

ELK - 19.31.14

NMAC

February 20th, 2026
New Mexico State Wildlife Commission
Roswell, NM



NM Elk Herd Management Zones

Primary Management Zone (PMZ)

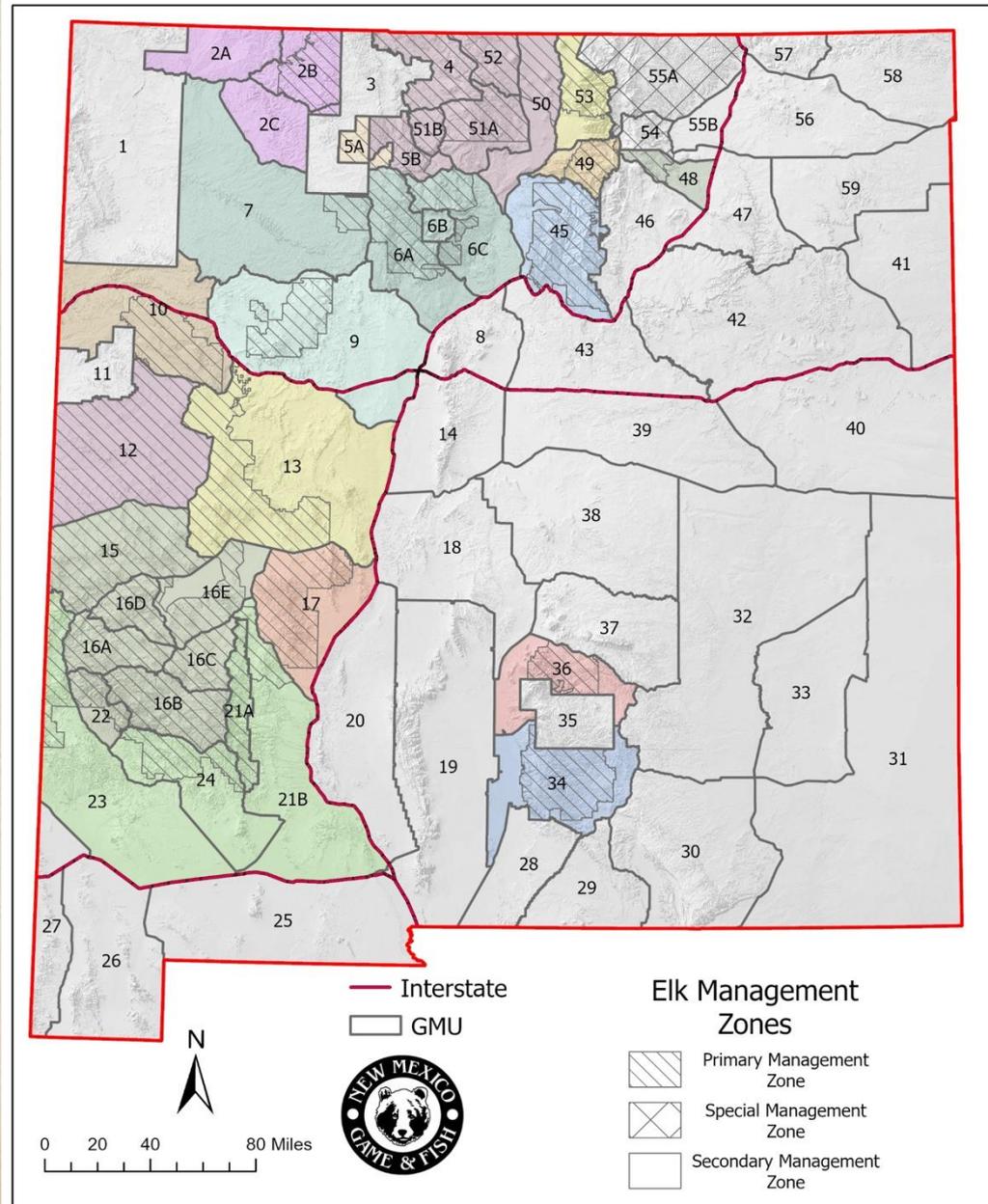
- 32 GMUs – Mostly public land, licenses allocated by NMDOW, management objectives: OOM, QHM

Secondary Management Zone (SMZ)

- Almost entirely private land
- Mostly marginal habitat or agricultural.
- Management objectives not set by rule

Special Management Zone (SpMZ)

- 2 GMUs – Entirely private land
- Large private ranches
- License allocation negotiated with DOW



Statewide Elk Harvest Summary

(2019 -23 Elk rule)

(2023 -27 Elk rule)

		2021	2022	2023	2024
License sold/converted		38,179	38,024	38,578	38,838
Hunters reporting		80%	79%	78%	81%
Harvest Success		39%	39%	39%	40%
Estimated Harvest	Cows	6,442	6,256	6,705	6,199
	Bulls	9,076	8,975	8,008	7,910
Satisfaction Rating		3.71	3.71	3.69	3.72



Elk Management Objectives

Quality Hunt Management (QHM)

- (a) Elk harvest in regional populations, herd units or GMUs within a region results in the trend of annual bull mortality rates to be below 35%.
- (b) Seasons should be designed to ensure timing and length of hunts are desirable.
- (c) At least 2/3 of all hunters are “satisfied” with the experience



Photo: Caittin Ruhl

Optimal Opportunity Management (OOM)

- (a) Elk harvest in regional populations, herd units or GMUs within a region results in the trend of annual bull mortality rates to be below 45% and harvest near optimal sustainable yield.
- (b) Season structure should be designed to ensure timing and length of hunts provide significant amount of opportunity.
- (c) At least 1/3 of all hunters are “satisfied” with the experience.



Photo: Orrin Duvuvuei

Preliminary Proposed Rule Changes for 2027-2030 Elk Rule

- I. Adjust hunt season dates to account for calendar shift.
- II. Align most primary management zone hunts to have a muzzleloader hunt first, followed by any-legal-weapon hunts.
- III. Align hunt season start dates in GMUs containing both PMZ and SMZ (hybrid).
- IV. Adjust some hunts to minimize overlap of weapons used or species hunted.



Preliminary Proposed Rule Changes for 2027-2030 Elk Rule

- V. Adjust draw license numbers based on biological data and management goals.
 - Possible reductions in the following herd units: Jemez (A), Greater Gila, Valle Vidal (A).
 - Possible slight increases in licenses in the San Juan (A), Northcentral herd unit (A), Sacramento, and Ruidoso.

- VI. Designate statewide draw elk license (currently ELK-1-700) as a quality hunt.

- VII. Require the purchase of a license at least one day prior to start of the hunt. For hunts where published season dates are less than 6 days, hunters will no longer be able to buy a license once the hunt starts.

- VIII. Possible adjustment of management zone boundaries.

- IX. Re-assess public/private land split due to land ownership changes of the last 4 years.



Status Update and Recommendations Northwest Region

▪ San Juan Herd (GMU 2): Stable

- OOM
- (36:100:31)
- PMZ/SMZ
- Slight increase in A licenses

▪ Mt Taylor Herd(GMU 9): Stabilizing

- OOM
- (35:100:36)
- Calf recruitment improved, yet not consistent over drought periods.
- PMZ/SMZ
- No changes recommended

▪ Lindrith Herd(GMU 5A): Stable

- OOM
- (36:100:31)
- Maintain current licenses and monitor harvest.
- No changes recommended

▪ Zuni Herd(GMU 10): Stable

- OOM
- (36:100:31)
- Maintain current licenses and monitor harvest.
- PMZ/SMZ
- No changes recommended



Status Update and Recommendations Northcentral Region

- **San Antonio/Chama Herd (GMUs 4, 5B, 50, 51, 52): Stable**
 - (37:100:35)
 - Consistently high recruitment across herd unit
 - Pop. Growth between 2013-2019
 - Pop. Stability (overlapping est.) 2019-2025
 - Several Pop Mgmt hunts in GMU 51 since 2014, to address winter concentrations

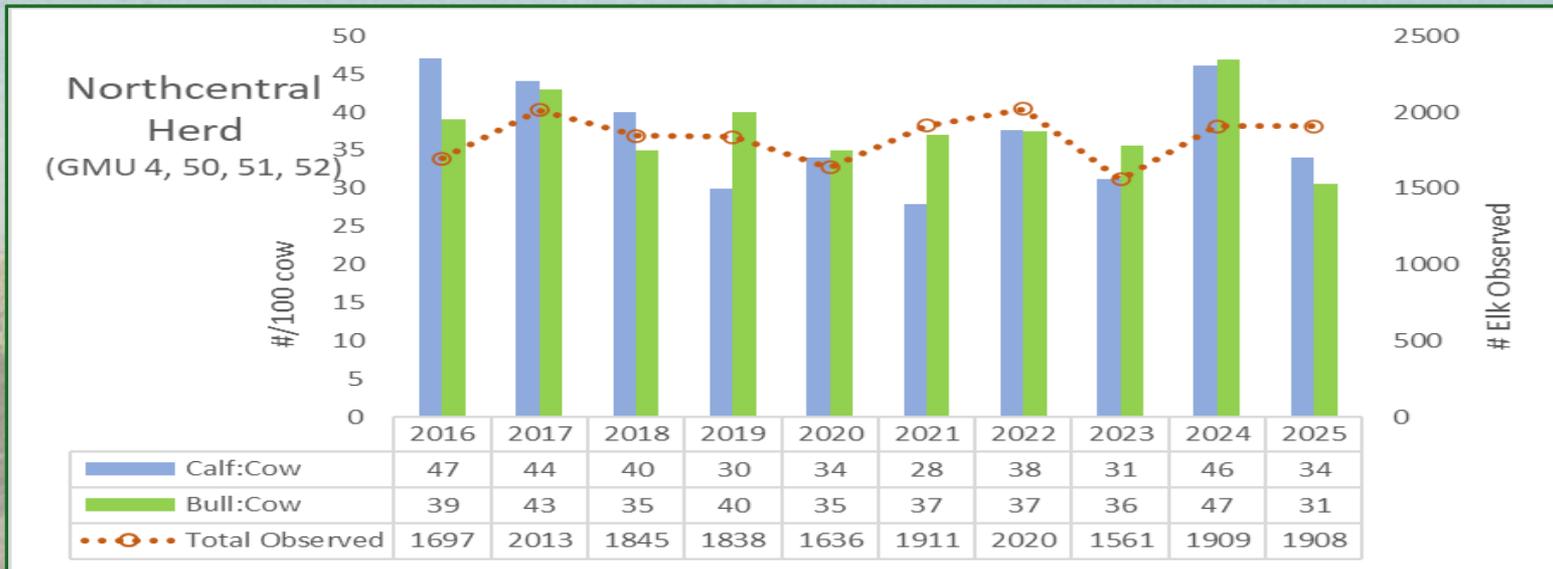
▪ **Considerations:**

- Slight increase in (A) licenses
- Hybrid Units (5B, 51) – Shift hunt dates across management zones to have same start date



- **San Antonio/Chama Herd (GMUs 4, 5B, 50, 51, 52): Stable**

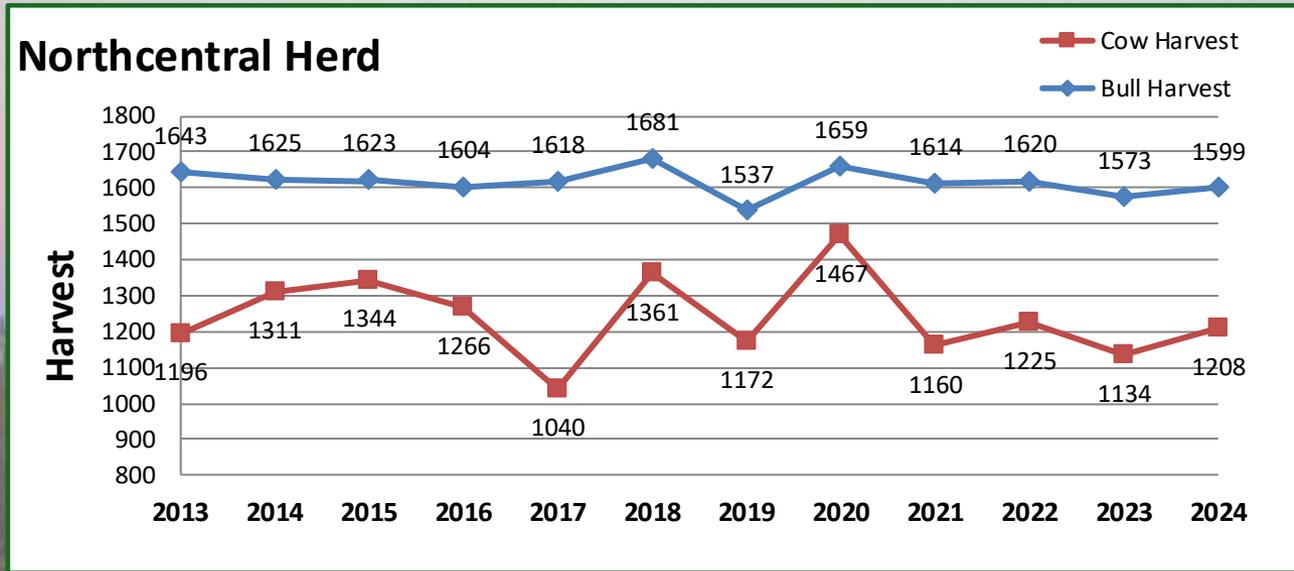
- Demographic ratios consistently high.
- Average C:c = 37 B:C = 42 (2016 – 2025)



- GMU 51 (A) licenses increased 15% during 2015 -19 Rule, additional 20% beginning 2016.
- 5 Pop. Mgmt. hunts in GMU 51 since 2014 (~1,000 licenses)

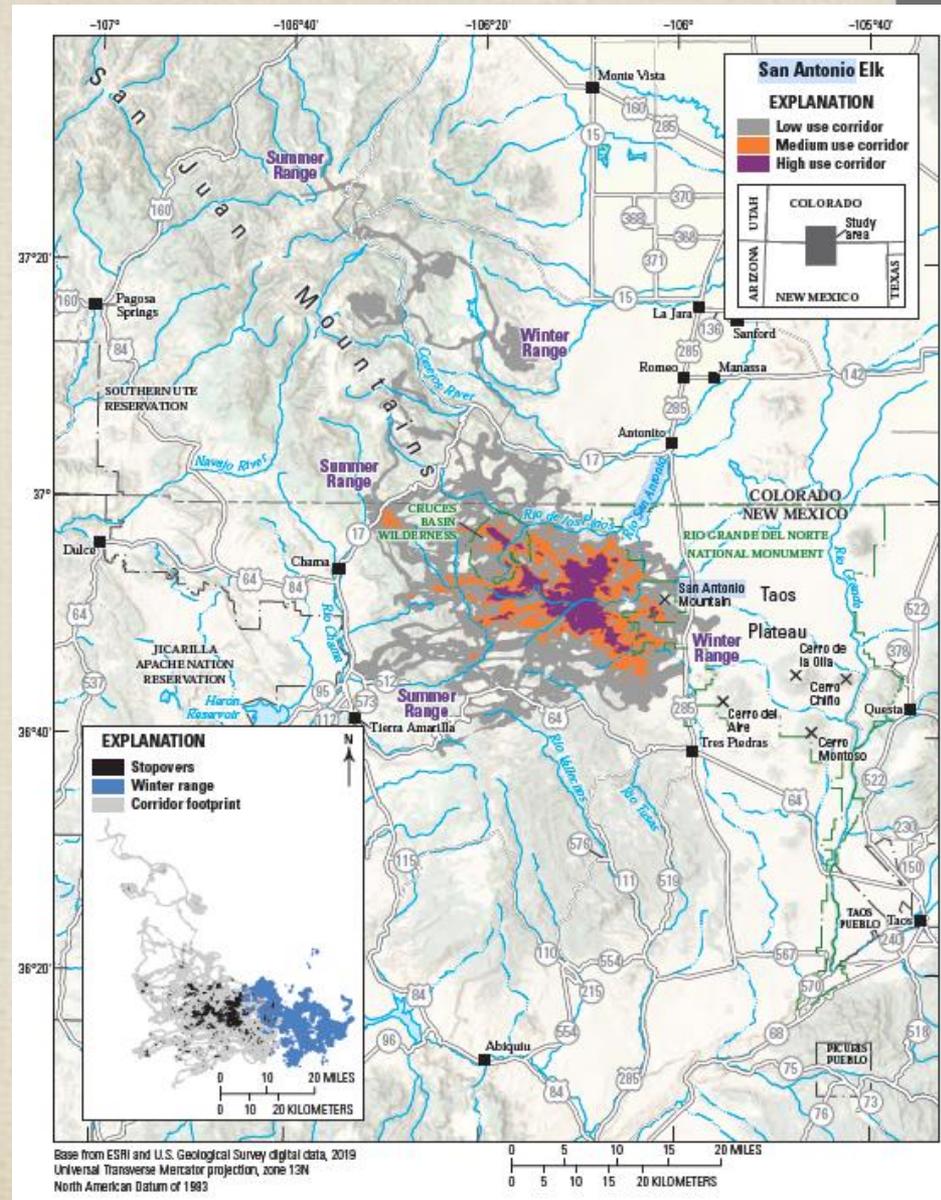


▪ San Antonio/Chama Herd (GMUs 4, 5B, 50, 51, 52): Stable



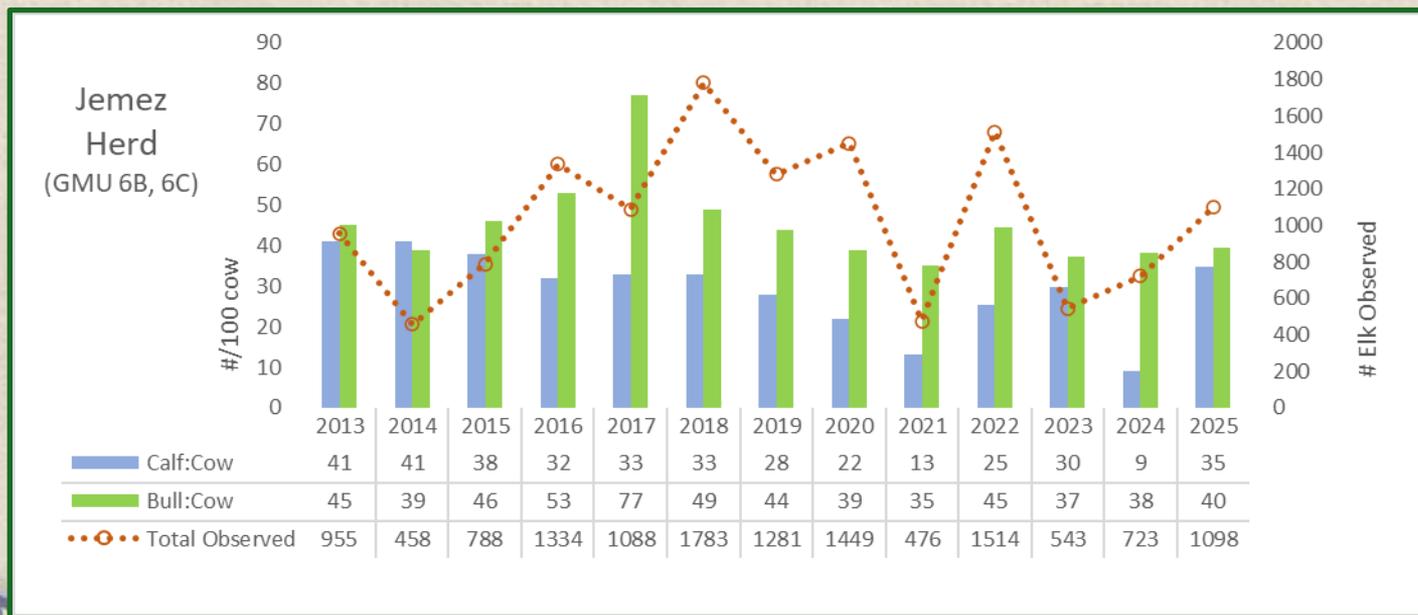
- **San Antonio/Chama Herd** (GMUs 4, 5B, 50, 51, 52):
- Seasonal Migration (GMU 52/4)
- Collar data from 40 adult females. (2020 - 2022)
- Migration duration (ave)
 - Spring: 56 days
 - Fall 22 days
- Migration length 13.7 – 51.8 mi (22.5 mi ave)

Published in USGS Ungulate Migrations of the Western United States, Vol 3



Status Update and Recommendations Jemez Region

- **Jemez Herd (GMU 6A-C, 7):** Stable w/low recruitment
 - 6A/B QHM; 6C & 7 OOM
 - (40:100:23)
 - Low recruitment observed since 2019 (ave = 23 C:c *without 2024)

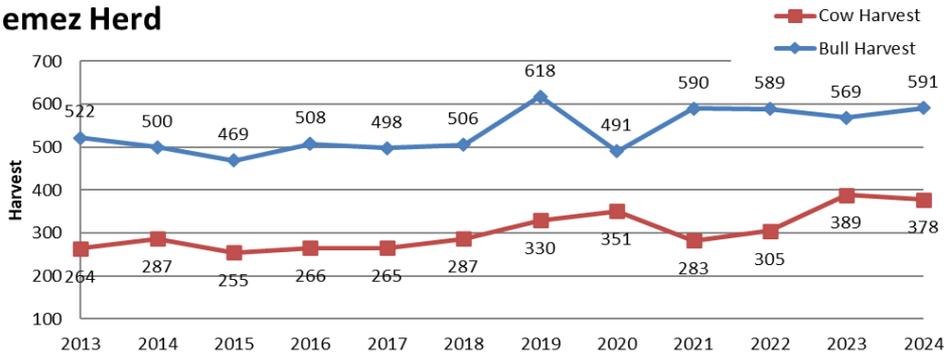


- **Considerations:**
 - Slight decrease in (A) licenses
 - Hybrid Units (6A, 6C) – Shift hunt dates across management zones to have same start date

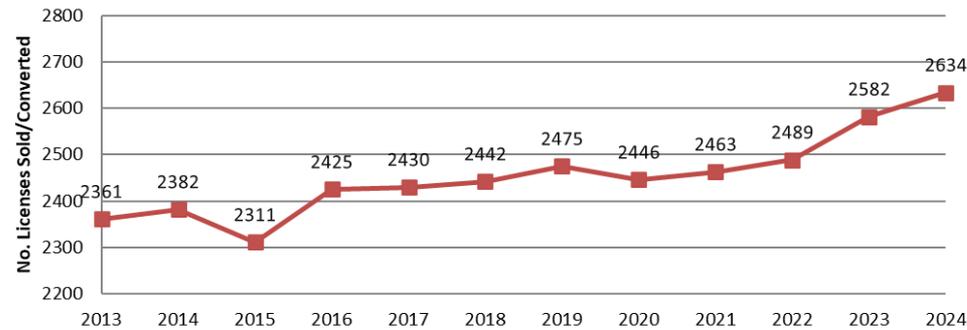


▪ **Jemez Herd (GMU 6A-C, 7):** Stable w/low recruitment

Jemez Herd



Jemez Herd



Jemez Herd

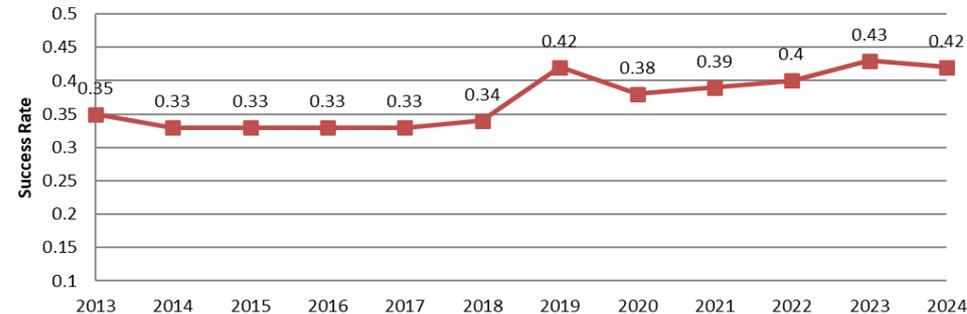


Photo: Caitlin Ruhl

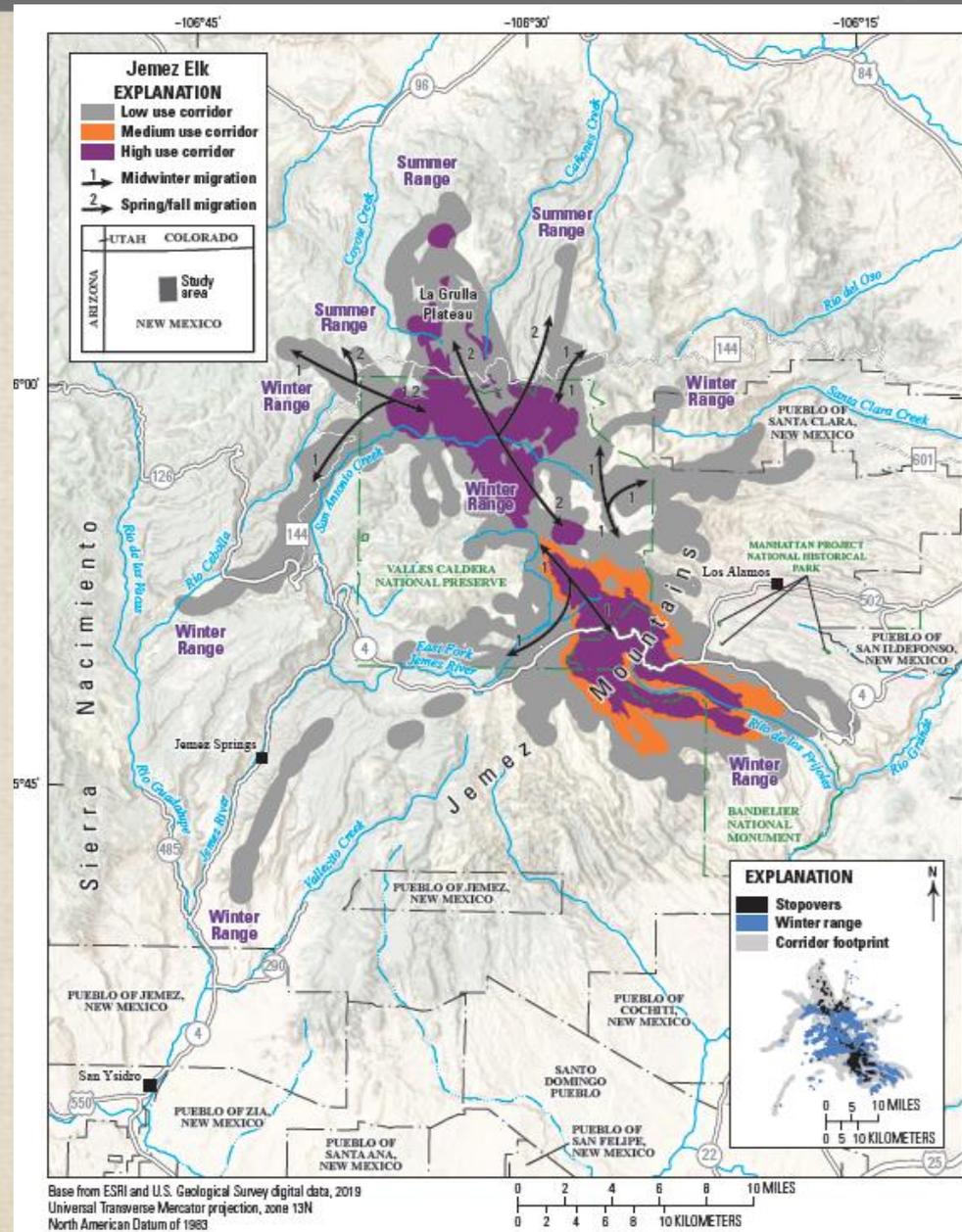
- **Jemez Herd (GMU 6A-C, 7):**
Seasonal Migrations

- Collar data from 122 adult females. (2012-2018, 2021-2023)

- Migration duration (ave)
 - Spring: 7 days
 - Fall 6 days

- Migration length 2.65 – 17.95
(7.6mi ave)

Published in USGS Ungulate Migrations of the Western US
Vol 4



Status Update and Recommendations Southwestern Region

▪ Fence Lake Herd (GMU 12): Stable

- (37:100:49)*
- Consistently high recruitment across herd unit, but heavy drought over past several years.
- No changes recommended

▪ Datil Herd (GMU 13): Stable

- (36:100:40)*
- Consistently high recruitment across herd unit, but heavy drought over past several years.
- PMZ/SMZ
- No changes recommended

▪ San Mateo/Magdalena Herd (GMU 17): Stable

- (37:100:34)*
- PMZ/SMZ
- No changes recommended

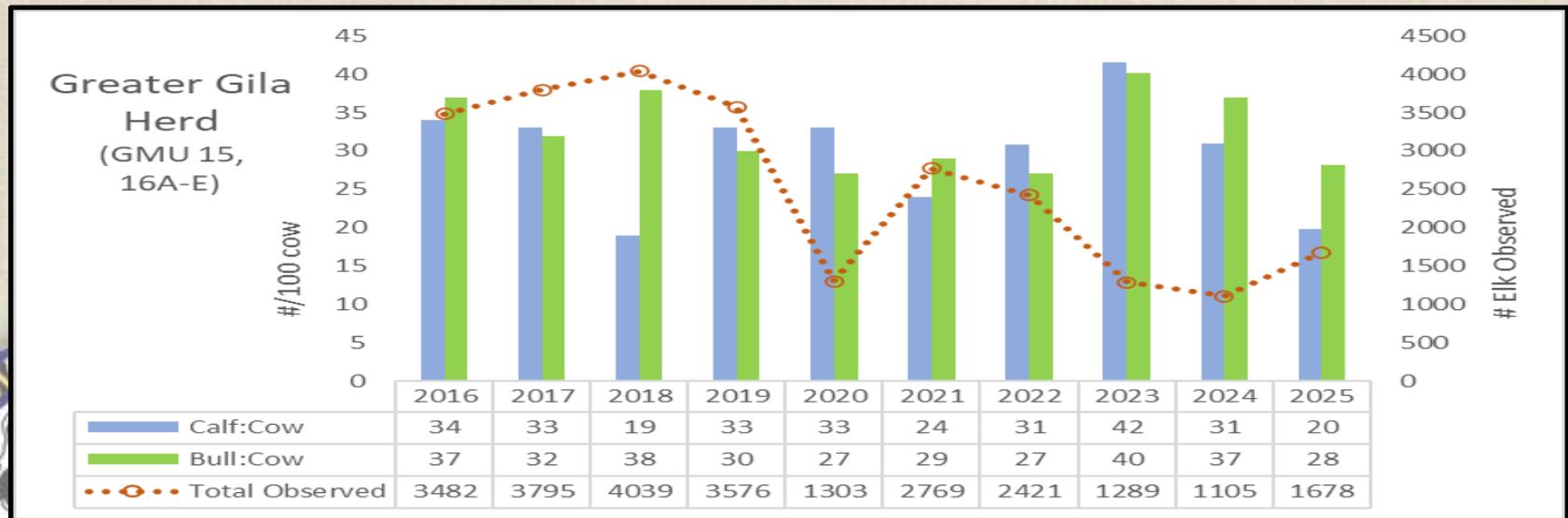


* Average number of elk observed
<250/year

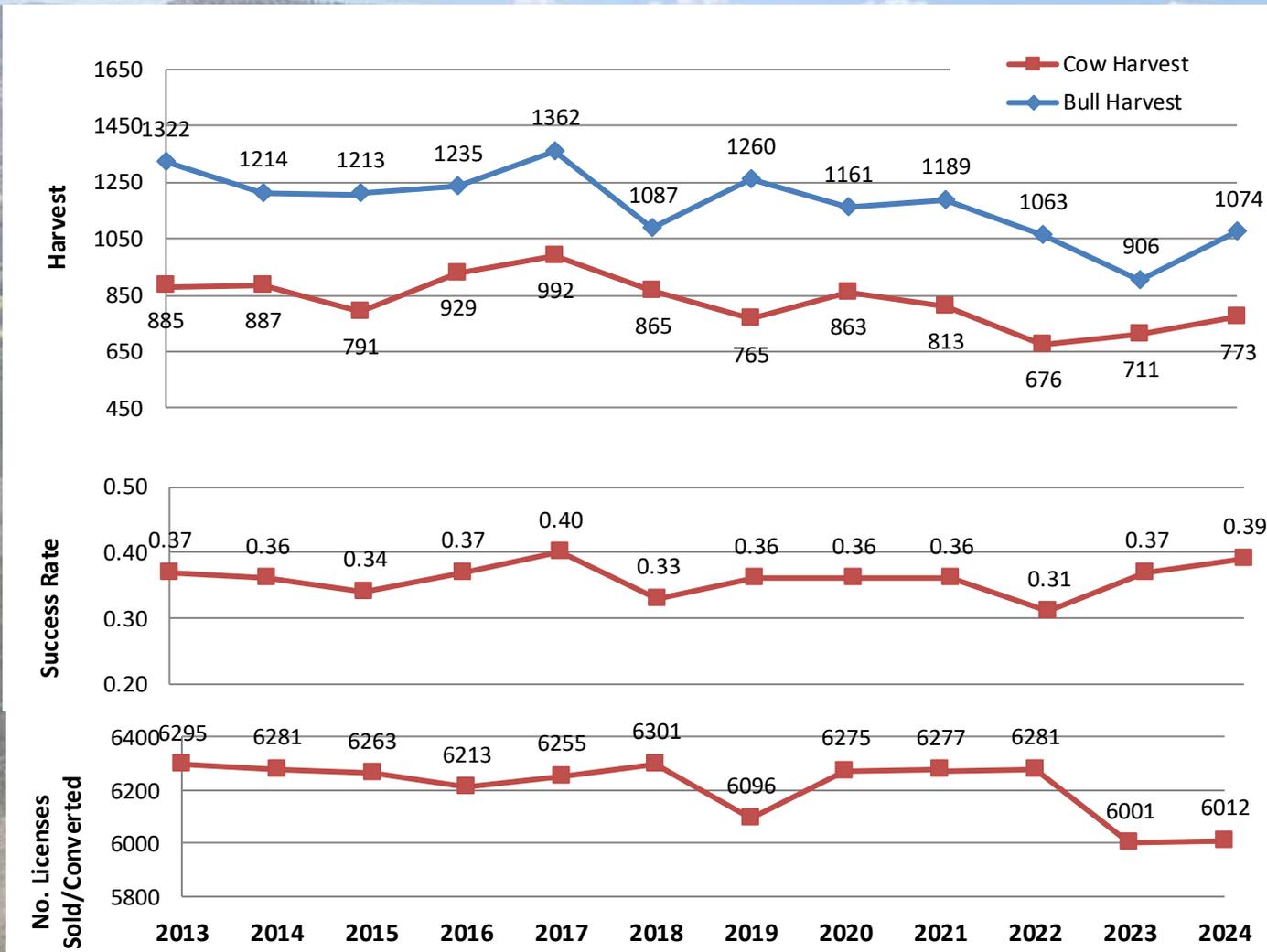
▪ **Greater Gila Herd (GMUs 15, 16A-E): Decreasing**

- Est population 19,500 – 22,400 (30:100:28)
- Suboptimal calf recruitment due to predation/drought
- High harvest pressure and severe drought conditions – increased mortality in adult females
- High harvest pressure during late rut impacting bull quality / numbers

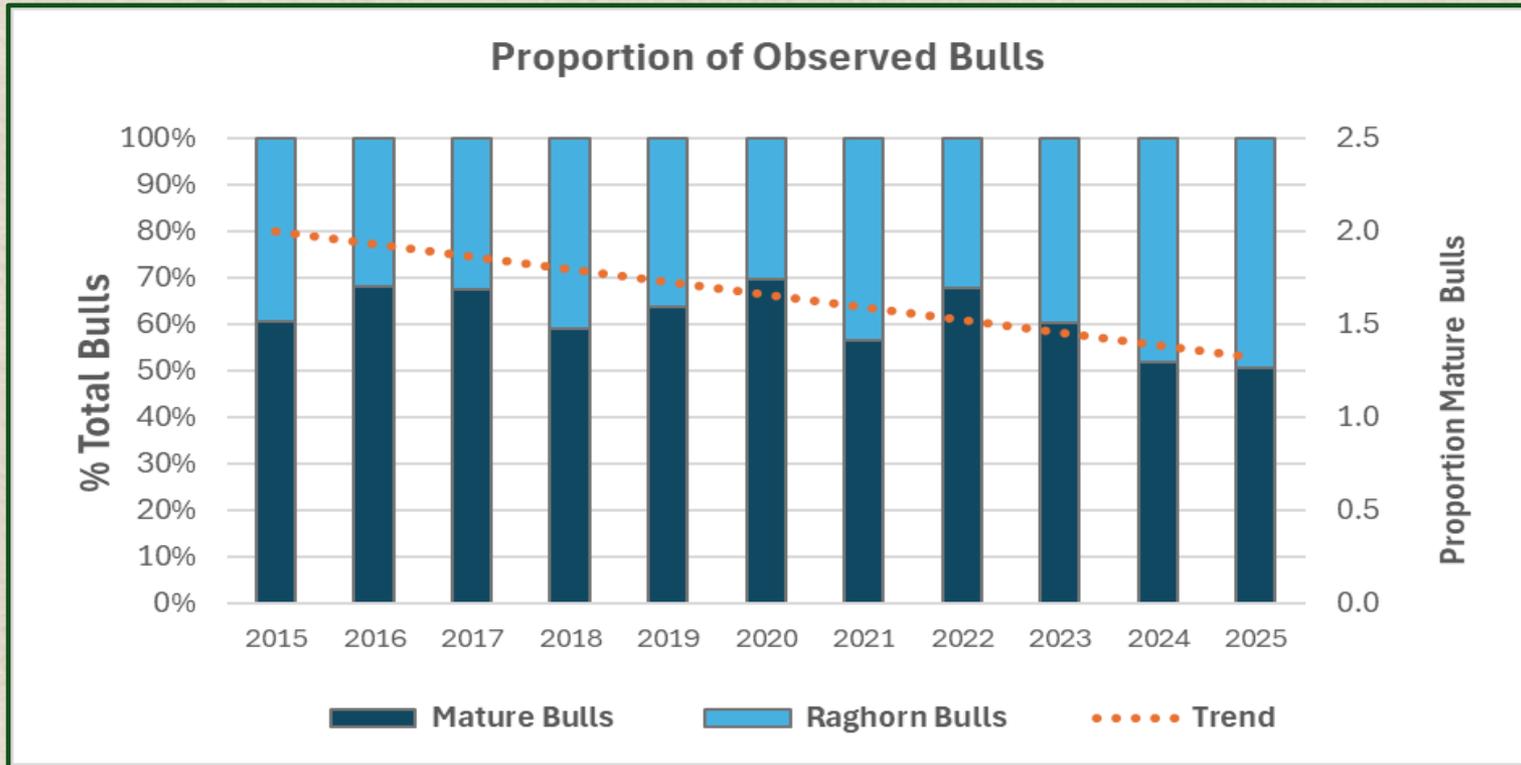
RULE CYCLE	BULL:COW:CALF
YEAR	(5yr Ave)
2013	40:100:45
2016	37:100:36
2019	34:100:33
2022	33:100:27
2025	30:100:28



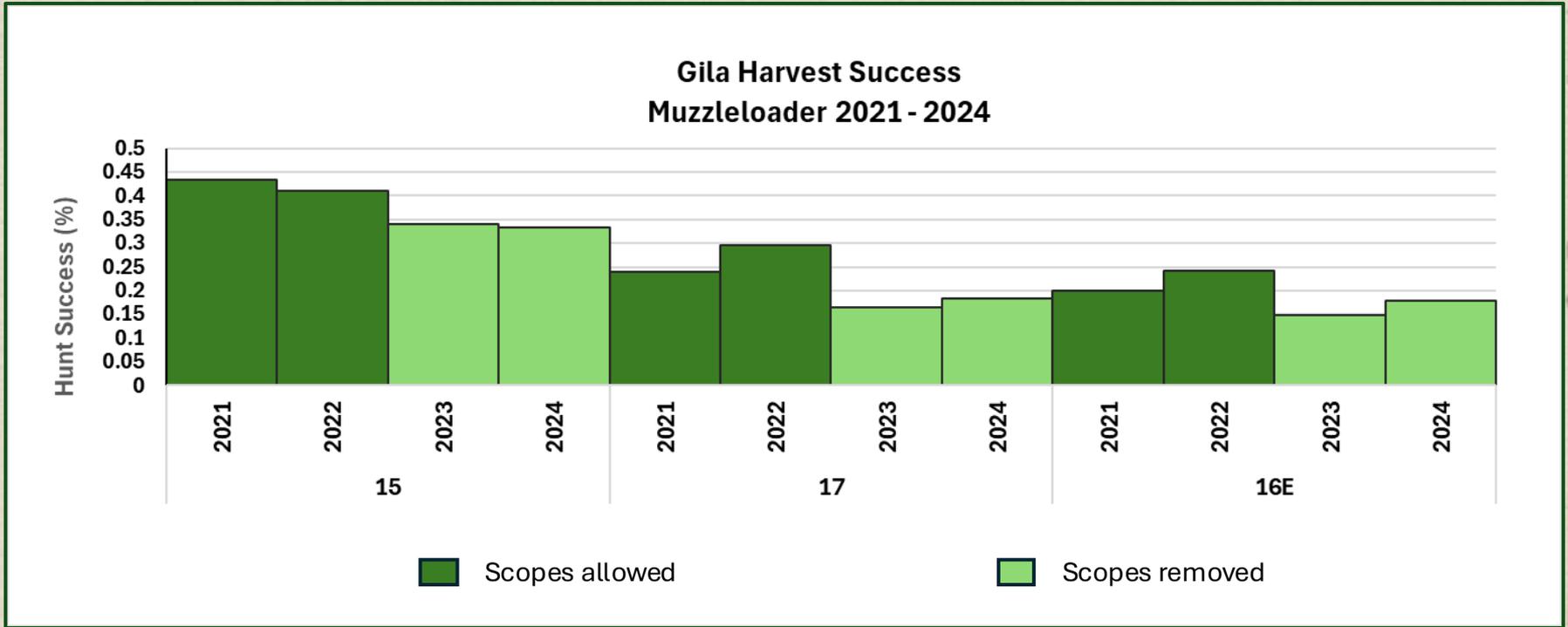
Greater Gila Herd (GMUs 15, 16A-E): Harvest / Licenses



- Greater Gila Herd (GMUs 15, 16A-E): Mature Bull Numbers



- **GMU 15, 17, 16E:** Muzzleloader harvest success

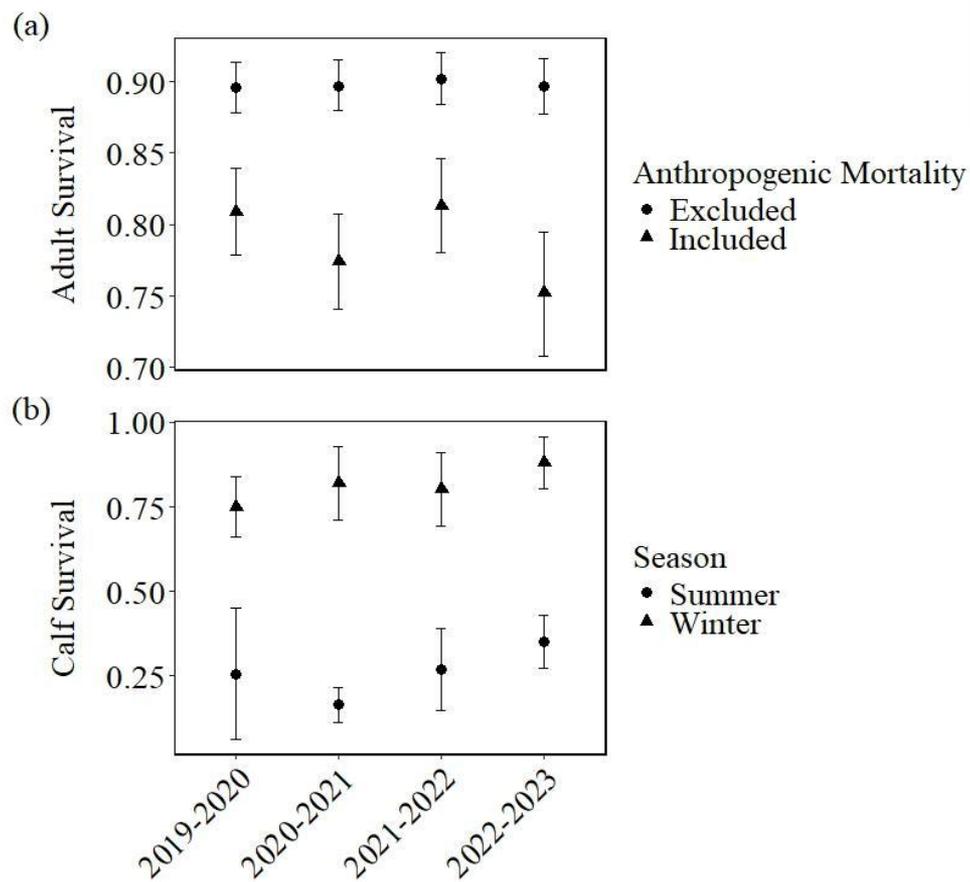


Greater Gila Herd (GMUs 15, 16A-E):

NMSU Research Findings

- Several research projects between 2019 – 2024
- Utilized nearly 900 GPS collars on adult females and ~500 collars on calves
- Investigating elk mortality / survival, habitat use, and behavior

- Major Findings: Adult Female
 - Annual survival was found to be lower (~76%) than previously estimated (~81%)
 - #1 cause of mortality was hunter harvest
 - Other contributors to mortality were predation / exposure to predators, age, and drought severity (specifically within the most recent 1-3 months, and prior year)

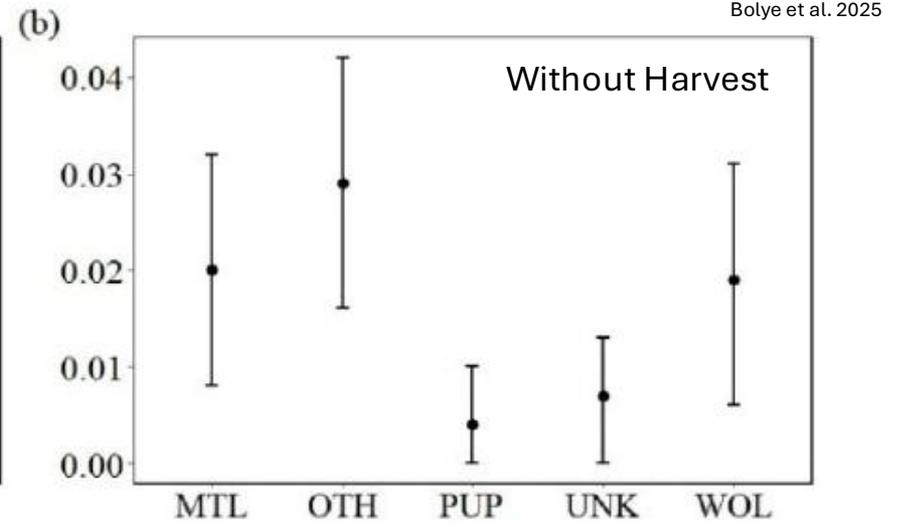
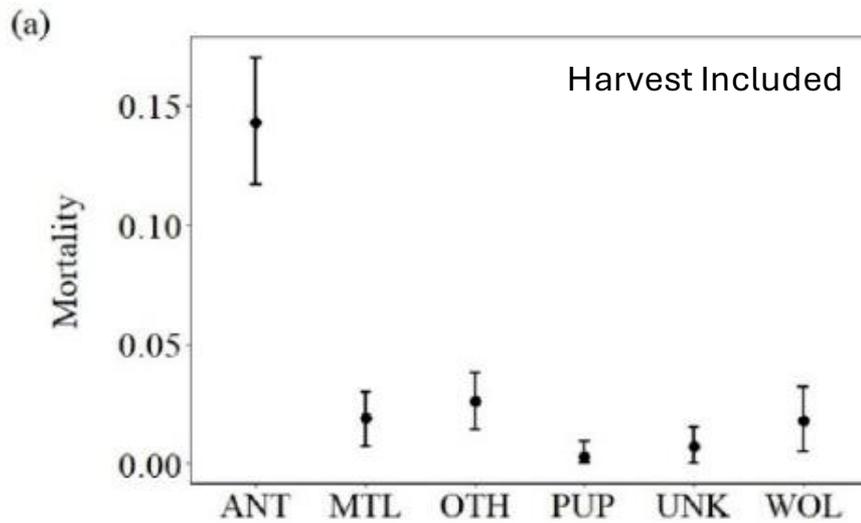


Bolye et al. 2025

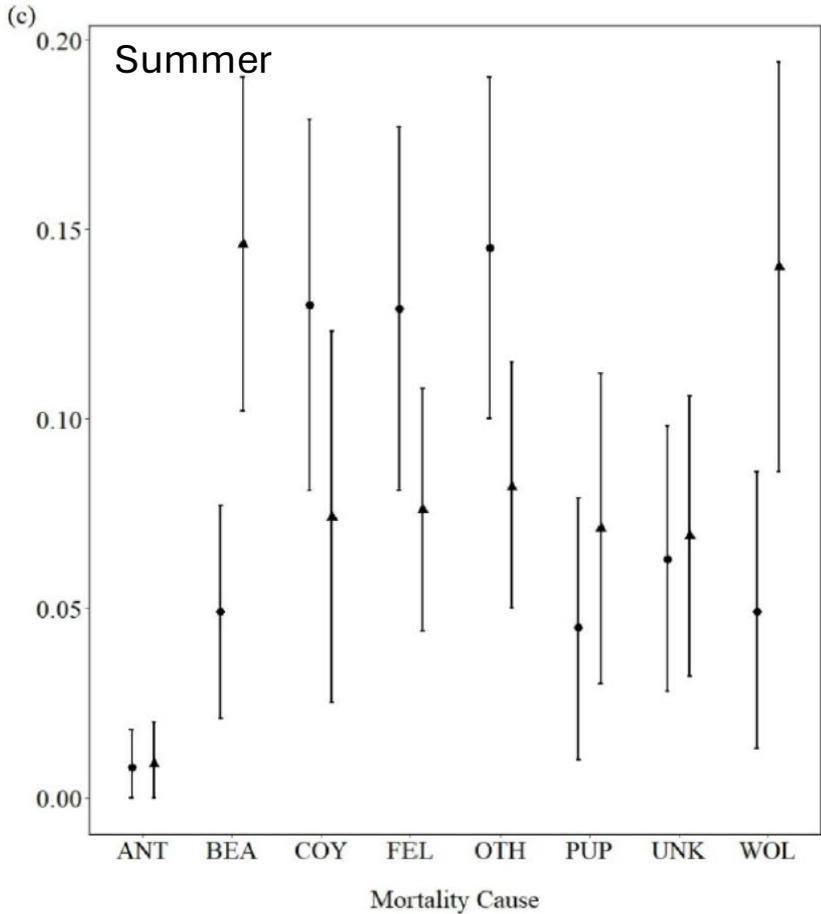
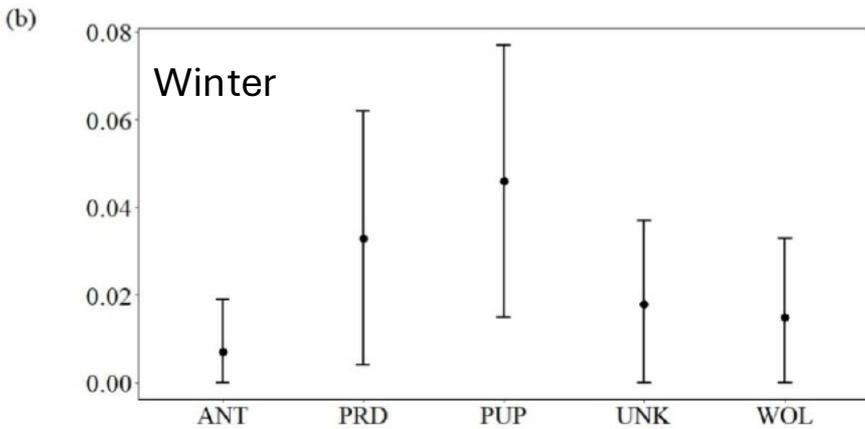
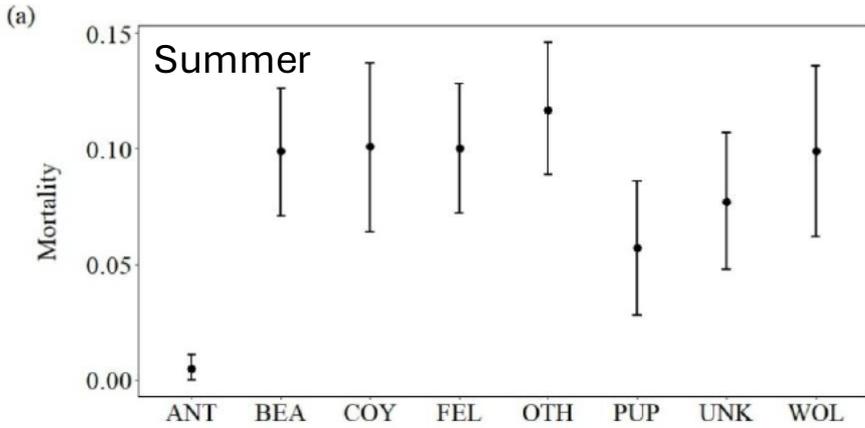


- **Greater Gila Herd (GMUs 15, 16A-E):** NM Adult female mortality probability

- NMSU Research findings



Greater Gila Herd (GMUs 15, 16A-E): NM Calf Mortality Probability



Wolf Exposure
 ● No/Low
 ▲ Mod/High

Bolye et al. 2025



- **Greater Gila Herd (GMUs 15, 16A-E):** Recommendations

- Decrease in licenses to buffer population from additive mortality
- Aligning PMZ public hunts to all begin with muzzleloader hunts, followed by rifle hunts.
- Hybrid unit (GMU 16E) – Shift hunt dates across management zones to have same start date
- Shift October hunt dates later to reduce harvest pressure during rut



Photo: Travis Zaffarano

Status Update and Recommendations Southwest Region

▪ Lesser Gila Herd (GMU 21A/B, 23, 24): Stable

- OOM
- (28:100:25*)
- Maintain current licenses and monitor harvest.
- Consider increasing survey efforts for herd
- PMZ/SMZ

*limited survey data (<350 elk observed on average)



S.A. Hammer ©



Status Update and Recommendations

Southeast Region

■ Sacramento Herd (GMU 34): Increasing

- OOM
- (53:100:35)
- PMZ/SMZ
- Consider slight increase in licenses for existing hunts

■ Ruidoso Herd (GMU 36): Stable

- OOM
- (60:100:35)
- PMZ/SMZ
- Consider slight increase in licenses for existing hunts



- Collaborative study between NMDGF and Mescalero Division of Natural Resource Management and Protection begins March 2026.
 - Deploy 60 GPS collars on adult females
 - Determine seasonal ranges / movement corridors
 - Investigate movements during hunt seasons
 - Help determine survival rates and inform management of GMU 34 / 36



Status Update and Recommendations Northeast Region

Pecos Herd (GMU 45): Stable (36:100:31)*

PMZ / SMZ

No changes recommended

Whites Peak Herd (GMU 48): Stable (36:100:31)*

PMZ / SMZ

No changes recommended

Penasco Herd (GMU 49): Stable (35:100:32)*

PMZ / SMZ

No changes recommended

Ute-Midnight-San Cristobal Herd (GMU 53)

Stable (34:100:24)*

PMZ / SMZ

No changes recommended



* Average number of elk observed
<250/year

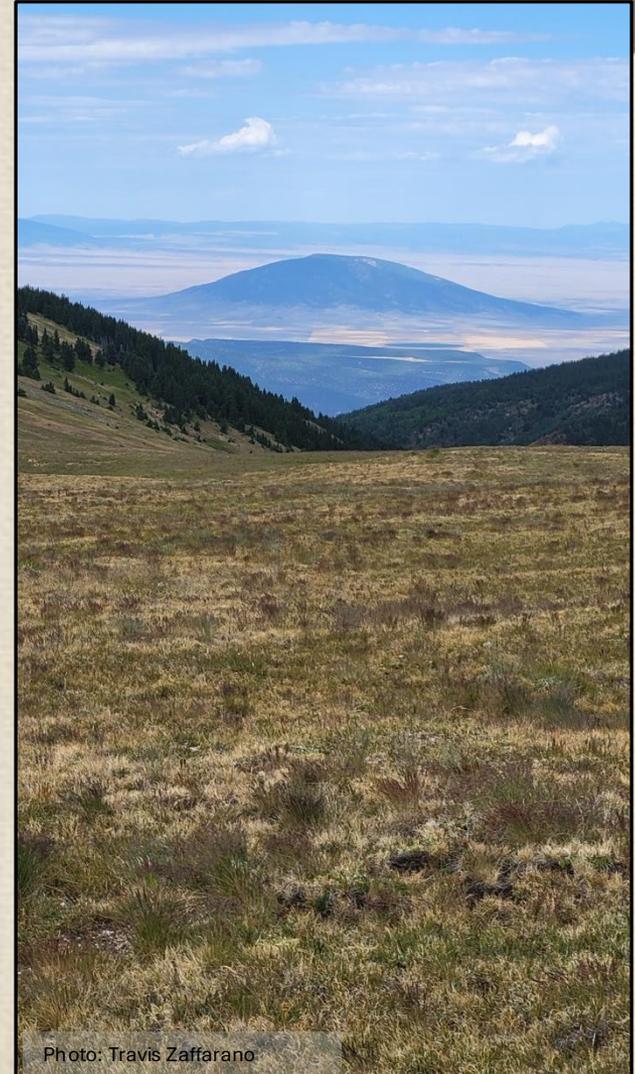
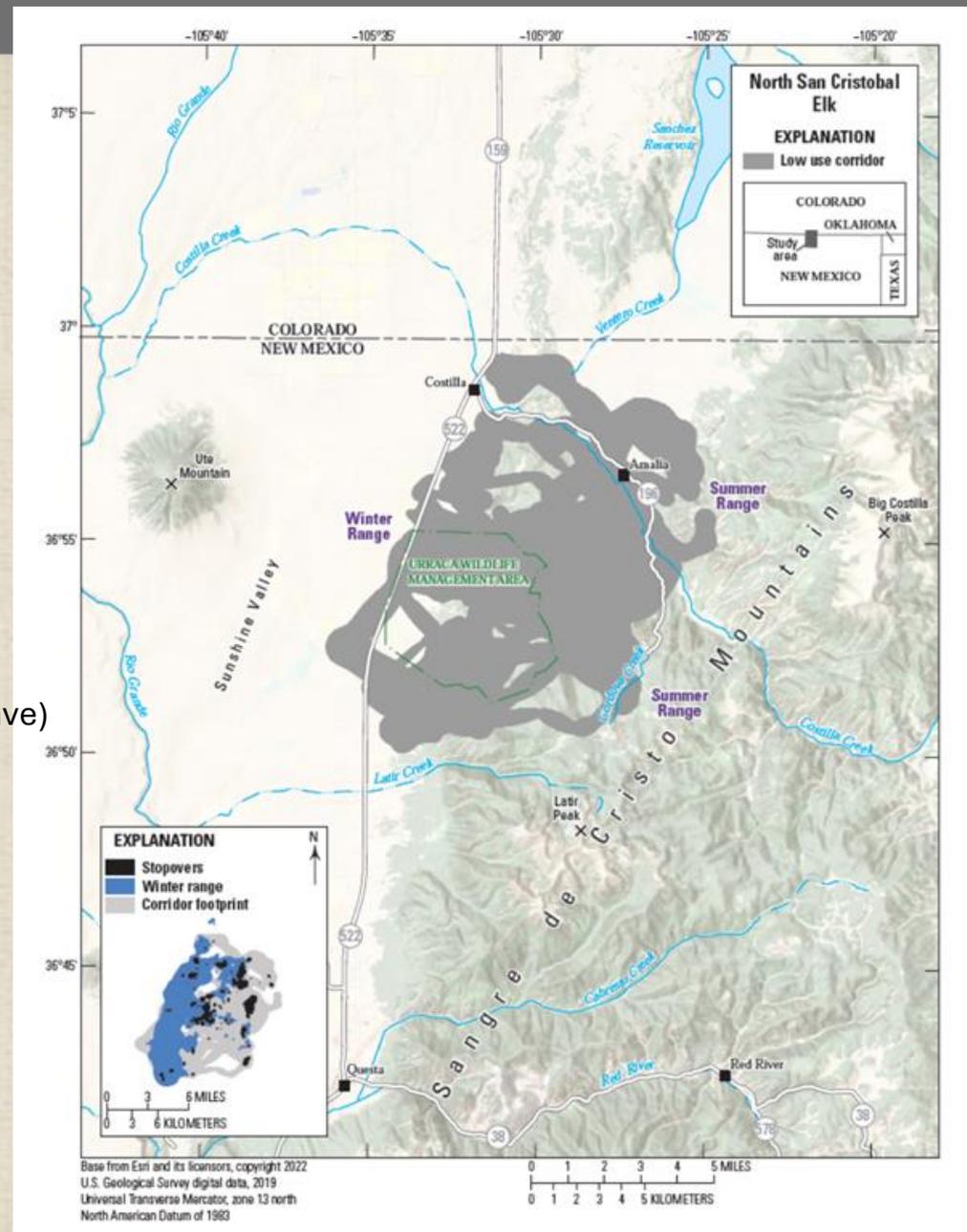


Photo: Travis Zaffarano

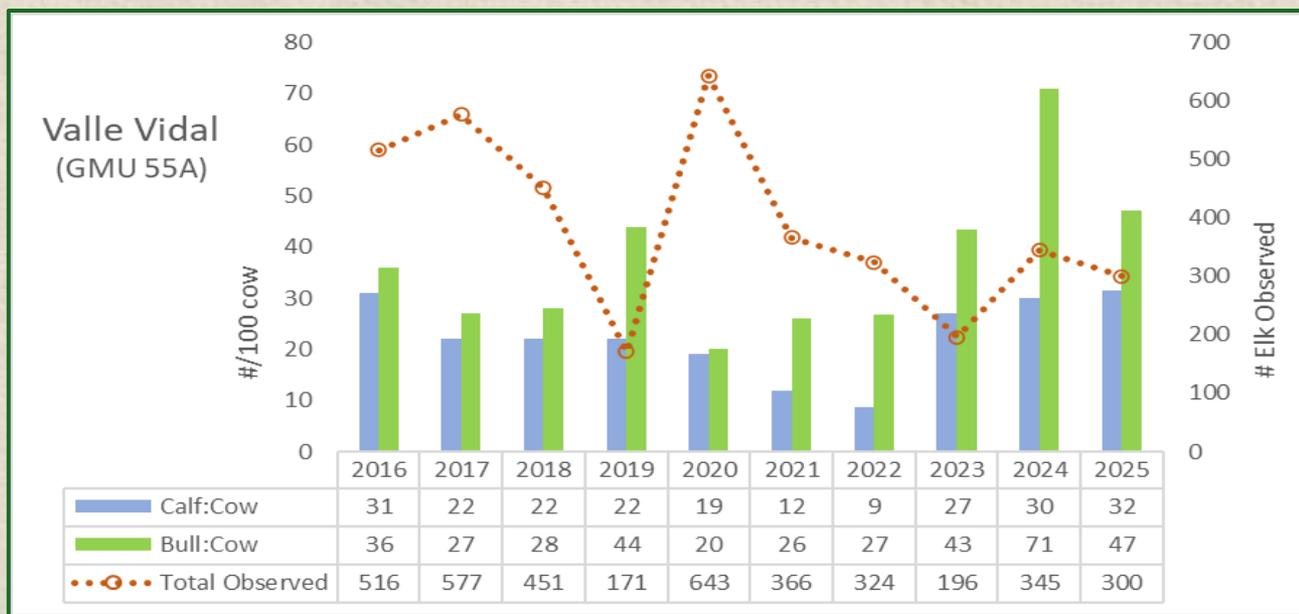
- **San Cristobal herd (GMU 53):**
- Seasonal Migration
- Collar data from 10 adult females. (2021-2023)
- Migration duration (ave)
 - Spring: 5 days
 - Fall 8 days
- Migration length 2.24 – 9.21mi (5.7mi ave)

Published in USGS Ungulate Migrations of the Western United States, Vol 5



Status Update and Recommendations Northeast Region

- **Valle Vidal Herd (GMU 55A):** Slightly decreasing (39:100:19)
 - QHM / Once in a lifetime hunts
 - Concerning calf recruitment observed since 2019 by NMDOW and VPR
 - Only 2 years C:c > 30 since 2017
 - Annual habitat conditions correlated to calf survival



Recommendations:

- Slightly reduce (A) licenses





Photo: Travis Zaffarano

Submit comments on proposed changes:

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