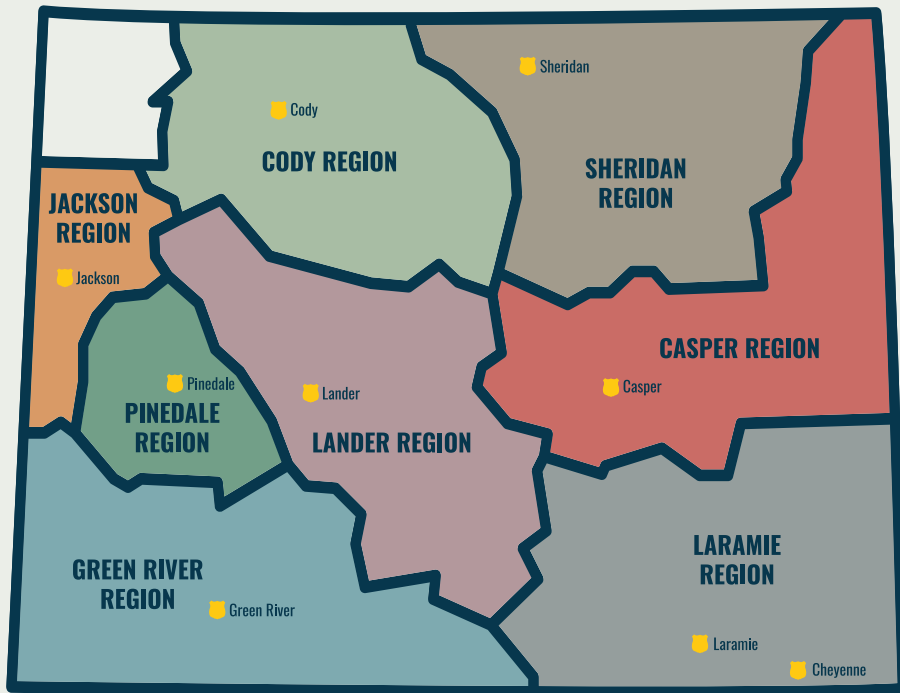




MULE DEER COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

PUBLIC MEETING ANALYSIS





The Wyoming Game and Fish Department held 37 Mule Deer Community Conversations across the state from August through December of 2024. Game and Fish staff (biologists, wardens, and others) met with members of the public to discuss mule deer in Wyoming. Located in small and larger Wyoming communities, the meetings had a conversational tone. Wyoming Game and Fish Department personnel summarized each meeting. Public comments were also obtained in an online form and in paper format. The following table is a summary of 3-4 of the most important topics that came up in the Mule Deer Community Conversations by region. Topics are not listed by order of importance within each region.

CASPER	Pg 2
CODY	Pg 2
GREEN RIVER	Pg 3
JACKSON	Pg 3
LANDER	Pg 4
LARAMIE	Pg 4
PINEDALE	Pg 5
SHERIDAN	Pg 5

Feedback Categories

 Chronic Wasting Disease Management	 Habitat and Land Use Management
 Predator Management	 Quality Decline
 Population and Harvest Management	 Migration Corridors and Competition with Other Species

Predator Management

- High predation by coyotes, mountain lions and bears was a recurring concern across all meetings.
- Suggestions for managing this included increasing mountain lion harvest, extending seasons, implementing trapping seasons for lions, aerial coyote removal and even linking deer tags with lion licenses to encourage predator control.

Population and Harvest Management

- There was a strong emphasis on the need to address declining mule deer numbers through various strategies like closing seasons for recovery (suggested for 1-5 years in different areas), implementing limited quota systems statewide or in specific regions, restricting weapon types and managing hunting seasons more tightly to protect or encourage population growth.
- There was also a push for better genetic management, reducing doe/fawn licenses and adjusting hunting seasons to manage Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD).

Habitat and Land Use Management

- Habitat degradation and competition for resources were highlighted as significant issues.
- Discussions included the need for habitat treatments like cheatgrass and juniper control, concerns about less water availability and the impact of livestock grazing on state and BLM lands.
- There was a focus on improving forage quality through measures like protein testing of sagebrush and managing land use to favor mule deer over other species like elk and white-tailed deer, which were seen as competitors.

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Management

- There was considerable discussion in Cody Region meetings on CWD, including current strategies, the effectiveness of these strategies, and future directions.
- Attendees were interested in understanding what has worked elsewhere, how CWD affects different herds and exploring options like hunting regulations (e.g., focusing harvest in CWD hotspots, removing private land restrictions for archery seasons), genetic research for resistance, and management of white-tailed deer to indirectly aid mule deer conservation.
- There was also a focus on education about CWD and disposal of infected carcasses.

Habitat and Land Use Management

- Habitat quality and availability were critical concerns.
- Discussions involved habitat treatments, the impact of grazing by elk, cattle, and domestic sheep on mule deer winter ranges, the need for better forest management, and the effects of development, fencing, and agricultural practices.
- There was a call for improved coordination with federal land management agencies like BLM and USFS to monitor and mitigate grazing impacts and to enhance habitat through projects like early successional habitat creation and wildlife-friendly fencing.

Population and Harvest Management

- This theme encompassed various suggestions for managing hunting to support mule deer recovery and sustainability.
- Key points included: moving to a limited quota system to protect young bucks and manage population levels more sustainably; adjusting season dates, lengths and types (e.g., archery, muzzleloader) to balance hunting opportunity with population health; addressing issues like hunter crowding, technology use in hunting and the cultural shift towards trophy hunting versus opportunity hunting.
- Proposals for antler point restrictions (APRs), region-specific regulations and managing nonresident hunting to reduce pressure on mule deer populations, especially in areas where numbers are low or where CWD is prevalent.

Habitat and Land Use Management

- There was a significant focus on habitat quality, with concerns about winter range conditions, carrying capacity, and the impact of development on mule deer habitats.
- Discussions included the effects of cheatgrass, juniper encroachment, and overgrazing by livestock on federal lands.
- There was also a strong interest in habitat treatments, water development, and the need for better land management practices to support mule deer populations.
- Attendees expressed concerns about how development projects like solar farms, wind projects, and urbanization could degrade habitats or disrupt migration corridors.

Population and Harvest Management

- Hunting pressure was a recurring theme, with discussions on how to manage it through season structures, such as limited quota systems versus general seasons, the use or removal of antler point restrictions (APRs), and the adjustment of season lengths and dates.
- There was debate on how these changes might influence population dynamics, particularly in relation to the recovery of deer numbers after severe winters.
- Concerns also include the impact of hunters relying on UTVs for hunting which increases pressure and changes the distribution of hunting opportunities, including special considerations for youth hunters.

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Management

- Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) was discussed in terms of management strategies, sampling, and the effectiveness of current approaches, with some attendees pushing for mandatory testing.

Predator Management

- Predation, particularly by coyotes, mountain lions, and bears was another area of concern, with suggestions for increased predator control or adjustments in seasons to manage predator populations.
- There was a mix of views on whether current predation management is effective or if more aggressive approaches are needed.

Population and Harvest Management

- There was a strong emphasis on doing “whatever it takes” to help mule deer recover quickly, both in the short and long term.
- Specific suggestions included deer feeding, altering hunting pressure through mechanisms like resident regions, limited quotas, and adjusting season structures (like standard opening dates or closing seasons post-bad winters).
- There was also a focus on predator management, with ideas to increase quotas or eliminate them to reduce predation impacts on deer.
- Attendees expressed concerns about hunting pressure and proposed changes to manage it better.
- Discussions included the removal of antler point restrictions (APRs) exemptions for youth, mandatory harvest reporting, choosing weapon types to possibly reduce hunting efficiency, and ending long-range shooting to promote fair chase ethics.
- There was also notable interest in learning from other states’ hunting regulations to potentially apply similar measures for conservation benefits.

Habitat and Land Use Management

- The importance of habitat for mule deer survival and reproduction was highlighted, will calls for habitat projects that aid in fattening deer in summer and surviving winters.

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Management

- There was also a significant discussion on CWD, with demands for updated statistics, mandatory testing, and education on carcass disposal to manage the disease.
- The focus was on improving habitat quality and managing diseases to support population growth.

LANDER



Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Management

- There was considerable focus on CWD across all meetings in the Lander region.
- Key points included the need for increased sampling (like the suggestion for a CWD barrel in Dubois), understanding its impact on mature bucks, managing deer in high-prevalence areas, and public concerns about consuming CWD-positive deer.
- There was also debate on whether aggressive deer harvest (like doe/fawn licenses) could control CWD spread, alongside concerns about how CWD might be influencing population dynamics and hunting regulations.



Population and Harvest Management

- Discussions focused on how to manage hunting to support mule deer recovery and population health.
- Suggestions included moving to a limited quota system, adjusting antler point restrictions (APRs), considering shorter or split seasons, and exploring different license types or pricing to manage hunting pressure.
- There was recognition that hunting isn't the sole reason for deer decline but is seen as a tool for managing population structure and health.
- The impact of hunting on deer numbers post-hard winters and the potential for overharvest were significant concerns.



Habitat and Land Use Management

- Habitat quality and the impact of human and natural factors on it were central.
- Concerns included competition with other species like elk and white-tailed deer, the effects of development (wind turbines, oil/gas), overgrazing by livestock, and the need for wildlife crossings to reduce road mortality.



Predator Management

- Predation by mountain lions and coyotes was discussed with suggestions for increased control measures.
- There was also interest in habitat projects, like those with NRCS in Dubois, to improve conditions for mule deer.

LARAMIE



Predator Management

- There was a strong call across all meetings for increased management of predators like mountain lions, coyotes, and bears.
- Suggestions included extending hunting seasons, changing the classification of species like mountain lions from trophy game to predator, and increasing removal efforts, either through direct action by Game and Fish or through incentives for public involvement.
- The impact of predators on mule deer populations, particularly after observing movements from neighboring states like Colorado was a significant concern.



Habitat and Land Use Management

- Ensuring habitat quality, including how to enhance or protect it, were key discussion points.
- Issues like competition from elk and white-tailed deer, the impact of development (like subdivisions in crucial ranges), and the need for habitat projects (e.g., sagebrush diversity, timber harvest effects, fence conversions) were highlighted.
- There was also a focus on managing livestock grazing, wild horses, and promoting habitat conservation through easements or direct improvements like food plots and fawning cover.
- The competition for resources with other species, particularly elk, was seen as a major factor influencing mule deer numbers.



Population and Harvest Management

- There was widespread interest in revising hunting regulations to aid in mule deer population recovery. Suggestions included moving to a limited quota system statewide, reducing season lengths or changing season dates, implementing or removing antler point restrictions (APRs), and considering closing seasons for recovery periods.
- There was also debate on how to manage hunting pressure, whether through license allocation adjustments, offering different types of hunts (e.g., choose your weapon), or managing expectations by eliminating general seasons or adjusting quotas.
- The discussion also touched on managing Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) through hunting practices, although with mixed views on effectiveness and implications.

Population and Harvest Management

- There was significant discussion on how hunting pressure has changed over the years, with fewer non-resident hunters now than in the past. The impact of this pressure, especially intensified by shorter seasons, was a concern.
- There was also considerable debate over the structure of the hunting seasons, including whether to maintain or remove antler point restrictions (APRs), support for different types of seasons like general vs. limited quotas, and the potential benefits of allowing youth to hunt any deer.
- Adjustments to season lengths and the introduction of mandatory harvest reporting were also discussed as means to manage hunting pressure and improve data collection.

Habitat and Land Use Management

- Weather, particularly harsh winters, was acknowledged as a major regulator of mule deer populations.
- There was a focus on what can be controlled, like habitat management.
- Discussions included the carrying capacity of winter ranges, the effectiveness of habitat treatments like sagebrush mowing, and the need for better grazing management on federal lands to prevent overgrazing.
- There was a strong emphasis on enhancing habitat to support mule deer recovery, including water developments and controlling invasive species like cheatgrass.
- The impact of human development, especially from oil and gas operations, on mule deer crucial ranges was a major concern, with calls for better reclamation practices and public involvement in decision-making processes.
- Competition for resources with other species (elk, cattle) and the need for increased white-tailed deer harvest to lessen competition were highlighted. This theme included discussions on how to mitigate these impacts through policy, public engagement, and habitat conservation.

Migration Corridors and Competition with other species

- There was a focus on protecting migration corridors through conservation easements and reducing highway mortality with crossing projects.

Habitat and Land Use Management

- Habitat degradation due to various factors like grazing permits, loss of sagebrush, and the increase in invasive grasses was a major concern.
- There was an emphasis on improving winter ranges by reducing livestock grazing on state lands and controlling white-tailed deer to reduce competition for resources.
- The loss of habitat was seen as a direct contributor to the decline in mule deer populations.
- Discussions also included the impact of development on migration corridors and the need for better management of these areas through habitat enhancement projects or reducing human-induced disturbances.

Population and Harvest Management

- The management of hunting, including the number of doe tags issued, the implementation of limited quota systems, antler point restrictions (APRs), and the allocation of licenses, particularly for non-residents, was a central theme.
- There was debate over whether seasons should be closed entirely to allow for population recovery or if current practices like hunting pregnant does on private land are counterproductive.
- Suggestions included bringing back doe tags to improve buck ratios, adjusting season structures to manage harvest pressure more effectively, and addressing issues like crossbows in archery seasons.

Quality Decline

- There was a widespread concern about the reduction in both the number and quality of mule deer, particularly noting fewer mature bucks and a general decline in mule deer numbers over the last 20+ years.
- This theme included discussions on the age structure of deer populations (with fewer 3.5-year-old deer noted) and the overall health and size of the herds, with some areas experiencing significant reductions in deer numbers.

