



2023-2024 NEW MEXICO ELK HUNTING PROSPECTS AND POPULATION SUMMARY



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ELK HUNTING OVERVIEW

New Mexico offers world class elk hunting opportunities throughout the state and is considered a premier hunting destination, known for productive elk herds across diverse landscapes and hunting opportunities. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (Department) offers many hunting opportunities on both public and private properties through rifle, muzzleloader, or archery hunting options. Between 2017 and 2021, approximately 37,000 licenses were sold to hunters; resulting in an average harvest of ~8,400 bulls and ~6,400 cows. Average hunt success across all weapons and license types was 41.1%. Visit our [Harvest Report Information](#) page for detailed annual reports.

Within New Mexico there are several elk herd units, defined as contiguous tracts of suitable elk habitat where distinct elk populations inhabit the landscape. Elk herd units are located primarily within the mountainous regions of the state and provide the geographic basis for which biologists monitor and manage populations (Figure 1). Although elk populations persist outside of these regions, the majority of the elk in New Mexico exist within these defined herd units. Many of these herd units span across several GMUs, each containing specific annual harvest regulations and license allotments (Figure 2).

The Department provides elk hunting opportunities on public lands through public draw licenses, and opportunity on privately owned properties through the Elk Private Land Use System (EPLUS). The EPLUS program was created in recognition of the important benefits that private lands make to the elk populations and hunting opportunities in New Mexico.

Elk are managed across the state in three zones, each having different management goals. The three management zones are Primary, Secondary, and Special (Figure 2). Within Primary Management Zones, the Department actively monitors herd productivity and recommends license adjustments to manage elk herds within a range of sustainable population metrics and harvest strategies. The total number of elk licenses issued in each Game Management Unit (GMU) are divided between the public draw and the EPLUS system based on the percent of public vs private land in the Primary Management Zone of each GMU. Licenses issued through the public draw are subject to quota set by the legislature (see below for more information). Public draw licenses are valid on legally accessible public land, and private land (with written permission) in GMU for which the license is issued.

Secondary Management Zones are areas within the state where elk are present, but are adjacent to, or outside of, core habitat and thus no specific elk management goals are set by the department. Elk licenses for enrolled private lands in Secondary Management Zones are issued over-the-counter, and are available for purchase with an appropriate ranch code. Special Management Zones are regions outside both Primary and Secondary Management Zones and elk authorizations are issued to private landowners by the Department on a ranch by ranch basis. Private property owners who are qualified participants in the EPLUS program are issued authorizations for elk hunts to be distributed by the landowner. These private property authorizations can then be converted to licenses by the hunter who has acquired the authorization. Depending on how the landowner enrolled their property in the EPLUS program, and where that property is located, licenses may be valid for the entire GMU, like public draw licenses, or they may be limited to the ranch boundaries where issued. For more information on EPLUS licenses, visit the [EPLUS webpage](#). The Department monitors elk herds in Primary and some in Special Management Zones using aerial helicopter surveys and hunter harvest

information. However, not all elk herds are at densities or in habitat types that are conducive to aerial surveys. In Secondary and some Special Management Zones, elk herds are often monitored using data provided through mandatory harvest reporting, making the hunter harvest report an invaluable tool in assessing elk population performance resulting in informed management recommendations. These metrics, surveys and hunter harvest reports, are used to recommend license adjustments to best manage each herd.

Opportunity vs. Quality Hunt Designations

In Primary Management Zones the Department sets goals for each designated herd unit and makes management recommendations to the State Game Commission to achieve that goal. The Department manages these herd units under one of two designations; Optimal Opportunity Management (OOM or ‘opportunity’) or Quality Hunt Management (QHM or ‘quality’) described below:

- **Optimal Opportunity Management (OOM):** Hunts designated as ‘opportunity’ maximize annual hunter opportunity without negative impacts to overall population viability. The number of licenses issued for each GMU are designed to stay well within a sustainable harvest limit while allowing ample hunting opportunities. Depending on the GMU, weapon type, and hunt timing, there is the potential for increased hunting pressure. There is also typically an increased chance at drawing a tag. These opportunity areas have a sufficient number of bulls, but fewer older age class males compared to ‘quality’ hunt areas.

- **Quality Hunt Management (QHM):** Hunts designated as ‘quality’ offer desirable season structure, lower hunter density, an increased chance for success, and an ability to choose from a wider selection of legal animals. These hunts typically have fewer licenses, resulting in a relatively high success rate for hunters. However, demand for these licenses is high and there is a lower chance of drawing a tag.

Opportunity and Quality Hunt designations are listed in the Big Game Rule and Information Booklet under the “Fee Type” for each listed hunt.

Draw System and License Quotas

Unlike many western states, New Mexico does not have a preference point system. The draw is completely random, meaning that a hunter applying for the public draw for the first time has the same chance as a hunter that has applied for 20 years or more. However, as directed by the state legislature, residents of the state are guaranteed the majority of elk licenses available through the public draw; 84% are allocated to residents, 10% to residents and nonresidents applying with a New Mexico registered outfitter, and 6% to nonresidents applying without a registered outfitter. Additionally, all draw licenses for antlerless elk, as well as all hunts on Department Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) are issued only to New Mexico residents. Private land authorizations are not subject to the quota.

ELK RULE DEVELOPMENT – WE WELCOME YOUR PARTICIPATION!

The Department's "Elk Rule" outlines season dates and license numbers and opens every 4 years, allowing the Department to make management recommendations based on changes in elk populations. When the elk rule is open for changes, the Department develops recommendations based on biological data, hunter harvest data, and management objectives. The Department solicits public input on these recommendations and makes adjustments where necessary. The following is a breakdown of how hunting rules are set in New Mexico and ways in which the public can be involved.

- 1) The Department proposes initial recommendations based on biological, survey, and harvest data.
- 2) These initial recommendations are presented at public meetings, typically in each region of the state.
- 3) The Department solicits and compiles formal written and emailed comments about proposals from all stakeholders.
- 4) Based on this input, the Department may modify the recommendations if the majority of stakeholders desire a particular change (or no change) as long as it does not negatively impact a population or management objective.
- 5) The Department makes recommendations to the Commission who then votes to adopt the rule based on biological data and public input submitted during the open rule period.

The Elk Rule for the 2023-2026 hunting seasons was open for public comment and passed in October 2022. The next elk rule will open in 2026 and changes to the rule will be available for comment ahead of the 2027-2030 rule cycle. The Department appreciates feedback, and encourages those interested to remain engaged with the Department's rulemaking process and submit official comments when rules are open. For a list of proposals that the Commission may be currently considering, please visit this webpage:

<http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/commission/proposals-under-consideration/>

Figure 1) New Mexico Elk Herd Units; defined as contiguous tracts of suitable elk habitat where distinct elk populations occupy the landscape.

New Mexico Elk Herd Units

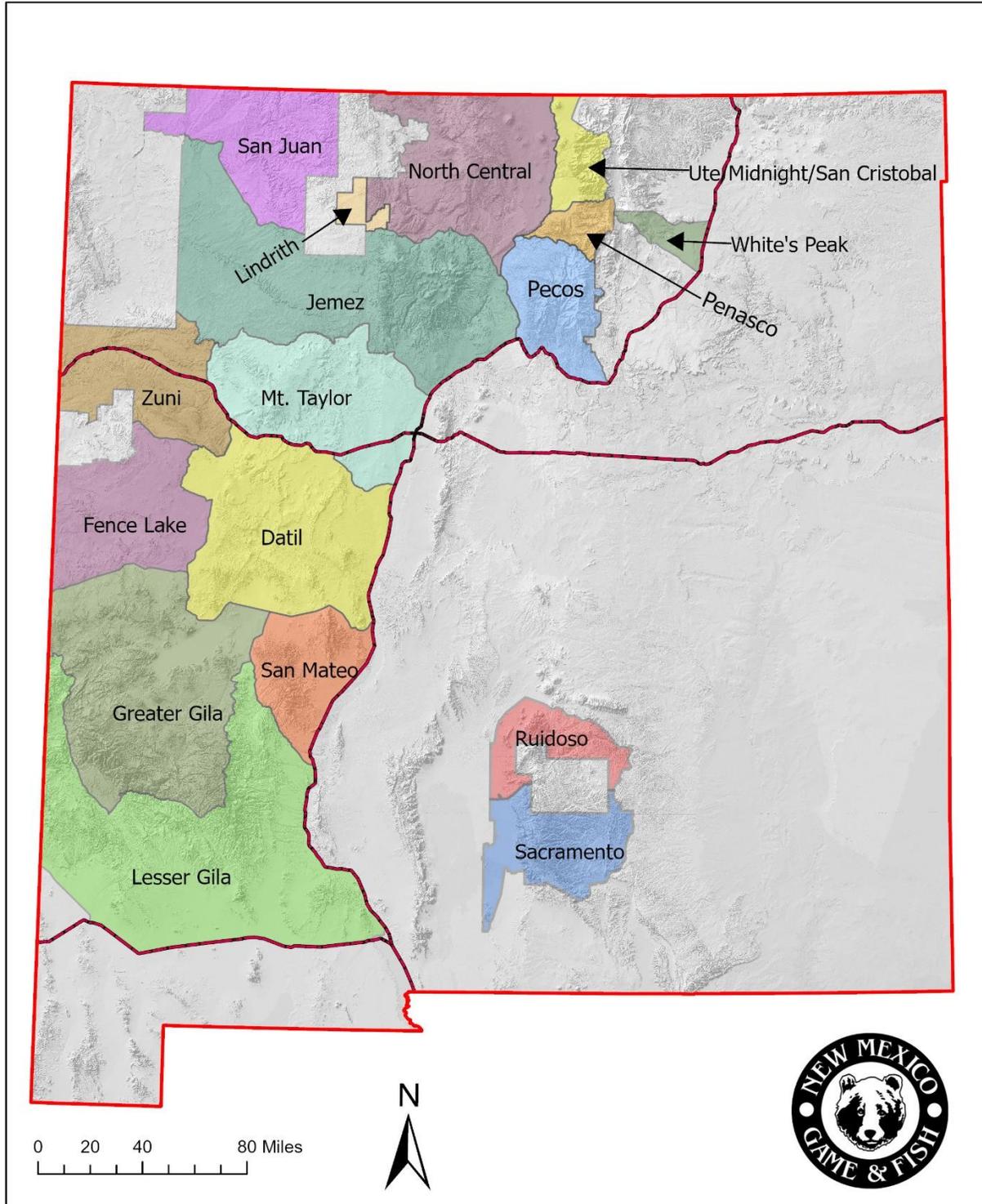
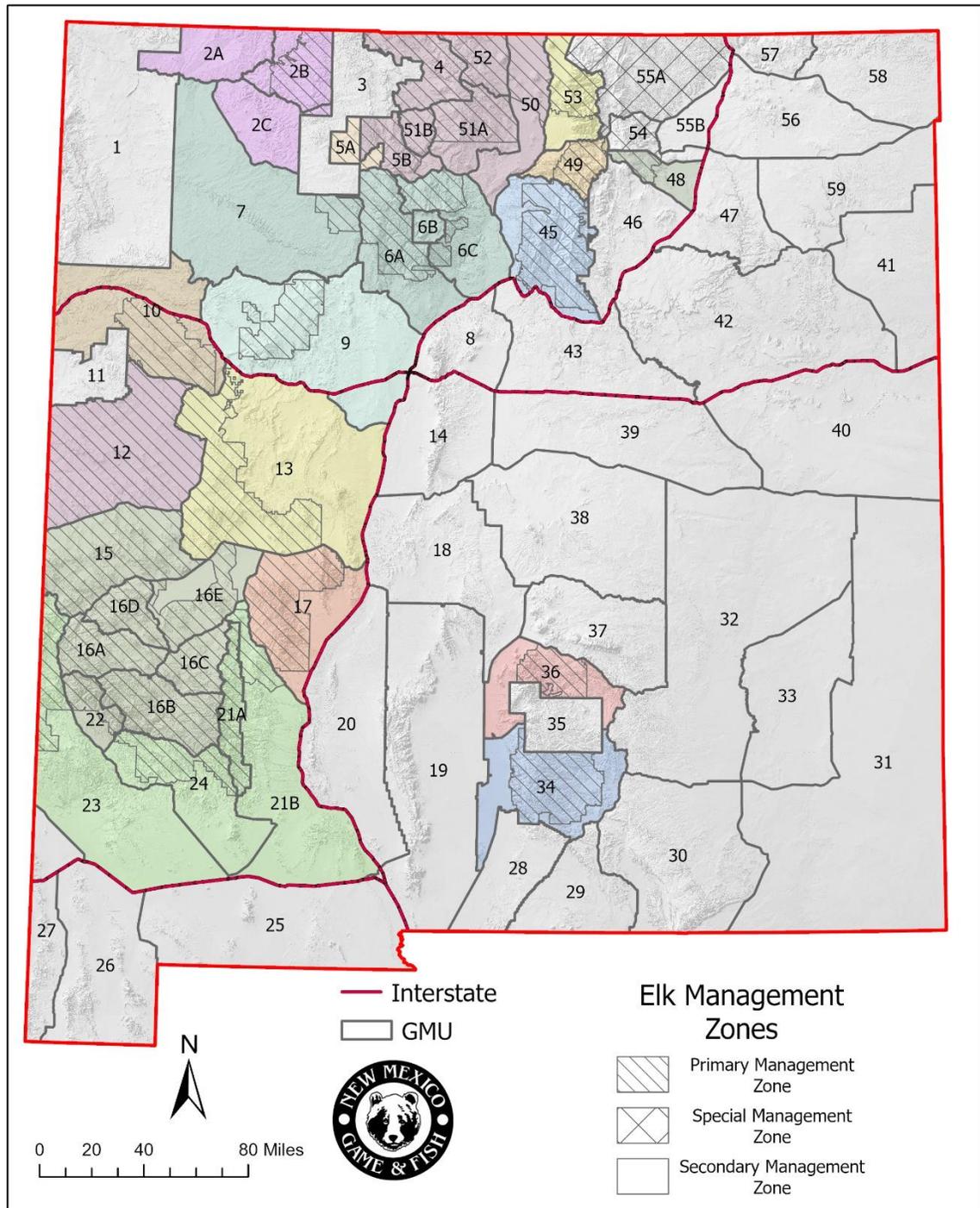


Figure 2) New Mexico Game Management Units (GMU) and Elk Management Zones.

New Mexico Elk Management Zones



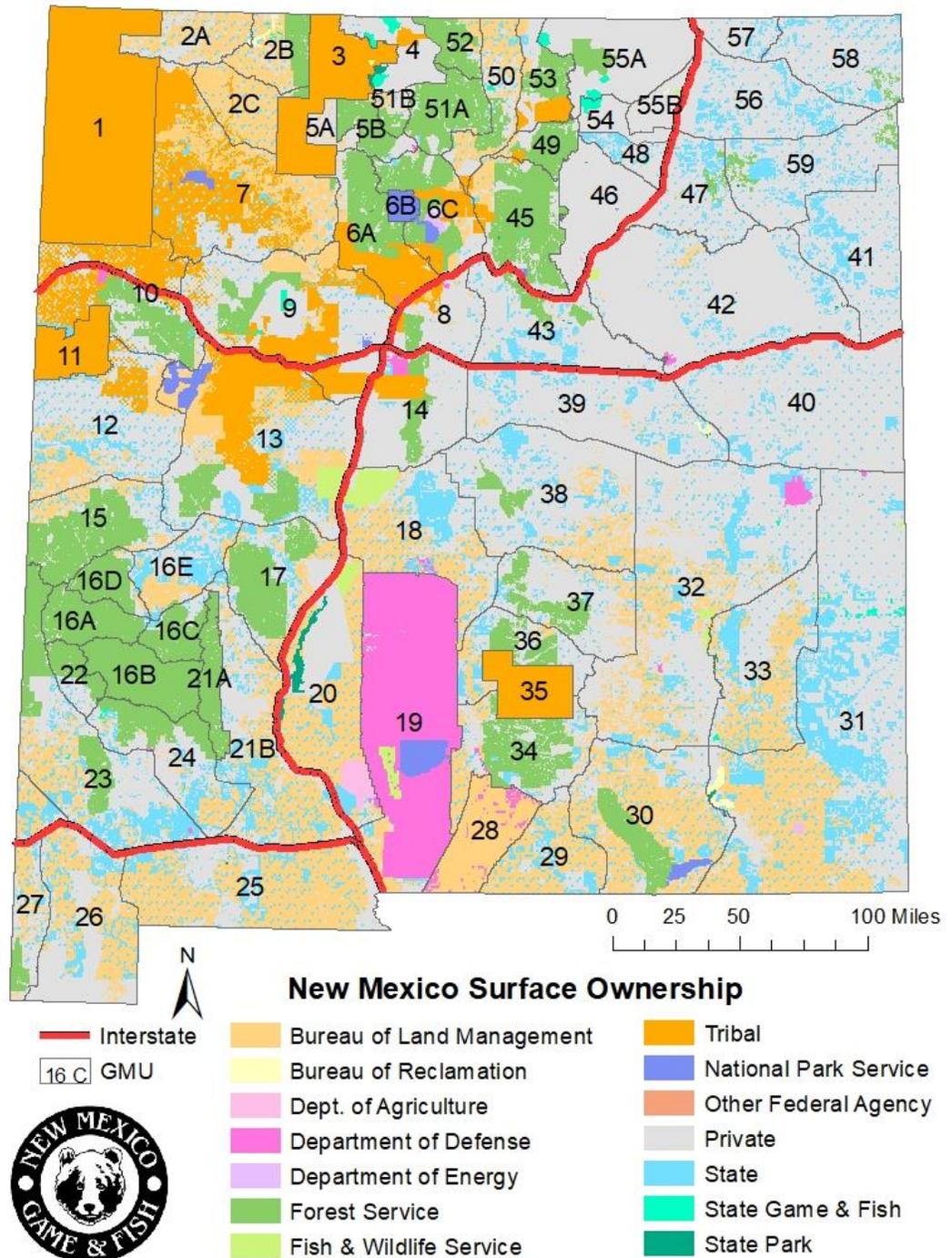
LAND OWNERSHIP

Figure 3) New Mexico Surface Ownership and Game Management Units

Approximately 11% of the land mass in New Mexico designated as tribal land. The Department does not manage for wildlife nor issue hunt licenses valid for hunting on tribal lands. Hunters will need to contact tribal wildlife agencies for opportunities on tribal lands. Of the remaining area, approximately 50% is public land and 50% is privately owned. Public lands available for elk hunting in New Mexico include both state and federally owned and managed properties (Figure 1). Each jurisdiction has different rules for access and recreation.

Additional information about rules for each land ownership type and each GMU can be found on the [Department's website](#).

Information regarding federally owned (public), state, and private properties in New Mexico can be access by following the links at the end of this document.



ELK BIOLOGY, SURVEYS, AND POPULATION TRENDS

Elk population sizes fluctuate over time in response to environmental, biological, and anthropogenic (human caused) influences. Population trends are largely driven by survival and mortality rates of adult females and calves. Adult males are certainly important for elk populations, but proportionally fewer males do not reduce the reproductive potential of the population because the same number of females are still bred by the remaining males. Weather, disease, predation, and human-induced mortality impact elk; however, availability of forage and concealment cover can lessen or intensify the effect of these individual factors. It is imperative for Department biologists to understand the biology and productivity of each elk herd to provide meaningful management recommendations. For this reason, the Department monitors elk herds using a combination of aerial helicopter surveys and hunter harvest reports.

Aerial helicopter surveys are completed annually after the end of archery season and before the first rifle or muzzleloader season begins. The timing of these surveys is imperative and they occur during the breeding period (rut) when all age and sex classes of elk are intermixed. Surveying during other times of the year yields biased information and leads to incorrect population estimates. During surveys, elk groups are briefly circled by the helicopter in order for



crews to obtain a total count and breakdown of each age and sex class. This information is then used in population models to generate estimates of the total number of elk in each herd which ultimately leads to informed recommendations on how many elk can be harvested sustainably.

Within many Primary Management Zones the Department conducts aerial surveys annually. However, outside of Primary Management Zones, the

Department does not regularly conduct aerial surveys and relies primarily on hunter harvest reports to monitor populations. The Department has found that hunter harvest data trends usually correspond with population data. For example, when a population is increasing, hunter success and satisfaction ratings trend upwards. When a population is declining, hunter success and satisfaction ratings follow a downward trend. Harvest data also informs biologists of the mortality and survival rates for elk in these herds, otherwise estimated with classification surveys. For this reason, the Department can use hunter harvest data as an index to the status and trajectory of an elk population where aerial surveys are not feasible. Both aerial surveys and hunter harvest reporting allow the Department to assess elk population status and productivity. It is critical that the Department obtain reliable aerial survey and hunter harvest data in order to develop sustainable harvest estimates and management recommendations best suited for each herd.

HUNTING PROSPECTS

Throughout much of the state elk populations are stable or slightly increasing in size. Whether hunters are looking for a backcountry experience on foot or by horse, or they prefer to hunt nearer to Forest Service roads and glass from their vehicles, New Mexico's landscape can accommodate every hunting style. Although some hunts are more difficult than others, hunters have an opportunity to fill their license in any unit that offers licenses.



In addition to accommodating a variety of hunting styles, the Department has designated some units as primitive weapon units. In these units, the Department offers only public muzzleloader and bow hunts. The primitive weapons units are GMUs 9, 13, 15 and 17. Other units provide rifle hunting opportunities in addition to muzzleloader and bow hunts. The Department also offers youth only, mobility impaired, and youth encouragement hunts throughout many of the state's Primary Management Zone hunt units. See the most current [hunting rules and information](#) booklet for more information on these and all of the different license types offered for elk hunting.

What to expect for the 2023-2024 season

The most recent population estimates for elk indicate populations in New Mexico are stable to slightly increasing. Abundant monsoonal rains over the past two years, combined with recent moderate severity wildfires in key habitat zones will likely benefit elk herds through time. Wildfires that burned in mosaic patterns with limited high severity, combined with abundant monsoonal rains in 2022, have produced an abundance of grasses and forbs in disturbed areas. These benefits will likely persist for many years. Antler growth was considered good during the 2022 annual surveys with observations of large mature bulls. The 2023-2024 hunt season is anticipated to be good for elk hunters in New Mexico with high bull to cow ratios in many GMUs and potential for improved habitat quality, depending on moisture quantity and timing in the coming seasons. Springtime snowmelt and rainfall stimulates grass, forb, and shrub growth that provides nutritious forage at a critical time for female and juvenile elk. Calf recruitment rates for most of the state were high in autumn 2022, suggesting populations are doing well.

The changes below will go into effect beginning with the 2023-2024 season:

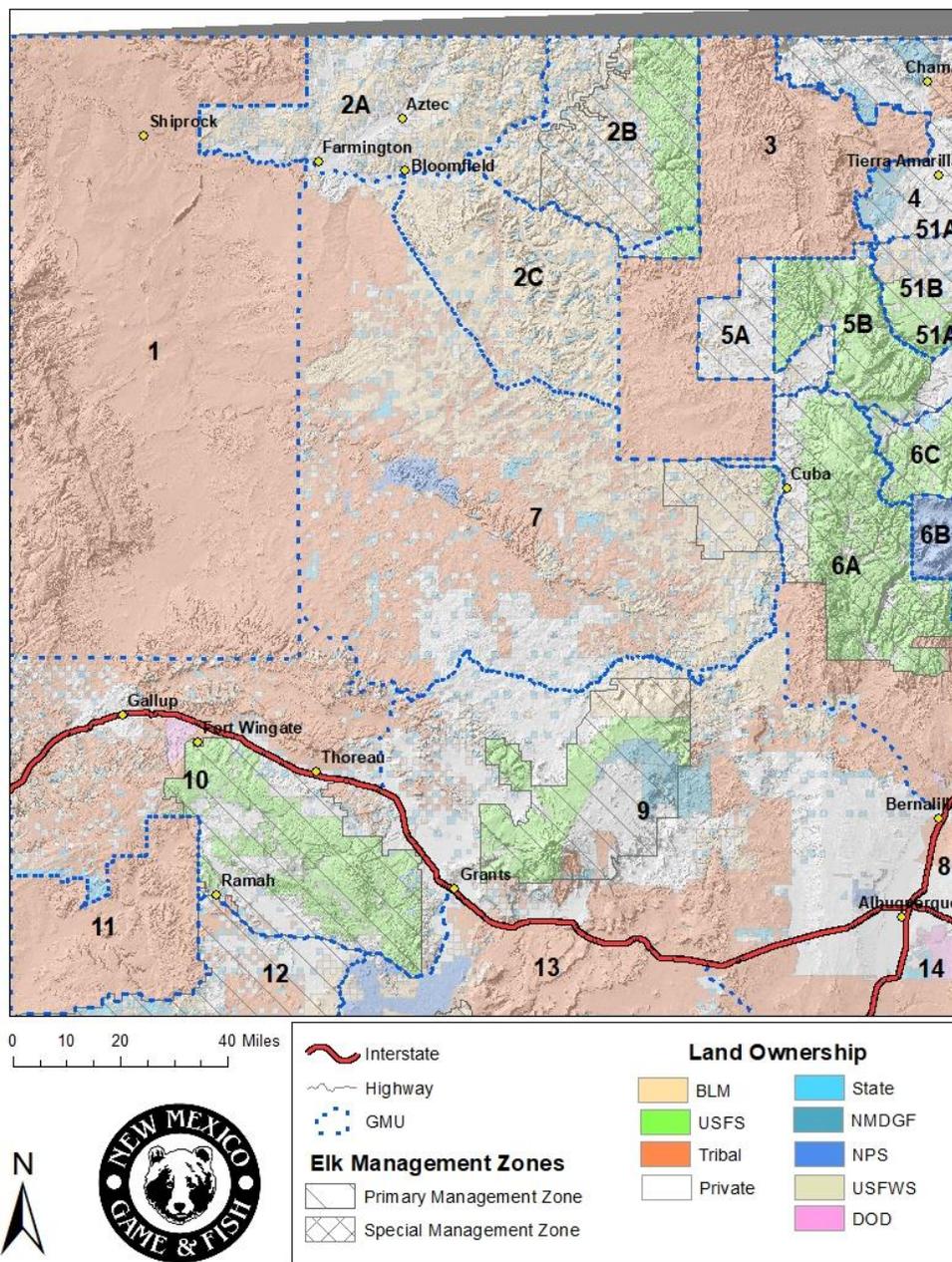
- Changed definition of a muzzleloader to be a muzzloading firearm with only open or “iron” sights.
 - Increased antlerless elk licenses in GMU 2 to address expanding elk population.
 - Increased antlerless elk licenses on the Rio Chama WMA to address a more resident elk population.
 - Increased antlerless elk licenses in GMU 6B.
 - Increased elk licenses on Marquez WMA. Additionally, combined hunts with the L-Bar WMA.
 - Decreased elk licenses in GMU 9. Success and satisfaction ratings have been low, and bull:cow ratios are not at desired levels.
 - Shifted late season antlerless elk hunt in GMU 10 to begin earlier in December to address limited access due to a road closure.
 - Expanded Primary Management Zone boundary in GMU 13, to reflect elk use
 - Expanded Primary Management Zone boundary in GMU 17, to reflect elk use
 - Decreased some mid and late-October mature bull rifle hunts in GMUs 16A, 16B/22, 16C, and 16E to address lower bull numbers and decreasing satisfaction ratings for MB hunts in these units.
 - Eliminated the elk hunt of 3 licenses in GMU 19 (White Sands Missile Range) as elk are not consistently found in the area.
- Created a new antlerless elk hunt in GMU 23, south of NM highway 78 to target elk in the Burro Mountains.
- Shifted a hunt to later dates in GMU 24 to allow hunters to take advantage of later season elk presence.
 - Increased licenses in GMU 30 and opened GMU 29 to be hunted in conjunction, to address a growing elk population.
 - Created two new antlerless elk hunts in GMU 34 to occur in late January and early February, and increased Youth Encouragement licenses. These recommendations were to address an increasing elk population in the GMU 34/36 metapopulation.
 - Created a new antlerless elk hunt in GMU 36 in late January and increased Youth Encouragement licenses. Additionally, changed all MB bag limits to ES. These recommendations were to address an increasing elk population in the GMU 34/36 metapopulation.
 - Increased licenses in the combined elk hunts in GMUs 42/47/59 to address an increase in public land access.
 - To address elk expansion, included GMU 39 with GMU 43 in a draw hunt, this did not increase licenses, just allowed hunters with the valid license to access both units.
 - Shifted the zone designation in GMU 46 from Special Management Zone to Secondary Management Zone.

- Shifted 25 archery licenses in GMU 48 into the muzzleloader and rifle hunts to address hunter density issues.
- Re-distributed the Youth Encouragement licenses in GMU 50 to GMU 51 to address late season elk densities.
- Eliminated the antlerless hunt north of Sunshine Valley Road in GMU 53 as success is low and the hunt achieved its goal of increasing harvest on this segment of the elk population.
- Decreased licenses on Colin Neblett WMA due to limited elk presence.
- Decreased licenses on Valle Vidal to address decreased calf recruitment.
- Established an archery hunt in the combined GMU 57/58 area. Increasing elk presence in this area offers increased opportunity for archery hunts.
- Re-defined "Encouragement Hunts" to be available to resident youth who did not draw a big game hunt in the draw for the first 14-days of availability, then offer to any youth after the first 14-days. This change eliminated the ability for seniors to purchase encouragement hunt licenses.

Hunt Description by Region

The following provides a brief description of elk hunting within each region and, at a smaller scale, each herd unit or GMU. To view or download detailed maps of each GMU, please visit the Department's [GMU map webpage](#). Links to each GMU map are also contained within this document under the corresponding GMU title. Each GMU map contains the names of all appropriate USFS and BLM topographic quad maps to assist hunters in both planning and navigation of their hunts.

Northwest Region – San Juan, Lindrith, Mt. Taylor and Zuni Herds

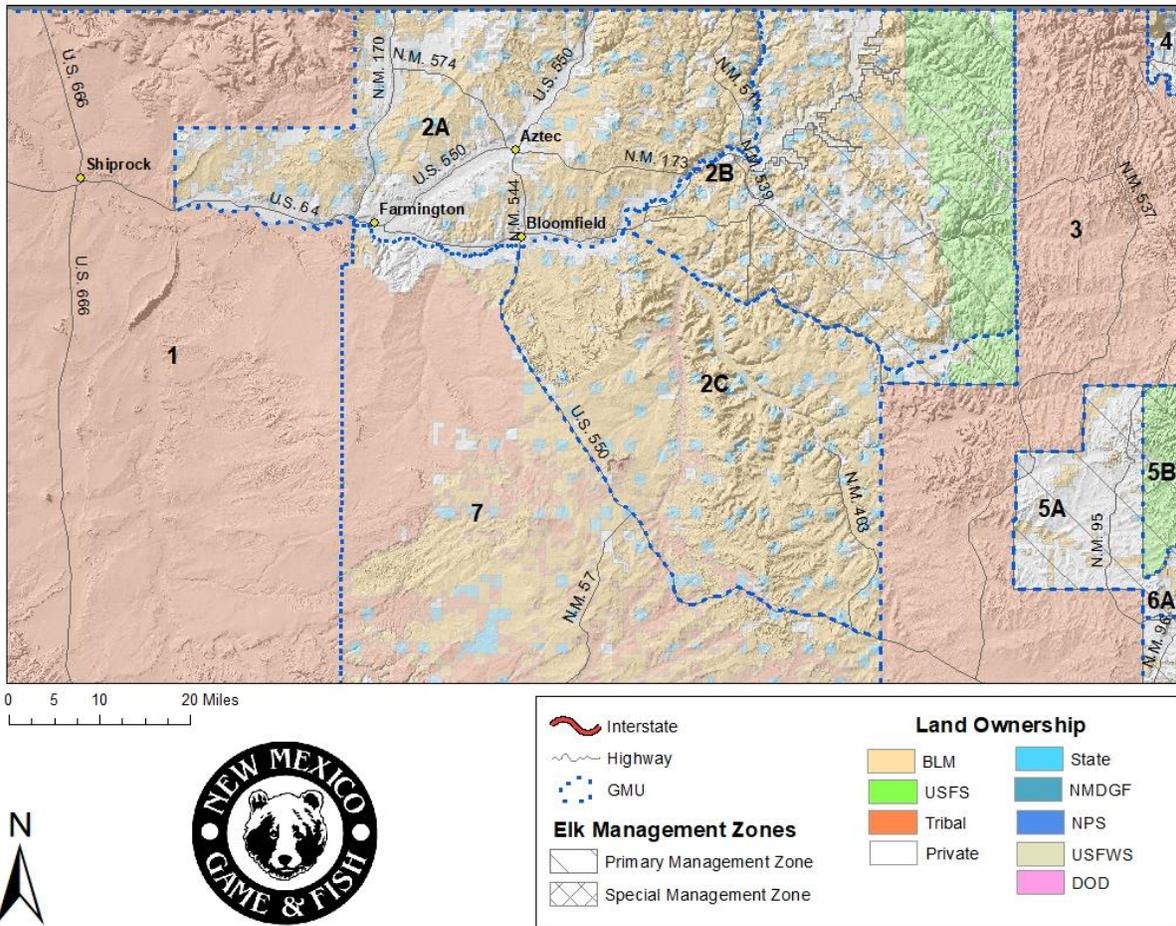


Both quality and opportunity elk hunts are available in the Northwest Region depending on the GMU. The majority of GMUs within this region have steady or slightly increasing herd sizes as well as moderate to high hunter satisfaction. The northwest offers opportunities for all hunters regardless of hunting style, weapon preference, or physical abilities. Rugged back-country hunts are available in some GMUs containing wilderness areas in addition to mobility impaired hunts in the Mt. Taylor (GMU 9) area. Some herds in the mountainous regions of the northwest are migratory due to snowpack at high elevation, having distinct summer and winter ranges.

San Juan Herd (GMU 2)

Opportunity Management

Unit Maps: [2A](#), [2B](#), [2C](#)

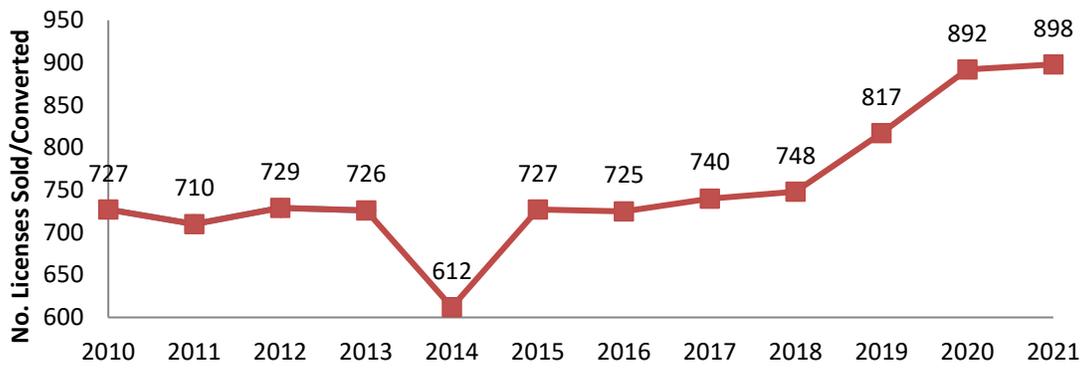


BIOLOGY – GMU 2 is considered a standalone elk herd unit, the San Juan herd. This elk herd is partially migratory with some movements occurring from the Jicarilla Apache Reservation to the east in the spring. It is also likely that some elk move into the area for the winter from the North. Because of the more dispersed nature of the San Juan Herd unit, aerial surveys are not successful and therefore not completed regularly. Rather, the population is monitored using hunter harvest data. The San Juan herd has been stable to slightly increasing and elk can be found throughout these GMUs.

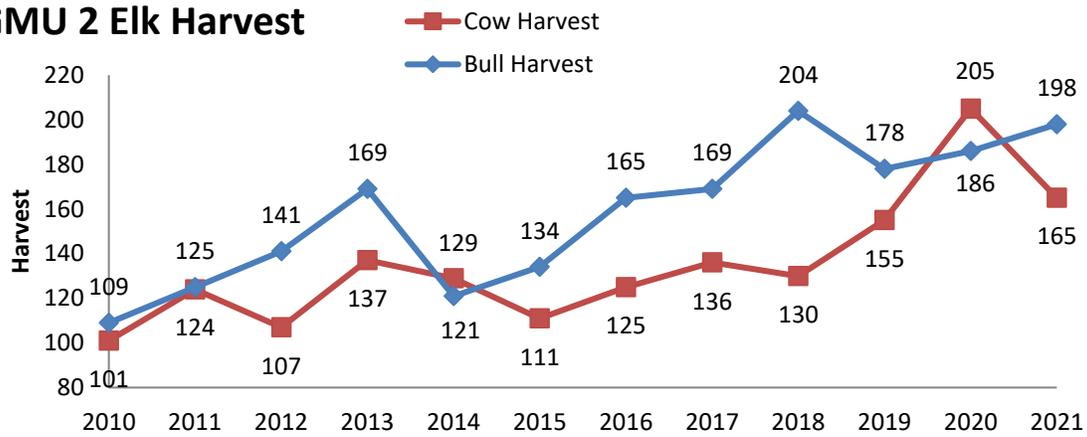
HUNTING – These units are 78% public land and a network of roads provides for very good access throughout the unit. Habitat is characterized by sagebrush flats, canyons, mesas and rimrock with the eastern side of the unit reaching approximately 7,500 feet and offering some opportunity to hunt in ponderosa pine habitat along the higher ridges. Hunter success and number of elk harvested have been slightly increasing through time.

Population Estimate (2022)	Bull:Cow:Calf	Sustainable Harvest Est.
2,300 - 2,900	35:100:32	140 – 200 Males
Stable to Slightly Increasing		180 – 220 Females

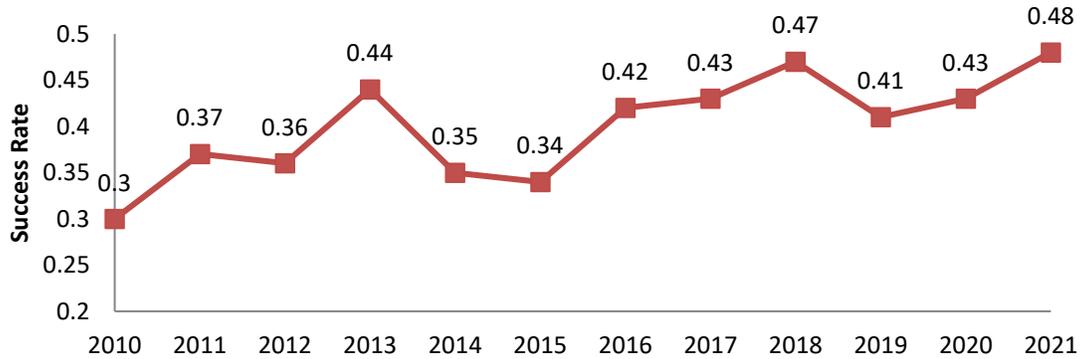
GMU 2 Licenses



GMU 2 Elk Harvest



GMU 2 Harvest Success

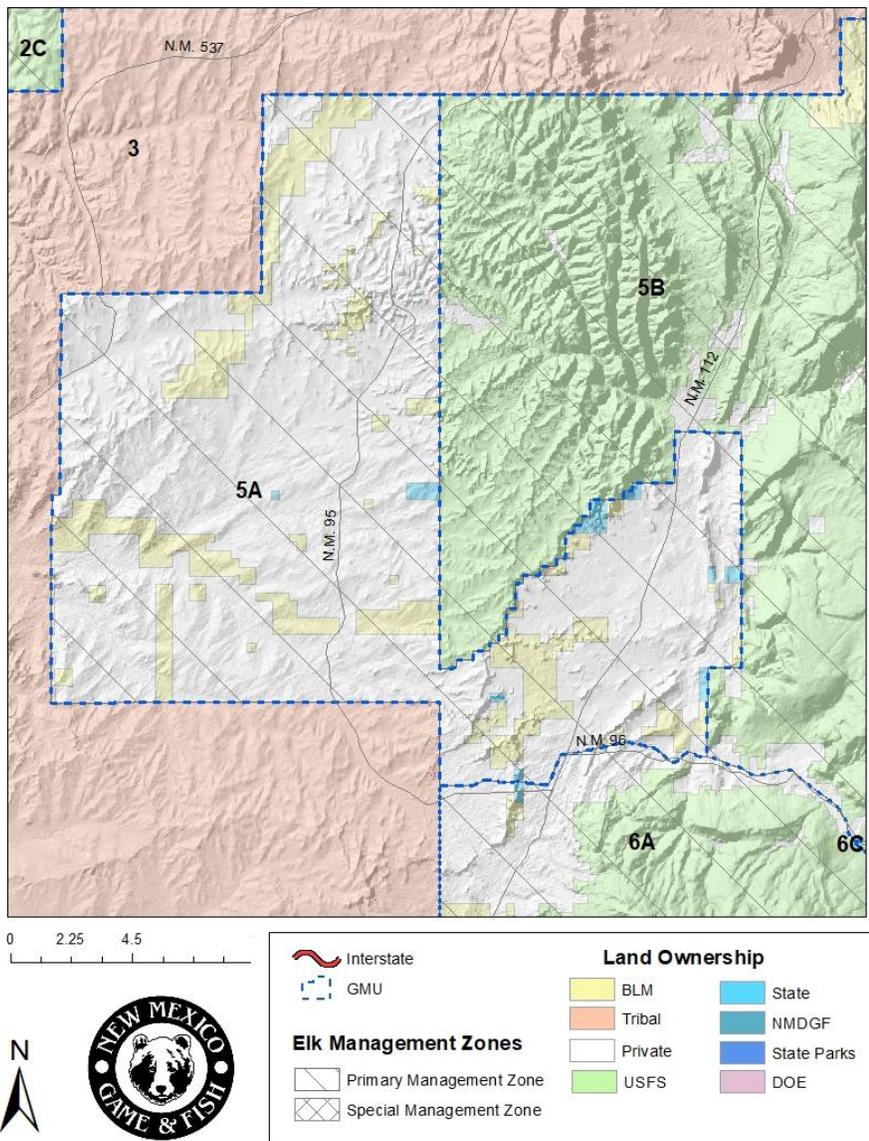


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Lindrith Herd (GMU 5A)

Opportunity Management

Unit Map: [5A](#)

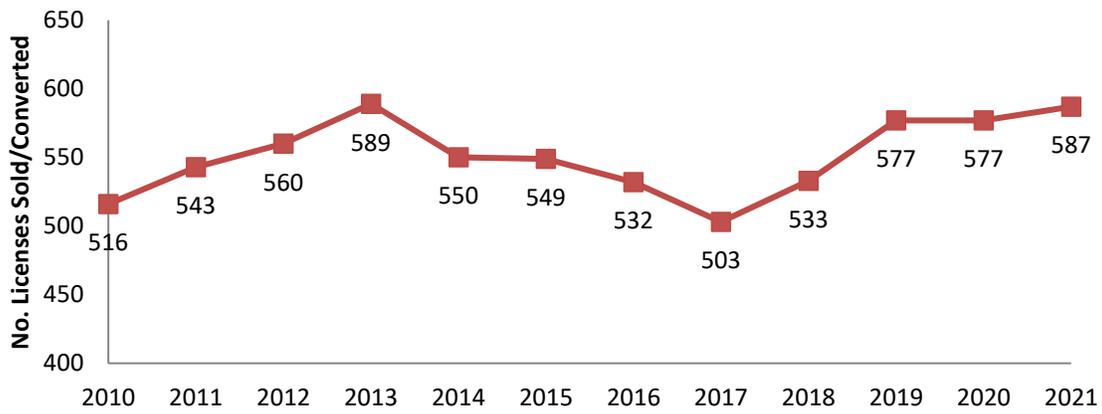


BIOLOGY – GMU 5A is considered a standalone elk herd unit, the Lindrith herd. Elk in the Lindrith herd are a mix of year-round residents and migratory individuals who move seasonally throughout the area. Aerial surveys are not conducted regularly, thus, herd productivity is monitored using hunter harvest data. The Lindrith herd is considered stable.

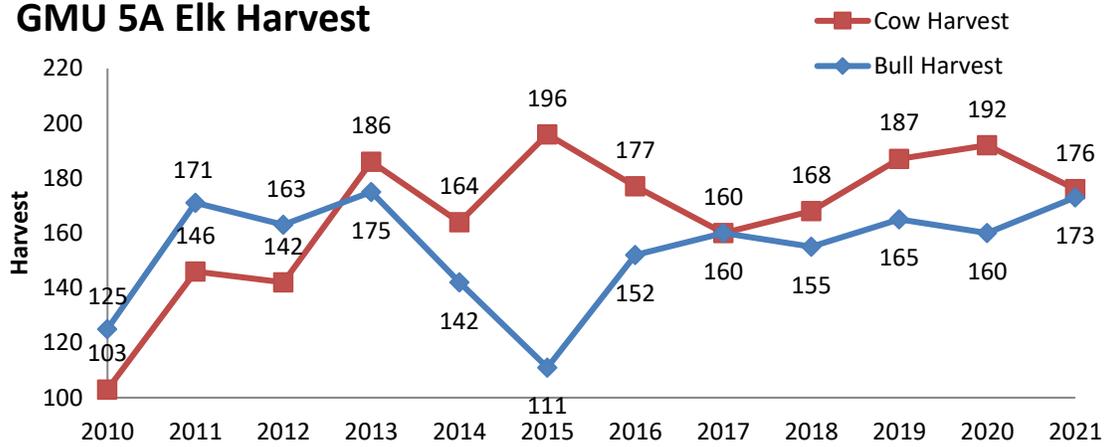
HUNTING – This unit is 16% public land and draw hunting opportunities are on BLM property. Hunters should be aware that not all public land is legally accessible and the Department recommends acquiring BLM maps prior to hunting in order to become familiar with access restrictions. Habitat is predominately sagebrush intermixed with pinyon-juniper forests. Hunter success and satisfaction ratings are both typically high for this herd.

Population Estimate (2022)	Bull:Cow:Calf	Sustainable Harvest Est.
2,200 – 2,500	35:100:32	140 – 180 Males
Stable		170 – 200 Females

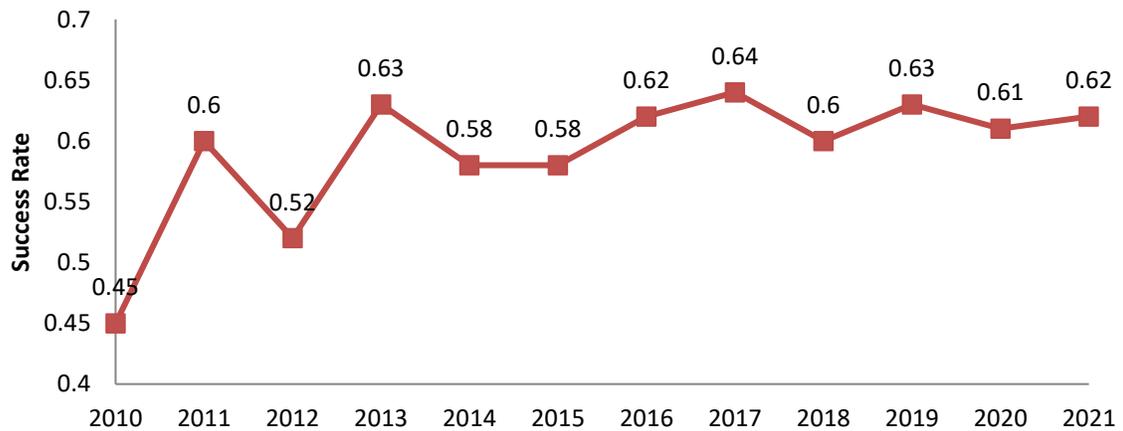
GMU 5A Licenses



GMU 5A Elk Harvest



GMU 5A Harvest Success

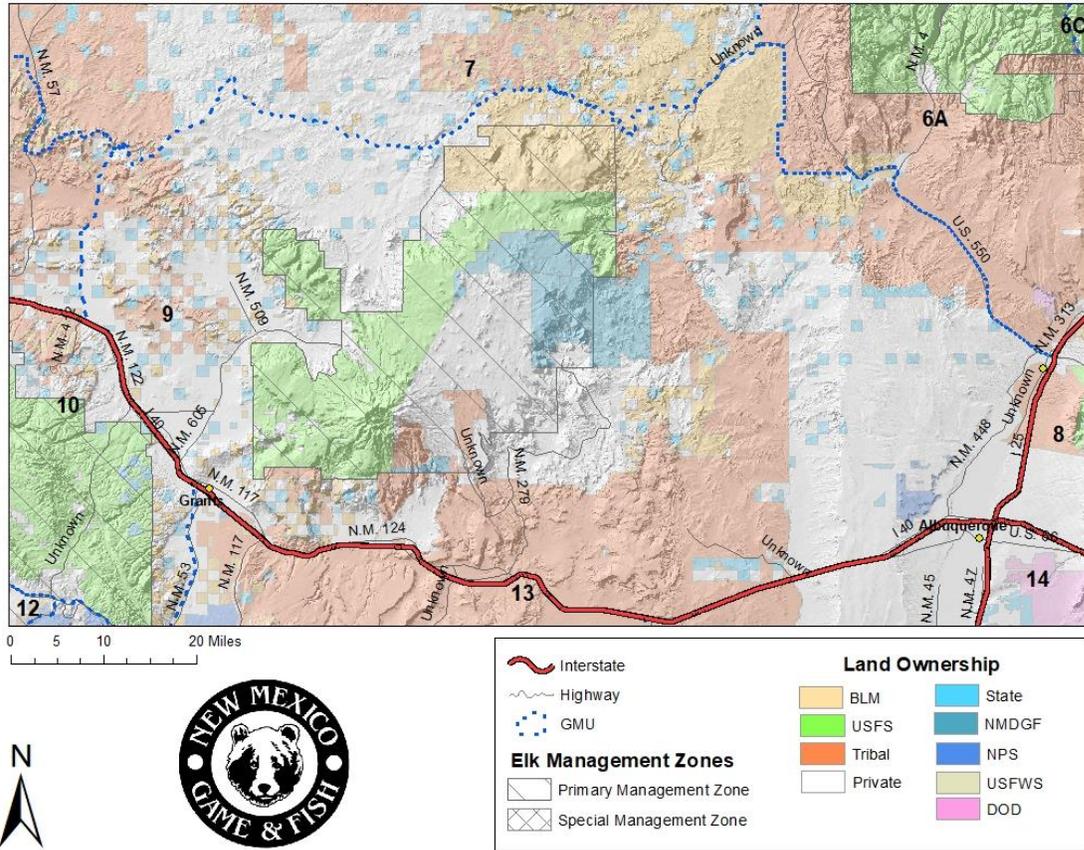


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Mt. Taylor Herd (GMU 9)

Opportunity Management

Unit Map: [9](#)

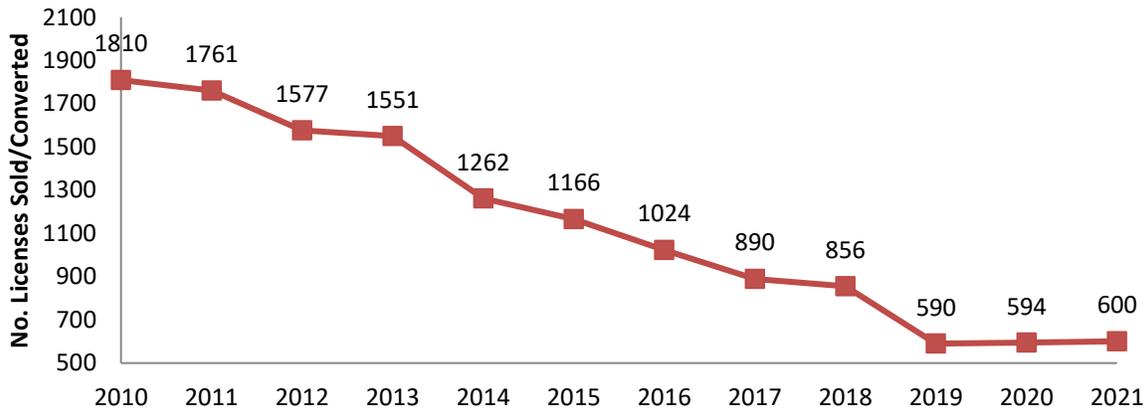


BIOLOGY – GMU 9 is considered a standalone elk herd unit, the Mt. Taylor herd. The Mt. Taylor herd has declined from historic numbers as a result of sustained low calf survival. Low calf recruitment has resulted in the Department taking efforts to increase productivity for the Mt. Taylor herd including several habitat improvement projects on critical calving and summer seasonal ranges. Although these management actions have improved calf recruitment since 2018 the herd still remains below objective. The removal of antlerless licenses and limiting hunts to primitive weapon types are intended to buffer this herd from negative harvest effects while populations rebound. The Mt. Taylor herd is monitored annually via aerial surveys.

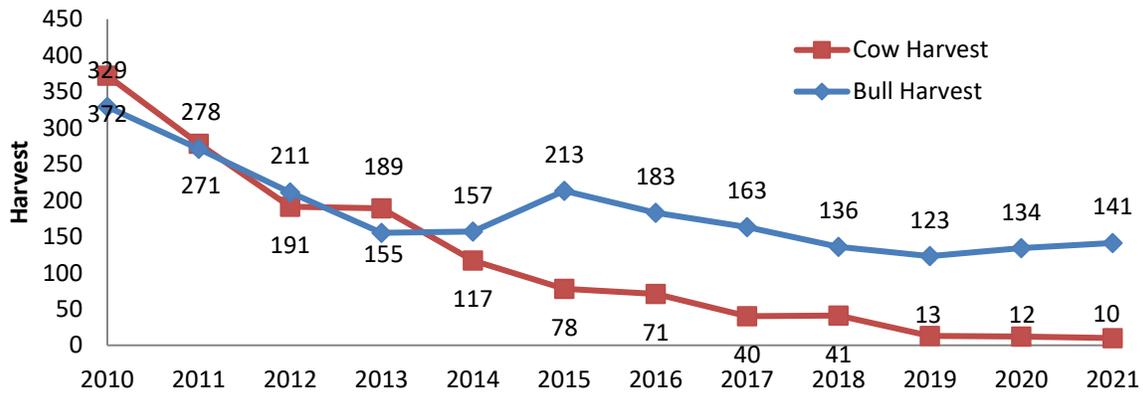
HUNTING – This unit is 27% public land, and a network of Forest Service roads provide several access points for hunters. Arid shrub and grasslands with interspersed pinyon-juniper forests are found in lower elevations and scrub oak and ponderosa pine forests are found at the higher elevations. In recent years, success rates have been lower than the statewide average and total license numbers and harvest has also declined since 2011.

Population Estimate (2022)	Bull: Cow: Calf	Sustainable Harvest Est.
1,000 – 2,100	26:100:28	40 – 100 Males
Stabilizing		0 Females

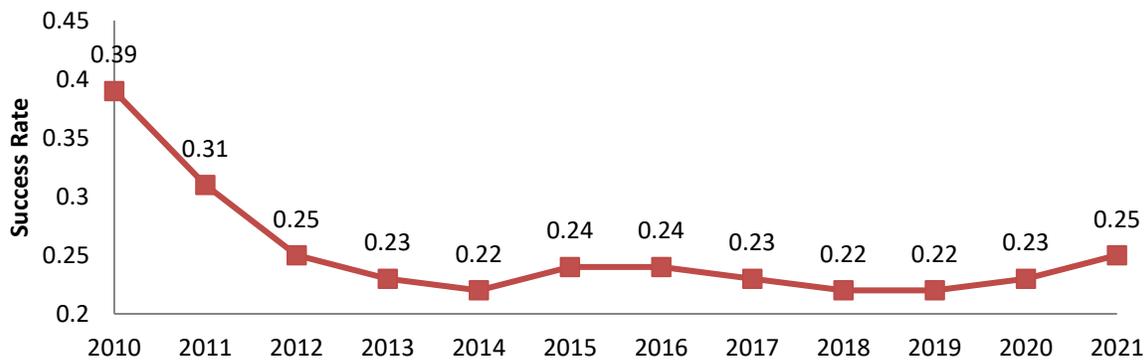
GMU 9 Licenses



GMU 9 Elk Harvest



GMU 9 Harvest Success

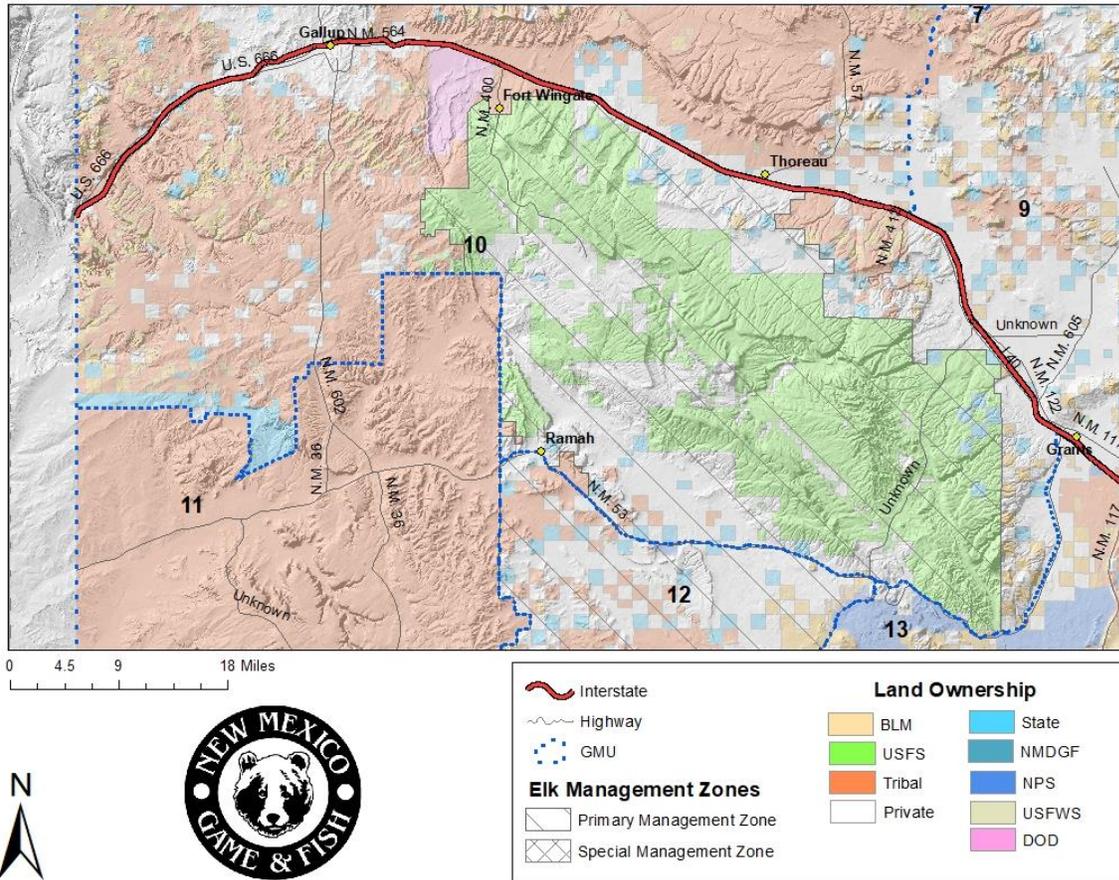


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Zuni Herd (GMU 10)

Opportunity Management

Unit Map: [10](#)

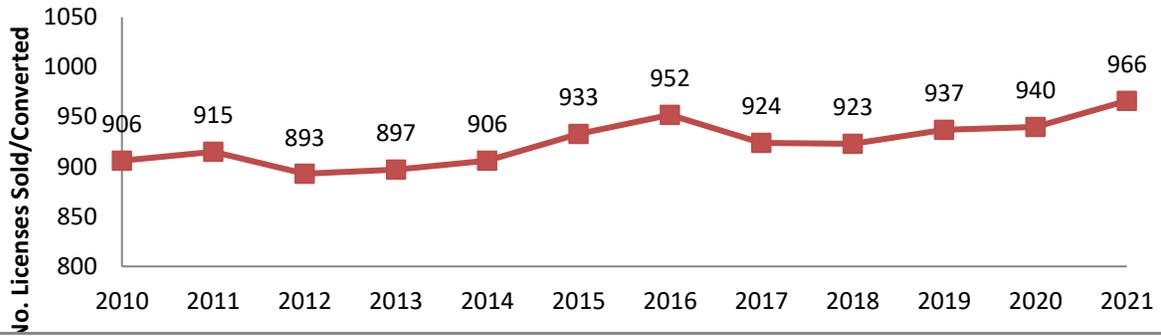


BIOLOGY – GMU 10 is considered a standalone elk herd unit, the Zuni herd. Elk are moderately mobile within this unit with varying movement patterns in search of scattered resources. Precipitation patterns often influence abundance and quality of forage, as well as sources of water for wildlife in this semi-arid landscape. Elk in this herd unit are not surveyed regularly; thus, the herd is monitored using hunter harvest data.

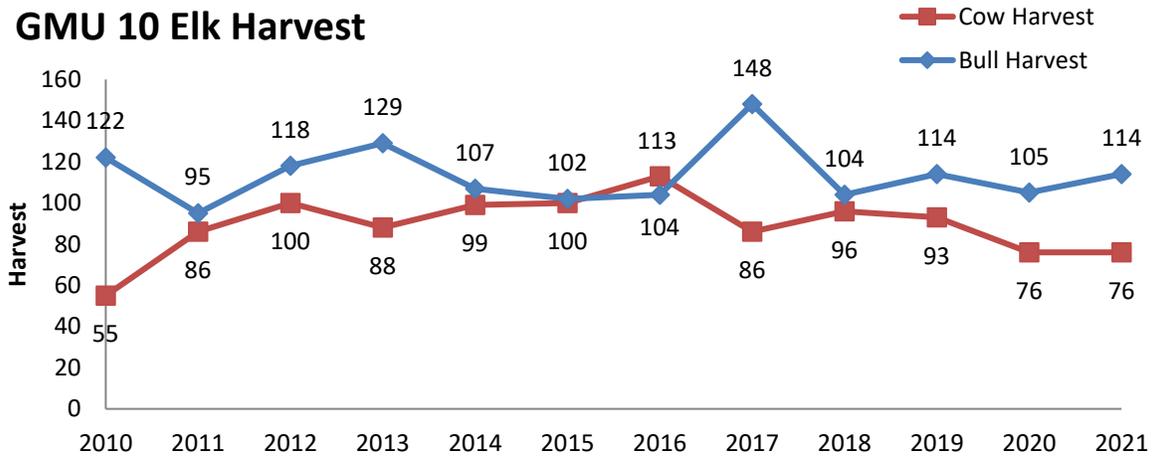
HUNTING – This unit is 34% public land, and a network of Forest Service roads provide several access points for hunters. Much of the western half of the unit is tribal land and inaccessible to public hunters. Low elevation basins in this unit are dominated by arid shrub and grasslands with some pinyon-juniper forests found interspersed throughout. Ponderosa forests provide thermal relief to elk at higher elevations in the Zuni mountains during summer months. Elk within this hunt unit tend to inhabit the landscape in clusters where resources are readily available.

Population Estimate (2022)	Bull:Cow:Calf	Sustainable Harvest Est.
1,500 – 1,800	35:100:32	110 – 150 Males
Stable		140 – 160 Females

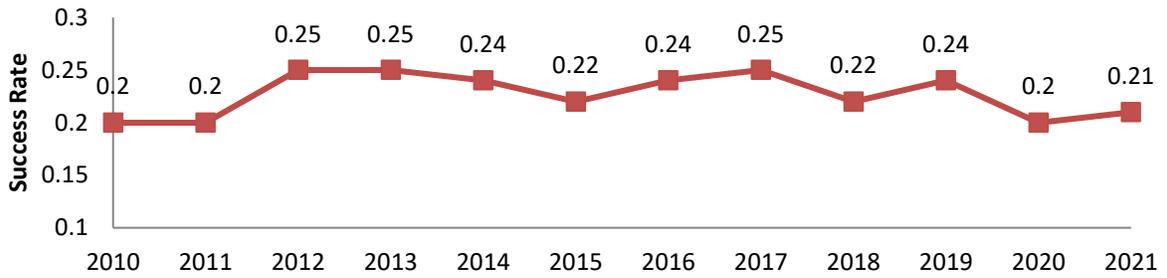
GMU 10 Licenses



GMU 10 Elk Harvest



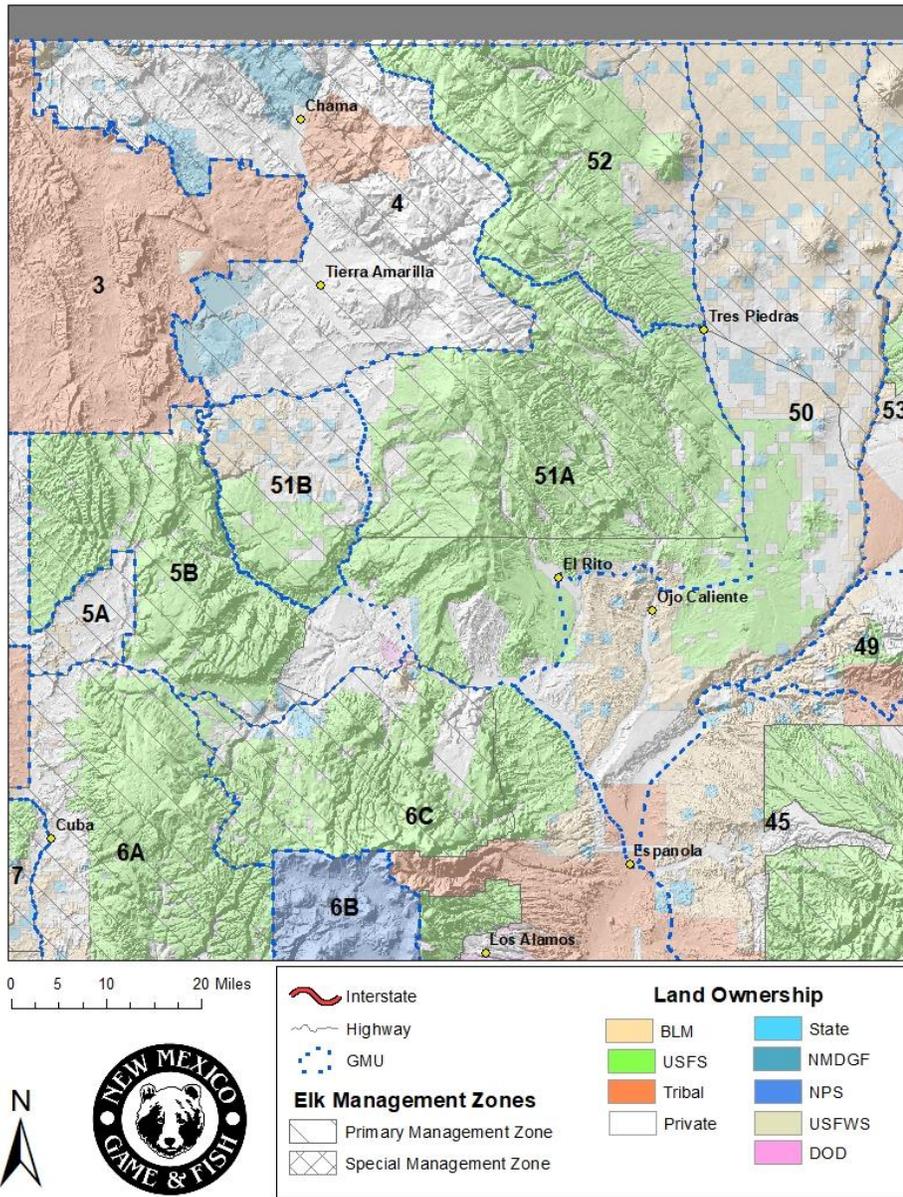
GMU 10 Harvest Success



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Northcentral Region – Northcentral Herd (GMUs: 4, 5B, 50, 51, and 52) Opportunity Management

The Northcentral herd is managed under the optimal opportunity framework, and is mostly designated as Primary Management Zone. The herd is stable. The Northcentral region offers a diverse landscape with quality elk habitat ranging from low elevation grasslands to aspen and mixed conifer in the Carson and Sante Fe National Forests. Portions of this herd are migratory or partially migratory, with many elk moving from high elevation summer range in the San Juan Mountains of southern Colorado and Northern New Mexico to lower elevation winter range near Chama NM and adjacent Wildlife Management Areas. The herd is monitored annually via aerial surveys.



Population Estimate (2022)	Bull:Cow:Calf	Sustainable Harvest Est.
25,300 – 29,000*	38:100:35	1,690 – 2,200 Males
Stable		2,070 – 2,370 Females

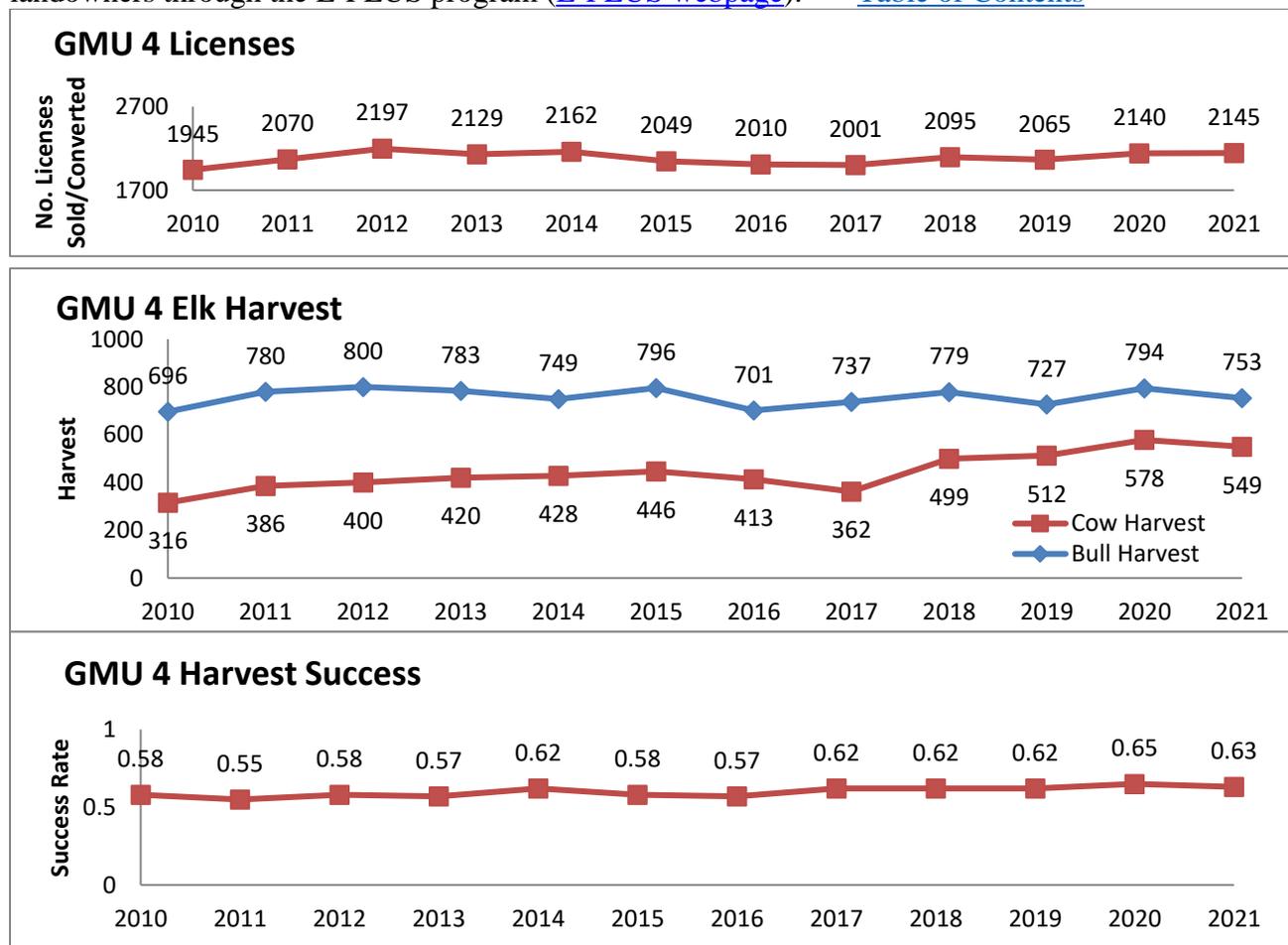
*Note: The Northcentral elk herd estimates and metrics are reported at the population level (across GMUs 4, 5B, 50, 51, and 52).

GMU 4 (part of the Northcentral Herd; opportunity management)

Unit Map: [4](#)

BIOLOGY – Elk in GMU 4 are part of the Northcentral herd wherein population estimates include several GMUs (see regional description). Animals can be found throughout the unit due to its varied topography, persistent water availability, and the availability of undeveloped habitat within WMA's. Productive and varied habitat here provide stable resources to support productive herds. Some seasonal movement does occur between this unit and the Jicarilla Apache Reservation to the west as well as movement between seasonal ranges east within Carson National Forest and north into Colorado.

HUNTING – This unit consists of 13% public land and all public hunts are restricted to one of 3 Wildlife Management Areas; the Edward Sargent WMA, Humphries WMA, and Rio Chama WMA). All WMA hunts are restricted to New Mexico residents only. Access in the WMAs is limited to either foot traffic or travel by horseback. These WMAs offer great elk hunting in scrub oak and mixed conifer habitats. There is ample opportunity for harvesting either bulls or cows. Success and satisfaction ratings for elk hunters in GMU 4 are among the highest in the state. A great majority of licenses sold in this unit are through private land hunts. Non-residents or hunters wishing to hunt private lands in GMU 4 can purchase authorizations issued to landowners through the E-PLUS program ([E-PLUS webpage](#)). [Table of Contents](#)

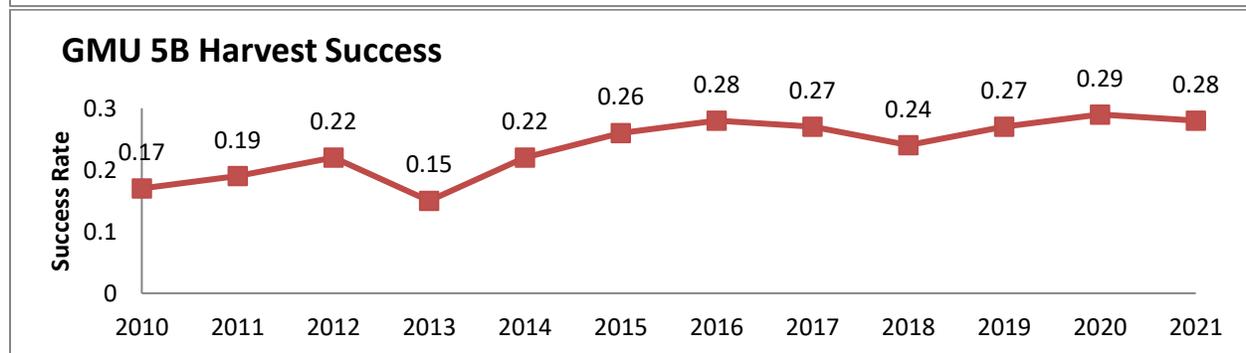
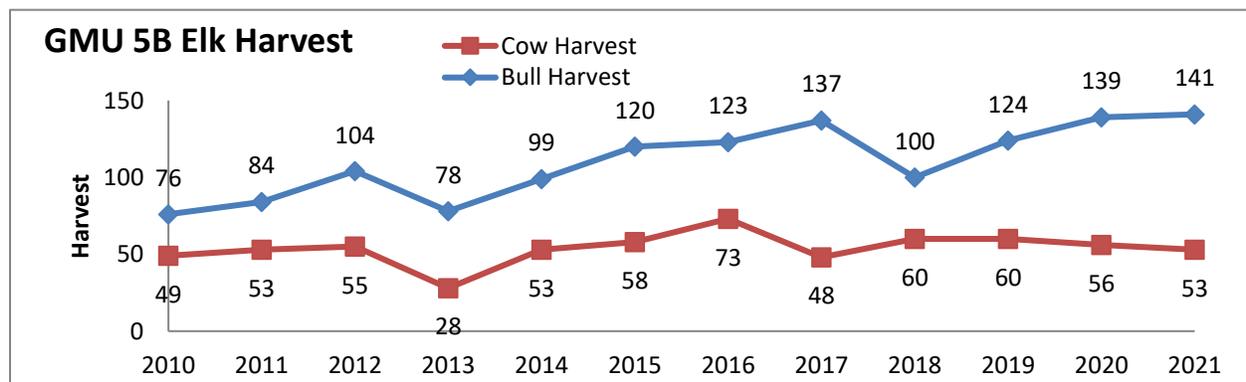
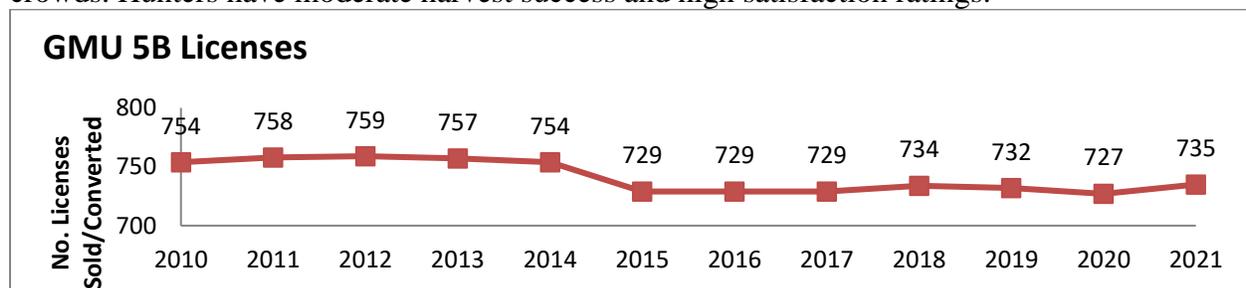


GMU 5B (part of the Northcentral Herd; opportunity management)

Unit Map: [5B](#)

BIOLOGY – Elk in GMU 5B are part of the Northcentral herd and population estimates include several GMUs (see regional description). The habitat types in GMU 5B vary with lower elevation semi-arid grass/scrubland in the east near Abiquiu Reservoir, pinyon-juniper mesas in the foothill regions, and conifer forests on higher elevation ridgelines. Elk densities in this unit are lower than other areas within the Northcentral herd and elk are scattered. Moderate sized herds can be found where conditions are favorable. Movement patterns are largely dependent upon forage and water availability and can vary from year to year.

HUNTING – This unit is 81% public land, and a network of Forest Service roads allows for good access throughout. The southern portion of the rugged Chama River Canyon Wilderness is found in this unit for those looking for more challenging pursuit opportunities away from crowds. Hunters have moderate harvest success and high satisfaction ratings.



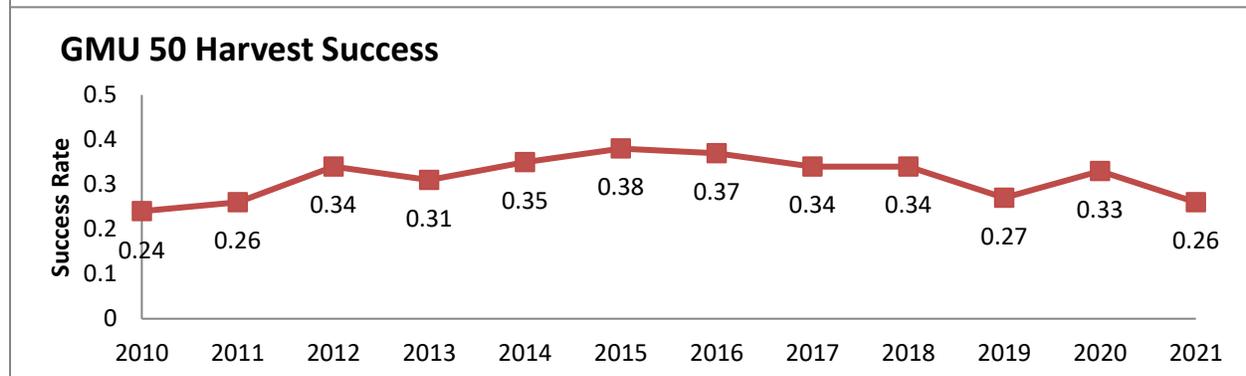
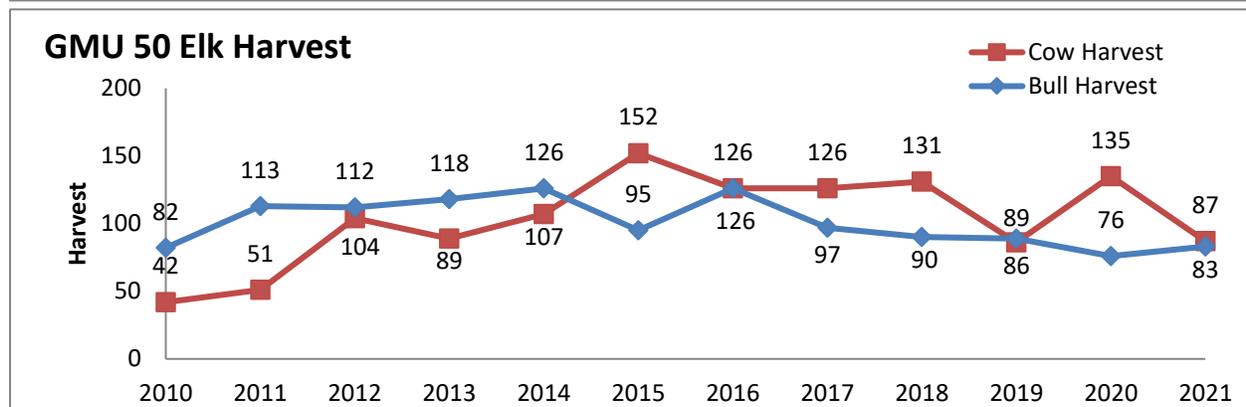
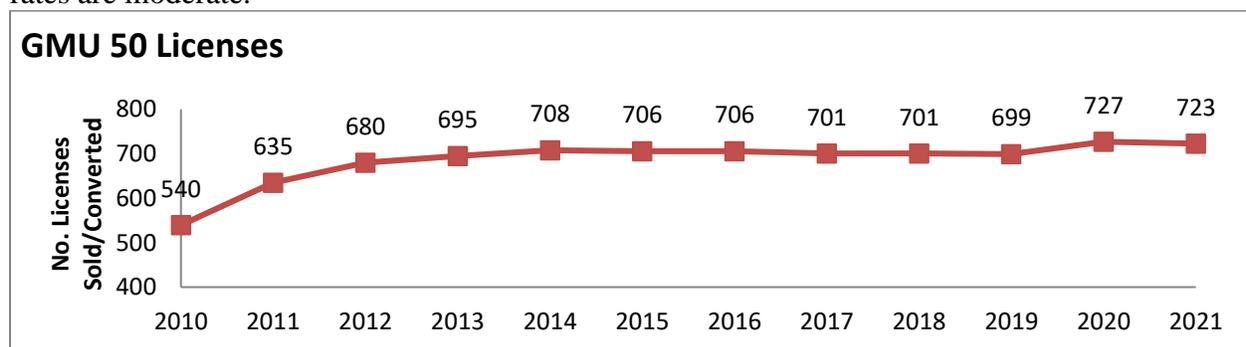
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GMU 50 (part of the Northcentral Herd; opportunity management)

Unit Map: [50](#)

BIOLOGY – Elk in GMU 50 are part of the Northcentral herd and population estimates include several GMUs (see regional description). In this unit, the lower elevation semi-arid grasslands and sagebrush flats offer suitable winter habitat with close proximity to escape terrain found on volcanic cones and in pinyon-juniper woodlands. Some elk move out of the adjacent high elevation summer range into lower elevation winter range in this GMU, however there are also resident animals present.

HUNTING – This unit is 68% public land with excellent road access. Although this unit does not contain a large resident herd, some small pockets of elk can be found here year-round and it serves as winter range for elk that have moved out of the surrounding mountains. Hunter success rates are moderate.

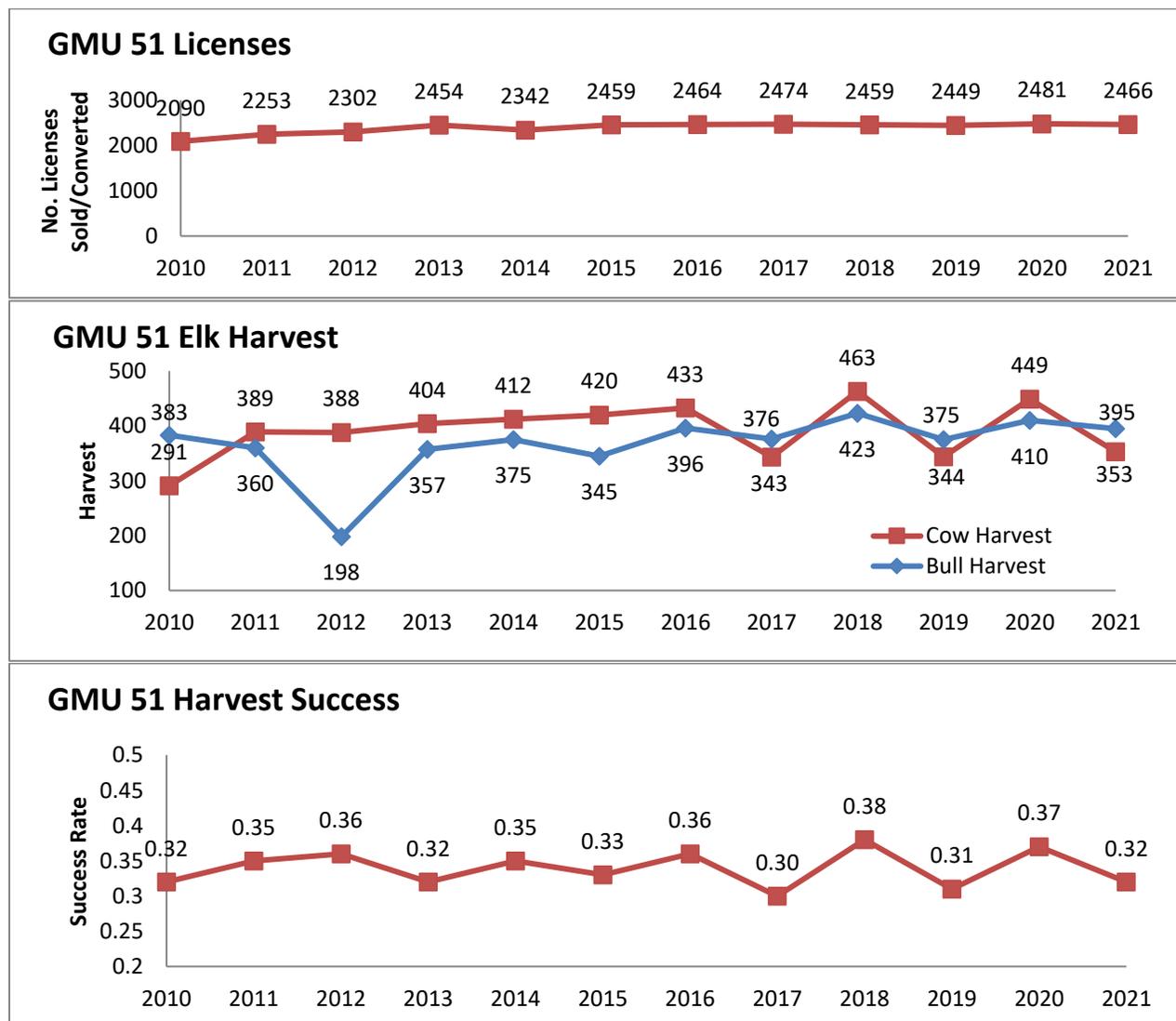


GMU 51 (part of the Northcentral Herd; opportunity management)

Unit Map: [51](#)

BIOLOGY – Elk in GMU 51 are part of the Northcentral herd and population estimates include several GMUs (see regional description). Resident and migratory elk can be found in this unit. Migratory individuals move seasonally between low elevation sagebrush flats and mesa habitats to high elevation mixed conifer and aspen forests. There are some resident elk along riparian corridors and adjacent to irrigated agricultural lands.

HUNTING – This unit is 82% public land with good road access. Population management hunts occur occasionally to address winter elk concentrations in the lower elevation winter range of this GMU. Overall success rates are moderate to good and the unit offers ample public and private hunting opportunity.

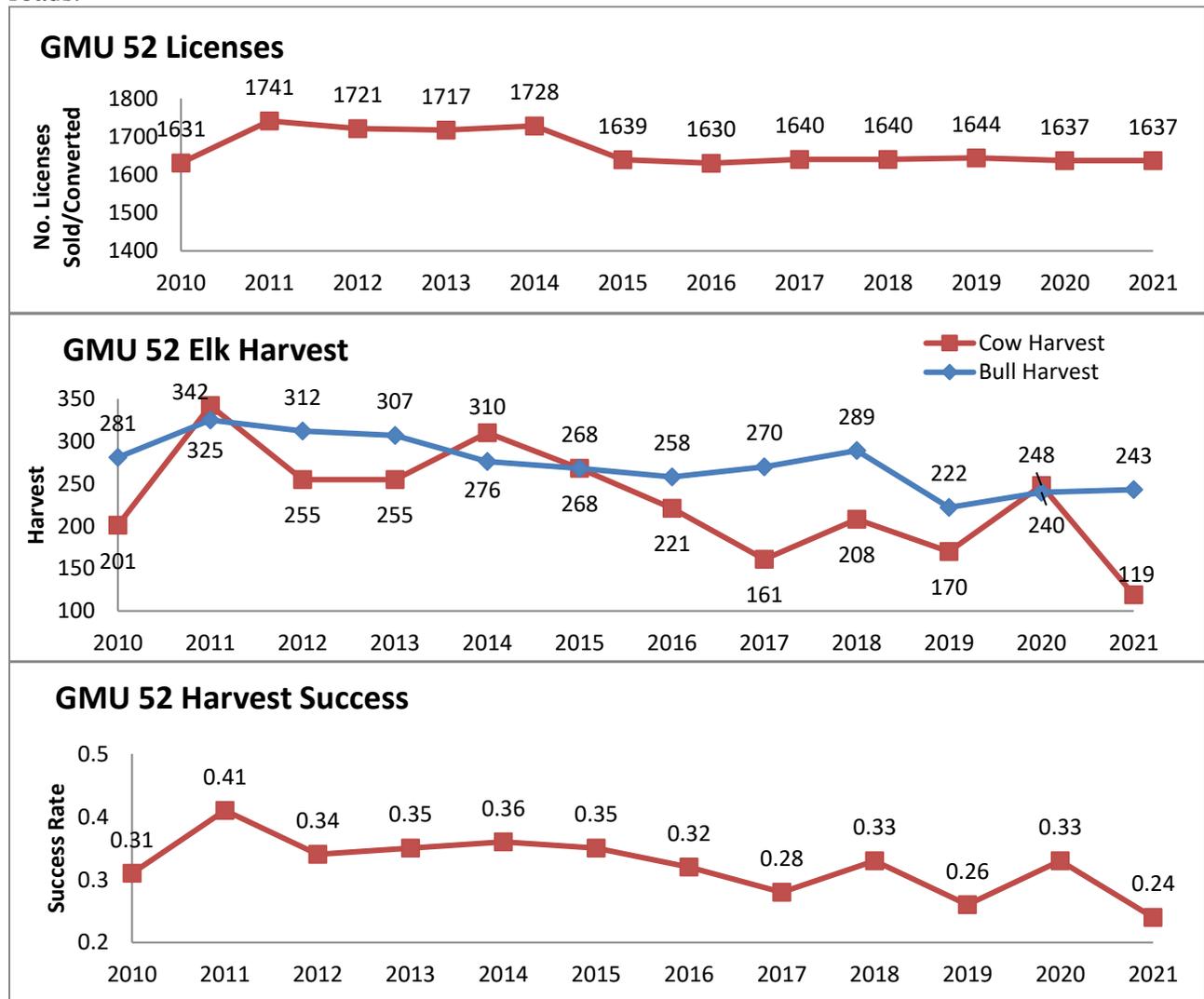


GMU 52 (part of the Northcentral Herd; opportunity management)

Unit Map: [52](#)

BIOLOGY – Elk in GMU 52 are part of the Northcentral herd and population estimates include several GMUs (see regional description). Variable habitat types between low and high elevation offer suitable year-round elk habitat. Pinyon-juniper woodlands and sagebrush flats are found in some lower elevations with mixed conifer and aspen forests at higher elevations. Elk make migratory movements from high to low elevations when snowpack accumulates.

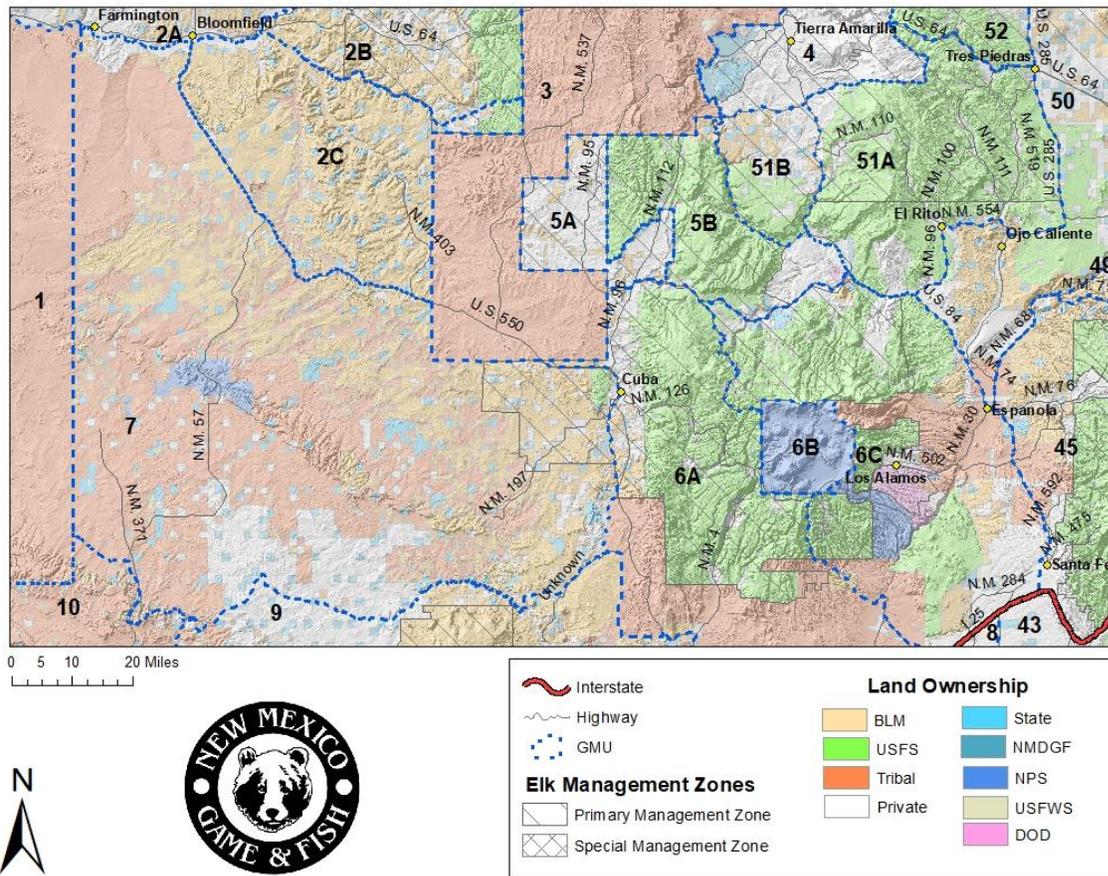
HUNTING – This unit is 92% public land with good road access. The Cruces Basin Wilderness Area is found in this unit for those looking for more rugged pursuit opportunities away from roads.



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Jemez Region - Jemez Herd (GMUs 6A, 6B, 6C, and 7)

Combination of Opportunity and Quality Management, depending on GMU



The Valles Caldera and surrounding forests offer premier elk habitat with sprawling montane meadows, vast forests, varied topography, and persistent water sources. Prescribed burning, recent wildfires, and landscape treatment efforts have further enhanced elk habitat in the area. The Jemez herd is considered stable with hunter success and satisfaction ratings moderate to high, depending on the GMU. Elk in GMUs 6A and 6B are managed under the quality framework and some licenses are highly coveted. In GMUs 6C and 7 elk are managed under the opportunity framework, wherein more public draw permits are allotted. The Jemez herd is surveyed annually and the population size is estimated using aerial survey and hunter harvest data.

Population Estimate (2022)	Bull: Cow: Calf	Sustainable Harvest Est.
6,100 – 7,100*	48:100:27	360 - 475 Males
Stable		440 – 510 Females

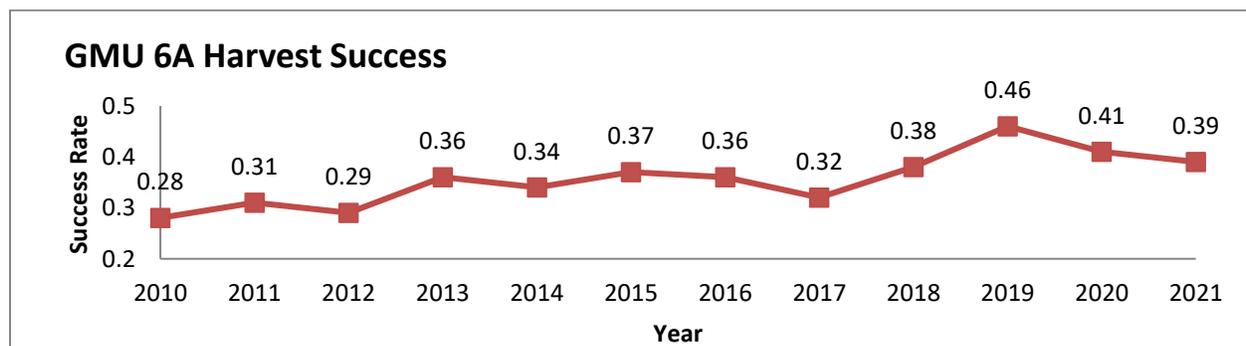
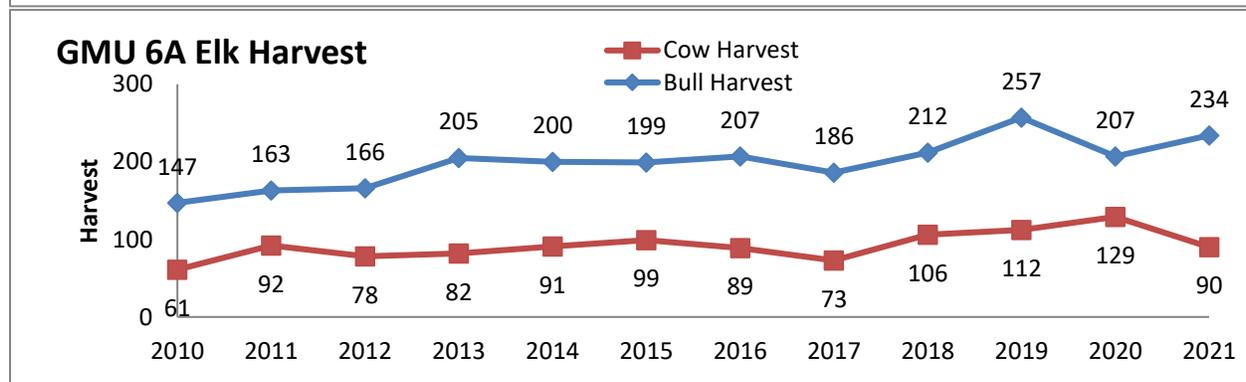
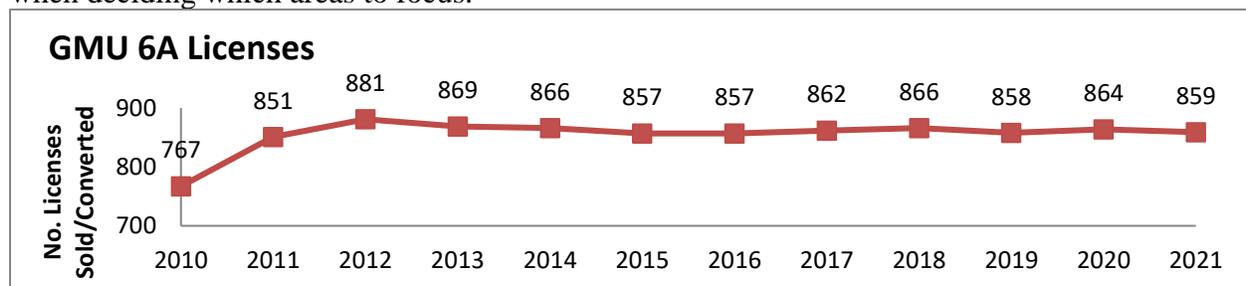
*Note: Elk populations within the Jemez herd unit are estimated at the regional level and are calculated across GMUs 6A-C and 7.

GMU 6A (part of the Jemez Herd; quality management)

Unit Map: [6A](#)

BIOLOGY – Elk in GMU 6A are part of the Jemez herd and population estimates include several GMUs (see regional description). Habitat in this unit ranges from sagebrush, scrub oak and pinyon-juniper forests in the lower elevations to ponderosa pine forests and sub-alpine habitats at the highest elevations. Prescribed burning as well as recent wildfires along the eastern and southern Jemez provide ample elk foraging habitat. Many elk in this unit are found in high elevation open meadows, aspen forests, and mixed conifer during summer months. During winter months, some elk migrate to lower elevations when snowpack accumulates.

HUNTING – This unit is 48% public land, and a network of Forest Service roads allows for good access throughout. The San Pedro Parks Wilderness is found in this unit for those looking for a backcountry experience. Much of the landscape is defined by deep drainages and canyons dividing large forested mesas. Due to the rugged topography of this GMU, travelling from one region to another is often indirect and can be time consuming; hunters should plan accordingly when deciding which areas to focus.



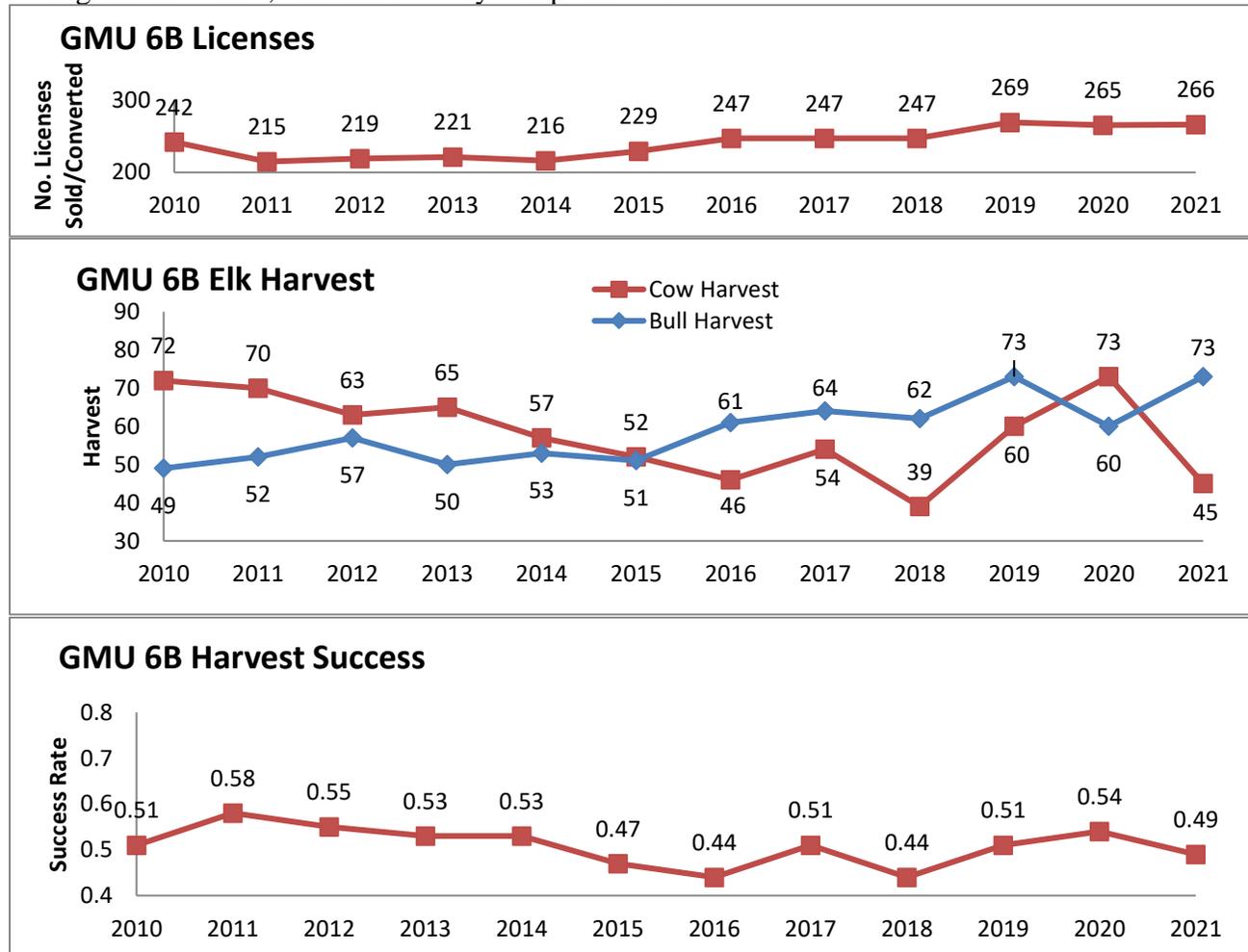
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GMU 6B (part of the Jemez Herd; quality management)

Unit Map: [6B](#)

BIOLOGY – Elk in GMU 6B are part of the Jemez herd and population estimates include several GMUs (see regional description). The unit is managed as The Valles Caldera National Preserve (VCNP) and is characterized by conifer forests ridges separated by vast grassland valleys. The VCNP is prime elk habitat and has been known for its abundant elk. Premier elk habitat in the VCNP, in combination with recent fires in the area, provide ample opportunity for elk to thrive. Seasonal movements occur between high elevation montane meadows and surrounding forests, to lower elevation mesas and drainages when snowpack accumulates. Although, during milder winters, some elk will remain within the VCNP year-round.

HUNTING – This unit is almost exclusively public land and is administered by the National Park Service as the Valles Caldera National Preserve. As such, hunters must follow some specific regulations and should visit the [Valles Caldera National Preserve hunt rules webpage](#) for the most up to date information. The VCNP restricts some vehicular access so hunters should be aware that there are few accessible roads. Hunter success rates and satisfaction are higher than average in this GMU, which has a very competitive draw.



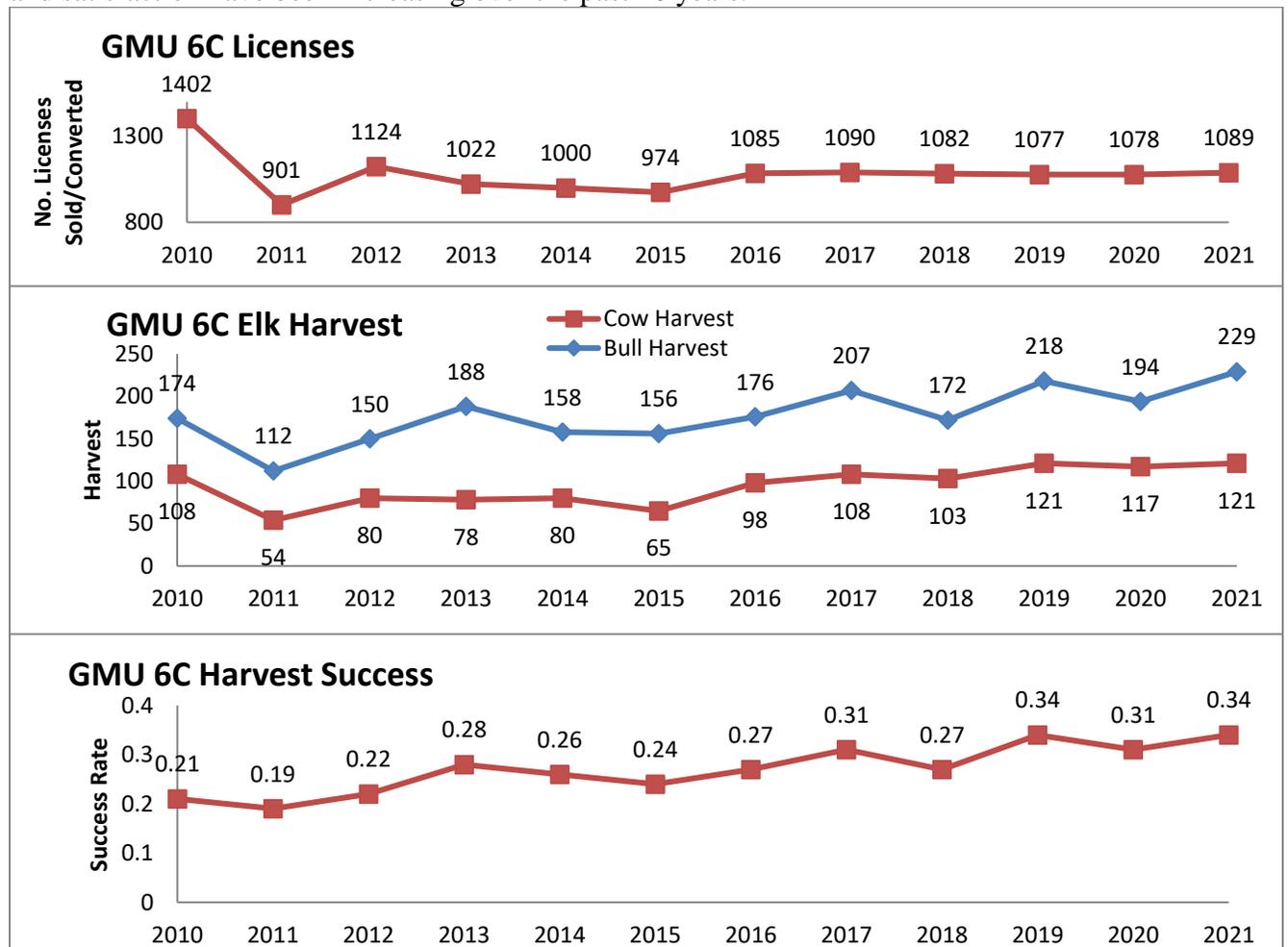
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GMU 6C (part of the Jemez Herd; opportunity management)

Unit Map: [6C](#)

BIOLOGY – Elk in GMU 6C are part of the Jemez herd and population estimates include several GMUs (see regional description). Vegetation communities in this unit range from sagebrush, scrub oak and pinyon-juniper forests in the lower elevations to ponderosa pine forests and sub-alpine habitats at the highest elevations; providing year-round elk habitat. Seasonal movements occur from high to lower elevations as snow accumulation pushes elk off winter range. Recent wildfires have opened up some areas and elk appear to be readily utilizing these burn scars.

HUNTING – This unit is 54% public land, and a network of Forest Service roads allows for good access throughout. The Dome Wilderness is found in this unit for those looking for rugged hunting opportunities. Although the elk population is stable to increasing in this unit, there are generally fewer elk in this unit than are found in GMUs 6A and 6B. However, hunter success and satisfaction have been increasing over the past 10 years.



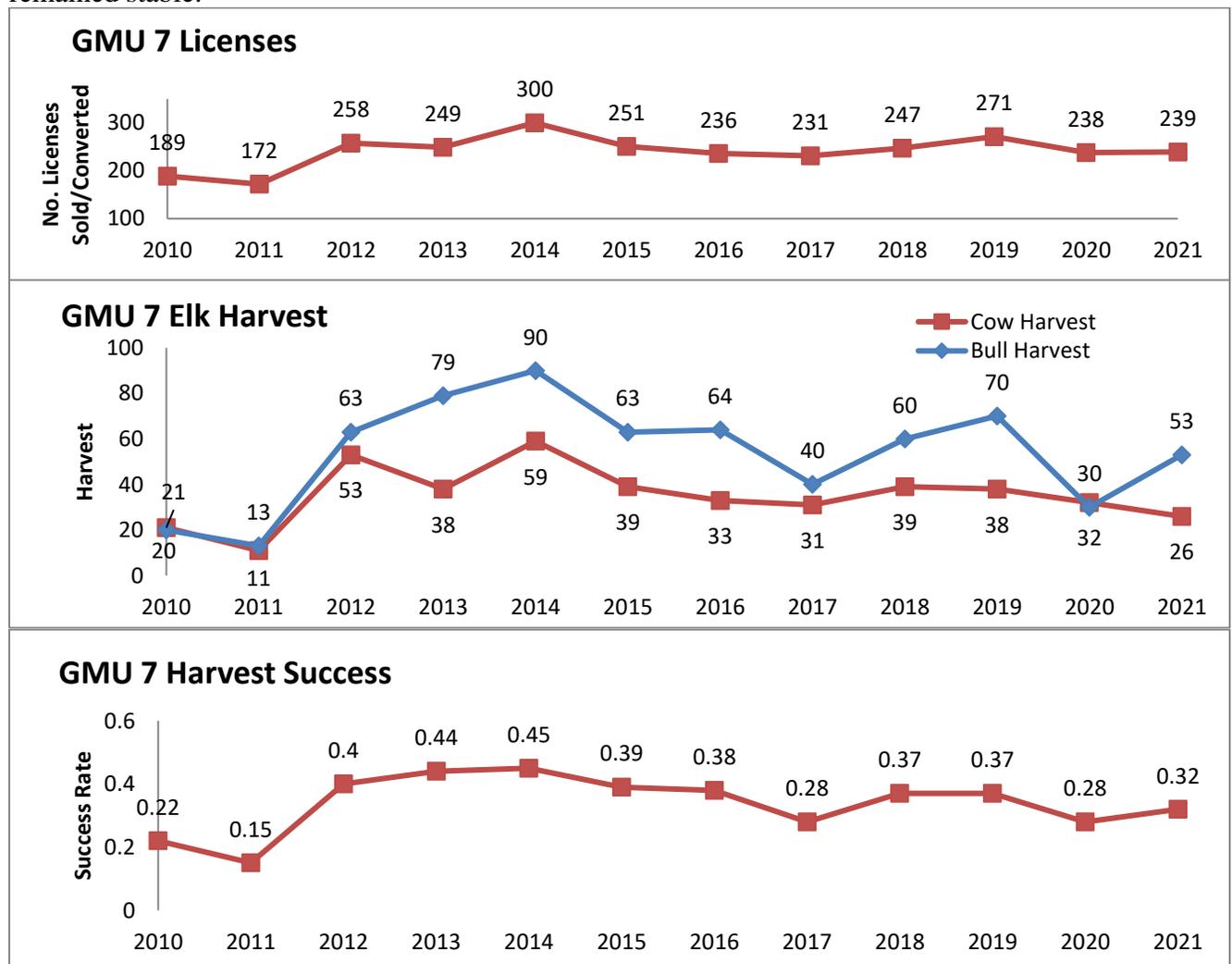
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GMU 7 (Jemez Herd; quality management)

Unit Map: [7](#)

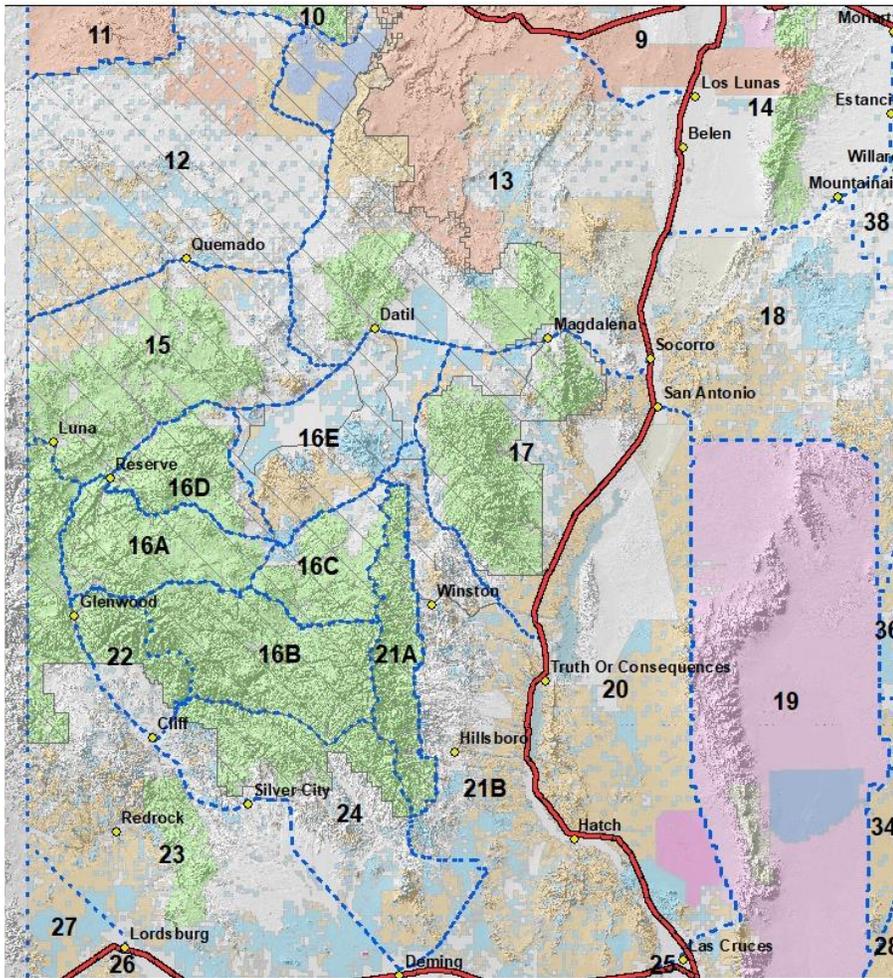
BIOLOGY –Elk in GMU 7 are considered part of the Jemez herd and population estimates include several GMUs (see regional description). Habitat type is dominated by lower elevation semi-arid grass/scrubland with interspersed pinyon-juniper woodlands. Elk densities in this unit are low and herds are scattered throughout the unit; however, moderate sized herds can be found where conditions are favorable. Movement patterns here are largely dependent upon forage and water availability and can vary from year to year.

HUNTING – This unit is largely tribal land (48%) intermixed with public land (36%). Public lands within this unit have limited access, thus good maps or the latest GPS technology with land status software is advised. Hunter success and satisfaction within this unit are moderate and have remained stable.

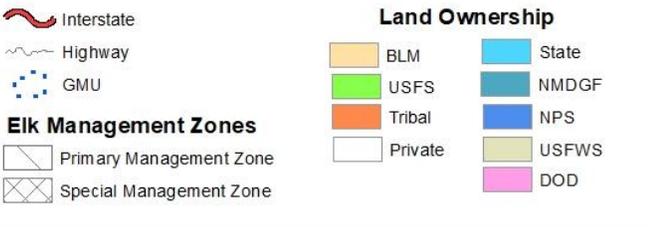


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Southwest Region – Fence Lake, Datil, Greater Gila, San Mateo/Magdalena, and Lesser Gila Herds



0 10 20 40 Miles



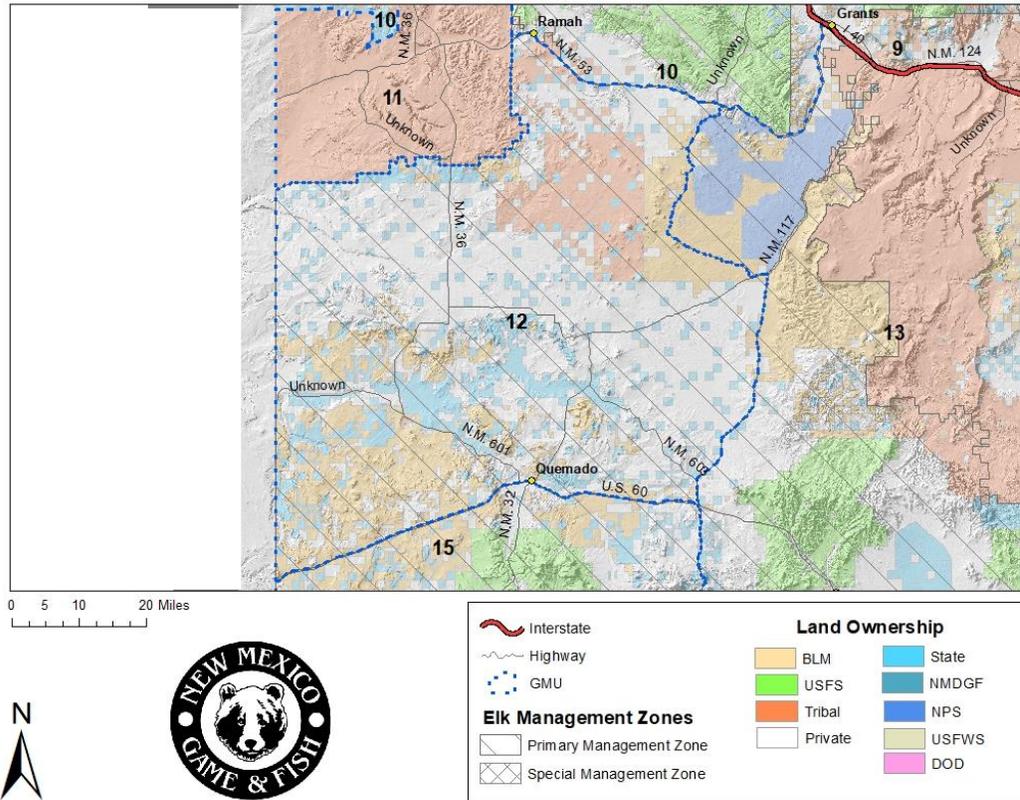
Southwestern New Mexico provides some of the largest expanses of premier elk habitat within the state. Large tracts of undeveloped Forest Service and Wilderness areas, as well as montane forest ecosystems provide for large concentrations of elk. The Department has identified many of the GMUs in the Southwest Area as “Quality” units. Hunters who draw a license in the southwest should do their preseason scouting knowing that the southwest area is primarily dry. Water and forage are limiting factors, which can be useful to keep in mind when assessing where elk might be located. Hunters can acquire maps and find established water sources to determine the best place to scout on the ground. Understanding what areas received monsoon rains the preceding July – September will likewise help guide hunters to areas being used by elk as the animals move into different areas depending on these rain events. As an example, elk in

the Wahoo Mountains in the north part of GMU 21A could move to five units within a few miles (21A, 21B, 16C, 16E and 17) depending on moisture events. Typically, elk are more dispersed, and in smaller groups during wetter years as resources are more abundant and spatially available.

Fence Lake Herd (GMU 12)

Quality Management

Unit Map: [12](#)

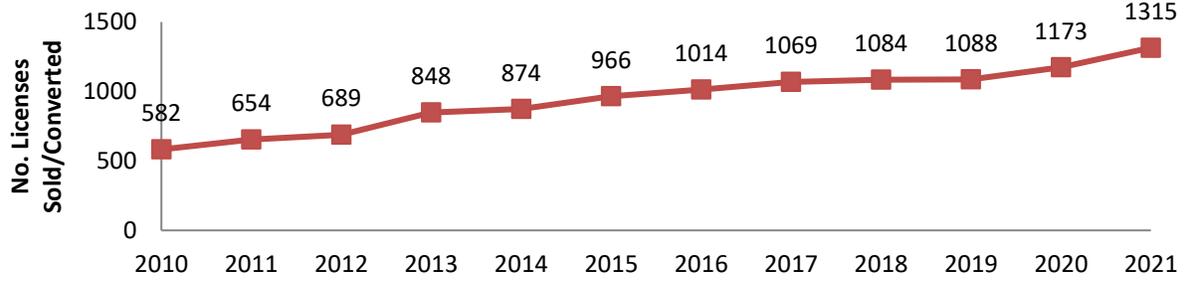


BIOLOGY – GMU 12 is considered a standalone elk herd unit, the Fence Lake herd. It was moved into the Primary Management Zone in 2019 as a result of increased herd productivity, population size, and increased interest by stakeholders to include this herd in the PMZ. The landscape has large, open drainages with forested mesas interspersed throughout. Habitat in this unit ranges from sagebrush and semi-arid grasslands in low elevations to pinyon-juniper and ponderosa woodlands on mesa tops. Elk are most often found in clusters dispersed across the unit where resources are most readily available, which can vary depending upon precipitation patterns. The Fence Lake herd is monitored annually using a combination of aerial surveys and hunter harvest data.

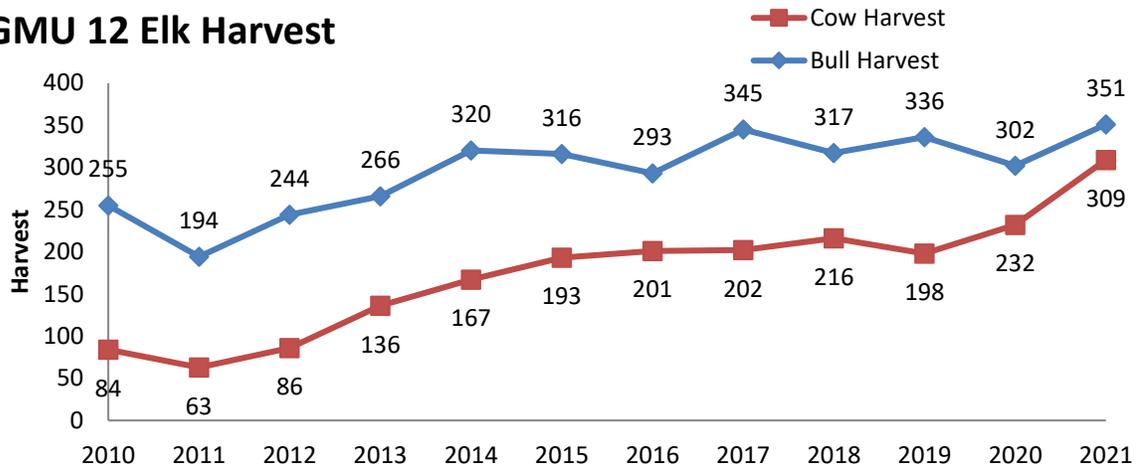
HUNTING – This unit is a checkerboard of private, public, and tribal land with 39% of the unit being public land. Public hunting opportunities can be found on BLM and NM State Trust Land. However, not all public land is legally accessible so public hunters should be prepared with good maps and/or GPS with land status software. Hunter success and satisfaction for this unit are higher than average and have been stable. Elk populations within this unit are stable in size, however, they are dispersed across the landscape in clusters near available resources and are thus more dispersed in years of abundant moisture and forage.

Population Estimate (2022)	Bull:Cow:Calf	Sustainable Harvest Est.
4,000 – 5,900	41:100:46	320 – 550 Males
Stable		400 – 590 Females

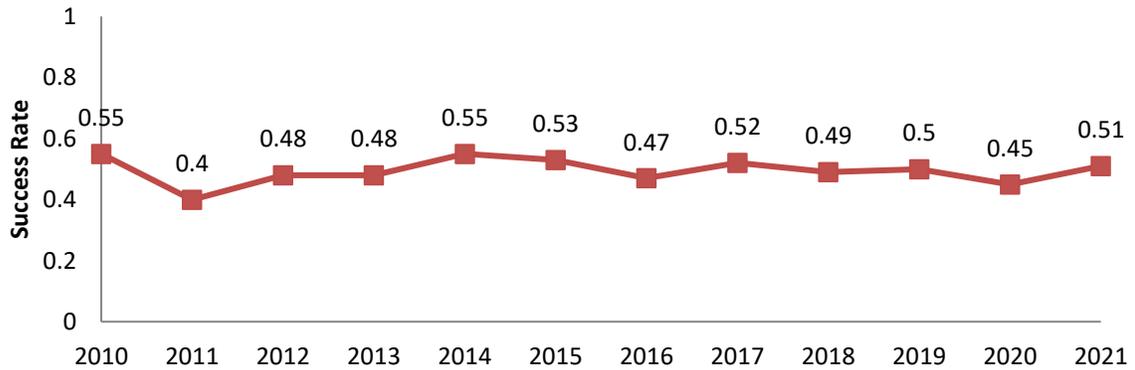
GMU 12 Licenses



GMU 12 Elk Harvest



GMU 12 Harvest Success

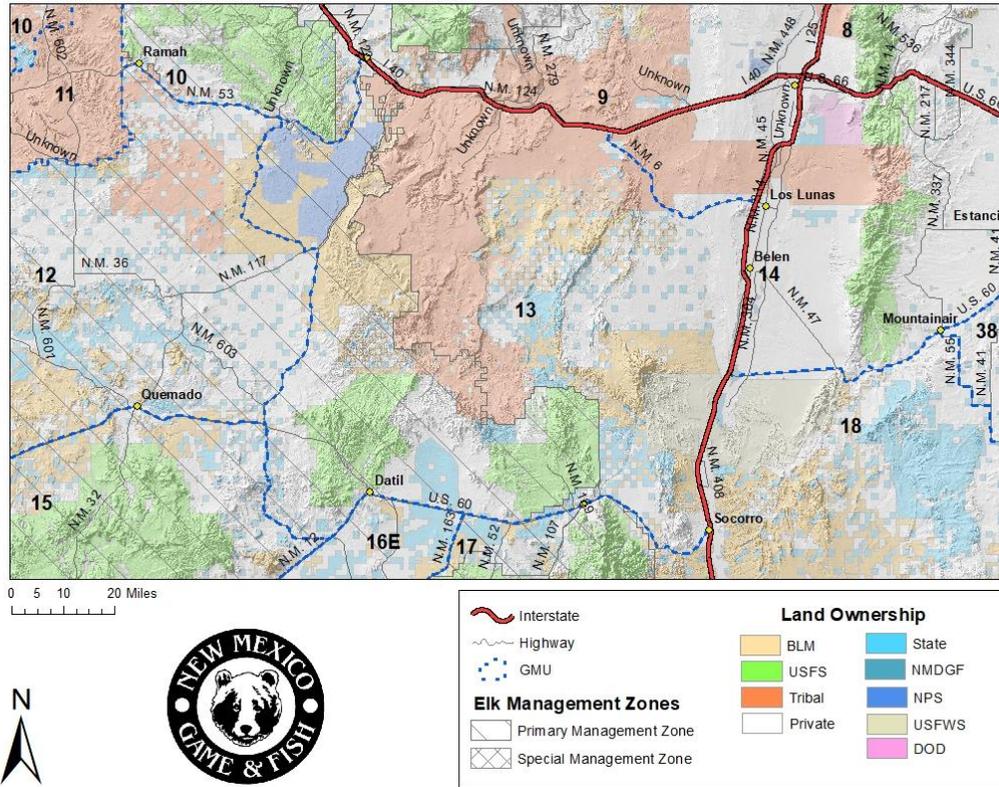


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Datil Herd (GMU 13)

Quality Management

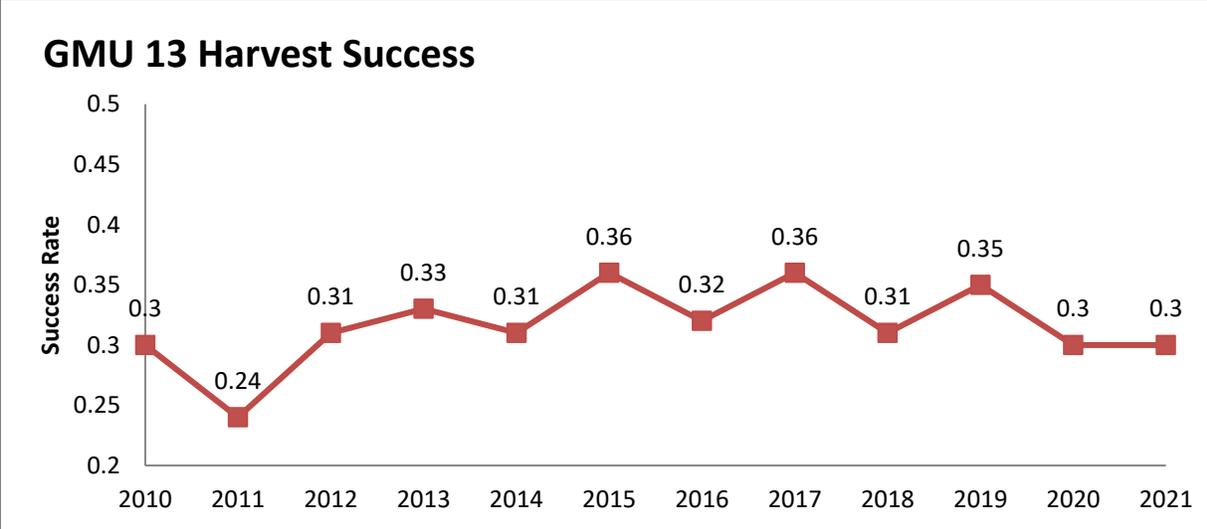
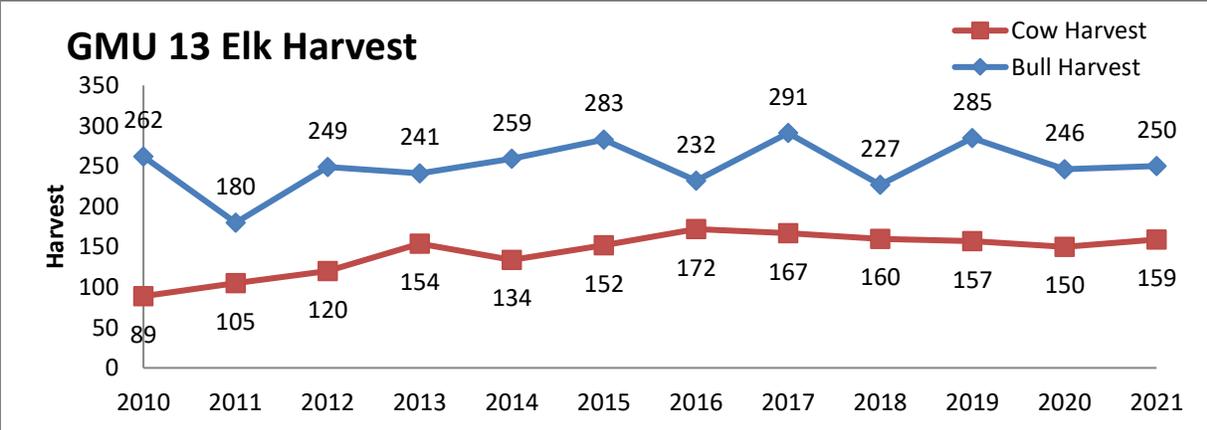
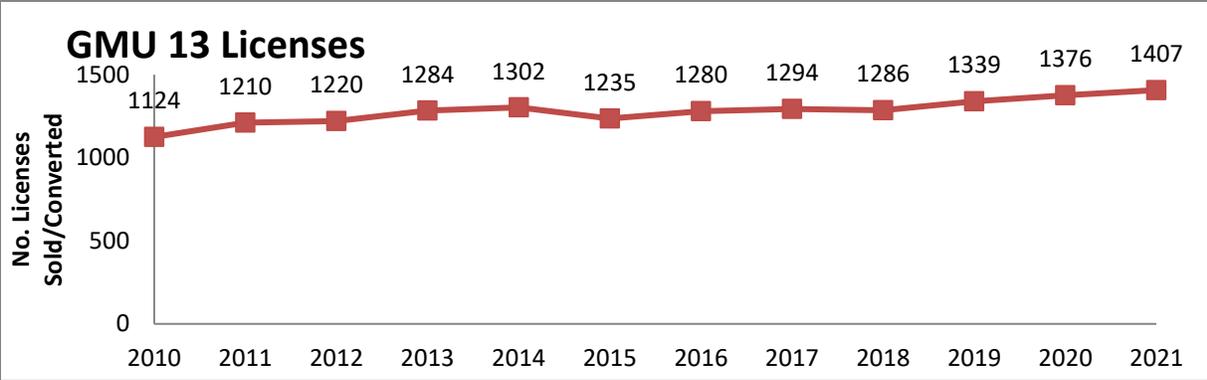
Unit Map: [13](#)



BIOLOGY – GMU 13 is considered a standalone elk herd unit, the Datil herd. Habitats range across an elevational gradient from plains and grasslands at low elevation to pinyon-juniper woodlands and ponderosa pine forests at higher elevations. Resource availability is the primary driver for elk movements throughout the year, where moderate sized herds can be found in clusters where resources are available. The Datil herd is considered stable, with ample resources to support healthy populations. Elk are monitored annually using a combination of aerial surveys and hunter harvest data.

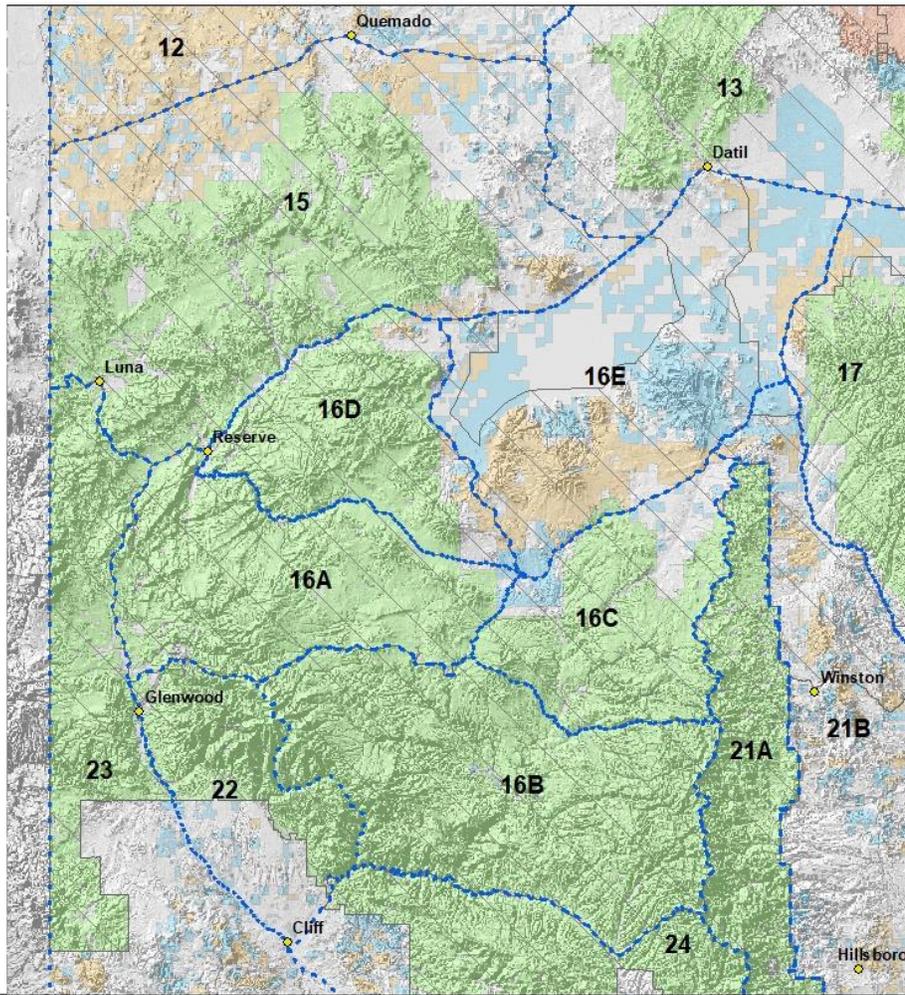
HUNTING – This unit is designated as a primitive weapon unit and hunting opportunities are provided through muzzleloader and bow hunts only. It is comprised of 39% public land with good road access throughout the unit. Although portions of the Cibola National Forest occupy the southern portion of this unit, much of the public land is BLM or state land. Up to date maps or GPS will aid hunters navigating this unit. There are two wilderness areas for those seeking more rugged pursuit opportunities - the West Malpais Wilderness and the Cebolla Wilderness. This is an extremely large unit with localized elk concentrations as well as some more mobile herds following available resources and water sources.

Population Estimate (2022)	Bull: Cow: Calf	Sustainable Harvest Est.
3,000 – 3,900	40:100:37	210 – 310 Males
Stable		250 – 33 Females



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Greater Gila Herd (GMUs 15, 16A, 16B/22, and 16C-E) Quality Management





Land Ownership

BLM	State
USFS	NMDGF
Tribal	NPS
Private	USFWS
	DOD

Elk Management Zones

Primary Management Zone
Special Management Zone

The Greater Gila elk herd unit spans across several GMUs in the Gila National Forest, a large contiguous tract of public land. The majority of this herd is found on public land with some limited exceptions and has moderate to good hunter access via a network of forest service roads. The Gila Wilderness Area and Aldo Leopold Wilderness Areas provide expansive regions of rugged and remote elk habitat and hunting opportunities. Licenses in these units are highly coveted and draw odds are generally low. Elk population trends are monitored using a combination of aerial surveys as well as hunter harvest information. The Greater Gila herd population size is estimated across GMUs 15, 16A, 16B/22, and 16C-E. The herd is stable to slightly increasing.

Population Estimate (2022)	Bull: Cow: Calf	Sustainable Harvest Est.
21,200 – 23,300*	33:100:27	1,100 – 1,400 Males
Stable to Slightly Increasing		1,300 – 1,400 Females

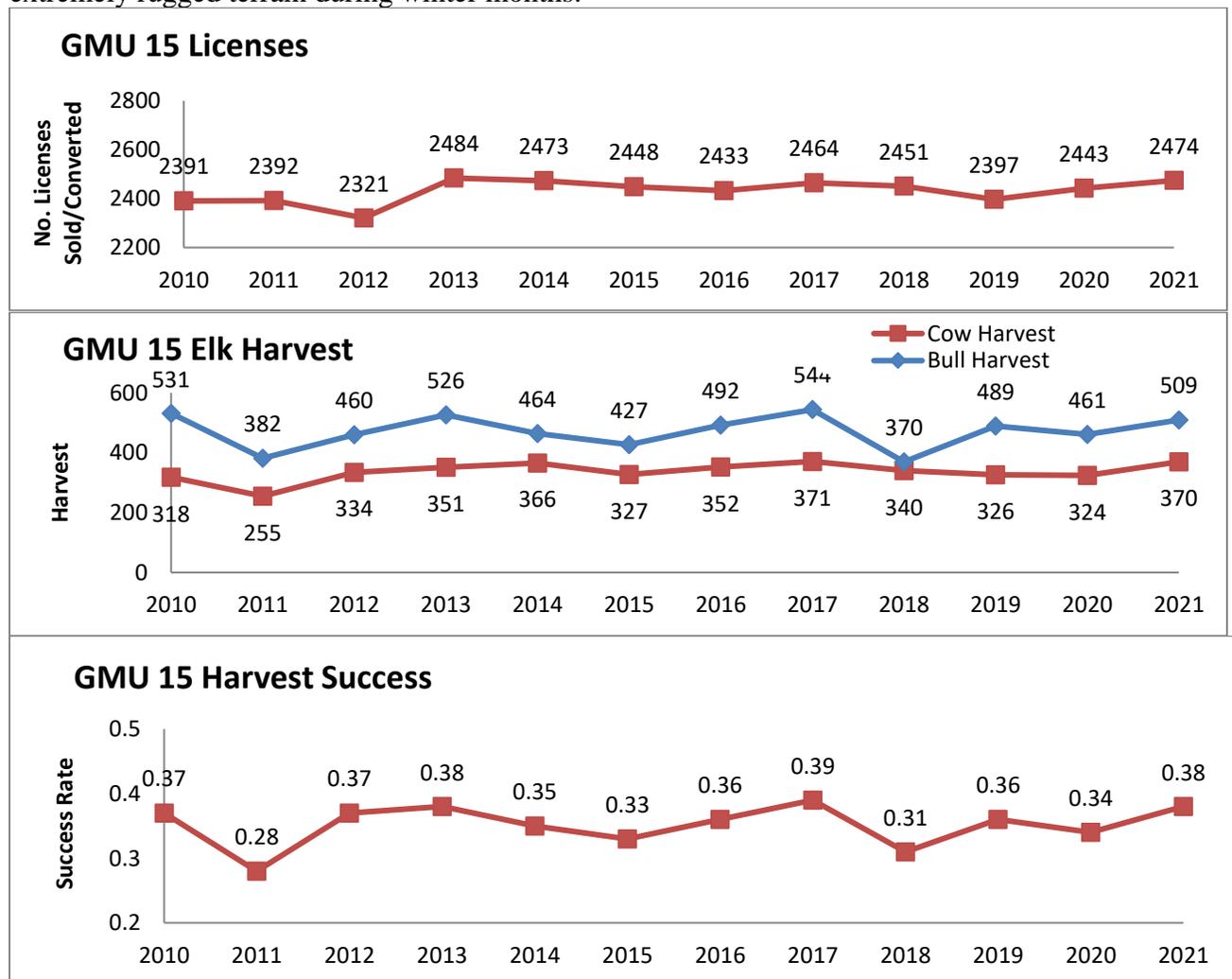
*Note: Elk populations within the Greater Gila herd unit are estimated at the regional level and population estimates are calculated across GMUs 15, 16A, 16B/22, and 16C-E.

GMU 15 (part of the Greater Gila Herd; quality management)

Unit Map: [15](#)

BIOLOGY – Elk in GMU 15 are part of the Greater Gila herd and population estimates include several GMUs (see regional description). The landscape offers a variety topography, offering quality year-round elk habitats. Habitats range across an elevational gradient from plains and grasslands at low elevation to pinyon-juniper woodlands and ponderosa pine forests at higher elevations. Seasonal movements are very limited in this herd; likely due to the lack of heavy snow accumulation

HUNTING – This unit is designated as a primitive weapon unit and hunting opportunities are provided through muzzleloader and bow hunts only. This unit is 78% public land with great road access throughout. Success rates and satisfaction ratings are above average. This unit offers quality elk habitat and hunters can find high elk densities throughout. GMU 15 also offers a unique hunting opportunity to pursue mature bulls late in the season when bulls can be found on extremely rugged terrain during winter months.



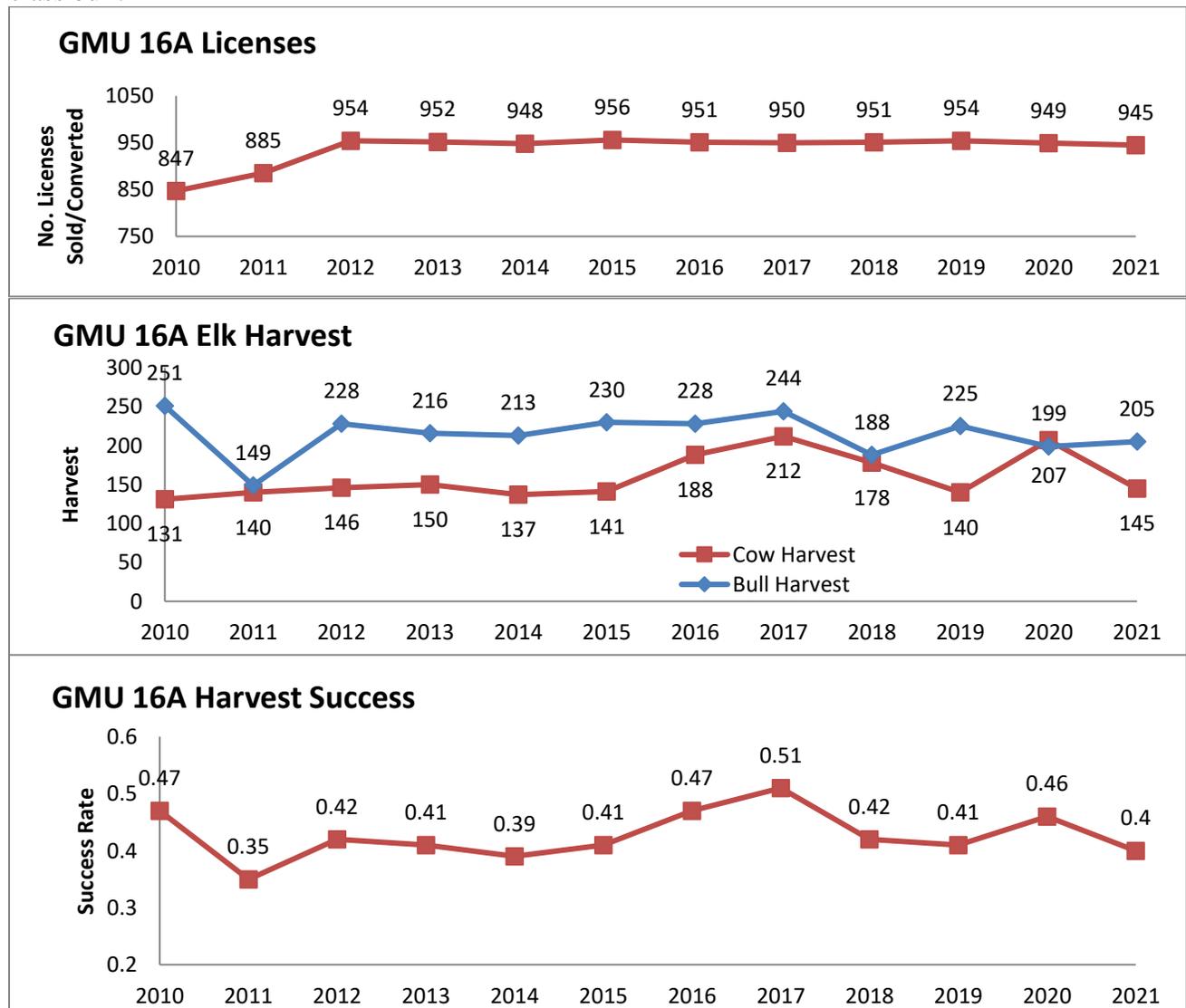
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GMU 16A (part of the Greater Gila Herd; quality management)

Unit Map: [16A](#)

BIOLOGY – Elk in GMU 16A are part of the Greater Gila herd and population estimates include several GMUs (see regional description). Lower elevations are characterized by plains and grasslands with ponderosa pine forests at higher elevations. The landscape is predominantly mountainous with large, deep drainages and some lower elevation meadows and foothills. Seasonal movements are very limited in this herd; likely due to the lack of heavy snow accumulation.

HUNTING –This unit is comprised of 97% public land with great road access throughout. Even with a good road network, there are still roadless areas allowing hunters the ability to get away from other people. This is often characterized as one of the best units in the state because of the abundant elk habitat and resources providing healthy herds and potential to harvest an older age class bull.



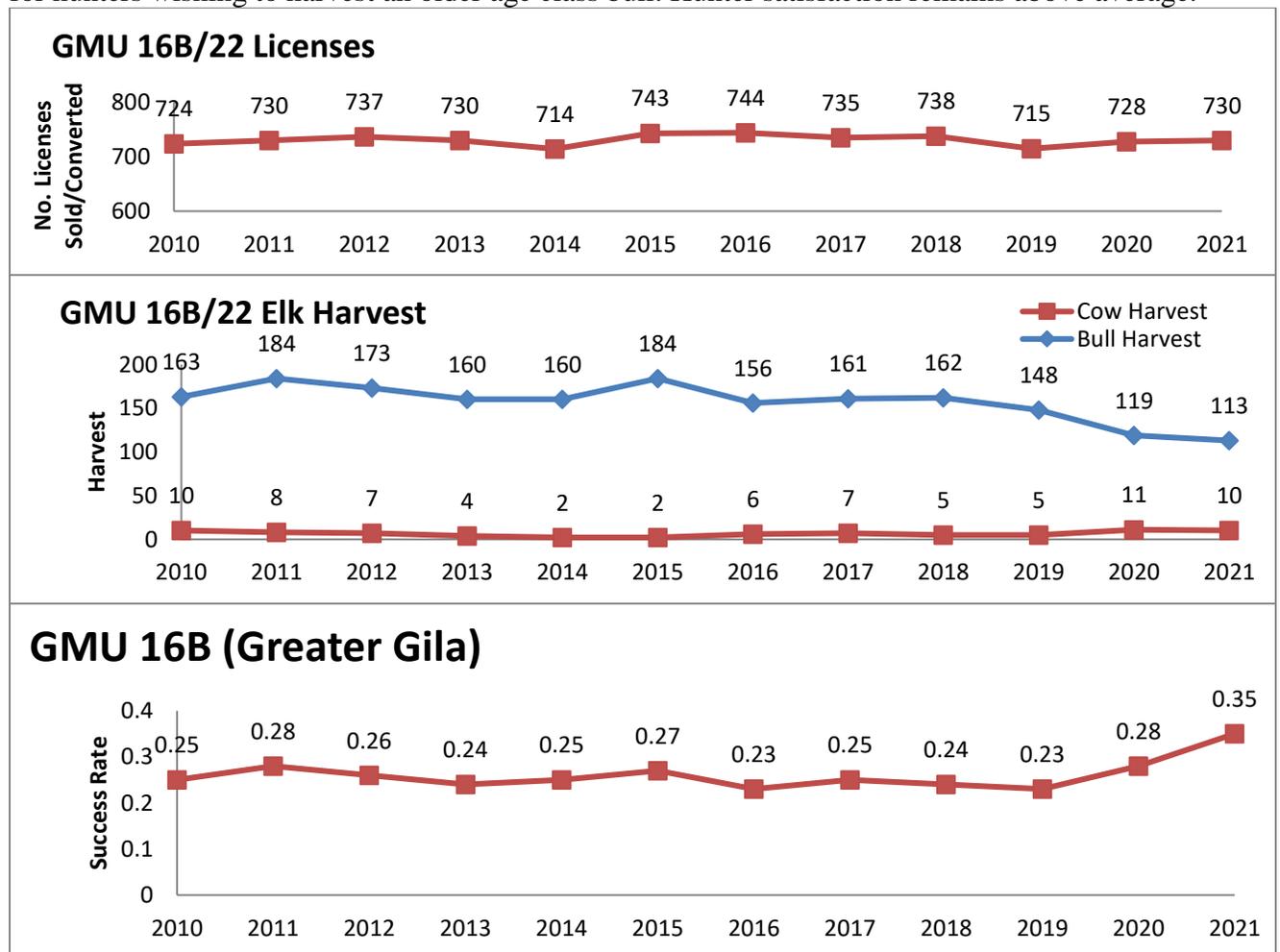
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GMU 16B/22 (part of the Greater Gila Herd Unit; quality management)

Unit Maps: [16B](#), [22](#)

BIOLOGY – Elk in GMUs 16B and 22 are part of the Greater Gila herd and population estimates include several GMUs (see regional description). The habitat is dominated by ponderosa pine forests with some grasslands interspersed throughout. The landscape is very rugged – especially within wilderness areas. Seasonal movements are very limited in this herd; likely due to the lack of heavy snow accumulation.

HUNTING – These units are 99% public land with much of the area falling in the Gila and Aldo Leopold Wilderness Areas. Road access is limited to nonexistent. Hunters should be prepared to hunt this unit with livestock or on foot. Some hunters choose to venture deep into the backcountry for multi-day excursions in pursuit of elk. These units are ideal for the hunter wishing to experience the solitude of a backcountry elk hunt. Hunter success is slightly below average for the state. The rugged and roadless nature of these units provide ample opportunity for hunters wishing to harvest an older age class bull. Hunter satisfaction remains above average.



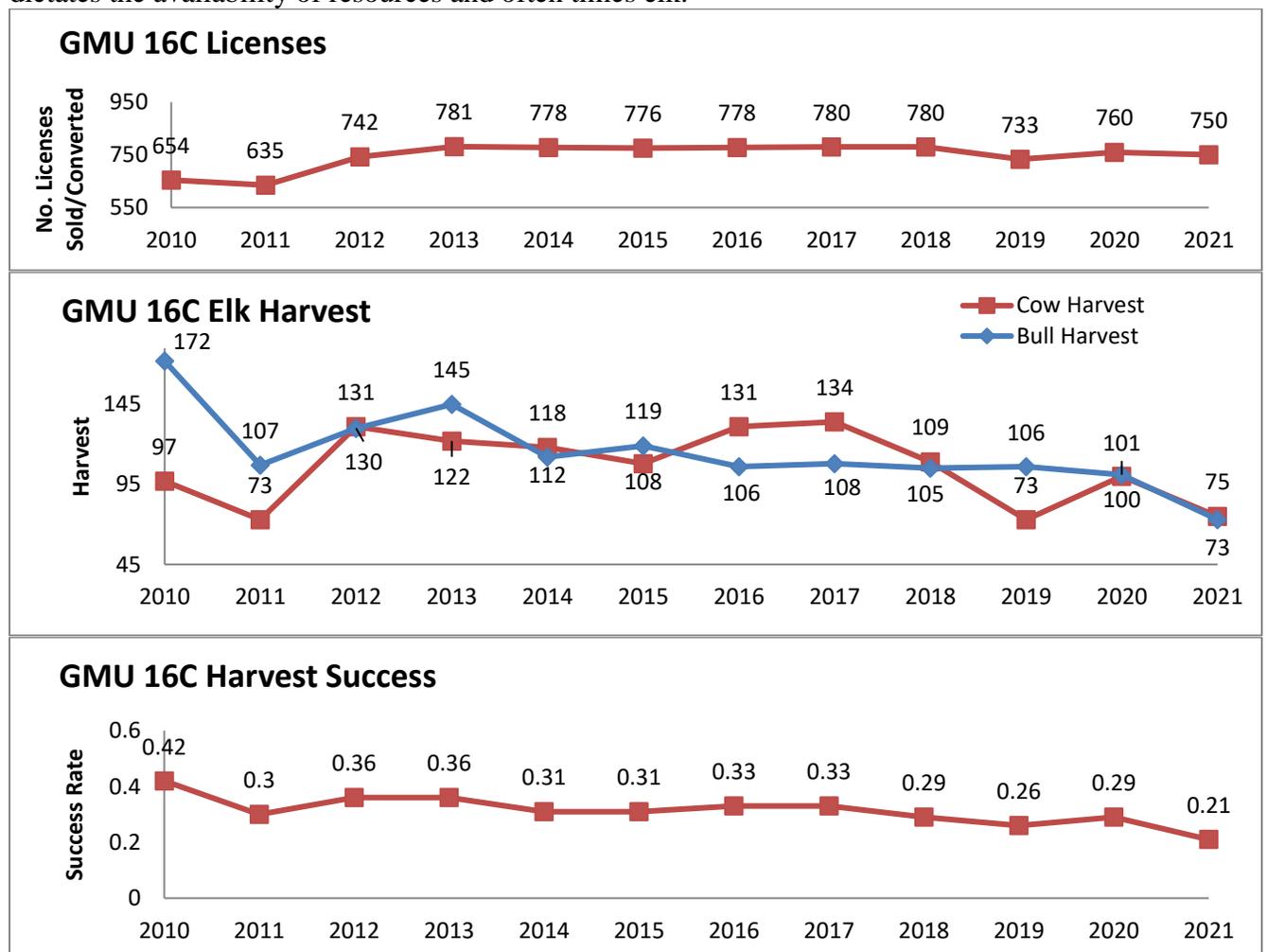
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GMU 16C (part of the Greater Gila Herd; quality management)

Unit Map: [16C](#)

BIOLOGY – Elk in GMU 16C are part of the Greater Gila herd wherein population estimates include several GMUs (see regional description). Like much of the region, the habitats range across an elevational gradient from plains and grasslands at low elevation to pinyon-juniper woodlands and ponderosa pine forests at higher elevations. Resource availability, often driven by precipitation patterns, typically determines movement patterns of elk across this unit during summer and fall seasons. Seasonal movements are very limited in this herd; likely due to the lack of heavy snow accumulation.

HUNTING – This unit is comprised of 83% public land with good road access. Hunters should stay flexible and scout during August and September to determine where moisture events have occurred to determine best places to hunt during the season. Moisture during this time often dictates the availability of resources and often times elk.



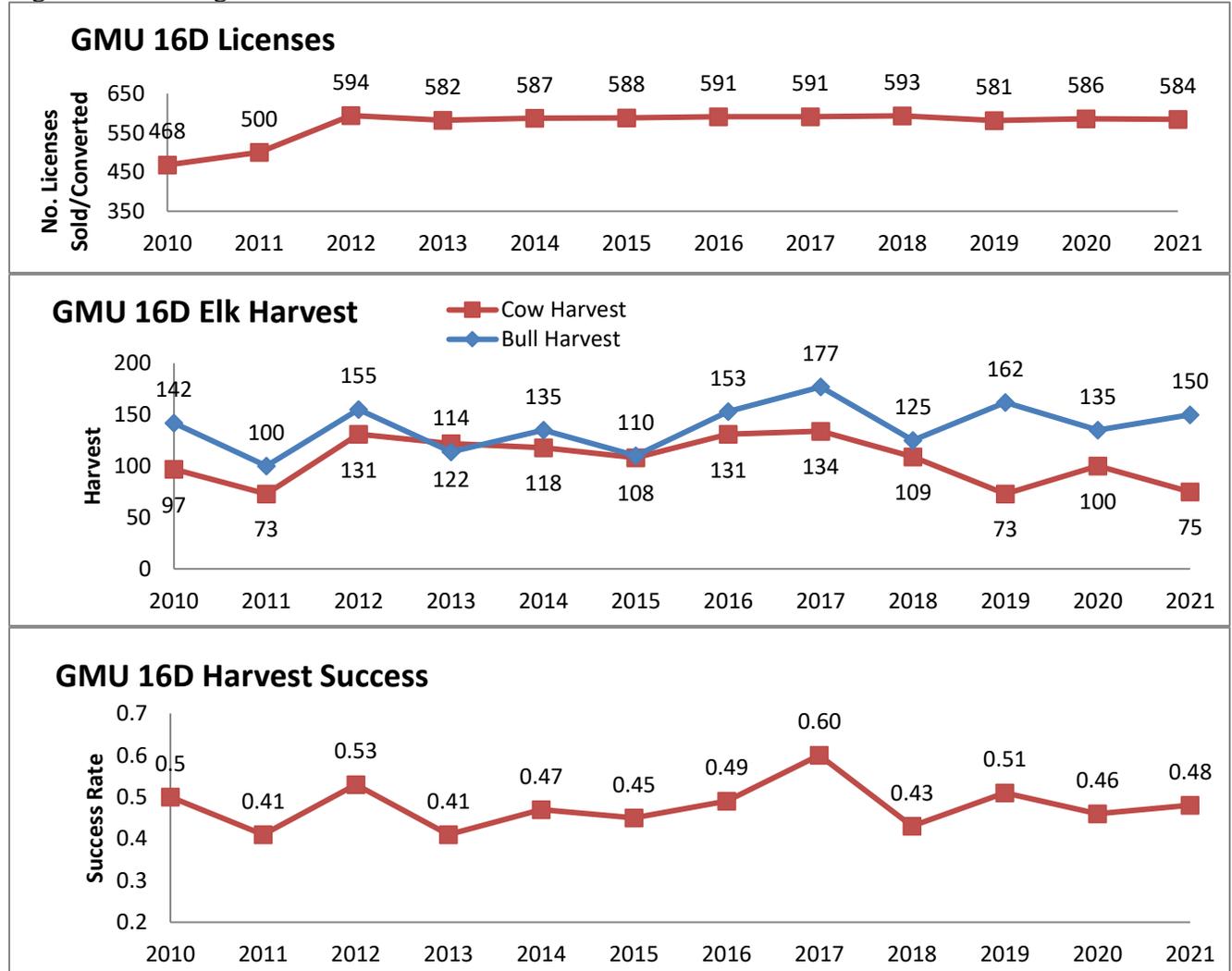
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GMU 16D (part of the Greater Gila Herd; quality management)

Unit Map: [16D](#)

BIOLOGY – Elk in GMU 16D are part of the Greater Gila herd and population estimates include several GMUs (see regional description). Similar to the rest of the region, habitats range across an elevational gradient from plains and grasslands at low elevation to pinyon-juniper woodlands and ponderosa pine forests at higher elevations. The landscape is predominantly mountainous with extensive foothills and some lower elevation meadows. Seasonal movements are very limited in this herd; likely due to the lack of heavy snow accumulation

HUNTING – This unit is 88% public land with good road access. Topography within the unit offers varied elk habitat from low elevation winter range to high mountain ridgelines, with many drainage and foothills areas to provide escape terrain. This is often characterized as one of the best units in the state because of the abundant elk habitat and resources. This unit has high elk densities and the hunter will be able to not only find elk, but they will have the flexibility to focus on older age class bulls, if desired. Hunter satisfaction and harvest rates are consistently higher than average.



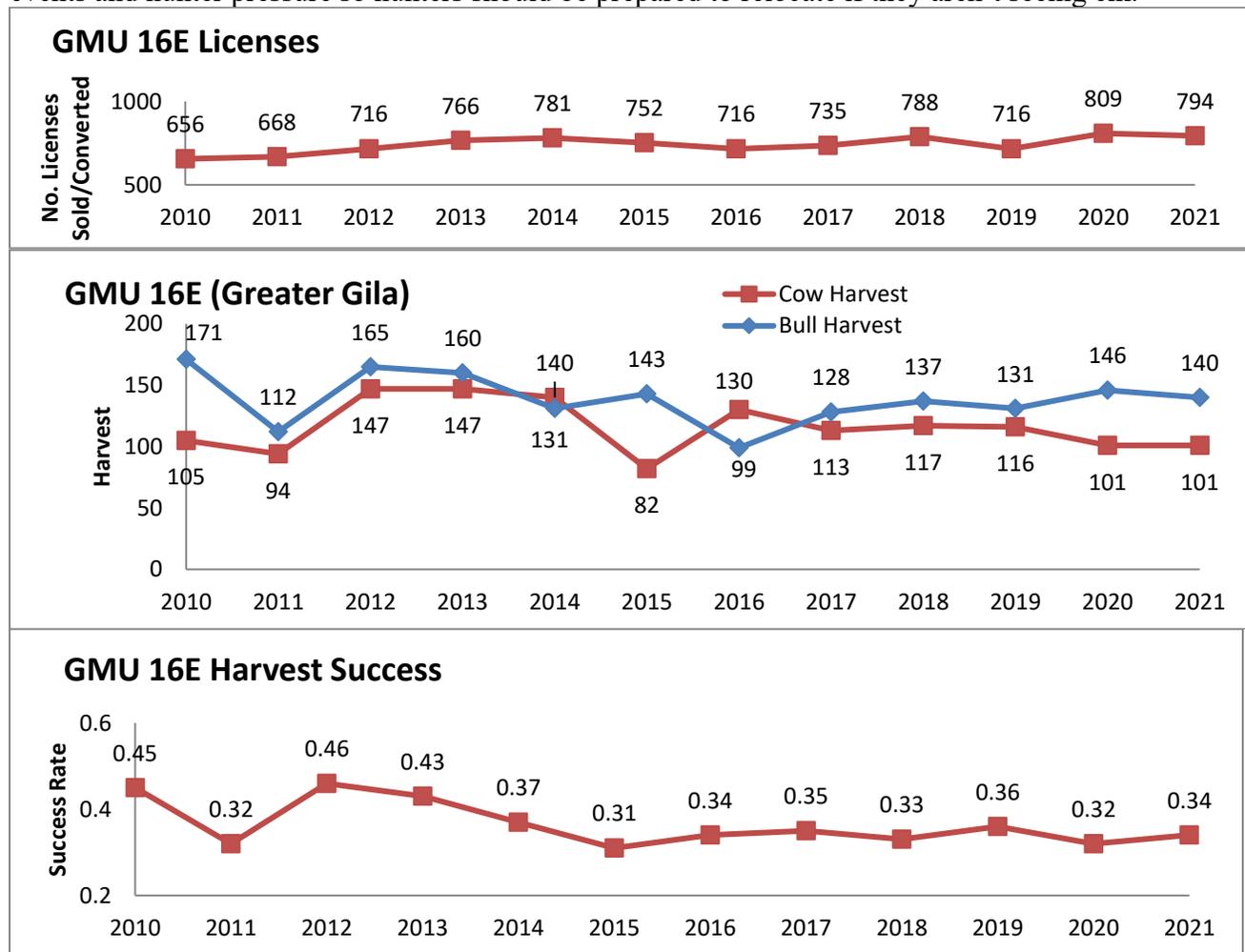
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GMU 16E (part of the Greater Gila Herd Unit; quality management)

Unit Map: [16E](#)

BIOLOGY – Elk in GMU 16E are part of the Greater Gila herd and population estimates include several GMUs (see regional description). The unit is dominated by large amounts of open grassland country while Luera and Pelona Mountains offer some topography and timber where elk often find cover. Resource availability can determine elk concentrations and are typically driven by precipitation patterns.

HUNTING – This unit is comprised of 63% public land but has limited road access. State, BLM, and private properties checkerboard the unit; thus, navigation skills or a GPS with land status will benefit hunters. An often-productive technique for hunting this area is to use optics to scan the vast landscape before pursuing target groups. Elk move regularly in this based on moisture events and hunter pressure so hunters should be prepared to relocate if they aren't seeing elk.

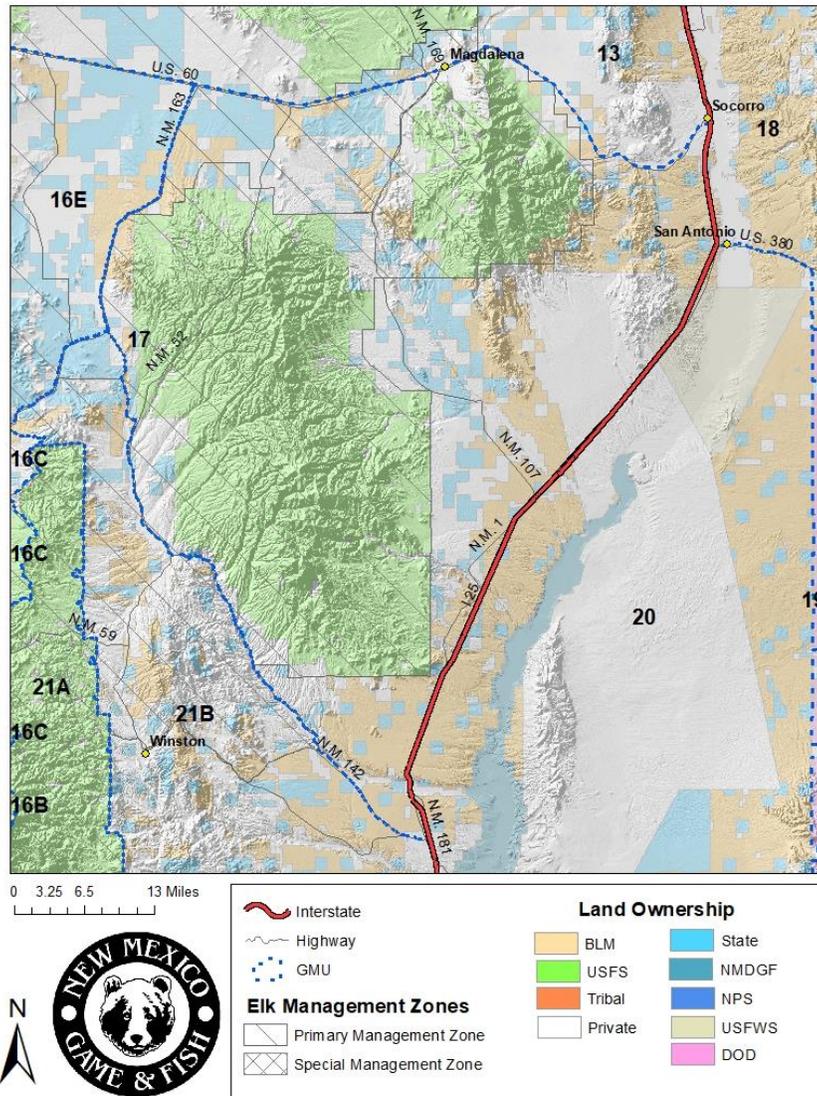


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San Mateo/Magdalena Herd (GMU 17)

Quality Management

Unit Map: [17](#)



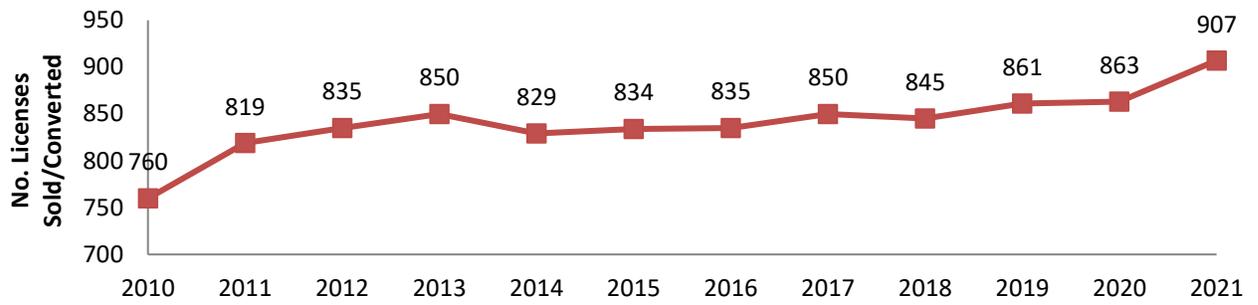
BIOLOGY – GMU 17 is considered a standalone elk herd unit, the San Mateo/Magdalena herd. The habitats range across an elevational gradient from plains and grasslands at low elevation to pinyon-juniper woodlands and ponderosa pine forests at higher elevations. Wildfires along the eastern slopes of Mt. Withington, Blue Mountain, and northern San Mateo mountains provide new growth and forage for elk. The herd is surveyed annually and population sizes are estimated using a combination of annual composition data as well as annual hunter harvest data.

HUNTING – This hunt unit offers hunting opportunities with primitive weapons so hunters will find only muzzleloader and bow hunts. The unit is comprised of 74% public land with a network of Forest Service roads providing good access. This unit has a higher bull to cow ratio allowing the hunter to focus on older age class bulls, if desired. Both the San Mateo and Magdalena Mountains

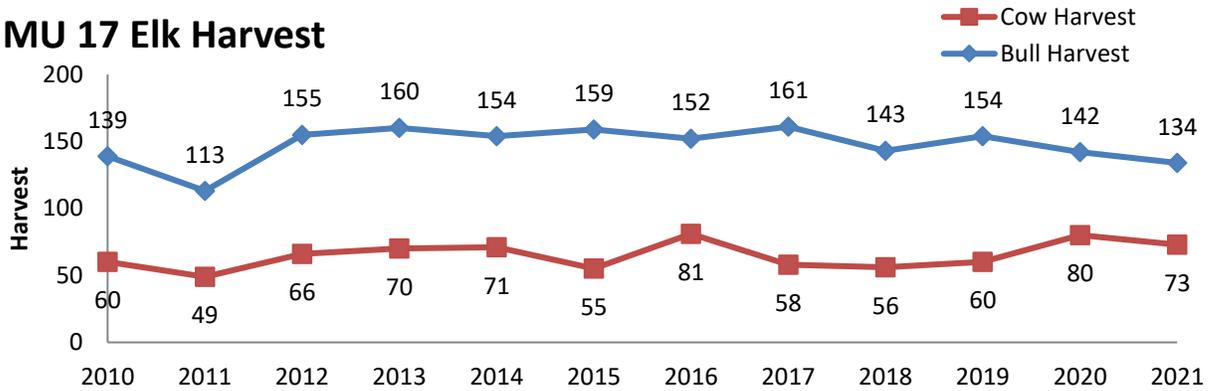
have extremely rugged country including the Apache Kid and Mt. Withington Wilderness Areas. The Department offers a late season bull hunt, and these hunters should focus in the extremely rugged country where bulls congregate during the winter.

Population Estimate (2022)	Bull:Cow:Calf	Sustainable Harvest Est.
1,600 – 2,400	51:100:38	110 – 180 Males
Stable		130 – 200 Females

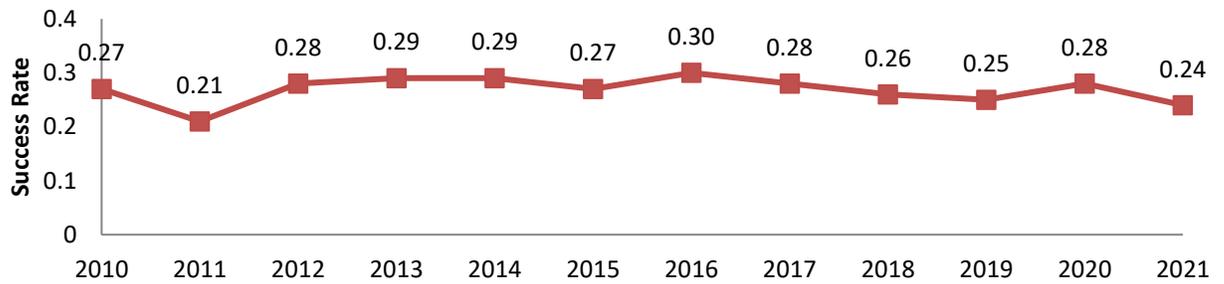
GMU 17 Licenses



GMU 17 Elk Harvest

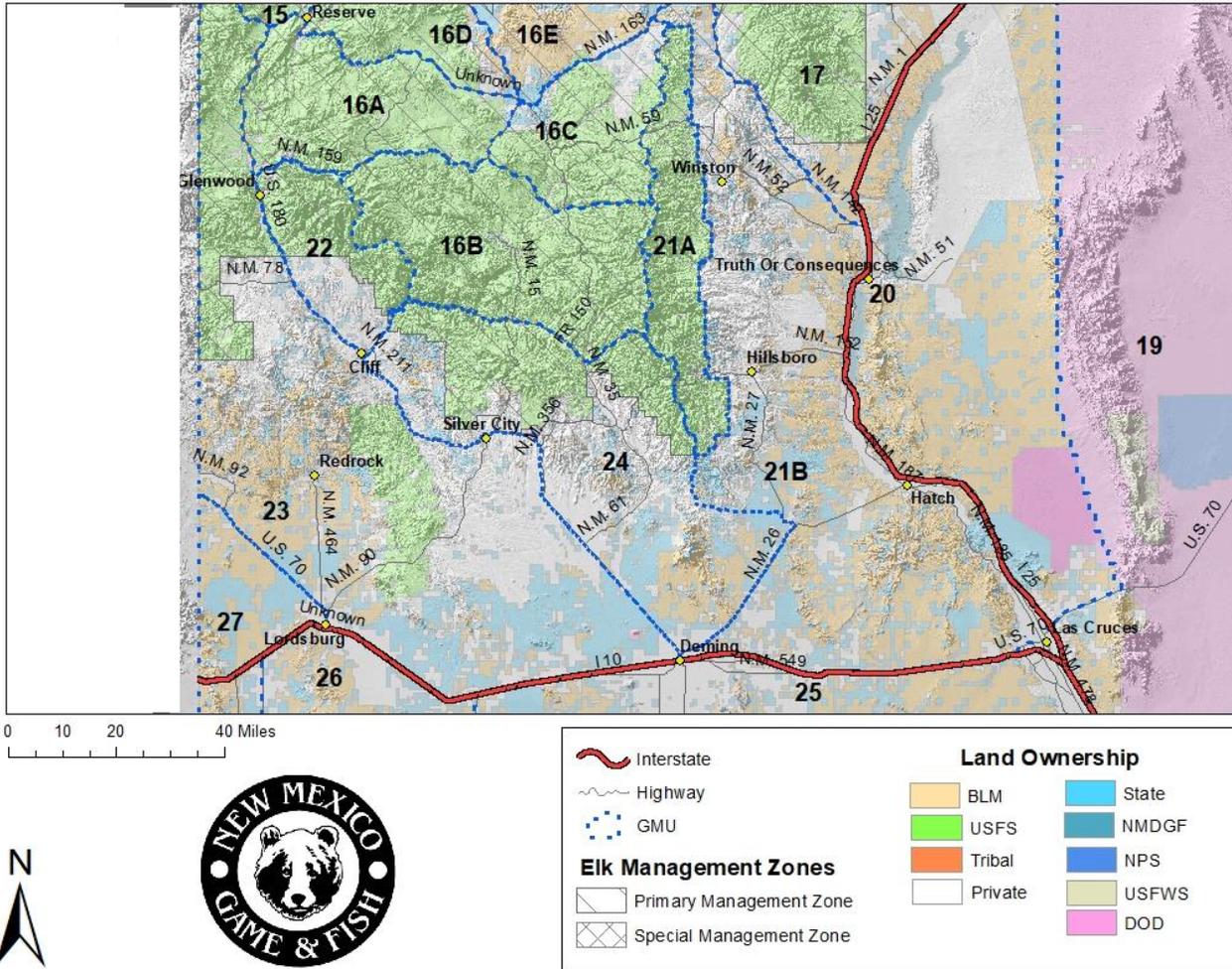


GMU 17 Harvest Success



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Lesser Gila Herd (GMUs 21A, 21B, 23 and 24) Opportunity Management



The Lesser Gila elk herd unit spans across a combination of National Forest, BLM, State, and private properties. Only GMU 21A is managed entirely within the Primary Management Zone, all other units are combined Primary and Secondary Management Zones. Although public property contributes the majority of land, much of it lies outside the Primary Management Zone and thus public draw permits are more limited than other regions. Elk are surveyed regularly, but not in every segment of the population so hunter harvest information is important for monitoring the Lesser Gila herd. Population size estimates are made across all GMUs within the Lesser Gila herd, which is considered stable to slightly increasing.

Population Estimate (2022)	Bull: Cow: Calf	Sustainable Harvest Est.
1,300 – 4,400*	39:100:27	80 – 280 Males
Stable		70 – 280 Females

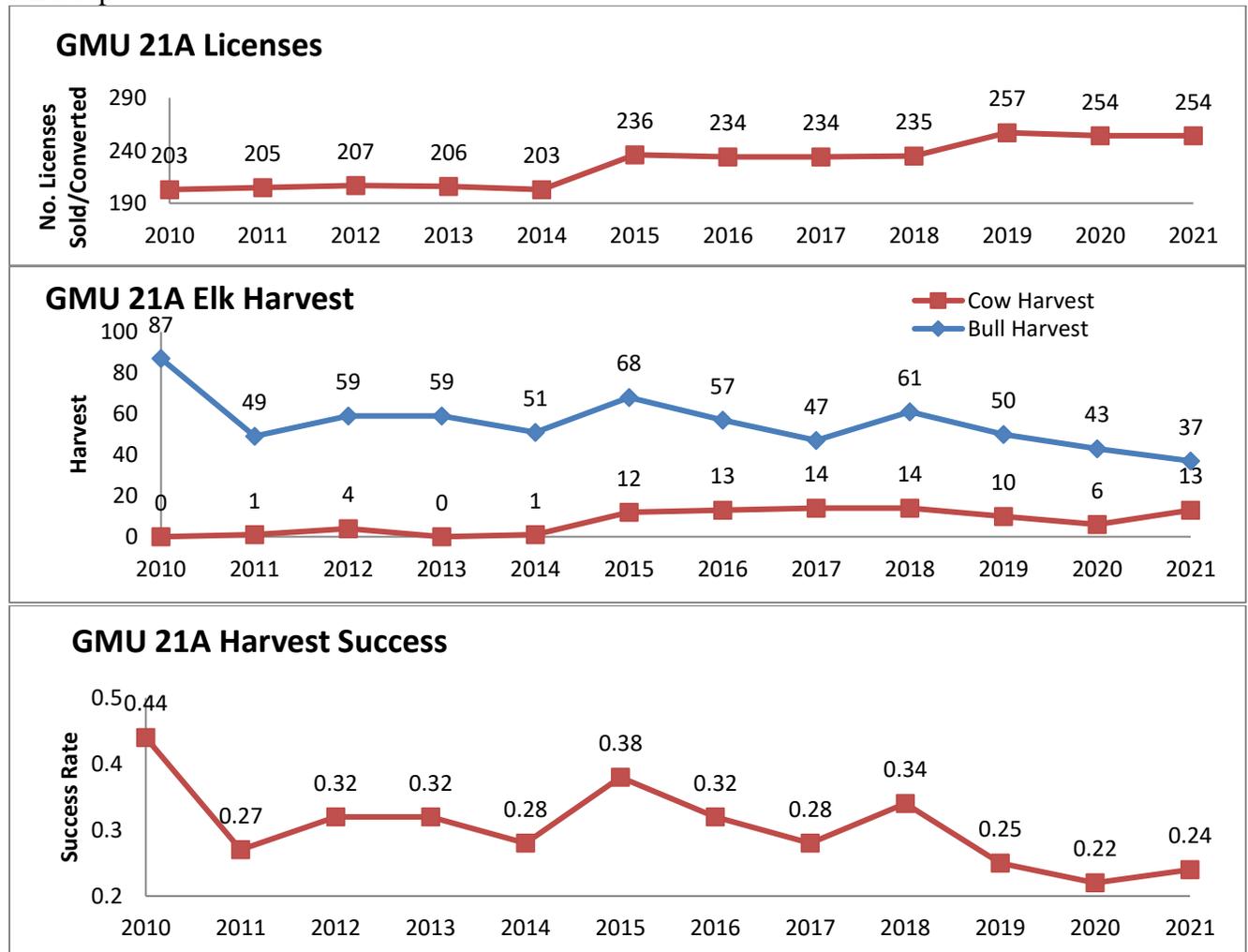
*Note: Elk populations within the Lesser Gila herd unit are estimated at the regional level and population estimates are calculated across GMUs 21A, 21B, 23, and 24.

GMU 21A (part of the Lesser Gila Herd; opportunity management)

Unit Map: [21A](#)

BIOLOGY – Elk in GMU 21A are part of the Lesser Gila herd and population estimates include several GMUs (see regional description). The habitat is dominated by ponderosa pine and scrub oak forests throughout. Portions of this unit, especially within the Aldo Leopold Wilderness area, are extremely rugged. Elk are typically found in lower densities; however, localized groups can be found where resources are plentiful. Much of the southern portion of the unit burned in the 2013 Silver fire, providing early growth forests with plentiful forage during normal precipitation years.

HUNTING – GMU 21A is 98% public land and contains a portion of the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Area. Road access is limited, but Forest Service roads and trailheads provide several starting points. Hunters may have better success using livestock to get into the roadless areas and will need to stay flexible to find mobile concentrations of elk as they will move across the landscape.



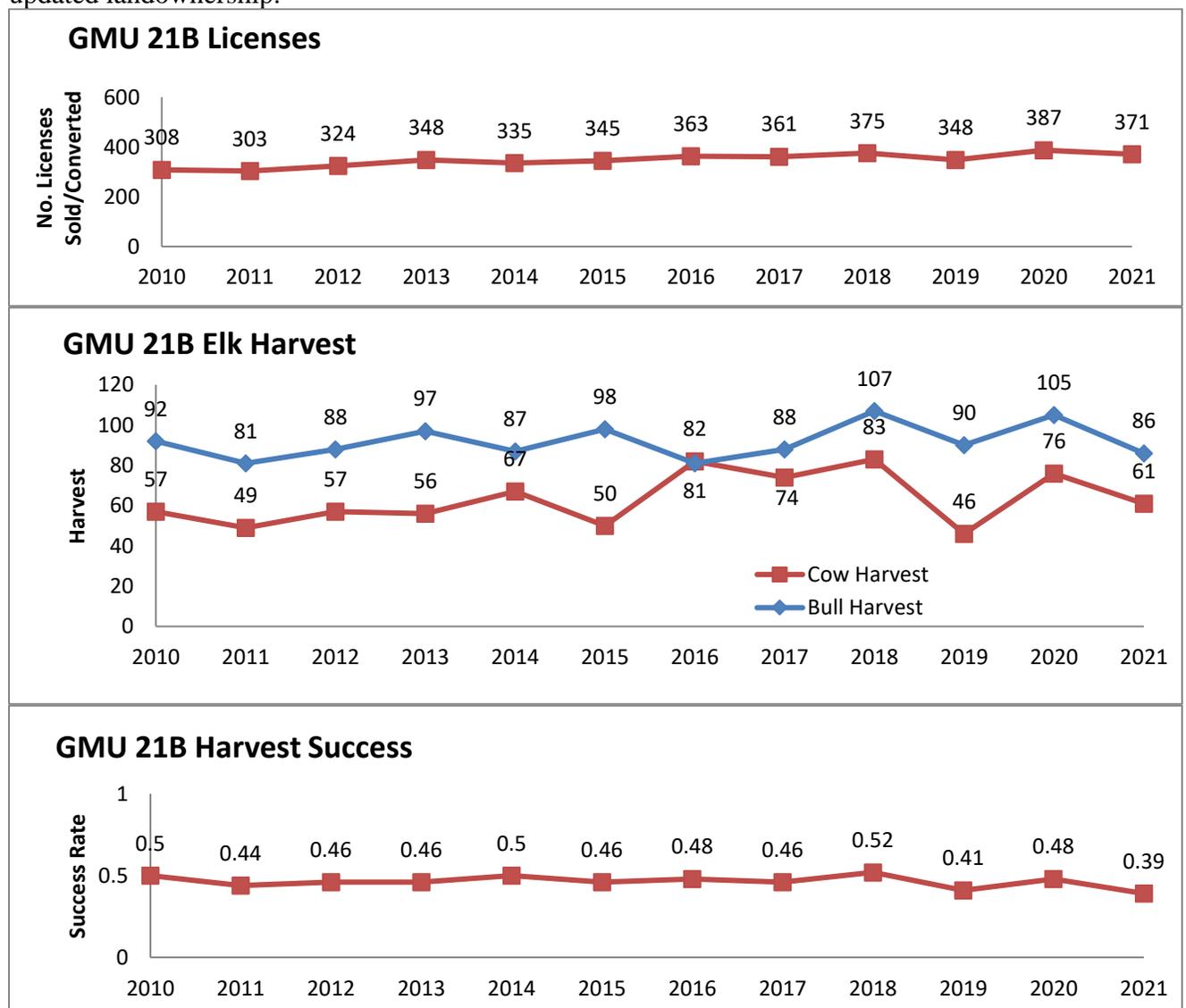
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GMU 21B (part of the Lesser Gila Herd Unit; opportunity management)

Unit Map: [21B](#)

BIOLOGY – Elk in GMU 21B are part of the Lesser Gila herd and population estimates include several GMUs (see regional description). The unit is dominated by arid shrub and grasslands and deserts. Clusters of elk are typically found where precipitation and moisture support localized forage and water resources.

HUNTING – This unit is comprised of 63% public land (BLM and State land only) spread across the landscape in pockets and access is limited. Elk move throughout the unit depending on moisture events and hunting pressure. Good knowledge of the landscape is helpful. Hunters should expect to be familiar with ownership boundaries and carry maps or GPS units with updated landownership.



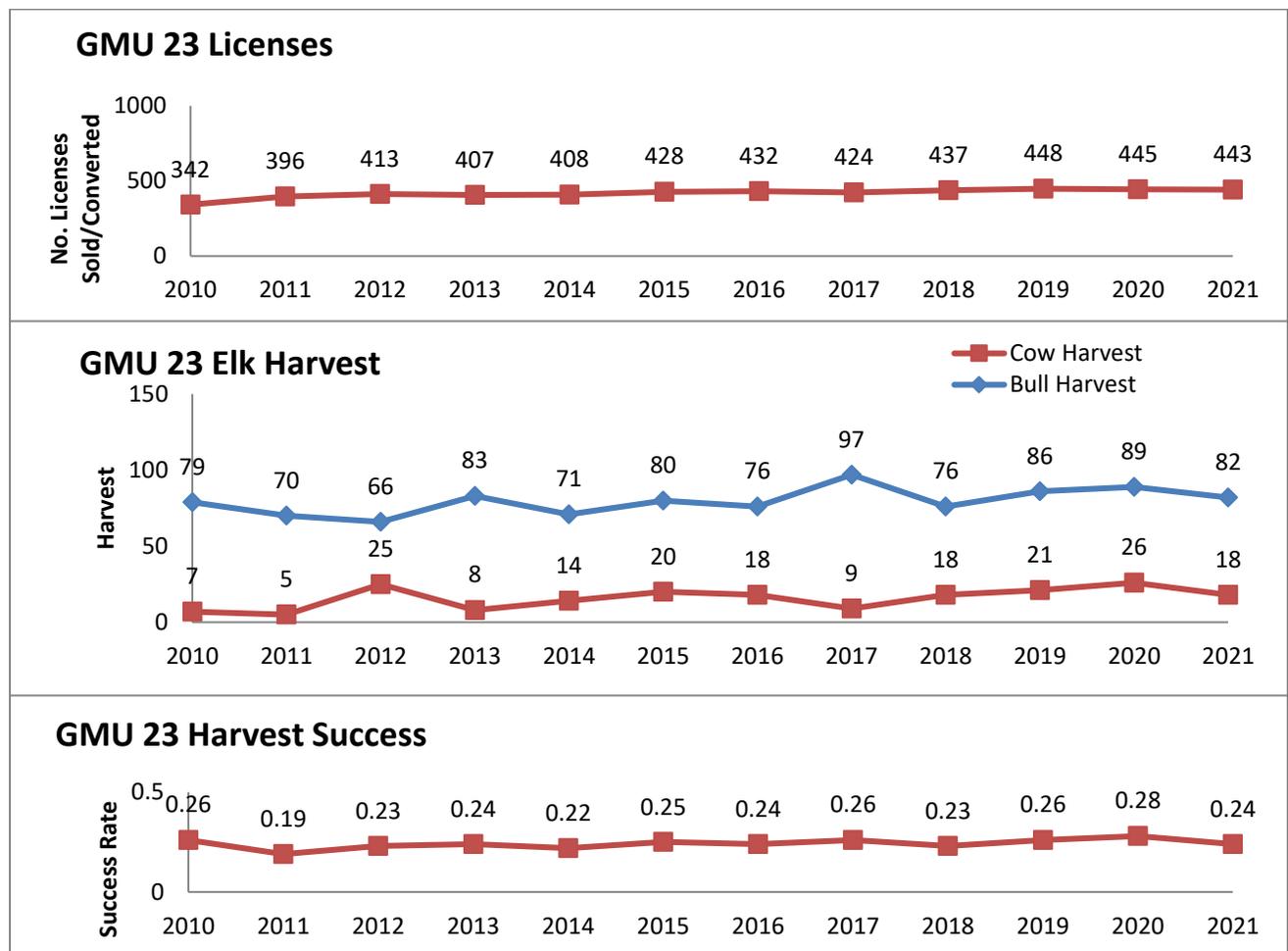
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GMU 23 (part of the Lesser Gila Herd Unit; opportunity management)

Unit Map: [23](#)

BIOLOGY – Elk in GMU 23 are part of the Lesser Gila herd and population estimates include several GMUs (see regional description). Ponderosa pine forests with some grasslands are found on the northern end of this unit while desert habitats and arid shrublands dominate the southern portion. Elk populations are localized. However, elk have expanded in this unit over the past 15 years.

HUNTING – This unit is comprised of 63% public land that can be accessed through the network of Forest Service and BLM roads. The Blue Ridge Wilderness is found in this unit providing an opportunity to get away from roads. Hunters should be flexible and look for elk where rain events have more recently occurred. Elk have been expanding in this unit and there are portions in the south that have potential to hold older age class bulls.



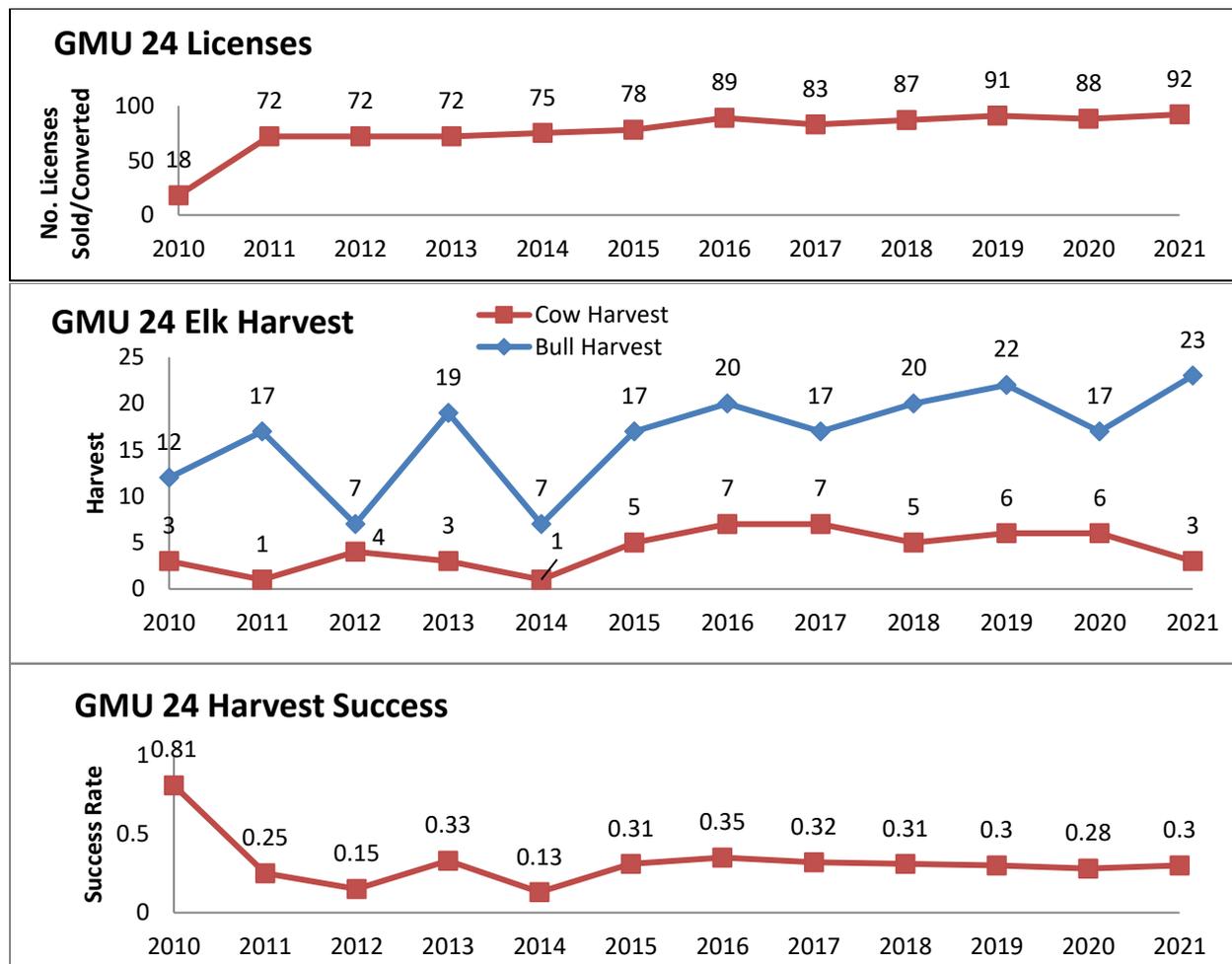
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GMU 24 (part of the Lesser Gila Herd Unit; opportunity management)

Unit Map: [24](#)

BIOLOGY – Elk in GMU 24 are part of the Greater Gila herd and population estimates include several GMUs (see regional description). Ponderosa pine forests with some grasslands are found on the northern end of this unit while desert habitats and arid shrublands dominate the southern portion. Resource availability, primarily driven by precipitation and moisture, dictate locations and movement of elk across the landscape.

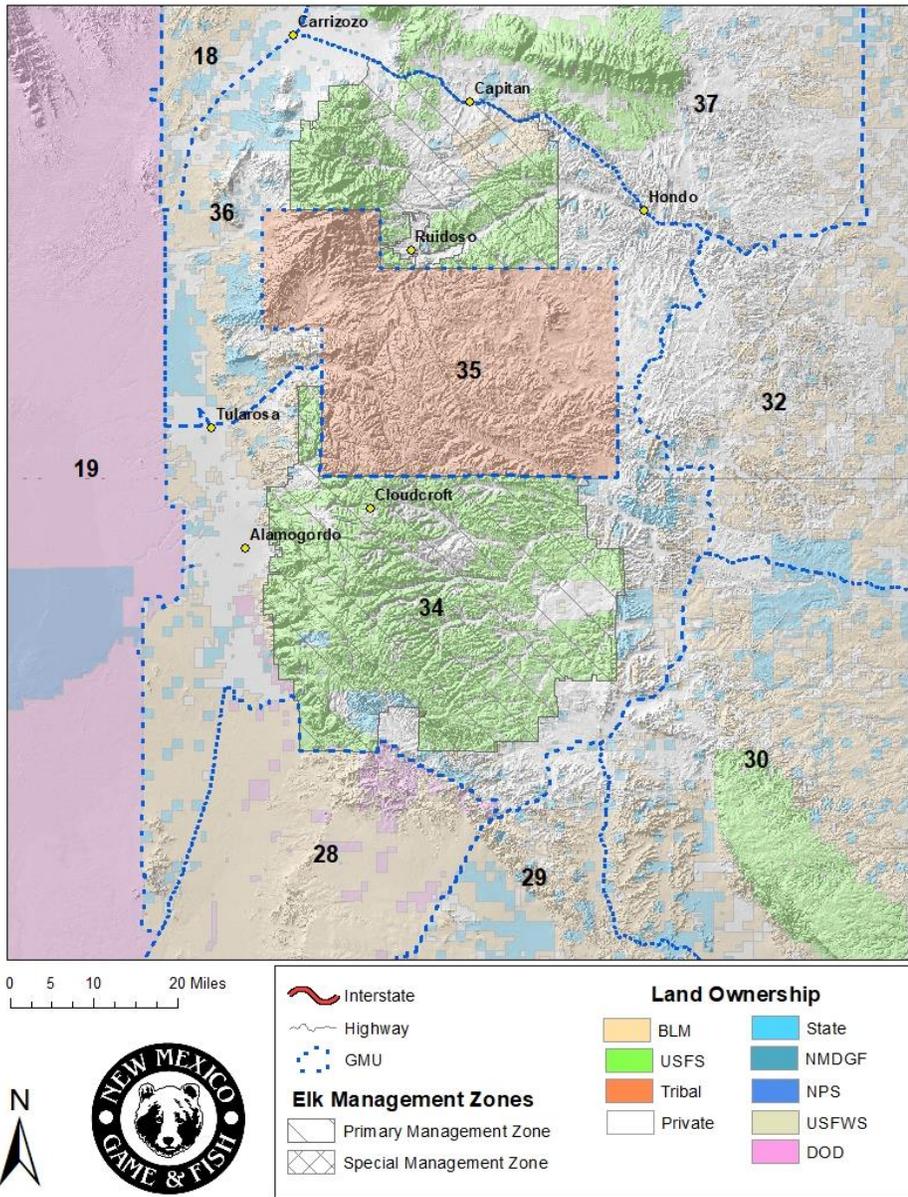
HUNTING – This unit is comprised of 63% public land with good road access. Overall the unit has relatively low elk densities. Elk are generally found in small, local pockets on public land.



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Southeast Region – Sacramento and Ruidoso Herds

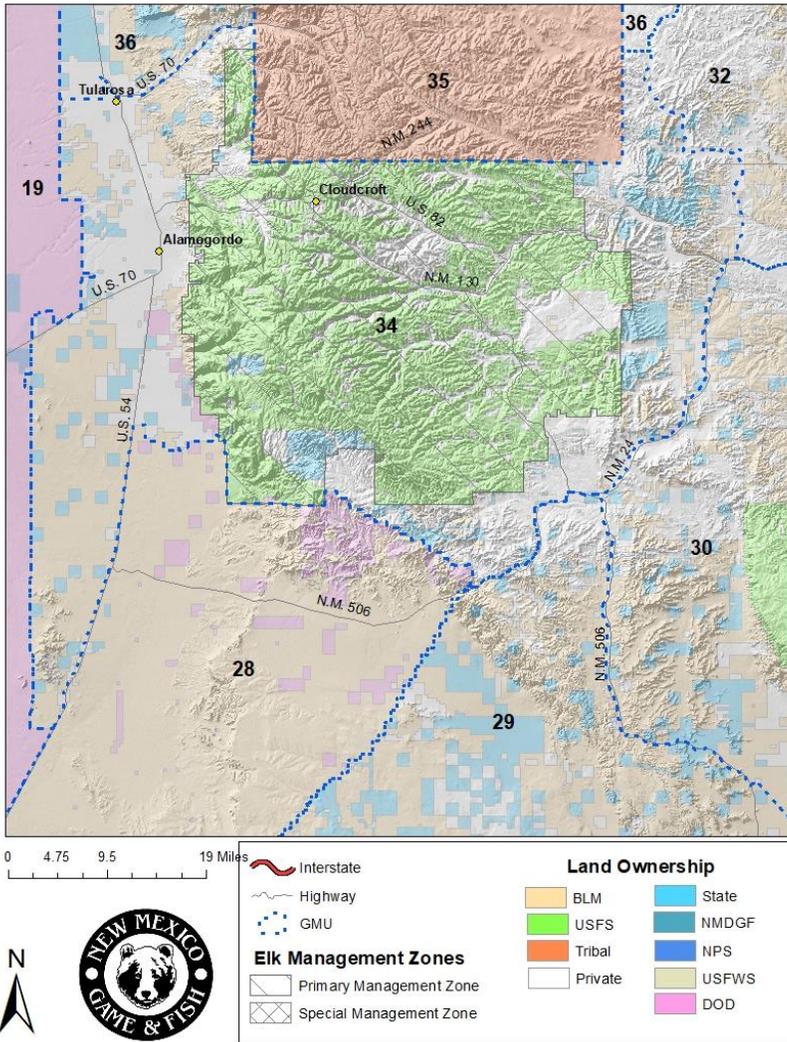
The Southeast Region of New Mexico is a popular destination for both resident and nonresident elk hunters. The popularity of the southeast can be attributed to high harvest success rates and the opportunity to harvest older age class bulls. Although public land draw licenses are available outside GMUs 36 and 34, the majority of elk hunting occurs on the Lincoln National Forest within the PMZ in these two units. Roads on forest service lands provide good access to some quality areas, and if a hunter wants to get further away from people, there are two wilderness areas with large elk populations: the White Mountain Wilderness in GMU 36 and the Capitan Wilderness in GMU 37. The Sacramento and Ruidoso herds consistently have some of the highest bull to cow ratios in the state.



Sacramento Herd (GMU 34)

Opportunity Management

Unit Map: [34](#)



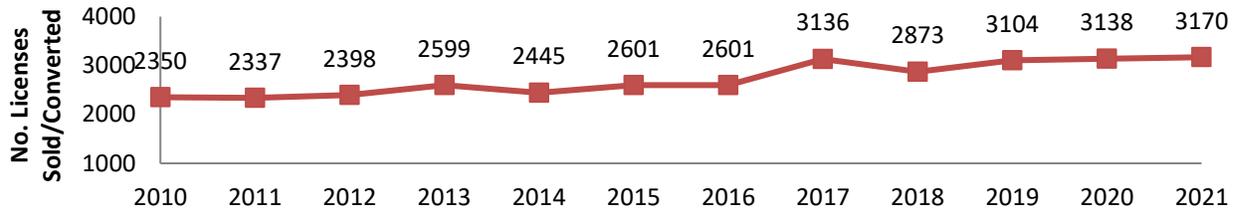
BIOLOGY – GMU 34 is considered a standalone elk herd unit, the Sacramento herd. Most likely the Sacramento herd is part of a larger herd complex that includes the Ruidoso herd (GMU 36) to the north and encompasses Mescalero tribal land in-between. However, since Mescalero tribal lands split these two units, 34 and 36, the Department considers each GMU on its own for purposes of generating population estimates and making management recommendations. Elevations in GMU 34 range from 4,300-9,700 feet and the habitat is creosote/mesquite and pinyon-juniper woodlands in lower elevations with mixed conifer forests in higher elevations. Heavy snowfall in the high elevations will cause elk to move to lower elevations. However, the climate in this region is typically milder than that of the northern mountains and snowfall events aren't always severe enough to spur elk movement during winter months. Elk populations are monitored annually via aerial composition surveys; population sizes are estimated using a combination of survey data and annual

hunter harvest data. The herd is considered to be increasing, despite the higher female harvest in recent years.

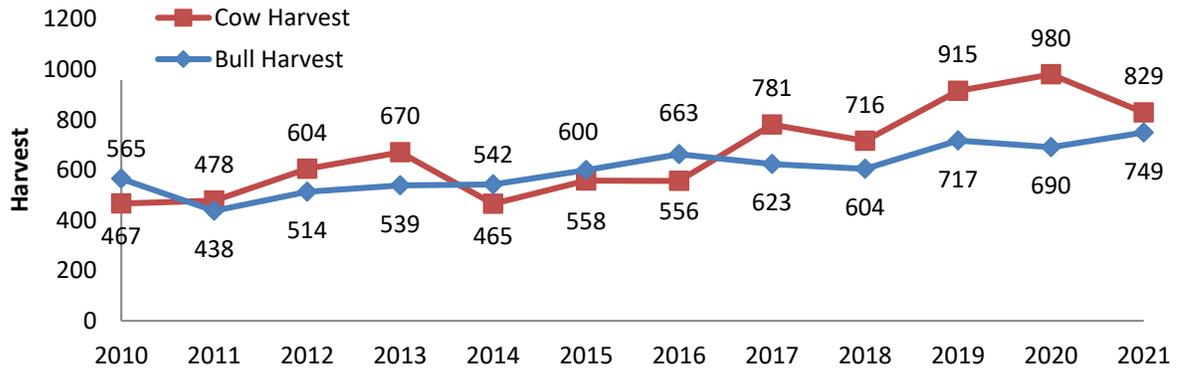
HUNTING – This unit is comprised of 67% public land and road access is excellent throughout. A large portion of the unit falls within the Lincoln National Forest. This unit is managed as an opportunity area and has one of the highest bull to cow ratios in the state. Hunter success in this unit is consistently high with older-age class males taken annually. Hunters should be aware that Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has been detected in this unit and are advised to check the regulations for transporting their elk carcass ([Carcass transport regulations webpage](#)).

Population Estimate (2022)	Bull: Cow: Calf	Sustainable Harvest Est.
7,400 – 8,600	52:100:39	500 – 660 Males
Increasing		610 – 710 Females

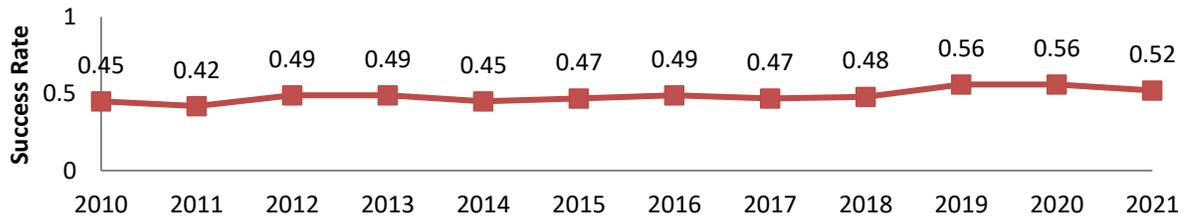
GMU 34 Licenses



GMU 34 Elk Harvest



GMU 34 Harvest Success

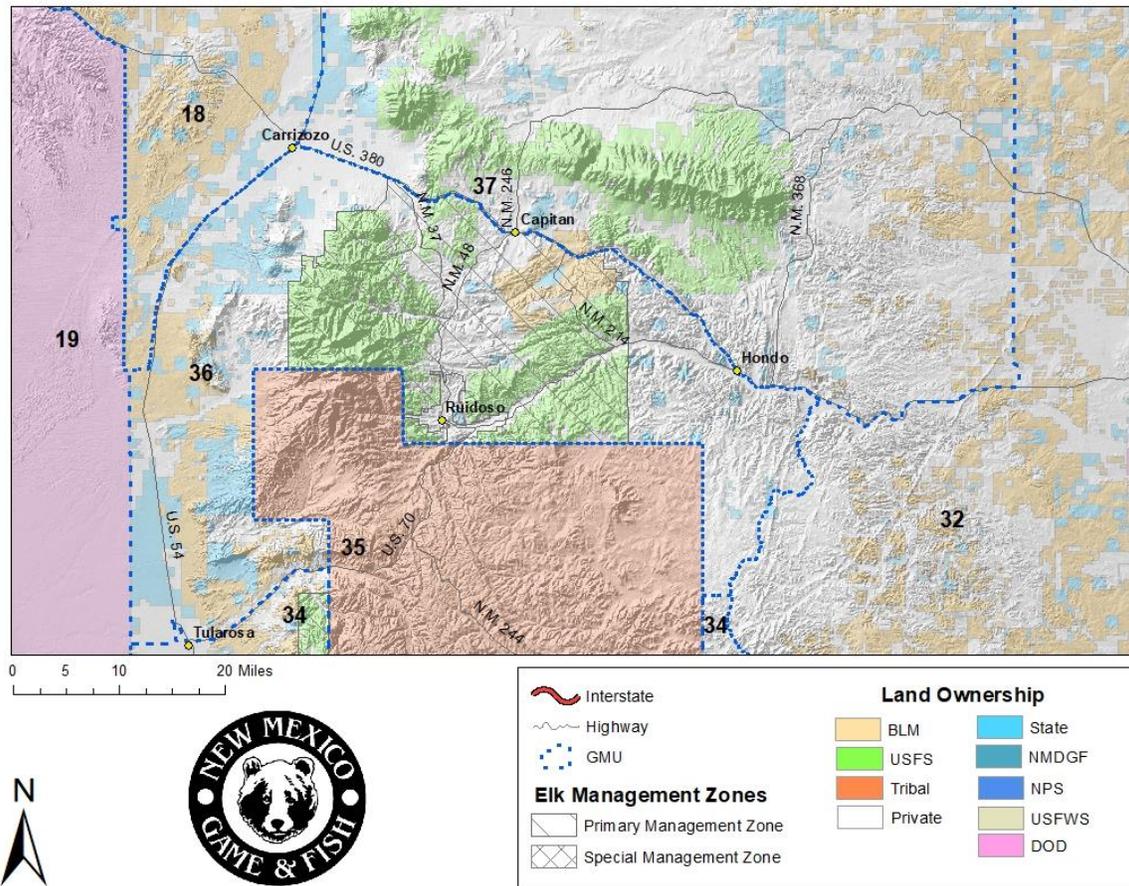


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Ruidoso Herd (GMU 36)

Quality Management

Unit Map: [36](#)

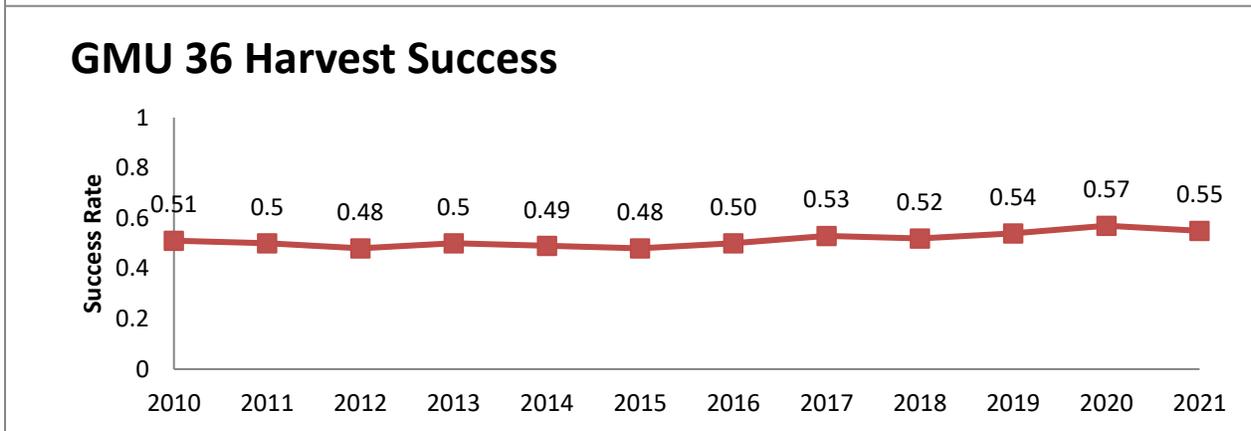
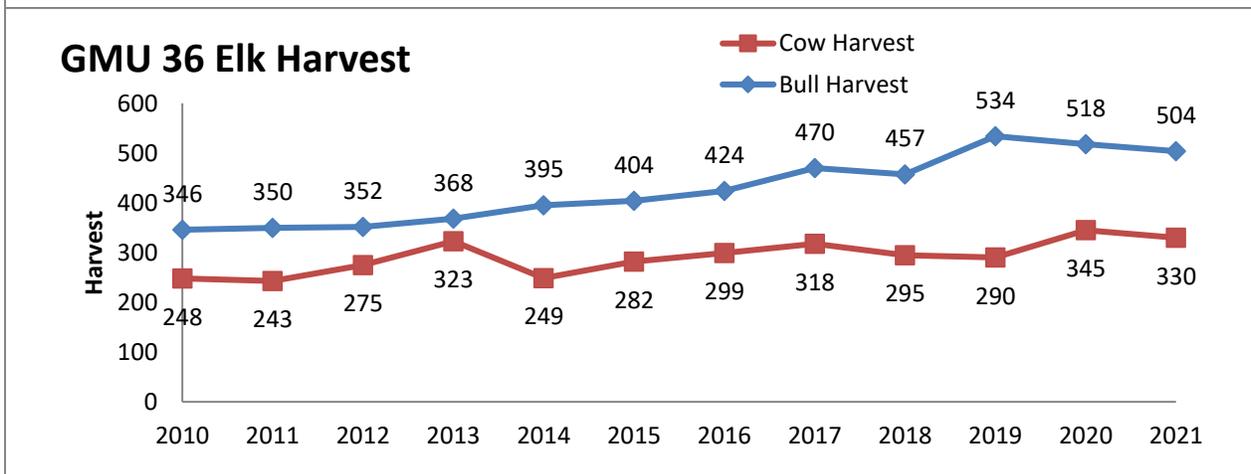
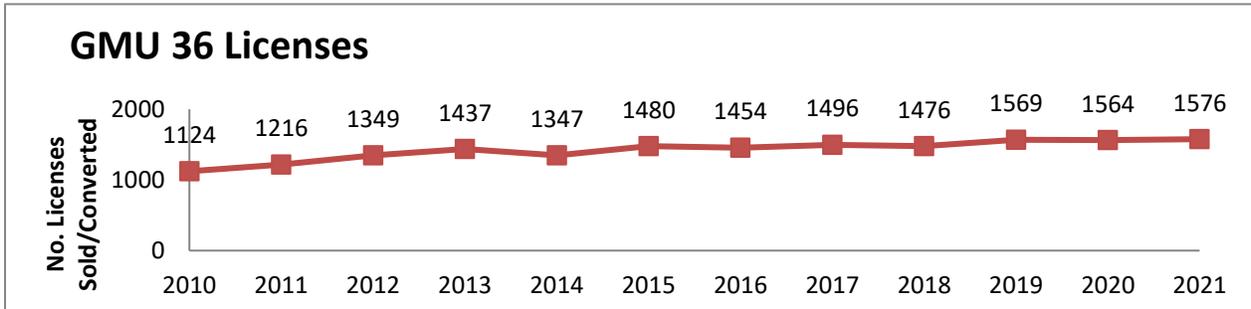


BIOLOGY – GMU 36 is considered a standalone elk herd unit, the Ruidoso herd. Most likely the Ruidoso herd is part of a larger herd complex that includes the Sacramento herd (GMU 34) to the south and encompasses Mescalero tribal land in between. However, since Mescalero tribal lands split these two units, 34 and 36, the Department considers each GMU on its own for purposes of generating population estimates and making management recommendations. Elevations in this unit range from 4,800-10,800 feet and the habitat ranges from pinyon-juniper woodlands in the lower elevations to high elevation oak woodlands and mixed conifer forests. Heavy snowfall in the high elevations will push elk down to lower elevations, but due to a mild climate these snowfalls don't always occur. As such, these elk do not migrate as regularly as some herds in northern New Mexico. The White Mountain Wilderness is located in the unit for those looking to get away from roads. Elk populations are monitored annually via aerial composition surveys; population sizes are estimated using a combination of survey and annual hunter harvest data. The herd is considered to be increasing.

HUNTING – This unit is comprised of 53% public land and road access is good. This unit is managed as a quality area, and success rates are consistently high. This unit has one of the highest bull to cow ratios in the state, and large, older-age class bulls are harvested every year. GMU 36 has some of the highest bull to cow ratios in the state so bull hunters should be able to

observe quite a few males and can be picky about their harvest. Hunter success rates are consistently higher than the state average in this unit.

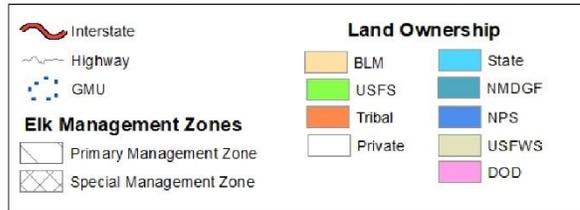
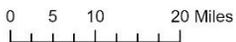
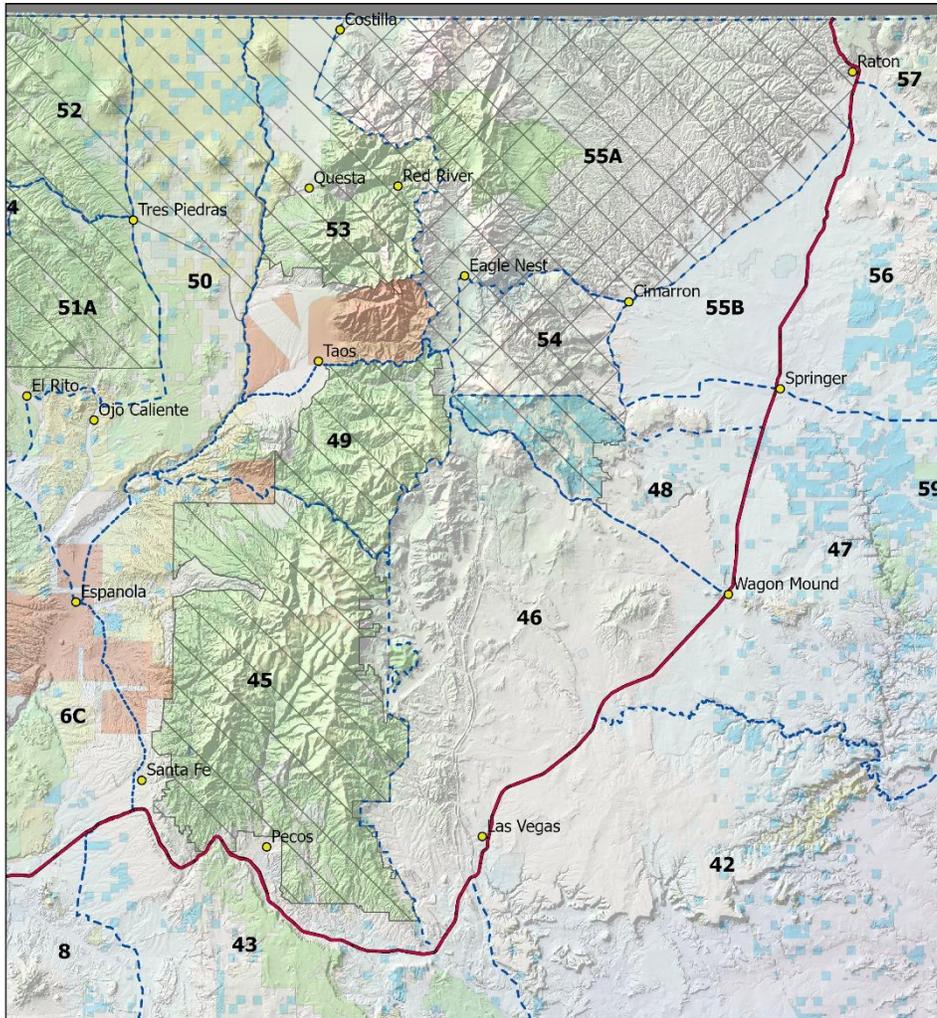
Population Estimate (2022)	Bull:Cow:Calf	Sustainable Harvest Est.
5,400 -8,500	66:100:43	370 – 640 Males
Slightly Increasing		610 – 710 Females



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Northeast Region – Pecos, Whites Peak, and Peñasco Herds

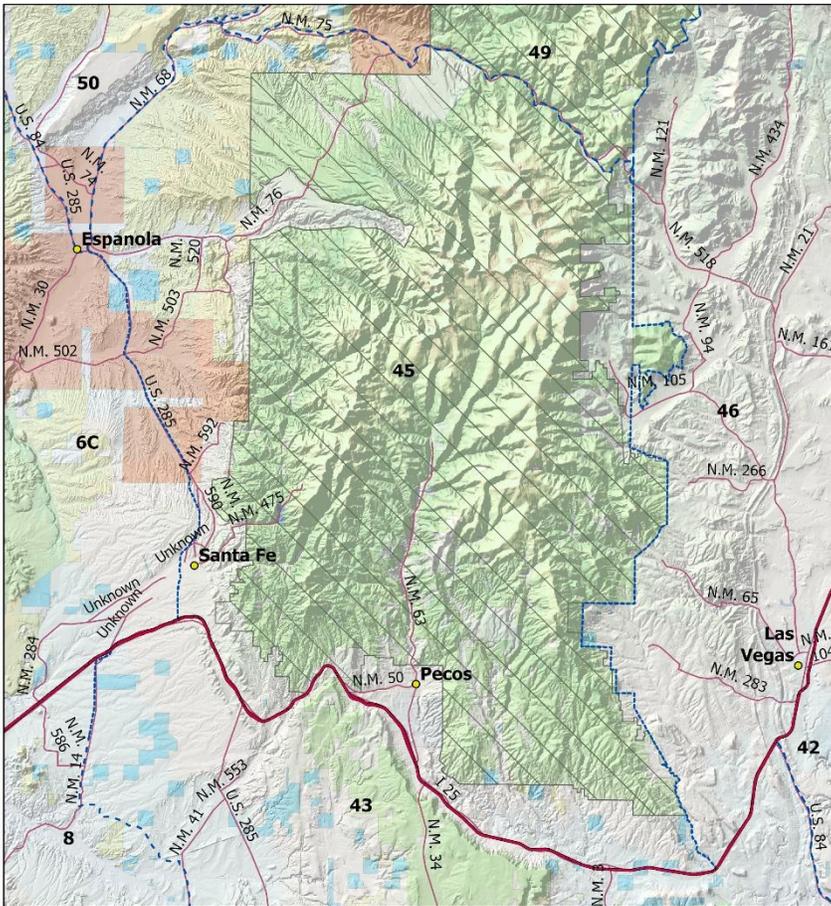
The Northeast Region offers a variety of elk hunting opportunities with habitats ranging from eastern plains to alpine, and it can accommodate each individual's unique hunting style. Elk populations are healthy and most herds are stable to increasing. Habitats range from semi-arid grass and scrubland to sub-alpine forests within high elevation wilderness areas. Much of the hunting opportunities within these herds is offered in predominately public land areas with moderate to good access (with the exception of GMUs in Special Management Zones). Although the Northeast doesn't receive as much attention for producing large antlered elk, those who draw a license stand a good chance at harvesting an elk and some older-age class bulls may be taken.



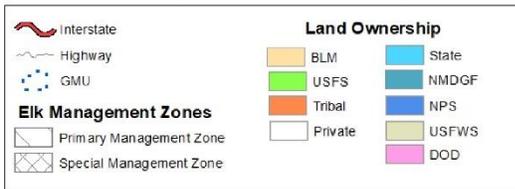
Pecos Herd (GMU 45)

Quality Management

Unit Map: [45](#)



0 2.5 5 10 Miles

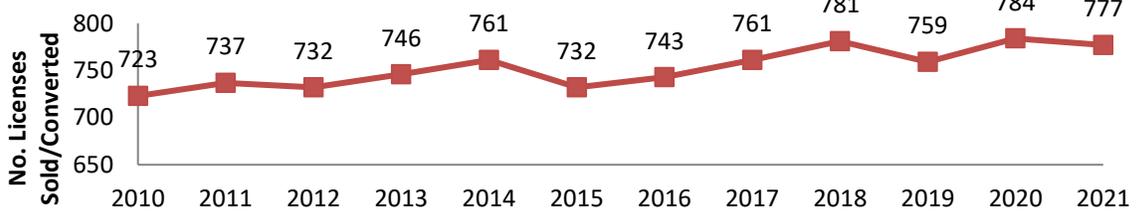


BIOLOGY – GMU 45 is considered a standalone elk herd unit, the Pecos herd. Habitats range from pinyon-juniper woodlands in the lower elevations to high elevation mixed-conifer forests and alpine meadows. Snow accumulation forces elk to migrate annually from the higher elevations to lower elevations in the surrounding regions during winter months. Due to the dense tree cover in most of the unit, aerial surveys are not productive and not flown often. The herd is assessed mostly based on hunter harvest survey data. The Pecos herd is considered stable.

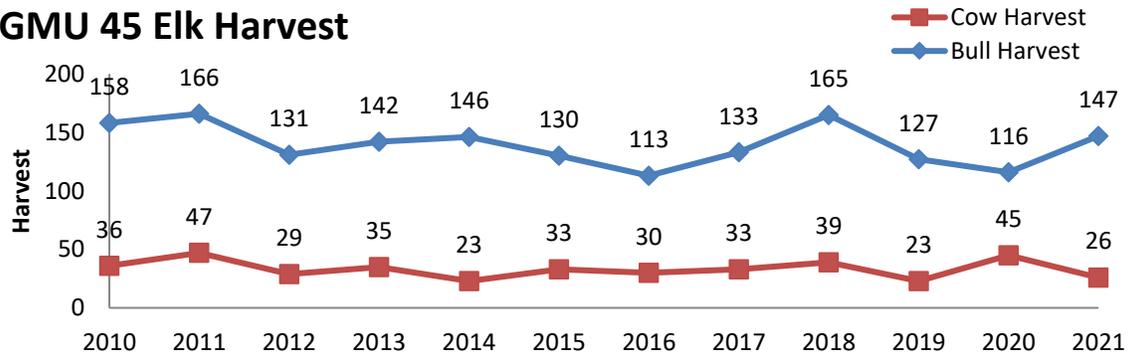
HUNTING – This unit is 74% public land and contains some of the highest peaks in New Mexico. Road access to this unit is good in some places while the Pecos Wilderness Area restricts vehicular access for a large portion of the north half of the unit. This unit has good numbers of elk throughout. However, the rugged and high elevation terrain can make the hunt difficult. Success rates for this herd are average to good.

Population Estimate (2022)	Bull: Cow: Calf	Sustainable Harvest Est.
1,100 – 2,100	35:100:32	80 – 150 Males
Stable		90 – 160 Females

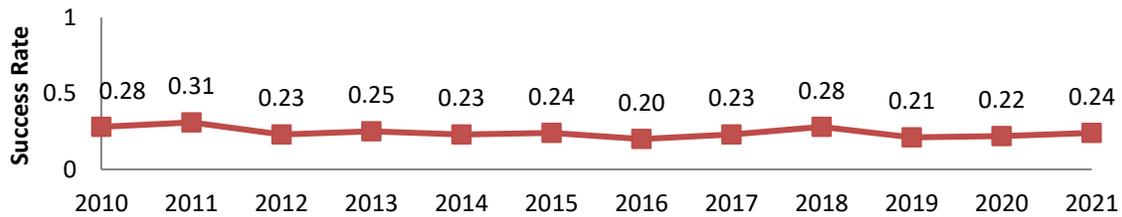
GMU 45 Licenses



GMU 45 Elk Harvest



GMU 45 Harvest Success

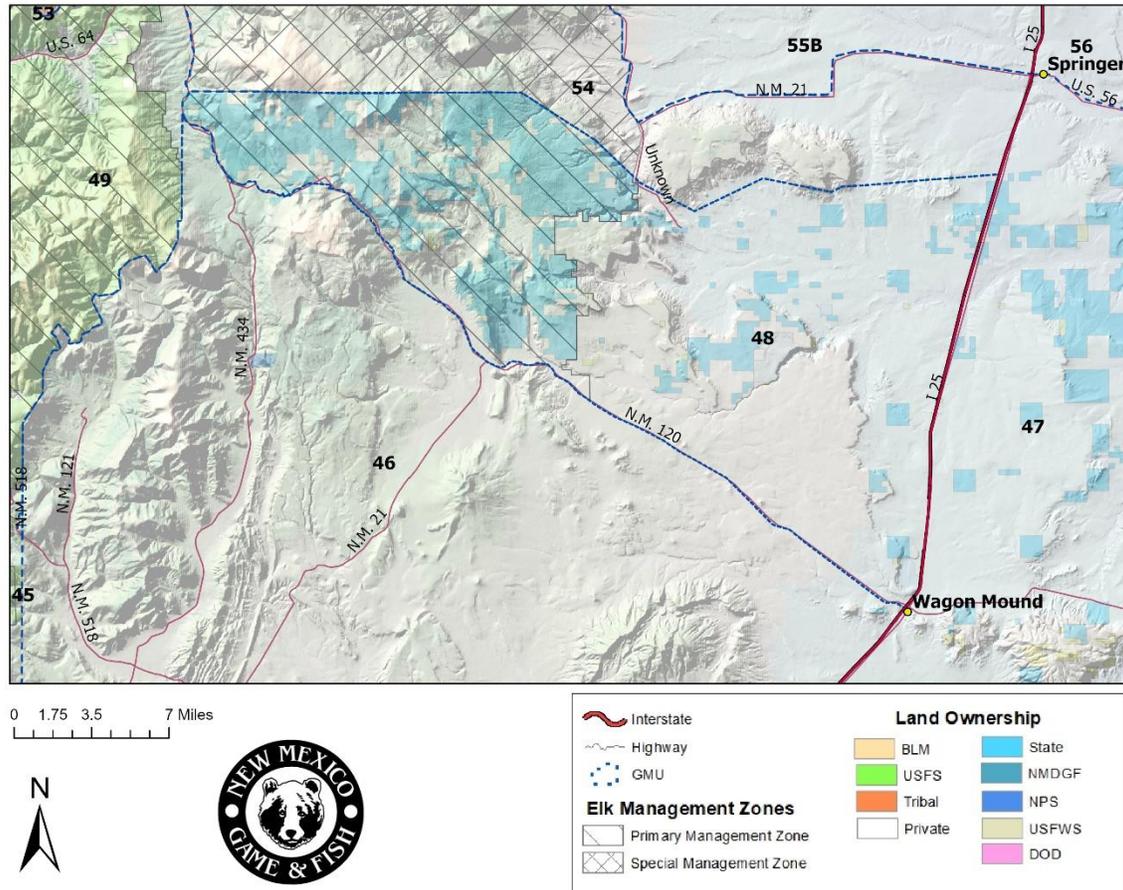


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Whites Peak Herd (GMU 48)

Opportunity Management

Unit Map: [48](#)

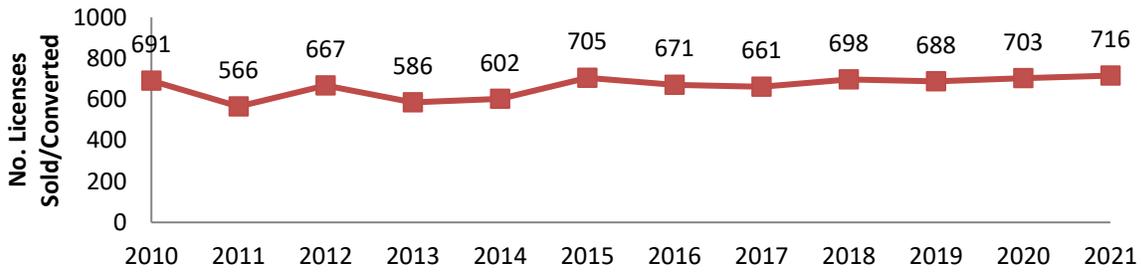


BIOLOGY – GMU 48 is considered a standalone elk herd unit, the Whites Peak herd. The habitat ranges from plains and grasslands to mixed conifer forests at the higher elevations of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Topography is varied and includes both steep cliff-lined drainages, rolling foothills, and flat open country. Elk are concentrated on the western side of the unit. The herd is not surveyed regularly but hunter harvest metrics indicate the population is stable.

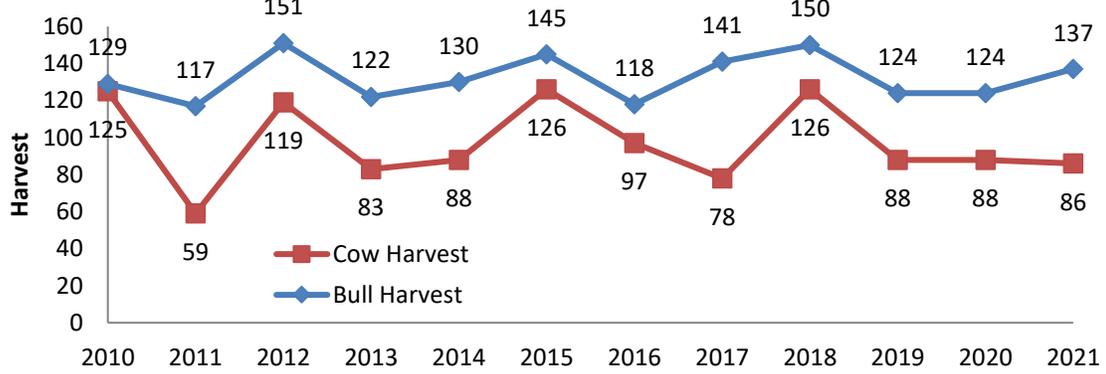
HUNTING – This unit is 29% public land and access can be difficult due to the checkerboarded nature of the private land and NM State Trust Land. Although some State Trust Lands are accessible for hunting, these designations may change. For more information regarding specific State Trust Lands, visit the [State Land Office webpage](#). Success rates hover near average.

Population Estimate (2022)	Bull:Cow:Calf	Sustainable Harvest Est.
1,200 – 2,000	35:100:32	70 – 140 Males
Stable		90 – 150 Females

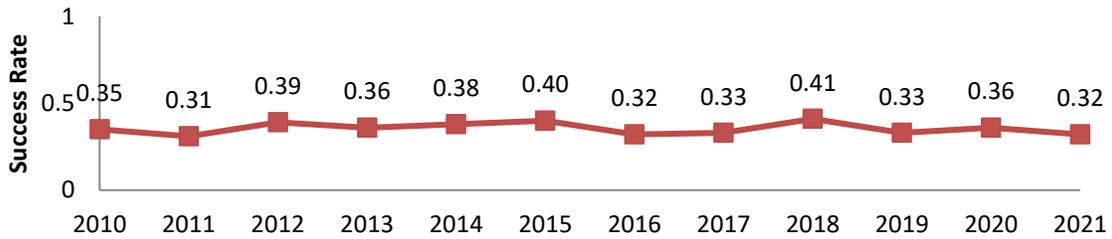
GMU 48 Licenses



GMU 48 Elk Harvest



GMU 48 Harvest Success

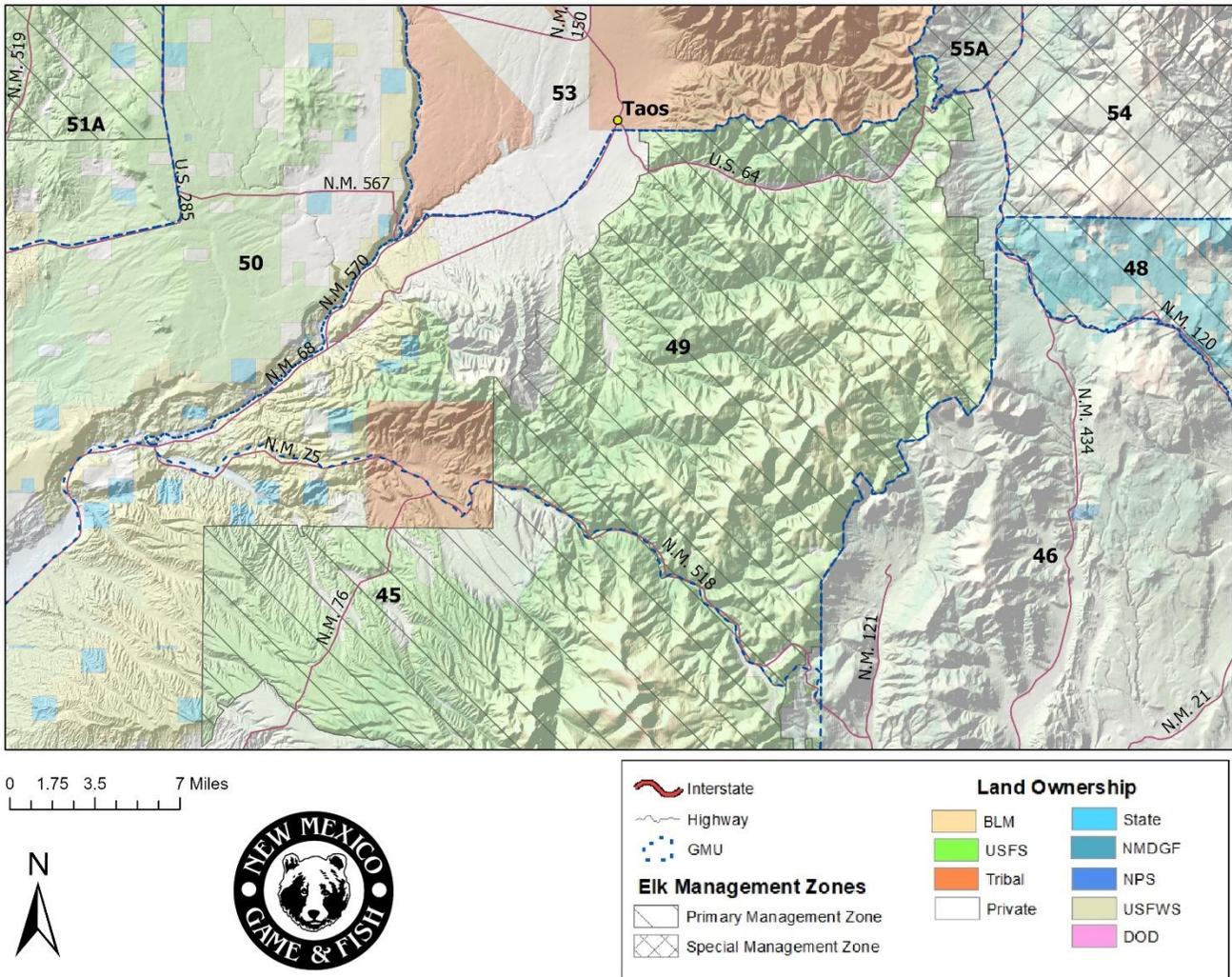


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Peñasco Herd (GMU 49)

Opportunity Management

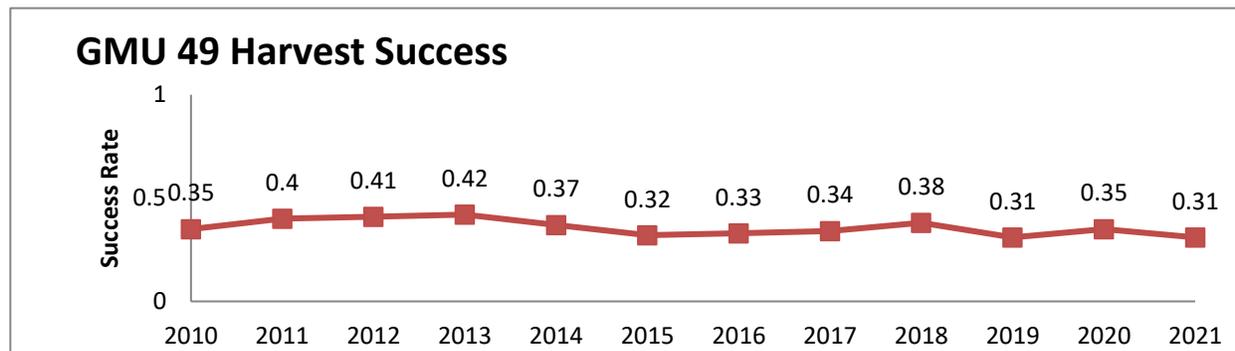
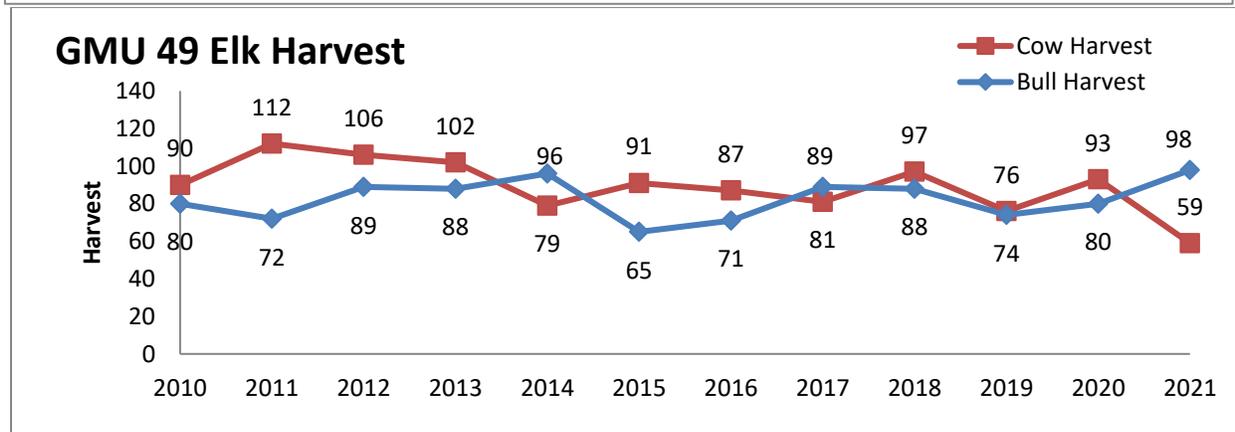
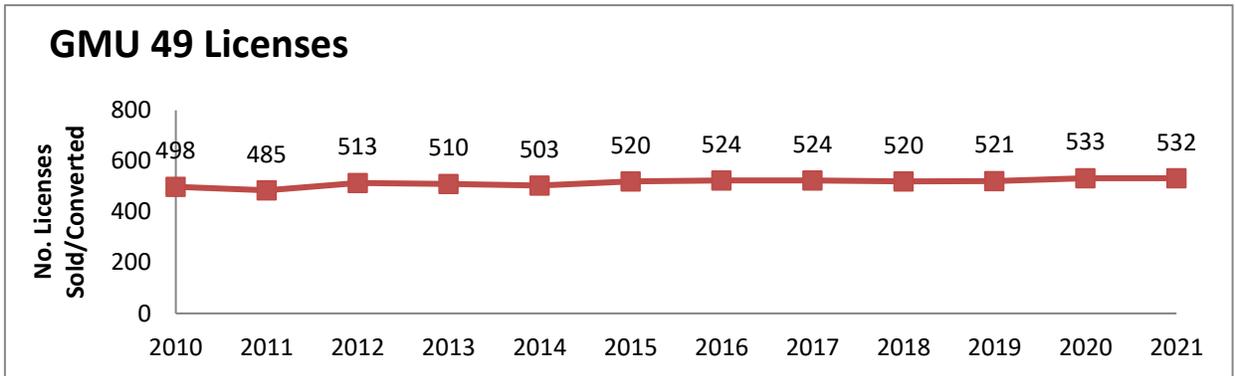
Unit Map: [49](#)



BIOLOGY – GMU 49 is considered a standalone elk herd unit, the Peñasco herd. Similar to other units in the Sangre de Cristo Mountain range, this unit contains some high elevation habitat. Habitat ranges from pinyon-juniper woodlands in the lower elevations to high elevation mixed conifer forests and upper montane forest habitats. Seasonal movements between high elevation summer range and lower elevation winter range occurs during heavy snow months. The herd is monitored using hunter harvest data along with periodic aerial surveys, and is considered stable to slightly increasing.

HUNTING – This unit is 78% public land, and road access is good throughout Carson National Forest. The majority of this hunt unit is comprised of National Forest lands with mountainous topography, providing a variety of elk habitats and escape terrain. Herd productivity in this unit is stable with hunter satisfaction ratings above the state average.

Population Estimate (2022)	Bull:Cow:Calf	Sustainable Harvest Est.
1,100 – 2,400	35:100:32	70 – 200 Males
Stable to Slightly Increasing		40 – 100 Females

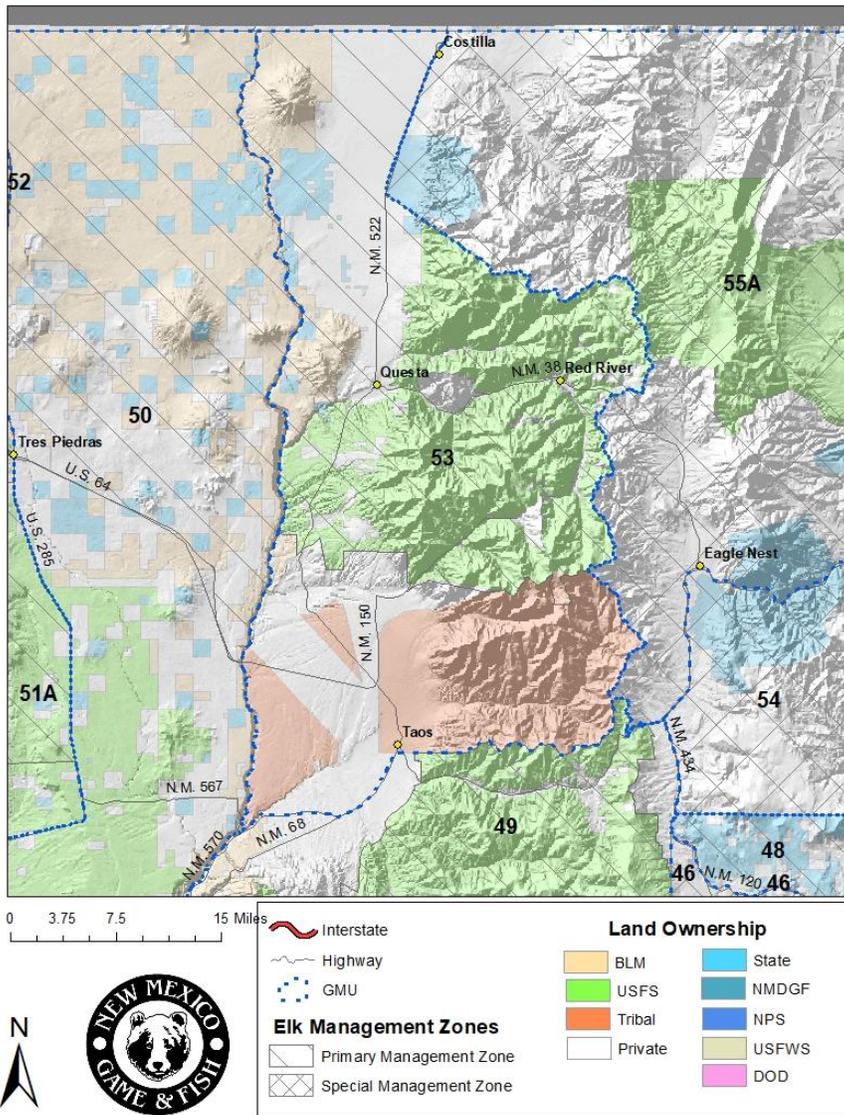


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Ute/Midnight/San Cristobal Herd (GMU 53)

Opportunity Management

Unit Map: [53](#)

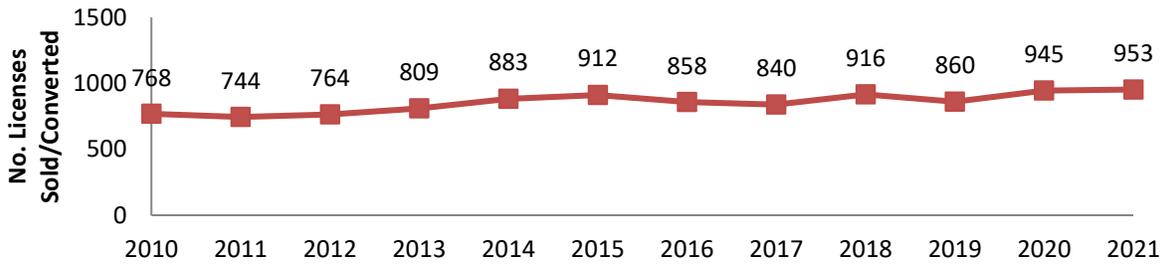


BIOLOGY – GMU 53 is considered a standalone elk herd unit, the Ute/Midnight/San Cristobal herd. The habitat ranges from scrub oak at the lower elevations to high elevation mixed conifer forests and alpine meadows. Elk behavior and habitat use in this unit are influenced by annual snowfall with elk moving to lower elevations when snow accumulates. The herd is monitored annually and population size estimates are generated using aerial surveys and hunter harvest data. The observed calf:cow ratio is lower than the statewide average, but the herd is still considered to be stable.

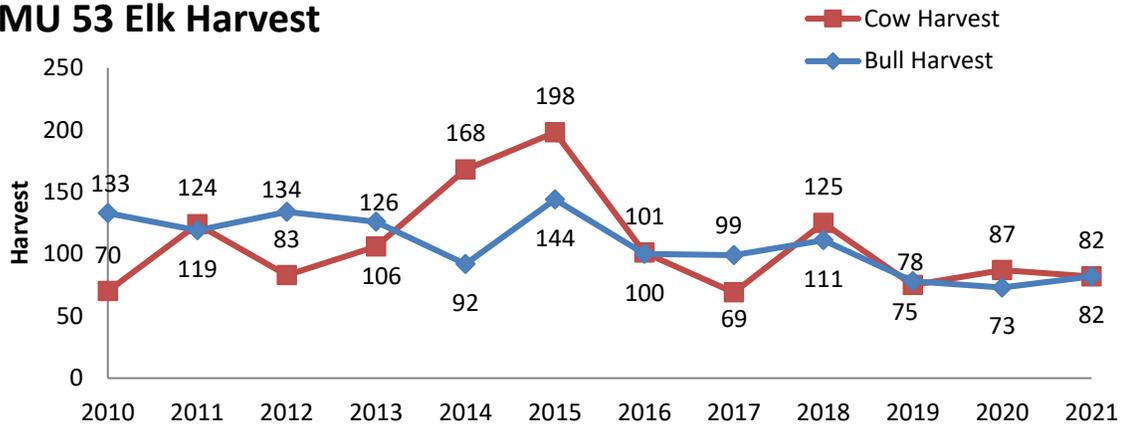
HUNTING – This unit is 47% public land with good road access. There are also 3 roadless wilderness areas (the Columbine-Hondo, Latir Peak, and Wheeler Peak Wilderness areas) for hunters wanting to get away from crowds. Due to the steep nature of the terrain, the hunt can be physically taxing. Hunters should consider hiking away from the roads for the best chance at encountering elk and having a successful hunt.

Population Estimate (2022)	Bull: Cow: Calf	Sustainable Harvest Est.
1,400 – 2,900	34:100:24	70 – 160 Males
Stable		90 – 180 Females

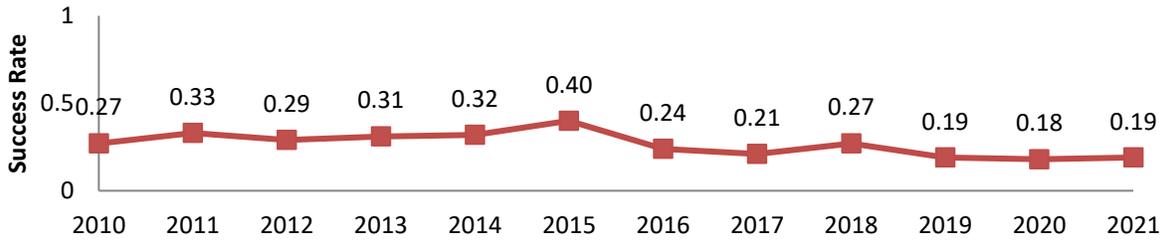
GMU 53 Licenses



GMU 53 Elk Harvest



GMU 53 Harvest Success



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Secondary Management Zone GMUs

The following GMUs are designated as Secondary Management Zones (SMZ) where the Department does not designate specific management objectives (i.e. opportunity or quality management). In these areas hunters can find opportunities through the public draw or through private land owner authorizations. For private land hunts, elk licenses are available over the counter; however, hunters must obtain and present an active SMZ ranch code to purchase a license and must also have written permission to hunt on that land. Private land elk licenses are only valid on private, deeded lands within the SMZ where hunters have been given written permission to hunt. Some GMUs throughout the state combine both Primary and Secondary Management Zones and hunters are advised to be familiar with management zone boundaries and property boundaries.

Elk populations and herd productivity are not surveyed regularly by the Department in Secondary Management Zones. Populations in these regions are monitored through mandatory harvest reporting, which provide data used in population models to estimate population sizes.

GMU 14

Unit Map: [14](#)

BIOLOGY/HUNTING – This unit opened to elk hunting for in 2019 and public opportunities are found in the Forest Service land in the Manzano Mountains. A network of Forest Service roads provides access. This unit is dominated by grass and shrublands at the lower elevations to mixed conifer forests at high elevations in the mountains. The elk population has been increasing in recent years but there is limited data on elk densities.

GMU 18

Unit Map: [18](#)

BIOLOGY/HUNTING – This unit is comprised of 57% public land that can be accessed through a network of BLM roads. This unit is dominated by pinyon-juniper woodlands and arid grasslands. Elk densities are low in this unit and found in localized pockets.

GMU 28

Unit Map: [28](#)

BIOLOGY/HUNTING – This unit is located on McGregor Range, a tract of BLM land that is managed by the military. There are additional requirements for hunting on McGregor Range, so hunters should be familiar with these rules. Additionally, hunt dates are subject to change based on military operations and hunters applying for this unit should be flexible to accommodate last minute changes. Pinyon-juniper woodlands dominate this unit and success rates are very high. Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has been detected in this unit; hunters should check the requirements for transporting an elk carcass from this unit ([Carcass transport regulations webpage](#)).

GMU 29/30

Unit Map: [29](#), [30](#)

BIOLOGY/HUNTING – This unit is 75% public land which can be accessed through the Forest Service and BLM road system. The highest elk densities in this unit are in the Guadalupe Mountains which is characterized by pinyon-juniper woodlands. Success rates are high in this unit and some older age class bulls are harvested every year.

GMU 37

Unit Map: [37](#)

BIOLOGY/HUNTING – This unit is comprised of 39% public land with good road access. The Capitan Mountain Wilderness is an area with options for roadless hunting. Elevations in this unit range from 6,000-9,500 feet and the habitats range from pinyon-juniper woodlands in the lower elevations to high elevation mixed conifer forests. This unit has consistently high success rates and produces some older-age class bulls.

GMU 38

Unit Map: [38](#)

BIOLOGY/HUNTING – This unit is 27% public land with very good road access to the available public land. Habitats range from pinyon-juniper woodlands in the lower elevations to mixed conifer forests in the Gallinas Mountains. Elk densities and success rates are moderate in this unit. Hunters who get away from roads will have a better chance at encountering elk.

GMUs 39, 42, 47, 56, 57, 58 and 59

Unit Maps: [39](#), [42](#), [47](#), [56](#), [57](#), [58](#), [59](#)

BIOLOGY/HUNTING – These units are dominated by private land with State Land Office properties checkerboarded throughout. Due to the checkerboarded nature, finding access points can be difficult and hunters should be familiar with landownership. A good GPS or map is recommended. Not all roads are open to the public, so hunters should identify which are county roads open to the public and which are private. This information can be found by contacting the counties. These units consist of large swaths of grassland broken by volcanic cones, rivers, canyons and arroyos. Elk can be found throughout these units, but hunters will have to scout and hunt hard to find them in areas accessible to public license holders. The Sabinoso Wilderness Area in GMU 42 provides a large area of contiguous public land to hunt. Hunters experience average to good success in many of these units.

GMU 46

Unit Map: [46](#)

BIOLOGY/HUNTING – Elk are found in good numbers throughout this unit, but the GMU is almost entirely private land and written permission must be obtained to hunt on private lands. Hunters must acquire an authorization number, hunt code, and ranch number from a landowner

participating in the E-PLUS program. Habitats range from pinyon-juniper woodland in the lower elevations to high elevation aspen and mixed conifer forests.

GMU 55B

Unit Map: [55B](#)

BIOLOGY/HUNTING – This hunt unit is almost exclusively private land with licenses issued through the E-PLUS system. If hunting elk on private land, hunters should consult the [E-PLUS webpage](#) for current requirements. Habitat in this unit is primarily low elevation grassland, irrigated cropland, and riparian corridors.

Special Management Zone GMUs

The following GMUs (or segments) are in Special Management Zones. These GMUs contain quality elk habitat, but a large proportion of the landscape is privately owned. For this reason, the Primary and Secondary Management Zone designations cannot be applied as in other areas with a higher proportion of public land. Authorizations within the Special Management Zone are determined on a ranch-by-ranch basis through a negotiation between the landowner and appropriate local department staff. Private landowners are issued private land elk authorizations for deeded acres enrolled in the E-PLUS program. All authorizations issued within the Special Management Zone are ranch-only and transferrable to other private lands within the same GMU and management zone with written permission from the landowner. A list of participating landowners and their contact information is available at the Department's [private lands hunting webpage](#).

Elk populations are not surveyed by the Department in some Special Management Zones. When aerial survey data is unavailable the Department monitors populations through mandatory harvest reporting.

GMU 54

Unit Map: [54](#)

BIOLOGY/HUNTING – This unit is largely private land with one Wildlife Management Area, the Colin Neblett WMA. If hunting on private land, hunters should consult the [E-PLUS webpage](#) for current requirements. A list of participating landowners and their contact information is available at the Department's [private lands hunting webpage](#). The Colin Neblett Wildlife Management Area offers public draw hunts, but only to New Mexico residents. Habitats range from pinyon-juniper woodland in the lower elevations to high elevation mixed conifer forests. Access to the Colin Neblett is limited and hunters should be prepared to hike in steep terrain.

GMU 55A

Unit Map: [55A](#)

BIOLOGY/HUNTING – The majority of GMU 55A is private but some public hunting opportunities are available through the draw on several Wildlife Management Areas (Urraca WMA, Elliott Barker WMA, Colin Neblett WMA) and on the Valle Vidal unit of the Carson National Forest. Public hunters should remember that WMAs are open to hunting for New Mexico residents only. Elk hunting on Valle Vidal Unit of the Carson National Forest is offered through the draw and is designated as a ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ license. These licenses are highly coveted. Mature bull hunters lucky enough to draw the 55A Valle Vidal license have the opportunity to pursue older-age class bulls and success rates for this hunt are high.

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HELPFUL LINKS

For more information on Federally owned (public) property

Bureau of Land Management
<https://www.blm.gov/node/7050>

U.S. Forest Service
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/r3>

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wildlife Refuge System
<https://www.fws.gov/refuges/refugelocatomaps/NewMexico.html>

National Park Service (Valles Caldera National Preserve)
<https://www.nps.gov/vall/planyourvisit/need-to-know.htm>

For more information on State owned lands

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish Wildlife Management Areas
<http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/conservation/state-game-commission-lands/>

New Mexico State Land Office
<https://www.nmstatelands.org/resources/recreational-access/hunting-access-information/>

For more information on Privately owned lands

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
<https://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/hunting/maps/eplus/>