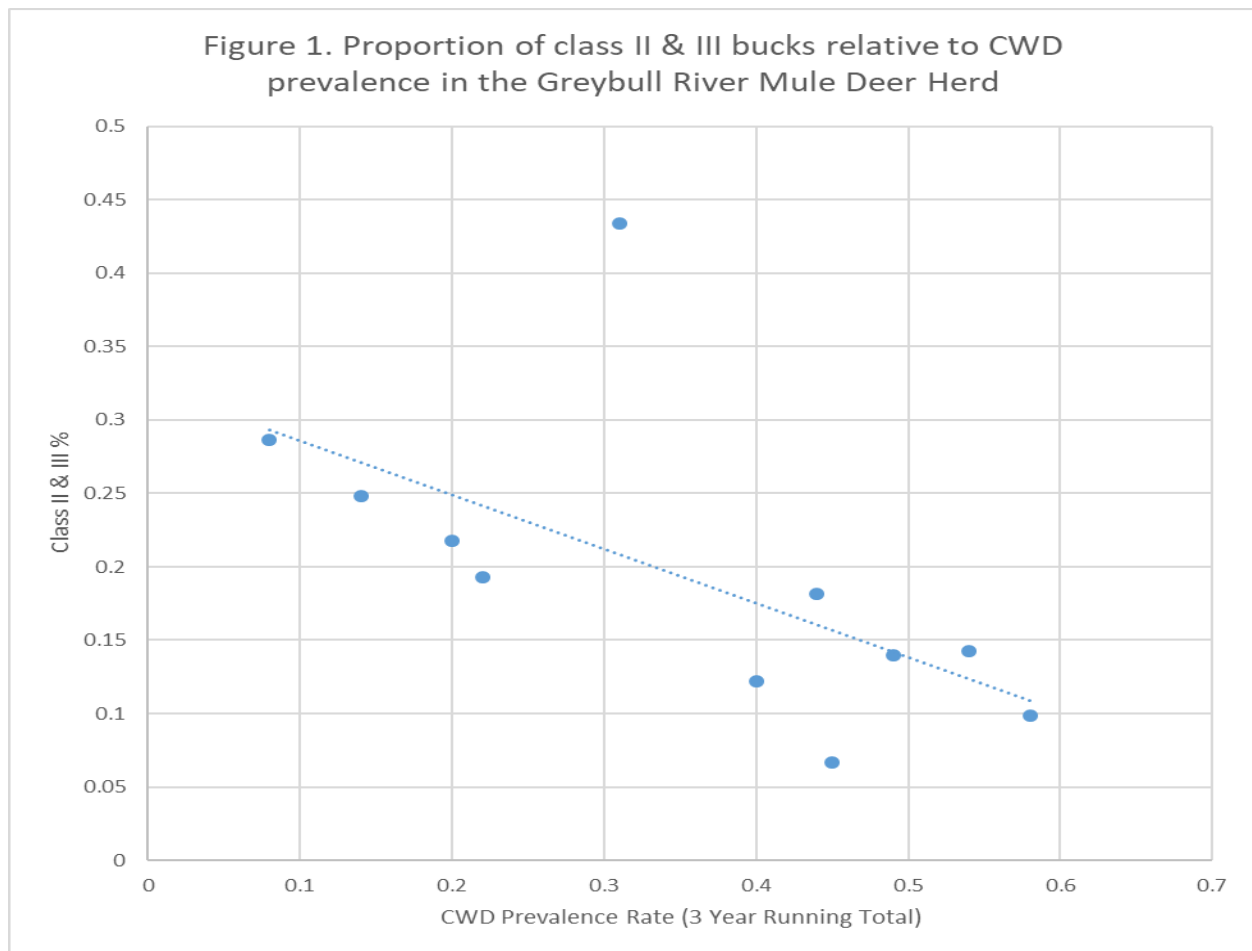
This herd was reviewed in 2026 and managers agreed to propose a reduction in the population based management objective from 4,000 to 1,000 deer. Given the precipitous decline in abundance, this population is unlikely to increase significantly. Managers have proposed an objective of 1,000 deer which would place the current estimate slightly below the objective range. This gives managers the ability to marginally increase abundance while still maintaining a lower density to reduce transmission of CWD.

3) Chronic Wasting Disease Management

The Greybull River mule deer herd was prioritized for CWD sampling from 2020-2022. The five-year annual and average prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled for CWD are presented below (Table 1). Mule deer abundance and subsequent harvest have continued to decline in the Greybull River herd unit, making it difficult to achieve target CWD sampling sizes. During prioritized sampling from 2020 to 2022, the target sample size of 200 adult males was not achieved, despite increased field presence and outreach through CWD signage, business cards, direct mailings, and expanded check station operations. The percentage of harvested males sampled across years is adequate when compared to other mule deer herds meeting sampling targets, but limited mule deer numbers result in limited harvest and sampling availability. Overall, adult male CWD prevalence is among the highest observed in the Cody Region and is likely contributing to population declines and adult male age structure/quality (Figure 1). Sampling and prevalence estimates for yearling males and adult females are limited and variable. CWD sample distribution and detections are primarily concentrated along the Greybull River corridor, mirroring hotspot trends in neighboring mule deer herds with sympatric white-tailed deer populations. To date, no mule deer harvest strategies have been implemented specifically to address CWD. However, increases in white-tailed deer Type 3 and 8 licenses have aimed to address CWD in the sympatric population.

Table 1. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested mule deer in the Greybull River Mule Deer Herd, 2020 - 2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>			
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	Percent of Harvested Males Sampled
2020	45% (n=65)	27% (15)	18% (33)	49.7
2021	42% (n=36)	56% (9)	8% (26)	33.6
2022	53% (n=15)	0% (6)	0% (3)	15.7
2023	59% (n=17)	100% (1)	0% (1)	20.2
2024	50% (n=18)	0% (2)	0% (1)	23.8
2025	69% (n=13)	0% (0)	40% (5)	14
2021-2025	52% (26-62%, n=99)	33% (18)	11% (36)	21.9



3.) Population Modeling:

The 2025 postseason population estimate for this herd unit from the PopR IPM is 643 (CL=515 – 786) mule deer. The model achieved convergence with an Rhat value of 1.03 indicating agreement between modeled and observed input values. Despite an abrupt decrease from the 2021 population estimate, the past four-year estimates match a steep decline in the population as evidenced by a rapid decrease in harvest since 2018.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Mule Deer

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

HERD: MD211 - SHOSHONE RIVER

HUNT AREAS: 121-123

PREPARED BY: SAM STEPHENS

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	2,484	1,481	1,832
Harvest:	384	250	250
Hunters:	1,109	909	909
Hunter Success:	35%	28%	28 %
Active Licenses:	1,177	958	958
Active License Success:	33%	26%	26 %
Recreation Days:	3,925	3,668	3,668
Days Per Animal:	10.2	14.7	14.7
Males per 100 Females	32	23	
Juveniles per 100 Females	56	50	

Population Objective ($\pm$ 20%) : 5000 (4000 - 6000)

Management Strategy: Recreational

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -70.4%

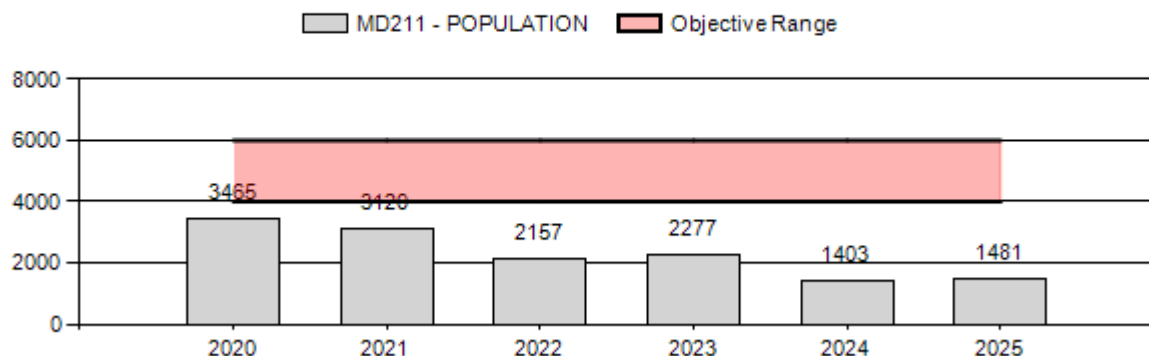
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 10

Model Date: 2/17/2026

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:	7%	5%
Males $\geq$ 1 year old:	44%	56%
Proposed change in post-season population:	94%	124%

Population Size - Postseason



2026 HUNTING SEASONS

SHOSHONE RIVER MULE DEER HERD (MD211)

Hunt Area	Hunt Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
121	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 10		Any deer on private land; antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer off private land
121	7			Aug. 15	Nov. 30	100	Doe or fawn valid on private land
122	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 10		Any deer on private land; antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer off private land
122	7	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 30	100	Doe or fawn valid on private land
123	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 31		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
123	7	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 30	25	Doe or fawn valid on private land

2026 Region X nonresident quota: 100 licenses

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 38% Satisfied, 31% Neutral, 31% Dissatisfied

2025 Management Summary

1.) Hunting Season Evaluation:

Similar to other low elevation populations in the Bighorn Basin, abundance and subsequent harvest continue to decline in the Shoshone River Herd. General season hunter success remained low at 24% while effort slightly increased to 14.6 days/harvest. High prevalence of chronic wasting disease (CWD) appears to be having a more lasting population level impact on adult deer. In 2025 hunters experienced another significant decline in harvest (-34%) from the 2019-24 average. Similarly, hunter satisfaction also decreased from 2024 to 2025 (47% to 38%). While reductions in license quotas have aimed to alleviate hunter-crowding the reality of a declining deer population and fewer mature bucks is likely driving the decreases in hunter satisfaction. Despite a significant population decrease, Type 6 "doe or fawn" licenses are still in place to address damage concerns however doe harvest has been minimal, not exceeding 100 since changes were made in 2022 to decrease these quotas.

2.) Management Objective Review:

This herd was reviewed in 2026 and managers agreed to propose a reduction in the population based management objective from 5,000 to 2,000 deer. Given the precipitous decline in abundance, this population is unlikely to increase significantly. Managers have proposed an objective of 2,000 deer which would place the current estimate slightly below the objective range. This gives managers the ability to marginally increase abundance while still maintaining a lower density to reduce transmission of CWD.

3.) Chronic Wasting Disease Management:

The Shoshone River mule deer herd was prioritized for CWD sampling in 2019 and 2020 and again starting in 2024 continuing through 2026. The five-year annual and average prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled for CWD are presented below (Table 1). Mule deer abundance and subsequent harvest have continued to decline in the Shoshone River herd unit, making annual sampling efforts difficult. Since prioritized sampling in 2019 and 2020, sample collection has continued to decline, despite increased field presence and outreach through CWD signage, business cards, direct mailings, and expanded check station operations during prioritized sampling efforts in 2024 and 2025. Overall, adult male CWD prevalence is among the highest observed in the Cody Region, comparable to the Greybull mule deer herd. The declines within this herd are, in part, due to the high prevalence of CWD. Sampling and prevalence estimates for yearling males and adult females are limited and variable. CWD sample distribution and detections are primarily throughout agricultural lands of the herd unit, with positive cases concentrated near Cody, Lovell, and Deaver. CWD management actions are limited in this herd unit due to low deer numbers and current harvest availability.

Table 1. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested mule deer in the Shoshone River Mule Deer Herd, 2021 - 2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>			
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	Percent of Harvested Males Sampled
2021	53% (n=30)	25% (4)	25% (12)	13.2
2022	46% (n=26)	0% (2)	36% (11)	12.3
2023	63% (n=27)	0% (3)	50% (2)	14.4
2024	50% (n=18)	0% (2)	100% (2)	9.2
2025	57% (n=21)	0% (3)	25% (4)	13.0
2021-2025	54% (27-63%, n=122)	7% (14)	36% (31)	12.4

4.) Population Modeling:

The 2025 postseason population estimate for this herd unit from the PopR IPM is 1,481 (CL=1,263-1,739) mule deer. The model achieved convergence with an rhat value of 1.01 indicating agreement between modeled and observed input values. While this model has never

been “anchored” with a sightability survey, managers found this estimate to be plausible given the steep decline in harvest over the past five years.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Mule Deer

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

HERD: MD212 - OWL CREEK/MEETEETSE

HUNT AREAS: 116-120

PREPARED BY: ASHLEIGH
RHEA

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	1,627	2,335	3,149
Harvest:	196	202	202
Hunters:	293	311	311
Hunter Success:	67%	65%	65 %
Active Licenses:	300	310	311
Active License Success:	65%	65%	65 %
Recreation Days:	1,272	1,581	1,575
Days Per Animal:	6.5	7.8	7.8
Males per 100 Females	40	46	
Juveniles per 100 Females	70	79	

Population Objective ($\pm$ 20%) :

5000 (4000 - 6000)

Management Strategy:

Special

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

-53.3%

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

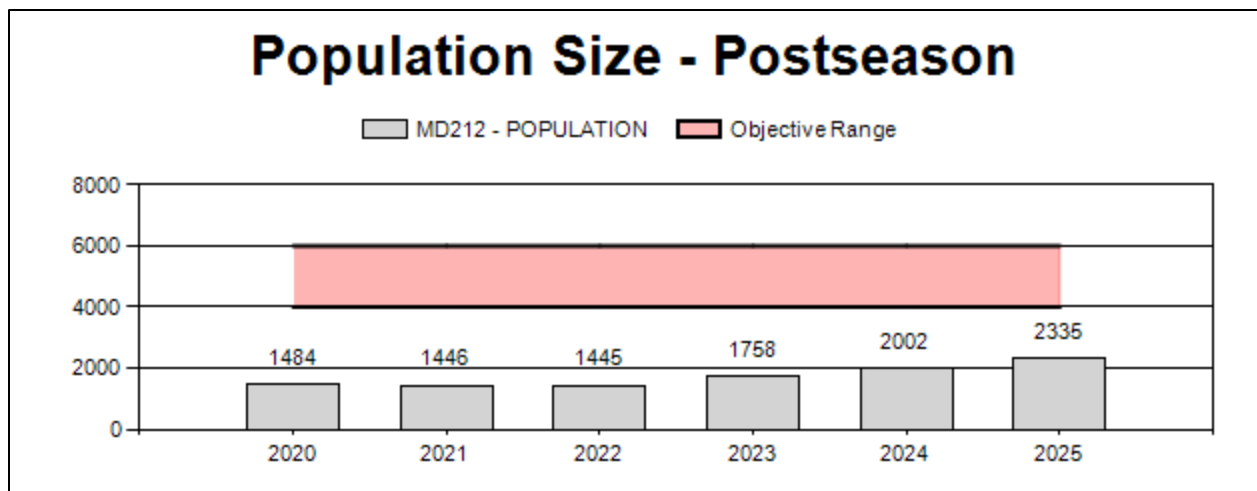
18

Model Date:

02/18/2026

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:	0%	0%
Males $\geq$ 1 year old:	32%	27%
Proposed change in post-season population:	-2%	1.18%



2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary

for Mule Deer Herd MD212 - OWL CREEK/MEETEETSE

		MALES								FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot CIs Cls Obj		Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	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	1,484	35	55	36	14	0	140	16%	400	47%	313	37%	853	0	9	26	35	± 3	78	± 5	58	
2021	1,446	42	42	25	4	0	113	20%	285	50%	175	31%	573	0	15	25	40	± 4	61	± 6	44	
2022	1,445	45	57	25	5	0	132	21%	310	49%	185	30%	627	0	15	28	43	± 4	60	± 5	42	
2023	1,758	74	66	40	6	0	186	21%	411	47%	286	32%	883	0	18	27	45	± 4	70	± 5	48	
2024	2,002	24	20	28	15	0	87	16%	253	46%	205	38%	545	0	9	25	34	± 5	81	± 8	60	
2025	2,335	52	81	36	5	0	174	20%	378	44%	298	35%	850	0	14	32	46	± 4	79	± 6	54	

**2026 Hunting Seasons
Owl Creek/Meeteetse Mule Deer (MD212)**

Hunt Area	Type	Special Archery Dates		Regular Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
116	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 31	75	Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
117	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 14	Sep. 15	Oct. 15	50	Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
118	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 31	25	Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
118	1			Nov. 1	Nov. 30		Any white-tailed deer
119	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 15	50	Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
119	2	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 31	50	Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
120	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 15	75	Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 69% Satisfied, 17% Neutral, 15% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

The 2025 season structure for the Owl Creek/Meeteetse herd unit will remain conservative with limited mule deer harvest. There has been a lack of doe mule deer harvest in recent years, while low Type 1 quotas have been sufficient at maintaining high buck ratios (5-year average of 42:100). Despite this long-term, conservative framework the population is currently well below objective levels. Hunter satisfaction remained about the same between 2024 (67%) and 2025 (69%), yet the number of days per harvest increased from 6.5 days in 2024 to 7.8 days in 2025. Overall hunter success remained consistent at 65% success in 2025 compared to the previous year's 64% success. Herd unit classification totals saw a marked increase in the total number of animals classified (850) in 2025 compared to the 10-year low of 545 animals classified in 2024. Buck and fawn ratios remain high at 46:100 and 79:100, respectively. The past three years of fawn ratio data (2023; 70:100, 2024; 81:100, 2025; 79:100) offer much encouragement and suggest a growing population.

In 2024, managers changed season dates for the Type 2 license in Hunt Area 119 from October 1–October 15 to October 15–October 31. This was largely in response to chronically low hunter success (46% in 2024) in addition to a high number of points required to draw this license type. In 2025, hunter success on the Hunt Area 119 Type 2 license increased to 81% hunter success. Given this metric of success and high hunter satisfaction in Hunt Area 119 (80% satisfaction), managers will continue with this season structure for the 2026 hunting season.

During 2025, there was one authorization for a Chapter 56 permit within the Owl Creek/Meeteetse mule deer herd unit. No deer were harvested under this authorization. Details are as follows:

- **Chapter 56 Permit – Deer Hunt Area 116**
 - Park County – Town of Meeteetse
 - Season Dates: November 1, 2024–December 31, 2025
 - Authorization for removal of up to 5 antlerless deer
 - Total harvest = 0 deer

Management Objective Review

The Owl Creek/Meeteetse herd unit objective was last reviewed in 2024 and is next scheduled to undergo review in 2029.

Chronic Wasting Disease Monitoring and Management

The Owl Creek/Meeteetse mule deer herd has not been prioritized for CWD sampling due to low deer numbers and limited hunting licenses to realistically achieve the target sample size of 200 adult males within a three-year timeframe. Despite limited sampling, the five-year annual and average prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled for CWD are presented below (Table 1). CWD prevalence in adult males is trending upward annually, with an overall five-year average of 21%. Despite its limited quota license structure and low harvest, this herd has remained stagnant, and as CWD prevalence increases, it will negatively impact herd performance. The only CWD management action implemented in this herd unit has been the reduction of white-tailed deer in high-density areas and hotspots within riparian and agricultural fields through increased harvest.

Table 1: CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested mule deer in the Owl Creek/Meeteetse Mule Deer Herd, 2021–2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>			
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	Percent of Harvested Males Sampled
2021	14% (n=22)	0% (2)	0% (6)	12.4
2022	22% (n=18)	0% (0)	20% (5)	10.3
2023	19% (n=21)	0% (0)	0% (2)	10.8
2024	30% (n=10)	0% (2)	43% (7)	7.1
2025	26% (n=23)	0% (1)	0% (0)	11.9
2021-2025	21% (11-31%, n=94)	0% (4)	20% (20)	10.5

Population Modeling

Given several sharp declines in the population from the early 2000s and relying more heavily on a sightability survey conducted in early 2025, managers opted to incorporate a narrower time frame (2016–2026) to provide a more representative abundance estimate for this herd unit. Managers maintained the default model structure for mule deer, incorporating constant adult survival and time-varying reproduction and juvenile survival. The 2025 postseason population estimate for this herd from the PopR IPM was 2,335 (CL = 1,888–2,864). With an Rhat value of 1.03, IPM convergence was excellent, with all Rhat values equal to or less than 1.1 and the model aligns well

with observed buck and fawn ratios. The previous year's population estimate was 2,002 (CL = 1,476–2,595) mule deer. The first sightability for this herd unit was conducted in early 2025 and generated an abundance estimate of 2,364 (CL = 1,447–3,281) and is acting as a significant anchor for this year's IPM. Given the overlapping confidence intervals for all three models, managers suggest that the true population estimate is accurately depicted in the 2026 IPM.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Mule Deer

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

HERD: MD215 - UPPER SHOSHONE

HUNT AREAS: 110-115, 148

PREPARED BY: TONY MONG

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	7,410	9,700	10,900
Harvest:	558	910	990
Hunters:	1,314	1,758	1,900
Hunter Success:	42%	52%	52%
Active Licenses:	1,340	1,788	1,930
Active License Success:	42%	51%	51%
Recreation Days:	6,818	9,247	9,400
Days Per Animal:	12.2	10.2	9.5
Males per 100 Females	28	29	
Juveniles per 100 Females	65	84	

Population Objective ($\pm$ 20%) :

12000 (9600 - 14400)

Management Strategy:

Recreational

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

-19.2%

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

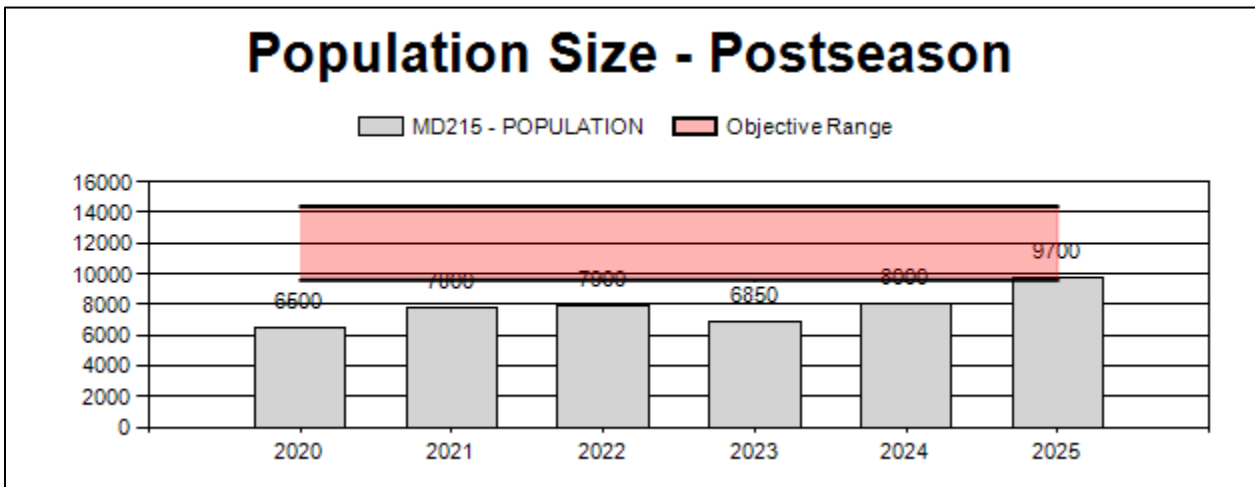
10

Model Date:

02/26/2026

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:	1%	1%
Males $\geq$ 1 year old:	34%	39%
Proposed change in post-season population:	1.0%	1%



2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary																					
for Mule Deer Herd MD215 - UPPER SHOSHONE																					
			MALES						FEMALES		JUVENILES				Males to 100 Females				Young to		
Year	Post Pop	Ylg	2+	2+	2+	2+			Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Tot	Cls	Ylng	Adult	Total	Conf	100
			Cls 1	Cls 2	Cls 3	UnCls	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Cls	Obj				Int	Fem
2020	6,500	108	149	50	9	0	316	14%	1,205	54%	691	31%	2,212	0	9	17	26	± 2	57	± 3	45
2021	7,800	147	167	98	29	0	441	16%	1,267	47%	972	36%	2,680	0	12	23	35	± 2	77	± 3	57
2022	7,900	69	100	31	6	0	206	14%	806	54%	476	32%	1,488	0	9	17	26	± 2	59	± 4	47
2023	6,850	82	125	60	8	0	275	14%	1,089	54%	650	32%	2,014	0	8	18	25	± 2	60	± 3	48
2024	8,000	121	108	56	9	0	294	14%	1,080	51%	746	35%	2,120	0	11	16	27	± 2	69	± 4	54
2025	9,700	40	33	24	4	0	101	13%	354	47%	297	39%	752	0	11	17	29	± 4	84	± 8	65

**2026 Hunting Seasons
Upper Shoshone Mule Deer (MD215)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
110	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 10		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
110, 111	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 20	25	Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
111	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 10		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
112	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 10		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
112, 113, 114	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 20	25	Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
113	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 10		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
113	7	Sep. 1	Sep. 14	Sep. 15	Dec. 31	100	Doe or fawn valid north and east of Carter Creek
114	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 10		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
115	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 9	Sep. 10	Oct. 27		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
148	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 14	Sep. 15	Oct. 25		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer

2026 Region F nonresident quota: 550 licenses

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 69% Satisfied, 19% Neutral, 12% Dissatisfied

2025 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

Total mule deer numbers increased again in 2025, and the 2025 hunting season resulted in the highest harvest recorded since 2016. Population metrics indicated that herd size had returned to levels observed prior to the significant winter mortality event of 2016–2017. Buck ratios remained elevated at 29:100, while CWD prevalence appeared to stabilize in recent years. Chronic wasting disease prevalence remained highest within the South Fork portion of the herd unit; however, increased harvest pressure and targeted management efforts corresponded with a decrease in CWD prevalence during 2025.

Tooth age data indicated that the average age of harvested bucks ranged from 3.5 to 4.5 years over the previous five years (N = 869; Figure 1), suggesting maintenance of a balanced age structure.

Fawn recruitment remained strong, with a 5-year average fawn ratio of 70:100. The 2025 fawn ratio of 84:100 represented the highest recorded value for this herd unit.

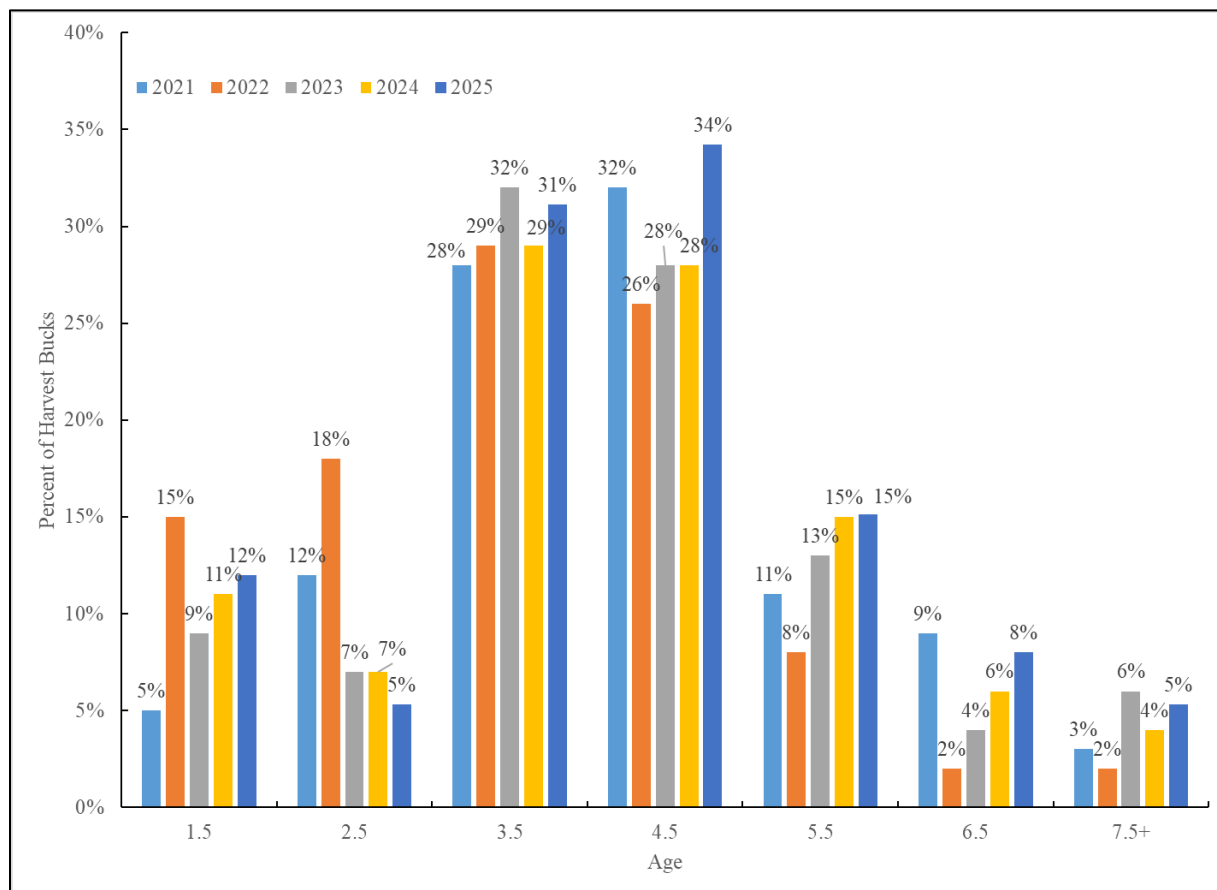
In addition to traditional ground-based classification surveys, trail camera data have been collected along migration corridors on U.S. Forest Service lands between Cody and Yellowstone National Park since 2018. These data provided an additional and less biased representation of herd composition, particularly for fawn ratios, which closely aligned with ground classification results. Interpretation of buck ratios from trail camera data required caution, as data collection occurred before, during, and after hunting seasons. To account for harvest-related reductions in buck numbers, trail camera classifications were adjusted using the average annual buck harvest rate of approximately 25% over the previous four years from collar data. Even after adjustment, buck ratios derived from trail camera data remained slightly higher than those obtained through ground classification methods, although values converged in recent years. During 2025–2026, buck ratios were estimated at 29:100 based on ground classification and 31:100 based on adjusted trail camera data. These results confirmed that buck ratios remained sufficient to support continued harvest opportunity.

White-tailed deer harvest declined during the reporting period due to continued limitations in hunter access to private land refugia.

Management objectives within this herd unit remained focused on stabilizing or reducing CWD prevalence within the South Fork portion of the herd and preventing similar increases within the North Fork portion. To support this objective, Hunt Area 114 was incorporated into white-tailed deer season structures to increase harvest pressure and limit expansion of white-tailed deer populations within the South Fork drainage.

We added Hunt Area 148 to the Upper Shoshone based on collar data collected from each of the herds around the Hunt Area. Data indicated that a vast majority of deer using the Hunt Area are from the Upper Shoshone mule deer herd.

Figure 1. Age structure of harvest from tooth aging of harvested mule deer bucks from 2021 to 2025 (N=869).



Management Objective Review

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

Chronic Wasting Disease Management

The Upper Shoshone mule deer herd was prioritized for chronic wasting disease (CWD) sampling during the 2020 and 2021 seasons. However, due to the strategic location of the South Fork check station and its annual 10-day operation, sampling in this herd consistently exceeded the target of 200 samples within rolling three-year periods. Five-year annual prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled were summarized (Table 1). Consistent annual sampling effort, particularly among adult males, provided a high degree of confidence in prevalence estimates across years.

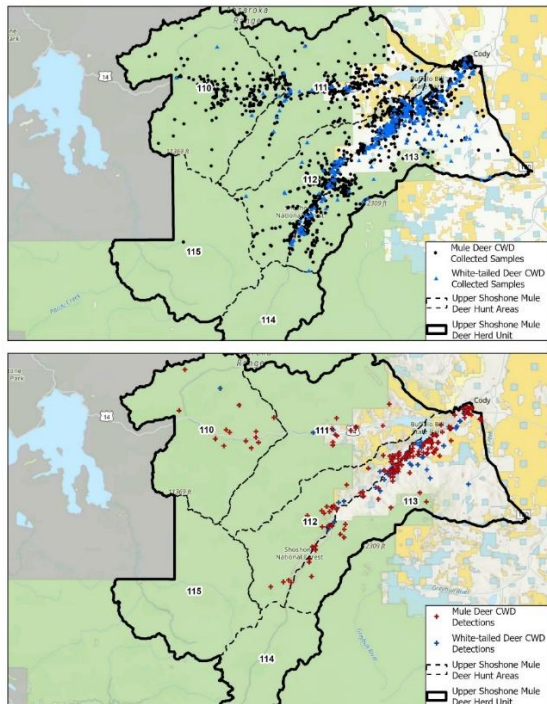
Due to increasing trends of CWD prevalence within this herd season structures were implemented and maintained to increase harvest of both mule deer and white-tailed deer, reflecting the complex population structure consisting of resident mule deer, resident white-tailed deer, and migratory mule deer components. Management actions targeting resident deer populations were particularly important due to the higher concentration of CWD detections in those groups. From these efforts, CWD prevalence in adult male mule deer appeared to stabilize

beginning in 2023 and in the South Fork Hunt Areas (112, 113) we saw an overall decrease in CWD prevalence from ~35% to ~30%. Yearling males and adult females experienced lower harvest rates, resulting in smaller sample sizes and greater uncertainty in prevalence estimates for those demographic groups. Harvest and sampling effort were concentrated primarily along the North Fork and South Fork of the Shoshone River, with relatively few samples collected from Hunt Areas 114 and 115. Positive detections were primarily concentrated on private lands within the South Fork drainage (Figures 1 and 2). Access limitations on private lands continued to present significant challenges for addressing CWD concerns within resident deer populations.

Table 1. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested mule deer in the Upper Shoshone Mule Deer Herd, 2021 - 2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>			
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	Percent of Harvested Males Sampled
2021	18% (n=93)	0% (2)	13% (8)	18.0
2022	19% (n=136)	0% (10)	0% (13)	26.8
2023	25% (n=179)	0% (11)	0% (6)	28.9
2024	22% (n=135)	15% (12)	0% (1)	25.3
2025	23% (n=230)	27% (11)	5% (0)	27.7
2021-2025	22% (16-25%, n=773)	7% (46)	3% (33)	25.7

Figure 1 & 2. Total CWD samples collected (top) and total CWD detections (bottom) for mule deer and white-tailed deer in the Upper Shoshone Mule Deer Herd, 2014-2024.



Population Modeling

Managers chose to model this herd using the default structure for mule deer, i.e. constant adult survival, time-varying reproduction and juvenile survival and have feel the estimate is fairly reasonable. Based on visual comparison of the available effort variables, active licenses was selected by managers as the variable most predictably related to annual harvest. The 2025 postseason population estimate for this herd unit was 8,000 (CL = 7,500-8,600; Rhat = 1.02) mule deer. This estimate from the model includes extensive survival data for doe, fawn and buck mule deer in this herd and the estimate produced from the March 2026 sightability flight (6,121; see below). These two factors give us high confidence in the estimate produced by the IPM.

Sightability Flight

During the winter of 2025/26 we flew a sightability flight for the first time ever in this herd. There were a total of 2,949 deer detected during the survey. Based on those counts, data and analysis yielded an independent population estimate of 6,121 (95% CI = 5,297-7,344) deer for the entire herd unit (Appendix A).

Appendix A. Upper Shoshone Mule Deer sightability flight summary.

Overview

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department conducted aerial sightability surveys for mule deer on winter range within the Upper Shoshone mule deer herd unit between February 27 and March 6, 2026. Survey data were provided by Tony Mong to Eric Newkirk for analysis.

Survey conditions were less than ideal. Snow cover was limited across most survey blocks, and temperatures were considerably warmer than average for the survey period. The typical average temperature during this timeframe is approximately 31.1°F; however, the average temperature during the 2026 survey was 44.9°F. Daily temperatures during the survey period ranged from 5°F to 19°F above average. These conditions likely influenced deer distribution and visibility during the survey.

Summary Statistics

Survey crews flew nearly 1,500 miles and completed 31.5 hours of flight time. Sampling included 60% of the high-density stratum blocks and 50% of the low-density stratum blocks (Table 1, Figure 1). The total cost of the survey was \$44,435.

During the survey, observers detected 2,949 mule deer in 313 groups (Table 1).

Table 1. Counts and groups of Upper Shoshone mule deer by stratum during the 2025/26 sightability survey.

Stratum	Total Available (N)	Total Flown (n)	Proportion Flown	Total Observed	Total Groups
High	114	68	0.600	2236	242
Low	204	102	0.500	713	71
Other	639	0	0.000	0	0

Results

The average detection probability across all mule deer groups was 0.74, with group-specific detection probabilities ranging from 0.33 to 0.91 depending on the covariates recorded for each group.

The estimated abundance for the Upper Shoshone mule deer herd was 6,121 deer, with a 95% confidence interval of 5,297 to 7,344 deer and a coefficient of variation of 8.3% (Table 2).

Table 2. Population estimate results for the Upper Shoshone mule deer herd from the 2025/26 sightability survey.

Demographic	Raw Count	Estimate	95% CI	CV
Total Deer	2,949	6,121	(5,297–7,344)	8.3%

Discussion

This survey represents the first independent abundance estimate for the Upper Shoshone mule deer herd. Although weather conditions were not ideal for conducting a sightability survey, the resulting estimate provides an important reference point for evaluating herd abundance and improving population modeling.

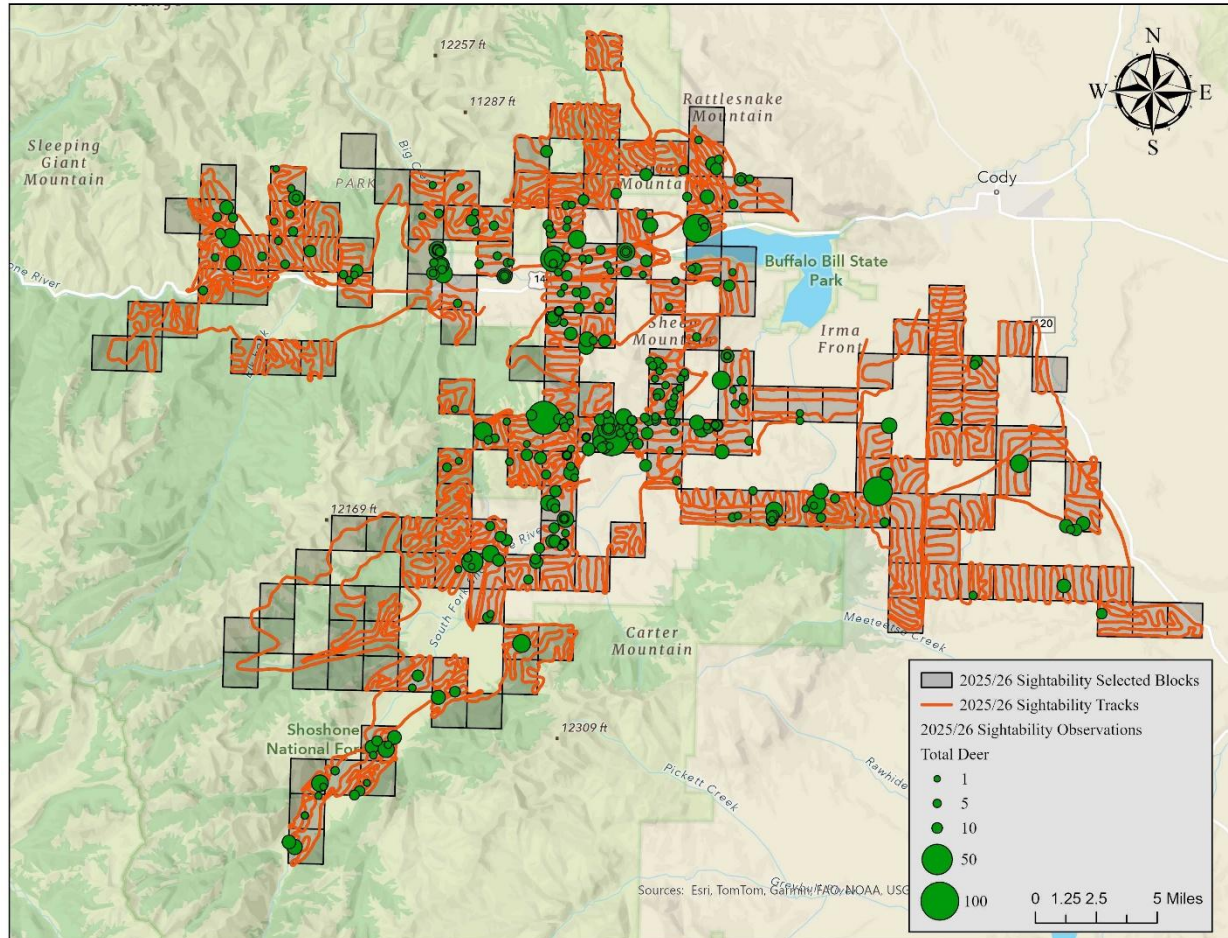
Snow cover was extremely limited during the survey, with snow recorded for only 14 of 307 observations. In addition, temperatures averaged approximately 13°F warmer than normal during the survey period. These conditions may have influenced deer distribution, sightability, and the degree to which animals were concentrated on traditional winter ranges. As a result, some caution should be used when interpreting this estimate.

Despite these limitations, the survey provides a valuable independent estimate that can be used to anchor future population models and improve understanding of the number of mule deer currently occupying the Upper Shoshone landscape.

The current population objective for this herd was established in 1992 and was based largely on estimates derived from POP-II, a relatively simple population accounting model. POP-II relied on an initial population baseline and projected abundance forward through annual biological cycles using fixed mathematical assumptions. As a result, POP-II-derived estimates have been prone to compounding error and potential overestimation over time.

Given this historical context, the 2025/26 sightability estimate may provide a more defensible representation of current mule deer abundance than previous model-based estimates alone. We recommend repeating this sightability survey within the next 2 to 3 years, ideally under more favorable winter survey conditions, to evaluate the consistency of the estimate. Additional survey information could then be used to refine population models and determine whether the herd objective established in 1992 remains appropriate.

Figure 1. Map of the flight path and locations of mule deer groups in relation to the selected flight blocks for the 2025/26 Upper Shoshone mule deer sightability flight. Blocks that were not flown extensively represent areas that based on elevation, snow and visibility did not need to have extensive flights over them.



2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Mule Deer

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

HERD: MD216 - CLARKS FORK

HUNT AREAS: 105-106, 109

PREPARED BY: TONY MONG

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	3,280	3,900	4,400
Harvest:	188	307	410
Hunters:	562	730	800
Hunter Success:	33%	42%	51%
Active Licenses:	563	730	800
Active License Success:	33%	42%	51%
Recreation Days:	3,074	3,556	4,300
Days Per Animal:	16.4	11.6	10.5
Males per 100 Females	32	41	
Juveniles per 100 Females	62	69	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) : 5000 (4000 - 6000)

Management Strategy: Recreational

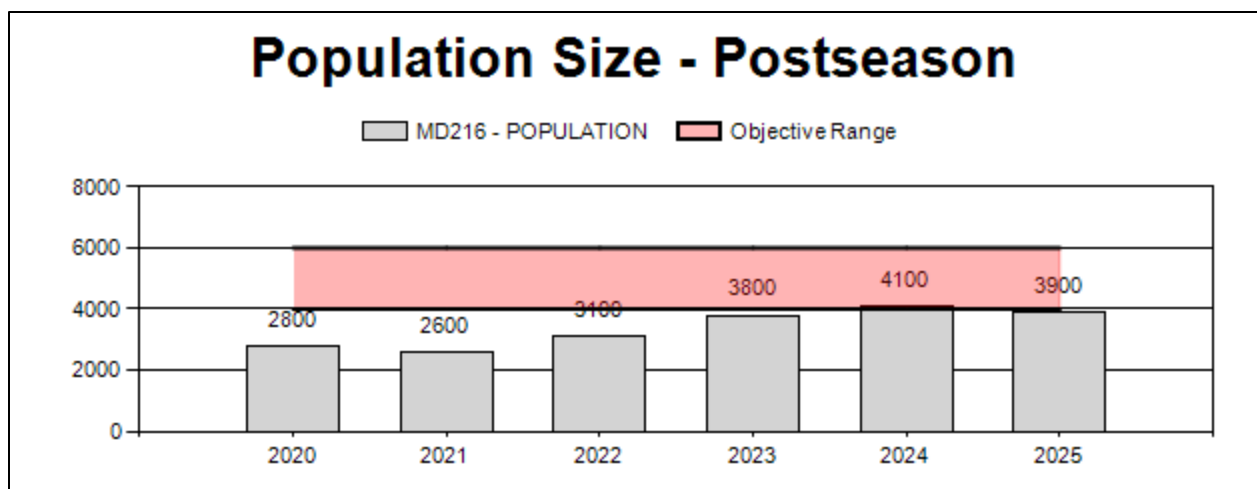
Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -22%

Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 10

Model Date: 02/26/2026

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:	25%	38%
Proposed change in post-season population:	1%	1%



2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary																					
for Mule Deer Herd MD216 - CLARKS FORK																					
		MALES							FEMALES		JUVENILES				Males to 100 Females				Young to		
Year	Post Pop	Ylg	2+	2+	2+	2+	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Tot	Cls	Ylng	Adult	Total	Conf	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
			Cls 1	Cls 2	Cls 3	UnCls							Cls	Obj				Int			
2020	2,800	25	24	21	12	0	82	15%	313	56%	167	30%	562	0	8	18	26	± 4	53	± 6	42
2021	2,600	25	37	22	2	0	86	12%	350	51%	255	37%	691	0	7	17	25	± 3	73	± 7	58
2022	3,100	41	43	27	0	0	111	19%	301	53%	159	28%	571	0	14	23	37	± 5	53	± 6	39
2023	3,800	125	139	78	27	0	369	17%	1,119	51%	691	32%	2,179	0	11	22	33	± 2	62	± 3	46
2024	4,100	37	38	33	8	0	116	17%	333	49%	232	34%	681	0	11	24	35	± 4	70	± 7	52
2025	3,900	39	33	37	1	0	110	20%	269	48%	185	33%	564	0	14	26	41	± 5	69	± 8	49

**2026 Hunting Seasons
Clark's Fork Mule Deer (MD216)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
105	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30				Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer valid in the entire area
105	Gen			Oct. 1	Oct. 31		Antlered mule deer valid on national forest; any white-tailed deer valid in the entire area
105	Gen			Nov. 1	Nov. 5		Antlered mule deer valid off national forest; any white-tailed deer valid in the entire area
105	Gen			Nov. 6	Nov. 20		Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
105, 106, 109	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov. 20	50	Any deer
106	Gen			Oct. 1	Oct. 14		Antlered mule deer within the North Absaroka Wilderness; any white-tailed deer valid in the entire area
106	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 31		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer

2026 Region F nonresident quota: 550 licenses

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

2025 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

Harvest success has been increasing over the last 6 years and we had the highest success in 2025 since 2017. We increased opportunity for mule deer bucks through increased licenses in the Type 1 hunting season and in order to better understand CWD rates across the deer in the herd we implemented mandatory sampling for the Type 1 license and all white-tailed deer licenses. Overall population size is returning to objective levels and we have seen an increase in buck ratios over the last 5 years (2025, 41; 5-year average, 31). The buck harvest in 2025 was the highest since 2016 despite a warm and dry fall season. We will continue to see harvest and numbers of hunters increased due to the successful 2024 and 2025 seasons and this will decrease buck ratios moving into the future.

Management Objective Review

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

Chronic Wasting Disease Management

The Clark's Fork mule deer herd was prioritized for chronic wasting disease (CWD) sampling during the 2019 and 2020 seasons and again beginning in 2025. Prioritized sampling was discontinued in 2021 after failing to achieve the target of 200 mule deer buck samples. This decision was based on low sample return relative to effort, which averaged approximately eight personnel hours per sample, and the low probability of achieving target sample sizes within the desired timeframe. Renewed prioritization in 2025 resulted in increased sample collection but required substantially greater field presence and outreach efforts, including installation of CWD signage, distribution of informational materials, direct mailings, and expanded check station operations.

Five-year annual prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled were summarized (Table 1). Limited and inconsistent annual sample sizes across age and sex classes resulted in fluctuating prevalence estimates and wide confidence intervals, indicating substantial uncertainty in disease prevalence estimates. Adult male mule deer consistently exhibited the highest prevalence rates (Table 1). Sampling effort was concentrated in Sunlight Basin (Hunt Area 106), while positive detections in both mule deer and white-tailed deer were clustered along the Clark's Fork River corridor near Clark (Hunt Area 105).

Management actions focused on increasing white-tailed deer harvest due to increasing abundance and elevated CWD prevalence within areas of overlapping winter range with mule deer. At the time of this report, CWD did not appear to be a limiting factor for the Clark's Fork mule deer herd. However, increasing prevalence represented a potential long-term concern, and management strategies were evaluated to slow or stabilize disease spread.

Beginning in 2026, mandatory sampling requirements were implemented for Type 1, Type 3, and Type 8 license types to increase sample sizes, improve confidence in prevalence estimates, and better inform future management decisions.

Table 1. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested mule deer in the Clark's Fork Mule Deer Herd, 2021 - 2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>			
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	Percent of Harvested Males Sampled
2021	7% (n=15)	0% (1)	0% (4)	9.9
2022	0% (n=6)	0% (2)	0% (3)	5.6
2023	20% (n=15)	0% (1)	0% (0)	9.1
2024	5% (n=19)	50% (2)	0% (0)	8.7
2025	10% (n=68)	0% (5)	0% (1)	24.0
2021-2025	10% (5-16%, n=123)	9% (11)	0% (8)	13.1

Population Modeling

Managers chose to model this herd using constant reproduction, and fixed effect survival for juveniles and adults. We used the linear effort prediction method and active licenses was selected

by managers as the variable most predictably related to annual harvest. In 2021/22 we conducted a winter range trail camera occupancy study which resulted in an estimate of 3,693 mule deer (SE = 239, LCI = 3,253, UCI = 4,193) and in 2023 we conducted a sightability survey which resulted in an estimate of 3,787 mule deer (SE = 347, LCI = 3,107, UCI = 4,466). The 2026 postseason population estimate for this herd unit was 4,400 (CL = 4,100-5,200; Rhat = 1.02) mule deer. Our confidence in this model is moderate because of the change in variables required to model this population as increasing to match what we are observing on the ground however, the abundance estimates over the last several years give us confidence in the estimate created.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: White tailed Deer

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

HERD: WD201 - BIGHORN BASIN

HUNT AREAS: 35, 37, 39-41, 46-47, 50-53, 105-106, 109-125, 127, 164-165

PREPARED BY: SAM STEPHENS

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	0	N/A	N/A
Harvest:	2,678	1,865	1,800
Hunters:	4,637	4,396	4,000
Hunter Success:	58%	42%	45 %
Active Licenses:	6,067	5,835	5,500
Active License Success:	44%	32%	33 %
Recreation Days:	25,695	26,998	26,000
Days Per Animal:	9.6	14.5	14.4
Males per 100 Females	28	39	
Juveniles per 100 Females	62	56	

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 $\geq$ 1 year old:	0%	0%
Males $\geq$ 1 year old:	0%	0%
Proposed change in post-season population:	0%	0%

2026 HUNTING SEASONS

BIGHORN BASIN WHITE-TAILED DEER HERD (WD201)

Hunt Area	Hunt Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
36	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 31	25	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
37,39	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Dec. 15	50	Any white-tailed deer
37,39	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Dec. 15	50	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
40	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 30	50	Any white-tailed deer; also valid in Hunt Area 35
40	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 30	150	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer; also valid in Hunt Area 35
41	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Dec. 15	75	Any white-tailed deer
41	8			Sep. 1	Dec. 31	150	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer, also valid in Hunt Area 46
47,51,52	3	Sep.1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Dec. 15	75	Any white-tailed deer
47	8			Sep. 1	Dec. 31	75	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer, also valid in Hunt Area 46
51	8			Sep. 1	Dec. 31	100	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
105	8			Sep. 1	Dec. 31	75	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
106	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Dec. 15	50	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
109	3	Sep. 1	Sep.30	Nov. 1	Dec. 31	35	Any white-tailed deer
109	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Dec. 31	125	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
110, 111	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Dec. 31	100	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
112, 113, 114	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Dec. 31	75	Any white-tailed deer
112, 113, 114	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Dec. 31	300	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
116, 117	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 30	100	Any white-tailed deer

116, 117	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 30	200	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
118,119	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 30	50	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
119, 120	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov. 30	100	Any white-tailed deer
120	8			Sep. 1	Dec. 15	150	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
121	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Dec. 15	75	Any white-tailed deer
121	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Dec. 15	100	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
122	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Dec. 15	50	Any white-tailed deer
122	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Dec. 15	100	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
124	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Dec. 15	50	Any white-tailed deer
124	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Dec. 15	100	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
127	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Dec. 15	50	Any white-tailed deer
127	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Dec. 15	75	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
164	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Dec. 15	50	Any white-tailed deer
164	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Dec. 31	150	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
165	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Dec. 15	100	Any white-tailed deer
165	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Dec. 31	300	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 50% Satisfied, 27% Neutral, 23% Dissatisfied

2025 Management Summary

1.) Hunting Season Evaluation:

White-tailed deer in the Bighorn Basin are managed as one herd unit consisting of 33 hunt areas under recreational management. Hunting seasons for white-tailed deer are typically set in conjunction with mule deer hunting seasons by hunt area. Hunting opportunity exists for licenses exclusive for white-tailed bucks such as Type 3 licenses and white-tailed does or fawns with Type 8 licenses. Significant outbreaks of epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) in 2025 reduced white-tailed deer abundance in parts of the Basin. Estimating the percent of the white-tailed deer population affected by disease mortality was never attempted, because no population estimate exists. However managers suspect significant localized declines exceeding 50% in Hunt Areas 40, 41, 47, 51, 122, 123, 124, and 164. This decline is evidenced by the decrease in hunter satisfaction from 2024 to 2025, which fell from 60% to 50% respectively. Proposed reductions in these hunt areas are intended to reflect a loss of deer and opportunity for Type 3 and 8 license hunters.

Regarding the management of white-tailed deer in the Basin Mule Deer Herd, managers removed the Hunt Area 125 Type 8 license in response to poor hunter success (25%) and loss of public access to private lands within the hunt area. The Type 8 license in Hunt Area 127 was reduced by 25 from a quota of 100 to 75 licenses. This change in quota stemmed from a localized EHD (epizootic hemorrhagic disease) outbreak, high CWD prevalence, and low hunter success (46%). The Type 8 license valid in Hunt Areas 118 and 119 was newly implemented in the 2025 hunting season. This license type was implemented to provide additional doe/fawn harvest opportunities throughout these hunt areas but with particular utility on private lands enrolled in the Absaroka Front HMA. In 2025, harvest success was 100% on active Type 8 licenses thus suggesting that more hunter opportunity could be allowed. An additional 25 licenses were added to the current Hunt Area 118/119 Type 8 quota of 25. Field managers documented a significant EHD (epizootic hemorrhagic disease) outbreak that impacted white-tailed deer within the Owl Creek drainage in Hunt Area 120. Given the severity of this localized die-off, the Hunt Area 120 Type 8 license quota was reduced from 200 licenses to 150 for the 2026 hunting season. Additionally, some seasons were extended to December 15th, in an attempt to standardize closing dates for the majority of Cody Region Type 3 licenses. White-tailed deer hunting seasons are set with Type 8 and Type 3 licenses to address landowner concerns and provide a late season opportunity to pursue bucks during the rut, respectively.

2.) Herd Unit Objective Review

The Bighorn Basin white-tailed deer herd is not managed to an objective. White-tailed deer hunting opportunity has historically been offered both through the liberal allocation of Type 3 and 8 licenses as well as general season opportunity. No license type or season exists within the Herd Unit which restricts hunters to only harvest mule deer. Given the deficient state of sympatric mule deer populations and increasing prevalence of chronic wasting disease (CWD), a population objective is unnecessary to adjust the current management strategies with regard to white-tailed deer in the Bighorn Basin.

3.) Chronic Wasting Disease Management:

The Bighorn Basin white-tailed deer herd has not been prioritized for CWD sampling. The five-year annual and average prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled for CWD are presented below (Table 1). The Bighorn Basin white-tailed deer herd overlaps nine separate mule deer herds where sampling for CWD in white-tailed deer occurs opportunistically. The CWD five-year average prevalence for hunter-harvested white-tailed deer within these nine corresponding mule deer herds are also presented below (Table 2). Overall, for the Bighorn Basin white-tailed deer herd, sample sizes for adult males and adult females are high. This provides high confidence both on an annual basis and for the five-year averages. Adult males consistently show the highest CWD prevalence through time and across all the mule deer herd units. Adult females also show high prevalence as well with lower sample sizes for yearling males making it hard to draw strong conclusions about that demographic. There is variability in white-tailed deer prevalence rates across mule deer herd units in the Bighorn Basin suggestive of differences in white-tailed deer densities, distributions, and/or suitable habitat such as riparian or agricultural

areas that white-tailed deer select for in the Bighorn Basin. Density of CWD samples and detections in white-tailed deer remain concentrated along agricultural lands of rivers and major tributaries, with numerous hotspots throughout the Bighorn Basin. Crucially, the high CWD prevalence observed is likely having impacts in areas/hotspots for white-tailed deer populations. This is likely causing increased mortality, potentially leading to population declines or altered age structures. Furthermore, and most importantly, the presence of CWD in white-tailed deer poses a risk of transmission to sympatric mule deer populations. Because these two cervid species do share habitats especially winter range in areas, the potential for cross-species transmission is a serious concern. Together, these two cervid species are further increasing transmission rates within and among populations and into the environment in hotspots. This creates a scenario where disease transmission is amplified, further impacting cervid populations in the Bighorn Basin.

Extensive CWD outreach and education efforts, including nine pre- and post-season scoping meetings (both in-person and online) and five sampling training sessions, were conducted in 2021. Surveys and focused conversations in the field were aimed to assess public support for various mule deer and white-tailed deer management options in HAs 41, 46, 47 (Paintrock); 164 (Southwest Bighorn); 105, 106, 109 (Clark's Fork); and 110-115 (Upper Shoshone). Survey questions were standardized within Paintrock and Southwest Bighorn herd scoping efforts (East Basin), and within Clark's Fork and Upper Shoshone herd scoping efforts (West Basin). A total of 145 surveys were completed by residents, non-residents, and non-hunters. East Basin respondents (n=74, 82% hunters) favored management actions targeting CWD hotspots, increasing harvest of adult male deer (both white-tailed and mule) through later hunting seasons, and prioritizing white-tailed deer population reduction over mule deer (Table 3). West Basin respondents (n=71, 17% non-residents) supported later general hunting seasons and increased limited quota licenses for both male and female white-tailed deer (Table 4). To specifically address CWD in white-tailed deer, increased Type 3 and 8 licenses were initiated in 2019 for hunt area 164.

Overall, CWD management for white-tailed deer in the Bighorn Basin has prioritized controlling deer densities and expanding distributions. This strategy aims to limit CWD transmission within white-tailed deer populations, between white-tailed deer and struggling mule deer populations, and within localized environments creating CWD hotspots. To achieve this, harvest seasons and quotas have been liberalized across the Bighorn Basin, particularly in known high-density CWD hotspots.

Table 1. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested white-tailed deer in the Bighorn Basin White-tailed Deer Herd, 2021 - 2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>			
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	Percent of Harvested Sampled
2021	32% (n=165)	7% (14)	21% (146)	13.2
2022	36% (n=209)	15% (13)	26% (140)	14.2
2023	37% (n=161)	15% (13)	23% (112)	10.6
2024	39% (n=135)	8% (13)	19% (110)	9.7

2025	40% (n=99)	25% (12)	22% (73)	9.9
2021-2025	36% (19-26%, n=769)	14% (65)	22% (581)	11.6

Table 2. CWD five-year average prevalence for hunter-harvested white-tailed deer by corresponding mule deer herd.

Herd	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>		
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females
MD 207 Paintrock	28% (n=71)	0% (8)	20% (79)
MD208 Southwest Bighorns	28% (n=125)	11% (9)	25% (67)
MD209 Basin	46% (n=26)	13% (8)	23% (13)
MD210 Greybull River	45% (n=123)	21% (14)	25% (91)
MD211 Shoshone River	47% (n=161)	18% (11)	27% (64)
MD212 Owl Creek/Meeteetse	31% (n= 67)	0% (3)	19% (107)
MD215 Upper Shoshone	22% (n=116)	29% (7)	15% (73)
MD216 Clark's Fork	52% (n=25)	0% (1)	29% (42)
*MD321 North Bighorn	40% (n=55)	0% (2)	30% (27)

*Only includes hunt areas in the Cody Region (i.e., 50, 51, 52, 53)

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Elk

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

HERD: EL211 - MEDICINE LODGE

HUNT AREAS: 41, 45

PREPARED BY: SAM STEPHENS

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Trend Count:	2,448	2,469	2,400
Harvest:	785	670	700
Hunters:	2,082	1,760	1,800
Hunter Success:	38%	38%	39%
Active Licenses:	2,238	1,882	1,930
Active License Success	35%	36%	36%
Recreation Days:	16,045	13,120	13,000
Days Per Animal:	20.4	19.6	18.6
Males per 100 Females:	30	21	
Juveniles per 100 Females	28	20	

Trend Based Objective ($\pm 20\%$)

2,200 (1760 - 2640)

Management Strategy:

Recreational

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

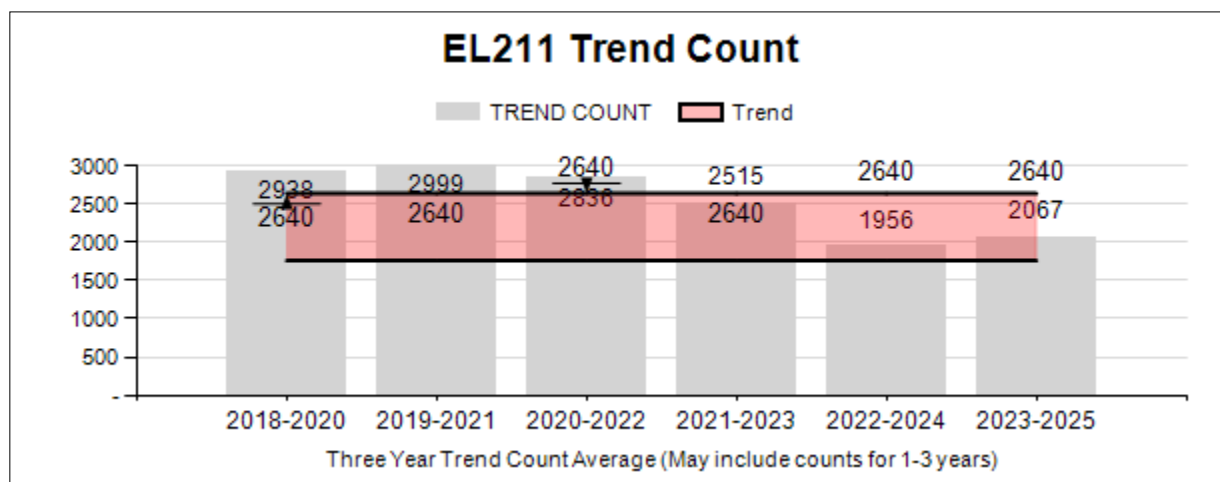
12%

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

1

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

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	20%	20%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	15%	15%
Juveniles (< 1 year old):	10%	10%
Total:	45%	10%



2026 HUNTING SEASONS
MEDICINE LODGE ELK HERD (EL211)

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
41	1			Oct. 15	Nov. 4	250	Any elk
41	2			Nov. 5	Nov. 20	75	Any elk
41	3			Sep. 1	Oct. 14	25	Any elk valid off national forest north of Trapper Creek
41	4			Nov. 5	Dec. 21	350	Antlerless elk
41	6			Dec. 1	Dec. 21	150	Cow or calf
41	7			Sep. 1	Dec. 21	200	Cow or calf valid off national forest north of Trapper Creek
41	9			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	100	Any elk, archery only
45	1			Oct. 15	Nov. 4	300	Any elk
45	4			Oct. 15	Nov. 30	250	Antlerless elk
45	5			Oct. 1	Oct. 10	200	Antlerless elk
45	5			Oct. 25	Nov. 30		Antlerless elk
45	6	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Dec. 1	Dec. 21	50	Cow or calf
45	7			Sep. 1	Oct. 14	50	Cow or calf valid within 1 mile of irrigated land
45	9			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	175	Any elk, archery only

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 52% Satisfied, 23% Neutral, 25% Dissatisfied

2025 Management Summary

1) Hunting Season Evaluation:

The 2026 season was structured to sustain changes made in 2025 to moderate Medicine Lodge elk harvest. Trend counts collected over a three year period averaged 2,067 which falls within 20% of our 2,200 trend count objective. This decline in elk abundance has been the result of an aggressive campaign by wildlife managers to curb population growth. Changes implemented in 2022 included the addition of 125 “any elk” and 350 “cow or calf” licenses, as well as significant season length extensions. This change fostered an increase in elk harvest, with years of high cow harvest most significant in 2022 (457) and 2024 (431). Maintaining an elk herd within this trend objective depends on aggressive cow elk management. This is particularly true in the Medicine Lodge Herd where strong calf recruitment is evidenced by an above average yearling male ratio

(2023-2025 avg: 13:100). Decreased elk abundance was the perception of many hunters from 2023 to 2024. This perception was supported by an 11% decrease in hunter satisfaction from 2022 to 2024. In 2025 this decreasing trend appears to be shifting back towards growth. While hunter success was highly variable in 2025, many of the seasons which reported low success rates can be explained by uniquely mild weather which historically depresses harvest. However during standardized aerial survey efforts, managers reported counting 2,469 elk which is the highest trend reported since 2021. Additionally, it's worth noting that prior to the 2022 season the average number of adult bulls reported during the trend count was 340 (2020-22 avg). This number decreased to approximately 200 in 2023 and 2024. This data corroborated increased hunter dissatisfaction rates and led to moderate decreases to Type 1, 2, and 9 license quotas in Hunt Area 41 and 45 in 2025. While no changes are proposed for this year, it's worth recognizing that a significant number of adult bulls were reported in this latest trend count (244) which will likely necessitate future quota increases. While the current trend count average puts this herd at the bottom end of the objective range, managers are cautious not to become complacent. A moderate adjustment to the Hunt Area 41 Type 6 license quota was made to increase some late season cow harvest while sustaining the changes implemented in 2025.

2) Chronic Wasting Disease:

This is a Tier 2 CWD surveillance herd, targeted for sampling in 2021 and 2022. CWD was first detected in the herd unit in 2020 (HA45), and was detected again in 2021 (HA41). Combined 2020-2022 data suggest low prevalence (Table 1). Sample distribution is nearly even between HA 41 and 45. New harvest strategies implemented in 2022 to address concentrated, overabundance of elk and help manage CWD included the addition of Type 3 and 7 licenses in HA 41, addition of Type 6 licenses in HA 45, and overall increased numbers of licenses and extension of seasons in both HA 41 and 45.

Table 1. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested elk in the Medicine Lodge 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	1% (n=80)	13.3
2022	0% (n=81)	9.8
2023	0% (n=20)	3.0
2024	0% (n=22)	3.0
2025	0% (n=30)	5.0
2021-2025	<1% (0-2%, n=235)	6.9

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Elk

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

HERD: EL214 - GOOSEBERRY

HUNT AREAS: 62-64

PREPARED BY: ASHLEIGH RHEA

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Trend Count:	2,230	2,718	2,320
Harvest:	653	662	690
Hunters:	1,160	1,233	1,250
Hunter Success:	56%	54%	55%
Active Licenses:	1,235	1,333	1,360
Active License Success	53%	50%	51 %
Recreation Days:	7,858	9,628	9,300
Days Per Animal:	12.0	14.5	13.5
Males per 100 Females:	25	19	
Juveniles per 100 Females	22	39	

Trend Based Objective ($\pm$ 20%)

2,000 (1600 - 2400)

Management Strategy:

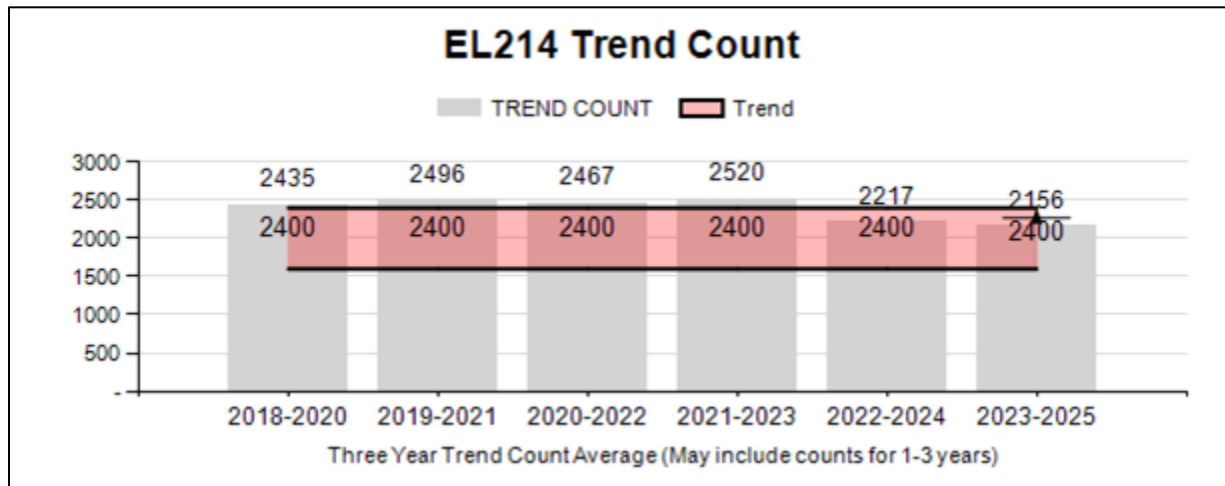
Special

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

36%

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

2



2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary

for Elk Herd EL214 - GOOSEBERRY

Year	Post Pop	MALES				FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot Cls	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	51	187	238	22%	727	66%	135	12%	1,100	0	7	26	33	± 0	19	± 0	14
2021	0	81	172	253	27%	587	62%	100	11%	940	0	14	29	43	± 0	17	± 0	12
2022	0	117	213	330	14%	1,686	74%	265	12%	2,281	0	7	13	20	± 0	16	± 0	13
2023	0	114	181	295	13%	1,655	72%	350	15%	2,300	0	7	11	18	± 0	21	± 0	18
2024	0	78	147	225	18%	718	57%	306	24%	1,249	0	11	20	31	± 0	43	± 0	32
2025	0	175	144	319	13%	1,533	62%	622	25%	2,474	0	11	9	21	± 0	41	± 0	34

**2026 Hunting Seasons
Gooseberry Elk (EL214)**

Hunt Area	Type	Special Archery Dates		Regular Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
62	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 21	125	Any elk
62	4	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 21	75	Antlerless elk
62, 63	5	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 22	Dec. 21	200	Antlerless elk
63, 64	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 21	200	Any elk
63, 64	2	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 21	35	Any elk valid within the Washakie Wilderness
63, 64	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 15	75	Any elk
63	4	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Dec. 21	100	Antlerless elk
63	6			Aug. 15	Oct. 31	200	Cow or calf valid off national forest north of Gooseberry Creek
63	6	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Dec. 21		Cow or calf valid in the entire area
64	6			Sep. 1	Nov. 14	250	Cow or calf valid in that portion of the Cottonwood Creek Drainage downstream of and including the 21-Creek Drainage, also valid within the Grass Creek Drainage downstream of the Grass Creek/Little Grass Creek confluence
64	6	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 15	Dec. 21		Cow or calf valid in the entire area
64	7	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Dec. 21	300	Cow or calf valid south of and including the Cottonwood Creek drainage

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

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

The 2026 hunting season structure remains liberal, with numerous Type 4, 6, and 7 licenses available with long seasons aimed at reducing cow elk numbers. Type 1 and 3 quotas (any elk licenses) remain consistent to continue providing a quality hunting experience while maintaining good bull numbers and hunter success. Over the past two years, the 3-year trend count for the Gooseberry Elk Herd lies in the top 20% of the trend count objective range. The combined 2025 herd unit hunter success remained steady at 54%, while days per harvest remained at a high of

14.5 days/harvest. Hunter comments strongly suggest that unseasonably warm weather in the Bighorn Basin plays a large role in elk availability and hunter success, managers concur with this sentiment.

A total of 662 elk were harvested in 2025, which is comparable to the 666 elk harvested in 2024 but represents a significant reduction from the high (729) number of elk harvested in 2023. However, the 2025 harvest was above the five-year average of 652. The total number of elk counted on the winter trend flight for 2025 was 2,718 elk for the herd unit. Compared to 2024, the observed calf ratio of 41:100 was consistent between the two years while the observed bull ratio declined from 31:100 to 21:100 in 2025. Managers acknowledge that flight conditions in early February were not optimal, being characterized by warm temperatures and a lack of snow cover. The detectability of bulls was particularly impacted by these mild survey conditions.

Given the reasonably high hunter success, confounding variable of unseasonably warm hunting seasons the past two years, and moderately high hunter satisfaction, managers opted to make minimal changes to the current season setting structure.

Management Objective Review

The Gooseberry elk herd unit objective was last reviewed in 2021, and no changes to the current objective were made. This herd unit will be reviewed again in 2026.

Chronic Wasting Disease Monitoring and Management

The Gooseberry elk herd has been a low priority for surveillance and limited CWD sampling data has been collected. Despite limited sampling, the five-year annual and average prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled for CWD are presented below (Table 1). Over the previous 5 years, there has been one CWD detection within this herd unit in hunt area 62, but sample sizes are significantly below the 200-adult elk sampling target within a three-year timeframe. To date, there has been no specific elk management actions to address CWD.

Table 1. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested elk in the Gooseberry 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=15)	2.7
2022	0% (n=21)	3.7
2023	0% (n=26)	3.9
2024	0% (n=29)	4.8
2025	4.3% (n=23)	3.6
2021-2025	1% (0-5%, n=114)	3.8

Brucellosis Monitoring and Management

Brucellosis is present within this herd, and measures to track prevalence and to reduce elk/cattle interaction have and will continue to be a priority. Brucellosis monitoring is done annually through hunter harvest to estimate prevalence (Table 1).

Table 1. Brucellosis sampling and seropositive prevalence estimates by hunt area in the Gooseberry Elk Herd; current year, five-year, and ten-year sampling and prevalence estimates from all collected samples.

	2025			5 Year (2021-2025)			10 Year (2016-2025)		
Elk Herd	Tested	POS	Prevalence	Tested	POS	Prevalence	Tested	POS	Prevalence
EL215 Gooseberry	26	7	26.92%	327	65	19.88%	704	152	21.59%

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Elk

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

HERD: EL216 - CODY

HUNT AREAS: 55-56, 58-61, 66

PREPARED BY: TONY MONG

	<u>2020 - 2024</u> <u>Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Trend Count:	5,653	6,859	6,200
Harvest:	1,179	1,494	1,700
Hunters:	2,502	2,904	3,000
Hunter Success:	47%	51%	57 %
Active Licenses:	2,705	3,199	3,200
Active License Success	44%	47%	53 %
Recreation Days:	16,274	19,464	20,000
Days Per Animal:	13.8	13.0	11.8
Males per 100 Females:	28	21	
Juveniles per 100 Females	21	20	

Trend Based Objective ($\pm 20\%$) 4,400 (3520 - 5280)

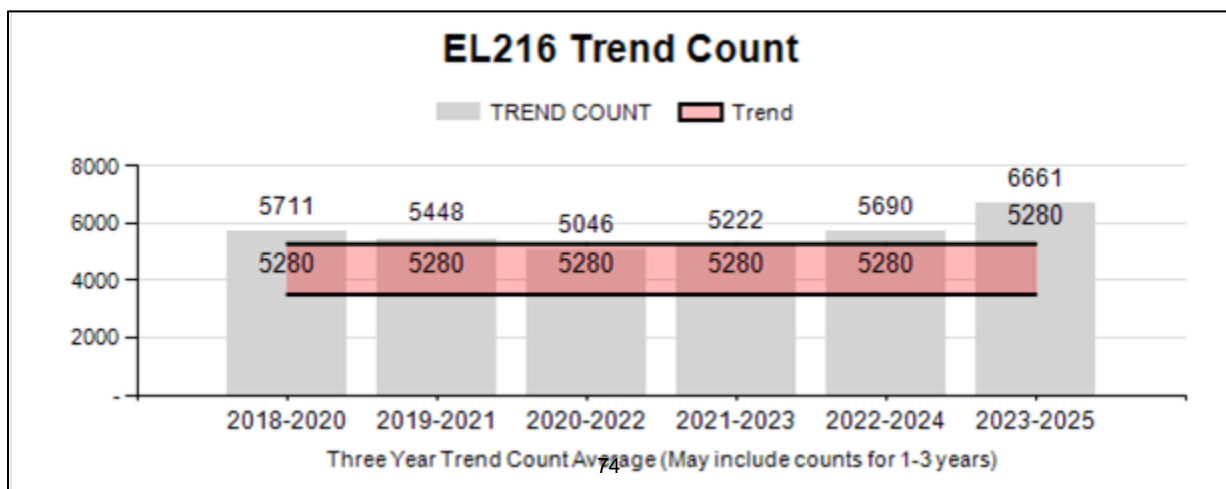
Management Strategy: Special

Percent population is above (+) or (-) objective: 56%

Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 10

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

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	n/a%	n/a%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	n/a%	n/a%
Juveniles (< 1 year old):	n/a%	n/a%
Proposed change in post-season population:	n/a%	n/a%



2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary																		
for Elk Herd EL216 - CODY																		
Year	Post Pop	MALES				FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot		Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	Adult	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Cls	Obj	Ylng	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
2020	0	153	589	742	29%	1,546	60%	299	12%	2,587	0	10	38	48	± 0	19	± 0	13
2021	0	261	471	737	19%	2,563	68%	495	13%	3,795	0	10	18	29	± 0	19	± 0	15
2022	0	206	387	593	16%	2,526	70%	506	14%	3,625	0	8	15	23	± 0	20	± 0	16
2023	0	408	661	1,069	16%	4,596	69%	976	15%	6,641	0	9	14	23	± 0	21	± 0	17
2024	0	474	631	1,105	19%	3,830	67%	820	14%	5,755	0	12	16	29	± 0	21	± 0	17
2025	0	272	487	759	15%	3,625	71%	726	14%	5,110	0	8	13	21	± 0	20	± 0	17

2026 Hunting Seasons

Cody Elk (EL216)

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
55	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	60	Any elk
55	9			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	25	Any elk, archery only
56	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 21		Any elk
56	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 5	Nov. 30	10	Any elk; also valid in Area 55
56	6	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Dec. 21	200	Cow or calf
56	7	Sep. 1	Sep. 30				Cow or calf
56	7			Sep. 1	Dec. 21	200	Cow or calf valid off national forest
56	7			Jan. 1	Jan. 15		Cow or calf valid off national forest south of the North Fork of the Shoshone River
56	9			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	30	Any elk, archery only
58	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov. 30	35	Any elk
58	6	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Dec. 21	300	Cow or calf
58	6			Jan. 1	Jan. 15		Cow or calf
59	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 21		Any elk
59	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 30	10	Any elk
59	6	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Dec. 21	200	Cow or calf
59	6			Jan. 1	Jan. 15		Cow or calf
59	7	Sep. 1	Sep. 30				Cow or calf
59	7			Oct. 1	Nov. 30	50	Cow or calf valid within the Washakie Wilderness
59	9			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	25	Any elk, archery only
60	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 19				Any elk
60	Gen			Sep. 20	Oct. 27		Antlered elk
60	9			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	20	Any elk, archery only
61	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30				Any elk; also valid in that portion of Area 62 within the Washakie Wilderness south of Avalanche Creek
61	1			Oct. 1	Oct. 31	125	Any elk; also valid in that portion of Area 62 within the

							Washakie Wilderness south of Avalanche Creek
61	2	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 7	Nov. 15	50	Any elk
61	4	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Dec. 21	100	Antlerless elk
61	6	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 7	Dec. 21	300	Cow or calf
61	7			Sep. 1	Dec. 21	500	Cow or calf valid on or within one-half (1/2) mile of irrigated land or north of and including the Rawhide Creek Drainage
61	7			Jan. 1	Jan. 15		Cow or calf valid on or within one-half (1/2) mile of irrigated land or north of and including the Rawhide Creek Drainage
61	9			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	25	Any elk, archery only; also valid in that portion of Area 62 within the Washakie Wilderness south of Avalanche Creek
66	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 21		Any elk
66	6			Aug. 15	Jan. 15	300	Cow or calf

2026 Region West Nonresident Quota: 2,775

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 65% Satisfied, 21% Neutral, 14% Dissatisfied

2025 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

Minimal changes were made to seasons during the year to continue increasing cow harvest across the herd unit. Cow elk harvest reached its highest level since 2014 despite mild temperatures and lack of snowfall throughout the season. Three-year average trend count numbers increased across the herd unit over the previous four years, despite total hunter numbers increasing from approximately 2,300 to 2,900 during that same period.

Trend count results indicated that all count blocks remained above the upper limits of their respective 3-year average trend objectives, although a decrease was observed in the Hunt Area

58/59 3-year average trend count objective. In Hunt Area 61, substantial annual variability in elk numbers persisted, with counts increasing from 2,007 elk in 2024 to 3,749 elk in 2025. This variability resulted in a corresponding increase in the 3-year average trend count objective. These observations continued to reflect the high degree of plasticity in elk movement patterns between Hunt Areas 61 and 58 and more broadly throughout the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Hunt Area 66 remained a priority management area where establishment of resident elk populations was not desired due to brucellosis concerns. Although liberal seasons had been implemented in recent years, private land refugia limited harvest effectiveness in portions of the hunt area. To increase harvest opportunity and maintain low elk numbers, we doubled the number of Type 6 licenses. In Hunt Area 56, cow elk groups were observed utilizing areas near the divide between the North and South Forks of the Shoshone River. To improve harvest effectiveness on these groups, the North Fork portion of the hunt area was added to the late-season structure.

Bull harvest also increased despite continued warm, dry fall conditions. In Hunt Area 60, the General Season was extended by five days for the 2025 season. Despite the increased opportunity, bull harvest increased by only 10 animals, indicating that environmental conditions and elk distribution continued to limit harvest effectiveness.

Management Objective Review

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

Chronic Wasting Disease Management

The Cody elk herd was prioritized for CWD sampling in 2023 and 2024. The five-year annual and average prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled for CWD are presented below (Table 1). Prioritized sampling efforts assisted in achieving the target of 200 adult elk samples collected within a three-year timeframe (2023-2025). Outreach and communication efforts focused through CWD signage, business cards, direct mailings, newspaper articles, and increased outreach and coordination by field staff played a vital role in meeting this sampling target. CWD detections have been limited within this herd unit, with the first detection in 2018, and has since had detections in hunter-harvested elk in 2020, 2021, 2023, and 2025. Although sample data is variable annually, the five-year average data suggests low prevalence within this herd unit with narrow confidence intervals (Table 1). There have been no harvest strategies implemented to directly address CWD due to limited detections and low prevalence.

Table 1. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested elk in the Cody 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% (n=31)	3.3
2022	0% (n=30)	2.8
2023	3% (n=115)	8.8
2024	0% (n=60)	5.8
2025	2% (n=64)	4.6
2021-2025	2% (1-4%, n=300)	5.2

Brucellosis Monitoring

Brucellosis is present within this herd, and measures to track prevalence and to reduce elk/cattle interaction have and will continue to be a priority. Brucellosis monitoring is done annually through hunter harvest to estimate prevalence (Table 1). Brucellosis blood kits were mailed to a random portion of limited quota license holders in 2025 to further bolster annual surveillance and sample sizes in response to prevalence trends.

Table 1. Brucellosis sampling and seropositive prevalence estimates by hunt area in the Cody Elk Herd; 2024, five year, and ten year sampling and prevalence estimates from all collected samples.

Elk Herd	2024			5 Year (2020-2024)			10 Year (2015-2024)		
	Tested	POS	Prevalence	Tested	POS	Prevalence	Tested	POS	Prevalence
EL216 Cody	28	3	10.71%	388	89	22.29%	1057	166	15.70%

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Elk

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

HERD: EL217 - CLARKS FORK

HUNT AREAS: 51, 54, 65

PREPARED BY: TONY MONG

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Trend Count:	2,604	2,221	2,600
Harvest:	378	405	300
Hunters:	853	924	700
Hunter Success:	44%	44%	43 %
Active Licenses:	916	994	724
Active License Success	41%	41%	41 %
Recreation Days:	6,707	6,909	5,000
Days Per Animal:	17.7	17.1	16.7
Males per 100 Females:	20	22	
Juveniles per 100 Females	21	18	

Trend Based Objective ($\pm 20\%$) 3,300 (2640 - 3960)

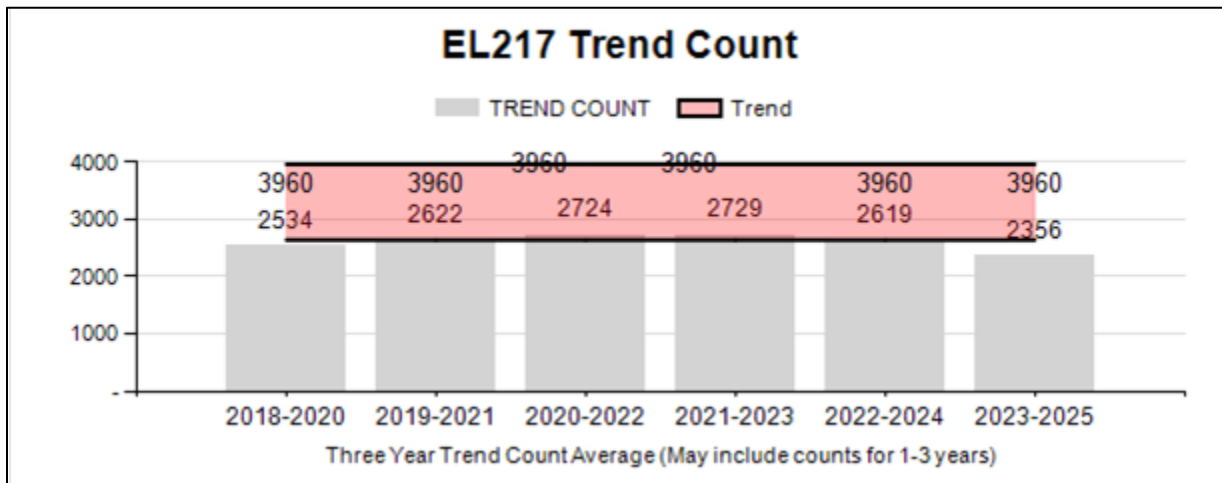
Management Strategy: Special

Percent population is above (+) or (-) objective: -32.7%

Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 5

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

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	n/a%	n/a%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	n/a%	n/a%
Juveniles (< 1 year old):	n/a%	n/a%
Proposed change in post-season population:	n/a%	n/a%



2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary																		
for Elk Herd EL217 - CLARKS FORK																		
Year	Post Pop	MALES				FEMALES		JUVENILES		Tot		Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	Adult	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Cls	Obj	Ylng	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
2020	0	166	87	253	12%	1,593	73%	343	16%	2,189	0	10	5	16	± 0	22	± 0	19
2021	0	129	216	345	12%	2,100	72%	458	16%	2,903	0	6	10	16	± 0	22	± 0	19
2022	0	132	63	195	8%	1,929	78%	361	15%	2,485	0	7	3	10	± 0	19	± 0	17
2023	0	163	293	456	21%	1,432	66%	290	13%	2,178	0	11	20	32	± 0	20	± 0	15
2024	0	161	316	477	18%	1,790	67%	403	15%	2,670	0	9	18	27	± 0	23	± 0	18
2025	0	111	231	342	16%	1,526	71%	270	13%	2,138	0	7	15	22	± 0	18	± 0	14

**2026 Hunting Seasons
Clark's Fork Elk (EL217)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
51	1			Oct. 1	Nov. 5	100	Any elk south and west of the Clarks Fork River
51	2			Oct. 1	Nov. 5	30	Any elk north and east of the Clarks Fork River
51	4			Nov. 16	Dec. 15	25	Antlerless elk
51	9			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	60	Any elk, archery only
54	1			Oct. 1	Oct. 31	50	Any elk valid south of the Clarks Fork River; also valid in Area 65
54	2			Oct. 1	Oct. 31	25	Any elk valid north of the Clarks Fork River and west of US Highway 120.
54	3			Nov. 1	Nov. 30	15	Any elk
54	6			Oct. 1	Oct. 31	50	Cow or calf
54	7			Aug. 15	Dec. 21	200	Cow or calf elk valid north of the Clarks Fork River and west of US Highway 120; also valid within the North Fork of the Shoshone River drainage
54	9			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	40	Any elk, archery only; also valid in Area 65
65	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	15	Any elk
65	4			Aug. 15	Dec. 21	75	Antlerless elk
65	4			Jan. 1	Jan. 15		Antlerless elk
65	6			Aug. 15	Oct. 31	100	Cow or calf
65	6			Jan. 1	Jan. 15		Cow or calf
65	7			Nov. 1	Dec. 21	200	Cow or calf

65	7			Jan. 1	Jan. 15		Cow or calf
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2026 Region West Nonresident Quota: 2,775

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 55% Satisfied, 22% Neutral, 23% Dissatisfied

2025 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

Elk hunting across this herd unit was difficult due to above-average fall temperatures and below-average snowfall. The herd unit remained below objective in Hunt Areas 51 and 54. The newly created Hunt Area 65 was above objective but showed a decrease in the 3-year average trend count in 2025. Overall harvest success remained low at 41%. The long-term trend in harvest success had been decreasing since 2010, and the decline was attributed to unfavorable weather conditions and reduced availability of resident elk within hunt areas, particularly in the Hunt Area 51 Type 1 license area. Warmer, drier fall conditions limited elk accessibility, as elk remained at higher elevations or within Yellowstone National Park during the regular hunting season. Across the primary hunt areas (51 and 54), bull harvest success was lower in Hunt Area 51 compared to Hunt Area 54. The Hunt Area 51 Type 2 license was the most difficult bull license to fill in 2025, with a harvest success rate of 28%, a substantial decrease from 57% in 2024. In contrast, harvest success increased for both the Hunt Area 54 Type 1 and Type 2 licenses compared to the previous year.

Warmer temperatures and reduced snowfall in recent years resulted in concerns that bull harvest in Hunt Area 51 had been disproportionately focused on resident elk. In response, license numbers for the Hunt Area 51 Type 1 license were reduced, and season length was extended later into the fall to improve harvest success and provide opportunity to harvest migratory bulls. The Hunt Area 51 Type 2 license had experienced harvest success exceeding 50% in 2023 and 2024, which likely contributed to reduced availability of bulls and lower harvest success in 2025. This portion of the herd unit received fewer migratory elk and was dominated by resident animals. To improve hunter opportunity and maintain herd structure, license numbers were reduced while season length was extended to allow additional opportunity for migratory bulls to enter the hunt area. Due to concerns regarding harvest pressure on resident elk in Hunt Area 51, Type 9 license numbers were reduced. In Hunt Area 54, the only reduction in bull licenses occurred in the Type 3 license. The 2025 season represented the second year of this license type, and observations indicated that bull availability during the season was lower than anticipated, particularly under warmer, drier fall conditions.

Cow harvest in this herd unit was structured to focus harvest in areas with documented damage concerns and higher densities of resident elk. However, there were some issues with getting hunters onto private land to help decrease damage concerns and increase hunting opportunities on those lands. Harvest management remained effective in maintaining elk numbers below objective in Hunt Area 54. However, elk numbers in Hunt Area 51 did not show a measurable increase. Hunt Area 65 continued to meet management objectives, with harvest pressure applied consistently enough throughout the season to prevent elk concentrations on private lands and reduce damage conflicts. Adjustments to cow licenses were limited to the Hunt Areas to align harvest with population objectives and distribution of hunters on private lands. In Hunt Area 54 we increased the Type 7 license to address the issue with distribution of hunters on private land and decreased Type 6 licenses to maintain our current numbers of elk. In Hunt Area 65, overall license numbers were reduced in response to elk movements out of the area. Sufficient license availability, including late-season opportunity in January, was maintained to allow management flexibility in

addressing potential damage situations.

Management Objective Review

This herd is currently managed by a 3-year average mid-winter trend count by Hunt Area blocks (HA51, HA54 and HA65). The objective was updated in 2024. Hunt Area 51 has an objective of 1,800, Hunt Area 54 has an objective of 1,400 and Hunt Area 65 has an objective of 100.

Chronic Wasting Disease Management

The Clark's Fork elk herd has been a low priority for surveillance and limited CWD sampling data has been collected. Despite limited sampling, the five-year annual and average prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled for CWD are presented below (Table 1). Over the previous 5 years, there have been no CWD detections within this herd unit, but sample sizes are significantly below the 200 adult elk target within a three-year timeframe. To date, there has been no specific elk management actions to address CWD.

Table 1. CWD prevalence for hunter-harvested elk in the Clark's Fork 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=10)	4.0
2022	0% (n=13)	4.2
2023	0% (n=16)	4.3
2024	0% (n=10)	2.7
2025	0% (n=20)	5.3
2021-2025	0% (0-5%, n=75)	4.5

Brucellosis Monitoring

Brucellosis is present within this herd, and measures to track prevalence and to reduce elk/cattle interaction have and will continue to be a priority. Brucellosis monitoring is done annually through hunter harvest to estimate prevalence (Table 1).

Table 1. Brucellosis sampling and seropositive prevalence estimates by hunt area in the Clark's Fork Elk Herd; 2024 prevalence, five year, and ten year sampling and prevalence estimates from all collected samples.

	2024			5 Year (2020-2024)			10 Year (2015-2024)		
	Tested	POS	Prevalence	Tested	POS	Prevalence	Tested	POS	Prevalence
Elk Herd									
EL217 Clark's Fork	34	1	2.94%	168	13	7.74%	269	16	5.95%

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Moose

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

HERD: MO201 - ABSAROKA

HUNT AREAS: 8-9, 11

PREPARED BY: ASHLEIGH
RHEA

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	0	N/A	N/A
Harvest:	8	8	8
Hunters:	8	8	8
Hunter Success:	100%	100%	100 %
Active Licenses:	8	8	8
Active License Success:	100%	100%	100 %
Recreation Days:	93	68	65
Days Per Animal:	11.6	8.5	8.1

Limited Opportunity Objective:

5-year median age of ≥ 4.0 years for harvested moose

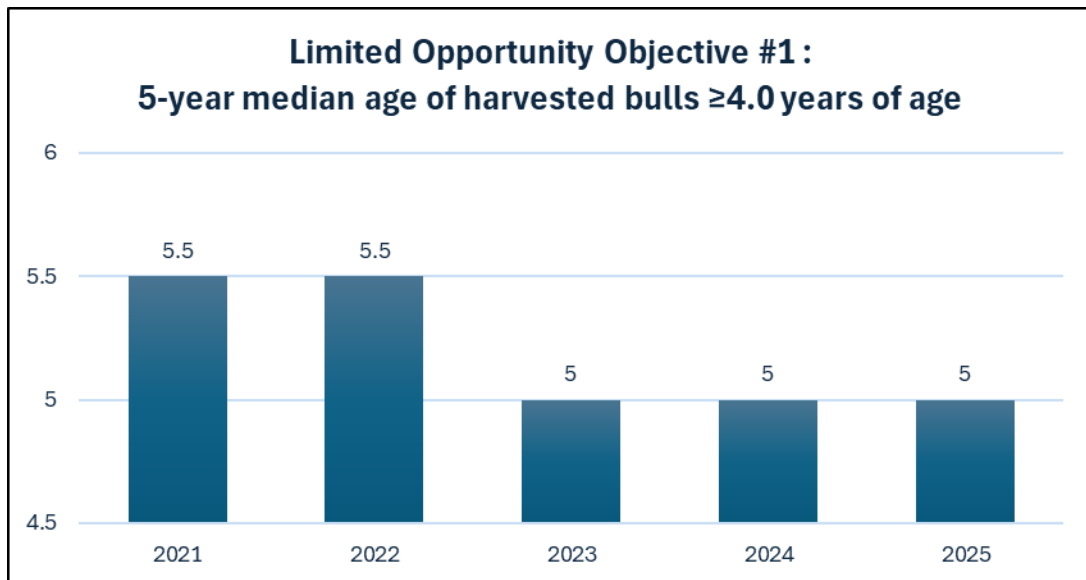
5-year average of ≤ 10 days/animal to harvest

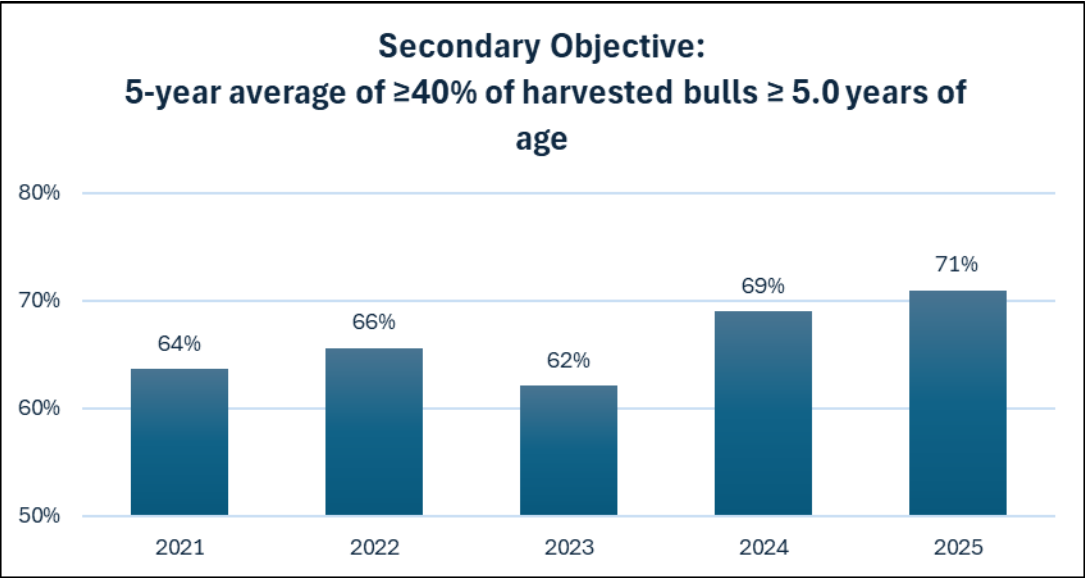
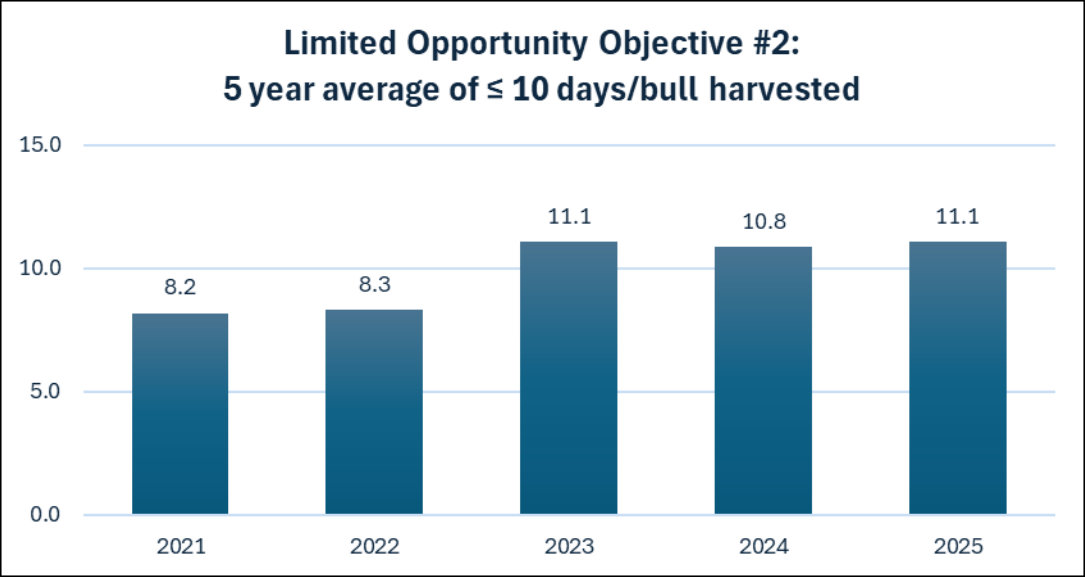
Secondary Objective:

5-year average of 40% of harvested moose are ≥ 5 years of age

Management Strategy:

Special





2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary

for Moose Herd MO201 - ABSAROKA

Year	Post 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	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0	0	0	0	± 0	0	± 0	0
2021	0	0	13	13	33%	18	46%	8	21%	39	0	0	72	72	± 0	44	± 0	26
2022	0	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0	0	0	0	± 0	0	± 0	0
2023	0	0	14	14	33%	18	43%	10	24%	42	0	0	78	78	± 0	56	± 0	31
2024	0	2	11	21	52%	14	35%	5	12%	40	0	14	79	150	± 0	36	± 0	14
2025	0	0	0	6	86%	1	14%	0	0%	7	0	0	0	600	± 0	0	± 0	0

**2026 Hunting Seasons
Absaroka Moose (MO201)**

Hunt Area	Type	Special Archery Dates		Regular Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
8							Closed
9	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 9	Sep. 10	Nov. 10	3	Antlered moose
11	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 9	Sep. 10	Nov. 10	5	Antlered moose

2026 Hunt Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

The Absaroka Moose Herd has long been considered a low-density herd unit, however, appears to be a large enough population to support limited bull harvest. Eight (8) bulls were harvested in 2024, constituting a 100% hunter success across both open hunt areas. The 2024 5-year median age of harvested bulls is 5.0 years (limited opportunity objective #1), and more than half (71%) of bulls harvested the past 5 years are ≥ 5 years of age (secondary objective). The 5-year average hunter effort was 11.1, a slight increase from the 5-year average reported for 2024. The 2023 hunting season saw a historic high in days per harvest (26 days) that have now tapered off with 8.5 days per harvest reported in 2025. Field personnel agree that this metric is not representative of bull availability within the herd unit, but rather an artifact of highly selective hunters being present for a large portion of the hunting season in Hunt Area 11. Except for the 5-year average days per harvest objective, the remaining two herd unit objectives are currently being satisfied.

The only changes managers implemented for the 2026 hunting season were to change season dates in Hunt Area 9 to match up with season dates already held in Hunt Area 11. By opting for a shorter special archery season and increasing the regular season dates to span from early September to early November, managers are allowing hunters to be more selective on this once in a lifetime license.

The collection of teeth from harvested bull moose will remain a difficult but vital part of the management of this herd unit. This past year teeth were submitted for 7 out of the 8 moose harvested. Managers emphasize the need to continue contacting hunters throughout the hunting season to obtain these samples.

Management Objective Review

The objective and management strategy for the Absaroka Moose Herd was last evaluated 2024 and will not be up for objective review until 2029.

Additional Management Data

Trail cameras have been deployed throughout the herd unit since 2018 to monitor the presence of moose from June–November annually, with the goal of documenting bull presence throughout the summer and rut. Managers will continue these efforts into the foreseeable future.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Bighorn Sheep

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

HERD: BS200 - ABSAROKA

HUNT AREAS: 1-5, 22, 999

PREPARED BY: TONY MONG

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	4,346	4,500	4,500
Harvest:	101	103	110
Hunters:	126	124	130
Hunter Success:	80%	83%	85 %
Active Licenses:	126	124	130
Active License Success:	80%	83%	85 %
Recreation Days:	1,085	1,091	1,000
Days Per Animal:	10.7	10.6	9.1
Males per 100 Females	37	145	
Juveniles per 100 Females	39	61	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) : 4500 (3600 - 5400)

Management Strategy: Special

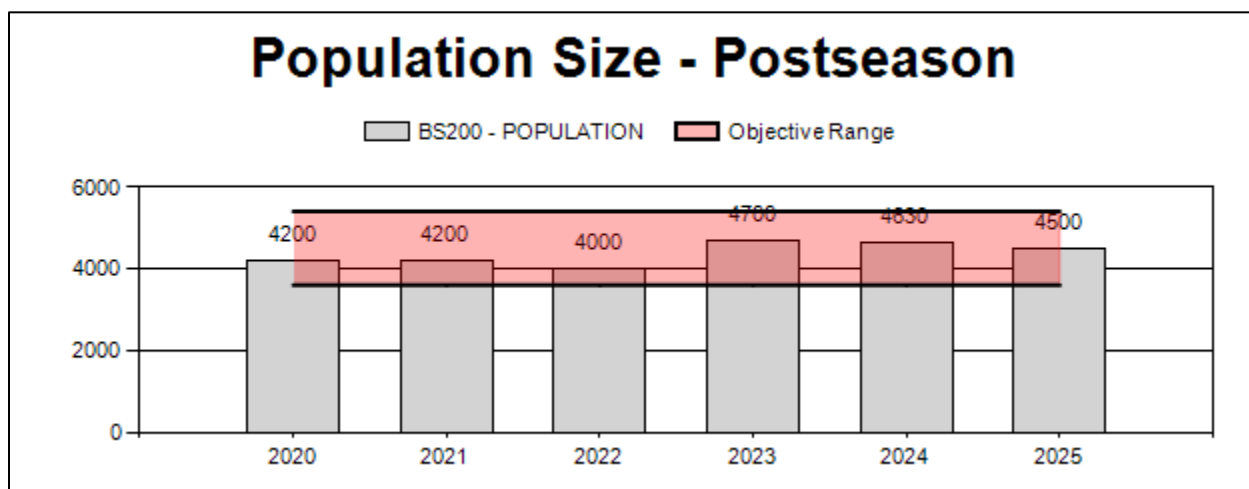
Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: 0%

Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 5

Model Date: 02/26/2026

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:	10%	9%
Proposed change in post-season population:	3.0%	0%



2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary																		
for Bighorn Sheep Herd BS200 - ABSAROKA																		
Year	Post Pop	MALES				FEMALES		JUVENILES				Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	Adult	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Tot	Cls	Ylng	Adult	Total	Conf	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
										Cls	Obj				Int			
2020	4,200	0	558	558	19%	1,655	58%	663	23%	2,876	0	0	34	34	± 1	40	± 1	30
2021	4,200	0	236	236	22%	612	57%	229	21%	1,077	0	0	39	39	± 3	37	± 3	27
2022	4,000	7	63	70	26%	140	51%	62	23%	272	0	5	45	50	± 9	44	± 8	30
2023	4,700	0	184	184	20%	549	60%	183	20%	916	0	0	34	34	± 3	33	± 3	25
2024	4,630	3	73	76	30%	118	47%	58	23%	252	0	3	62	64	± 12	49	± 10	30
2025	4,500	3	123	126	47%	87	33%	53	20%	266	0	3	141	145	± 25	61	± 13	25

**2026 Hunting Seasons
Absaroka Bighorn Sheep (BS200)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
1	1	Aug. 15	Aug. 31	Sep. 1	Oct. 31	15	Any ram
2	1	Aug. 15	Aug. 31	Sep. 1	Oct. 31	25	Any ram
3	1	Aug. 15	Aug. 31	Sep. 1	Oct. 31	20	Any ram
4	1	Aug. 15	Aug. 31	Sep. 1	Oct. 31	20	Any ram
5	1			Aug. 1	Aug. 31	40	Any sheep valid within the Owl Creek drainage
5	1	Aug. 15	Aug. 31	Sep. 1	Oct. 31		Any ram
22	1	Aug. 15	Aug. 31	Sep. 1	Oct. 31	3	Any ram, also valid in Area 5

2025 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

Total license numbers in the herd unit were increased by five for 2026. Overall harvest success was 83%, indicating fair performance across the herd unit. However, success rates varied by hunt area, with Hunt Area 5 exhibiting the lowest success at 78%, while Hunt Areas 2 and 4 reported the highest success at 89%. The average age of harvested rams remained strong at 7.5 years across the herd unit, with hunt area averages ranging from 5.0 years in Hunt Area 22 to 8.2 years in Hunt Area 3. Given the unseasonably warm and dry fall conditions, lower harvest success had been anticipated; however, reduced success was observed only in Hunt Area 5.

Despite prior concerns regarding ram abundance in Hunt Area 3, harvest success and average age of harvested rams both increased. These results reflected the inherent variability in bighorn sheep harvest and hunter success across years. Although Hunt Area 5 experienced a decline in harvest success, this was likely influenced by hunter demographics and voluntary restraint, rather than reduced ram availability.

A summer sightability survey flight was conducted for the herd unit and documented a substantial number of adult rams (n = 189) in Hunt Area 5. Survey results, combined with field observations, provided sufficient confidence to support the increase in license numbers for this hunt area.

Adjustments to license allocations in Hunt Areas 1 and 2 were implemented to maintain compliance with the 90/10 resident-to-nonresident allocation requirement.

Management Objective Review

The objective and management strategy for the Absaroka Bighorn Sheep Herd was last evaluated and approved in 2022, and will not be reviewed again until 2027.

Population Modeling

Managers chose to model this herd using the default structure for bighorn sheep, i.e. constant adult survival, time-varying reproduction and juvenile survival. Based on visual comparison of the available effort variables, active licenses was selected by managers as the variable most predictably related to annual harvest. Trends in harvest have changed significantly in the last 10 years so we restricted data to 2016 to 2026 within the IPM. With these settings the observed data for the IPM included 9 years of harvest and ratio data along with an abundance estimate from surveys in 2020 and 2025. IPM convergence was excellent, with all Rhat values less than 1.1. IPM abundance estimates also aligned well with the results obtained from an aerial sightability survey completed in 2020 (4,750; UCL = 5,269, LCL = 4,230) and in 2025 (4,790; UCL = 5,757, LCL = 3,823. The total post-season abundance estimate from the IPM for 2025 was 4,431 sheep (CL 3,669-5,206), which represents a relatively flat population trend, which matches managers field observations of sheep populations. Because this is a large population spread over a very large area, the herd level objective is only used at a very coarse level to determine the herd performance.

Sightability Flight

During the summer we flew a sightability flight for this herd. There were a total of 1,873 sheep detected during the survey (Table 1). Within the sightability blocks a total of 1,769 sheep in 272 groups, analysis yielded an independent population estimate of 4,790 (95% CI = 3,823-5,757) sheep for the entire herd unit (Appendix A, Table 2).

Appendix A. Report of the 2025 sightability flight for the Absaroka Bighorn Sheep Herd.

Overview

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department conducted aerial sightability surveys for bighorn sheep on summer ranges within the Absaroka Bighorn Sheep herd unit between July 28 and August 6, 2025, with flight segments conducted during the morning (6:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.) and evening (3:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.) to avoid the hottest parts of the day. Survey data were provided by Tony Mong to Eric Newkirk for analysis. Survey conditions were generally good, with wind grounding flights for only one day.

Summary Statistics

Survey crews flew nearly 3,650 miles and completed approximately 45 hours of flight time. Sampling included 70% of the high-density stratum blocks and 30% of the low-density stratum blocks (Figure 1). Total survey cost was \$55,000. During the survey, observers detected 1,769 sheep in 272 groups within the sampling blocks and 1,873 total sheep across the entire flight area (Table 1, Table 2).

Results

Average detection probability across all sheep groups was 0.73, with group-specific detection probabilities ranging from 0.34 to 0.78 depending on the covariates recorded for each group. Estimated abundance for the Absaroka Bighorn Sheep herd was 4,790 sheep, with a 95% confidence interval of 3,823 to 5,757 sheep (Table 2). Because management is organized by Hunt Area, and because adult male abundance and lamb production are important metrics within those areas, we also generated abundance estimates by Hunt Area and by sex and age class (Table 2).

Discussion

This survey represents the second independent abundance estimate for the Absaroka Bighorn Sheep herd. In 2020, we conducted an intensive survey of the entire herd unit using the same sightability method (Bodie, W. L., E. O. Garton, E. R. Taylor, and M. McCoy. 1995. A sightability model for bighorn sheep in canyon habitats. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 59: 832–840; see 2020 Job Completion Report for the Absaroka Bighorn Sheep). Data from that intensive flight were used to inform the development of the sightability block designations and the extent of block placement. The 2025 sightability estimate was within 40 animals of the 2020 estimate; however, the 95% confidence interval was larger, reflecting the smaller sampling effort used in 2025 compared to the “fly everything” approach used in 2020 (Table 2).

There is an obvious tradeoff between flight time and cost on one hand, and precision of the estimate on the other. The 2020 survey cost approximately \$30,000 more than the 2025 survey. That tradeoff appears to be reflected in the width of the confidence interval around the estimate, which could present a challenge if this were the sole source of information used to assess the population. However, management of the Absaroka Bighorn Sheep herd relies on multiple streams of information. The total herd abundance estimate has limited direct influence on management decisions, which are more often made at the Hunt Area level. The primary value of this sightability analysis at the herd scale is its ability to track population trends over time.

At the Hunt Area level, these abundance estimates may have additional management value if the sightability technique and analysis can be further refined. One important caution regarding use of the current sightability model is that it was developed in canyon-type habitat. That landscape differs substantially from the Absarokas and gives us some pause in fully trusting the resulting estimates. If a sightability model were developed specifically for the mountain ranges of the Absarokas, the resulting abundance estimates could potentially be used more directly to inform ram license setting within individual Hunt Areas. Under the current framework, the main utility of these estimates is in tracking trends within Hunt Areas over time.

Although the 2025 herd estimate was very similar to the 2020 estimate, there were apparent gains and losses among the five Hunt Areas within the herd unit (Table 2, Figure 2). While confidence intervals for all Hunt Areas overlapped to varying degrees, the estimates still show spatial variability between 2020 and 2025. Hunt Areas 1 and 3 showed decreases in total sheep estimates, whereas Hunt Areas 2, 4, and 5 showed increases (Table 2, Figure 2). Interestingly, the number of sheep counted per mile flown declined in every Hunt Area from 2020 to 2025, suggesting that sheep may have been more widely distributed across the landscape in 2025 despite the similarity in overall abundance estimates (Table 2).

The utility of the current sightability model, the estimates it produces, and the way the survey is flown should all be carefully evaluated before another flight is conducted. The large confidence intervals around Hunt Area level estimates may limit our ability to reliably detect upward or downward trends at that scale. One possible approach would be to fly the herd unit in segments in alternating years to allow greater survey effort within a smaller geographic area. For example, Hunt Areas 1 and 2 could be surveyed in one year, followed by Hunt Areas 3, 4 and 5 the next year. That approach may improve coverage and potentially reduce confidence intervals. However, the larger concern remains the application of a sightability model developed in a landscape that differs substantially from the one in which it is being used. That issue likely deserves more attention than changes to survey scheduling alone.

Figure 1. 2025 Absaroka Bighorn Sheep Herd sightability blocks, flight lines and location data.

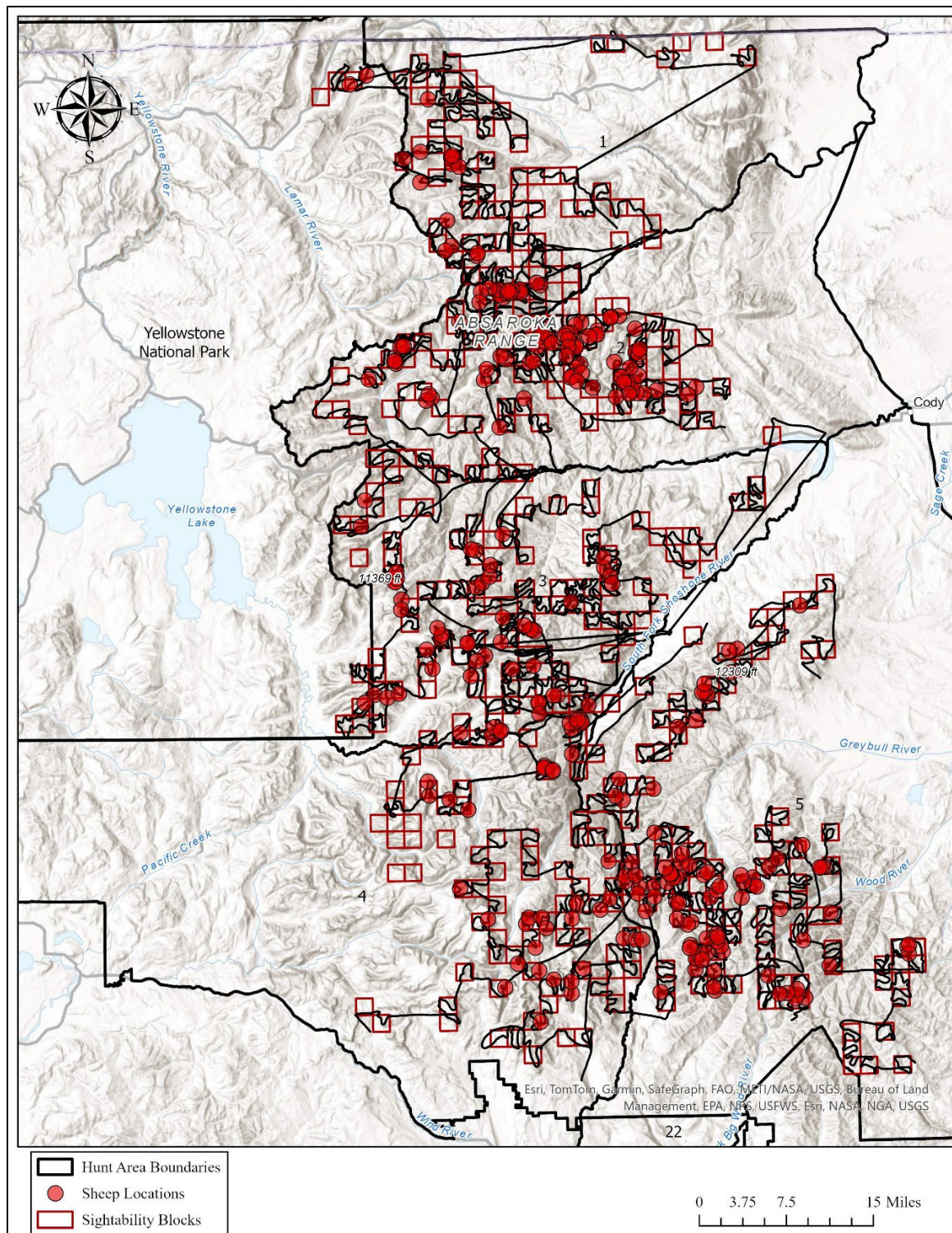


Table 1. 2025 Absaroka Bighorn Sheep Herd sightability flight data including data outside of sightability blocks.

Hunt Area	Total Classified	Ewes	Lambs	Class I Rams	Class II Rams	Total Rams	Lamb Ratio	Adult Ram Ratio
1	183	96	57	14	8	22	59	23
2	423	257	108	47	45	92	42	36
3	328	231	85	17	12	29	37	13
4	264	154	80	10	8	18	52	12
5	660	310	159	114	75	189	51	61
22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
YNP	15	9	6	0	0	0	60	0
Total	1873	1057	495	202	148	350	47	33

Table 2. 2025 and 2020 Absaroka Bighorn Sheep Herd sightability flight data and abundance estimates.

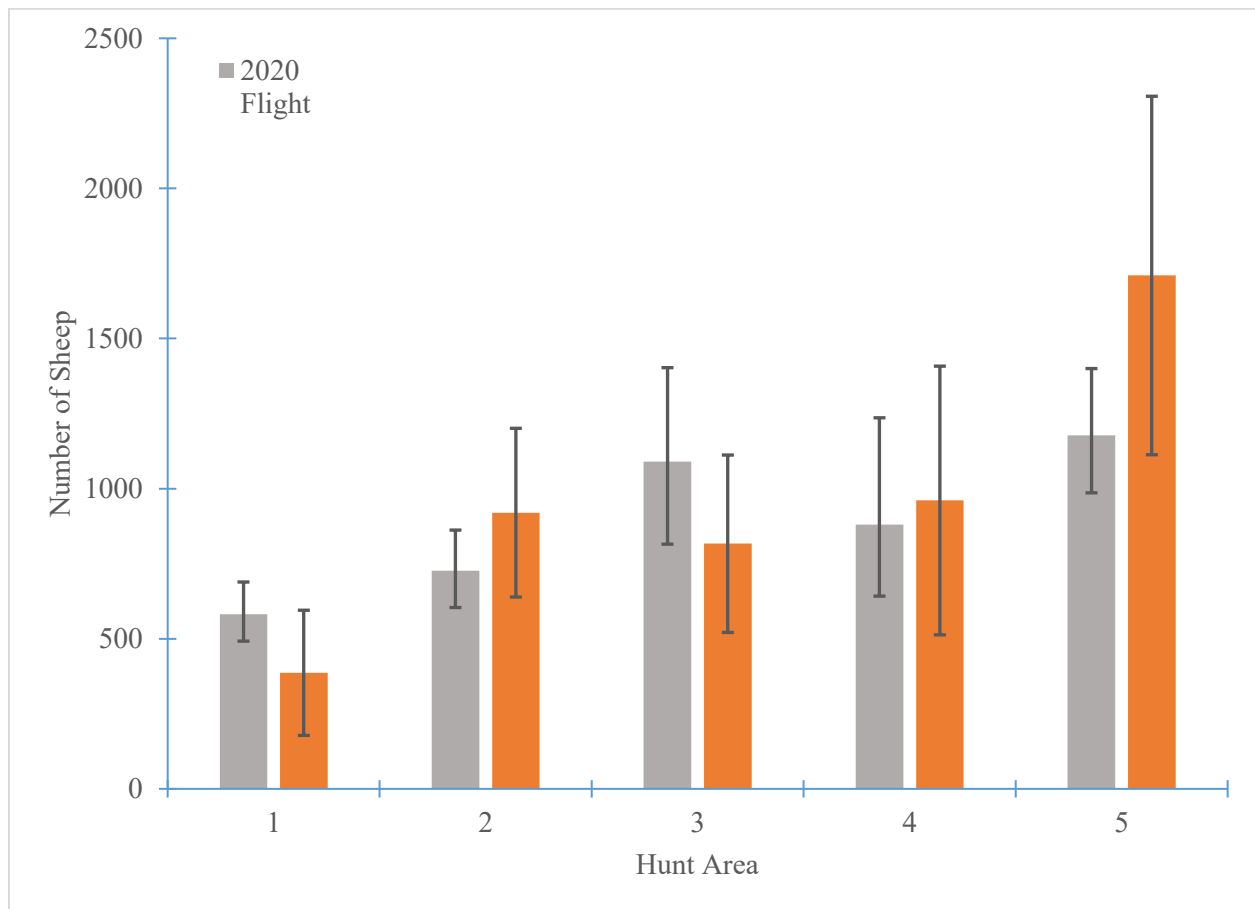
2025

Hunt Area	Total Miles	Actual Count		Ratios (# per 100 Ewes)			Sheep per mile flown	Sightability Estimate	
		Total Counted	Total >3/4 Curl	Lamb Ratios	Adult Ram Ratio	>3/4 Curl Ratio		Estimated Total (95% CI)	Estimated >3/4 Curl (95% CI)
1	546	150	4	55	14	5	0.27	387 (178-595)	30 (24-84)
2	475	365	42	54	50	23	0.77	920 (639-1201)	99 (43-155)
3	1244	319	4	36	5	2	0.26	817 (521-1112)	19 (14-53)
4	528	261	8	53	12	5	0.49	961 (513-1408)	27 (6-59)
5	780	659	74	51	60	24	0.84	1710 (1113-2307)	161 (83-238)
YNP	50	15	0	67	0	0	0.30	95 (73-264)	0
Total		1769	132	49	68	20		4790 (3823-5757)	340 (208-471)

2020

Hunt Area	Total Miles	Actual Count		Ratios (# per 100 Ewes)			Sheep per mile flown	Sightability Estimate	
		Total Counted	Total >3/4 Curl	Lamb Ratios	Adult Ram Ratio	>3/4 Curl Ratio		Estimated Total (95% CI)	Estimated >3/4 Curl (95% CI)
1	631	425	17	46	32	7	0.67	582 (492-689)	26 (9-47)
2	469	492	41	64	40	17	1.04	727 (604-862)	72 (35-119)
3	892	618	58	55	34	18	0.69	1090 (815-1403)	83 (45-128)
4	1147	543	33	45	25	10	0.47	880 (642-1236)	43 (12-84)
5	857	867	98	43	44	21	1.01	1177 (986-1400)	127 (80-179)
YNP	231	139	13	41	42	17	0.60	261 (152-401)	19 (4-38)
Reservation	123	30	19	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.24	33 (15-54)	21 (3-43)
Total	4350	3114	279	49	36	16	0.72	4750 (4259-5261)	392 (302-488)

Figure 2. Comparison of the 2025 and 2020 Absaroka Bighorn Sheep Herd sightability flight estimates with confidence intervals by Hunt Area.



2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Bighorn Sheep

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

HERD: BS212 - DEVIL'S CANYON

HUNT AREAS: 12

PREPARED BY: SAM STEPHENS

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Trend Count:	172	100	120
Harvest:	7	8	8
Hunters:	7	8	8
Hunter Success:	100%	100%	100 %
Active Licenses:	7	8	8
Active License Success	100%	100%	100 %
Recreation Days:	27	34	30
Days Per Animal:	3.9	4.2	3.8
Males per 100 Females:	57	62	
Juveniles per 100 Females	41	46	
Trend Based Objective ($\pm 20\%$)			150 (120 - 180)
Management Strategy:			Special
Percent population is above (+) or (-) objective:			-33.3%
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend:			2

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:	23%	30%
Juveniles (< 1 year old):	0%	0%
Total:	10%	0%
Proposed change in post-season population:	90%	94%

2026 HUNTING SEASONS
DEVILS CANYON BIGHORN SHEEP HERD (BS212)

Hunt Area	Hunt Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
12	1	Aug. 1	Aug. 14	Aug. 15	Oct. 15	5	Any ram
12	2	Aug. 1	Aug. 14	Aug. 15	Oct. 31	3	Any ram less than three-quarter (3/4) curl

2025 Management Summary

1.) Hunting Season Evaluation:

In 2022, increased sheep harvest was applied to address an overabundance of bighorns in Devil's Canyon. This included a modest increase to Type 1 licenses as well as the issuance of a new Type 6 ewe license. Female harvest was intentionally low in 2022 as this was the first time ewe tags were employed as a management tool. Therefore only 4 licenses were issued. Immediately following the end of the 2022 hunting season a significant mortality event impacted the Devils Canyon Herd. Wildlife Health Laboratory staff concluded that this event was triggered by a novel strain of the pathogen *Mannheimia haemolytica* which caused pneumonia. Disease related mortality continued through the fall and into the winter. By December 31, 2022: approximately 44% of the collared sheep (n=6 ewes: 6 rams) were lost to the pneumonia outbreak. Standardized aerial trend counts were conducted in July of 2023 where 142 sheep were observed. Two weeks after the flight a second pneumonia outbreak impacted the herd. Mortality notifications lasting through August prompted the recovery and investigation of dead collared ewes. Field necropsies and samples submitted to the Wyoming State Veterinary Lab confirmed a second outbreak of *Mannheimia haemolytica*. Unlike the initial outbreak, the second episode seemed to primarily impact ewes. During the month long die-off, no lamb or ram carcasses were detected despite many orphaned lambs being found in close proximity to ewe carcasses that were later confirmed positive for the pathogen. Marked individuals were drastically reduced during this period from 13 to 2 collared ewes. The reason why lambs showed resistance to *Mannheimia haemolytica*, could be due to a passive immunity developed through nursing. Lamb mortality could have resumed later in the year but was never detected. In the late summer, rams are typically sexually segregated in Devils Canyon. Rams often congregate in bands at higher elevations away from ewe/lamb groups. This behavior likely protected them from the die-off. Based on 2023 observations, rams appeared to be unaffected from the second outbreak. At the time this phenomenon rendered an increased ram ratio. In 2025 managers increased ram harvest with the introduction of Type 2 licenses, valid for any ram less than ¾ curl. This license type targeted younger aged rams (<4 y.o) which is an age cohort more prone to wander outside of the herd unit. Hunters achieved 100% success with four Type 2 and four Type 1 licenses filled, for a total of eight rams harvested in 2025. A trend count was conducted from the air in July, 2025 where 100 sheep were classified. This is slightly higher than managers anticipated, following the 2023 die-off. Ram ratios appeared to have decreased (62:100) since 2023, which could be due to increased harvest in 2024 and 2025. Lamb ratios increased to 46:100, a ratio commonly seen prior to the pneumonia outbreak. Given the suppressed lamb recruitment from 2022-2024, it's

evident that recruitment of Class 1 and 2 rams have stagnated. Prior to the initial die-off, Class 1 (<1/2 curl) rams accounted for 31% of the total rams classified in 2022. The 2025 classification results indicate that this cohort only comprised 13% of total rams classified, whereas class 3 and 4 rams (>3/4) comprised 63% of the rams classified. Due to this aging demographic of rams, one license was removed from the Type 2 quota and added to the Type 1 quota to maintain a harvest of eight rams while shifting the harvest forward in age class.

2.) Herd Unit Objective Review

In 2025 managers adopted a new trend count objective of 150 sheep to reflect the sensitive nature of the isolated Devils Canyon sheep herd. A trend based objective of 150 sheep directs wildlife managers to maintain between 120 (-20% limit) and 180 (+20% limit) in the herd. Secondly, increased ram abundance poses a threat to the future recovery of this herd. Ram ratios have ranged from 21 to 91:100 in the past 10 years with higher ratios resulting in increased dispersal incidents. Allowing ram ratios to exceed 50:100 risks the introduction of novel pathogens and increased competition. A sub-objective to manage ram ratios at a lower range of 30-50:100 was adopted to reduce ram dispersal and possible disease transmission risk.

3.) Devils Canyon Bighorn Sheep Movement Analysis:

With disease sampling funding secured through the Wyoming chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation, additional funding was opportunistically granted by the organization (\$12,450) and the Wyoming Governors Big Game License Coalition (\$15,000) in 2019 to purchase GPS collars (n=30) to monitor habitat use, seasonal movement, and annual recruitment rates of Devils Canyon bighorn sheep. Amongst four capture efforts (November 2019, March 2020, December 2020, and January 2022) we maintained a sample size of 10 adult males (1-7 y.o) and 20 adult females fitted with GPS collars. GPS collars proved to be a critical tool in detecting and monitoring disease related mortalities following the initial *Mannheimia haemolytica* die-off throughout the 2022-23 winter and 2023 summer. A total of 13 mortalities were detected from a starting total of 15 GPS collared sheep in 2023. Each event was investigated and cause was attributed to each mortality (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Cause-Specific Mortality of GPS Collared Bighorn Sheep (n=30)

SEX	Time of Mortality	Cause of Death
Ewe	February 2022	Capture Myopathy
Ram	August 2022	Poached
Ram	September 2022	Mountain Lion Predation
Ewe	October 2022	Disease
Ewe	October 2022	Disease
Ewe	October 2022	Disease
Ewe	October 2022	Disease
Ewe	November 2022	Disease
Ram	November 2022	Disease
Ram	November 2022	Disease
Ram	November 2022	Disease
Ram	December 2022	Disease
Ram	December 2022	Disease

Ewe	December 2022	Disease
Ram	December 2022	Disease
Ram	April 2023	Disease
Ram	April 2023	Mountain Lion Predation
Ewe	July 2023	Disease
Ewe	July 2023	Disease
Ewe	July 2023	Disease
Ewe	July 2023	Disease
Ewe	July 2023	Disease
Ewe	August 2023	Disease
Ewe	August 2023	Disease
Ewe	August 2023	Disease
Ewe	August 2023	Disease
Ewe	August 2023	Disease
Ewe	August 2023	Disease
Ewe	September 2024	Mountain Lion Predation

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Mountain Goat

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

HERD: MG201 - BEARTOOTH

HUNT AREAS: 1, 3, 5, 514, 999

PREPARED BY: TONY MONG

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Trend Count:	142	0	175
Harvest:	34	26	26
Hunters:	46	28	28
Hunter Success:	74%	93%	93%
Active Licenses:	46	28	28
Active License Success	74%	93%	93%
Recreation Days:	318	171	165
Days Per Animal:	9.4	6.6	6.3
Males per 100 Females:	0	0	
Juveniles per 100 Females	32	28	

Trend Based Objective ($\pm 20\%$)

175 (140 - 210)

Management Strategy:

Special

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

N/A%

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

0

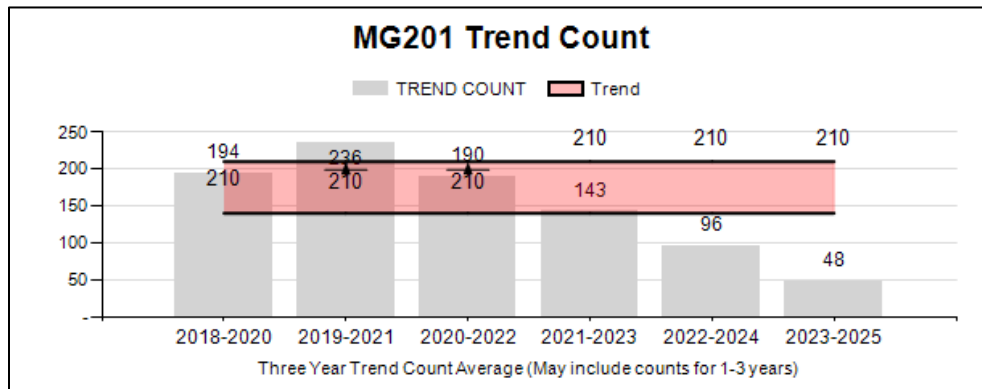
Proposed harvest rates (percent of pre-season estimate for each sex/age group):

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	n/a%	n/a%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	n/a%	n/a%
Juveniles (< 1 year old):	n/a%	n/a%
Total:	n/a%	n/a%

Proposed change in post-season population:

n/a%

n/a%



2020 - 2025 Preseason Classification Summary																		
for Mountain Goat Herd MG201 - BEARTOOTH																		
Year	Pre Pop	MALES				FEMALES		JUVENILES				Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	Adult	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Tot	Cls	Ylng	Adult	Total	Conf	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
										Cls	Obj				Int			
2020	0	0	0	0	0%	167	71%	68	29%	235	0	0	0	0	± 0	41	± 0	41
2021	0	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0	0	0	0	± 0	0	± 0	0
2022	0	0	0	0	0%	194	80%	47	20%	241	0	0	0	0	± 0	24	± 0	24
2023	0	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0	0	0	0	± 0	0	± 0	0
2024	0	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0	0	0	0	± 0	0	± 0	0
2025	0	0	0	0	0%	40	78%	11	22%	51	0	0	0	0	± 0	28	± 0	28

**2026 Hunting Seasons
Beartooth Herd (MG201)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
1	1	Aug. 15	Aug. 31	Sep. 1	Oct. 31	10	Any mountain goat
3	1	Aug. 15	Aug. 31	Sep. 1	Oct. 31	9	Any mountain goat
3	2	Aug. 15	Aug. 31	Sep. 1	Oct. 31	9	Any mountain goat valid in the North Fork Shoshone River drainage; also valid in Area 5

2025 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

Overall harvest success within the herd was the highest it has been since 2016 at 93%. Nanny harvest was the lowest it has been since 2015 at 19%. Within the herd, the Type 1 license in Hunt Area 3 had the lowest success rate at 89% but the Hunt Area 1 Type 1 license had the highest Nanny harvest at 30%. The Hunt Area 3 Type 2 license continued to produce high success (100%) and low average days per harvest at 2.9. Based on that information we did not make any changes to quotas. Due to statewide regulations requiring a split of 90% resident licenses and 10% non-residents this caused us to offer an irregular number of licenses for the Type 1 and Type 2.

We typically fly this herd every other summer which in 2024, due to budgetary constraints and poor weather conditions we were only able to fly a very small portion of Hunt Area 3. The data used for the 3-year trend data should not be considered reliable or a representation of the entire herd.

Management Objective Review

The 3-year average mid-summer trend count objective of 175 was set in 2016 and we are not proposing any changes to this objective for 2026. The trend count data for this herd is collected every other year so the 3-year average trend data typically encompasses data collected over a 5-6 year period but the JCR does not recognize this every other year pattern and puts the count at zero for the years we do not fly, causing the reported trend data to be wrong.