Mule Deer

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Published by Utah State University Press

Austin, Dennis D.
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1908  State legislature closes mule deer hunting in Utah for six years.
With the previous six month hunting season (1894-1907), mule
deer had become extremely scarce, and extirpation was possible
in many Utah counties.
1913  “BUCK-ONLY” law was passed by the state legislature.
Antlerless mule deer were completely protected.
1916  U.S. Biological Services began control of large predators to pro-
tect livestock.
This action increased protection for mule deer from predators.
1930  Excessive utilization of winter ranges by mule deer was first
recorded.
At least some of Utah’s deer herds were approaching or exceeding
carrying capacity of winter ranges.
1933  Board of Big Game Control was established.
The Board was given the authority and responsibility to regulate
the number of mule deer in Utah.
1934  First antlerless deer hunt was approved and conducted.
First efforts were made to balance mule deer numbers with avail-
able winter habitat and forage.
1937  Purchase of the Mule Deer Research Management Area near
Utah State University.
This site became the focus area for most of the research on mule
deer and habitat requirements. Note: Most of the Management
Area and associated winter range was sold to Logan City in 2001
for a cemetery, development, and other uses.
1944  Publication of the initial Doman and Rasmussen manuscript on
supplemental feeding and nutritional experiments on the Mule
Deer Research Wildlife Management Area.
1946  Definition and establishment of 53 mule deer units.
First efforts were made to manage mule deer populations within
individual units.
1946  Establishment of the big game-livestock relationships project at
Utah State University.
Research begins on winter range relationships. Note: This project
was terminated in 1994 when the Division of Wildlife Resources
was financially compelled to an action of ‘Reduction in Force.’
1948  Establishment of the Interagency Committee.
Cooperation improved between state and federal agencies.
1948  Description of overall range conditions. Conditions of the range were defined with respect to big game and livestock grazing.

1949  Recognition and identification of summer and winter ranges. The critical value of winter ranges was clearly defined.

1950  Publication of USFS Research Paper Number 24. A thorough review of Utah’s’ big game, livestock and range relationships problems was completed. Research needs associated with mule deer were defined. The herd unit management concept was developed.

1951  Annual report of mule deer harvest in Utah was initiated. Data collection and reporting were greatly improved. This effort has continued through to the present.

1955  Publication of the textbook *Range Management* by Stoddart and Smith. This was the first textbook dealing with range management.

1957  Establishment of the Great Basin Research Center in Ephraim. Extensive research on rangelands revegetation was begun. This project has continued through 2009 and hopefully will continue indefinitely. First publication in 1958.

1957  Systematic collection of range trend data and analysis was initiated. Selected winter range sites were first characterized by vegetative data. This project with incremental improvements has continued through 2009 and hopefully will also continue indefinitely. First publication in 1958.

1968  Publication of Smith and Doell’s manuscript on livestock grazing benefits for mule deer. Initial guidelines for grazing cattle on mule deer winter ranges were established.

1968  Publication of the booklet *Restoring Big-game Range in Utah* by Plummer et al. Initial methods for revegetation of winter ranges were established.

1976  Publication of the symposium *Mule Deer Decline in the West*. Public recognition of the decline of mule deer populations throughout their entire range, and recognition of the significance and decline of deer winter ranges was stated.

1976  Division of Wildlife Resources publication on limiting range factors.
Defined each unit as limiting deer populations by available summer range, winter range, or units were both summer range and winter ranges were equally limiting.

1977 Publication of the *Oak Creek Mule Deer Herd in Utah* by Robinette et al.
A major source of information on mule deer biology and population dynamics was made available.

1981 Publication of Hancock’s manuscript on mule deer management in Utah.
Management synopsis for the past and framework for future management.

Hunters, environmentalists, conservationists, and citizen groups as well as wildlife biologist realized the folly of carrying excessive numbers of mule deer on winter ranges. This resulted in the initial increase of public involvement with wildlife management.

Substantial reduction in harvest and deer numbers due to a combination of factors.
It was realized that decades of periodic overutilization of ranges by deer and livestock have resulted in long-term loss of habitat. Due to changes in winter habitat, deer populations statewide were now unable to recover to pre-1993 levels.

1993 Hunters restricted to one hunt - rifle, muzzleloader, or archery.
1994 Total number of general season buck deer hunting permits capped at 97,000. Hunters required to choose hunting Region.
1997 Publication of Division of Wildlife Resources document on “Deer Herd Units.”
Prioritization system for land acquisition of winter range was developed.

1997 Wildlife management units and boundaries redefined.
Thirty, more clearly defined and larger management units in Utah, were established.
Data collection needs and biological efforts were reduced to a more manageable number of units.

1998 Establishment of permanent annual range utilization transects on the Cache unit.
1998  Beginning of several years of statewide drought especially in southern Utah. Drought continued in parts of Utah through 2005.

1999  Range trend data analysis altered to use only permanently marked end points. Greatly improved data accuracy and precision of range trend data.

2000  Publication of Austin’s manuscript on mule deer-livestock relationships. Summarized 50 years of research and updated recommendations for livestock grazing on mule deer winter ranges.

2002  Division of Wildlife adopts aggressive programs on habitat revegetation. Reestablishment of vegetation on depleted winter ranges becomes a major priority.

2003  Comprehensive statewide management plan for mule deer was developed and published.

2005  Total number of general season buck deer hunting permits reduced to 95,000.

2006  Declining statewide range conditions recognized. Primary factors defined as drought, invasive plant species, wildfire, frequent overgrazing by livestock, and over population by mule deer on summer and winter ranges. Predators, hunter and human harassment, and highway mortality listed as limiting and decreasing deer numbers. The long-term goal of maintaining 426,000 deer in Utah was temporarily reduced to 412,000. Number of general season Utah buck deer hunting permits remains capped at only 95,000, with less than 1,000 limited-entry buck permits, and with fewer than 1,100 antlerless permits. Statewide buck deer harvest determined at a little over 30,000.

2007  Wildfires blacken over 600,000 Utah acres mostly on big game winter ranges. Statewide buck harvest determined for a second consecutive year at a little over 30,000.

2008  Following a moderately harsh winter, buck harvest significantly declines to less than 23,000.
The behavior of buck deer during the rut is always fascinating to observe.