DEER HERD UNIT MANAGEMENT PLAN
Deer Herd Unit # 13A
La Sal, La Sal Mountains
September 2025

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTIONS

Grand and San Juan counties—Boundary begins at I-70 and the Green River; south along this river to the Colorado River; north along this river to Kane Springs Creek; southeast along this creek to Hatch Wash; southeast along this wash to US-191; south on US-191 to Big Indian Road; east on this road to Lisbon Valley Road; east on this road to Island Mesa Road; east on this road to the Utah-Colorado state line; north on this state line to the Dolores River; west along this river to the Colorado River; north along this river to the Utah-Colorado state line; north on this state line to I-70; west on I-70 to the Green River.

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LAND OWNERSHIP

RANGE AREA AND APPROXIMATE OWNERSHIP OF MULE DEER HABITAT

Ownership	Area (acres)	Percentage (%)
Forest Service	140,539	27.15%
Bureau of Land Management	235,953	45.58%
Utah State Institutional Trust Lands	47,282	9.13%
Private	73,602	14.22%
Department of Defense	32	0.01%
National Parks	17,900	3.46%
Utah Department of Transportation	81	0.02%
Department of Natural Resources	2,260	0.44%
TOTAL	517,649	100%

UNIT MANAGEMENT GOALS

- Manage the deer population at a level capable of providing a broad range of recreational opportunities, including hunting and viewing.
- Use current research (body condition scores (BCS), survival rates, cause-specific mortality, range trend data, etc.), historic population estimates, and classification data to set realistic and attainable population objectives and use those data to evaluate population estimates using the most reliable models.
- Balance deer herd goals and objectives with impacts on human needs, such as private property rights, agricultural crops and local economies.

POPULATION MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Target Winter Herd Size - Manage for a target population of 11,500 wintering deer (modeled number) during the five-year planning period.

Subunit	2015-2019 Objective	2020-2024 Objective	2025-2029 Objective
UNIT TOTAL	13,500	8,000	11,500

The 2025-2029 objectives are not necessarily the carrying capacity nor long-term objectives. Deer populations will be assessed annually using the monitoring strategies outlined below to determine the current population status and their relationship to carrying capacity. Deer populations can be very dynamic depending on a number of factors that can change carrying capacity. Deer objectives can be adjusted based on range condition and trend assessments, as well as deer body condition, productivity and survival trends. Improvements in computer population modeling has provided better estimates of current deer numbers which will aid in setting population objectives that are more realistic and attainable.

An increase in population objective to 11,500 deer will be implemented in 2025. This largely comes from improvements in modeling estimates. The 2015-2019 population objective of 13,500 was derived using harvest data from the 1980's when deer populations were at a high and the most recent population objective of 8,000 reflected population estimates from models that did not take fluctuating survival rates into account. Range Trend data will be used to assess habitat conditions. Should over-utilization and range damage by deer occur, recommendations will be made to reduce deer populations to sustainable levels in localized areas. The Desirable Components Index (DCI) scores from the 2024 range trend survey show that the unit has generally remained similar from year to year since 1994 (Figure 1). This suggests that overall, this herd has not reached or exceeded carrying capacity on the summer range and upper elevation winter ranges on years with favorable environmental conditions. Population trend, habitat, and body condition data suggest that the current objective is realistic, attainable and allows for herd growth of 2700 deer over the next 5 years.

Herd Composition - This is a general season unit and will be managed for a buck-to-doe ratio of 15-17 bucks per 100 does, in accordance with the statewide plan. Biologists will take into account current year buck/doe ratio, 3 year average buck/doe ratio and trend as well as fawn and adult survival when making permit recommendations.

Harvest - Continue general season unit buck deer hunt regulations, using archery, any weapon, and muzzleloader hunts. Antlerless removal may be implemented if needed to maintain the population below carrying capacity and to address specific localized crop depredation, range degradation or urban conflict concerns, using a variety of harvest methods and seasons.

POPULATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Monitoring

Population Size - Population estimates will be made based on fall (post-season) composition counts conducted by biologists, survival and body condition data from GPS collared deer, and hunter harvest data. These data will be used to model the winter deer herd population size. The modeled population estimate for the winter of 2024 was 8,800 deer.

Buck/doe ratios and Age Structure – Collect buck/doe and fawn/doe ratio data during fall composition counts. Monitor age class structure of the buck population through check stations, postseason classification, mandatory harvest surveys, and field bag checks.

Harvest - The primary means of monitoring harvest will be through statewide mandatory hunter harvest reporting.

Research – Continue to support research and collar efforts on this unit. These projects aim to collect annual adult and fawn survival rates, body condition scores, cause specific mortality, potential CWD transmission, mapping migration corridors, and identifying limiting factors for deer herd growth.

Table 1. Population Trends and Harvest for the La Sal Mountains (13A)

Year	Buck harvest	Permits	Post-Season F/100 doe	Post-Season B/100 doe	Post-Season Population	Objective	% of Objective
2015	534	1800	45	18	7000	13500	52%
2016	587	1800	46	17	7100	13500	53%
2017	589	1800	23	11	5300	13500	39%
2018	527	1600	21	17	5500	13500	41%
2019	463	1600	34	17	5500	13500	41%
2020	425	1200	53	22	6500	8000	81%
2021	512	1400	38	16	5900	8000	74%
2022	443	1200	43	26	5500	8000	69%
2023	571	1200	47	17	5500	8000	69%
2024	616	1400	50	30	8800	8000	110%
10 Year Avg	527	1500	40	19	-	-	-

Antlerless Harvest

Use antlerless harvest to locally reduce deer populations when range conditions, deer adult and fawn survival, fawn production, and deer body condition suggest it is approaching carrying capacity.

Use antlerless harvest in combination with the Urban Deer Rule to reduce nuisance and depredation by deer.

Predator Management

Manage predators according to the predator management policy (W1AG-04) where habitat is not limiting and predators are demonstrated to have negative impacts on the population. Indices such as doe and fawn survival, body condition scores, fawn production, and cause specific mortality will be used to determine if predator management is deemed necessary.

Private Lands Management

Support programs that increase tolerance for deer on private lands including CWMU, landowner permits, and Walk-In Access programs.

Address all depredation problems in a timely and efficient manner.

Disease Management

Investigate and manage diseases that threaten mule deer populations and continue monitoring for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) as stated in the Statewide plan. The La Sal Mountains unit is a CWD positive unit (Map 2), displaying the highest prevalence rates in the state (~20-25%; Table 2)

Table 2. Chronic Wasting Disease sampling results 2019-2025. Note that "Percent Positive" on some sample years may not accurately reflect prevalence rate due to low sample sizes.

Fiscal Year	Positive CWD Result	Total Samples	Percent Positive
2019	9	62	15%
2020	2	10	20%
2021	8	16	50%
2022	7	35	20%
2023	18	30	60%
2024	36	165	22%

CWD Strategies

- Utilize rotational hunter harvest surveillance, targeting this unit once every several years.
- Consider compulsory testing of hunter harvested deer to increase sample size.
- Consider managing the unit toward the lower end of the buck/doe objective to minimize increase of the disease.
- Consider late season buck hunts in focal hotspots on the unit to minimize disease transmission.
- Consider increasing harvest on private lands and in urban areas working with landowners, WMAs, cities, and counties
- Educate public and enforce rules regarding carcass importation and disposal from CWD positive areas.

Urban Deer Management

Work with municipalities on localized urban deer control management actions. Work cooperatively with municipalities in developing urban deer management plans, within the guidelines set by state law and agency policies.

Poaching

While the effect of poaching on wildlife populations can be difficult to assess, the illegal take of wildlife is unacceptable. Law enforcement will continue to make mule deer protection a high priority by concentrating efforts on prioritized winter ranges. Success will only be achieved with vigilance and assistance from our conservation partners and the general public.

RECREATION OBJECTIVES

Provide mule deer hunting that encourages a variety of hunting opportunities while maintaining population objectives.

RECREATION STRATEGIES

Consider additional hunt opportunities such as early/late rifle, HAMSS or extended archery hunts as hunter crowding, disease issues and other concerns dictate.

Work with land managers to maintain access during hunting seasons where appropriate.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Maintain or improve mule deer habitat on the unit by monitoring, protecting, maintaining, and enhancing existing crucial habitats and mitigating losses due to natural and human impacts.

Use current range trend data and the best available science when prioritizing, designing, and implementing habitat improvement projects

Minimize deer vehicle collisions along highways on the unit by continuing to cooperate with UDOT in construction and maintenance of highway fences, passage structures and warning signs, etc.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Monitoring

Range trend studies will be conducted by DWR to evaluate deer habitat health, trend, and carrying capacity using the deer winter range Desirable Component Index (DCI) and other vegetation data. The DCI was created as an indicator of the general health of deer winter ranges. The index incorporates shrub cover, density and age composition as well as other key vegetation variables. Changes in DCI suggest changes in winter range capacity. The relationship between DCI and the changes in deer carrying capacity is difficult to quantify and is not known.

Continue to work with and support Universities and land management agencies on habitat research projects.

Conduct cooperative range assessments to evaluate forage condition and utilization of important deer ranges. Determining opportunities for habitat improvements will be an integral part of these surveys. This will also be pivotal in determining if antlerless harvest is necessary.

Habitat Protection

Work toward long-term habitat protection and preservation through the use of agreements with federal agencies and local governments and the use of conservation easements on private lands.

Support, cooperate with, and provide input to land management planning efforts dealing with actions affecting habitat security, quality and quantity.

Work with land management agencies and energy companies to minimize and mitigate impacts of energy development activities.

Work with land management agencies in managing riparian areas in critical fawning habitat to furnish water, cover and succulent forage from mid- to late summer.

Work with private landowners, federal, state, and local governments to maintain and protect critical ranges from future losses and degradation through grazing management and trail, OHV and Travel Plan modifications.

Habitat Improvements

Continue to improve, protect, and restore summer and winter ranges critical to deer, such as aspen and sagebrush steppe communities. Cooperate with federal land management agencies and private landowners in carrying out habitat improvements such as pinion-juniper removal, reseedings, controlled burns, mechanical treatments, grazing management, water developments etc. on public and private lands. Habitat improvement projects will occur through the WRI process. Projects completed to date are summarized in Table 3 and Map 1.

Reduce expansion of pinion-juniper woodlands into sagebrush habitats and improve habitats dominated by pinion-juniper woodlands by completing habitat restoration projects like lop-and-scatter, bullhog and chaining.

Protect deer winter ranges from wildfire by reseeding burned areas, creating fuel breaks and vegetated green strips and reseed areas dominated by annual grasses with desirable perennial vegetation. Seek opportunities to increase browse in burned areas of critical winter range.

Seek out opportunities to improve fawning habitat across the unit. Consider summer range habitat improvement projects that remove encroaching trees, improve succulent vegetation and wet meadow habitat, increases aspen recruitment, enhances and/or protects riparian areas, use prescribed fire to promote early succession habitats where appropriate.

Utilize antlerless deer harvest to improve or protect forage conditions when vegetative declines are attributed to deer over utilization.

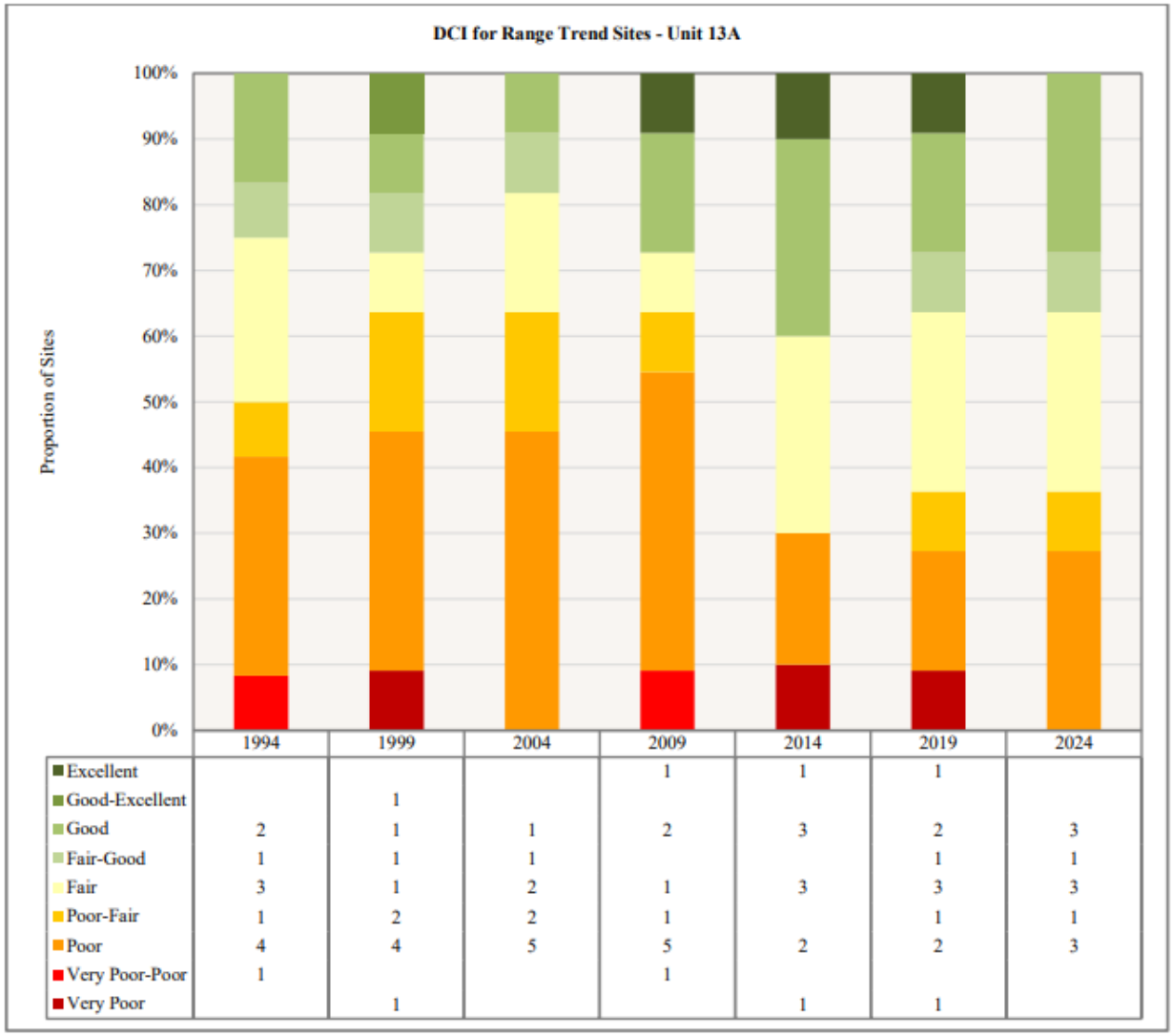
Highway mortality will continue to be monitored and the need for additional highway fences, passage structures, warning signs and other mitigation options will be evaluated.

RANGE TREND SUMMARIES AND BODY CONDITION DATA

Deer Winter Range Condition Assessment

The overall condition of deer winter and transitional range within the La Sal Mountains Management Unit has remained similar from year to year with sites averaging between poor-fair and fair condition since 1994 (Figure 1). North Beaver Mesa (13A-11), Below Polar Rim (13A-12), Lower Lackey Fan (13A-14), Hideout Mesa (13A-15), and Dolores Point (13A-18) are the main drivers for the unit's wintering habitat stability and quality, and deer winter range condition for these sites averages between fair and good. Two Mile Chaining (13A-01), Buck Hollow (13A-03), Slaughter Flat (13A-04), Amasas Back (13A-05), Round Mountain (13A-07), Black Ridge (13A-08), Upper Fisher Valley (13A-10) (suspended), and Beaver Canyon (13A-13) (suspended) are/have been considered to be between very poor-poor and poor-fair wintering habitat conditions consistently from year to year: these poor conditions suppress the unit's overall winter range quality. Range Trend sites in WMU 13A that tend to have higher winter habitat variability include Lower Lackey Fan and Hideout Mesa: this may suggest a higher potential for winter range improvement.

The overall deer winter range assessment in 2024 for WMU 13A is that the unit is in fair condition. However, North Beaver Mesa, Lower Lackey Fan, Hideout Mesa, and Dolores Point were considered to be in good condition due to the high cover of preferred browse and perennial grass. Lower Lackey Fan would benefit from an increase in native perennial grasses and forbs, while a reduction in annual grass on both Lower Lackey Fan and Hideout Mesa would increase habitat suitability in these areas. All sites would benefit from an increase in perennial forbs.



	1994	1999	2004	2009	2014	2019	2024
Excellent				1	1	1	
Good-Excellent		1					
Good	2	1	1	2	3	2	3
Fair-Good	1	1	1			1	1
Fair	3	1	2	1	3	3	3
Poor-Fair	1	2	2	1		1	1
Poor	4	4	5	5	2	2	3
Very Poor-Poor	1			1			
Very Poor		1			1	1	

Figure 1. Deer winter range Desirable Components Index (DCI) summary by year of Range Trend sites for WMU 13A, La Sal Mountains

Treatments/Restoration Work

There has been an active effort to address many of the limitations on this unit through the Watershed Restoration Initiative (WRI). A total of 27,294 acres of land have been treated within the La Sal Mountains unit since the WRI was implemented in 2004. Treatments frequently overlap one another, bringing the net total of completed treatment acres to 24,468 for this unit (Table 3, Map 1). Other treatments have occurred outside of the WRI through independent agencies and landowners, but the WRI comprises most of the work done on deer winter ranges throughout the state of Utah.

Lop and scatter to remove pinyon (Pinus spp.) and juniper (Juniperus spp.) is the most common treatment type. However, mastication treatments to remove pinyon and juniper trees are also very common. Herbicide application to remove invasive species is an effective tool to manage cheatgrass (Bromus tectorum) and has been employed as a treatment method in unit 13A. Other management practices in this unit include (but are not limited to) seeding, prescribed fire, forestry practices, and shrub transplants (Table 3)

Table 3: WRI treatment action size (acres) for completed projects for WMU 13A, La Sal Mountains. Data accessed on 02/25/2025.

Type	Total Completed Acreage
Vegetation Removal/Hand Crew	**11,825**
Lop & Scatter	8,389
Lop-Pile-Burn	2,639
Cut Stump	751
Lop & Chip	39
Lop (No Scatter)	7
Bullhog	**7,157**
Full Size	6,204
Skid Steer	953
Herbicide Application	**3,424**
Spot Treatment	2,132
Aerial (Fixed-Wing)	1,292
Prescribed Fire	**2,075**
Prescribed Fire	1,896
Pile Burn	180
Seeding (Primary)	**1,971**
Broadcast (Aerial-Helicopter)	597
Broadcast (Aerial-Fixed Wing)	557
Hand Seeding	502
Ground (Mechanical Application)	274
Drill (Rangeland)	41
Planting/Transplanting	**244**
Other	161
Bareroot Stock	73
Container Stock	10
Forestry Practices	**206**
Ripping	124
Clearcutting	57
Thinning (Non-Commercial)	25
Anchor Chain	**157**
Ely (One-Way)	152
Ely (Two-Way)	4
Chain Harrow	**89**
> 15 ft. (One-Way)	89
Harrow	**53**
≤ 15 ft. (One-Way)	53
Mowing	**49**
Other	49
Seeding (Secondary/Shrub)	**21**
Hand Seeding	21
Interseeding	**18**
Interseeding	18
Other	**6**
Road Decommissioning	4
Road/Parking Area Improvements	2
Grand Total	**27,294**
***Net Total Land Area Treated**	**24,468**

Map 1: Terrestrial WRI treatments by fiscal year completed for WMU 13A, La Sal Mountains

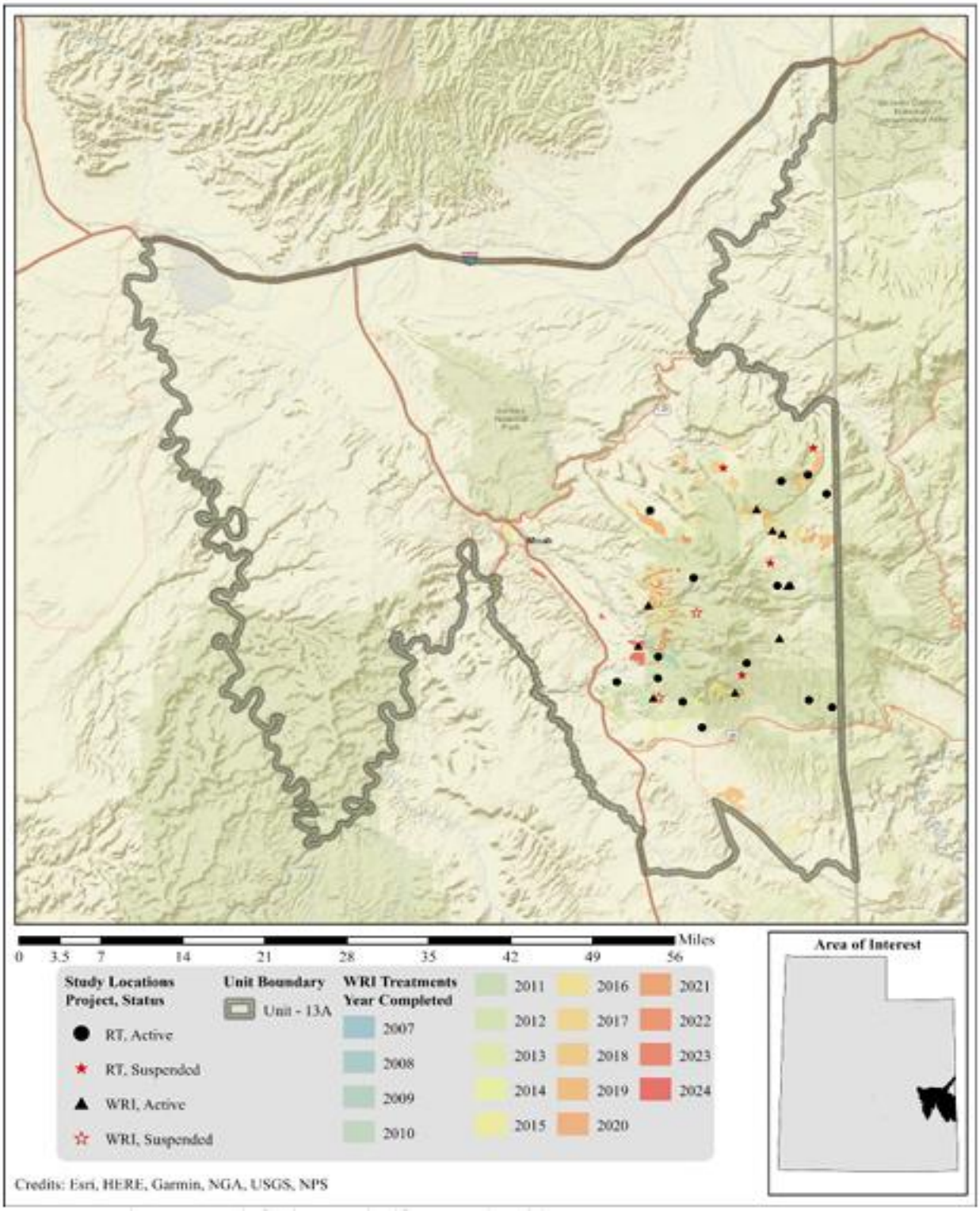
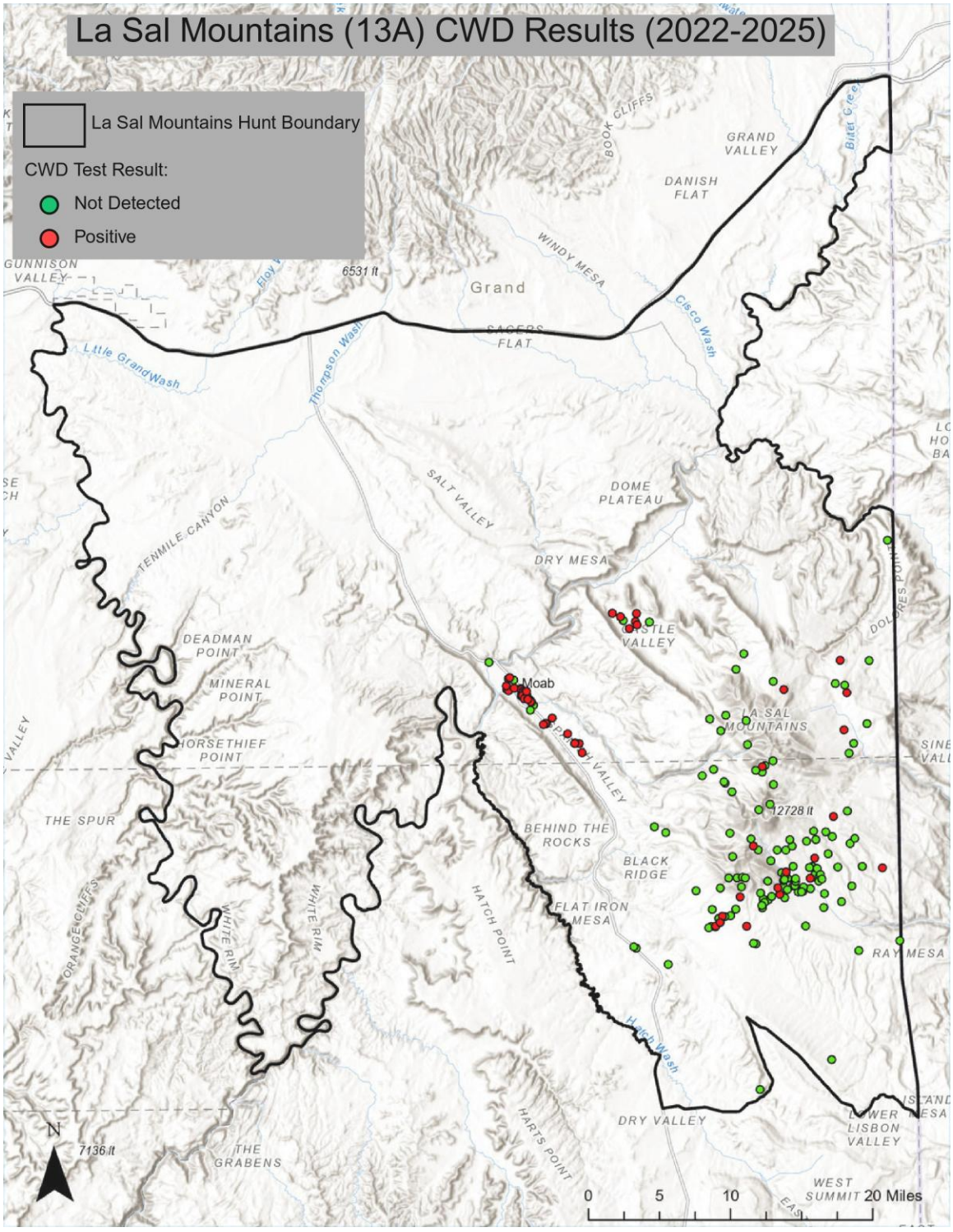


Table 4: Percent Ingesta Free Body Fat Comparisons of Captured Deer, 2014-2024.

Percent (%) Ingesta Free Body Fat (IFBF)											
Unit	Dec-14	Dec-15	Dec-16	Dec-17	Dec-18	Dec-19	Dec-20	Dec-21	Dec-22	Dec-23	Dec-24
Box Elder						8.79	9.3	12.42			
Cache		11.02	9.59	13.65	10.32	13.71	12.13	12.88	10.44	14.4	12.4
Morgan							8.84	10.84		14.97	
Antelope Island						9.99					
North Slope					8.59						10.06
South Slope	11.31	9.46	9	9.56	7.24	9.9	8.52	12.18	8.65	11.02	9.11
Oquirrh-Stansbury	10.52	8.43	9.56	8.79	7.39	8.46	8.26	10.91	9.91	10.02	10.43
Chalk Creek/Kamas					7.19	11.02	10.75				
Wasatch-Manti		8.76	9.22	10.23	9.32	11.11	8.97	10.28	9.4	12.02	9.53
Wasatch East						11.51	12.26	10.78			
Wasatch-West											12.3
Southeast Manti			8.87			9.42	9.25	10.89	8.03		
Southwest Manti							7.3				
Nebo-Tintic								12.67	8.88	12.61	9.33
Book Cliffs				7.56	6.35	8.8	7.13	8.88		6.65	8.84
Range Creek									8.48	11.25	8.58
West Desert					6.33	8.04					
Monroe	8.1	8.98	8.23	9.53	6.5	10.37	8.56	11.28	8.4	12.23	8.59
Beaver						7.75	8.44	9.67			
Boulder						8.54	5.96			10.05	10.9
Kaiparowits							5.88				
Panguitch					8.76	8.64					
Pine Valley		7.42	6.68	6.54	6.91	6.86	6.77	7.71	7.25	8.92	6.89
Southwest Desert											7.28
Zion					8.48	9.04				7.21	8.36
La Sal						8.63		7.61	8.91	11.46	6.64
San Juan		9.35	9.25	7.6	7.77	9.5	8.11	8.79	7.97	9.22	7.36
Statewide	9.98	9.06	8.8	9.18	7.78	9.48	8.61	10.52	8.76	10.86	9.16
Statewide_7_Units	9.98	9.01	8.71	9.72	7.95	10.07	8.87	10.87	9.01	11.12	9.19

Unit Low

Unit High



Map 2. Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) test results from 2022-2025 on the La Sal Mountains (13A) WMU.

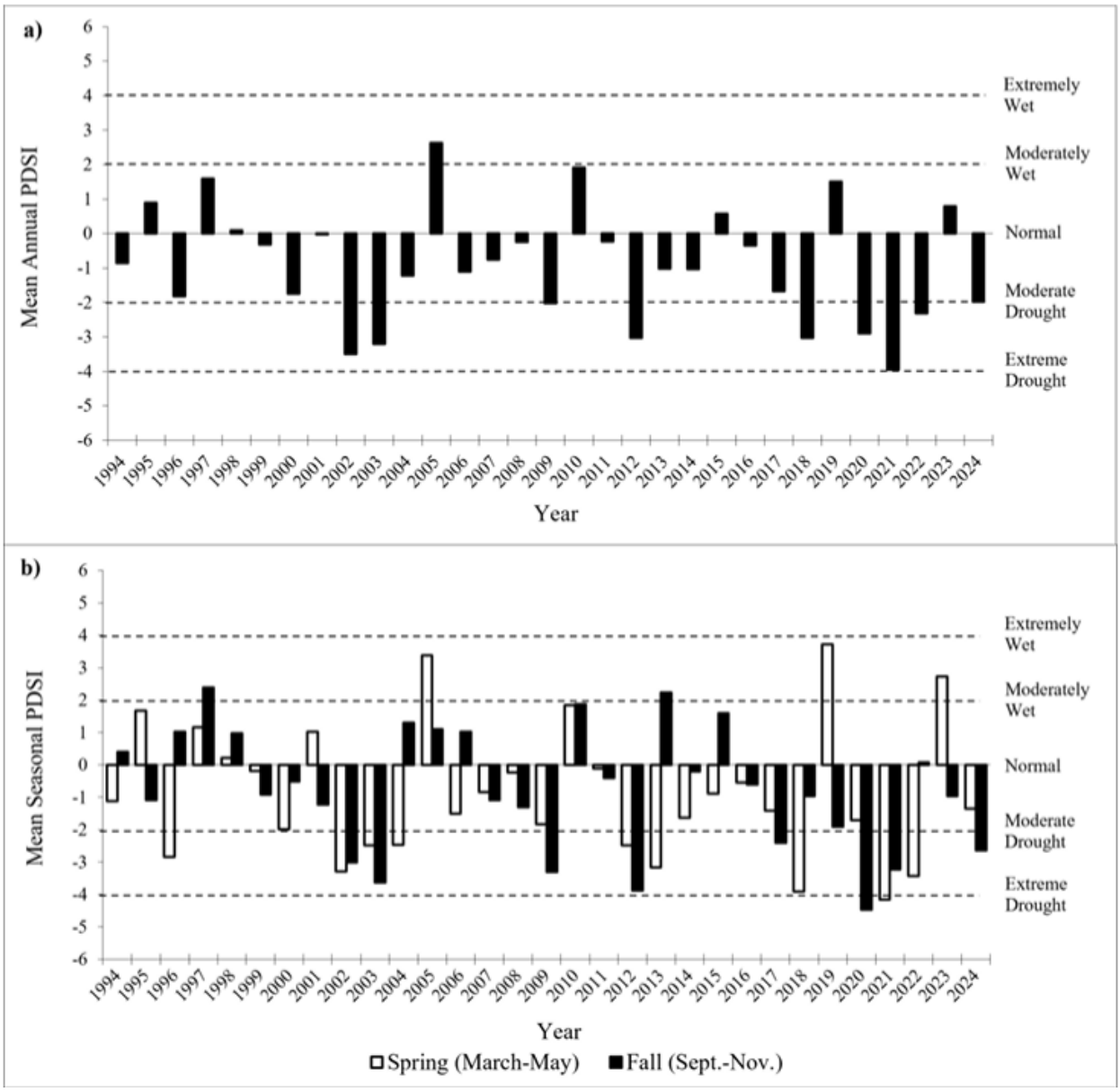


Figure 5. Drought Index, Southeast Utah. Top Graph Depicts the Entire Year; Bottom Graph Depicts Spring and Fall.

DURATION AND AUTHORITY OF PLAN

After approval by the Utah Wildlife Board this unit plan will be in effect for five years, or until amended. Unit deer plan goals, objectives and strategies are constrained within the sideboards set in the statewide deer plan, which supersedes unit plans. It is possible that changes to the statewide deer plan may affect unit plans. Additionally, changes to Utah State Code and/or Administrative Rules may also affect deer unit plans.