

**Idaho
Department of
Fish and Game
Mule Deer Initiative
Action Plan**



2010 Update

Introduction

The mule deer is an icon of the state of Idaho and the West. Mule deer populations over their entire range have suffered declining populations over the past two decades. Idaho's Mule Deer Initiative (MDI) was developed to begin to help mule deer populations recover, find ways to enhance mule deer habitat, increase public knowledge of mule deer biology and management and to eventually restore and maintain healthy mule deer populations in Idaho.

The MDI has three basic goals: 1) increase mule deer populations, 2) increase mule deer hunter satisfaction, and 3) protect and improve mule deer habitat. In order to meet these goals Idaho Department of Fish and Game (Department) has developed an action plan that addresses the seven key elements (action items) currently affecting mule deer and public perception; habitat, populations, predation, enforcement, access, communications/public involvement, and technical assistance. This action plan is the guiding document to focus Department efforts to achieve the goals of the MDI.

Guiding Principles:

The MDI exists because mule deer are important to Idaho hunters, all Idahoans, and to the West.

Mule deer are a public resource and a keystone species of western open spaces.

The MDI was the result of the public asking the Department to proactively help mule deer populations.

The MDI is an adaptive program that is constantly changing to maximize our resources and knowledge.

The MDI is project-based program. It is about making things happen on the ground. Research that is action-based, answering questions that provide managers insight into improving management actions to benefit mule deer is also important.

The MDI primarily concentrates funding and habitat projects within MDI Focus Area (see map 1) in efforts to make a positive impact on a landscape scale that is obtainable. The MDI also promotes and completes projects outside of the focus area in order to capture additional opportunities to improve conditions for mule deer.

The MDI will promote partnerships with sportsmen groups, public land management agencies and conservation organizations to increase support for the program and habitat projects. A diversity of partnerships will enable MDI funds to be leveraged to increase resources for actions and projects benefiting mule deer.

The MDI will improve habitat on both private and public land as both are important to Idaho's mule deer.

The MDI is designed to focus on both landscape level and site specific issues and projects.

The MDI focuses efforts in areas of Idaho where mule deer recovery from declines experienced in the early 1990s has been slow; primarily the southeast portions of the state. Opportunities to improve mule deer habitat in other locations across Idaho will not be overlooked. The knowledge and successes from our work in southeast Idaho will then be used throughout the state to benefit mule deer.

The MDI is focused on mule deer but other species will benefit from the resulting habitat improvement efforts. All wildlife species are considered when projects are developed and implemented.

The MDI is a long term venture. Mule deer populations and their habitat have changed over decades, restoring populations and habitats will take time. The Department is committed to the MDI as a long term program. In this plan we have set both three year and ten year objectives.

The motto of the MDI is: “**Mule Deer for the Future**”.

The MDI is a Department wide effort. Many disciplines and employees within the Department have responsibilities within the MDI. Key to MDI is identifying all the issues affecting mule deer populations and mule deer habitat and addressing these issues as an interdisciplinary team.

The Action Plan

This action plan outlines strategies to accomplish the goals of the Mule Deer Initiative. The scope of activities and projects will be determined by funding and personnel priorities, as well as public preference and acceptance.

History

Mule deer are an important wildlife resource to Idaho's hunters and citizens. Southern and eastern Idaho, have traditionally been renowned for abundant populations providing ample opportunity for hunting and the harvest of mature bucks. Following an exceptional period of high productivity and over-winter survival between 1984 and 1992, resulting in high mule deer numbers, the trend in mule deer populations across the West, including Idaho, has been downward. The combined effects of a dry summer in 1992 and a hard winter during 1992-1993 resulted in a significant loss of mule deer. Relatively low recruitment levels since then and significant mortality during the winter of 2001-2002 in portions of eastern, southeastern, and south-central Idaho have resulted in mule deer populations lower than desired by both Department biologists and hunters.

A number of factors may influence mule deer populations and the hunting experience including:

1. Habitat changes caused by fire, fire suppression, invasive plants, and excessive herbivory have lessened the ability of some habitats to support mule deer populations.
2. Climatic swings such as drought and severe winters play a key role annually and over the long term in the quality and quantity of habitat and the ability of mule deer young to survive to breeding age.

3. Habitats are fragmented and lost as a result of human population growth and development in mule deer habitat.
4. The increased use and development of interstates and rural highways have had very negative impacts on mule deer populations. Mule deer road mortalities are a significant percentage of overall mortality in many herds. In some cases road developments have further fragmented habitats and blocked historic migration corridors.
5. Changes in use of private agricultural grounds can have a significant effect on mule deer populations and distribution. The quantity and quality of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) fields within key mule deer ranges can have both positive and negative effects on mule deer.
6. Predators play a shifting role as habitat loss and urban sprawl concentrate mule deer populations on smaller tracts of land near human population centers. Additionally, the diversity and abundance of alternate prey species affects predator impacts on mule deer populations.
7. While buck-only hunting seasons can affect age structure and the proportion of mature bucks, they have little influence on total deer populations or population growth rates.
8. Hunting seasons designed to reduce the vulnerability and harvest of mature bucks (e.g., early October), negatively affect the hunting experience.
9. No doe hunting may have affects on the age structure and fecundity of mule deer populations.
10. Off-highway vehicle use has increased hunter efficiency and also reduced the amount of area in which deer can find refuge during hunting season. This increases vulnerability of bucks, can lower the buck ratios and reduce quality of the hunt.

Natural resource managers have no control over weather, climate or human population growth. However, there is opportunity for managers to preserve or improve existing habitat, reduce the impact of predators, and implement hunting season and rule changes to improve mule deer populations and hunter experiences. Both short-term (three years) and long-term (ten years) objectives have been developed to achieve the primary goals of:

1. Improving mule deer habitat on a landscape scale.
2. Increasing recruitment rates of bucks within the population.
3. Increasing over-winter survival of fawns and adult does.
4. Providing optimal hunting season frameworks that maximize desired hunter experiences.

Measurable Objectives

Time lines, short term and long term MDI goals, and regional objective goals for measureable objectives are listed in Table 1 in the appendix.

2013 Short Term Objectives (3 years)

➤ Habitat

- Incorporate United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Bill programs and funding in MDI private land habitat improvement projects when and wherever applicable.

- Complete 15,000 acres of CRP stand improvements (forb strips, mountain brush plantings, vegetation rejuvenation) and 3,000 acres of mountain brush regeneration projects (shrub plantings, juniper abatement, shrub rejuvenation) in at least 150 different locations on public and private lands within the MDI focus area.
 - Rejuvenate 7,500 acres of Mtn Brush communities (Aspen, Mahogany, Juniper, and Bitterbrush) on public lands.
 - Continue to work with conservation organizations, County officials, federal and state land managers, and private landowners in efforts to preserve or improve mule deer habitat and protect open space and resources important to mule deer.
 - Improve 9 miles of critical riparian areas on private and public lands
 - Aggressively pursue and obtain outside MDI project funding through building cooperative partnerships and applying for conservation grants. Apply for at least four grants per year.
- **Populations/Hunting**
- Fully implement the Department's Mule Deer Management Plan 2008-2017 (see appendix 1) to achieve performance targets set within plan.
 - Evaluate mule deer hunter satisfaction using a survey in three years, Feb 2013.
 - Work with Idaho Dept of Transportation and/or county road departments to initiate one road mortality prevention project per year within MDI focus area.
- **Predation**
- Direct Wildlife Services to harvest at least 75% of the coyotes in focus areas where control may improve fawn survival.
 - Monitor effectiveness of coyote removal project in GMU's 76, 69, and 66A.
 - Review mountain lion objectives in areas where mule deer numbers have declined to determine if lion objectives are running counter to mule deer objectives.
- **Enforcement**
- Increase the number of mule deer violations detected by 30%.
 - Increase budget for enforcement by 10% to be targeted specifically at improving existing enforcement and developing new enforcement efforts to curtail illegal harvest of mule deer.
 - Increase mule deer related enforcement efforts and activities by 10%.
 - Increase MDI personnel and funding support to achieve increased enforcement goals to address mule deer management concerns.
- **Access**
- Manage current and new Access Yes properties to balance hunter access. Maintain mule deer security through motorized closures and improved signing.
 - Coordinate motor vehicle restrictions on public land to protect mule deer habitat, provide better mule deer buck age structures, and to minimize conflicts between motorized and non-motorized hunters.
- **Communications/Public Involvement**
- Update and distribute MDI newsletters biannually.

- Update MDI web site biannually
- Write and circulate ten MDI related articles within news papers, sportsmen group newsletters and magazines annually.
- Increase public input regarding mule deer management by 50%

➤ **Technical Assistance**

- Provide increased technical assistance to public land management agencies to initiate, plan and implement 15 new habitat improvement projects on public lands.
- Work with conservation organizations, elected officials, and private landowners to provide long-term conservation measures for 3,000 acres of important mule deer habitat through cooperative conservation agreement and easements.
- Develop a prioritized and annually updated list of properties and projects for protection, restoration, or enhancement of mule deer habitat by region by 2011.

➤ **Program and Project Reporting and Funding**

- Develop new database to improve MDI habitat project tracking and enable staff to report progress and success of MDI related activities by June 2010.
- Develop and maintain a consistent annual MDI budget which tracks with the MDI Action Plan and the Mule Deer Management Plan. Increase budget of mule deer management by $\geq 25\%$ by 2013.
- Implement an annual meeting of the statewide Department mule deer and MDI team.
- Establish three committees composed of at least Department representatives which will meet at least annually, review progress toward action items, propose assignments for Department staff, and by way of Committee Chairs report to MDI leader and team at annual meeting:
 - Habitat Committee and Chair
 - Populations Committee and Chair
 - Communications Committee and Chair
 - Enforcement Committee and Chair

2020 Long Term Objectives (10 years)

➤ **Habitat**

- Incorporate United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Bill programs and funding in MDI private land habitat improvement projects when and wherever applicable.
- Complete 50,000 acres of CRP stand improvements (forb strips, mountain brush plantings, vegetation rejuvenation) and 9,000 acres of mountain brush regeneration projects (shrub plantings, juniper abatement, shrub rejuvenation) in at least 500 different locations on public and private lands within the MDI focus area.
- Rejuvenate 25,000 acres of mountain brush communities (aspen, mahogany, juniper, and bitterbrush) on public lands.
- Continue to work with conservation organizations, County officials, federal land managers, and private landowners in efforts to improve mule deer habitat and

protect open space and resources important to mule deer though long term protection (e.g. conservation easements).

- Improve 30 miles of critical riparian areas on private and public lands.

➤ **Populations/Hunting**

- Fully implement the Department's 2008-2017 Mule Deer Management Plan, achieve performance targets set in plan.
- Re-vise and update Mule Deer Management plan for 2018-2027.
- Implement random mule deer hunter survey in 2017.
- Develop monitoring protocols to measure level of success and mule deer population changes due to implementation of MDI Action Plan.
- Have a well defined and cooperative Department driven program in place to address and complete mule deer road mortality prevention projects; complete no less than 5 projects and have at least 5 more in the works.

➤ **Predation**

- Direct Wildlife Services to harvest at least 75% of the coyotes in focus areas where control may improve fawn survival.
- Monitor effectiveness of coyote removal project in GMU's 76, 69, and 66A.
- Review mountain lion objectives in areas where mule deer numbers have declined to determine if lion objectives are running counter to mule deer objectives.

➤ **Enforcement**

- Increase the number of mule deer violations detected by 30%.
- Increase budget for enforcement by 10% to be targeted specifically at improving existing enforcement and developing new enforcement efforts to curtail illegal harvest of mule deer.
- Increase mule deer related enforcement efforts and activities by 10%.
- Increase MDI personnel and funding support to achieve increased enforcement goals to address mule deer management concerns.

➤ **Access**

- Manage current and new Access Yes properties to balance hunter access while maintaining mule deer security through motorized closures and improved signing.
- Coordinate motor vehicle restrictions on public land to protect mule deer habitat, provide better mule deer buck age structures, and to minimize conflicts between motorized and non-motorized hunters.

➤ **Public Involvement/Outreach**

- Information about the MDI programs and projects should be readily available via consistent progress reporting and data availability through the web to all publics.
- Provide sufficient educational materials and media so 75% of Idahoans should have significant knowledge about mule deer habitat and ecology.
- Increase public input regarding mule deer management by 50%.

➤ **Technical Assistance**

- Provide increased technical assistance to public land management agencies to initiate, plan and implement 50 new habitat improvement projects on public lands
- Work with conservation organizations, elected officials, and private landowners to provide long-term conservation measures for 10,000 acres of important mule deer habitat through cooperative conservation agreement and easements.
- Department should be the go to agency for species and habitat conservation technical assistance in Idaho and have resources to provide significant funding and support towards conservation projects.

These objectives will be assessed for progress annually by the Department and the Commission. We will also revise the list of objectives as we accomplish them and develop new objectives. In a step down process from the objectives we have developed specific action items for each of the MDI components.

ACTION ITEMS

Specific Action Items are developed to provide direction to Department staff to achieve goals defined in the short and long term objectives of both the MDI and state Mule Deer Mgt Plan. They are meant to provide guidance to Regional Program Mangers and Biologists when completing annual work plans and should be reviewed annually. MDI related work load assignments for Department staff should be set accordingly with considerations to MDI annual budget appropriations, personnel staffing levels, and other Department priorities. It is the responsibility of all Department staff to work to achieve the goals of the MDI.

Each action item includes a short description of the action, justification, objectives and/or methods to consider achieving annual work goals, and primary Department section responsible to complete action item. Section codes: Habitat – HAB, Populations – POP, Farm Bill Coordinators – FBC, Landowner Sportsmen Coordinators – LSC, Enforcement – ENF, Environmental Staff Biologist – ESB, Research – RES, Headquarter Staff – HQ, and Communications – COM.

Habitat Management

Ultimately, healthy wildlife populations depend on adequate amounts of quality habitat. Hunting, disease, weather, predators and human development all affect mule deer. But healthy habitat has greater influence over the total abundance of mule deer. Mule deer use a variety of habitats as they transition and/or reside within their seasonal ranges. Maintaining quality habitat and critical resources within each seasonal range are of equal importance in maintaining healthy mule deer populations and should be considered when developing habitat improvement actions.

Fish and Game has the knowledge and expertise to improve habitats but very limited ability to affect habitat at a landscape level. Only through collaborative working relationships will Fish and Game influence habitat practices that meet mule deer needs. Fish and Game will increase efforts to work with federal land managers and private landowners to improve habitat for mule deer. Building collaborative partnerships is essential to acquiring additional funding to benefit mule deer. It will be important for the MDI staff to pursue outside Department funding to leverage the limited sportsmen dollars to increase habitat improvement acres on the ground.

The 2009 Habitat Guidelines for Mule Deer: Intermountain West Ecoregion (see appendix 2) developed by the Mule Deer Working Group, sponsored by the Western Association of Fish and Game Agencies, will be adopted and serve as the main guidance document for MDI habitat management actions.

1. Identify and incorporate USDA Farm Bill program opportunities (CRP, WHIP, SAFE, EQUIP) into MDI private land habitat projects. Identify landowners, make personal contacts and implement prioritized projects.

Justification: Currently there are approximately 460,000 acres of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) fields within the MDI Focus Area and 575,000 acres within the 3 Southern Idaho Regions. CRP lands are important in some areas to the health and recruitment of mule deer populations. Manipulation of existing vegetation on most CRP fields will likely benefit mule deer. Manipulations of existing CRP fields will require coordination with the landowners, FSA, and NRCS. There are several CRP Conservation Practices that can be used to provide landowners with increased project funding and assistance to improve their CRP to increase benefits to mule deer and other wildlife (e.g. Integrated Wildlife Mgt and Mid-Management practices).

There are further opportunities to expand the scale and types of habitat projects MDI is completing on private lands through the development and implementation of existing Farm Bill programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) and Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP). To implement these programs, along with additional CRP improvements, will require cooperation with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and increased Department Technical Service Provider (TSP) assistance within the USDA county field offices and for the private landowners.

Objectives

- Complete 5,000 acres of CRP stand improvements to include the installation of forb forage strips, mountain brush plantings, and stand rejuvenating mid-management projects annually.
- Provide increased Farm Bill technical assistance to 50 private landowners annually to implement CRP Mid-Contract Management projects and Integrated Wildlife Management.
- Provide additional Department TSP assistance to USDA field offices to implement conservation programs and practices that can benefit mule deer habitat.
 - Involve current Department Farm Bill Coordinators more into MDI.
 - Develop up to three new MDI/Farm Bill TSP positions and/or train and TSP certify existing MDI staff.

Methods

1. Create a GIS CRP priority layer to identify areas where CRP improvements and implementing other Farm Bill programs will have the most benefit to mule deer and sage and sharp-tailed grouse.
 - Will be used to direct and concentrate limited funding and manpower to make most impact within identified important wildlife areas.
 - Share with USDA agencies to prioritize CRP during signups.

2. Develop cooperatively funded MDI TSP positions with conservation agencies and organizations. With reductions in Department personnel and funding, forming cooperative positions is needed to develop additional TSP manpower to work on conservation projects.
3. Work with private landowners to sign up for Integrated Wildlife Mgt and to complete required Mid-Contract Management projects for their CRP lands.
 - Supplement Farm Bill funding with MDI funding to provide increased cost-share to participating landowners.
 - Projects can be completed with MDI funding alone if Farm Bill programs or landowners preference do not fit.
 - Provide additional support to IDFG Farm Bill Coordinators.
4. Pursue opportunities to implement other Farm Bill Programs.
 - For example Brush Mgt (314) could be used to remove encroaching juniper from sage steppe and to remove conifers out of aspen stands within the EQIP program.

Section Responsibility: HAB/FBC

2. Action: Improve mountain brush communities vital to mule deer populations across seasonal ranges on both public and private lands.

Justification: Climate changes, wild fires, fire prevention, unregulated livestock grazing, and human development have greatly diminished the quality and quantity of brush communities that are critical to mule deer across S. Idaho. For the MDI to make a significant difference in mule deer populations on a landscape level it will be important to maintain and improve thousands of acres of mountain brush communities within summer, transitional and summer ranges. For MDI purposes mountain brush represents aspen, mahogany, juniper, bitterbrush, and sagebrush steppe stands and communities.

Objectives:

- Maintain, improve and/or protect 2,500 acres of Mtn Brush on public lands annually.
- Maintain, improve and/or protect 1,000 acres of Mtn Brush on private lands annually.
- Increase Technical Assistance efforts to state and federal land management agencies (IDL, BLM, and USFS) and implement 5 new cooperative Mtn Brush habitat projects annually.
- Provide increase Farm Bill Technical Assistance to 25 private landowners annually to implement Mtn Brush mgt practices on CRP and/or private rangelands.

Methods:

- Increase TSP assistance to USDA Service Centers and landowners to implement brush mgt projects on private lands.
- Increase TSP assistance and develop cooperative projects with state and federal land managers and agencies.
- Provide full support to the Eastern Idaho Aspen Working Group and adopt their Aspen Management and Assessment Guidelines.
- Work with livestock producers to apply the Farm Bill Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) to improve mule deer habitat on their deeded and/or permitted federal and state lands.

Section Responsibility: HAB/FBC

3. Action: Develop a new Landscape Management approach on how MDI works with private landowners, develops conservation plans and implements mule deer habitat improvement projects.

Justification: Since 2004 developing mule deer habitat projects on private lands have been a significant action item within the MDI program. MDI Techs and Habitat Biologist have done an outstanding job to date getting landowners involved with the MDI and on-the-ground projects completed. Most of the 15,000 acres of mule deer habitat projects have been successful and provided benefit to resident mule deer herds. Landowner interest and participation has also been encouraging. To build on these good efforts and to take how we work with private landowners further, the MDI is proposing a Landscape Management (Holistic) approach with private land habitat work. The new direction of the MDI is to try to make a difference at a landscape level too have positive effects on mule deer at a population level. The Landscape Management approach is basically working with ranchers and farmers on a ranch/farm level instead of project by project basis as MDI has been functioning.

Objectives:

- The Landscape Management approach to private land habitat work is to assess the private property with the landowner in its entirety and to work more closely with landowners to better improve the entire property for mule deer and all wildlife over time.
- Instead of looking for sites on private lands for specific project types (i.e. forb strips) MDI staff will be identifying resource issues and needs (limiting factors for mule deer) first and then selecting appropriate project type(s) and best suited conservation program to address resource concerns. MDI will be planning and implementing a much wider range of habitat project types to address a wider variety of resources issues.
- Provide a quality, full service conservation program assistance to private landowners to implement habitat projects.
- Empower MDI Tech and Biologist staff by providing them with better training, conservation planning skills and clearer work objectives.
- With multiple habitat project funding sources coming from Farm Bill programs, conservation grants, sportsmen organizations, and other federal agencies the limited MDI budget can be leveraged to impact many more acres of mule deer habitat on private and privately leased state and federal lands.

Methods:

- Provide increased training to MDI/Habitat staff to become certified IDFG Technical Service Providers (TSP's) to provide them with better conservation planning knowledge and tools. MDI staff will have a greater source of conservation programs and funding avenues to complete private land habitat projects.
- Provide landowners with a complete assessment and evaluation their entire property and, with the landowner, develop a Mule Deer (wildlife) Habitat Management Plan for the property. The Plan will identify limiting factors for mule deer across the property; define

areas for resources protection and/or improvements; what habitat improvement projects should be completed; and what improvements can be completed within the bounds of the landowner's abilities and resources. Specific habitat projects will be laid out and a timeline developed for the landowner to follow and achieve their mule deer habitat goals.

- Final part of the Plan will be to generate a list of conservation program options to fund and implement the projects.
- Having TSP certification and increased conservation planning skills MDI staff will be able to serve as a conservation program liaison for the private landowners. The goal is to serve as “one-stop-shopping” for landowners to complete their wildlife conservation goals.

Section Responsibility: HAB/FBC/POP

4. Action: Develop monitoring procedures and complete initial stand establishment monitoring on all MDI habitat improvement projects. Select a subsample of project to monitor vegetation for continued success and stand health.

Justification: To ensure that MDI habitat improvement practices are being applied correctly and sites are functioning properly it is important to monitor initial vegetation establishment after first growing season. Depending on project type, long term monitoring is also required periodically to document project development and to determine if project maintenance is required. A well structured monitoring program is crucial to determine if MDI is meeting its objectives and to ensure sportsmen that project funds are being spent wisely and making a difference.

Objectives:

- Develop standardized MDI habitat project monitoring protocols.
- Monitor every new MDI habitat project after first growing season.
- Monitor all MDI project periodically as appropriate for project type until full establishment.
- Report monitoring annually.

Methods:

- To standardized MDI monitoring procedures across Regions need to adopt the USDA Rangeland Data Base and Field Data Entry System (http://usda-ars.nmsu.edu/monit_assess/monitoring_main.php).
- Adopt the Eastern Idaho Aspen Working Group Aspen monitoring procedures.
- Develop monitoring data base to accurately track and report data.
- Provide increased training to staff on monitoring procedures.
- Provide Regions with additional personnel and operating funding to complete required annual monitoring.
 - Monitoring levels should be set annually depending on personnel and workload.

Section Responsibility: HAB/FBC

5. Action: Identify, prioritize, and seek opportunities to protect and restore degraded riparian areas and improve water resources for mule deer.

Justification: Riparian communities (streams, springs and seeps) provide mule deer populations with important watering, foraging, and fawning habitats. Water availability can effect distribution and relative abundance of mule deer, especially on summer ranges. Across SE Idaho's arid mountain ranges riparian areas represent a very small fraction of the available habitat types but are the most important for all wildlife. Many have been degraded due to unmanaged grazing over the decades and are not in Properly Functioning Condition (PFC) or are functioning at risk. USDA PFC riparian monitoring procedures should be used to evaluate the hydrological condition of stream. There is a significant need to protect and restore these valuable riparian resources. Within the more arid portions of the MDI focus area there are adequate summer habitats that are not being fully utilized by mule deer due to lack of water during the dryer seasons. The development of artificial water sources (guzzlers) and enhancement of natural water sources will result in better distribution of mule deer and use of currently unoccupied habitats.

Objectives:

- Protect and improve 3 miles of riparian areas annually on both public and private lands.
- Provide TSP assistance to initiate 2 riparian improvement projects on private lands.
- Develop 2 cooperative riparian protection/enhancement projects on public lands.
- Construct 1 or more wildlife watering structure(s) where water is a limiting factor for mule deer.

Methods:

- Use top 10 degraded riparian sites developed by the Department's Environmental Staff Biologists to prioritize riparian restoration projects.
- Most riparian habitats reside on public lands so it will be important to work with state and federal land management agencies to protect and enhance them. Protect and enhance riparian areas on private lands with the implementation of the Continuous CRP Riparian Buffer (CCRP) conservation program.
- Use beaver reintroductions where improvements to mule deer habitat would result.
- Delineate areas within summer ranges where the development of artificial or natural water sources would be beneficial to mule deer.
- Look for sportsmen group support for funding, construction and maintenance when establishing guzzlers.
- Work with livestock producers to apply the EQIP program to improve mule deer habitat on their deeded and/or permitted federal and state lands.

Section Responsibility: HAB/FBC

6. Action: Identify, prioritize and treat aspen stands.

Justification: Aspen communities are important areas for mule deer fawning. Aspen clones are used as fawning sites and the understory in healthy aspen provides important feed for mule deer fawns. Aspen clones also provide important security habitat for does and fawns. Forest Service reports indicate Idaho has lost 61% of its aspen since European settlement. Excessive livestock grazing and conifer encroachment threaten many remaining aspen clones. Some areas in Eastern Idaho have relatively stable and healthy aspen communities. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management personnel have expressed their intent to increase aspen management. State and federal

agencies have requested more specific information on high priority mule deer fawning areas. The Department will, in general, support aspen management efforts by land management agencies that benefit mule deer. Some Department owned wildlife management areas contain aspen communities that are important to mule deer and could benefit from prescribed treatments. These projects can be initiated and completed in a relatively short time. Similarly, some landowners may be amenable to treating aspen on their properties with Department cost-sharing and support. Aspen treatment projects on other state and federal lands will take longer to develop and implement. A great deal of collaboration will be required to facilitate aspen treatments on Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Idaho Department of Lands properties.

Objectives: Same as Habitat Action Item 2

Methods: Same as Habitat Action Item 2

Section Responsibility: HAB/FBC/ESB/RS/ESB

7. Action: Treat and manage noxious weeds to help protect and restore mule deer habitats.

Justification: Noxious weeds typically have a competitive advantage over native and cultivated deer forage species. Weed infestations have the ability to reduce the availability of plant biomass for deer. The distribution and abundance of noxious weeds is continually expanding. Identifying and controlling noxious weeds will help maintain and protect mule deer range.

Objectives:

- Reduce noxious weed invasions to maintain and increase the native vegetation component that is vital to mule deer habitat
- Provide assistance to private landowners to manage noxious weed issues if it leads to the promotion of mule deer habitats.

Methods:

- Assist private landowners to enroll CRP into Integrated Wildlife Mgt practice to provide them with additional assistance to manage their noxious weeds and promote wildlife habitat.
- Assist public land managers and local governments in the detection and control of noxious weeds.
- Monitor all MDI habitat projects for weed infestations.
- Treat with chemicals, physical removal or biological agents when appropriate.

Section Responsibility: HAB/FBC

Population Management

In addition to habitat, a number of other factors can affect mule deer populations including hunting season frameworks, disease, and inter-specific competition. These factors can be manipulated and their relative importance in affecting population change will depend on the role each factor plays within individual mule deer populations. For example, a population of deer where hunting has a

negligible effect on survival rates is unlikely to respond to more conservative hunting seasons. In order to optimally manage mule deer, wildlife managers need an adequate population monitoring program that produces the precision in the results to maximize their ability to detect population changes. An adaptive management framework should be utilized in the analysis of monitoring information to increase management flexibility as various management actions are instituted.

1. Action: Fully Implement the Department's 2008 Mule Deer Management Plan.

Justification: The Mule Deer Management Plan (MDP) was developed to provide management direction, set performance targets and identify strategies to achieve mule deer management goals for the next 10 years. To maintain a consistent and well focused Department effort to improve mule deer populations, habitats, and hunter satisfaction, the MDP should be used as the main guidance document to direct management actions and set annual staff workloads.

Objectives:

- Implement Mule Deer Management Plan.
- Develop annual work plans accordingly with the MDP.
- Annually report progress towards management goals and/or successful completion of performance targets.

Methods:

- Review MDP annually, along with MDI Action Plan, and annual work plans should reflect efforts and projects to achieve goals.
- Develop improved reporting system to track and record progress and successful completion of performance targets and goals.

Section Responsibility: ALL

2. Action: Improve the mule deer population monitoring program.

Justification: To track progress towards successfully achieving goals set within the MDP and to determine if MDI action items are making a positive impact on mule deer populations it is very important to have a good mule deer monitoring program. Monitoring is time consuming and very costly. It is important to streamline procedures and appropriate adequate funding. Monitoring data should be reported accurately and centrally compiled to be available for all to use.

Objectives:

- Identify and develop new monitoring procedures to track changes in mule deer populations resulting from MDI habitat improvement projects.
- Enter and report monitoring data more consistently within a centrally located, web based data base.

- Improve fawn monitoring capture and monitoring techniques to reduce annual effort and funding put forth by regional staff.
- Explore new mule deer surveying techniques to be more efficient in population monitoring and reporting.

Methods:

- Form a technical team to review current mule deer population monitoring techniques, explore new alternatives, and develop more cost and time efficient survey methods.
- Develop a central monitoring database to enter and report monitoring data.
 - Web based and administered by Boise staff.
 - Provide training and procedures to ensure proper use of database.
- Develop new monitoring procedures to track changes in mule deer populations due to implantation of MDI habitat improvement projects.
- Complete Fawn Survival model to reduce the winter fawn capture and field monitoring efforts.
- Obtain additional funding for increased mule deer monitoring efforts.

Section Responsibility: POP/RES

- 3. Action: Identify, map and determine the status of all mule deer winter ranges. Develop consistent and complete mule deer winter range management plans for each large winter range in the MDI area. Identify and map important migration corridors.**

Justification: A comprehensive delineation and assessment of all mule deer winter ranges is key component in the future of mule deer habitat. Delineation of all the winter ranges and migration corridors is important. Winter range delineation will provide a basis to assess the current and future threats to mule deer habitat. An assessment of the current status and condition in the form of winter range plans will help wildlife biologists develop and prioritize the restoration, conservation, and protection of these areas. Winter range plans will be adaptive and include monitoring strategies. Development of a complete winter range and migration corridor database will enable the Department to monitor the status and trends of all mule deer winter ranges. This information will be used to inform the public about the location and importance of this crucial habitat relative to land use planning.

Objectives:

- Develop consistent winter range maps and plans by 2011 for all winter ranges and migration corridors within MDI focus area.
 - Use Magic Valley Region’s completed winter range plans as format.
 - Use SE Region’s GIS mapping to delineate mule deer winter ranges.
- Develop a centralized location for storing and reviewing all plans and maps.
 - Provide agencies, conservation organization, planning & zoning, etc... with means to review and integrate winter range plans and maps into their conservation or project planning.
- Develop plans to monitor human disturbance on important winter ranges.

Methods:

- Form a winter range technical team with representations from each Region and the Wildlife Bureau with objectives to:
 - Define winter range types and migration corridors.
 - Develop consistent winter range mapping protocols.
 - Standardize winter range plan format and oversee the completion of winter range plans and maps.
 - Develop web site for all to use the winter range data.
- Identify and map important migration corridors for mule deer and elk.
- Work with land management agencies to manage human disturbance activities on winter ranges.
- Improve signing and publicity of winter range issues.
- Increase enforcement patrol of winter ranges.

Section Responsibility: POP/HAB/ENF

4. Action: Reduce mule deer road and rail mortalities.

Justification: Roads and railways have a very dramatic impact on mule deer populations. Vehicular collisions in some locations represent a large percentage of the overall mortality of mule deer. Roads can fragment habitats and create impermeable barriers to mule deer populations. The Department needs to develop clear and concise management strategies to prioritize road/rail mortality locations, potential projects, and to develop funding avenues and partnerships. Road mortality projects cannot be completed without the building of collaborative partnerships with Idaho Dept of Transportation (ITD), local communities and governments, and conservation agencies and organizations.

Objectives:

- Develop a clear and concise Department approach to resolve road mortality issues.
- Identify and prioritize two road and rail mortality project sites per region and initiate management strategies and measures to resolve the problem.
- Obtain additional road mortality project funding through pursuing outside grant opportunities.
- Develop cooperative partnerships to foster increased support from sportsmen and conservation groups.
- Improve efforts to record road mortalities.

Methods:

- Create a Department Road Mortality Team to develop clear and concise objectives and management strategies to prioritize road/rail mortality projects, funding avenues, and partnerships.
- Involve upper level management, Department commissioners and conservation organizations in highway mortality issues to support regional efforts.
- Increase communications and collaborative efforts with ITD, Union Pacific Railroad (UPR), and Federal Highway Administration to reduce mule deer highway mortalities and identify and implement strategies to protect important mule deer linkage corridors.

- Facilitate the creation of local Road Mortality Working Groups to build community support for projects.
- Develop project prospectuses for local state and federal legislatures to both inform them of project possibilities and foster support for projects.
- Work with local sportsmen, conservation organizations and insurance companies to enlist their support, involvement and possible funding.

Section Responsibility: POP/HAB/ESB/ENF

Predator Management

The effects predators have on prey populations are dependent upon habitat conditions, the numbers of predators and prey, and the sex and age ratios of predator and prey populations. Knowing all of these factors is critical to prescribing appropriate predator management actions. Widespread predator management may or may not increase a mule deer population. Populations near carrying capacity will likely not respond to predator management activities. Smaller mule deer populations may be more susceptible to predators than larger ones. If a mule deer population experiences one or more severe winters or droughts and their numbers are low, the population may be more susceptible to the negative impacts of predators until their population numbers increase.

Predator management can benefit mule deer populations when:

- Mule deer populations are well below carrying capacity
- Populations of alternate prey species (rodents and rabbits) are at low levels
- Predation can be identified as a limiting factor
- Management efforts to reduce predator populations are enough to yield results
- Management efforts are timed to be most effective
- Management is focused

1. Action: Coyote control and mountain lion management

Justification: Management of predators is a complex and sensitive issue. Predator removal is often popular with sportsmen but may have little or no effect on mule deer populations if efforts are not well focused. Mountain lion predation can have impacts on sensitive and localized mule deer herds but at the population level impacts on mule deer may be negligible. It is important to balance increased mountain lion harvest with proper mountain lion management to avoid negatively impacting one species because of another. Coyote removal as well may have little effect on mule deer at the population level. Control measures must be well directed and focused in to a specific area. The first month of a mule deer's life is a critical time for survival. In order to have the greatest effect on fawn survival, coyotes should be removed prior to and during the fawning period in units meeting the criteria listed above.

Objectives:

- Direct Wildlife Services to harvest at least 75% of the coyotes in focused areas where control may improve fawn survival.
- Monitor effectiveness of coyote removal project in BGU's 76, 69, and 66A by 2013.
- Increase mountain lion harvest for 1 to 3 years following significant decline of mule deer numbers as long as lion population status is within lion management objectives.

- Evaluate mountain lion objectives in areas of mule deer decline to determine if the objectives are consistent or counter to mule deer objectives in the same area.

Methods:

- Identify concentrated mule deer doe fawning areas in units where populations are determined to be below carrying capacity.
- Annually direct Wildlife Service's coyote management activities to fawning areas in units where populations are below carrying capacity.
- Conduct annual meetings with Wildlife Services to coordinate control. Maps will be produced to target identified areas.
- Coyote removal will be implemented to reduce coyote numbers by 75% in the target areas.
- Develop and complete monitoring protocol to measure and document changes in mule deer populations in control units.
- Annually assess mountain Lion harvest to determine if increased hunting is negatively impacting lion populations. If lions are below management objectives changes to the lion seasons should be made.

Section Responsibility: POP/RES

Enforcement

Enforcement of regulations will play an important role in achieving MDI goals. Poor compliance with regulations would render them ineffective in enhancing mule deer populations and would result in decreased hunter satisfaction. Conservation Officers, in addition to regulation enforcement, provide good local knowledge on mule deer populations and provide MDI project contacts and assistance.

1. Action: Improve compliance of OHV regulations.

Justification: OHV use has increased substantially over the past decade. The effect of OHV use on access has reduced the amount of security cover for mule deer, increased hunter efficiency and reduced the amount of area in which deer can find refuge during hunting season. This increases vulnerability of bucks, can lower the buck ratios and reduce quality of the hunt.

Objectives/Methods:

- Operate 10 IDFG-USFS joint patrols annually.
- Target 30 officer patrol days to OHV enforcement annually. Implement joint enforcement patrols with the BLM and USFS.
- Educate the public on OHV rules through citizen contacts, signing, public service announcements, big game rules, and hunter education regarding ethical OHV use.

Section Responsibility: ENF/ALL

2. Action: Increase enforcement and I&E efforts to protect mule deer on winter ranges.

Justification: Mule deer are affected more by human disturbance during the winter. There is a need for increased enforcement to minimize the negative human disturbance and reduce illegal

harvest on winter ranges. Improved public information through various media is needed to explain the impact humans have on winter ranges.

Objectives/Methods:

- Conduct 20 enforcement patrols on winter ranges to detect and deter violations.
- Initiate a volunteer “Mule Deer Watch” program to utilize volunteers to monitor use and identify problems on selected winter ranges.
- Improve signing and publicity through production of informative material of winter range issues.

Section Responsibility: ENF/POP/COM

3. Action: Direct special enforcement operations to target trophy poachers and commercialization issues of mature buck deer.

Justification: The value of large mature buck mule deer is increasing and the efforts that people go to pursue those large deer is expanding. The value of these individual deer has created a market for illegal parts and a market for trophy deer. The effects of illegal harvest on large deer can be significant in some areas. Efforts to thwart the illegal activity are important.

Objective/Methods:

- Reduce the poaching and commercialization of trophy mule deer.
- Provide officers with increased equipment and time needed to improve detection of violations.

Section Responsibility: ENF

4. Action: Involve Conservation Officers more into MDI habitat projects.

Justification: Officers are a great resource to find and develop relationships with private landowners that are interested in a MDI habitat projects. They can provide valuable assistance in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the projects. Many officers work directly with federal and state agencies and can assist in initiating projects and developing cooperative partnerships.

Objective/Methods:

- Increase level of Conservation Officer participation in the MDI.
- Provide additional resources in equipment and funding to officers to enable them to work on MDI action items.
- Involve every officer in focus area, as duties permit, in at least 2 MDI projects within their patrol areas annually.
- Increase MDI correspondence and staff time spent with officers within focus area.
- Involve officers in road mortality and federal land projects within their areas.

Section Responsibility: ENF/HAB/FBC

Access Management

During the past 10 years, the increased use of motorized vehicles by hunters has resulted in an increasing number of conflicts between hunters and has created difficult challenges for managing mule deer. Four wheel drive pickups, motorcycles, and ATVs have dramatically improved hunter access to once remote and secure habitats while increasing the vulnerability of deer and reducing opportunities for hunting in areas with low hunter densities and more mature bucks. Presently, the Department is working to balance the goals of maintaining liberal general hunting opportunities and providing hunts with more mature bucks and lower hunter densities. Managing access is a management tool that can help achieve those goals.

In some Game Management Units there are significant amounts of private land that are closed to hunting or that control access to public lands. The Access Yes program will be the primary tool to address this issue. Access Yes properties will be managed to balance hunter access while maintaining mule deer security areas by closing valuable habitat to motorized travel and promoting walk-in access whenever possible. Regional staff will need to work closely with the Landowner Sportsmen Coordinator to review annual Access Yes applications. Potential hunting access through or on private lands can actually be detrimental to mule deer by increasing buck vulnerability in an area that historically that has provided good deer security.

The Department is committed to working with land managers, landowners, and sportsmen to manage motorized access during hunting seasons, maintain access to public lands, increase deer survival, improve access to currently inaccessible public and private lands where appropriate, and provide opportunities to those who prefer non-motorized experiences.

1. **Action: Develop a coordinated, comprehensive motorized access management plan throughout the MDI area to offer a variety of hunter opportunities, reduce user conflicts, and reduce vulnerability of deer where appropriate.**

Justification: Conflicts between motorized and non-motorized hunters have been identified by sportsmen as one of the top statewide issues. In response, the Commission created the "Motorized Vehicle Rule" (IDAPA 13.01.08.411) in 2003. Identifying problem areas is the first step necessary to implementing appropriate solutions. Subsequently the IDFG and Idaho Department of Parks Recreation (IDPR) commissioners provided a joint memorandum of direction to their respective staffs to cooperate and coordinate travel plan comments to reduce or eliminate contradictions. All travel plan comments by IDFG are made in light of the goals and objectives of IDPR programs as well as wildlife and fisheries values. Most of the corrective management actions will require cooperation of BLM or USFS.

Objectives/Methods:

- Identify units, or a portion of units, where the level of motorized access may have an additive effect to hunting mortality resulting in unacceptable high buck vulnerability, buck to doe ratios that are below objective, and/or is causing significant conflicts between hunters.
- Delineate problem areas and identify strategies for managing motorized use in cooperation with IDPR, within the guidelines and direction of IDPR and IDFG commissioners.

- Seek interdisciplinary team member status during travel planning efforts of BLM and USFS.
- Strive to obtain motorized road and trail densities commensurate with big game habitat needs, and reasonable recreational access desires.
- Support federal direction to close cross-country motorized travel opportunities in favor of “designated routes only” system.
- Consider recommendations regarding seasonal motorized road and trail closures in travel planning efforts that would benefit mule deer security during hunting seasons.
- Develop a coordinated approach between regions, hunt units and federal and state land management agencies.

Section Responsibility: LSC/POP

2. Action: Continue involvement with the travel planning efforts on public lands.

Justification: Travel planning on national forests or rangelands is a very difficult and often contentious process. Because the issues are so controversial, influencing travel management outside a planning effort is very difficult. This is an opportunity to make long-term changes in travel management that can have positive benefits to mule deer and mule deer hunting.

Objectives/Methods:

- Increase involvement and technical assistance to future BLM travel management planning.
- Support the current direction of the USFS to eliminate cross-country motorized travel on national forests.
- Promote hunting season motorized closure (non-motorized) areas upon the USFS lands to improve mule deer security and provide a different non-motorized hunting opportunity in select areas. Requires re-visiting USFS travel management planning.
- Recommend reductions in motorized road/trail densities where appropriate.
- Promote the involvement of sportsmen groups within the travel mgt planning procedures.

Section Responsibility: LSC/POP/ENF

3. Action: Identify areas where access to and through private property would improve deer hunting without dramatically reducing deer security and buck quality.

Justification: The deer hunting experience can be enhanced by redistributing hunter densities in some areas and by increasing hunter access to currently inaccessible areas. It will be important not to promote increased hunter access opportunities if buck security is an issue within the area.

Objectives/Methods:

- Contact landowners to discuss potential opportunities for access through Access Yes, right-of-way agreements, conservation easements, etc.
- Identify areas where increased access through private lands will have negative impacts on mule deer.
- Promote thoughtful development of Access Yes properties travel management with landowners.

- Provide signs to any landowner to improve hunter management as long as public access is provided. These signs are designed to instruct hunters of access requirements of individual landowners. They include messages such as “Walk-In Access Permitted, No Motorized Vehicles” and “Please Close the Gate”.

Section Responsibility: LSC/POP/HAB

4. Action: Evaluate impacts to mule deer from human disturbances on seasonal ranges. Recommend mitigation where appropriate.

Justification: Human activities on some seasonal ranges cause deer to expend energy necessary for survival and to underutilize important habitats. Access restrictions may be useful to reduce disturbance to deer and improve overwinter survival rates and reduce fawn disturbance.

Objectives/Methods:

- Pursue the development of winter range human entry closures on public and private lands.
- Initiate increased monitoring to identify areas of fawning habitat disturbances.
 - Increase public information on importance of summer range habitats and issues.
 - Scope possibilities of some summer range motorized closures.

Section Responsibility: LSC/POP

Public Involvement/Outreach

Public involvement and support is a critical component of the Mule Deer Initiative. Communications will play a prominent and continuing role in the success of the initiative.

1. Action: Communicate with hunters and general public on all aspects of MDI on a continuing basis. Bureau of Communications will work with regional staff to deliver consistent messages.

Justification: IDFG has a statutory obligation as well as an informal social contract to inform and educate the citizens of Idaho on the status of their wildlife. A thorough awareness of MDI is likely to help build support for the Initiative and attract active assistance on the part of volunteers.

Objectives/Methods:

- Include MDI displays and discussion within regional public scoping sessions.
- Fish & Game News tabloid page 1 story in winter and spring editions, feature stories in each following edition.
- MDI web site on main IDFG web site, updated annually or as needed.
- Targeted email through new govdocs program that directs information to web users who indicate interest in mule deer.
- Statewide news releases on each MDI news event. Regional news releases as needed.
- Radio and television news releases to accompany print and television releases and to showcase keystone MDI projects.
- Biannually publish the MDI newsletter.

Section Responsibility: COM/ALL

2. Action: Help our constituents understand mule deer management, population dynamics and effects of hunting season options.

Justification: An essential component of the public understanding and acceptance of mule deer management is education. Often, the public does not understand the realities of mule deer population dynamics and life history. Widespread education efforts would help increase the general deer hunting public understands and develop a higher appreciation of mule deer management. Developing low cost, high distribution methods of education should be explored and used.

Objectives/Methods:

- Develop and distribute a “Guide to Mule Deer Hunting and Ecology in Idaho” to the public by July 2011.
- Deliver a “Wild about Mule Deer” program to 250 teachers within focus area.
- Increase educational materials on mule deer hunting and ecology displayed at nature centers, sportsmen banquets, fair displays, IDFG Regional offices, and other appropriate avenues.
- Increase MDI staff presentations to sportsmen groups, schools, community meetings, etc..
- Support Department staff involvement within sportsmen groups.

Section Responsibility: COM/ALL

3. Action: Increase citizen involvement in mule deer management.

Justification: Public involvement is critical to the success of the MDI and to achieve the objectives of the Department’s Mule Deer Management Plan.

Objectives/Methods:

- Increase public input regarding mule deer management by 50%
- Increase development and distribution of mule deer information to the public.
- Investigate new methods for providing material to the public, increasing public/biologist personal contacts, and to receiving more public input.
- Increase volunteer assistance with MDI habitat and structure development projects.

Section Responsibility: COM/POP

4. Action: Increase opportunities for and retention of youth hunters.

Justification: Idaho’s hunting heritage will only survive with the increased participation and retention of Idaho’s youth into the hunting population. It is important to provide youth with mule deer hunting opportunities that will enable them to get involved and have positive experiences in the field.

Objectives/Methods:

- Implement youth hunting seasons when and where appropriate.
- Provide antlerless youth hunting opportunities when appropriate.
- Integrate MDI information into all Hunter Education Classes.
- Simplify regulations and license requirements to increase youth participations.
- Explore mule deer youth/mentor hunting program. Get youth who want to hunt but have no one to take them connected with mentors.

Section Responsibility: POP/COM

Technical Assistance

Technical assistance is an important component of MDI because much of the habitat in which mule deer populations live are lands managed by the state and federal government or held in private ownership. These lands are primarily designated for multiple uses. These multiple uses sometimes include substantial changes to habitat. Historically, the Department has been asked to comment on many of these proposed uses, changes or alterations. Our input of technical assistance is important to substantiate and support the wildlife value of the lands and the potential effects of change on the wildlife resources of the State. If the MDI is to make significant positive changes to the landscape, it will be important to provide additional technical and funding assistance to the state and federal agencies. Department staff will need to be more proactive initiating potential habitat projects and be willing to provide conservation agencies with technical assistance through the development, implementation and monitoring phases of completing a project. Often it just takes committed non-federal cost-share dollars to really get a habitat project off the ground. It will be important to develop a solid and maintained budget in which the MDI can form long term partnerships, while providing funding and technical assistance to state and federal land management agencies.

1. Action: Increase Department Technical Assistance and habitat improvement project involvement with State and Federal Land Management agencies.

Justification: The majority of mule deer habitat is located on public lands. The Department has the personnel and knowledge to improve habitats but very limited ability to affect habitat at a landscape level. In order to complete habitat manipulations at a scale that will result in positive changes to mule deer on a population level it is imperative that collaborative partnerships be formed with our state and federal land management agencies. In some instances, Department staff may be able to provide cost-sharing or personnel to implement and monitor projects.

Objectives:

- Provide increased technical assistance to public land management agencies to initiate, plan and implement 15 new habitat improvement projects on public lands by 2013.
- Increase participation in inter-agency technical teams by Department staff.
- Develop and maintain a cooperative federal project budget of a minimum \$250,000 to provide cost-share match for federal dollars.
- Work with conservation organizations, elected officials, and private landowners to provide long-term conservation measures for 10,000 acres of important mule deer habitat

Methods:

- Increase Department staff technical assistance responsibilities and duties within annual work plans.
- Provide additional MDI personnel funding to reduce the MDI day to day and specific field project work load for biologists.
- Develop cooperatively funded MDI TSP positions with conservation agencies and organizations. With reductions in Department personnel and funding, developing cooperative positions will be necessary to get extra TSP manpower to work on conservation projects important to all agencies and groups.

Section Responsibility: HAB/ESB/FBC**2. Action: Increase MDI program funding through the exploration and procurement of outside Department funding through the development of conservation partnerships and grant application.**

Justification: MDI has primarily been funded by sportsmen license dollars. With current and future economic predictions, these limited license funds will never be able to fund MDI personnel and project costs to achieve MDI goals. The development of collaborative project partnerships with conservation agencies, organizations and sportsmen groups is essential to leverage limited Department funding and provide more resources for the MDI. There are wide variety conservation grants available annually that could be obtained to assist with the MDI program and project funding.

Objectives:

- Increase budget for mule deer management by 25% by 2013.
- Develop and maintain an adequate MDI license and PR operational budget.
- Pursue all applicable grant opportunities, submit four grants annually.
- Develop cooperative cost-share partnerships whenever possible on all MDI habitat projects. Goal is to match license dollars used 3:1 with outside department funds.

Methods:

- Improve public and legislative recognition of the value of mule deer to Idaho's economy.
- Work with state and federal legislators and the Governor's office to increase funding for mule deer management.
- The Wildlife Bureau and Commission develop a secured MDI budget large enough to provide MDI personnel and operating funds to implement MDI action items to achieve goals set for program.
- Pursue Cooperative Project Agreements with conservation partners whenever possible for large scale habitat projects.

Section Responsibility: HAB/ESB/FBC/HQ**3. Action: Develop an expanded program with adequate funding to conserve key mule deer habitats in perpetuity to benefit today's communities and future generations.**

Justification: Certain mule deer habitats in southern and eastern Idaho are critical and crucial to the mission of the Department and need to be protected in perpetuity. Mule deer winter ranges are an example. Currently, the Department does not have an adequate and reliable funding source to secure crucial parcels of mule deer habitat. Additionally, many of these areas are at risk to urban development. These high priority mule deer areas should be protected with conservation agreements and/or fee title acquisition. The development of regional conceptual area plans is consistent with the Department's Land Policy A-14.09.

Objectives:

- Develop a prioritized list of potential areas that need mule deer habitat protection for perpetuity by 2012.
- Review and improve current Department programs and policies to enable conservation easements and/or fee title acquisitions to be easier to develop and obtain through the Department's State Lands committee.
- Develop a substantial and sustaining Department conservation easement budget and program by 2012.
- Develop collaborative partnerships and long term agreements with conservation organizations to pursue and obtain outside conservation easement funding.

Methods:

- Prioritize conservation efforts with Regional mule deer conceptual area plans.
- Establish a long term program to provide additional and consistent funding to secure key mule deer habitats in perpetuity.
- Pursue conservation agreements as an initial means to secure key parcels and then pursue fee title acquisitions only with willing partners.
- Increase collaboration with Regional land trusts.

Section Responsibility: HAB/ESB/FBC

4. Action: Work with federal land managers and private landowners to facilitate livestock grazing practices compatible with providing good mule deer habitat.

Justification: Grazing is an important use of public lands in Idaho. The goal is to coordinate wildlife values and grazing practices for the mutual benefit of both. Under certain conditions, benefits to wildlife habitat can be garnered from properly managed grazing systems. Unregulated grazing of lower elevation shrub lands can result in degraded winter range conditions. Extensive use of riparian, mountain shrub and aspen communities can reduce the quality of important fawning and rearing habitats. By working with federal land managers and private livestock operators improved livestock grazing practices could be implemented to produce better habitat conditions for mule deer.

Objectives:

- Increase technical assistance and involvement to state and federal land management agencies during grazing allotment renewal and management plans.
- Goal should be to develop grazing plans that maintain appropriate ecosystem functions and provide healthy rangeland for both wildlife and livestock.

- Increase contacts and information exchange with livestock producer and associations.
- Provide additional MDI funding and assistance to livestock producers to implement improved grazing management plans and range improvements.

Methods:

- Develop flexible grazing plans in cooperation with associated agencies range management specialists and private operator. Rely on their knowledge of the vegetation and land and our knowledge of wildlife and habitat requirements to develop and implement potential improvements.
- Assist in the creation of a Department initiated Grazing Land bank program. The concept is to:
 - Provide resources and funding to private landowners to bank retired CRP acres and use these acres to remove cows off of important mule deer areas during critical time of the year.
 - Work with USDA contracts to find ways to harvest hay crops to be stored and used to feed livestock when turnout in a grazing unit is undesirable. I am sure you can word this better.
 - Find other private ground that could be managed as a grazing reserve.
 - Find or create vacant allotments on federal and state managed properties that can be used to shift livestock use from sensitive areas during specific time periods or to aid in restoration objectives.
- Initiate more creative MDI projects that allow livestock producers to improve their grazing practices and rangelands. Incorporate USDA program when appropriate.

Section Responsibility: HAB/FBC

5. Action: Increase public official awareness of impacts of human development on mule deer habitats and populations and pursue conservation measures with city and county governments.

Justification: Urban encroachment and rural development are two one of the biggest threats to mule deer habitats and populations within SE Idaho. To mitigate the impacts to mule deer it will be important to work closely with local communities and governments during initial project planning phases. Important items like travel corridors and “open-space” planning concepts can lessen the impacts and provide some resources to mule deer.

Objectives:

- Develop important mule deer areas and corridors maps surrounding communities and across private lands within focus area by Dec 2011.
- Attend planning and zoning meetings and provide information on importance of mule deer.
- Provide increased technical assistance during the planning phases of rural development projects.
- Assist developers, government agencies and communities with funding avenues to implement mule deer mitigation procedures.

Methods:

- Continue collaborative efforts with county officials, including planning and zoning committees, to provide information regarding mule deer populations and habitats.
- Continue to offer perspectives on what wildlife values might be lost in light of development or related decisions.
- Provide information to County officials and residents regarding the values associated with open space and wildlife within their counties.
- Continue to provide technical services and resource evaluations to Counties during comprehensive plan processes, planning and zoning development, and while they make decisions for their counties that might affect mule deer populations or habitats.

Section Responsibility: ESB**6. Action: Increase technical assistance and Department's involvement in new energy developments across SE Idaho.**

Justification: Across the Western US the development of new energy sources and their associated footprints are having a significant impact on mule deer habitats. Significant acres of habitat are being lost forever, mule deer habitats are being fragmented, and migration corridors are being disrupted. Typical new energy developments include mining, wind turbine and solar facility installations, and the establishment of new pipelines and power transmission lines. With the new National Energy Policy and ever increasing numbers of projects being proposed and implemented it will be impossible to stop the loss of habitat. However, it will be important to be involved with the planning process to help lessen the impacts to wildlife and to possibly mitigate habitat losses.

Objectives:

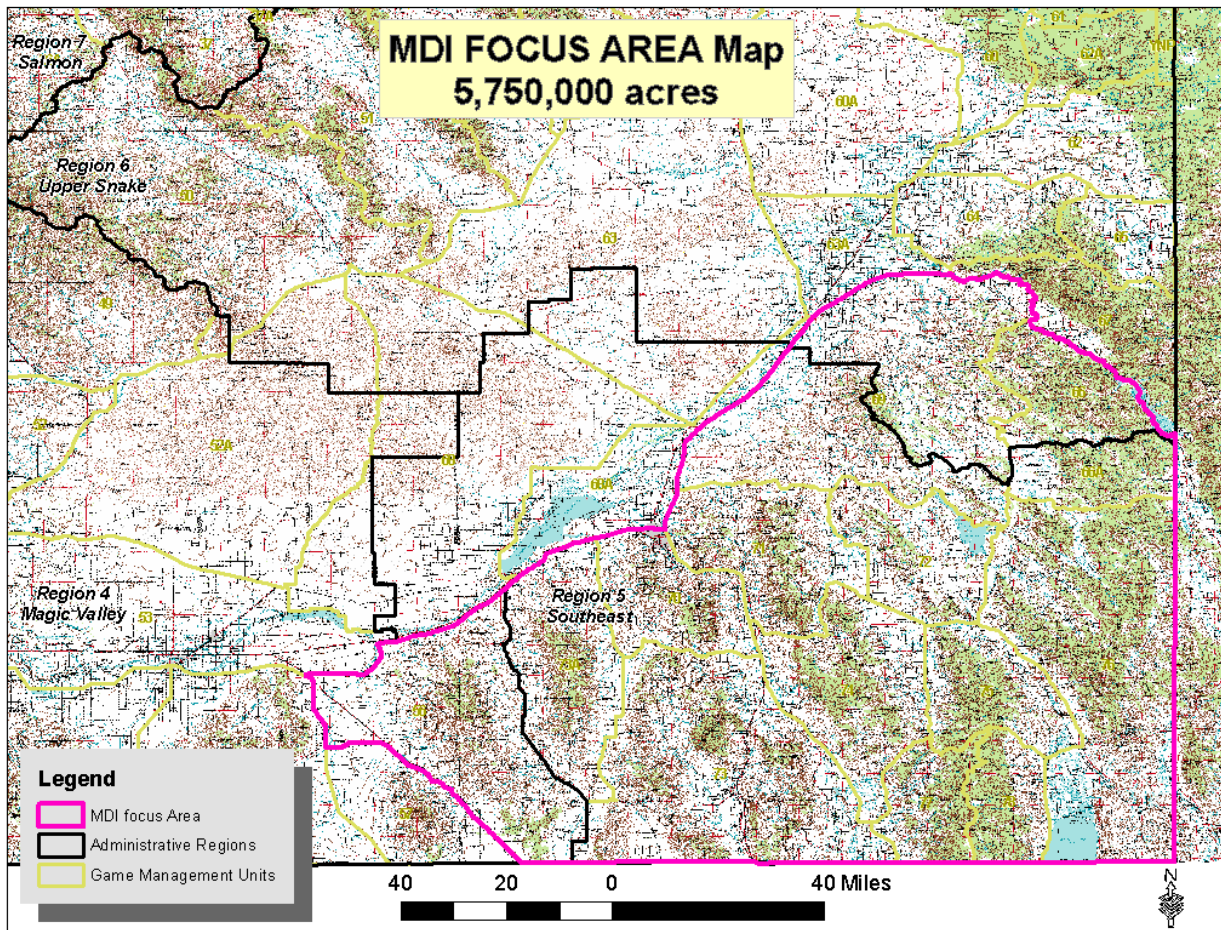
- Increase Department's participation in Energy Development Planning.
- Identify and quantify the acres of habitat being lost to all energy developments within SE Idaho.
- Pursue mitigation measures and funding to offset habitat acres being lost.

Methods:

- Consult appropriate state and federal land management agencies during pre-planning process.
- Assist in the design of the development to avoid or reduce unnecessary disturbances, wildlife conflicts, and habitat impacts.
- Provide energy planners and agencies with data and maps of important habitats and sensitive specie locations.
- Provide planners with potential procedures to minimize the disturbance and impacts to wildlife during the construction phase of the projects.
- Assist mining and power companies during the planning and implementation of reclamation and restoration projects.

Section Responsibility: HAB/ESB/FBC

Map 1: MDI Focus Area



Appendix 1: Idaho Mule Deer Management Plan, 2008-2017

<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/wildlife/plans/muledeer/mdpnosum.pdf>

Appendix 2: Habitat Guidelines for Mule Deer: Intermountain West Ecoregion, 2009

http://www.muledeerworkinggroup.com/Docs/IMW_Mule_Deer_Habitat_Guidelines.pdf

Table 1: Measurable Objectives	Short Term Goal 3 Year	Long Term Goal 10 Year	R4 Goal Annual	R5 Goal Annual	R6 Goal Annual
CRP Improvements – Forb strips, stand rejuvenation, shrub plantings	15,000 ac	50,000 ac	1,250 ac	2,500 ac	1,250 ac
Mtn Brush rejuvenation and plantings – private lands	3,000 ac	9,000 ac	250 ac	500 ac	250 ac
Private Land Projects	150	500	12	26	12
Mtn brush rejuvenation and plantings – public lands	7,500 ac	25,000 ac	625 ac	1,250 ac	625 ac
Riparian protection and/or improvements – public and private lands	9 miles	30miles	1/2 miles	1 1/2 miles	1 miles
Implement Mule Deer Mgt Plan, quantify performance targets	July 2013	July 2017	X	X	X
Re-vise Mule Deer Mgt Plan		July 2016			
Complete hunter satisfaction survey	Feb 2013	Feb 2016			
Initiate and/or complete road mortality project	4	10	1	1	1
Develop and complete MDI project/mule deer response monitoring	Develop 2013	Every 3 years	X	X	X
Complete hunter satisfaction survey		2017			
Increase mule deer populations in focus area	10%	40%	X	X	X
Remove portion of coyotes in removal project area	75%	75%		75%	
Monitor effectiveness of coyote removal	June 2012	June 2017			
Increase # of mule deer violations detected	30%	30%	30%	30%	30%
Increase mule deer enforcement activities	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%
Increase enforcement budget	10%	10%			
Provide and maintain access on and through private lands for MD hunting	75,000ac	75,000ac	15,000ac	45,000ac	15,000ac
Improve ATV use on private lands	August 2013				
Update and distribute MDI newsletter	6 editions	20 editions			
Update MDI web site annually	3 updates	10 updates			
Write MDI and mule deer ecology and management articles	30	100	3	4	3
Increase attendance at public meetings	50%	50%			
Technical assistance to state and federal agencies leading to projects	15	50	5	5	5
Private lands conservation projects	3,000ac	10,000ac	250ac	500ac	250ac
Prioritized list of properties important for mule deer	January 2011	Update annually	X	X	X

Develop MDI project Access Data Base	June 2010				
Increase mule deer mgt budget	25%	25%	X	X	X
Develop adequate and maintained MDI budget	June 2010	Increase annually			

