



State of Utah

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### MEMORANDUM

To: Wildlife Board and Regional Advisory Councils  
From: Dax Mangus, Big Game Program Coordinator  
Date: Oct. 21, 2024  
Subject: Statewide deer plan revision

Utah's current statewide deer management plan was approved in 2019, and it is set to expire in December 2024. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources has drafted a new deer management plan in consultation with a diverse committee of stakeholders.

Below is a summary of the updates and recommended changes to the statewide deer management plan:

- 1) The proposed plan will have a duration of six years and will encompass two, three-year cycles for setting hunting-season structure and season dates.
- 2) This revised plan consists of four major parts or sections:
  - a. Species biology and the history of mule deer management in Utah
  - b. Population management goals, objectives and strategies
  - c. Sustainable harvest goals, objectives and strategies
  - d. Chronic Wasting Disease Management Plan (included as Appendix A)
- 3) The natural history and management portion of the plan has been updated to reflect the most current scientific understanding. Key additions include insights from GPS collar studies related to mule deer survival, reproduction, migration and habitat use as well as body condition, sex ratios in population dynamics and winter-feeding research findings. We have also included expanded discussion of threats to mule deer, limiting factors and public demand.
- 4) The population management section of the plan is divided into direct population management and habitat management objectives.



- a. Direct population management objectives and strategies include:
    - i. Statewide and unit deer population objective criteria
    - ii. Strategies related to setting unit population objectives
    - iii. Population management and monitoring
    - iv. Continuation and expansion of deer research
    - v. Private lands strategies to alleviate conflicts and incentivize deer-friendly land management
    - vi. Active predator management for cougars, coyotes and bears
    - vii. Disease surveillance and management
  - b. Habitat management objectives and strategies include:
    - i. Identifying and protecting crucial mule deer habitats
    - ii. Requesting additional mitigation for disturbance to deer habitats
    - iii. Coordinating with federal land-management agencies, counties, cities and towns to encourage protection and improvement to mule deer habitats while working to minimize negative impacts to mule deer
    - iv. Supporting responsible travel management
    - v. Encouraging responsible energy development
    - vi. Minimizing impacts to deer from human recreation
    - vii. Encouraging the use of wildlife-friendly fencing
    - viii. Establishing drought-resistant vegetation communities and increased water development and availability
    - ix. Continuing aggressive habitat-restoration work through Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative by improving 100,000 acres of deer habitat per year. (A total of 600,000 acres this plan cycle.)
    - x. Educating the public on the importance of habitat efforts
- 5) In the sustainable harvest section of the plan, the objectives and strategies include:
- a. General-season deer hunting
    - i. Creation of a new "extended archery only" permit application option that would allow successful applicants the ability to hunt just the extended archery hunt areas during the extended season dates
    - ii. Setting the objectives of general-season units to a post-season buck-to-doe ratio of either 15-17 or 18-20 to optimize herd productivity, reduce disease risks and increase hunter participation (see Table 1 below)
    - iii. Use of population estimate, population demographics, production, hunter harvest and observed — as well as anticipated — survival data (based on GPS collar data, animal health, habitat status and weather conditions) to automatically adjust permit numbers



annually up to  $\pm 30\%$ . Changes that exceed 30% of the previous year's permit number would be presented to the RACs and Wildlife Board for approval.

- iv. Splitting the Beaver unit into the Beaver, East and Beaver, West units, with I-15 as the boundary.
- v. Reorganizing the West Desert and Oquirrh-Stansbury hunting units to better match deer movements and migrations, creating three new units:
  - Oquirrh/Tintic
  - Cedar/Stansbury
  - West Desert, Swasey

See the new boundary description and maps in the RAC packet.

**Table 1. Utah general-season unit buck-to-doe ratio proposed objectives by unit.**

Unit	Proposed objective	Unit	Proposed objective
Beaver, East*	15-17	Nebo	15-17
Beaver, West*	15-17	Nine Mile	18-20
Boulder/Kaiparowits	15-17	North Slope	15-17
Box Elder	18-20	Ogden	18-20
Cache	15-17	Oquirrh/Tintic*	18-20
Cedar/Stansbury*	15-17	Panguitch Lake	15-17
Chalk Creek	18-20	Pine Valley	18-20
East Canyon	18-20	San Juan, Abajo Mtns	15-17
Fillmore	15-17	Southwest Desert	15-17
Fishlake	15-17	Vernal/Bonanza	15-17
Kamas	18-20	Wasatch Mtns, East	15-17
La Sal, La Sal Mtns	15-17	Wasatch Mtns, West	15-17
Manti/San Rafael	15-17	West Desert, Swasey*	15-17
Monroe	15-17	Yellowstone	18-20
Morgan-South Rich	18-20	Zion	18-20
Mt Dutton	15-17	-	-

\*New general-season unit this plan

- b. Limited-entry and premium limited-entry deer hunting
  - i. Manage limited-entry deer units to a post-season buck-to-doe ratio objective of 25-30
  - ii. Manage premium limited-entry deer units to a post-season buck-to-doe ratio objective of 40-45 and issue 10-20% of the permits on these units as management buck permits
  - iii. Continue to issue cactus buck permits as needed/available on the Paunsaugunt unit
  - iv. Use of population estimate, population demographics, production, hunter harvest and observed — as well as anticipated — survival data (based on GPS collar data, animal health, habitat status and weather conditions) to automatically adjust permit numbers



annually up to  $\pm 30\%$ . Changes that exceed 30% of the previous year's permit number would be presented to the RACs and Wildlife Board for approval.

- v. Conversion of the Thousand Lakes unit from general season to limited entry
  - vi. Addition of two new limited-entry late-season buck hunts on the "Henry Mtns, Little Rockies and "San Juan, Mancos Mesa" (see boundary description and maps in RAC packet)
- 6) The Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Management Plan, Appendix A portion of the plan includes the following strategies:
- a. Expand disease testing
  - b. Encourage responsible carcass disposal in an approved landfill
  - c. Support expanded CWD management efforts, including the ability to recommend targeted hunts in CWD hotspots
  - d. Direction to manage CWD-positive units at the lower end of their buck-to-doe objective range
- 7) Other plan changes and upcoming recommendations related to the proposed plan include:
- a. Ability to create new limited-entry units/hunts to capture unique opportunities
  - b. Support mule deer research studies investigating the use of restricted weapons and antler point restrictions
  - c. Expansion of youth hunting opportunities and education efforts directed at parents/guardians of youth hunters

For all proposed changes and additional details, please see the attached recommended Statewide Deer Management Plan included in the RAC packet.

