

ELK HERD MANAGEMENT PLAN
Elk Herd Unit #19
West Desert
September 2016

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Juab and Tooele counties--Boundary begins at the Pleasant Valley road and the Utah-Nevada state line; north along this state line to the Salt Springs (Blue Lake) road; south on this road to the Pleasant Valley road; northwest on this road to the Utah-Nevada state line. EXCLUDES ALL NATIVE AMERICAN TRUST LAND WITHIN THIS BOUNDARY.

LAND OWNERSHIP

RANGE AREA AND APPROXIMATE OWNERSHIP DEEP CREEK SUB-UNIT

Unit 19a	Spring-Fall		Summer-Fall Range		Winter Spring		Winter Range		Yearlong range	
	Area (acres)	%	Area (acres)	%	Area (acres)	%	Area (acres)	%	Area (acres)	%
Forest Service										
Bureau of Land Management	37,822	74	16,738	83			19,833	54		
Utah State Institutional Trust Lands							1475	4		
Native American Trust Lands	12,507	24	2694	13			12,359	34		
Private	1039	2	843	4			3127	8		
Department of Defense										
USFWS Refuge										
DOD										
Utah State Parks										
Utah Division of Wildlife Resources										
Water										
TOTAL	51,367	100	20,275	100			36,795	100		

UNIT MANAGEMENT GOALS

The unit management goals are to: provide and sustain a healthy elk population; provide varied and high quality recreational opportunities for viewing and limited entry elk harvest; balance impacts between elk and man's economic and social activities, private property rights and local economies; maintain an elk population consistent with the available range resources and which is in balance with other range users such as domestic livestock, other big game and the need for watershed protection; strive for consistency and simplicity in elk management programs; provide elk viewing opportunities to wilderness visitors and other segments of the public on a year round basis and; maintain a population of mature bull elk sufficient to provide opportunities to see and hear mature bull elk behavior during the breeding season.

UNIT MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Habitat

- Maintain a stable or improving range trend on the important areas of elk habitat.
- Monitor permanent range trend studies located throughout the winter range.

Population

Target Winter Herd Size – We want to achieve a wintering population of 200 elk on that portion of the Deep Creek Mountains exclusive of the Goshute Indian Reservation. A secondary objective is to achieve a wintering population of 150 elk in the Dog Valley-Sage Valley area in the eastern part of the West Desert Wildlife Management Unit. This is the number of elk that BLM has provided for in their planning process.

Harvest - Because of tribal lands, the state of Utah has only minimal authority or ability to regulate harvest, and thus population size, on this unit. The bulk of harvest, at least for the foreseeable future will likely be confined to the Goshute Reservation. Utah's objective is to harvest 7.5-8.0 year old bulls annually under a limited entry harvest strategy. Antlerless harvest will be governed by depredation concerns and the eventual possibility of range condition problems attributable to elk.

Current Status of Elk Management

Habitat

There are 8 range trend study sites on the Deep Creek Mountain range. Seven are on BLM administered land while one is on Goshute Indian Reservation Land. Four study sites are present on winter ranges in Trail Gulch, Ochre Mountain, Sevy Canyon and Durse Canyon. Three summer range studies exist on Chokecherry, Granite, and the Basin.

There was a stable to upward trend for soil, herbaceous understory, and browse components in 2012. Improvement on the browse component can be attributed to habitat treatments. Following a treatment of the browse the sagebrush stand was still relatively dense, but comprised of mostly smaller mature and young plants.

Habitat projects include joint UDWR, BLM and NRCS treatments on the west slope and Ibapah Valley. These multi-year projects will help improve winter range conditions for elk.

Several factors impact the ability of this unit to support larger elk populations, including agricultural depredation, and competition for forage with domestic livestock.

Completed habitat improvement projects

Over the past decades many habitat improvement projects have occurred that benefit elk. These include; both prescribed fire and wild fire, pinyon-juniper chainings, conifer thinning, etc. This table lists specific habitat improvements & protections that have occurred in the last ten years on Unit 19.

WMU 19 Elk Projects 2005 to 2016

Completed Project	Agency	Acres	Cooperators
Ibapah Sagebrush Improvement- Year 1	BLM	250	DWR, MDF
Ibapah Sagebrush Improvement - Year 2	BLM	2,202	DWR, SFW, MDF, RMEF
Ibapah Sagebrush Improvement - Year 3	BLM	1,033	DWR, SFW, MDF, RMEF, NWTF
Ibapah Sagebrush Improvement - Year 4	BLM	152	DWR, SFW, RMEF, MDF
Ibapah Fire Rehab	BLM	1,135	DWR, FFSL

Deep Creek Valley Sagebrush Improvement -Year 2	BLM	647	DWR, MDF
Deep Creek East Pasture Habitat Improvement	BLM	150	DWR, RMEF
Deep Creek West Pasture Habitat Improvement	BLM	250	
Goshute Pinyon Juniper chaining project	NRCS	750	DWR
	USFS	750	DWR, National Forest Foundation, NRCS
TOTAL		7,319	

Population

The latest aerial flight was conducted January 2009 where 66 bulls were counted. Antlerless animals had moved off of the unit and were not located. These animals likely move onto tribal ground in the winter when aerial flights take place and move back onto the WMU at other times of the year. The adjusted modeled population count for 2016 is below objective at 60 animals. Average calf production is 40 to 50 calves/100 cows. The unit is scheduled to have another aerial flight winter of 2017.

BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Crop Depredation - Prevention and/or minimization of damage caused by elk to privately owned crops and rangelands is a very high priority. The Utah State Wildlife Resources Code and the rules developed by the Wildlife Board constitute the basic guidance for implementing big game depredation prevention and compensation procedures.

Habitat - Specific areas of elk habitat have become degraded from juniper encroachment. Managing for healthy habitats is a priority on the deep creek unit. DWR will propose habitat improvement projects where needed to benefit elk and livestock on the range, and design antlerless hunts to obtain harvest and properly distribute elk on the unit.

Weather Extremes - Periodic climatic extremes, especially severe drought and winters, can cause great fluctuations in overall population size, sex ratios, and age structure. In the broadest sense, these impacts are generally not preventable, although their impacts can sometimes be moderated with management programs. The best option is to try and provide an abundant habitat base of the highest quality. Artificial winter-feeding of elk will be considered only under the most extreme emergency conditions as prescribed by the Division of Wildlife Resources written policy for the winter feeding of big game.

Other Mortality Causes - Occasionally, other sources of elk mortality such as unlawful harvest, highway mortality, winter loss, disease or losses to predators may prevent or at least slow down the achievement of objectives. These situations are best dealt with on a case specific basis tailored to the specific situation. Unlawful harvest is best addressed through an action plan approach that assigns greater law enforcement efforts or which specifies some necessary public education measures. Cooperative efforts with the state Department of Transportation may help reduce highway mortality. Predator management plans and their implementation may reduce the impact of predators.

STRATEGIES FOR REMOVING BARRIERS AND REACHING UNIT MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Habitat

- Achieve an improving range trend on the important winter range areas on the Deep Creek Mountains
- Work with the BLM on habitat improvement projects on winter ranges. Limit winter range conversion from wildfires to cheat grass, juniper encroachment, control ATV use.
- Work cooperatively with land management agencies and private landowners to plan and implement improvement projects for the purpose of enhancing wildlife habitat and range resources in general. Participate with landowners by providing seed, labor or machinery to implement specific improvements.
- UDWR has fenced 220 acres of alfalfa field to reduce depredation, and will explore fencing 250 additional acres to minimize elk depredation in the Ibapah Valley.

Population

Monitoring

Population Size – use the results from the annual harvest survey, age and sex classification surveys, aerial census and estimates of mortality to monitor population status and trends. A dynamic computer model, which utilizes some or all of the previously mentioned data, will be used as an aid to assess population status. Its primary use, however, will be to assist in determining ongoing harvest requirements necessary to manipulate herd size and composition. If needed, DWR may trap and remove or transplant elk to achieve management objectives.

Bull Age Structure - The primary means to monitor this parameter will be preseason ground classification surveys, winter aerial classifications conducted every third year and tooth aging data.

Harvest - Whenever possible, harvest recommendations will be crafted so as to simultaneously manage overall population size and also address concerns in specific areas such as depredation problems or localized range concerns. The primary means to achieve this will be through antlerless harvest. Bull harvest will be managed under a limited entry hunt system and general season spike hunting. For antlerless harvest, a variety of strategies, seasons and type of permits are available. Monitoring of harvest will occur through the use of the uniform statewide harvest survey.

Communication - DWR will strive to coordinate with the Goshute Tribe regarding harvest recommendations for the entire herd, keeping in mind the sovereign status of the Goshute Tribe. DWR has agreed to manage to a similar age objective as the Goshute tribe of 7.5-8.0 year old limited entry bull harvest. Another priority is to coordinating with the Goshute Tribe on habitat management efforts so that elk populations and range resources both on and off the reservation may benefit.

DWR will work cooperatively with the Bureau of Land Management and state land management agencies and private landowners to plan and implement improvement projects for the purpose of enhancing wildlife habitat and range resources in general. Cooperatively, we will propose habitat projects to reduce juniper encroachment. BLM, NRCS and Utah Division of Wildlife Resources are participating in projects to improve sage grouse habitat, which in turn will improve winter range for elk.