

Appendix F: 2025 status of the Elk & Vegetation Management Plan

On Jan 31, 2025, Parks & Open Space concluded the eighth year of hunting at Ron Stewart Preserve at Rabbit Mountain (RSP/RM) and surrounding properties used by the resident elk herd. The season started on Oct 2, 2024, and ran through Jan 31, 2025, with week-long breaks each month for holidays and to keep the park open to the public for longer periods.

This past season, elk were largely absent from RSP/RM. Despite this, Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW) still paid out \$11,000 in game damage last year—largely to one agricultural producer in the area. Resident elk are no longer using RSP/RM as a safe refuge from hunting pressure to forage nearby farms and ranches at night. Instead, this small resident herd is mostly staying on private property, where hunting pressure is limited and sporadic in this area.

The hunt management team continued to offer support to our tenants east of RSP/RM by providing hunters to their leased properties to address elk damage on an “as needed” basis. This past season, elk damage in this area was minimal and no hunters were needed on these properties.

Ron Stewart Preserve Harvest Overview 2025

- 1) Total participants: 24
- 2) Total harvests: 1 (4.2% success)

When the management plan was first approved eight years ago, the program’s goals were to:

- Reduce elk numbers to 30-70 individuals.
- Limit damage caused by elk to the fragile natural resources on the property.
- Assist the surrounding landowners experiencing game damage issues.
- Reduce elk-vehicle collisions along US 66.

Using these metrics, this program has been largely successful in these goals. For most of the year, elk are so scarce in the area that CPW struggles to find animals for their classification counts. We can confidently say that resident elk at RSP/RM is currently near zero (although the entire subunit north of the property up to Berthoud has around 40 resident elk). Long-term shrub monitoring by staff has shown major improvement in the mountain mahogany stands on the south end of Rabbit Mountain. These areas were once overused by elk and vulnerable to cheatgrass and other noxious weeds. Now, they are thriving with native grasses and forbs. Game damage still occurs in the area, but less than what neighboring landowners experienced in the past. Unfortunately, highway safety continues to be an issue in this area, with elk and other wildlife regularly crossing US 66 to access the St. Vrain riparian corridor to the south.

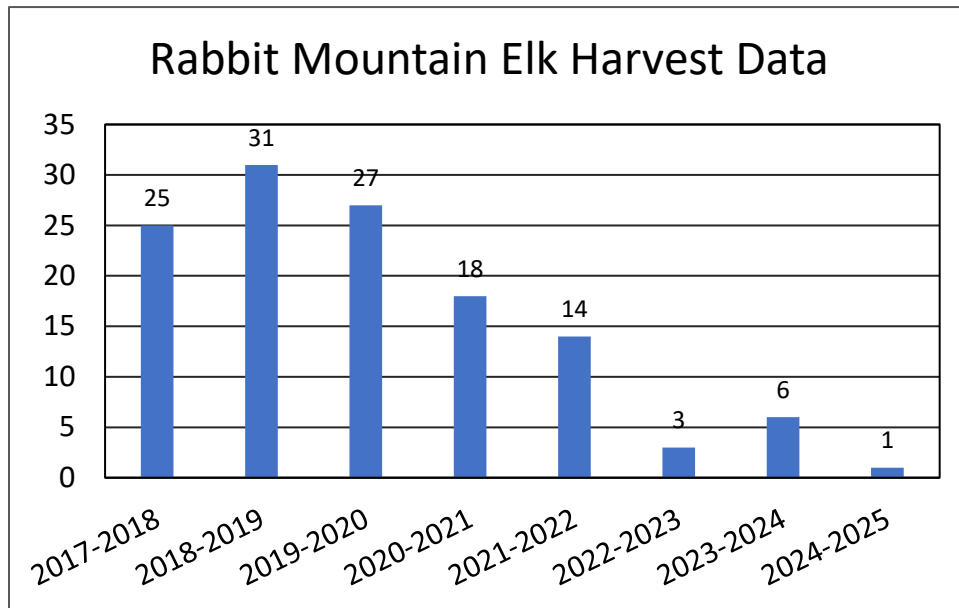


Figure 1: Elk harvest data for Ron Stewart Preserve at Rabbit Mountain from 2017-2025

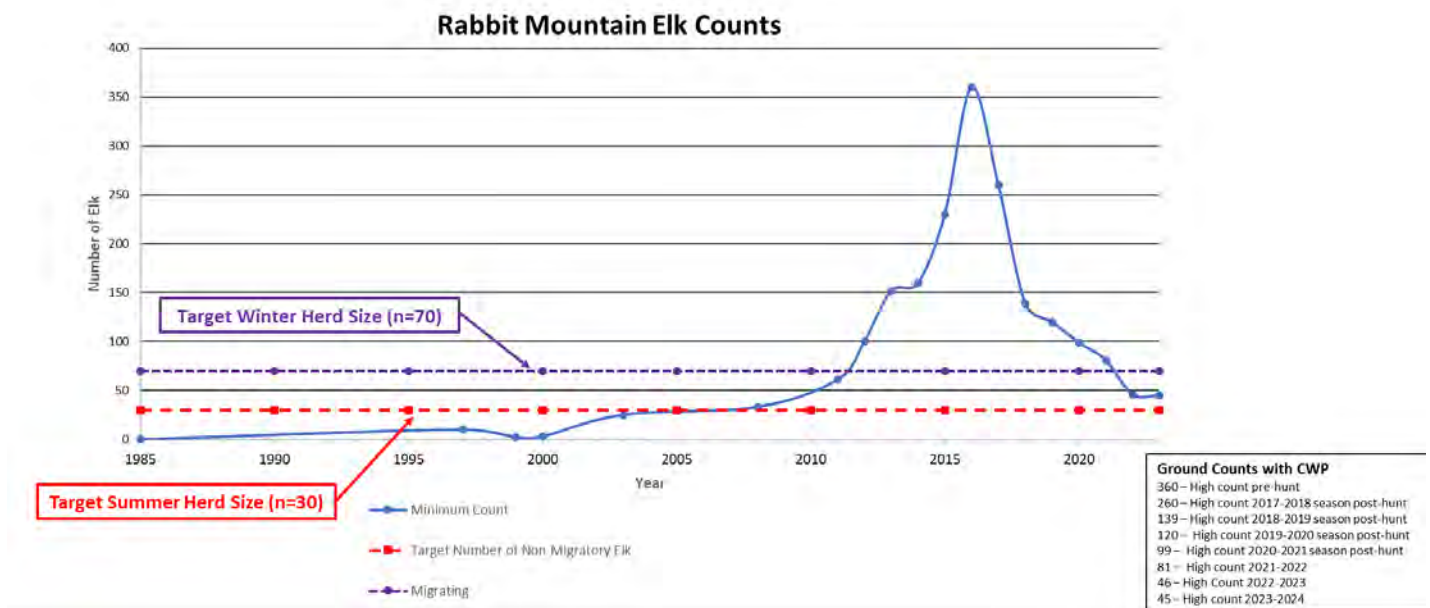


Figure 2: Elk Count Data for Ron Stewart Preserve at Rabbit Mountain. Initial counts for 2024-2025 have found no elk at RSP/RM.

Appendix G: Proposed Amendment for 2025-2030

Based on the status of the Rabbit Mountain elk herd as of 2025, staff propose to reauthorize the Rabbit Mountain Elk and Vegetation Management Plan. To simplify the process moving forward the following two amendments are suggested:

1. The Rabbit Mountain Elk and Vegetation Management Plan will be brought before the Board of County Commissioners for reauthorization every five years.
 - Any changes that dramatically alter the size and scope of the current written plan will be brought before the commissioners for approval. This would include, but is not limited to, the addition of new properties to the hunt area or major increases to the hunt boundaries.
2. BCPOS staff will work directly with Colorado Parks and Wildlife to make operational changes to the current plans, such as altering the number of hunters per week, changes to the duration of the hunting season, and pausing hunting once objectives have been met and restarting hunting if elk numbers increase to levels outside of plan objectives.