

Making a Difference for Wildlife

Hundreds of local conservation projects are undertaken annually by SCI Chapters. They are reinforced by many notable conservation initiatives funded by the SCI Foundation.



Colorado Buck Survival Study
Uncompahgre Plateau, Colorado
Total Funds: \$10,000

Interestingly, a similar decline has been observed in the nearby Unit 62 area, where the mule deer population isn't managed as conservatively.

IN AN EFFORT to reverse the decline of Colorado's mule deer populations, the state's Division of Wildlife has limited the number of mule deer buck hunting licenses. However, in Unit 61 on the Uncompahgre Plateau near Montrose, the buck/doe ratio has continued to decline despite a 90 percent license reduction since 1992.

Research on factors driving deer populations usually focuses on does and fawns. The assumptions are that natural mortality rates are the same for both sexes and hunter harvest is the primary mortality cause of post-fawn bucks. But evidence from Unit 62 is challenging these assumptions for the Uncompahgre Plateau herds.

In 1999, the DOW's Bruce Watkins began a five-year study to determine Unit 61 and 62 buck survival factors. With a grant from *SCI Western Colorado*, buck fawns are being helicopter net-gunned and fitted with solar-powered ear tag transmitters. Information also is being acquired from sportsmen with buck licenses.

It is hoped that sources of differential mortality for bucks may be identified by comparison to similar data collected for does. Possible factors include decreased winter survival due to reduced body condition following the rut, or increased susceptibility to predators from solitary lifestyles.

According to Watkins, "This is an experiment that the gift from SCI has allowed us to try."

