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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Pronghorn

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

HERD: PR309 - PUMPKIN BUTTES

HUNT AREAS: 23

PREPARED BY: ERIKA
PECKHAM

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	16,100	15,000	15,200
Harvest:	2,096	1,992	1,993
Hunters:	2,166	2,286	2,300
Hunter Success:	97%	87%	87 %
Active Licenses:	2,475	2,441	2,500
Active License Success:	85%	82%	80 %
Recreation Days:	7,136	7,820	7,800
Days Per Animal:	3.4	3.9	3.9
Males per 100 Females	52	53	
Juveniles per 100 Females	84	29	

Population Objective (± 20%) : 18000 (14400 - 21600)

Management Strategy: Private Land

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -16.7%

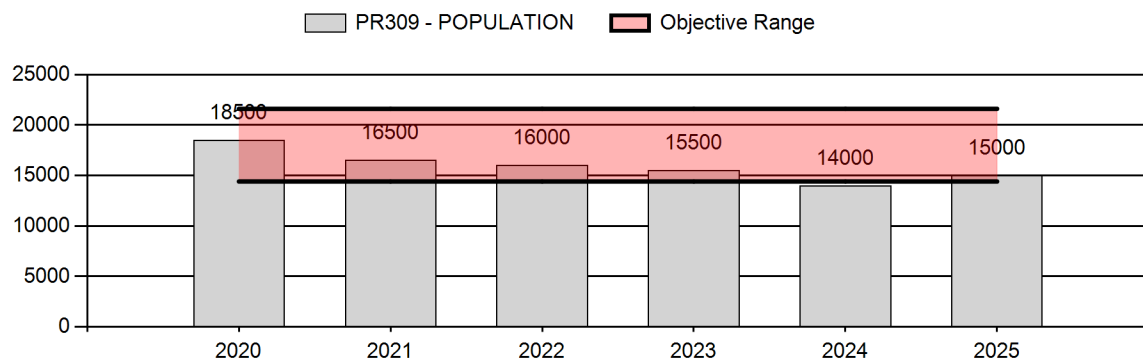
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 2

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:	1%	.08%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	28%	28%
Proposed change in post-season population:	-6%	1.6%

Population Size - Postseason



2026 HUNTING SEASONS
PUMPKIN BUTTES PRONGHORN HERD (PR309)

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
23	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	550	Any antelope
23	2	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	1500	Any antelope valid on private land
23	6	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	300	Doe or fawn
23	7	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	700	Doe or fawn valid on private land

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

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

Overall harvest success dropped to 87% from 105% success in 2024. Days per harvest remained close to the same at 3.9 days to harvest an antelope. Although there were some negative comments from hunters, the overall satisfaction was favorable at 76%. Success was lower and days per harvest higher on the Type 1 public lands licenses vs. the Type 2. Type 1 tags are utilized on public lands and typically experience a lower success rate than the Type 2 and Type 7 licenses, which are valid on private lands only. The proportion of Type 1:Type 2 and Type 6 :Type 7 licenses issued were aligned with the harvest the public lands could accommodate and provide a better quality public lands hunt. The 2025 growing season resulted in favorable rangeland conditions with good forage production and residual cover going into the winter of 2025-2026. The winter of 2025-2026 was very mild with no major weather events.

The model indicates that this herd entered a precipitous decline in 2018. This decline coincides with unfavorable climatic conditions, coupled with disease outbreaks in 2021. Since 2021 the model indicates that population has overall trended upwards, corroborated by field observations.

The 2026 license issuance was designed to address a population that was on the low end of the acceptable objective range, but that has trended slowly upwards. It was estimated that the percentage of buck harvest over the preceding three-year period was 28% of total bucks. With this license issuance, the herd is predicted to be 17% below objective, with 28% of the mature bucks being harvested.

Herd Objective Review

This herd is managed with a post-season population objective of 18,000 pronghorn and a private lands management strategy. The next herd unit management review will be conducted in 2030.

Population Modeling

The 2026 postseason population estimate for this herd unit from the model was approximately 15,200 pronghorn. The IPM illustrates a slow decline over time, while ground observations over the years suggest a population that ebbs and flows, but is certainly lower than what it was 15 years ago. Observed fawn ratios have varied over the last several years but are typically within the range of 70-90 fawns per 100 does with a preceding five-year average of 85:100. The observed fawn ratio in 2025 classification surveys was 73:100

Buck ratios typically range from the 40-60 bucks:100 does, with the 2025 observed ratio at 53:100, which was fairly consistent with the private land management strategy and continued to provide ample opportunity for selective buck harvest.

In June of 2023, a line transect was flown in this herd unit for the 2022 biological year. This independent abundance estimate was 18,400 pronghorn (CI 13,550-25,270), which was higher than the IPM estimate, but still considered reasonable. There is a line transect scheduled for 2026 in this herd unit.

With no changes to license issues, the population was estimated to increase slightly. This model was considered a fair model (convergence pretty likely, but not perfect and proportion of .93).

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Pronghorn

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

HERD: PR318 - CRAZY WOMAN

HUNT AREAS: 22, 113

PREPARED BY: ZACH
TURNBULL

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	11,900	10,900	12,400
Harvest:	1,059	643	643
Hunters:	1,286	766	766
Hunter Success:	82%	84%	84%
Active Licenses:	1,432	847	847
Active License Success:	74%	76%	76%
Recreation Days:	5,314	3,642	3,642
Days Per Animal:	5.0	5.7	5.7
Males per 100 Females	54	68	
Juveniles per 100 Females	74	80	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) : 11000 (8800 - 13200)

Management Strategy: Recreational

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -0.9%

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

Model Date: 1/28/2026

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%	2%
Males ♂ 1 year old:	25%	19%
Proposed change in post-season population:	5%	-1%

2021 - 2025 Preseason Classification Summary															
for Pronghorn Herd PR318 - CRAZY WOMAN															
Year	Pre Pop	MALES			FEMALES	JUVENILES			Males to 100 Fem ales				Young to		
		Ylg	Adult	Total			Tot	Cls	Ying	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
2021	15,950	63	189	252	434	325	1,011	2,529	15	44	58	± 7	75	± 9	47
2022	17,000	142	177	319	433	322	1,074	2,638	33	41	74	± 9	74	± 9	43
2023	10,900	63	115	178	486	367	1,031	0	13	24	37	± 5	76	± 8	55
2024	9,400	97	113	210	335	287	832	0	29	34	63	± 9	86	± 11	53
2025	12,400	151	262	413	609	485	1,507	0	25	43	68	± 7	80	± 7	47

2026 Hunting Seasons
Crazy Woman Pronghorn (PR318)

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
22	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	600	Any antelope
22	6			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	150	Doe or fawn valid on private land north of Crazy Woman Creek
22	6	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31		Doe or fawn valid in the entire area
113	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	75	Any antelope
113	2	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 11	Oct. 31	75	Any antelope
113	6	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	25	Doe or fawn

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 67% Satisfied, 21% Neutral, 12% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

Hunter satisfaction in 2025 was slightly lower than the previous year, with similar hunter success and days/harvest to the previous five years. Fawn ratios in 2025 (80:100) remained similar to the five-year average (75:100). Some hunter crowding is to be expected on public lands. Land ownership and access limits harvest opportunity in this herd unit. The herd likely still suffers from impacts of severe drought conditions in 2020 and 2021, and disease events (epizootic hemorrhagic and bluetongue virus) in 2021 and 2022. A large wildland fire impacted the unit in the summer of 2024, consuming nearly 175,000 acres of pronghorn habitat. Landowners generally indicated numbers were at or below desired levels, and expressed concerns about drought, disease and fire impacts.

Based on these trends, license issuance remained unchanged. The herd unit has seen marked declines in harvest metrics, particularly over the last five years. With this license issuance, 18% of the mature bucks were predicted to be harvested in 2026. We maintained limited doe harvest for hunter opportunity and area specific population concerns. This level of doe harvest won't limit population growth across the herd unit.

Table 1. PR 318 Harvest Summary 2016-2025.

Year	HUNTERS			SUCCESS			
	Res Htrs	NRes Htrs	Total Htrs	Hntrs	Act Lic	Hntr Days	Days to Harv
2016	216	1,699	1,915	86%	80%	6,730	4.1
2017	245	1,521	1,766	95%	86%	5,876	3.5
2018	189	1,650	1,839	98%	89%	5,746	3.2
2019	162	1,640	1,802	86%	80%	6,055	3.9
2020	149	1,554	1,703	87%	81%	6,141	4.1
2021	203	1,557	1,760	72%	68%	7,196	5.6
2022	270	909	1,179	80%	75%	4,333	4.6
2023	269	706	975	91%	73%	4,873	5.5
2024	275	537	812	87%	73%	4,026	5.7
2025	304	462	766	84%	76%	3,642	5.7

Management Objective Review

The Crazy Woman herd is managed as a recreational herd with a post-season population objective of 11,000 pronghorn. The next herd unit review is scheduled for 2028.

Line Transect Survey

Line transects estimates for the herd have varied greatly. Most recently we conducted line transect (LT) surveys in 2020, 2022 and 2025. Surveys were completed using a Husky Aviat supplied by Flightline LFS, Inc and one observer. Using the Pooled Hierarchical model to analyze results the survey produced an estimate of 14,000 pronghorn, an increase from the last estimate. Unlike many traditional models, the pooled model uses other similar line transect flights to inform the model. While this estimate seems slightly high, it may suggest a population that had begun to recover from previous lows. Traditional single herd analysis produced an estimate of 18,000 pronghorn.

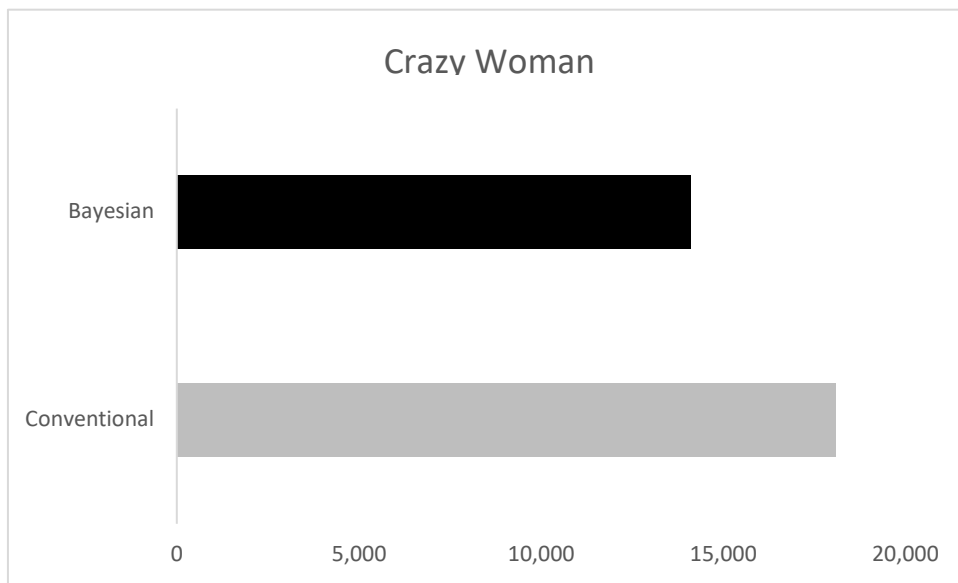


Figure 1. Comparison of single herd analysis and pooled hierarchical (Bayesian) modeling 2025.

Population Modeling

Using Integrated Population modeling, a bio-year 2025 postseason population estimate of 11,000 (CL = 9,700-12,600) pronghorn was generated and showed a stable to slightly increasing population trend. This model used recreation days as the effort variable. Multiple models were considered. When truncated to start in 2012, models appeared to more accurately describe current field observation and harvest metrics. This abbreviation focuses on the period following large scale events that likely impacted population numbers. Managers realize that using such an abbreviated period has associated risks as well. The model had an Rhat value of 1.22. When the model was not truncated a similar population estimate was derived, but CI increased and the model depicted greater population growth predictions.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Pronghorn

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

HERD: PR320 - HAZELTON

HUNT AREAS: 20, 102

PREPARED BY: ZACH TURNBULL

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Hunter Satisfaction Percent	64%	59%	59%
Landowner Satisfaction Percent	60%	0%	60%
Harvest:	781	423	423
Hunters:	1,074	644	644
Hunter Success:	73%	66%	66 %
Active Licenses:	1,255	721	721
Active License Success:	62%	59%	59 %
Recreation Days:	4,962	3,261	3,261
Days Per Animal:	6.4	7.7	7.7
Males per 100 Females:	60	61	
Juveniles per 100 Females	72	76	

Satisfaction Based Objective

0%

Management Strategy:

Private Land

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

N/A%

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

0

2021 - 2025 Preseason Classification Summary

for Pronghorn Herd PR320 - HAZELTON

Year	Pre Pop	MALES			FEMALES	JUVENILES			Males to 100 Fem ales				Young to		
		Ylg	Adult	Total	Total	Total	Tot	Cls	Yng	Adult	Total	Conf	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
							Cls	Obj				Int			
2021	0	95	216	311	522	360	1,193	2,106	18	41	60	± 0	69	± 0	43
2022	0	138	215	353	521	421	1,295	0	26	41	68	± 0	81	± 0	48
2023	0	102	153	255	488	301	1,044	0	21	31	52	± 0	62	± 0	41
2024	0	60	165	225	403	309	937	0	15	41	56	± 0	77	± 0	49
2025	0	96	231	327	537	406	1,270	0	18	43	61	± 0	76	± 0	47

**2026 Hunting Seasons
Hazelton Pronghorn
(PR320)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
20	1	Aug. 15	Oct. 14	Oct. 15	Nov. 15	300	Any antelope
20	6	Aug. 15	Oct. 14	Oct. 15	Nov. 15	100	Doe or fawn
102	1	Aug. 15	Oct. 14	Oct. 15	Nov. 15	300	Any antelope
102	6			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	175	Doe or fawn valid on private land
102	6	Aug. 15	Oct. 14	Oct. 15	Nov. 15		Doe or fawn valid in the entire area

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

2025 Landowner Satisfaction: 9% Above, 59% At, 32% Below Desired Levels

**2026 Management Summary
Hunting Season Evaluation**

Pronghorn harvest in 2025 was poor, with high days/harvest (7.7) and low harvest success (59% of active licenses) for the herd unit (Table 1). The impacts of the 2020-2021 drought combined with the appearance of bluetongue virus (BTV) and epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) in 2021 and 2022 likely contributed to these statistics. Fawn production improved in 2024 (77:100) following a low in 2023 (62:100). Harvest was limited by access to private lands. The majority of landowners felt that numbers were at (59%), or below (32%) desired levels, which was slightly surprising when contrasted to field observation and hunter comments.

The herd is managed for satisfaction and lacks significant data on herd size and population numbers. This being said, using the best estimates, this license issuance will harvest an estimated 23% of adult males in 2026.

Management Objective Review

The Hazelton herd is managed for hunter and landowner satisfaction (60% or above), and private land strategies. The next herd unit objective review is scheduled for 2028.

Table 1. PR320 Harvest statistics 2016-2025.

Year	Res	NRes	Tot	Hntrs	Act	Hntr	Days
	Htrs	Htrs	Harv		Lic	Days	to
							Harv
2016	252	1,086	1,071	80%	72%	5,064	4.7
2017	243	1,119	1,262	93%	82%	4,861	3.9
2018	211	1,153	1,205	88%	81%	5,291	4.4
2019	174	1,171	1,094	81%	73%	4,996	4.6
2020	172	1,186	1,011	74%	68%	5,695	5.6
2021	192	1,200	948	68%	63%	5,883	6.2
2022	192	854	744	71%	64%	4,665	6.3
2023	184	610	657	83%	58%	4,313	6.6
2024	260	519	545	70%	55%	4,252	7.8
2025	310	334	423	66%	59%	3,261	7.7

Population Modeling

Using Integrated Population modeling, a bio-year 2025 postseason population estimate of 3,700 (CL = 3,100-4,400) pronghorn was generated and showed a stable population trend. This model used recreation days as the effort variable. This model was truncated to start in 2015. This abbreviated examination eliminates earlier estimates that may have been exaggerated, and focuses on the period following large scale events that likely impacted population numbers. Managers realize that using such an abbreviated period has associated risks as well. The model had an Rhat value of 1.18.

Landowner Survey

The annual landowner survey had twenty-three (n=22) survey returns. Landowner satisfaction was acceptable. Most landowners (59%), felt that pronghorn were at desired levels, and 32% felt numbers were lower than desired. This input, along with hunter metrics, hunter comments, and hunter interactions in the field led to unchanged seasons in 2026.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Pronghorn
 HERD: PR321 - LEITER
 HUNT AREAS: 10, 15-16

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

PREPARED BY: ERIC MAICHAK

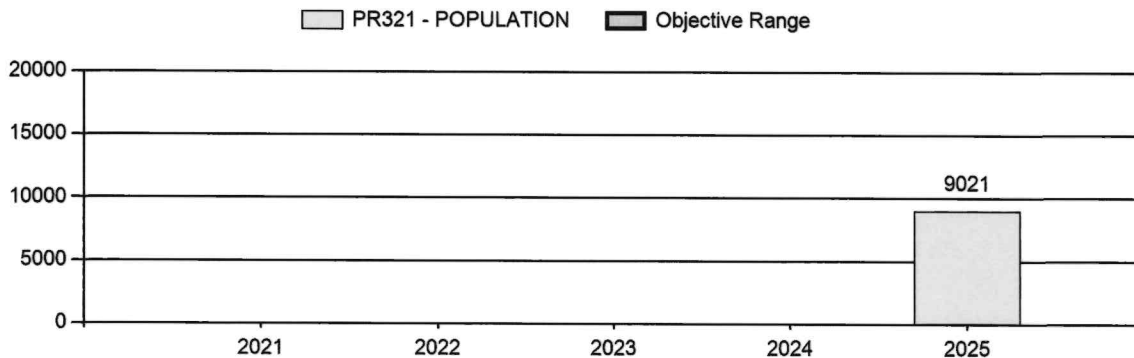
	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	0	9,021	9,521
Harvest:	1,001	624	625
Hunters:	1,407	775	775
Hunter Success:	71%	81%	81 %
Active Licenses:	1,539	878	875
Active License Success:	65%	71%	71 %
Recreation Days:	5,301	3,196	3,200
Days Per Animal:	5.3	5.1	5.1
Males per 100 Females	39	29	
Juveniles per 100 Females	55	60	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) : 13000 (10400 - 15600)
 Management Strategy: Private Land
 Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -30.6%
 Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 1
 Model Date: 02/06/2026

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

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	4%	4%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	21%	18%
Proposed change in post-season population:	4%	6%

Population Size - Postseason



2020 - 2025 Preseason Classification Summary
for Pronghorn Herd PR321 - LEITER

Year	Pre Pop	MALES			FEMALES	JUVENILES			Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	Adult	Total	Total	Total	Tot Cls	Obj	Ylng	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
2020	0	91	168	259	631	369	1,259	1,530	14	27	41	± 0	58	± 0	41
2021	0	46	121	167	459	287	913	0	10	26	36	± 0	63	± 0	46
2022	0	77	126	203	405	241	849	0	19	31	50	± 0	60	± 0	40
2023	0	66	137	203	531	259	993	0	12	26	38	± 0	49	± 0	35
2024	0	45	114	159	518	252	929	0	9	22	31	± 0	49	± 0	37
2025	10,254	47	102	149	510	308	967	0	9	20	29	± 4	60	± 7	47

**2026 HUNTING SEASONS
LEITER PRONGHORN (PR321)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
10	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14	150	Any antelope
10	6	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	150	Doe or fawn
15	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14	350	Any antelope
15	6	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	150	Doe or fawn
16	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14	200	Any antelope
16	6	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	50	Doe or fawn

2025 Hunter Satisfaction Estimate: 72% Satisfied; 20% Neutral; 8% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

This herd unit is predominantly private land, with limited accessible public lands supporting pronghorn. Hunting season strategies are informed by classification ratios, population model, adult buck harvest estimates, survey responses, and comments from landowners and hunters. Weather, disease, and habitat data are considered as available.

We observed 967 pronghorn during classifications in August, similar to totals observed per year since 2021. We observed 29 bucks:100 does, and 60 fawns:100 does. Compared to five-year averages, the buck ratio is down from 39 bucks:100 does, while fawn ratio is up from 57 fawns:100 does. Herd productivity and buck ratios are suppressed with fawn ratios less than 66:100.

Among hunter comments (n=85), 56% were negative, mostly regarding access issues, crowding with deer hunters, and lower populations than prior years. Positive comments (32%) suggest improvement in population size, while remaining comments (12%) were neutral. Satisfaction was 72%, down from 79% in 2024. Days hunted per animal harvested for Type 1 licenses was 4.5 compared to 4.4 in 2024. Ninety-one percent of animals harvested on Type 1 licenses were bucks. Days hunted per animal harvested for Type 6 licenses was 6.6 compared to 5.6 in 2024. Harvest success for active Type 1 licenses exceeded 70% for all hunt areas. Harvest success of Type 6 licenses exceeded 70% in Hunt Areas 10 and 16, yet was 53% in Hunt Area 15.

The 2025-26 annual landowner survey results suggest landowners felt pronghorn numbers were at (n=17; 52%), below (n=12; 36%), or above (n=4; 12%) preferred levels, similar to results from 2024-25. Of respondents, those from Area 15 indicated populations near preferred levels

(60%) more than landowners from Areas 10 (43%) or 16 (45%). Relative to 2025, landowners felt 2026 seasons should be set with similar (n=20; 61%), less (n=8, 24%), or more (n=5; 15%) opportunities.

Summer of 2025 saw good precipitation particularly from the northwest to southeast of the herd unit, a common pattern for this area. The winter of 2024-25 was open and mild.

Since the early 1980s, observed fawn ratios have been lowest around 1994, 2010, and 2023, with peaks around 2000 and 2015. These oscillations suggest response to regional growing season precipitation patterns and effects on vegetation and herd productivity. Buck ratios have followed similar trends, yet with a continued decline in Hunt Area 10 rather than just oscillations observed in Hunt Areas 15 and 16. Managers will continue to closely monitor Hunt Area 10 and adjust seasons as needed.

Recent upward trend in observed fawn ratios should improve herd productivity. Given relatively stable hunter and landowner satisfaction, and to help improve buck ratios by maintaining similar harvest as this herd grows, we made no changes to this season.

Management Objective Review

Herd unit objective is a post-season population objective of 13,000 pronghorn. The management strategy is Private Land Recreational. The next scheduled review will be 2030.

Population Modeling

The 2025 integrated population model (IPM) adjusted with line-transect (LT) survey information estimated a postseason population of 9,021 pronghorn (95% CI = 8,140-9,905). The estimated 2026 postseason population was 9,521. Estimated harvest of bucks >1 year old relative to total population based on the IPM was 0.21 in 2025, up from 2024 (0.18), with a three-year average of 0.21, and predicted at 0.18 in 2026. The model performed well (Rhat proportion = 0.95) with date range 2006-2027; effort = days/harvest, licenses; reproduction = constant; adult and juvenile survival = time varying; burnin = 50,000; iterations = 30,500; and thinning rate = 1.

Line Transect Survey

The next scheduled LT survey is 2027.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Pronghorn

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

HERD: PR339 - NORTH BLACK HILLS

HUNT AREAS: 1-3, 18-19

PREPARED BY: ERIKA
PECKHAM

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	10,200	12,600	12,850
Harvest:	1,020	1,057	1,150
Hunters:	1,126	1,264	86 %
Hunter Success:	91%	84%	1,250
Active Licenses:	1,267	1,366	79 %
Active License Success:	81%	77%	4,200
Recreation Days:	3,921	4,268	4.2
Days Per Animal:	3.8	4.0	
Males per 100 Females	39	40	
Juveniles per 100 Females	66	67	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) : 17000 (13600 - 20400)

Management Strategy: Recreational

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -25.9%

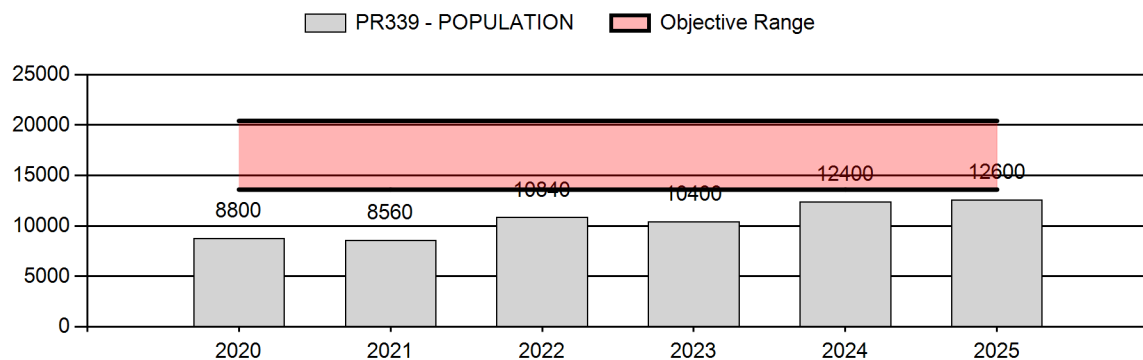
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 1

Model Date: 2/24/2026

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

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	4%	1%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	31%	28%
Proposed change in post-season population:	10%	1.02%

Population Size - Postseason



**2026 HUNTING SEASONS
NORTH BLACK HILLS PRONGHORN (PR339)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
1	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov.20	400	Any antelope
1	6	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov.20	25	Doe or fawn
2	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov.20	125	Any antelope
3	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov.20	225	Any antelope
3	6	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov.20	25	Doe or fawn
18	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct.20	250	Any antelope
18	6	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct.20	25	Doe or fawn
18	7	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct.20	25	Doe or fawn valid on private land
19	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct.20	250	Any antelope
19	7	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct.20	50	Doe or fawn valid on private land

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 80% Satisfied, 13% Neutral, 7% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

The North Black Hills Herd Unit is predominantly private land access with the exception of Hunt Area 18, and to some degree, Hunt Area 1. One challenge with managing this herd unit was that historically there has been very little collar data on pronghorn in this corner of the state. Managers had noticed differences between these hunt areas as far as fawn production and overall population trends. It seemed likely that these hunt areas were not truly all one population, but were likely constrained by topographical features that correspond to the Black Hills area. With the inception of a collaring project in 2022, there will be a re-analysis of this herd unit to better define distinct populations, if they exist. This project is on-going and further details will be provided in subsequent reports.

The 2025 season structure allowed for more opportunity in some of the hunt areas that were able to support additional harvest. This herd has trended slightly upward the last five years after a marked decline. This decline was explained by relatively harsh winters, drought conditions and epizootic hemorrhagic disease outbreak that were experienced the past few years.

Type 1 licenses were increased in Hunt Areas 1 and 18 in 2025. Harvest success in these areas were 90% and 79%, respectively. Days per harvest decreased slightly in Hunt Area 1 and increased in Hunt Area 18. In recent years, Hunt Area 2 has had lower harvest success than the other areas in this herd unit, and 2025 was no exception at 67%. Harvest success for Area 3 increased slightly from 81% to 83% on the Type 1 licenses, while Area 19 success decreased from 81% to 69% on the Type 1 licenses.

The 2026 license issuance was designed to continue to provide buck hunting opportunity, while minimizing doe harvest to allow for a predicted slight increase in population. Type 1 licenses in Hunt Area 2 were reduced. Success last year was only 67% compared to averaging 76% the prior three years and days to harvest increased to five days the last four years compared to around three days prior to that. Hunt Area 1, Type 6 and Hunt Area 19, Type 7 licenses were decreased to allow for growth in these hunt areas. With current licenses issuance it was estimated that 28% of the bucks will be harvested, which was right in line with the three-year average of 30%.

Management Objective Review

The management objective was internally reviewed in 2025. The next herd unit review will be in 2030.

Population Modeling

The 2025 postseason estimate from the IPM was 12,620 (11,382-13,947) pronghorn and was considered a good model with convergence likely. Both field observations and the model indicate that this herd was in a slow but upward trend, although still below the objective of 17,000 pronghorn.

In 2025 a line transect was conducted. The estimate was 17,359 (14,917-20,021) with a SE of 1283. This independent estimate was substantially higher than the IPM estimate, but did track with the overall trend when compared to past line transect surveys. Although this estimate was included in the IPM, the model did not weight this independent estimate very greatly and it was not allowed to heavily influence the estimate derived in the IPM.

In looking at the ratios pertaining to this herd, the observed fawn ratios were fairly low in 2025, running from 64%-71% depending on the hunt area and averaging 67:100 across the herd unit. When looking at the last 10 years of observed fawn ratios for this herd, they were consistently in the 60-70:100. This was close to the preceding five-year average of 66:100. Fawn ratios in this range were enough to support a slowly increasing population, which the model and field observations supported. There was a high variability in observed buck ratios in each hunt area with ratios ranging from 22-61:100. The herd-wide observed buck ratio in 2025 was 40:100, which was close to the five- year average of 39:100. The 2026 harvest was predicted to result in a slight increase in the post-season population. The 2026 season would result in 28% of the bucks being harvested.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Pronghorn

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

HERD: PR351 - GILLETTE

HUNT AREAS: 17

PREPARED BY: ERIKA
PECKHAM

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	6,152	5,200	5,700
Harvest:	554	357	319
Hunters:	731	474	450
Hunter Success:	76%	75%	71 %
Active Licenses:	758	490	475
Active License Success:	73%	73%	67 %
Recreation Days:	2,579	2,539	2,500
Days Per Animal:	4.7	7.1	7.8
Males per 100 Females	37	50	
Juveniles per 100 Females	50	38	

Population Objective (± 20%) : 11000 (8800 - 13200)

Management Strategy: Recreational

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -52.7%

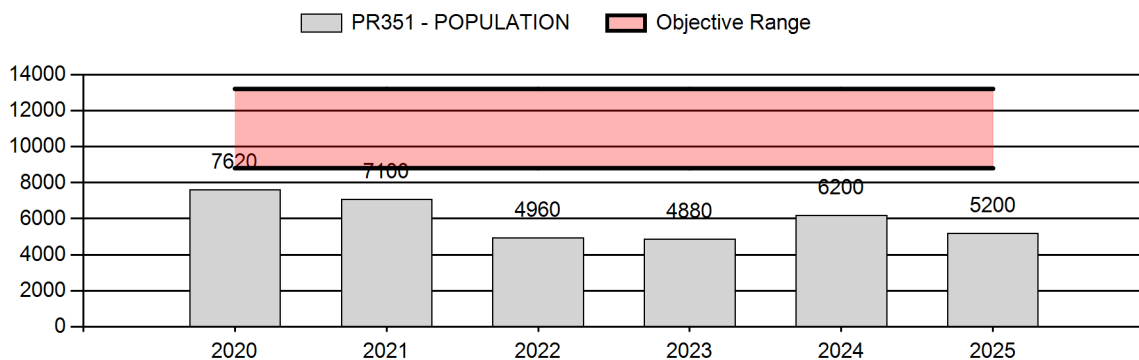
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 4

Model Date: 2/18/2026

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

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	1%	0%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	31%	26%
Proposed change in post-season population:	5%	8%

Population Size - Postseason



**2026 HUNTING SEASONS
GILLETTE PRONGHORN (PR351)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
17	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 20	500	Any antelope

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 77% Satisfied, 17% Neutral, 6% Dissatisfied

Hunting Season Evaluation

Overall harvest success dropped slightly from 78% success to 73% success. However, more notably, days per harvest increased from 5.5 to 7 days, which is substantially above the statewide average of 4 days. Although there were some negative comments from hunters, the overall satisfaction was 77%. Since 2017, the harvest success has decreased, even with reduction of licenses. Although the harvest success in 2025 was only slightly down from 2024, the days per harvest was reported as 7.1 days which is the highest on record for this herd. Declining hunter success and increased days per harvest all indicate that this herd likely continued to decline.

The model indicated that this herd entered a decline in 2016. This decline coincided with unfavorable climatic conditions, disease outbreak and 85,000 acres of wildfire in 2025. Since 2016 the model indicates that population was on a downward trend which corroborates field observations. Favorable rangeland conditions, characterized by good forage production and residual cover, occurred during the 2025 growing season. The winter of 2025-2026 was uncharacteristically mild, and saw no significant weather events.

The 2026 license issuance was designed to address a population that is below the acceptable objective range. It is estimated that the percentage of buck harvest over the preceding three-year period is 27% of the total bucks with a proposed 26% of the mature bucks being harvested. Although doe harvest was minimal on the Type 6 licenses, due to the herd being this far below objective, the removal of these licenses was warranted. With this license issuance, the herd was predicted to be 48% below objective.

Management Objective Review

This herd is managed by a post-season population objective of 11,000 and a recreational management strategy. The next herd unit management review will be in 2030.

Population Modeling

The 2026 postseason population estimate for this herd unit is approximately 5,700 pronghorn using the PopR IPM (CL=5,220-7,234). The model is considered good with convergence likely and a proportion of 1.

Viewing the observed fawn ratios also illustrates why this herd is likely modeling in such a downward trajectory. With the exception of 2023 (observed fawn ratio of 74:100), since 2016 fawn ratios have been in the 40's to 50's, which does not support an increase in population. In 2025, the observed fawn ratio was 38:100 which was the lowest observed fawn ratio in the last 15 years. Looking closer at data for this herd unit, all factors considered, it was not surprising that the observed fawn ratios in this herd have been low during the preceding five-year period, averaging only 54:100. As this is a predominantly private lands herd with limited access, buck ratios are fairly high with the preceding 5-year average of 39 bucks per 100 does and with 2025 observations indicating a ratio of 50:100.

With the 2026 license issuance, it was predicted that there will be an 8% increase in the population from 2025 and that the herd would be 48% below objective.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Pronghorn

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

HERD: PR352 - MIDDLE FORK

HUNT AREAS: 21

PREPARED BY: ZACH
TURNBULL

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	3,605	3,440	3,300
Harvest:	344	213	213
Hunters:	488	363	363
Hunter Success:	70%	59%	59%
Active Licenses:	539	387	387
Active License Success:	64%	55%	55%
Recreation Days:	1,926	1,217	1,217
Days Per Animal:	5.6	5.7	5.7
Males per 100 Females	48	40	
Juveniles per 100 Females	71	105	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) : 6000 (4800 - 7200)

Management Strategy: Recreational

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -42.7%

Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 8

Model Date: 2/2/2026

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

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females $\diamond$ 1 year old:	9%	2%
Males $\diamond$ 1 year old:	25%	22%
Proposed change in post-season population:	1.01%	.96%

2021 - 2025 Preseason Classification Summary															
for Pronghorn Herd PR352 - MIDDLE FORK															
Year	Pre Pop	MALES			FEMALES	JUVENILES			Males to 100 Fem ales				Young to		
		Ylg	Adult	Total			Tot	Cls					100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
2021	4,373	17	31	48	123	77	248	1,534	14	25	39	± 11	63	± 15	45
2022	3,650	24	33	57	138	114	309	0	17	24	41	± 10	83	± 16	58
2023	3,800	25	30	55	153	82	290	0	16	20	36	± 9	54	± 12	39
2024	4,300	35	73	108	142	128	378	0	25	51	76	± 15	90	± 17	51
2025	3,900	30	29	59	148	155	362	0	20	20	40	± 10	105	± 19	75

2026 Hunting Seasons
Middle Fork Pronghorn (PR352)

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
21	1	Aug. 15	Oct. 14	Oct. 15	Oct. 31	400	Any antelope
21	6	Aug. 15	Oct. 14	Oct. 15	Oct. 31	50	Doe or fawn

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 47% Satisfied, 25% Neutral, 28% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

The current season structure is intended to bring the population back to objective (6,000) and increase hunter satisfaction, while minimizing damage and limiting crowding on public lands. Some hunter crowding on public lands is expected due to the limited amount available for access. Starting in 2020, harvest statistics began to deteriorate. To address these concerns and a downward trending population, licenses were reduced in 2022. Harvest metrics and satisfaction have fluctuated greatly since. (Table 1).

Type 6 licenses were reduced slightly in 2024 due to continued population concerns, and stagnant hunter harvest metrics. This reduction was intended to bring the population back to objective while still providing limited recreational opportunity and the ability to address damage concerns. With this license issuance, 22% of the mature bucks are predicted to be harvested in 2026.

Management Objective Review

The herd is managed as a recreational herd with an objective of 6,000 pronghorn. The herd is scheduled for population objective review in 2028.

Line Transect Survey

Line transects estimates for the herd have varied greatly. We conducted line transect (LT) surveys most recently in 2021 and 2024. Surveys were completed using a Husky Aviat supplied by Flightline LFS, Inc and one observer. Using a new pooled hierarchical model to analyze results the survey produced an estimate of 3,560 pronghorn. Unlike many traditional models, the pooled model uses other similar line transect flights to inform the model. This estimate seems to reasonably represent the population and field observations. Traditional single herd analysis produced an estimate of 7,100.

Table 1. PR 352 Harvest Summary 2016-2025.

Year	Res	NRes	Total	Hntrs	Act	Hntr	Days
	Htrs	Htrs	Htrs		Lic	Days	to
							Harv
2016	62	532	594	85%	78%	1,988	3.9
2017	115	517	632	92%	83%	1,900	3.3
2018	97	649	746	95%	85%	2,600	3.7
2019	123	648	771	75%	68%	2,293	4
2020	117	614	731	67%	62%	2,763	5.6
2021	146	471	617	62%	56%	2,807	7.4
2022	155	250	405	73%	69%	1,359	4.6
2023	175	136	311	91%	72%	1,431	5.1
2024	284	94	378	71%	67%	1,268	4.7
2025	276	87	363	59%	55%	1,217	5.7

Population Modeling

The bio-year 2025 postseason population estimate for this herd unit from the PopR integrated population models (IPM) was approximately 3,400 (CL = 3,000-3,900) pronghorn which suggests the population was below objective (6,000). The IPM model had an Rhat max of 1.16 and tracked population input well. Recreation days was used as the model variable as it produced the lowest Rhat and tracked field observations best.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Pronghorn

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

HERD: PR355 - BECKTON

HUNT AREAS: 109

PREPARED BY: ERIC MAICHAK

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	571	2,584	2,739
Harvest:	266	145	178
Hunters:	388	280	250
Hunter Success:	69%	52%	71 %
Active Licenses:	448	319	250
Active License Success:	59%	45%	71 %
Recreation Days:	1,748	1,289	1,200
Days Per Animal:	6.6	8.9	6.7
Males per 100 Females	31	19	
Juveniles per 100 Females	56	57	

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

Management Strategy: Private Land

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: 72%

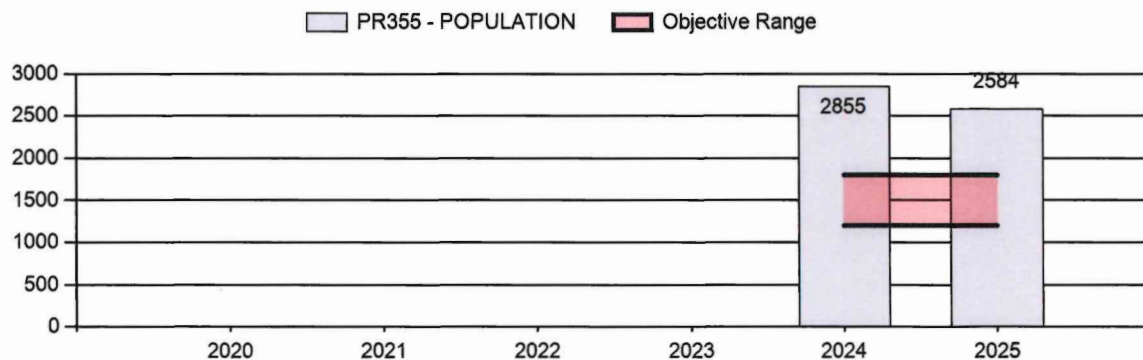
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 3

Model Date: 03/03/2026

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%	5%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	17%	18%
Proposed change in post-season population:	1%	3%

Population Size - Postseason



2020 - 2025 Preseason Classification Summary
for Pronghorn Herd PR355 - BECKTON

Year	Pre Pop	MALES			FEMALES	JUVENILES			Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Adul			Total	Total	Cls	Obj	Conf				100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
		Ylg	t	Total					Ylng	Adult	Total	Int			
2020	0	16	19	35	113	72	220	1,027	14	17	31	± 0	64	± 0	49
2021	0	23	21	44	146	54	244	0	16	14	30	± 0	37	± 0	28
2022	0	25	25	50	113	90	253	0	22	22	44	± 0	80	± 0	55
2023	0	13	16	29	103	31	163	0	13	16	28	± 0	30	± 0	23
2024	3,083	11	18	29	123	89	241	0	9	15	24	± 8	72	± 16	59
2025	2,907	13	25	38	200	114	352	0	6	12	19	± 5	57	± 10	48

**2026 HUNTING SEASONS
BECKTON PRONGHORN (PR 355)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
109	1	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov. 30	200	Any antelope
109	6	Aug. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov. 30	150	Doe or fawn

2025 Hunter Satisfaction Estimate: 55% Satisfied; 24% Neutral; 28% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

This herd unit is predominantly private land, with limited public land access to areas that support pronghorn. Hunting season strategies are informed by survey responses, comments from landowners and hunters, classification ratios, population modeling, and harvest estimates. Weather, disease, and habitat data are incorporated as available.

The 2025-26 annual landowner survey results tended toward populations at to below preferred levels with similar harvest opportunities. Landowners felt pronghorn numbers were near (n=8; 47%), below (n=7; 41%), or above (n=2; 12%) preferred levels. Landowners felt seasons should be set for similar (n=11; 65%), less (n=4; 24%), or more (n=2; 12%) opportunities.

Hunter satisfaction (very satisfied + satisfied) was 55%, up slightly from 49% in 2024, but lower than the previous five-year average of 67%. Hunter satisfaction in this herd has declined since 2009. Total harvest (n=145) improved slightly from 2024 (n=135), yet well below the previous 5-year average (n=268). Total harvest of adult males on Type 1 licenses (n=73) was up slightly from 2024 (n=64), yet also below the previous 5-year average (n=132). Effort was similar for Type 1 licenses as days hunted per animal harvested was 9.8 in 2025 and 9.6 in 2024. Eighty-two percent of animals harvested on Type 1 licenses were bucks. Effort decreased for Type 6 licenses as days hunted per animal harvested was 7.5 in 2025 versus 13.2 in 2024. Success decreased for Type 1 (51% 2024; 43% 2025) yet increased for Type 6 licenses (42% 2024; 50% 2025). Hunter comments (n=31) generally reflected frustration with low numbers of pronghorn and difficult access.

We observed 352 pronghorn during preseason August classification surveys. We observed 19 bucks:100 does, lower than the previous 5-year average of 31 bucks:100 does, and lowest since 1990. Observed buck ratios peaked around 55:100 in the mid-2000s and have declined since. We observed 57 fawns:100 does, identical to the previous 5-year average of 57 fawns:100 does. Fawn ratios in this herd have declined since the 1990s, yet with improvement since 2015. Despite the relatively low ratio of bucks:does, our observed fawn ratio suggests an adequate number of bucks to breed and help maintain this population. Observed buck and fawn ratios in this herd are extremely variable among count blocks and years, with no association between number of pronghorn observed and ratio. Variability in observed ratios, particularly since the

early 2000s when surveys were standardized among ground count blocks, may result from surveys conducted primarily from public roads and visibility of available pronghorn.

This was the second season that the regular start date has occurred on October 1 rather than September 15. Similar to years when the regular season started September 15, 75% of harvest occurred during the first three to four weeks of the season. Thus, pronghorn hunters were again compressed onto limited public lands and increased competition during the first 14 days of the season. Overlap with deer hunters from October 15 to 31 further increased crowding. The end result was that many pronghorn stayed on or rarely left private lands, were unavailable for harvest, and maintained harvest lower than prior to change of the start date.

Summer of 2025 saw good moisture through late July. The 2025-26 winter was mild with limited snow cover.

To reduce hunter crowding on public lands and improve harvest success and hunter satisfaction, we reduced Type 1 licenses from 250 to 200.

Management Objective Review

The herd unit objective is a postseason population objective of 1,500. The management strategy is Private Land Recreational. The next scheduled review will be 2029.

Population Modeling

The 2025 postseason integrated population model (IPM) adjusted with input from the 2024 line-transect (LT) survey estimated 2,584 pronghorn (95% CI = 2,120-3,088). The 2026 postseason population estimate was 2,667. Estimated harvest of bucks >1 year old relative to total population based on the IPM was 0.17 in 2025, up from 2024 (0.16), with a 3-year average of 0.17, and predicted at 0.18 in 2026. This model performed well (R^2 proportion = 1) with date range 2013-2027; reproduction = constant; adult and juvenile survival = time varying; effort = recreation days, licenses; burnin = 50,000; iterations = 30,500; and thinning rate = 1.

Several iterations of IPM suggest harvest of adult males, with harvest of females similar to 2025, will need to increase to about 110 animals in 2026 to reach 20% of the preseason population estimate. Similar to 2025, we anticipate a slight increase in buck harvest in 2026 over 2025. However, harvesting enough bucks to meet 20% of the preseason population will be challenging relative to the dominance of private land acreage in this herd unit.

Given that our population estimate (2,580) exceeds the objective (1,500; set prior to conducting an LT survey), we will reevaluate the management objective in light of future LT survey results and population modeling.

Line Transect Survey

The next scheduled LT survey is 2026.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Mule Deer

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

HERD: MD319 - POWDER RIVER

HUNT AREAS: 17-18, 23, 26

PREPARED BY: ERIKA
PECKHAM

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	26,580	19,500	23,500
Harvest:	2,005	1,327	1,330
Hunters:	3,618	2,900	2,900
Hunter Success:	55%	46%	46 %
Active Licenses:	3,725	2,902	2,900
Active License Success:	54%	46%	46 %
Recreation Days:	15,519	13,824	13,900
Days Per Animal:	7.7	10.4	10.5
Males per 100 Females	42	45	
Juveniles per 100 Females	58	59	

Population Objective (± 20%) : 30000 (24000 - 36000)

Management Strategy: Private Land

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -35%

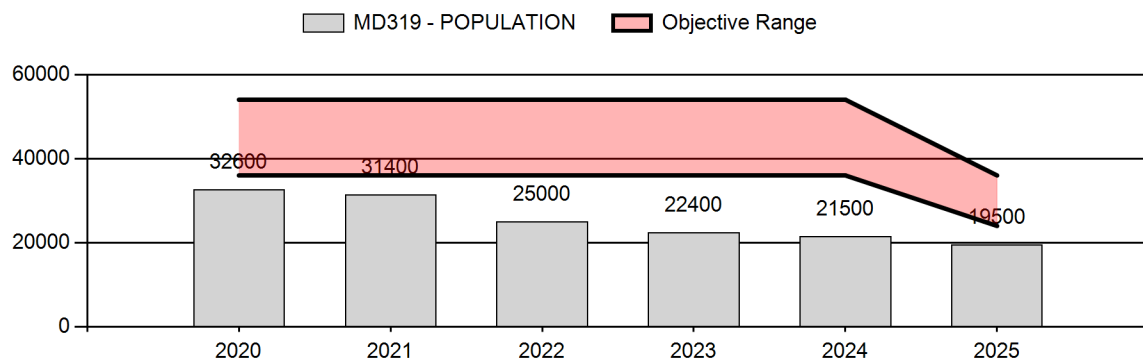
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend: 10

Model Date: 2/25/2026

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

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	2%	0%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	23%	21%
Proposed change in post-season population:	-7%	20%

Population Size - Postseason



**2026 HUNTING SEASONS
POWDER RIVER MULE DEER HERD (MD319)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
17	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
18	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
23	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
23	7			Sep. 1	Dec. 15	25	Doe or fawn valid on private land
26	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer

2026 Region C nonresident quota: 1,800

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

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

All hunt areas within this herd unit are general season areas. Habitats in Hunt Areas 23 and 26 differ from Hunt Areas 17 and 18, with larger agricultural fields and wider riparian bottoms in the former. Fawn ratios in Hunt Areas 23 and 26 are consistently higher than Areas 17 and 18, resulting in slightly different management strategies.

As this herd unit is a general license unit, the management tools are doe/fawn license, non-resident regional quota and season length. Over the last three years, all variables have been adjusted to provide for a more conservative harvest. In Hunt Area 23, Type 7 licenses were reduced in 2025 to 25 with an estimated harvest of 4 doe mule deer. These licenses were available to address damage concerns. With this reduction, removal of Type 7 licenses in Hunt Area 26, reduction of the Region C non-resident quota and shortening of season length in Hunt Areas 17 and 18 over the last few years, the overall harvest success of active hunters dropped to 46%, down from 54% in 2024. Estimated days per harvest increased from 8.1 in 2024 to 10.1 in 2025. Harvest estimates show that success was the lowest in the last 5 years for the 2025 season. (Table 1).

Portions of this area experienced large-scale wildfires, with over an estimated 100,000 acres burned in this herd unit in 2024. Much of these fires occurred in suitable mule deer habitat. Many mule deer were at least temporarily displaced, and there are portions of these burned areas in which all residual vegetation was lost. Although grasses and forbs will come back in the next growing season with appropriate moisture, in areas of sagebrush it will be many years before there is noticeable recovery and the effects of the fires will be long-lasting.

The 2026 license issuance remained the same as the previous year. With next to no doe/fawn harvest, it is estimated that 20% of the mature bucks will be harvested.

Table 1. Harvest Summary

2021 - 2025 Harvest Summary																		
for Mule Deer Herd MD319 - POWDER RIVER																		
Year	HUNTERS					HARVEST									SUCCESS			
	Res Htrs	NRes Htrs	% NRes	Total Htrs	Act Lic	Ylg Male	Adult Male	Total Male	% Male	Fem	% Fem	Juv	% Juv	Tot Harv	Hntrs	Act Lic	Hntr Days	Days to Harv
2021	1,819	2,105	54%	3,924	4,039	0	1,810	1,810	77%	519	22%	13	1%	2,342	60%	58%	17,365	7.4
2022	1,815	1,807	50%	3,622	3,754	0	1,446	1,446	79%	371	20%	19	1%	1,836	51%	49%	16,750	9.1
2023	1,659	1,430	46%	3,089	3,157	0	1,433	1,433	93%	91	6%	17	1%	1,541	50%	49%	12,941	8.4
2024	1,695	1,408	45%	3,103	3,119	0	1,665	1,665	99%	21	1%	0	0%	1,686	54%	54%	13,666	8.1
2025	1,574	1,326	46%	2,900	2,902	0	1,316	1,316	99%	11	1%	0	0%	1,327	46%	46%	13,824	10.4

This herd has been well below objective for many years due to various factors, including land use change, large scale wildfires, unfavorable climatic conditions and disease. Since 2020, harvest success has steadily declined (Table 1) corresponding to the decline in the population.

The population is predicted to increase by 20% but still below objective with current license issuance.

Management Objective Review: The objective and management strategy were reviewed and updated in 2025. The next evaluation will occur in 2030.

CWD: This herd was last targeted in 2024. From 2021-2025, CWD prevalence from hunter-harvested mule deer was 27% (n=441) in adult males and 23% (n=13) in adult females.

Table 2. CWD prevalence from hunter harvested mule deer in the Powder River Mule Deer Herd 2020-2024.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – Hunter Harvest Only			Percent of Adult Harvested Males Sampled
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	
2021	22% (n=144)	0% (n=2)	6% (n=18)	8%
2022	16% (n=50)	0% (n=0)	0% (n=7)	3%
2023	28% (n=50)	25% (n=4)	17% (n=6)	3%
2024	29% (n=136)	0% (n=4)	33% (n=3)	8%
2025	39% (n=61)	67%(n=3)	50% (n=2)	5%
2021-2025	27% (n=441)	23% (n=13)	36% (n=11)	6%

We have not specifically structured hunting seasons to address CWD in this herd. However, Type 7 licenses in Area 23 with liberalized white-tail deer seasons and licenses throughout the herd unit may potentially help address CWD by reducing deer densities and environmental contamination with prions in hotspots.

Population Modeling: The 2026 postseason population estimate for this herd unit from the PopR IPM was around 23,500 (20,775-27,061). This model was considered a fair model because there was very little external data to bolster the model. Even using the same variables, the model tended to change from year to year. Running it in various scenarios never allows for convergence. Observed fawn ratios in 2025 for all hunt areas were slightly improved from 2024 for most of the hunt areas, with an overall observed ratio of 59:100 (Table 2). This is up slightly from 2024 and close to the preceding five-year average of 61:100. A fawn ratio of 59:100 is just under the ratio needed to maintain a population. Observed buck ratios were variable through the hunt areas, running from 20-67 bucks:100 does. The overall observed buck ratio for this herd unit was 59:100. Observed abundance is far above the simulated abundance. This is likely due to limited amount of flight time annually for a composition/abundance survey, resulting in a sample size that is too small to be very accurate.

2021 - 2025 Postseason Classification by Hunt Area																				
for Mule Deer Herd MD319 - POWDER RIVER - Hunt Area ALL																				
Year	Area	% Herd	Males							Females		Juveniles		Total	Class Obj	Males/100 Females			Young/100	
			# Ylg	# 2+ Cls 1	# 2+ Cls 2	# 2+ Cls 3	# 2+ Other	Total Male	% Male	#	% Fem	#	% Juv			Ylg	Adult	Males	Female	Adult
2021	17	0%	39	275	148	5	0	467	25%	998	54%	372	20%	1,837	1,187	4	43	47	37	25
	18	0%	13	40	10	0	0	63	17%	202	56%	98	27%	363	1,187	6	25	31	49	37
	23	0%	68	237	84	1	0	390	23%	817	47%	526	30%	1,733	1,187	8	39	48	64	44
	26	0%	50	90	6	0	0	146	19%	388	51%	224	30%	758	1,187	13	25	38	58	42
2022	17	0%	50	145	62	1	0	258	17%	735	50%	483	33%	1,476	1,155	7	28	35	66	49
	18	0%	4	2	4	0	0	10	8%	80	67%	30	25%	120	1,155	5	8	12	38	33
	23	0%	47	67	43	4	0	161	23%	286	41%	254	36%	701	1,155	16	40	56	89	57
	26	0%	28	41	15	0	0	84	18%	222	49%	149	33%	455	1,155	13	25	38	67	49
2023	17	0%	16	29	30	3	0	78	25%	126	40%	110	35%	314	0	13	49	62	87	54
	18	0%	14	20	2	0	0	36	19%	82	43%	71	38%	189	0	17	27	44	87	60
	23	0%	21	20	35	2	0	78	22%	151	43%	122	35%	351	0	14	38	52	81	53
	26	0%	7	4	3	0	0	14	14%	44	45%	39	40%	97	0	16	16	32	89	67
2024	17	0%	9	17	18	1	0	45	23%	113	59%	35	18%	193	0	8	32	40	31	22
	18	0%	5	9	3	0	0	17	12%	80	56%	46	32%	143	0	6	15	21	58	47
	23	0%	1	6	3	0	0	10	16%	32	52%	19	31%	61	0	3	28	31	59	45
	26	0%	2	11	8	0	0	21	34%	27	44%	13	21%	61	0	7	70	78	48	27
2025	17	0%	0	7	7	1	0	15	12%	75	60%	36	29%	126	0	0	20	20	48	40
	18	0%	7	4	23	2	0	36	18%	102	50%	64	32%	202	0	7	28	35	63	46
	23	0%	5	33	11	0	0	49	29%	78	46%	42	25%	169	0	6	56	63	54	33
	26	0%	5	25	12	0	0	42	28%	63	42%	45	30%	150	0	8	59	67	71	43

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Mule Deer

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

HERD: MD320 - PUMPKIN BUTTES

HUNT AREAS: 19, 29, 31

PREPARED BY: ZACH
TURNBULL

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	5,980	6,100	6,900
Harvest:	434	364	364
Hunters:	881	847	847
Hunter Success:	49%	43%	43%
Active Licenses:	890	847	847
Active License Success:	49%	43%	43%
Recreation Days:	3,731	3,434	3,434
Days Per Animal:	8.6	9.4	9.4
Males per 100 Females	39	48	
Juveniles per 100 Females	54	62	

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

Management Strategy: Private Land

Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective: -32.2%

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

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 $\diamond$ 1 year old:	0%	0%
Males $\diamond$ 1 year old:	18%	22%
Proposed change in post-season population:	10%	16%

2021 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary																	
for Mule Deer Herd MD320 - PUMPKIN BUTTES																	
		MALES					FEMALES	JUVENILE S			Males to 100 Fem ales				Young to		
Year	Post Pop	Ylg	2+	2+	2+	Total	Total	Total	Tot	Cls	Ylng	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
			Cls 1	Cls 2	Cls 3				Cls	Obj							
2021	7,500	34	120	72	4	230	582	246	1,058	0	6	34	40	± 4	42	± 4	30
2022	4,700	17	77	0	0	94	316	184	594	0	5	24	30	± 4	58	± 6	45
2023	4,300	6	14	0	0	20	97	59	176	0	6	14	21	± 6	61	± 13	50
2024	5,300	13	38	3	0	54	117	73	244	0	11	35	46	± 10	62	± 12	43
2025	6,100	11	37	14	1	63	130	81	274	0	8	40	48	± 9	62	± 11	42

2026 Hunting Seasons
Pumpkin Buttes Mule Deer (MD320)

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
19	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14		Antlered mule deer three (3) points or more on either antler or any white-tailed deer
29	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14		Antlered mule deer three (3) points or more on either antler or any white-tailed deer
29	Gen			Dec. 1	Dec. 31		Antlerless white-tailed deer
31	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 10		Antlered mule deer three (3) points or more on either antler or any white-tailed deer

2026 Region C nonresident quota: 1,800

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 23% Satisfied, 19% Neutral, 58% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

The 2025 season saw a similar harvest to the previous five years (n=364), but far below the previous 10-year average (n=520). Fawn ratios (62:100) were slightly higher than the previous five years (~57:100). Composition sampling produced what appears to be exaggerated buck ratios (48:100), likely a result of sample size bias. Stagnant growth likely remained an artifact of drought, disease and ongoing habitat concerns. Epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) was observed and verified for three consecutive years (2020-2022) in the unit and had population level impacts.

Nearly 175,000 acres of mule deer habitat burned in a wildfire in the 2024 summer. A great deal of work was conducted to improve habitat conditions in the burn. Invasive control, sage brush seeding, water improvements and fence modification were all components of this work.

Antler point restrictions (three point or better) were enacted for the 2025 season, and will be evaluated annually. The antler point restriction is not expected to exceed three years and is not viewed as a long term fix for population numbers or composition. This regulation was implemented to provide a break to the younger cohort in the population following the fires and large scale habitat disturbance. While this regulation will not likely produce dramatic increases in bucks or long term populations, it was designed to provide some relief to a young vulnerable portion of the population that has undergone extreme habitat disruption. The public and landowners were very supportive of antler point restriction regulations. It was likely that antler point restrictions had some impact on overall harvest in 2025.

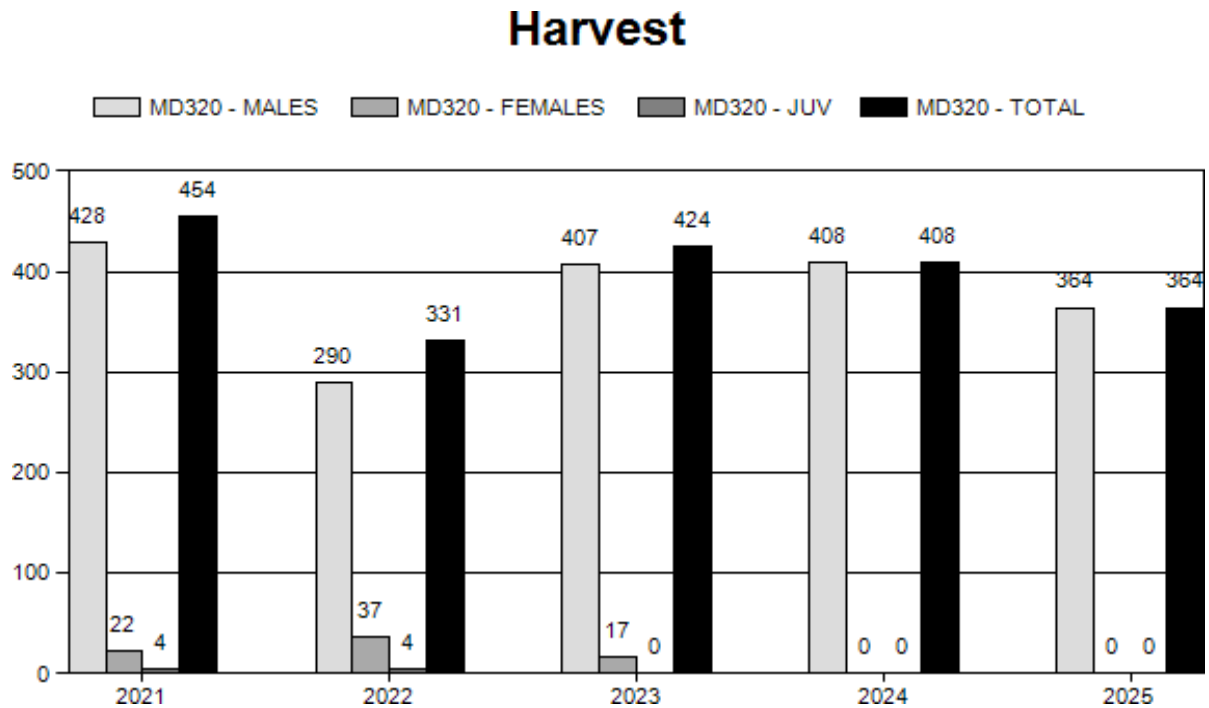


Figure 1. MD 320 harvest 2021-2025.

Management Objective Review

The management objective is a postseason population estimate of 9,000, established in 2023. The next herd unit management review is scheduled for 2028.

Population Modeling

Current models and population metrics show a population that decreased over the last two decades. The bio-year 2025 postseason population estimate for this herd unit from the PopR integrated population models (IPM) was approximately 6,100 (CL = 5,400-7,800) which suggests the population was below objective (9,000). The IPM model had an Rhat max of 1.09. License issuance was used as the model variable as it produced the lowest Rhat and tracked field observations best.

Sightability flights were conducted during the 2024-2025 winter to assess the population in Pumpkin Buttes. A point estimate of 8,300 deer was generated (4,700-11,900).

Chronic Wasting Disease Monitoring and Management

Prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled for CWD in the Pumpkin Buttes herd unit are presented below (Table 1).

Table 1. CWD prevalence in Pumpkin Buttes Mule Deer Herd Unit, 2021-2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) - <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>			Percent of Harvested Adult Males Sampled
	Adult males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	
2021	11% (n = 45)	0% (n = 0)	0% (n = 6)	11%
2022	25% (n = 4)	0% (n = 0)	0% (n = 0)	1%
2023	0% (n = 3)	0% (n = 1)	0% (n = 0)	1%
2024	27% (n = 11)	0% (n = 0)	0% (n = 0)	4%
2025	14% (n = 37)	0% (n = 0)	0% (n = 0)	10%
2021-2025	14% (n = 100; 7-22%)	0% (n = 1)	0% (n = 6)	5%

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Mule Deer

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

HERD: MD321 - NORTH BIGHORN

HUNT AREAS: 24-25, 27-28, 50-53

PREPARED BY: ERIC MAICHAK

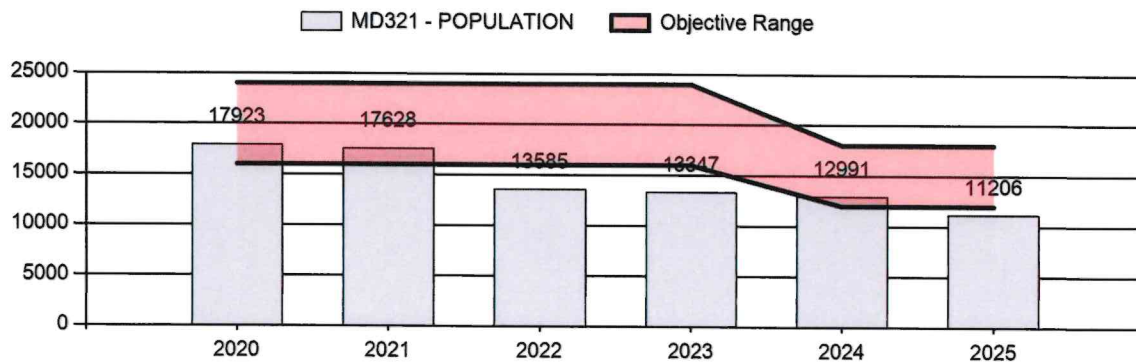
	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	15,095	11,206	13,501
Harvest:	898	875	875
Hunters:	2,649	2,742	2,750
Hunter Success:	34%	32%	32 %
Active Licenses:	2,736	2,794	2,800
Active License Success:	33%	31%	31 %
Recreation Days:	13,673	15,361	15,000
Days Per Animal:	15.2	17.6	17.1
Males per 100 Females	26	25	
Juveniles per 100 Females	66	62	

Population Objective ($\pm 20\%$) :	15000 (12000 - 18000)
Management Strategy:	Recreational
Percent population is above (+) or below (-) objective:	-25.3%
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend:	2
Model Date:	02/10/2026

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

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females ≥ 1 year old:	2%	1%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	25%	26%
Proposed change in post-season population:	6%	20%

Population Size - Postseason



2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary
for Mule Deer Herd MD321 - NORTH BIGHORN

Year	Post Pop	MALES					FEMALES	JUVENILES	Males to 100 Females					Young to			
		2+		2+	2+	Total	Total	Total	Tot	Cls	Conf			100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult	
		Ylg	Cls 1	Cls 2	Cls 3				Cls	Obj	YIng	Adult	Total				Int
2020	17,923	110	133	67	8	318	1,188	806	2,312	1,353	9	18	27	± 2	68	± 4	54
2021	17,628	82	79	41	11	213	875	515	1,603	1,061	9	15	24	± 2	59	± 4	47
2022	13,585	90	68	27	5	190	668	431	1,289	0	13	15	28	± 3	65	± 5	50
2023	13,347	65	71	33	4	173	686	482	1,341	0	9	16	25	± 3	70	± 5	56
2024	12,991	23	24	7	0	54	198	138	390	0	12	16	27	± 5	70	± 10	55
2025	11,206	30	32	8	1	71	283	176	530	0	11	14	25	± 4	62	± 7	50

**2026 HUNTING SEASONS
NORTH BIGHORN MULE DEER HERD (MD321)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
24	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 31		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
24	7			Sep. 1	Dec. 15	25	Doe or fawn valid on private land
25	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 24		Antlered mule deer three (3) points or more on either antler or any white-tailed deer
27	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 31		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
28	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 24		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
50	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 24		Antlered mule deer three (3) points or more on either antler or any white-tailed deer
51	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 24		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
51	Gen			Oct. 25	Oct. 31		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer valid on or within one-half (1/2) mile of irrigated land
51	7	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 15	75	Doe or fawn valid on or within one-half (1/2) mile of irrigated land
52	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 24		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
52	Gen			Oct. 25	Oct. 31		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer valid on or within one-half (1/2) mile of irrigated land
52	7	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 30	25	Doe or fawn valid on or within one-half (1/2) mile of irrigated land
53	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 24		Antlered mule deer three (3) points or more on either antler or any white-tailed deer

Nonresident Region R Quota: 500
Nonresident Region Y Quota: 1,000

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 53% Satisfied; 24% Neutral; 23% Dissatisfied
2025 Postseason Population Objective: 15,000
2026 Postseason Population Estimate: 11,206

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

This herd unit includes public and private lands spanning two administrative regions and the northern Bighorn Mountains. Hunting season strategies are informed by classification ratios, survey responses, comments from landowners and hunters, and modeled population estimates. Weather, disease, habitat, and cause-specific mortality data are considered as available. Hunting seasons have generally been conservative (i.e., 10-15 days) and geared toward antlered mule deer, with limited doe harvest (i.e., primarily private lands), and recent emphasis to address CWD.

In 2025, we observed 62 fawns:100 does during postseason classification surveys. This is below the previous 5-year average (66:100) and the desired 66:100 ratio needed to sustain or grow a population. We observed 25 bucks:100 does, slightly below 2024 (27 bucks:100 does) and the previous 5-year average of 26 bucks:100 does. The observed ratio was within the preferred range of 20-30 bucks:100 does for this herd with a recreational management objective.

Hunter satisfaction at the herd level remained at 53%, similar relative to 2024. Satisfaction was highest in Hunt Areas 51 (66%), 53 (60%), and 27 (57%). Declines in hunter satisfaction generally follow declines in harvest success and increased effort. Hunter comments specific to mule deer from the harvest survey (n=204) were largely negative. Top responses noted populations and buck quality below expectations, and to a lesser extent hunter crowding. Numerous comments from Hunt Areas 25, 50, and 53 applauded implemented antler point restrictions (APR), with some suggesting an increase from three to four point-or-better on a side.

Regarding mule deer, experiences from western states do not favor improved buck ratios or quality following inception of APR (Mule Deer Working Group 2013). Similarly, data from Hunt Area 25 prior to (2017-2019), during (2020-2022), and after (2023-2025) inception of APR show no difference in quality based on average age, maximum antler spread, or points per side. The public continues to perceive that an APR will improve buck numbers and quality, and appeases a vocal segment of hunters. Of 20 landowners in Hunt Area 24, 50% preferred similar seasons to 2025. Given request from some landowners for mule deer doe harvest to address damage concerns, we maintained 25 Type 7 licenses in Hunt Area 24. In Hunt Areas 51 and 52, we changed Type 6 licenses to Type 7 as these licenses have restrictions and do not become valid throughout either hunt area. In Hunt Area 51, we maintained 25 Type 7 (previously Type 6) licenses. We reduced Type 7 (previously Type 6) licenses from 150 to 75 in Hunt Area 51 as damage concerns in this area remain but have diminished.

No changes were implemented in the Region R or Y nonresident quotas.

Management Objective Review

The next objective review will be 2029.

Chronic Wasting Disease Monitoring & Management

Although not prioritized for sampling, in light of recent APR, this herd had additional efforts for sampling in 2025 to gain a head start on the target sample size of 200 adult (≥ 2 years old) male mule deer. Hunter-harvested adult male mule deer from 2021-2025 suggest prevalence was 20% (n=396, Table 1). Population impacts may occur in mule deer when prevalence reaches high levels. CWD-positive mule deer have been documented in all hunt areas of this herd, with hotspots in Hunt Areas 24, 27, 51, and 52.

Table 1. CWD prevalence from hunter harvested mule deer in the North Bighorn Herd Unit, 2021-2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – Hunter Harvest Only			Percent of Harvested Adult Males Sampled
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	
2021	16% (n=109)	15% (n=13)	28% (n=25)	15
2022	20% (n=59)	0% (n=3)	13% (n=23)	7
2023	20% (n=77)	0% (n=4)	11% (n=27)	10
2024	20% (n=56)	0% (n=8)	8% (n=13)	3
2025	24% (n=95)	0% (n=6)	5% (n=21)	12
2021-2025	20% (13-24%, n=396)	6% (n=34)	14% (n=109)	11

In Hunt Areas 51 and 52, we extended seasons in 2022 as part of a broader effort in non-resident Deer Region R to address CWD hotspots within the Bear, Beaver and Shell Creek drainages. These seasons were maintained through 2026. Where we have implemented a 3-point or better APR (HA 25, 50, 53), the APR will be reviewed and lifted in a given hunt area if prevalence of CWD in adult male mule deer meets or exceeds 10% in that hunt area. Removing the APR would occur to increase harvest of bucks, as bucks generally have higher prevalence than does or fawns of the same population. In 2025, CWD-positive bucks were harvested in Hunt Areas 25 (2/15, 13%), 50 (2/22, 9%), and 53 (1/13, 8%), hunt areas with a 3-point or better APR. Given the relatively low sample sizes from each hunt area, we retained the APR in each hunt area for 2026.

Population Modeling

Utilizing a PopR integrated population model, our 2025 postseason population estimate, corrected with sightability, abundance, and survival (2022-2024), was estimated at 11,206 mule deer (95% CI = 9,297-13,387). The 2026 postseason estimate was 13,501. This model performed well (Rhat proportion = 0.99) with date range 2004-2027; effort = licenses; reproduction = constant; adult and juvenile survival = time varying; burnin = 50,000; iterations = 30,500; and thinning rate = 1.

Despite the model performing well, the projected increase in 2026 post-season population (1.2) was likely high given the modest level of survival of collared adults.

Research

As part of the state-wide focal herd project, this is one of five herds targeted to better understand factors influencing mule deer populations, seasonal habitat use, and survival. This is the fourth year of the five year study.

Survival in adult females was 74% (2022), 78% (2023), and 63% (2024). Survival in adult males was 63% (2022 and 2023) and 50% (2024). Causes of mortality, when determined, included malnutrition, CWD (particularly in HA24 and 27), predation, and hunter harvest primarily of adult males. Seasonal travel routes between summer and winter ranges appear similar among animals between this and previous research, with limited migration from the east slope of the herd unit. The 2024 Elk Fire does not appear to have influenced movements of migratory animals, with animals continuing to move through the burn without apparent stopover during migration. In mid-late January 2026, GPS collars were deployed on 32 adult females, 19 adult males, and 100 juveniles.

Literature Cited

Mule Deer Working Group. 2013. Understanding mule deer and antler point restrictions [Fact Sheet #6]. Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Mule Deer

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

HERD: MD322 - UPPER POWDER RIVER

HUNT AREAS: 30, 32-33, 163, 169

PREPARED BY: ZACH
TURNBULL

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Population:	5,936	7,200	8,700
Harvest:	462	465	465
Hunters:	1,086	969	969
Hunter Success:	43%	48%	48%
Active Licenses:	1,086	969	969
Active License Success:	43%	48%	48%
Recreation Days:	5,143	4,608	4,608
Days Per Animal:	11.1	9.9	9.9
Males per 100 Females	25	32	
Juveniles per 100 Females	55	56	

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

Management Strategy: Recreational

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

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

Model Date: 2/19/2026

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

	<u>JCR Year</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Females $\blacklozenge$ 1 year old:	0%	0%
Males $\blacklozenge$ 1 year old:	31%	21%
Proposed change in post-season population:	-3%	22%

2021 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary																	
for Mule Deer Herd MD322 - UPPER POWDER RIVER																	
		MALES					FEMALES	JUVENILES			Males to 100 Fem ales				Young to		
Year	Post Pop	Ylg	2+	2+	2+	Total	Total	Total	Tot	Cls	Ying	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
			Cls 1	Cls 2	Cls 3				Cls	Obj							
2021	6,150	51	78	21	0	150	652	298	1,100	0	8	15	23	± 2	46	± 4	37
2022	4,700	42	101	11	0	154	696	395	1,245	0	6	16	22	± 2	57	± 4	46
2023	5,200	29	59	4	0	92	269	184	545	0	11	23	34	± 5	68	± 8	51
2024	6,400	35	42	0	0	77	227	127	431	0	15	19	34	± 6	56	± 8	42
2025	7,200	23	68	0	0	91	282	157	530	0	8	24	32	± 5	56	± 7	42

2026 Hunting Seasons
Upper Powder River Mule Deer (MD322)

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
30	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 31		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
32	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 21		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
33	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 31		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
163	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 21		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
169	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 21		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer

2026 Region Y nonresident quota: 1,000

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

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

This herd has been below the population objective for more than a decade. The 2025 observed buck/doe ratio (32 bucks: 100 does) and fawn/doe ratio (56 fawns: 100 does) were similar to the past five years. The nonresident Region Y quota was reduced from 1,200 to 1,000 in 2025. Reported harvest in 2025 was slightly lower than 2024 but similar to the last five years overall (Figure 1). As noted by previous research in the herd unit, herd health and disease remain major concerns for managers.

In 2025, nonresident hunters accounted for an estimated 39% of general license hunters in the Upper Powder River herd unit, and harvested an estimated 55% of mule deer bucks.

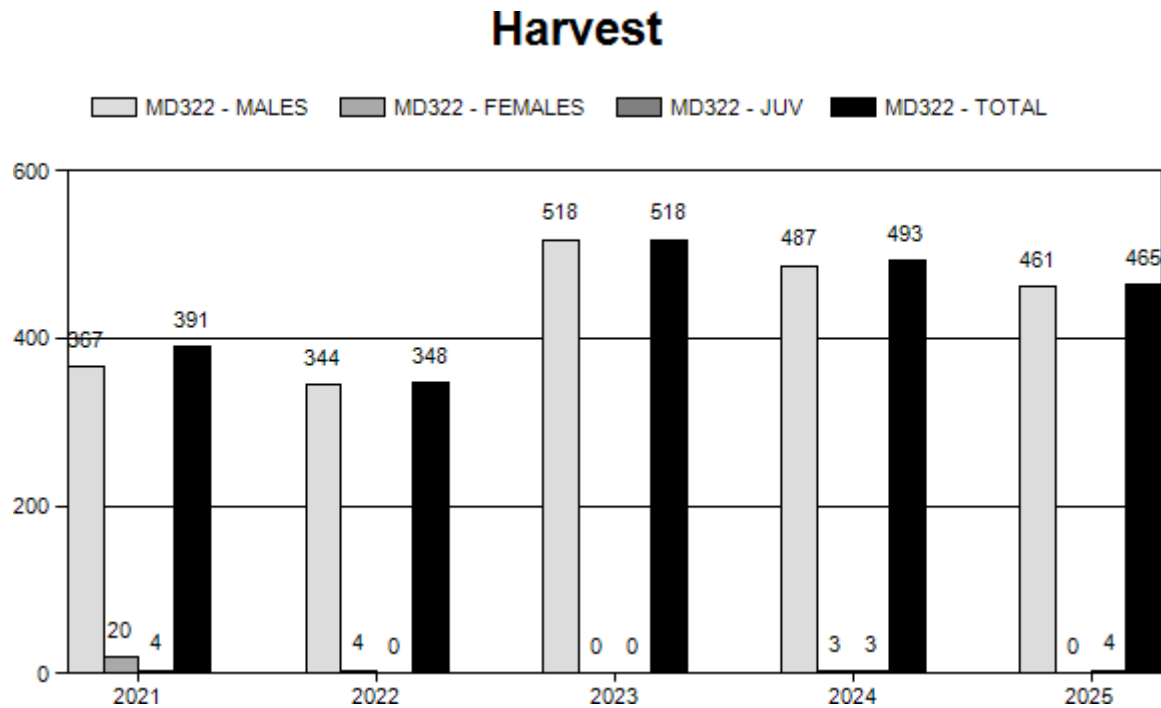


Figure 1. Mule Deer harvest, 2021-2025

Management Objective Review

The management objective is a postseason population of 9,000 animals and herd status of recreational management, established in 2023. The next herd unit management review is scheduled for 2028.

Population Modeling

The bio-year 2025 postseason population estimate for this herd unit from the PopR integrated population models (IPM) was approximately 7,100 mule deer (CL = 6,500-7,900) which suggests the population was well below objective (9,000). The IPM model had an Rhat max of 1.08. Days per harvest and recreation days were used as the model variable (combined) as it produced the lowest Rhat and tracked field observations best.

Chronic Wasting Disease Monitoring and Management

Prevalence estimates, sample sizes, and percent of harvest sampled for CWD in the Upper Powder River herd unit are presented below (Table 1). Prevalence in adult male mule deer, based on hunter harvest surveillance, was 23%.

Table 1. Upper Powder River CWD Statistics 2021-2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) - <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>			Percent of Harvested Adult Males Sampled
	Adult males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	
2021	16% (n = 77)	0% (n = 8)	0% (n = 10)	27%
0% (n = 5)	0% (n = 9)	0% (n = 0)	0% (n = 1)	5%
2023	30% (n = 20)	50% (n = 4)	0% (n = 0)	14%
2024	13% (n = 8)	17% (n = 6)	100% (n = 1)	2%
2025	30% (n = 66)	11% (n = 9)	0% (n = 1)	14%
2021-2025	23% (n = 187; 13.5-29%)	17% (n = 24)	8% (n = 12)	9%

Weather

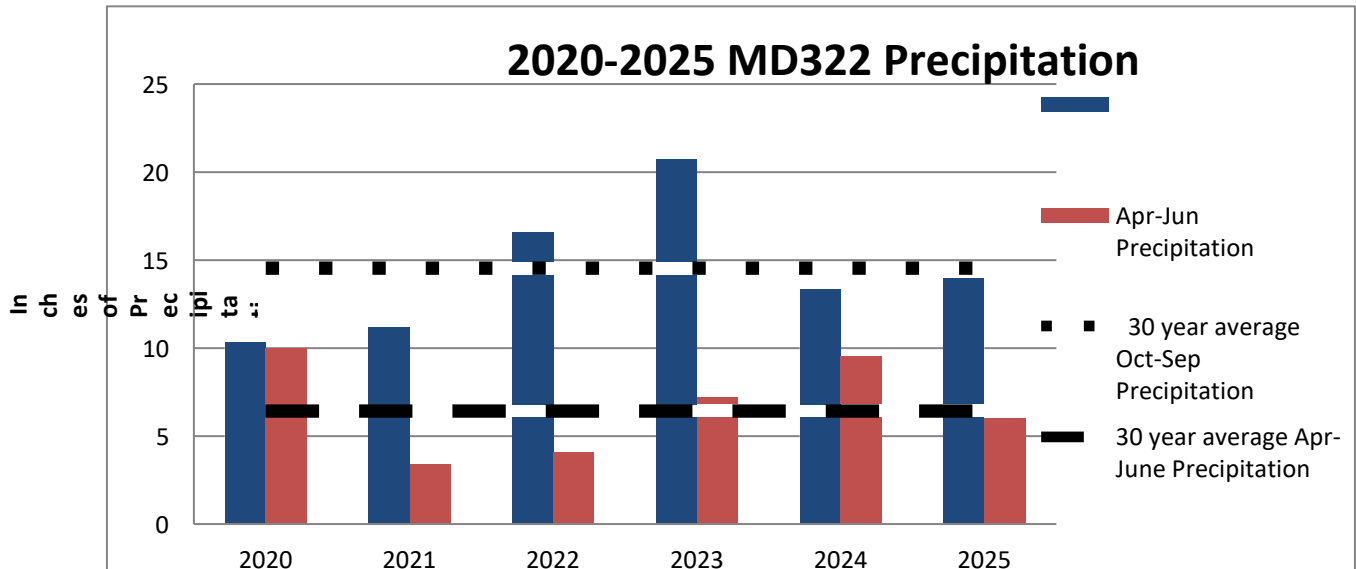


Figure 2. Spring (April-June) and water year (October -September) precipitation for 2020-2025.

Precipitation from October 2024-September 2025 water year, extrapolated from PRISM Climate Group, Oregon State University, was similar to the 30-year average. Precipitation during the growing season (April through June) was also similar to the 30-year average (Figure 2).

Winter temperatures (November 2024-February 2025), as recorded at Kaycee, Wyoming, averaged 36.1°F, significantly warmer compared to the 30-year average (28.5°F). Winter moisture accumulation, recorded at Kaycee, was 0.25 inches of precipitation, well below the 30-year average of 1.89 inches. Snow accumulation was 6 inches, compared to the 30-year average of 21.8 inches.

The snow water equivalent measured at Powder River Pass, Beartrap Meadow, Middle

Powder, and Grave Springs Snotel sites, observed February 20, 2026, was 104%, 83%, 57%, and 52% of the mean for those respective sites. To date, the winter of 2025-2026 has experienced above average temperatures, and below average snow accumulation at lower elevations and average snow accumulation at higher elevations.

Spring-summer conditions were similar to the long term average for vegetation production, which can influence body condition entering winter. Field observation indicated improved body condition compared to recent years. Current winter conditions have been warmer and drier than normal and are likely to have minimal adverse affect on winter survival. Current snow water equivalents indicate productive spring forage conditions in the northern part of the herd unit, but lower productivity in the southern part of the herd unit.

All winter precipitation, snowfall accumulation, and temperature data was acquired from the Kaycee NWS COOP Station (#485055-5; Lat/Lon 43° 43'/106° 38'; elevation 4660 ft).

Habitat Projects

Between 2023-2025, significant habit projects included:

- 227 acres of conifer removal from curl-leaf mountain mahogany communities in crucial mule deer winter range
- 46 beaver dam analogs (BDA) installed on the Middle Fork of Crazy Woman Creek, Poison Creek, and North Fork of the Powder River in spring/summer/fall habitats
- 9,022 acres of cheatgrass treatment in the lower North Fork of Crazy Woman drainage in high-use yearlong habitat.
- 596 acres of conifer removal from aspen stands on the southern Bighorn National Forest in spring/summer/fall habitats.
- 4 miles of woven wire fence conversion to a wildlife friendly fence along Doyle Creek, a documented mule deer seasonal migration route.

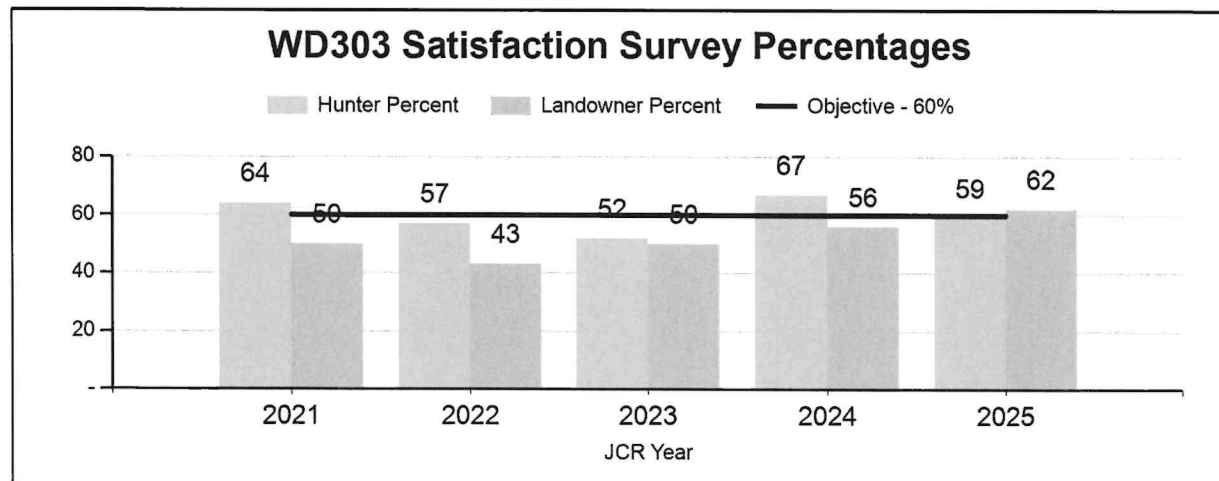
2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: White tailed Deer
 HERD: WD303 - POWDER RIVER
 HUNT AREAS: 17-19, 23-33, 163, 169

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

PREPARED BY: ERIC MAICHAK

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Hunter Satisfaction Percent	63%	59%	60%
Landowner Satisfaction Percent	47%	62%	60%
Harvest:	4,604	3,331	3,331
Hunters:	6,766	5,763	6,000
Hunter Success:	68%	58%	56%
Active Licenses:	8,081	6,798	6,600
Active License Success:	57%	49%	50%
Recreation Days:	33,116	33,964	30,500
Days Per Animal:	7.2	10.2	9.2
Males per 100 Females:	40	32	
Juveniles per 100 Females	64	69	
Satisfaction Based Objective			60%
Management Strategy:			Private Land
Percent population is above (+) or (-) objective:			0%
Number of years population has been + or - objective in recent trend:			0



2021 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary
for White tailed Deer Herd WD303 - POWDER RIVER

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
2021	0	156	367	523	1,319	750	2,592	1,103	12	28	40	± 0	57	± 0	41
2022	0	185	329	514	1,219	765	2,498	0	15	27	42	± 0	63	± 0	44
2023	0	68	137	205	645	356	1,206	0	11	21	32	± 0	55	± 0	42
2024	0	159	317	476	818	677	1,971	0	19	39	58	± 0	83	± 0	52
2025	0	53	105	158	486	337	981	0	11	22	33	± 0	69	± 0	52

2026 HUNTING SEASONS
POWDER RIVER WHITE-TAILED DEER HERD (WD303)

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
17	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
17	Gen			Nov. 1	Nov. 30		Any white-tailed deer
17	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov. 30	250	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
18	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
18	Gen			Nov. 1	Nov. 15		Any white-tailed deer
18	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov. 15	200	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer valid on private land
19	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14		Antlered mule deer three (3) points or more on either antler or any white-tailed deer
19	Gen			Nov. 1	Nov. 15		Any white-tailed deer
19	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Nov. 15	75	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
23	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
23	Gen			Nov. 1	Nov. 30		Any white-tailed deer
23, 26	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 30	500	Any white-tailed deer
23	7			Sep. 1	Dec. 15	25	Doe or fawn valid on private land
23, 26	8			Sep. 1	Dec. 15	1000	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer valid on private land
24	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 31		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
24	Gen			Nov. 1	Nov. 30		Any white-tailed deer
24	3			Oct. 15	Oct. 31	500	Any white-tailed deer valid on private land
24	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 1	Nov. 30		Any white-tailed deer valid in the entire area
24	7			Sep. 1	Dec. 15	25	Doe or fawn valid on private land
24	8			Sep. 1	Dec. 15	3000	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer valid on private land

25	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 24		Antlered mule deer three (3) points or more on either antler or any white-tailed deer
26	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
26	Gen			Nov. 1	Nov. 30		Any white-tailed deer
27	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 31		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
27	Gen			Nov. 1	Nov. 30		Any white-tailed deer
27	8			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	1200	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer valid on private land
27	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Nov. 30		Doe or fawn white-tailed deer valid in the entire area; also valid in Area 28
27	8			Dec. 1	Dec. 31		Doe or fawn white-tailed deer
28	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 24		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
28	Gen			Oct. 25	Nov. 30		Any white-tailed deer
29	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 14		Antlered mule deer three (3) points or more on either antler or any white-tailed deer
29	Gen			Nov. 1	Nov. 30		Any white-tailed deer
29	Gen			Dec. 1	Dec. 31		Antlerless white-tailed deer
29, 31	8			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	700	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer valid on private land
29, 31	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Dec. 31		Doe or fawn white-tailed deer valid in entire area
30	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 31		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
30	Gen			Nov. 1	Nov. 30		Any white-tailed deer
30	Gen			Dec. 1	Dec. 31		Antlerless white-tailed deer
30, 32, 33, 163, 169	8			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	1000	Doe or fawn white-tailed deer valid on private land
30, 32, 33, 163, 169	8	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Dec. 31		Doe or fawn white-tailed deer valid in the entire area

31	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 10		Antlered mule deer three (3) points or more on either antler or any white-tailed deer
32	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 21		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
32	Gen			Nov. 1	Nov. 15		Any white-tailed deer
33	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 31		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
33	Gen			Nov. 1	Nov. 15		Any white-tailed deer
33	Gen			Nov. 16	Dec. 31		Antlerless white-tailed deer
163	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 21		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
163	Gen			Nov. 1	Nov. 15		Any white-tailed deer
169	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 15	Oct. 21		Antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer
169	Gen			Nov. 1	Nov. 15		Any white-tailed deer

Nonresident Region C Quota: 1,800

Nonresident Region Y Quota: 1,000

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 59% Satisfied; 23% Neutral; 18% Dissatisfied

2025 Landowner Satisfaction: 62% Satisfied; 20% Below Desired; 18% Above Desired

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

We manage this white-tailed deer herd based on hunter and landowner satisfaction. Many hunting opportunities are offered in most hunt areas in an effort to reduce damage, nuisance complaints, deer-vehicle collisions, competition with mule deer, and CWD.

We classified deer annually, primarily with ground surveys. We opportunistically record white-tailed deer during aerial surveys for other species. In 2025, we observed 69 fawns:100 does, consistent with the previous five year average of 64:100. We observed 11 yearling bucks:100 does and 22 adult bucks:100 does, down moderately from the previous five year average. Males tend to exhibit secretive behavior, and may be underestimated. Decreased deer numbers, and mild winter conditions contributed to a reduced sample size (n=981).

Hunter satisfaction (59%) remained near objective in 2025. Total harvest (n=3,331) was similar to 2024 (n=3,366). Reported harvest of bucks decreased slightly in 2025 (n=1,576) from 2024 (n=1,661). Overall hunter harvest success, in this herd unit, decreased by 10% while effort increased. Days hunted per harvest were 9.1 in 2024 and 10.2 in 2025. Unseasonably warm weather may have contributed to dispersed and less active deer throughout the fall.

We also documented limited localized EHD losses in 2025. EHD events that occurred in 2021 and 2022 had population level impacts that this herd has not rebounded from. Comments from hunters and landowners identified concern about EHD, and suggested deer numbers were lower than previous years.

Landowner survey responses (n=92) indicated white-tailed deer populations were at (62%) preferred levels. Landowners suggested providing similar (69%) hunting season opportunities relative to 2025. Varying levels of access to private land where most white-tailed deer reside, and refuges provided by rural subdivisions, complicate white-tailed deer management.

Some Type 3 license holders were dissatisfied with deer numbers. Harvest success on Type 3 licenses was still 52% even with depressed deer, and specifically, buck numbers. There were sufficient Type 8 licenses available to achieve desired doe/fawn harvest.

After receiving public input, we added days to the general regular season in Hunt Area 18 for harvest of any white-tailed deer. This change will add consistency with surrounding hunt areas.

Management Objective Review

The management objective for this herd is $\geq 60\%$ landowner and hunter satisfaction, with a recreational management strategy. The next review will be in 2029.

Chronic Wasting Disease Monitoring and Management

CWD sampling occurred opportunistically with overlapping targeted mule deer herds. From 2021-2025, prevalence was higher in white-tailed deer adult males (34%, n=638) than adult females (21%, n=438, Table 1), which was expected. Prevalence was higher in white-tailed compared to overlapping mule deer adult males (22%, n=1,124) and females (12%, n=163).

Table 1. CWD prevalence of hunter-harvested white-tailed deer in Powder River Herd Unit, 2021-2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – Hunter Harvest Only			Percent of Harvested Adult Males Sampled
	Adult Males (CI = 95%)	Yearling Males	Adult Females	
2021	31% (n=241)	16% (n=19)	17% (n=212)	11%
2022	30% (n=132)	0% (n=7)	14% (n=69)	8%
2023	36% (n=99)	45% (n=11)	32% (n=53)	6%
2024	40% (n=77)	20% (n=15)	26% (n=57)	5%
2025	43% (n=89)	0% (n=8)	28% (n=47)	6%
2021-2025	34% (n=638)	18% (n=60)	21% (n=438)	7%

Sampling effort was not uniform across the herd unit. CWD prevalence was influenced by disproportionate sampling in the western portion of the herd unit. Due to biased sampling effort, managers should use caution extrapolating CWD prevalence across the herd unit.

While we have not implemented specific management actions to address CWD, we continued to encourage landowners to reduce deer densities through increased harvest. These

recommendations have historically been to control deer numbers, address nuisance and damage complaints, and reduce browsing pressure on shrub communities. Reducing density of white-tailed deer and mule deer may aid in limiting CWD prevalence and spread.

Population Modeling

We do not have a functional PopR based integrated population model for white-tailed deer. Conducting any type of sightability survey is logistically impractical due to the size of the herd unit - approximately 6.7 million acres.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Elk

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

HERD: EL320 - FORTIFICATION

HUNT AREAS: 2

PREPARED BY: ERIKA PECKHAM

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Trend Count:	348	698	1,000
Harvest:	168	224	250
Hunters:	303	442	500
Hunter Success:	55%	51%	50%
Active Licenses:	324	460	470
Active License Success	52%	49%	53%
Recreation Days:	1,383	2,017	2,025
Days Per Animal:	8.2	9.0	8.1
Males per 100 Females:	44	40	
Juveniles per 100 Females	53	41	

Trend Based Objective ($\pm$ 20%)

150 (120 - 180)

Management Strategy:

Private Land

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

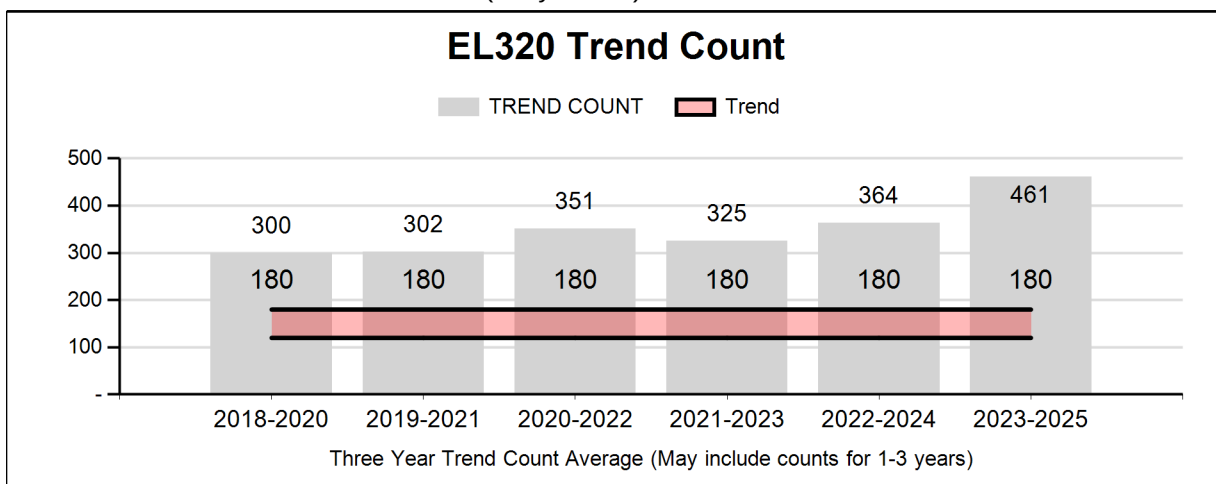
365%

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 $\geq$ 1 year old:	35%	25%
Males $\geq$ 1 year old:	30%	30%
Juveniles (< 1 year old):	10%	10%



**2026 HUNTING SEASONS
FORTIFICATION ELK (EL320)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
2	Gen	Sep. 20	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 20		Any elk
2	Gen			Oct. 21	Nov. 15		Antlerless elk
2	6			Oct. 1	Dec. 15	200	Cow or calf

2026 Region E nonresident quota: 1,000

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 69% Satisfied, 21% Neutral, 10% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

This was the fourth year of a general season structure. In preceding years, this herd unit alternated between some combination of Type 1, Type 4 and Type 6, limited quota licenses, and around 10 days in season length. At the December 2021 meeting, it was made clear and agreed upon by those present that if a general season were implemented it would be for a minimum of 3-5 years. Large changes to seasons on an annual basis are both confusing to hunters and do not allow the time required to assess if a new management strategy was successful. Managers have evaluated this season structure annually to assess whether it addresses the concerns of being consistently over objective and landowner complaints. As this is the fifth year of the general season structure, managers will meet with constituents and seek public input as part of the 2027 season setting process.

During the first year of this general season structure there were several private landowners enrolled in the Department's Access Yes program. In subsequent years there has been no formal public access granted other than the limited legally accessible public land.

This elk herd has been over the objective for many years. Elk were frequently located south of I-90 and west of the Powder River, indicating that they were exceeding carrying capacity within the boundary of Hunt Area 2, and expanded into the adjacent hunt area. In the past, complaints were received from some landowners stating that there were not enough licenses or time to be able to control elk on their property. Since the implementation of a general season structure, these complaints ceased.

The majority of the elk habitat is either private land, or public land predominantly surrounded by private land. There is one legal access point to Bureau of Land Management land that allows public land hunters the opportunity to hunt elk in this herd unit. The five-year average of hunter success was 58%. This year harvest success increased from 45% to 51%. Although public access was minimal, people did find ways to access elk. Overall, harvest success dropped since converting to the general season structure, however, it is important to note that the total number of harvested elk substantially increased. It was estimated that in 2025 there were 224 total elk harvested, double the highest harvest recorded when operating under a limited quota season structure. In 2025, residents harvested 54% of the elk (n=121). There was no way to know from

the harvest survey how many elk were harvested on the HA 129, Type 6 license valid in a portion of this herd unit, but numerous landowner coupons have been returned from an area that was experiencing high densities of elk.

Management Objective Review

The mid-winter trend objective is set at 150 elk. The objective was last reviewed in 2022 and is scheduled for review in 2027.

CWD

There was minimal sampling for CWD surveillance during the past five years. To date, there have been no positives.

Table 1. CWD prevalence from hunter harvested elk in the Fortification Herd Unit, 2021-2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – Hunter Harvest Only	Percent of Harvested Adult Elk Sampled
	All Adult Elk (CI = 95%)	
2021	0 (n=2)	2%
2022	0 (n=5)	3%
2023	0 (n=2)	1%
2024	0 (n=8)	4%
2025	0 (n=1)	1%
2021-2025	0 (n=18; 0-18%)	2%

Population

There was no working population model for this herd. This herd has a trend count objective of 150 elk. The three-year average was 366 elk classified, well above the objective. A helicopter survey conducted in January of 2026 resulted in 698 elk detected, which is the highest number documented. Classification results from this flight indicated a calf ratio of 41:100. Although there have been hunter comments stating a lack of bulls, the observed bull ratio was 40:100 with numerous small bull groups being spotted throughout the herd unit.

In elk herds that are consistently over objective, the Department implemented more liberal harvest strategies. Even in areas with tightly controlled access it was important to ensure that there are sufficient season lengths and license types to allow for harvest of elk for those who desired to decrease numbers. This was of particular importance concerning cows, as these are the individuals that drive the increase or decrease of the overall herd. The season length on the type 6 licenses is in line with the surrounding Hunt Area 129 dates and allows flexibility on adjacent lands where elk may cross the boundary daily. Season structure currently allows for flexibility to maximize elk harvest.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Elk
 HERD: EL321 - NORTH BIGHORN
 HUNT AREAS: 35-40

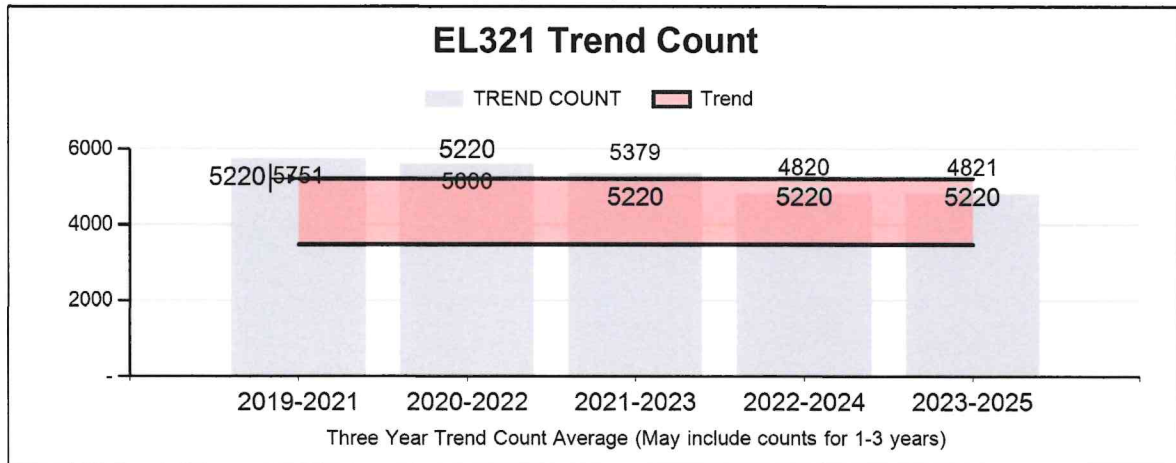
PERIOD: 6/1/2025 - 5/31/2026
 PREPARED BY: ERIC MAICHAK

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Trend Count:	5,227	5,127	4,800
Harvest:	1,464	1,339	1,500
Hunters:	4,721	4,796	4,800
Hunter Success:	31%	28%	31 %
Active Licenses:	5,044	5,177	5,200
Active License Success	29%	26%	29 %
Recreation Days:	35,888	41,540	40,000
Days Per Animal:	24.5	31.0	26.7
Males per 100 Females:	24	20	
Juveniles per 100 Females	28	17	

Trend Based Objective ($\pm 20\%$) 4,350 (3480 - 5220)
 Management Strategy: Special
 Percent population is above (+) or (-) objective: 18%
 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:	25%	25%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	28%	28%
Juveniles (< 1 year old):	10%	10%



2020 - 2025 Trend Count Summary

for Elk Herd EL321 - NORTH BIGHORN

Year	Count Dates	Flight Time		Number Counted
		Hours	Minutes	
2020	JANUARY 2021, FEBRUARY 2021	7	42	5,615
2021	JANUARY 2022, MARCH 2022	14	0	6,062
2022	JANUARY 2023, FEBRUARY 2023	14	30	5,124
2023	FEBRUARY 2024, JANUARY 2024	9	30	4,952
2024	JANUARY 2025	9	30	4,384
2025	JANUARY 2026	7	30	5,127

**2026 HUNTING SEASONS
NORTH BIGHORN ELK HERD (EL321)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
35	1	Sep. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 10	Nov. 5	150	Any elk
35	1			Nov. 15	Dec. 31		Antlerless elk
35	4	Sep. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 10	Nov. 5	175	Antlerless elk
35	4			Nov. 15	Dec. 31		Antlerless elk
35	7			Aug. 15	Oct. 9	425	Cow or calf valid on private land
35	7	Sep. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 10	Nov. 5		Cow or calf valid off national forest
35	7			Nov. 15	Dec. 31		Cow or calf valid off national forest
35	9			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	75	Any elk, archery only
36	Gen	Sep. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 10	Nov. 5		Antlered elk valid on national forest; any elk off national forest
36	4	Sep. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 10	Nov. 5	300	Antlerless elk
36	4			Nov. 15	Dec. 31		Antlerless elk
36	6			Oct. 1	Oct. 9	250	Cow or calf valid off national forest north of Rock Creek
36	6	Sep. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 10	Nov. 5		Cow or calf valid in the entire area
36	9			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	75	Any elk, archery only
37	Gen	Sep. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 10	Nov. 5		Any elk
37	Gen			Nov. 6	Nov. 15		Antlerless elk
37	6			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	600	Cow or calf valid on private land
37	6	Sep. 15	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Dec. 31		Cow or calf valid in the entire area
37	9			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	150	Any elk, archery only
38	1			Oct. 10	Oct. 31	400	Any elk
38	1			Nov. 1	Nov. 15		Antlerless elk
38	4			Oct. 1	Nov. 15	550	Antlerless elk

38	6			Sep. 15	Dec. 31	100	Cow or calf valid off national forest and off the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission's Amsden Creek and Kerns Wildlife Habitat Management Areas
38	9			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	250	Any elk, archery only
39	1			Oct. 10	Nov. 4	175	Any elk
39	1			Nov. 5	Nov. 30		Antlerless elk
39	4			Oct. 1	Nov. 30	150	Antlerless elk
39	6	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 5	Nov. 30	75	Cow or calf
39	9			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	100	Any elk, archery only
40	1			Oct. 15	Nov. 4	175	Any elk
40	4			Oct. 15	Nov. 30	125	Antlerless elk
40	6			Sep. 1	Nov. 4	125	Cow or calf valid off national forest
40	6			Nov. 5	Nov. 30		Cow or calf valid in the entire area
40	9			Sep. 1	Sep. 30	75	Any elk, archery only

2026 Nonresident Region W Quota: 2,775

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

This herd unit includes public and private lands spanning two regions and the northern Bighorn Mountains. The current management objective is a mid-winter trend count of 4,350 elk ($\pm 20\%$) and an overall management strategy of trophy management, with recreational management in Hunt Areas 36 and 37. We have also established hunt area trend count sub-objectives: HA 35=400; HA 36=800; HA 37=800; HA 38=1,000; HA 39=500; and HA 40=850. Our 2026 mid-winter trend count was 5,127 elk, up from 2025 ($n=4,384$). Although our total count was within objective, managers were confident animals were missed among hunt areas.

Mild conditions and lack of snow allowed access on public lands well into November. However, these conditions did not improve harvest significantly as the 2025 harvest ($n=1,339$) was only slightly higher than 2024 ($n=1,282$), and down from the previous 5-year average ($n=1,436$). Hunters required 31 days per elk harvested, seven days higher than 2024 and a level not seen since 2005. Reduced harvest and increased days/harvest tend to accompany mild and dry years in this herd unit. Hunter satisfaction for the herd unit (52%) was similar to 2024 (51%), and was highest in Hunt Areas 39 (68%) and 38 (61%). Hunter comments tended toward frustration with elk inaccessible on private land (HA 35, 36), redistribution of elk from the 2024 Elk Fire and habitat treatments (HA 37, 38), and overlapping Type 6 licenses during archery and deer season with regular season dates (HA 39, 40). Landowner survey responses ($n=22$, HA 37-38) suggested populations above (45%), at (41%), or below (14%) desired levels. These landowners

suggested season strategies primarily with similar (55%) to more (41%) opportunities than 2025.

Managers continued to develop strategies, including engaging landowners, in an effort to secure access and increase elk harvest on private lands as part of damage mitigation. In Hunt Area 37, managers removed six adult female elk (donating five deemed “CWD not detected”) on a Chapter 56 permit. Hunters were not utilized in this case as elk were not available during daylight hours. In Hunt Area 40, an auxiliary season was implemented in late January on a Chapter 34 permit. Three adult female elk were harvested by hunters utilizing leftover Type 6 licenses. These efforts reduced elk presence and damage claims where targeted.

Type 6 licenses in Hunt Area 35 were changed to Type 7 as these licenses have restrictions within the hunt area and do not become valid throughout the entirety of either hunt area. We increased Type 6 licenses in Hunt Area 37 from 500 to 600 based on landowner support for additional harvest opportunities and elevated elk numbers. In Hunt Area 38 we increased Type 1 licenses from 100 to 400 and Type 4 licenses from 375 to 550 to return quotas to levels prior to 2025 reductions resulting from carryover of licenses due to the 2024 Elk Fire. In Hunt Area 38 we increased Type 6 licenses from 75 to 100 based on support of multiple landowners. We made no changes in hunt areas 36, 39, or 40.

Management Objective Review

The management objective and strategy were last reviewed and approved in 2022, and will not be reviewed until 2027.

Chronic Wasting Disease Monitoring and Management

This herd was targeted for sampling in 2025. Sampling from 2021 to 2025 seasons suggests 9% prevalence (n=379, Table 1). Hotspots occur in Hunt Areas 35-37. These hotspots likely result from environmental contamination from non-migratory white-tailed deer and mule deer with relatively high prevalence (36% WTD, 20% MD) overlapping non-migratory and wintering elk.

Table 1. CWD prevalence from hunter harvested elk in the North Bighorn Herd Unit, 2021-2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – Hunter Harvest Only	Percent of Harvested Adult Elk Sampled
	All Adult Elk (CI = 95%)	
2021	8% (n=72)	6%
2022	10% (n=68)	5%
2023	10% (n=69)	5%
2024	14% (n=51)	4%
2025	5% (n=119)	10%
2021-2025	9% (n=379; 6-12%)	6%

Population Modeling

Testing of several PopR integrated population models estimated post-season populations >100% of observed trend counts. Managers consider these estimates inaccurate and well above the actual population. Potential confounding factors to model performance and perceived accuracy include lack of classification and sightability data for this herd, as well as consistent movement

of 1,000 to 2,000 animals into and out of Montana. The top model (Rhat proportion = 0.72) suggested a 2025 postseason population estimate of 11,675 elk (95% CI = 10,691-13,089) with date range 2000-2027; effort = licenses; reproduction = constant; adult and juvenile survival = time varying; burnin = 50,000; iterations = 30,500; and thinning rate = 1. The 2026 postseason estimate was 12,233.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Elk

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

HERD: EL322 - SOUTH BIGHORN

HUNT AREAS: 33-34, 47-49, 120

PREPARED BY: ZACH TURNBULL

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Trend Count:	4,173	3,796	3,796
Harvest:	1,621	1,648	1,648
Hunters:	3,817	3,988	4,000
Hunter Success:	42%	41%	41 %
Active Licenses:	4,165	4,258	4,260
Active License Success	39%	39%	39 %
Recreation Days:	31,090	36,615	36,650
Days Per Animal:	19.2	22.2	22.2
Males per 100 Females:	32	42	
Juveniles per 100 Females	39	73	

Trend Based Objective (± 20%)

3,300 (2640 - 3960)

Management Strategy:

Private Land

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

15%

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

10

2021 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary															
for Elk Herd EL322 - SOUTH BIGHORN															
Year	Post Pop	MALES			FEMALES	JUVENILES			Males to 100 Fem ales				Young to		
		Ylg	Adult	Total	Total	Total	Tot	Cls	Yng	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
							Cls	Obj							
2021	0	95	175	270	445	126	841	0	21	39	61	± 0	28	± 0	18
2022	0	47	96	143	484	111	738	0	10	20	30	± 0	23	± 0	18
2023	0	45	91	136	364	96	596	0	12	25	37	± 0	26	± 0	19
2024	0	117	85	202	970	560	1,732	0	12	9	21	± 0	58	± 0	48
2025	0	54	40	94	226	164	484	0	24	18	42	± 0	73	± 0	51

2026 Hunting Seasons
South Bighorn Elk (EL322)

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
33	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 9	Oct. 31	200	Any elk
33	1			Nov. 7	Dec. 31		Antlerless elk
33	4			Aug. 15	Sep. 30	100	Antlerless elk valid on private land east of Buffalo Creek and the Bar C Road (B.L.M. Road 6214)
33	4	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 9	Oct. 31		Antlerless elk valid in the entire area
33	4			Nov. 7	Dec. 31		Antlerless elk
33	6	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 7	Dec. 31	200	Cow or calf
34	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 9	Nov. 15	800	Any elk
34	1			Nov. 16	Dec. 31		Antlerless elk
34	7			Aug. 15	Oct. 8	700	Cow or calf valid on private land on or within one (1) mile of irrigated land
34	7	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 9	Dec. 31		Cow or calf valid off national forest
47	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 9	Oct. 31	150	Any elk
47	1			Nov. 1	Nov. 30		Antlerless elk
47	6	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 9	Nov. 30	25	Cow or calf
48	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 9	Oct. 31	400	Any elk
48	1			Nov. 7	Dec. 15		Antlerless elk
48	4	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 9	Oct. 31	125	Antlerless elk
48	4			Nov. 7	Dec. 15		Antlerless elk
48	6	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 9	Oct. 31	600	Cow or calf
48	7	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 7	Dec. 15	300	Cow or calf
49	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 9	Oct. 31	350	Any elk
49	1			Nov. 7	Dec. 21		Antlerless elk
49	4			Sep. 1	Oct. 31	100	Antlerless elk
49	4			Nov. 7	Dec. 21		Antlerless elk
49	6	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 9	Oct. 31	300	Cow or calf

49	7	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 7	Dec. 21	500	Cow or calf
120	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 9	Oct. 31	175	Any elk
120	1			Nov. 1	Dec. 15		Antlerless elk
120	4	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 9	Dec. 15	100	Antlerless elk
120	6	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 9	Dec. 15	100	Cow or calf

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 22% Satisfied; 26% Neutral; 53% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

This herd remained above trend count objectives in spite of interchange between many hunt areas and some herd units. The three-year trend count averaged 4,100 elk. (3,300 objective), which was 24% over the management objective. While low winter range fidelity complicates hunt area trend data, most hunt areas remained over objective: HA 33(n=400; 1,100 sub-objective); HA 34 (n=2,534; 1,000 sub-objective); HA 47 (n=0; 200 sub-objective); HA 48 (n=339; 400 sub-objective); HA 49 (n=145; 300 sub-objective); HA 120 (n=378; 300 sub-objective).

Harvest statistics, including hunter success (41%), were similar to previous years. Effort per harvest remains high (22.2 days per harvest). Harvest continues to be complicated by private land access, with large numbers of elk residing on properties with restricted access. Ample cow/calf and antlerless hunting opportunity exists under the current season structure, with many licenses available late into the season.

Due to many of these concerns, and frustration of hunters and landowners, we have explored the option of adding general license hunting in Hunt Areas 33, 34, 47, 48 and 49. These changes would be considered for 2027 seasons at the earliest. Discussion and analysis of this concept are ongoing. General license strategies may increase hunter opportunity as elk are highly mobile between hunt areas and a general structure would allow increased flexibility. The intention of general license strategies is not to alter the structure or number of hunters on the landscape greatly, but to provide increased opportunity and flexibility for hunters.

High hunter success, lower elk numbers and decreased damage situations in HA 47 and HA 49 have warranted a decrease in cow/calf hunting opportunity for 2026, reflected in decreased license quotas.

Season structure remained the same in Hunt Areas 33 and 34, with a reduction in HA 33 cow/calf licenses. Licenses were decreased in HA 33 to address decreased winter elk counts in the unit. Very few hunters apply for HA 33 type 4,6 licenses and a reduction is unlikely to affect draw statistics significantly. It is likely that many elk moved north, utilizing lower elevation agricultural lands. Decreased hunting pressure was designed to improve elk distribution to the south. Elk management in both areas are highly influenced by private land ownership, distribution of elk, and access to those elk during hunting seasons. Additional licenses or longer seasons are unlikely to contribute to a population reduction as access remains the biggest issue. Over 1,500 elk moved to low elevation private lands and remained largely undisturbed for most of

the season. The Department continued to work with private land owners to provide access and some improvements have occurred. Without involvement from key landowners, elk management will continue to be problematic.

While 2025 HA120 Type 1 harvest success was good at 66%, success has gradually decreased the last two years and was below the previous five-year average of 69%. Mild falls and poor hunting conditions the last two years likely contributed to reduced success. Hunter saturation on public lands was also a concern. Type 1 licenses will remain the same in 2026.

Hunter success dropped in 2025 on HA120 Type 4 and Type 6 licenses (33% and 38%) and increased time to harvest for the second year in a row. Cows and calves were difficult to locate. Weather was mild with little snow, likely contributing to reduced elk movement into the area and longer harvest times. Successive years of low cow and calf harvest rates resulted in a reduction in Type 4 and 6 licenses.

Management Objective Review

The next herd unit management objective review is scheduled for 2027.

Chronic Wasting Disease Monitoring and Management

Table 1. South Bighorn elk CWD sampling 2020-2024.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) - <i>Hunter Harvest Only</i>	Percent of Harvested Adult Elk Sampled
	All Adult Elk (CI = 95%)	
2021	5.3% (n = 38)	3%
2022	3.9% (n = 128)	9%
2023	11.1% (n = 27)	2%
2024	2.9% (n = 34)	2%
2025	6.1% (n = 33)	4%
2021-2025	5% (n = 260; 3-8%)	4%

CWD statistics for the herd unit are listed below (Table 1). Prevalence increased across the herd unit and was a significant concern. A shift in herd behavior may have contributed to increased prevalence, with large sedentary herds occupying areas for extended periods.

Population Modeling

Population modeling has not been used prior to this year for the South Bighorn elk herd. The bio-year 2025 postseason population estimate for this herd unit from the PopR integrated population models (IPM) was approximately 16,800 (CL = 15,400-19,500). This estimate was likely inflated, and lacked an independent abundance estimate to anchor the model. The IPM model had an Rhat max of 1.52. Days per harvest and recreation days run in conjunction were used as the model variable (combined) as it produced the lowest Rhat and tracked field observations best.

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Elk

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

HERD: EL344 - ROCHELLE HILLS

HUNT AREAS: 113, 123

PREPARED BY: ERIKA PECKHAM

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Trend Count:	832	1,867	1,500
Harvest:	278	615	700
Hunters:	352	829	850
Hunter Success:	79%	74%	82 %
Active Licenses:	381	906	950
Active License Success	73%	68%	74 %
Recreation Days:	1,757	4,948	5,200
Days Per Animal:	6.3	8.0	7.4
Males per 100 Females:	221	34	
Juveniles per 100 Females	44	44	

Trend Based Objective ($\pm$ 20%)

800 (640 - 960)

Management Strategy:

Private Land

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

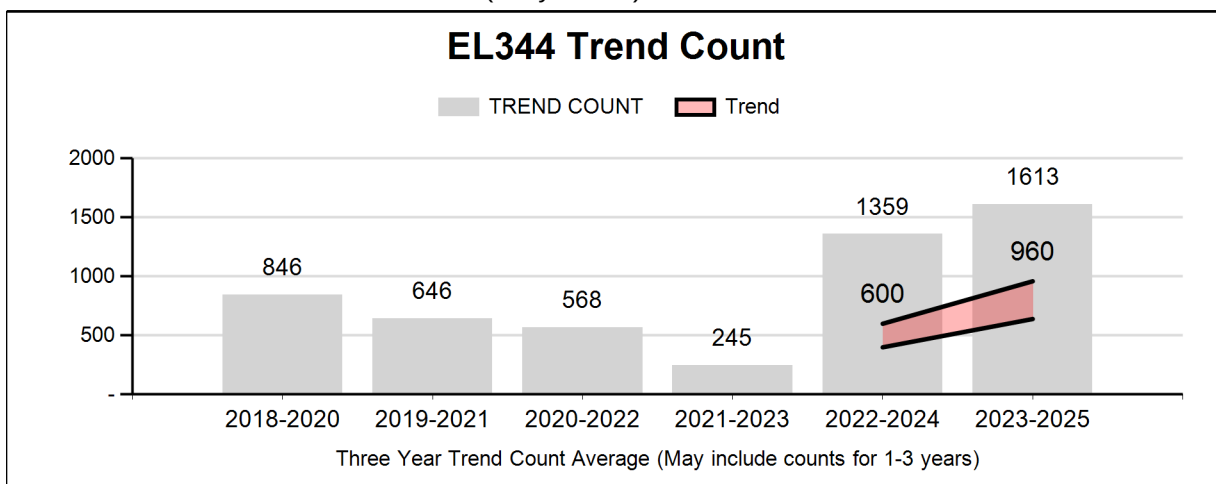
133%

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 $\geq$ 1 year old:	16%	20%
Males $\geq$ 1 year old:	10%	10%
Juveniles (< 1 year old):	5%	5%



**2026 HUNTING SEASONS
ROCHELLE HILLS ELK (EL344)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
113	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 5	Nov. 30	50	Any elk
113	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Nov. 5	Dec. 31	150	Spike or antlerless elk
113	8			Aug. 15	Jan. 31	Unlimited	Cow or calf valid on private land
123	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 14	Sep. 15	Oct. 20	150	Any elk
123	4	Sep. 1	Sep. 14	Sep. 15	Nov. 30	100	Antlerless elk
123	6			Sep. 15	Nov. 30	100	Cow or calf
123	8			Sep. 1	Jan. 31	Unlimited	Cow or calf valid on private land

2025 Hunter Satisfaction: 74% Satisfied, 17% Neutral, 9% Dissatisfied

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

Hunt Area 123 is predominantly a private access hunt. Elk numbers are high and continue to increase. Although overall, landowners indicated that they were satisfied with elk numbers in HA 123. In 2025, the harvest survey indicated 58 cow/calf elk were harvested utilizing the Type 4 and Type 6 licenses. In elk herds that are consistently over objective, we have implemented more liberal harvest strategies. Even in areas of tightly controlled access, it is important to ensure sufficient season length and license types to allow for harvest of elk for those who desire to decrease numbers. This is of particular importance concerning cows, as they drive the growth of the overall herd.

The 2025 harvest survey indicated an estimated 100 cow elk were harvested during the second year of Type 8 licenses. We estimated 98 mature bulls were harvested on the Type 1 licenses. This hunt area has an overall success rate of 61% with residents taking 66% of the harvested elk.

The majority of dissatisfied landowners reside within Hunt Area 113 and there is overall concern that there are too many elk in this hunt area. This has been a concern that has grown gradually over the last few years. In 2025, hunters harvested an estimated 42 mature bulls on the Type 1 licenses. There were 150 Type 3 licenses available, resulting in an estimated harvest of 45 yearling males, 71 cows and 13 calves harvested with this license type. A Type 8 license was added for the 2025 season to address damage issues and reduce this population to desired levels. The harvest survey indicated that 178 cows and calves were harvested on private land on this license type. This hunt area is a coveted public lands area with the difficult draw odds for both residents and non-residents. The 2025 hunter success rate was 87%, compared with the five-year average of 83%. Although Hunt Area 113 had high success on the Type 3 and Type 8 licenses (87% and 82% respectively), this elk herd is relatively small and historically has high harvest success and can be controlled with license issuance, due to the high amount of public land. The Type 8 licenses were added in 2025 and the intent was to target particular private lands that had high numbers of elk. The harvest that occurred was higher than anticipated, illustrating that there are an abundance of elk. With the Type 8 in place for 2026, there are plenty of harvest possibilities on cow elk. Moving forward, if a three-year season setting schedule is adapted, the objective is to have enough elk to support all license types moving forward. Managers did not feel there was a need to increase the Type 3 licenses with unlimited cow elk harvest opportunities and hunters finding places to access these elk.

Additionally, a Chapter 34 permit was issued to Fiddleback Ranch for Hunt Area 113. The permit allowed the use of up to 100 Hunt Area 113 Type 8 licenses during the season from 07/31/2025 through 08/14/2025. A total of eight elk were harvested under the permit.

Management Objective Review

The herd objective was due for review in 2024. As there was a data gap for elk numbers, before the management objective was updated, managers planned and conducted standardized aerial surveys the past two years. A mid-winter trend count of 1,200 elk has been proposed. This should be considered a starting point and may be adjusted as managers continue to collect data, as budgets and work schedules permit. Additional trend data from continued flights will help to inform managers. The trend count objective change was presented in public season setting meetings.

CWD

Limited CWD samples were collected opportunistically during the past five years, with two positive individuals.

Table 1. CWD prevalence from hunter harvested elk in the Rochelle Hills Herd Unit, 2021-2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – Hunter Harvest Only	Percent of Harvested Adult Elk Sampled
	All Adult Elk (CI = 95%)	
2021	25% (n=4)	1%
2022	0 (n=5)	2%
2023	20% (n=5)	1%
2024	0 (n=3)	1%
2025	0 (n=1)	1%
2021-2025	10% (n=18; 1-32%)	1%

Population Management

As of 2024, this herd is managed by a trend count. Although a numeric population objective is preferable, at this time there are no current models that accurately predict the population in this herd unit. This has been the case over the last 20 years with utilizing three different methods of modeling. In the future it is planned to conduct a siteability survey in this herd unit, which could provide valuable information that could better inform the current IPM.

In 2025, managers counted approximately 1,860 elk during~8 hours of flight time, compared to 1,360 elk counted in 2024 during 6 hours of flying. There is typically a very large group of elk in Hunt Area 123 that was initially noted around 10 years ago. This year the elk appeared to be distributed slightly differently across the landscape with many medium size groups out in open treeless areas. The total number of elk counted in HA 123 was 1,244 compared to 909 the preceding year. Trend counts are only a snapshot in time and are influenced by snow cover, light, and temperature. Every effort was made to fly the same areas for the same amount of time with tracks being saved for reference for subsequent flights. As trend counts have the potential

to be variable, a three-year average helps to address years that may be an anomaly. The 2026 seasons were structured to address a herd over objective and provide consistency in hunting season structure in subsequent years. As season setting timelines have changed internally, it is beneficial to have the same license types every year to alleviate confusion for non-residents and allow them the ability to apply for license types that are available in a given year.

In Hunt Area 113 managers feel elk numbers warrant Type 1 and Type 3 licenses annually. With continued concern over elk numbers, Type 8 licenses gave private landowners a tool to harvest elk and were available again in 2026. It is unlikely this hunt area can support unlimited cow harvest for several years. The Type 3 license was designed to target antlerless and yearling elk for harvest. High hunter success of 87% on Type 3 license, should help curb the growth this herd has experienced. These licenses were available to allow harvest flexibility with the ability to target young males and females. The continued issuance of these licenses allow private landowners to manage elk and provide continued hunting public opportunity on the public lands.

**2026 HUNTING SEASONS
HUNT AREA 129**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
129	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 14				Any elk valid off private land
129	Gen			Sep. 1	Sep. 14		Any elk valid on private land
129	Gen			Sep. 15	Oct. 31		Any elk valid in the entire area
129	Gen			Nov. 1	Nov. 30		Antlerless elk
129	6			Sep. 1	Dec. 15	850	Cow or calf; also valid in that portion of Area 2 within Johnson County
129	8			Sep. 1	Jan. 31	Unlimited	Cow or calf valid on private land

2026 Nonresident Region E Quota: 1,000

2025 Postseason Minimum Population Estimate: 4,640

2025 Landowner Satisfaction Estimate: Population at preferred level, 62%; Same seasons, 77%

2025 Hunter Satisfaction Estimate: 61%

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

This hunt area was created in 2001 to address growing numbers of elk in a large area outside of established herd units. There are limited public lands in Hunt Area 129 that are publicly accessible and regularly support elk. Elk Hunt Area 129 is not part of a herd unit and has no designated management objective.

A survey of key stakeholders following the 2025 season provided a postseason minimum population estimate of 4,640, down from 5,310 estimated elk in 2024. This was likely influenced by mild winter weather conditions. Most stakeholders suggested little change in total estimated elk since 2024, yet some landowners mentioned altered redistribution and movement patterns of elk in response to mild weather, harvest pressure, or 2024 wildfires.

The current management strategy was to provide adequate season length and license allocation, allowing landowners to maintain elk numbers at preferred levels. Some landowners use outfitters to manage hunters on private lands. Managers continue to engage landowners in an effort to secure access and develop strategies to maintain or increase elk harvest where desired.

Hunters harvested 1,087 elk in 2025, down from 2024 (n=1,221), yet above the previous five-year average (n=698). Harvest success was 40% on general licenses, with 578 bulls, 45

cows and 13 calves harvested. Hunter success was 49% on the Type 6 license, similar to 2024. Harvest success was 54% on the Type 8 license, down from 2024 (84%). Landowner survey responses from Hunt Area 129 (n=26) suggested populations at (62%), below (23%) or above (15%) desired levels. These landowners suggested season strategies with similar (76%), more (12%), or less (12%) opportunities than 2025.

We made no changes to seasons for 2026.

Management Objective Review

This hunt area is not within a designated herd unit and has no management objective. Seasons are structured to allow flexibility for landowners to manage elk numbers to their desire.

Chronic Wasting Disease Monitoring and Management

Elk from Hunt Area 129 are sampled opportunistically for CWD. Prevalence from hunter harvested adult elk from 2021 to 2025 was 6% (n=54). We have not implemented specific management strategies to address CWD in elk. Maintaining increased harvest levels may help reduce prevalence of CWD in elk.

Table 1. CWD prevalence from hunter harvested elk in the Hunt Area 129, 2021-2025.

Year(s)	Percent CWD-Positive and (n) – Hunter Harvest Only	Percent of Harvested Adult Elk Sampled
	All Adult Elk (CI = 95%)	
2021	8% (n=12)	2%
2022	25% (n=8)	1%
2023	0% (n=9)	1%
2024	0% (n=14)	1%
2025	0% (n=11)	1%
2021-2025	6% (n=54; 1-15%)	1%

2020 - 2025 Harvest Summary

for Elk Herd EL999 - REST OF STATE - Hunt Area 129

Year	Area	Hunter Data					Harvest Data									Success		Hntr Days	Avg Days
		Res Hntrs	NR Hntrs	NR %	Total Hntrs	Act Lic	Ylg Male	Adult Male	Total Male	Male %	Fem	Fem %	Juv	Juv %	Total Harv	Huntr	Lic		
2020	129	1,037	239	19%	1,276	1,300	14	229	243	48%	239	47%	29	6%	511	40%	39%	7,780	15.2
2021	129	1,087	307	22%	1,394	1,453	8	226	234	44%	272	51%	23	4%	529	38%	36%	8,015	15.2
2022	129	1,052	343	25%	1,395	1,438	23	276	299	52%	251	44%	22	4%	572	41%	40%	7,806	13.6
2023	129	1,135	292	20%	1,427	1,564	4	344	348	53%	264	40%	43	7%	655	46%	42%	8,037	12.3
2024	129	1,708	574	25%	2,282	2,354	48	444	492	40%	646	53%	83	7%	1,221	54%	52%	15,720	12.9
2025	129	1,630	716	31%	2,346	2,461	52	526	578	53%	472	43%	37	3%	1,087	46%	44%	17,006	15.6

2025 - JCR Evaluation Form

SPECIES: Moose

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

HERD: MO313 - BIGHORN

HUNT AREAS: 1, 34, 42

PREPARED BY: ERIC MAICHAK

	<u>2020 - 2024 Average</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026 Proposed</u>
Trend Count:	160	201	180
Harvest:	31	30	39
Hunters:	34	34	40
Hunter Success:	91%	88%	98%
Active Licenses:	34	34	40
Active License Success	91%	88%	98%
Recreation Days:	317	179	240
Days Per Animal:	10.2	6.0	6.2
Males per 100 Females:	69	32	
Juveniles per 100 Females	43	29	

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

110 (88 - 132)

Management Strategy:

Special

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

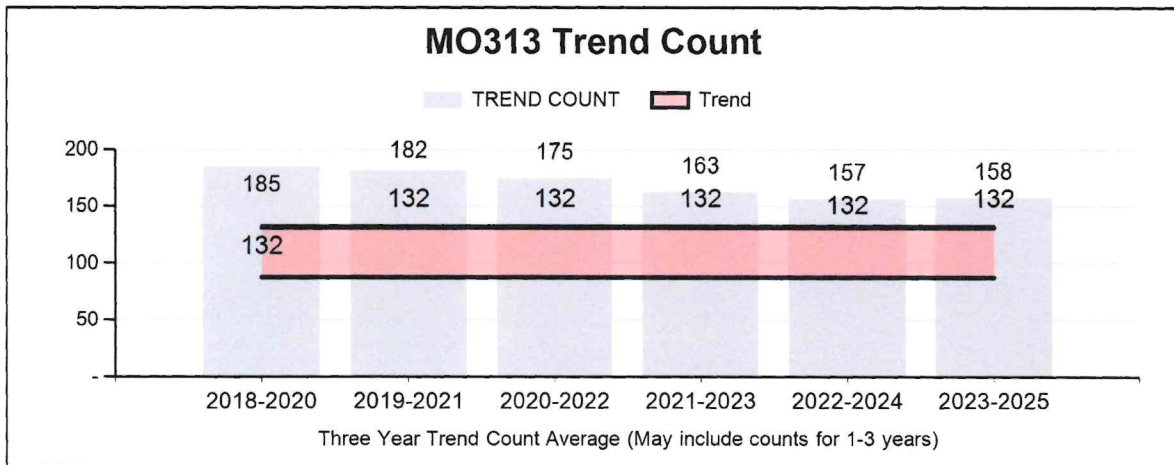
83%

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:	5%	8%
Males ≥ 1 year old:	15%	15%
Juveniles (< 1 year old):	0%	0%



2020 - 2025 Preseason Classification Summary
for Moose Herd MO313 - BIGHORN

Year	Pre Pop	MALES			FEMALES	JUVENILES	Tot Cls	Cls Obj	Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	Adult	Total	Total	Total			Ylng	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
2020	0	7	29	36	62	20	118	0	11	47	58	± 0	32	± 0	20
2021	0	8	33	41	59	21	121	0	14	56	69	± 0	36	± 0	21
2022	0	5	45	50	107	35	192	0	5	42	47	± 0	33	± 0	22
2023	0	5	28	33	50	15	98	0	10	56	66	± 0	30	± 0	18
2024	0	7	29	36	74	41	151	0	9	39	49	± 0	55	± 0	37
2025	0	5	38	43	75	28	146	0	7	51	57	± 0	37	± 0	24

2020 - 2025 Postseason Classification Summary
for Moose Herd MO313 - BIGHORN

Year	Post Pop	MALES			FEMALES	JUVENILES	Tot Cls	Cls Obj	Males to 100 Females				Young to		
		Ylg	Adult	Total	Total	Total			Ylng	Adult	Total	Conf Int	100 Fem	Conf Int	100 Adult
2020	0	1	14	15	20	13	48	0	5	70	75	± 0	65	± 0	37
2021	0	0	16	16	15	8	39	0	0	107	107	± 0	53	± 0	26
2022	0	0	7	7	13	6	26	0	0	54	54	± 0	46	± 0	30
2023	0	0	11	11	17	5	33	0	0	65	65	± 0	29	± 0	18
2024	0	1	3	4	12	1	17	0	8	25	33	± 0	8	± 0	6
2025	0	0	11	11	34	10	55	0	0	32	32	± 0	29	± 0	22

**2026 HUNTING SEASONS
BIGHORN MOOSE (MO313)**

Hunt Area	Type	Archery Dates		Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
		Opens	Closes	Opens	Closes		
1	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	9	Any moose, except cow moose with calf at side
1	4	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	17	Antlerless moose, except cow moose with calf at side
34	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	3	Any moose, except cow moose with calf at side
34	4	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	1	Antlerless moose, except cow moose with calf at side
42	1	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	8	Any moose, except cow moose with calf at side
42	4	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 31	2	Antlerless moose, except cow moose with calf at side

2025-26 Trend Objective: 110 Moose

2026 Management Summary

Hunting Season Evaluation

We manage this herd on a trend count objective of 110 moose ($\pm 20\%$) based on a three-year running average. We have established sub-objectives for each hunt area to represent desired distribution of moose (Area 1 = 50; Area 34 = 30; Area 42 = 30). Habitat, weather, disease, and cause-specific mortality data are considered as available. In 2025, we observed 201 moose (Area 1 = 111; Area 34 = 55; Area 42 = 35), and a three-year running average of 167 moose (Area 1 = 101; Area 34 = 35; Area 42 = 31). Over the past five years, we have typically observed more moose in each hunt area than desired. In 2025 we observed preseason ratios of 43 calves:100 cows (Area 1) and 14 calves:100 cows (Area 42), and a postseason ratio of 29 calves:100 cows (Area 34). Ratio of calves:100 cows was lowest in Area 42 since 2021.

Observed ratios of bulls:100 cows from 2023-2025 were 117 (Area 42), 43 (Area 34) and 41 (Area 1). To maintain adequate age structure and hunt quality, we have established harvest metrics for males, specifically: 40% of harvested males greater than five years old, and a median age ≥ 4 years old for harvest bulls. From 2023-2025, 68% of hunter-harvested bulls that were aged by cementum analysis (n=44) were greater than five years old, and the median age was five years old. Three-year average ages were 5.8 (Area 42, n=16), 5.5 (Area 34, n=11) and 5.4 (Area 1, n=17), suggesting an adequate age structure to support harvest of mature bulls.

In 2025, harvest success of Type 1 licenses was 95% for all hunt areas (90% in Hunt Area 42), and 80% for Type 4 licenses with unsuccessful active license holders in Hunt Area 1. In Hunt Area 1, days per harvest of Type 4 licenses was 7.8, up from previous 3-year average of 3.4. In

Hunt Area 34, days per harvest of Type 4 licenses was 2, well below the previous 3-year average of 15.7. However, a bull moose harvested illegally on a Type 4 license in Hunt Area 34 was not counted toward active licenses or harvest. In Hunt Area 42, days per harvest of Type 4 licenses was 1, well below the previous 3-year average of 16.7. and 1 for Hunt Areas 1, 34, and 42, respectively. Hunter comments were largely positive.

Managers have measured willow use, using a live-dead index, in Hunt Area 1 since 2012. Negative indices can denote excessive browsing and reduced overall plant cover and structure. Continued negative indices may suggest long-term degradation of existing willow communities. Ongoing projects to rehabilitate willow communities include installation of beaver dam analogs, translocation of beavers, and conifer removal from aspen and riparian communities in segments of the herd unit. In 2024, the Elk Fire burned 98,351 acres on the eastern side of Hunt Area 1, which stimulated new growth of forbs and shrubs. Moose have been documented using this burn. It will take several years for moose to realize nutritional benefits, particularly in conifer habitats following establishment of conifer seedlings.

In Hunt Area 1, the observed bull ratio is less than 50:100. However, trend counts continue to exceed objective, observed calf ratios remain above 40:100, with Type 1 harvest success 100% at 2.7 days per harvest (lowest since 1990). Despite 100% success and improved days per harvest of Type 4 licenses in Hunt Areas 34 and 42, sample sizes were low. Furthermore, improved counts of moose in 34 (and total cows observed) likely resulted from perfect viewing conditions (clear, calm, snow cover), while overall observations of cow moose in Hunt Area 42 remain low. Therefore, we decreased Type 1 and 4 licenses in Area 34, moving two Type 1 licenses and one Type 4 license to Hunt Area 1. To further promote harvest of females in Hunt Area 1, we added nine Type 4 licenses. Managers are confident this female harvest will reduce population growth to balance numbers with available habitat.

Management Objective Review

We will conduct a herd unit review in May 2026, along with a public review process. Any proposed change will be presented to the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission in September 2026.

Population Modeling

An integrated population model (IPM) has been constructed for this herd. The 2025 IPM estimated a postseason population of 419 moose (95% CI = 262-680). The 2026 postseason estimate, with predicted harvest of 39 moose, was 425. Estimated harvest of males >1 year old relative to total population based on the IPM was 0.18 in 2025, higher than 2024 (0.12), with a three-year average of 0.19, and predicted at 0.15 in 2026. The model performed well (Rhat proportion = 1) with date range 2000-2027; effort = licenses; days/harvest; reproduction = constant; adult and juvenile survival = time varying; burnin = 50,000; iterations = 30,500; and thinning rate = 1.

Results of several IPM iterations suggest a harvest of 35-45 moose would stabilize population growth.

Seasonal Range Update

Delineated moose seasonal ranges have not been updated since 1988. We updated seasonal range delineations based on 30 years of independent observations, GPS data from 63 adult female moose (2018-2021), and input from managers, Department staff, key stakeholders, and the public. Key changes include expansion of parturition areas, crucial winter-yearlong and yearlong seasonal ranges, and a reduction in total number of unique seasonal ranges.

Research

In Hunt Area 1, based on annual aerial surveys conducted in late August since 1997, bull:cow ratios have declined while calf ratios have remained relatively stable. Moose are conspicuous in portions of Hunt Area 1, particularly in June, possibly providing an opportunity to observe a larger portion of the population. To compare totals and ratios of observed moose, we flew the annual trend survey route in mid-June 2025. From this survey, we observed 210 moose, 61 bulls:100 cows, and 19 calves:100 cows. Flights are funded by WGBGLC through 2027.