

What is Wyoming Doing?

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department and its Mule Deer Working Group are working to enhance mule deer habitat, increase mule deer productivity and provide mule deer hunting opportunity throughout Wyoming in the following ways:

Habitat:

- Improving crucial mule deer habitats with the help of non-governmental organizations, industry, federal land management agencies and volunteers.
- Providing funds to assist private landowners with habitat restoration projects.
- Implementing strategies to minimize and mitigate the impact of oil/gas and mineral development.
- Monitoring crucial habitats to ensure deer populations do not negatively impact valuable browse species (i.e., mountain mahogany and antelope bitterbrush).

Populations:

- Managing deer populations within the habitat's capability to sustain them over the long-term.
- Continued monitoring of mule deer populations using methods that provide the best information for setting hunting seasons.
- Minimizing competition between deer and other herbivores where needed (i.e., elk and livestock).
- Providing a variety of hunting opportunities to accommodate different user groups.
- Minimizing deer/vehicle collisions.

Predators:

- Recognizing predator management, where feasible, could be a tool to increase mule deer numbers where predation, and not habitat, is limiting population growth or recovery.

Diseases:

- Monitoring prevalence of diseases throughout Wyoming. When appropriate, adjust harvest levels to compensate for mortality due to disease.

Weather:

- Monitoring weather conditions throughout the year, evaluating potential impacts to mule deer and making appropriate adjustments in harvest levels to compensate for weather effects.

Hunting:

- Encouraging landowners to provide hunter access.
- Working with federal land management agencies to gain access to inaccessible blocks of public land through land trades, etc.
- Monitoring public attitude towards mule deer and their management.
- Evaluating harvest and hunter management practices to accommodate changing public perceptions and desires.
- Continuing to involve the public in mule deer management activities.
- Working with land management agencies to better manage ATV use/abuse.

What's Next

The intent ultimately is to develop individual management plans or strategies for key herd units based on the overarching goals and objectives outlined in this document. Your support and involvement in mule deer management in Wyoming is critical to the success of the program.

How You Can Help

Stay informed about and become involved in the issues affecting mule deer and their management.

Participation in organizations dedicated to wildlife and their habitats provides funding and volunteers to implement projects that positively impact mule deer.

It is important you develop and maintain positive relationships with private landowners to encourage both access for hunting and the maintenance of mule deer habitat they provide.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, taking a kid mule deer hunting will ensure that future generations value this great symbol of the American West.

The Mule Deer of Wyoming . . .



. . . and their future

Across the west and in Wyoming, mule deer numbers have declined since the “good old days” of the ‘50s and ‘60s for a variety of reasons including habitat loss, weather and predation.

Because mule deer are so important to Wyoming, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department has committed personnel (The Mule Deer Working Group) and resources to identify and strategically address the many factors affecting this valuable wildlife species. This has been completed and is presented as the “*The Wyoming Mule Deer Initiative.*”



About the Initiative

The Wyoming Mule Deer Initiative focuses on six conservation goals:

- 1) Conserve, enhance and restore mule deer habitat essential for population maintenance, reproduction and survival;
- 2) Through hunting frameworks, manage wildlife populations to sustain productive habitat conditions, resilient mule deer populations and recreation opportunity;
- 3) Apply the best available science, within budgetary considerations, to monitor deer populations and habitat conditions;
- 4) Develop cooperative working relationships with universities and other institutions to conduct applied research needed to improve deer management;
- 5) Inform and educate the public at large, deer hunters, landowners, government agencies and others regarding issues and opportunities affecting conservation of mule deer; and
- 6) Enhance funding and public support for mule deer management.

Accomplishing the Goals

To accomplish these goals, the *Initiative* addresses the following critical aspects of mule deer management:

Habitat:

Adequate supplies and availability of food, water, shelter and space are the building blocks needed to support healthy mule deer populations. The quality and quantity of habitat in Wyoming has declined due to several factors including:

- mineral exploration and development,
- fire suppression,
- drought,
- forage over-utilization,
- introduction of non-native plants, and
- land developments such as roads and railroads, subdivisions and golf courses.

Measures to mitigate these impacts are vital to ensure crucial mule deer habitat is maintained for future generations.

Population Management:

Maximizing mule deer numbers may or may not be possible or desired. When mule deer over-utilize important habitats (i.e., winter range) to the point plant vigor is decreased, it is necessary to decrease the number of deer. This will ensure the long-term sustainability of the population.

Mule deer hunting in Wyoming is highly sought after and is a vital component of mule deer management. Hunting season structure is influenced by many factors such as:

- social/hunter expectations (i.e., trophy quality bucks, more deer, more hunting opportunity, fewer hunters, etc.),
- mule deer population size vs. management objective,
- habitat availability and condition,
- crop damage,
- decreased hunter access onto private lands, and
- increased use/misuse of ATVs.

Predator Management:

Predators, such as coyotes, mountain lions, wolves, bobcats and black bear, prey on mule deer. The effect of predators on total mule deer numbers varies from year to year and depends on mule deer population size compared to the habitat's carrying capacity. Changes in habitat quality and quantity, weather patterns and abundance of other prey species all impact how much predators affect mule deer populations.

Disease:

Diseases such as Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) are important considerations for mule deer managers. While there is relatively little that can be done to control most diseases, monitoring their prevalence can help determine future management actions.

Law Enforcement:

Wildlife laws and regulations serve three broad purposes: 1) protect the resource, 2) protect the public and 3) assure fairness. A strong majority of the hunting and non-hunting publics support effective wildlife laws that are firmly and fairly enforced. Due to the rapid evolution of outdoor technology, increasing numbers of users and increasing trophy values, wildlife law enforcement is as important today as it was during the early years of the conservation movement.

Weather:

Precipitation influences mule deer and their habitats perhaps more than any other factor. The amount and timing of precipitation affects deer survival, plant growth, fire frequency and forage quality. Of course, winter in Wyoming can be especially harsh. Mule deer need extra energy to move in deep snow and to maintain core body heat in cold temperatures. Fat reserves, built up during summer and fall months, provide this extra energy.

Elk and Deer Interactions:

In some areas, elk are thriving while mule deer are declining. Elk are bigger, stronger and able to survive more severe weather than mule deer. Changes in vegetation communities may favor elk over mule deer. In other locations, there may be direct competition between deer and elk for crucial habitats.

Public Involvement and Outreach:

Deer management entails a myriad of biological and social considerations. The public is key to future support and funding of deer management. The Department's public outreach program is a two-way street and includes education, understanding and involvement.

Research:

Many problems and issues confronting mule deer management are not well understood. Through monitoring, field studies and research, managers improve their understanding of the effects of changing habitat conditions, human developments, energy extraction, land management practices, weather and climate changes, disease, predation, competition with other wildlife species and other factors.

Funding and Support:

The Department foresees three critical funding needs in the future:

- 1) Landscape-scale habitat management,
- 2) Energy impact analysis and mitigation and
- 3) Disease research and management.

For more information, contact your nearest Wyoming Game and Fish Office or visit our website at <http://gf.state.wy.us>.