

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Mule Deer and Energy – Federal Policy & Planning in the Greater Green River Basin
Executive Summary
April 2011

In an attempt to understand the federal government policy approach to promoting and protecting the West's populations of mule deer, this project analyzed the extent of collaboration between the federal land agencies and the state wildlife agencies. The overarching goal was to construct a basic policy assessment that describes the approaches used by agencies to conserve mule deer and their habitat in the face of energy development. It is specifically concerned with the region known as the Greater Green River Basin (GRB), a geographic area home to some of the most significant mule deer herds in North America. The region is also home to some of the United States' largest energy reserves, creating the opportunity for substantial conflict.

The three states (WY, CO, UT) in which the GRB resides each have some level of state-wide or regional mule deer planning or initiative that outlines how mule deer management and objectives should be met. We reviewed and analyzed land use planning documents and major energy project documents completed by federal agencies (BLM, FS) within the GRB to find out how the federal agencies treated mule deer habitat in analyses, intended to manage mule deer habitats, incorporated state mule deer planning or objectives, and general collaboration with states in addressing potential mule deer issues. We also conducted interviews with key agency personnel and other managers who are instrumental in managing mule deer populations and habitats.



Watershed Map of the Greater Green River Basin (GRB) project area.

General Summary

- Federal agencies recognize the importance of mule deer habitats within plans and projects but there is an inconsistent approach to analysis and future management.
- Crucial winter habitats are identified as the primary concern in most plans and analyses with increased awareness and concern for continued impacts on crucial winter range with no apparent specific plans to avoid or mitigate on-going or future impacts.
- Habitat Management Planning (HMP) is used very sporadically and it is unclear if the proposed HMP's in planning were ever completed or exist today.
- Seasonal and timing stipulations and restrictions are the most common approach to mule deer habitat management on federal lands.
- No reference to existing mule deer initiatives were found in plans or projects, nor were there specific references to how habitat would be managed to meet state set population objectives.
- Management analysis and actions differed between states and offices based on same literature, information and science.
- Management across geo-political boundaries in both cultures (state and federal) was basically non-existent
- Energy development has become the dominant land use priority on the public lands managed by the BLM in the Green River Basin.
- Federal agencies have not embraced the recommendations for implementing state mule deer planning and the North American Mule Deer Conservation plan developed by WAFWA.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis and knowledge of policy, planning, and wildlife conservation we can make the following recommendations:

Coordination

1. Revise current agreements between the BLM, Forest Service, and state wildlife agencies to guarantee each agency is represented on all planning and projects that affect mule deer
2. Ensure recommendations from state mule deer initiatives and the WAFWA NA MD Conservation plan are implemented
3. Develop regional coordinating groups for the cross boundary coordination of mule deer

Science

1. Complete a thorough review of the state of the science on mule deer and how they are impacted by energy development activities
2. Establish a regular review process for incorporating science into future plans and projects
3. Address gaps in understanding by undertaking coordinated research on those areas

Planning

1. Specifically identify state population objectives for mule deer and how those objectives are going to be met by habitat management actions, land use designations and protections of specific habitats needed to meet long term sustainability of mule deer populations.
2. Develop specific monitoring and reporting requirements on how commitments made in land use plans are being implemented and met - for annual review by stakeholders and public
3. Incorporate state level mule deer planning, WAFWA mule deer recommendations and habitat guidelines, and other specific mule deer information into all plans and energy projects

Management

1. Develop specific habitat management plans or regional mule deer plans that include agreed upon goals and objectives for mule deer based on habitat and population needs.
2. Develop a set of guidelines or best management practices to be implemented during energy development activities within mule deer habitats
3. Develop specific stipulations and actions that address habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation of mule deer habitat from energy development including addressing impacts to mule deer hunting opportunities