PRONGHORN MANAGEMENT PLAN

DATA ANALYSIS UNIT PH-18, TWO BUTTES

GAME MANAGEMENT UNITS 132, 139, 145

Prepared For:

THE COLORADO DIVISION OF WILDLIFE

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August 2005

DAU PH-18 (Two Buttes)
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GMU's: 132, 139, 145 **Land Ownership:** 94% Private, 6% Comanche National Grassland, State, CDOW, and BLM

Post Hunt Objectives:
Previous Objective – 150; 2004 Estimate 441; Current Objective 300-500

Post Season Sex Ratio (bucks/100 does) Objective:
Previous Objective – 36; 2004 Modeled – 60; Current Objective – 36-40

Pre-hunt Sex Ratio:
2005 Observed – 55; 2005 Modeled - 52

Figure 1. PH-18 Posthunt Population Estimate

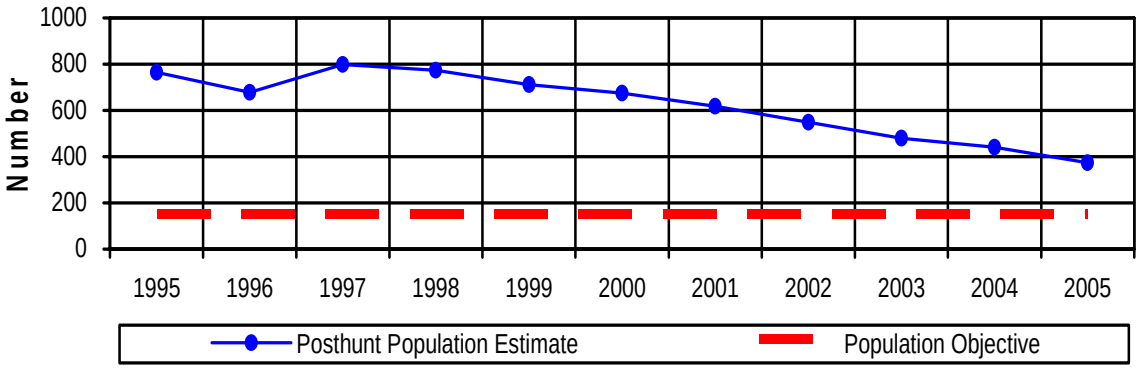


Figure 2. PH-18 Harvest

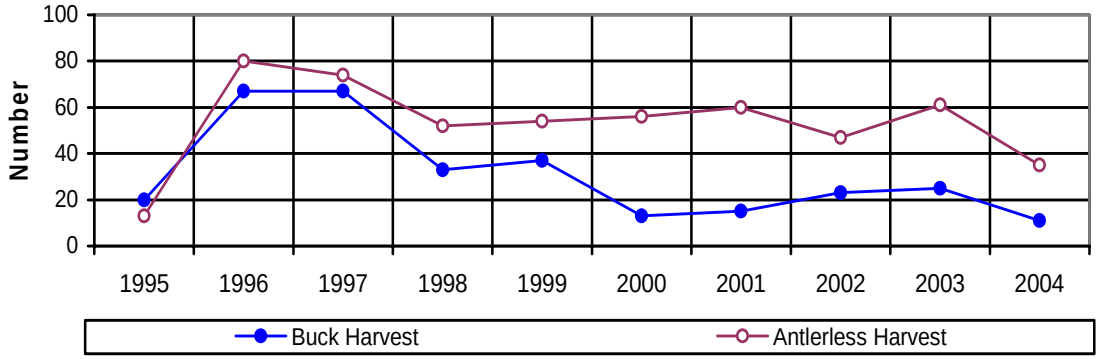
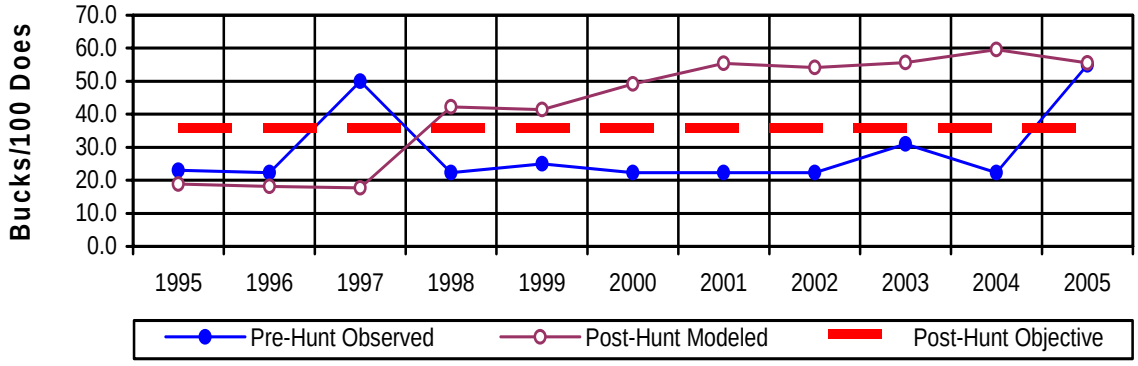


Figure 3. PH-18 Posthunt Bucks/100 Does



PH-18 Background Summary:

The Two Buttes DAU covers approximately 2,311 square miles. Under the previous management plans' population objective of 150 pronghorn this would equate to one pronghorn per 15.4 square miles. The low population objective was set in the mid 1980's. By the mid 1990's landowner complaints of damage from pronghorn escalated as the population neared 900 animals (Fig. 1). In order to address the burgeoning population, 150 animals were trapped in 1996 and transplanted to Arizona. In addition, license numbers were increased significantly with a focus on doe harvest (Fig. 2). This has all but eliminated landowner conflicts but hunter complaints have risen.

The hunter success rate in 2004 was 31% for the DAU with unit 132 at 33%, unit 139 at 20%, and unit 145 at 53%. After nearly 20 years of trying to reach the goal of 150 animals it has become apparent this is an unrealistic goal. When game populations reach a low point the law of diminishing returns takes over where people are not willing to put forth more effort for less return.

PH-18 Significant Issues from the Public:

Very few comments were received on PH-18 during the formal DAU meeting process held in 2005. Most input has come from casual conversations with hunters and landowners. The general feeling from most is that the current population objective is too low and could be increased. However, the objective can not be set so high that damage complaints increase to the level of the mid 90's.

Comments from the largest public land management agency in the DAU, the Comanche National Grasslands, are geared toward increasing native species on the grasslands. As such, the forest service in conjunction with the CDOW, desires to improve pronghorn habitat on the Comanche Grasslands in order to increase pronghorn numbers on public land. This effort may decrease conflicts on surrounding private lands.

PH-18 Management Alternatives

Various alternatives were provided for public comment (Figure 4) including the option for suggested alternatives not presented. The alternatives presented ranged from keeping the current herd structure and composition to increasing the population by 50 percent, increasing the population by 100 percent, or increasing the population by 200 percent. Along with the total population objective sex ratio alternatives were also presented. Sex ratio alternatives ranged from leaving them at the current level of 33 bucks per 100 does to increasing the objective to 40 bucks per 100 does.

With the new format for DAU plans a population range will be used instead of set static numbers as in previous plans. This will allow more flexibility in population management. From comments received an acceptable population range will be determined. Examples of possible ranges would be 150– 250; 250 – 350; **350 - 500** as potential total population objectives.

Figure 4. DAU Alternatives for Population Objectives and Sex Ratios

Two Buttes PH-18	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4
Population Objective	Current 150	Increase 50% 225	Increase 100% 300	Increase 200% 450
Sex Ratio	36:100	36:100	36:100	36:100
Or suggested alternatives	36-40:100	36-40:100	36-40:100	36-40:100

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The preferred alternatives chosen after all comments were received from the draft plan and public meetings are a **population objective range** of **300–500** with a **36-40:100 sex ratio**.

The PH-18 DAU Plan was approved by the Colorado Wildlife Commission on November 3, 2005.

TWO BUTTES DAU MANANGEMENT PLAN
PH-18, GMU's**:** 132, 139, 145
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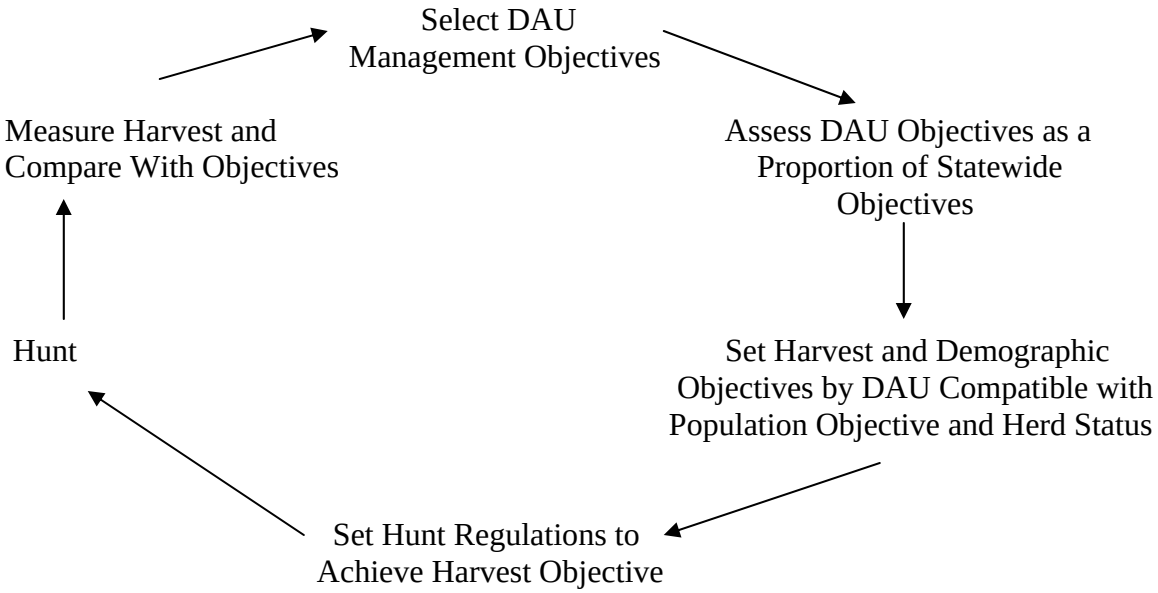
INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Historically, big game seasons were set by tradition and/or political whims rather than by current wildlife population levels or habitat conditions**.** This is still the case to some extent however, with today's advances in technology and information exchange, the public is demanding more accountability for wildlife management. To meet this demand for accountability, the Division of Wildlife (DOW) has established objectives for individual herds of big game animals. These herds are managed at the Data Analysis Unit (DAU) level. Individual herds are managed for long term population objectives as well as desired Buck:Doe:Fawn ratios**.** These objectives are established for five year intervals determined by historic population levels tempered with current conditions. The plans are currently being developed for the 2005 long term objectives based on public input, land use changes and game damage conflicts.

Each DAU is composed of one or many Game Management Units (GMU's) managed for a specific herd of animals. The boundaries of the DAU are generally defined by geographic features which minimize animal movement into or out of the DAU. The approach used to manage a DAU relies on the short and long-term demographics and size of a big game herd. Annual information on each herd is collected, then analyzed, and decisions are made for the upcoming hunting seasons. This cycle (Figure 1) repeats on an annual basis with the number of available hunting licenses adjusted to meet yearly herd objectives for sex ratio and population size. These plans are designed to meet both the public's desires for wildlife based recreation and the Division of Wildlife's Long Range Plan Goals, while at the same time minimizing human/wildlife conflicts.

Colorado's Objective Cycle of Big Game Management and Harvest

(Adapted from Connolly in Walmo 1981, pp263)



Members of the general public, clubs, organizations, and governmental entities are provided many avenues for input into the DAU planning process. Opportunities to comment are provided

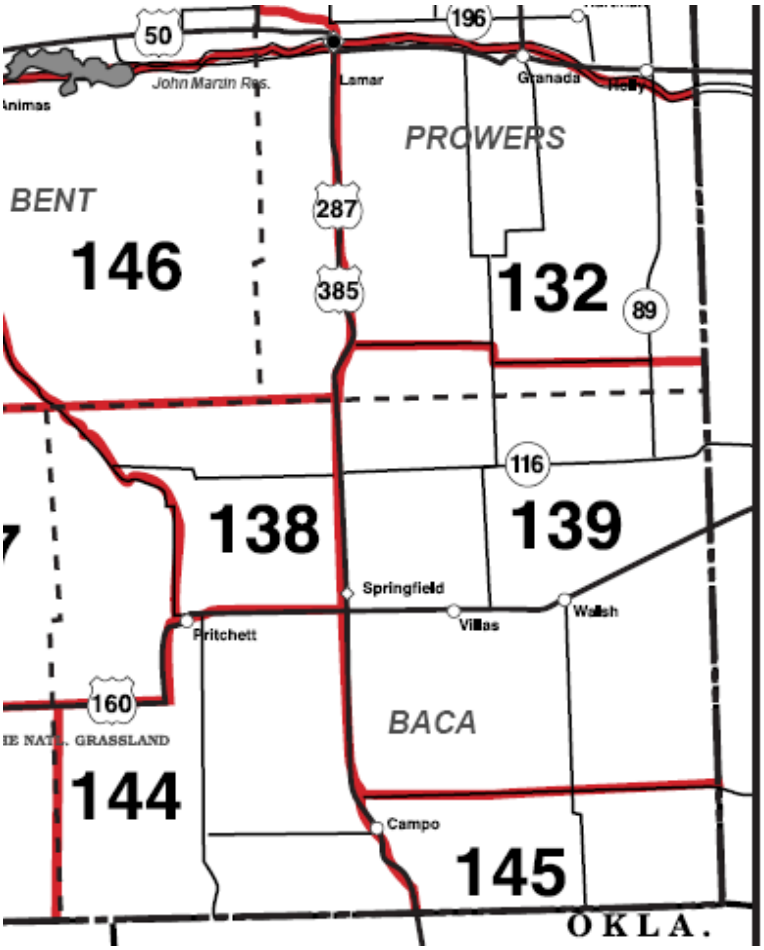
at public meetings, through written requests, through personal contacts between DOW personnel and these groups, and by attending Wildlife Commission meetings. All comments and suggestions received will be considered and applied to these management plans where feasible and pending approval of the plan by the Wildlife Commission.

TWO BUTTES DAU DESCRIPTION

Location

Two Buttes DAU is located in extreme southeastern Colorado (Figure 2). Boundaries include the Arkansas River on the north; the Kansas State line on the east; the Oklahoma State line on the south; and highway 287 on the west.

Figure 2. Location Map of PH-18, Two Buttes, **GMU's 132, 139, 145**



DAU Physical Description

The DAU includes three game management units and covers approximately 2,273 square miles. The geography of Two Buttes DAU is generally slightly rolling agricultural and pasture lands.

There are several drainages across the DAU, with the Arkansas River, Cimarron River, Clay Creek and Two Buttes Creek being the most prominent. The climate of the area is characterized by long, hot summers with temperatures above 100 degrees Fahrenheit common June – August and mild winters with temperatures below freezing common.

Land Ownership

The majority of the DAU is private land. However, there is some public land, most of which is administered by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Comanche National Grasslands. Land controlled by government agencies accounts for approximately 6% of the area of the DAU. Public land holders in addition to the USFS are the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), State Land Board, and the Colorado Division of Wildlife. Most public land is found in the southwestern corner of the DAU.

Land Use

Land use (both public and private) is almost exclusively agricultural. Livestock grazing is controlled on USFS holdings by using a system of grazing allotments. Agricultural uses on private land include both grazing and farming with dry land and irrigated crops being produced.

Land use in the DAU has not changed significantly in recent times. The major changes would be in varieties of crops planted and a slight increase in irrigated cropland from center pivot irrigation systems. Development is not currently a significant threat to pronghorn habitat.

POPULATION DYNAMICS

Pronghorn Distribution

Pronghorn are found throughout the DAU with concentrations occurring on or near winter wheat fields during winter. Some areas of high intensity row crop agriculture are not frequented as much as areas of mixed wheat and rangeland sites are. This tendency to concentrate near areas of winter wheat has lead to game damage complaints in the past and is the major factor in having a very low population objective for this herd. As the population level has been reduced in recent years, game damage complaints have dropped off significantly.

Pronghorn Population Size

Pronghorn populations in the DAU had been on a steady increase since the mid 60's through 1995 due to conservative hunting seasons. Through the 1981 hunting season the only unit open to limited rifle buck hunting was unit 145. Beginning in 1982 pronghorn population increases warranted opening the entire DAU to hunting during established seasons for rifle, archery, and limited muzzleloading.

In the early 1990’s the pronghorn population reached levels that were becoming un-tolerable to many landowners. By the mid 90’s a boiling point was reached when the observed pronghorn

count tallied 698 animals (Table 1 and Figure 3). At this time landowners demanded that something be done to decrease the number of pronghorn in the DAU. As a result license numbers were increased and 151 pronghorn were trapped in January of 1997 and transplanted to Arizona.

These actions resulted in a significant population reduction back down to levels acceptable to landowners. Observed pronghorn numbers were lowest in 1976 (13) and at their highest in 1995 (698). Since that time herd management has been geared to reaching the previous population goal of 150 pronghorn.

Pronghorn Harvest

Pronghorn harvest has varied from a low of 0 animals in 1975 to a high of 312 in 1996. Doe harvest was allowed beginning in 1981 with a harvest total of 5 females and young taken. The peak doe harvest occurred in 1996 with 213 females and young removed (these figures include hunting and trapped and transplanted animals). Buck harvest also peaked in 1996 with 99 bucks removed from hunting and as a result of trapping and transplanting.

Due to the low density of pronghorn in this DAU **(1 pronghorn per 15 sq. mi. at DAU objective of 150)** harvest goals can be difficult to obtain. When animal densities get this low hunter success drops due to difficulty in hunters finding animals to shoot (Table 1 and Figure 3). Harvest success reached a new low of 31% for the DAU in 2004 with GMU 139 posting a measly 20% rifle success rate.

Hunting Pressure

Hunting pressure has kept pace with herd numbers since 1996 (Table 1 and Figure 3). However, due to the low hunter success rate and corresponding low harvest, the herd as been growing rather than declining the past few years. Current hunting pressure is being maintained at a fairly high level but to no avail. This leads to the conclusion that the previous DAU population objective of 150 pronghorn is unrealistic and likely unattainable without drastic changes in season structure and license numbers.

Buck license numbers were reduced over the past few years and doe license numbers were increased in an effort to bring the buck: doe ratio up and the population down. Hunters applying for rifle buck licenses can expect to draw with 1-2 preference points. Doe licenses are typically under subscribed.

Table 1. Pronghorn Population, License Numbers, Harvest, and Success Rates, 1995-2005

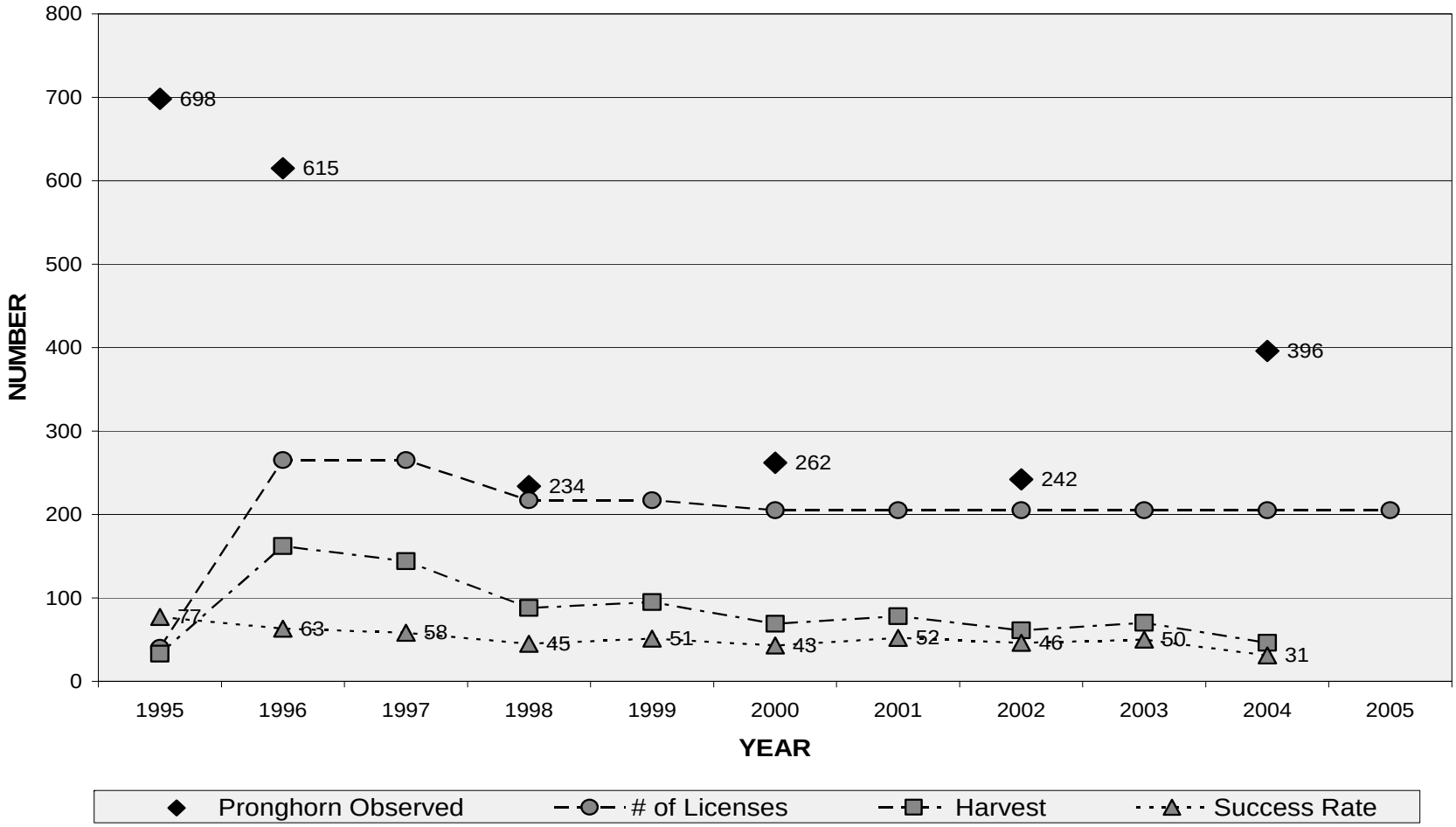
PRONGHORN POPULATION, LICENSE NUMBERS, HARVEST, AND SUCCESS RATES 1995-2005

DAU: Two Buttes A-18
Current population Objective: 150
Current sex ratio Objective: 36:100:78

YEAR	* NUMBER OBSERVED	**PLUS 30%	LICENSE NUMBERS	HARVEST	% SUCCESS RATE
1995	698	907	40	33	77
1996 ***	615	800	265	162	63
1997			265	144	58
1998	234	304	217	88	45
1999			217	95	51
2000	262	341	205	69	43
2001			205	78	52
2002	242	315	205	61	46
2003			205	70	50
2004	396	515	205	46	31
2005			205		

* Population inventory is typically flown every other year
** Plus 30% refers to the number of antelope possibly not observed during flights added to the # actually seen
*** In 1996 150 antelope trapped and moved out of A-18

Figure 3. Two Buttes (PH-18), Pronghorn Population VS License Numbers & Harvest, 1995-2005



HERD MANAGEMENT

Herd population data is assimilated from aerial counts conducted from fixed wing aircraft. During pre-season counts the herd composition of Buck:Doe:Fawn is derived by flying 3-mile interval transects for individual GMU's within the DAU and counting the number of bucks, does, and fawns observed. During post-season counts a total animal count is obtained by flying the entire DAU at 1-mile transect intervals and counting every pronghorn observed. Additional herd data is obtained from harvest surveys.

This data is entered into the DEAMAN (Deer, Elk, and Antelope Management System) population database program (Gary C. White, Department of Fishery and Wildlife, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO, gwhite@cnr.colostate.edu) and used to produce spreadsheet population models. From these models and observed data, a herd composition and total herd population projection can be made which in turn is used as an aid to set the number and type of hunting licenses offered.

Current Conditions

The post-hunt population estimate for 2005 is 450 pronghorn which is 300 pronghorn over the long-term population objective of 150 pronghorn. Current observed pre season buck:doe ratio is estimated at 55 bucks per 100 does, which is well above the post hunt objective of 36 buck per 100 does. Current management is geared toward further herd reduction and stabilizing the buck:doe ratio. With small populations and erratic success rates like this it can be difficult to predict and maintain finite population numbers such as the buck to doe ratio.

Habitat

Habitat conditions vary annually depending on localized precipitation. The pronghorn habitat in this DAU occurs almost entirely on private land with the majority of private ground in dry land farming or cattle ranching. Being at low elevations and having mild winters there is no distinct difference between winter and summer range. However, pronghorn tend to group up and congregate on winter wheat fields from late fall through early spring.

Public Input Meetings

In order to gain local public input on pronghorn management issues a series of public meetings were held during the month of July in Lamar, LaJunta, Eads, Cheyenne Wells, and Pritchett. At these meetings attendees were given the opportunity to comment on four different pronghorn DAU plans, PH-5 Haswell, PH-12 Cheyenne, PH-13 Tobe, and PH-18 Two Buttes. These four DAU meetings were combined since they are all being updated concurrently and many landowners and sportsmen have an interest in, or own property in, several different DAU's. The locations for meetings were chosen based on geographic location in order to maximize convenience and minimize driving distance for those wishing to attend.

The meetings were advertised in various ways. Flyers (Appendix A) announcing the meetings were distributed to local businesses and individuals and hung in locations frequented by those likely to be interested in the plans. Announcements for the meetings were run in; the Lamar Daily News, Baca Weekly, Plainsman-Herald, LaJunta Tribune-Democrat, Kiowa County Press, Range Ledger, and Rocky Ford Daily Gazette, as well as being aired on some local radio stations. The meeting information was also posted on the CDOW website (Appendix A).

Comments received at the public meetings were recorded and can be seen below along with additional written comments received from landowners, sportsmen, and government agencies after the meetings. All public input received to this point was considered when writing this plan.

Public Meeting Comments

Lamar Meeting - July 11, 2005
Attendance = 6

Make draft plans available on the DOW website

Make it easier to draw a license, especially for kids

Have a late doe antelope hunt

SAG group is interested in late antelope management hunt

Advertise meetings better

Colorado DOW should have a once a week radio or TV program

Cheyenne Wells Meeting - July 13, 2005
Attendance = 9

Increase antelope population

Increase quality of bucks

Prefer Alternative 3

Increase both quality and quantity of population (buck)

LaJunta Meeting - July 14, 2005
Attendance = 12

Need landowner's signatures on applications for PLO licenses

Lower licenses in Haswell, population devastated

With only 15% landowner licenses can't draw a license

Ought to be a better way to reimburse landowners for providing habitat

Land owner vouchers should be tied to the individual's land

Need disease studies for leptospirosis

Current population is good

Need to decrease antelope population

Antelope ate the grass we had saved for winter pasture (60-80 head)

Last 2-3 years we had to hunt a lot harder for animals

Road hunters with no permission are a problem

Do not want an increase in hunters

Want larger bucks

Like Alternative 3 for all four DAU's

December antelope season for does

Prefer Alternative 4 for Tobe

Eads Meeting - July 15, 2005
Attendance = 7

Could aerial photos be used for antelope counts?

Have seen a lot of triplets this year

More pronghorn are being seen in milo fields

Antelope are increasing in our area would like to see them reduced
Want fewer does and more bucks

Rifle season would be better if there were two weekends to hunt, not just one

Would like to see a December hunt for antelope

Voucher system is not working for them, too hard to draw a license

Old landowner license system was fairer, go back to the old system

Most of the vouchers are being handled by outfitters which is not good

Large herds of antelope in winter pound the wheat and spread bindweed

A lot of landowners are disgusted with the voucher system, they can't draw a license

Too many people are running antelope and deer with 4 wheelers

Outfitters are trespassing a lot on private lands where they don't have permission

Would like to see the population lower than where it is now

Prefer Alternative 1 or 4 for Haswell

Prefer Alternative 2 for Haswell and Tobe

Prefer Alternative 2 for Haswell

Pritchett Meeting - July 18, 2005
Attendance = 9

Dispersal Licenses- How many antelope are considered a problem?

How long does it take to get Dispersal licenses and how much red tape does it entail?

What can be done if a landowner does not want any antelope

Antelope are primary vector in transmitting bindweed to fields.

Had no bindweed problems until antelope arrived in the 1980's, knows antelope spread it/caused it

Suggestion made to contact CSU to do a bind weed study to determine extent of problem and culprits that spread it so that he can have scientific data on his side

Road graders also spread bindweed even in town where there are no pronghorn

Proposal made to fence out or modify fence on a quarter section of agricultural land surrounded by USFS land to exclude antelope

That would require USFS policy change unless this is determined to be a special circumstance and could lead to a line of landowners wanting the same thing

Biggest concern with antelope was bindweed, not making the soil blow

Tordon to control bindweed is $104/gallon, antelope are the primary factor in spreading bindweed

USFS receives many hunter complaints regarding lack of antelope on public ground in Units 139 and 144.

Discussion about possible late doe seasons to address damage concerns

Damage from antelope is occurring any time grass is not green- fall, winter and spring and ends when green up occurs and antelope generally disperse

USFS is willing to explore options to influence antelope distribution on a scale smaller than DAU (GMU/public vs. private). In general want to increase density on public ground in the Carrizo unit specifically GMU 139, 144.

USFS expressed interest for habitat improvement in cooperation with CDOW on USFS ground. Suggested increasing/planting winter fat on USFS to possibly compete with wheat. Unit 130 has more winter fat present on USFS ground and higher antelope density

Recommend planting winter fat over the disturbed pipeline right of way

USFS expressed a desire to potentially raise post-season buck/doe ratios to 40:100 or higher over time to possible improve herd structure and health.

Concern about landowner attendance at meeting. There is strong public perception that attending these meetings are a waste of time as CDOW has its mind already made up and attending will not do any good as CDOW does not listen to landowner complaint issues or does nothing about them.

What about the big prairie dog meeting held recently in Springfield. No one from USFS or

CDOW knew about a recent prairie dog meeting

Could plague transmission be feasible to use as prairie dog control

Any changes in hunting/shooting prairie dogs on public ground or will it change
CDOW is not aware of plans to change laws regarding recreational hunting of prairie dogs right now

Some landowners express a strong desire to get rid of all prairie dogs

Written Comments

Landowner and Sportsman Comments
E-mail Comments (condensed by Yost)

Landowners hate pronghorn, "they spread bindweed" is the most common response.

I have owned irrigated farm land and for 30 years there has not been a single antelope on it but it is full of bindweed. Spreading is what bindweed is genetically programmed to do.

M opinion as a sportsman, mentor, HE instructor and conservationist I would favor gradually increasing the population objectives, especially in Two Buttes DAU. It is far too low. In DAU's with significant public land, such as Comanche National Grassland, I would like to see Buck ratio nearer 40% and the harvest managed for better quality animals. Population objectives could be achieved with PLO licensing in GMU's where there is significant public land. I would like to see something like 10% of the male population reach at least 4 1/2 years - 61/2 years of age. Bucks are capable of reaching 15 - 16 inches if there is not too much harvest pressure. I feel that the Comanche Grassland has a carrying capacity for many more pronghorns and would very much favor increasing the population objectives and harvest objectives to achieve this.

My primary agenda is to create or at least not loose opportunity for public without them needing to pay large trespass fees to hunt Pronghorn.

December management hunt for pronghorn – landowners I know in Haswell DAU are unanimously in favor of it and would grant access to public. Winter is when antelope are congregated in their wheat fields, very visible so it is a period when reducing numbers is foremost in many of their minds. Landowners like it because instead of appeasement by the Division in the form of a couple of Dispersal licenses, there is a possibility of some real reduction in areas where there may be a potential damage problem. At License Allocation workgroup meeting I addressed the December hunt issue. Need to go through DAU planning process. I interpreted the response as we are moving in the right direction. If there is enough landowner support and it passes license numbers and distribution would be determined by Division based on criteria that drives such things

Spoke with another large landowner in Haswell DAU today. They are also in support of late management hunt. I have been encouraging all to send in Public input form for License Allocation Workgroup stuff, since all are complaining that there were very few landowner vouchers given out this year. I have spoke to none that received deer, and only a couple that got 1 or 2 doe antelope vouchers, some that received

nothing, and have yet to find a public that drew in those GMU's. Since these are the people that support the Foundation efforts by giving me some of their vouchers and access for fund raising purposes, I also am disappointed. When I began the quest for special licensing for the sick kids, I made a commitment to DOW senior Staff that we would never ask for any for the purpose of selling them, instead, we beg landowner vouchers for that purpose. I am trying to get the pulse of different stakeholders, even though many may have very different opinions than mine.
Spoke with two large landowners today, about antelope plan. Both favor a management hunt as an additional population objective tool. I asked both to e-mail their comments.

They want me to draft something (Issue) and he will sign it. Let me know what you need to see on this and I will draft something

Thus far 14 people in DAU 5 Haswell, have expressed support for a late doe hunt. Need to talk with about a dozen more .

Sportsman's Advisory Group Representative

Land Management Agency Comments

Antelope (plus elk) Comments for DAU's A-5 (Haswell); A-12 (Cheyenne); A-13 (Tobe); A-18 (Two Buttes)

Research conducted in Oregon and Idaho have demonstrated the importance of herd health in connection with buck:doe and bull:cow ratios. Managing herd ratios of 20-25 mature bucks/bulls (2.5+yrs old) per 100 doe/cows was found to tighten calving season distribution, allowing young-of-the-year more time to grow and mature physically prior to winter. In order to maintain this level (20-25) of mature males, the population structure requires managing for a pronghorn buck:doe ratio approaching 40:100 per DAU.

If suggestion #1 is followed, the target calving ratio could be raised from 61 to 70 (total spread = 40:100:70) due to availability of more sexually proficient bucks across the populations in A-5, A-12, A-13 & A-18. Reproduction rates usually grow at a 2:1 of mature males to offspring (i.e., for every 1% increase in 2.5-yr old males a 2% increase in calf ratio occurs if habitat is not the limiting factor and mature male ratios are below 30:100).

The Forest Service is required to manage native species on a sustainable basis by administrative unit. Because antelope and elk are being managed at such low densities in SE CO, the Comanche NG must consider impacts of heavy hunting/recreation pressure. Our desired conditions for the next 20 years includes managing wild herbivores at a more ecologically appropriate level (higher numbers with greater ratios of sexually mature males).

The current CDOW management plans for wild ungulates does not align with Forest Service's need to manage viable elk & antelope populations. I ask you to consider increasing both herd numbers and SE Colorado buck:doe and bull:cow ratios that are more reflective of the Historic Range of Variability (HRV). Projects analyses on the Forest Service show extremely low herd numbers of antelope & elk, that are suppressed due to perceptions of crop depredation and bind weed spread. As the Wildlife, Fish, & Rare Plants (WFRP) Program Manager for the PSICC, we will begin managing for larger (sustainable & viable) numbers of elk & pronghorn. However, I do not want our management objectives to conflict with CDOW's management goals and wish to coordinate our efforts. I view this process and hope you view our Grassland Revision Plan process as opportunities to work together on elk, antelope and other native species.

Our primary management tool for achieving HRV for ungulates would be burning, interplanting winterfat and restricting hunter access. We would like to work with CDOW in developing ways to prevent the spread of bind weed, especially in unique situations where private cropland is surrounded by National Grassland. I would like to assist CDOW in meeting its needs to reduce ungulate depredation where needed, while maintaining an overall management objective that meets our needs to reflect HRV where feasible.

I would like our annual efforts of spring burning for mountain plover to also be effective for pronghorn on the Comanche NG. Please contact me or (Comanche biologist) to coordinate our burning program with CDOW and your big game management efforts. Our WFRP 5-Yr Action Plan on the Comanche has numerous projects planned for maintaining and improving rangeland and riparian conditions and carrying capacity for pronghorn, elk and other species. My hope is CDOW will utilize our efforts to expand elk and pronghorn populations towards the HRV of higher populations and better sex ratios for these four DAU’s

Thank you for the opportunity to comment,

USDA, Forest Service - PSICC, Supervisor's Office

Land Management Agency Comments -Continued

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Pronghorn Management Plans that the Colorado Division of Wildlife is developing for the DAUs in southeastern Colorado. Our comments on the management plans and population objectives fare focused on the Tobe (A-13) and Two Buttes (A-18) DAUs, specifically GMUs 130, 136, 137, 139, 143, 144, and 145, which encompass portions of the Comanche National Grassland.

The Forest Service is required to manage native species on a sustainable basis by administrative unit. Because pronghorn and elk are being managed at such low densities in SE CO, the Comanche NG must consider impacts of heavy hunting/recreation pressure. Our desired conditions for the next 20 years includes managing wild herbivores at a more ecologically appropriate level (higher numbers with greater ratios of sexually mature males). Current CDOW management plans for wild ungulates do not align with Forest Service's need to manage for viable elk and pronghorn populations.

For the revised Pronghorn Management Plans, we recommend increasing both herd numbers and buck:doe ratios to levels that are more reflective of historic conditions on the shortgrass prairie. Project analyses on the Comanche National Grassland indicate extremely low current pronghorn numbers in the GMUs listed above, and we recognize that populations are suppressed due to perceptions of crop depredation and bind weed spread. Because we do not want our management objectives to needlessly conflict with CDOW's management goals on private lands, we hope to improve coordination of management efforts between our agencies in the future. We view this process and hope you view our Grassland Plan Revision process as opportunities to work together on management for elk, pronghorn and other native species. While the Comanche NG does not have recommendations for overall DAU population objectives, we do recommend a large increase in local population objectives (on the order of 100 percent or more increase in relevant units of A-13), and a more balanced sex ratio (40 bucks:100 does) for the Comanche NG.

Ongoing and planned habitat management efforts that could increase pronghorn use of shortgrass prairie habitat on the Comanche NG compared to adjacent private lands include:

- prescribed burns conducted in the spring in collaboration with the Colorado Division of Wildlife
- interseeding of winter forages such as winterfat into shortgrass prairie
- developing ways to prevent the spread of bind weed in unique situations, such as where private cropland is surrounded by National Grassland
- increasing the size of allotments through the removal of interior fences
- improving pronghorn access to water sources, and
- installing livestock fence that allows for pronghorn movement in appropriate areas.

We also recommend that CDOW consider new harvest options for pronghorn does, including issuing a greater proportion of doe licenses for private land only, and a separate doe season in late fall or early winter to disperse herds from wheat fields.

USDA, Forest Service - Comanche National Grasslands

Issues and Strategies

In February of 1998 the Great Plains Pronghorn Conflict Resolution Committee (ACR) released a report on issues and concerns of pronghorn management in southeastern Colorado. The major issues identified by the group were:

1. Spread of noxious weeds by pronghorn
2. Loss of forage, both wheat and grass to pronghorn
3. Wind erosion from pronghorn grazing
4. Hunter trespass

Issues raised by landowners in 2005 are very similar to those raised in the 1998 ACR report. Though recent game damage complaints have been minimal, they are a major factor in herd population limits. Many landowners will not tolerate high numbers of pronghorn for the reasons outlined above. Thus pronghorn population levels will be set at acceptable levels and will be maintained there using hunting harvest as the primary management tool. When damage complaints occur, hazing techniques such as cracker shells or physically chasing them off will be used. Dispersal hunts issued through the Area Wildlife Manager will also be available to disperse pronghorn away from problem areas after other methods are tried and fail.

The CDOW will also actively work with the USFS Comanche National Grasslands to improve habitat conditions on the National Grasslands and encourage pronghorn use of public lands in DAU's PH-13 Tobe and PH-18 Two Buttes. Increasing use of public lands by pronghorn will help alleviate some game damage issues on private land and will provide significant benefits to the public at large in terms of pronghorn viewing and hunting opportunities. To this end, more PLO licenses have been designated to the units containing significant acres of National Grasslands (GMU's 136, 137, 143, and 144) in an effort to distribute licenses more evenly across the GMU's rather than concentrating hunters on the available public land. This will in turn increase harvest on private land reducing damage there.

Many of the issues and concerns brought up at the meetings are things that cannot be dealt with in a DAU plan but are important to mention. Many landowners are concerned that they have a hard time drawing licenses through the Landowner drawing. This is simply a factor of the demand for the licenses being greater than the supply (15 percent landowner set aside). Unless that percentage changes drastically through the Big Game License Allocation Process it will remain difficult to draw licenses. Demand for all big game hunting tags statewide continues to climb as indicated by the increasing number of preference points required to draw licenses.

Another major concern from landowners is pronghorn spreading bindweed. This is a contentious issue that has been going on for decades. As long as there are pronghorn and bindweed there are going to be folks blaming the spread of bindweed on pronghorn. Once again this is an issue that cannot be solved in a DAU management plan. The focus of this pronghorn DAU plan will be to set acceptable population goals and sex ratio objectives for pronghorn in the DAU and what management techniques will be used to meet those goals.

The idea has been brought up to use late season population management doe hunts as a way to help alleviate some game damage issues caused by pronghorn and help to meet DAU objectives. Many local landowners and hunters are very interested in this idea. The local Sportsman's Advisory Group (SAG) representative has written up a proposal to be submitted as an issue for establishing such a hunt (Figure 4). Along with this proposal a letter was also drafted seeking support for the hunt (Figure 5) including a Landowner / Sportsman survey (Figure 6).

All of the responses to the survey were not received back prior to writing this draft plan. Of the Five written surveys returned all five are in favor of a late season doe hunt.

Comments on the surveys returned are:

A late hunt would help disperse and reduce herd size on fields at critical growth period

Too large a herd on small wheat causes bare spots and fine soils, which blow easily

It would allow more hunters to hunt, when they could have time off work

Gives first timers a better chance to hunt

Needs to be closely monitored so over ha rest is not a problem

Breeding would be over and colder temps make better meat

Figure 4. Late Doe Pronghorn Season Proposal

PROPOSAL

To establish a late season pronghorn management hunt in selected GMU's.

This proposal seeks to establish a late season pronghorn hunt in selected Game Management Units, including, but not limited to, 120 and 121 in Haswell DAU - 5.

The season dates requested are the Friday, Saturday and Sunday following Thanksgiving Holiday which traditionally is on Thursday.

This proposal would be for the purpose of population reduction in units where biological data indicates that the numbers are sufficient to support a management hunt.

This proposal would seek from 33% - 50% of the doe pronghorn licenses set for the selected GMU's be allocated to this late management hunt. This proposal seeks 0% of the buck licenses allocated for selected GMU's.

The number and dispersal of licenses would be subject to existing allocations and regulations established for pronghorn hunts.

Data released by the Colorado Division of Wildlife, suggests that the pronghorn population in Haswell DAU 5 is increasing. License numbers have increased annually, and harvest holds pretty steady at 65 - 75%.

Discussions with landowners and sportsmen in the area indicate wide support for establishing a late management hunt. It is a time when the Pronghorn are in the winter wheat, congregated in larger herds and therefore more visible.

It is a time when landowner's think about reducing numbers, and therefore it creates an opportunity for landowner/hunter cooperation and additional access to private lands that would not necessarily be available in the established October Pronghorn hunt.

Since there are no buck licenses, for this hunt, it eliminates the competition with other hunters seeking a buck and creates an opportunity for youth/mentor hunts and first time women pronghorn hunters, as well as a terrific opportunity for the "meat" hunter merely seeking a quality animal for the table.

A short, intense, three day only hunt, would assist DWM's in working the hunts, and would be favorable to Landowners for the purpose of allowing access for such a short time period.

Hunter check in/out would further assist with collection of harvest data, and dispersal of hunters to properties willing to allow access.

Figure 5. SAG Rep. Letter Seeking Support of Late Doe Hunt

SPORTSMEN/LANDOWNERS

I am introducing a proposal for inclusion in the ten year pronghorn management plan for Haswell DAU -5 that would establish a late season pronghorn population reduction hunt. The proposal is not limited to Haswell DAU - 5 but population dynamics suggest that the numbers are sufficient to support such a hunt.

This hunt would be for doe pronghorn only, and would seek from 1/3 - ½ of the doe antelope licenses allocated for a specific Game Management Unit be issued for the late season, subject to existing allocation percentages and regulations. This would mean Res/Non res....landowner....youth set aside etc.

The season dates requested are the Friday, Saturday and Sunday following Thanksgiving holiday which is traditionally on a Thursday. Three days only....

These dates would not conflict with other big game rifle hunts.

This proposal will live or die depending on support from Public. Take a little time to answer a few questions and provide Name and contact information to be submitted to Wildlife Commission for consideration.

Time is short...Draft of DAU plan will be presented to Commission at the August workshop in Alamosa and consideration at September meeting in Lamar.

Thank You
S.E. Colorado Sportsman Advisory Group

Figure 6. Late Season Hunt Survey

LATE SEASON PRONGHORN INPUT

NAME: _____

PHONE: _____ _____

E-MAIL: _____

ARE YOU? LANDOWNER _____ SPORTSMEN _____ OTHER _____

ARE YOU IN FAVOR OF A LATE SEASON PRONGHORN HUNT? YES ___ NO ___

DO YOU FEEL A LATE SEASON HUNT WOULD EFFECTIVELY REDUCE PRONGHORN NUMBERS IN AREAS OF POTENTIAL AGRICULTURAL DAMAGE. YES _____ NO _____

IF YOU ARE A LANDOWNER, WOULD YOU CONSIDER ALLOWING SOME PUBLIC ACCESS FOR THE PURPOSE OF PRONGHORN POPULATION REDUCTION FOR THIS 3 DAY PERIOD, SUBJECT TO SOME REASONABLE RESTRICTIONS TO PROTECT FRAGILE CROP AND RANGELAND.

YES _____ NO _____

COMMENTS: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

QUESTIONS? CALL OR E-MAIL;

ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Various alternatives were provided for public comment (Figure 7) including the option for suggested alternatives not presented. The alternatives presented ranged from keeping the current herd structure and composition to increasing the population by 50 percent, increasing the population by 100 percent, or increasing the population by 200 percent. Along with the total population objective sex ratio alternatives were also presented. Sex ratio alternatives ranged from leaving them at the current level of 33 bucks per 100 does to increasing the objective to 40 bucks per 100 does.

With the new format for DAU plans a population range will be used instead of set static numbers as in previous plans. This will allow more flexibility in population management. From comments received an acceptable population range will be determined. Examples of possible ranges outlined in the Executive Summary would be 150– 250; 250 – 350; **350 - 500** as potential total population objectives.

Figure 7. DAU Alternatives for Population Objectives and Sex Ratios

Two Buttes PH-18	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4
Population Objective	Current 150	Increase 50% 225	Increase 100% 300	Increase 200% **450**
Sex Ratio	36:100	36:100	36:100	36:100
Or suggested alternatives	40:100	40:100	40:100	**40:100**

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The preferred alternative chosen after all comments were received from the draft plan and public meetings are a **population objective range** of **300 – 500** with a **40:100 sex ratio**.

SUMMARY

The major issues for the biological management of pronghorn are total population objective and sex ratio. However, the majority of land here is under private ownership and the political factor of how many pronghorn landowners will tolerate carries the most weight. Setting population objectives at a level to please everyone from pronghorn hunters to wheat growers and cattle ranchers is the challenge. The preferred alternative is an effort to maintain the balance of both the recreational hunter and those making a living off the land while at the same time optimizing the pronghorn population.

APPENDICES

A. MEETING ANOUNCEMENT

B. PRESS RELEASE

C. WAYS TO PROVIDE INPUT

APPENDIX A

ANNOUNCMENT

ANTELOPE MANAGEMENT PLANNING MEETINGS

The Colorado Division of Wildlife will be hosting a series of public meetings concerning management of pronghorn antelope in portions of southeast Colorado. Pronghorn Data Analysis Units to be discussed include Haswell A-5, Cheyenne A-12, Tobe A-13, and Two Buttes A-18. Purpose of these meetings will be to establish 10 year goals for pronghorn population and sex ratios objectives. License types and hunting seasons to meet these goals will also be discussed. All interested parties are invited to participate in these management plans for pronghorn antelope in their local area. Meetings will be held at the following locations and times. Refreshments will be provided. Please call the CDOW at 336-6600 if you have questions or comments and cannot attend one of the meetings.

Location:	Date:	Time:
Lamar - Division of Wildlife Office	July 11, 2005	7:00 PM
Cheyenne Wells - Community Bldg.	July 13, 2005	7:00 PM
LaJunta - Fire Department	July 14, 2005	7:00 PM
Eads - Courthouse	July 15, 2005	7:00 PM
Pritchett - School cafeteria	July 18, 2005	7:00 PM

APPENDIX B PRESS RELEASE

News about Colorado's Natural Resources

Email Article

7/7/2005
Division of Wildlife

Southeast Pronghorn Meetings

Public Input Sought

The Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW) is holding public meetings to discuss pronghorn antelope management for the southeast corner of the state.

The DOW manages big game hunting by dividing specific areas into what are known as Data Analysis Units or DAU's. Those large areas are further divided into smaller geographical areas called Game Management Units or GMU's.

Pronghorn management to be discussed includes the areas around Haswell (A-5), Cheyenne (A-12), Tobe (A-13), and Two Buttes (A-18).

This is a continuation of the DAU planning process and is a chance for public opinion to be incorporated into the DOW herd planning process. Items that will be discussed are the herd population and herd composition objectives that will govern license setting and policy issues for the next ten years.

All interested parties are invited to participate in these management plan discussions.

Meetings will be held at the following locations and times. Refreshments will be provided.

Location:	Date:	Time:
Lamar - Division of Wildlife Office	July 11, 2005	7:00 PM
Cheyenne Wells - Community Bldg.	July 13, 2005	7:00 PM
LaJunta - Fire Department	July 14, 2005	7:00 PM
Eads - Courthouse	July 15, 2005	7:00 PM
Pritchett - School cafeteria	July 18, 2005	7:00 PM

People who cannot attend the meetings can call at the Lamar DOW office at (719) 336-6600 or send written comments to Jeff Yost at 2500 South Main, Lamar, CO 81052.

APPENDIX C

WAYS TO PROVIDE INPUT

Ways to Provide Input on Antelope Management Plans

1) Attend a public meeting and make comments there.

2) Phone the CDOW in Lamar at 719-336-6600

3) E-mail the CDOW at jeff.yost@state.co.us

4) Attend the Wildlife Commission meeting in Lamar September 8-9, 2005

5) Send written comments to the CDOW at:

Colorado Division of Wildlife
2500 S. main
Lamar, CO 81052

Comments to be included in the draft management plan must be received by July 29, 2005