

STATE OF COLORADO

Bill Ritter, Jr., Governor

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

DIVISION OF WILDLIFE

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

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For Wildlife
For People

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Thompson Divide Coalition
C/O Wilderness Workshop
PO Box 1442
Carbondale, CO 81623

Thompson Divide Coalition Wildlife Summary

Compiled by

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The Thompson Divide Coalition has identified the Thompson Creek watershed and surrounding areas including, Coal Basin, Clear Fork, East and West Divide Creeks, and Baldy Mountain for desired permanent protection from oil and gas development. This identified priority area contains several designated roadless areas under the 2001 Roadless Rule, including; East Divide/Four Mile Park, Baldy Mountain, Thompson Creek, Clear Fork and Huntsman Ridge Roadless Areas. The area identified by TDC provides high quality habitat for a variety of wildlife including; mule deer, elk, moose, black bear, lynx, native cutthroat trout, a variety of small mammals, and several raptor species.

The areas covered by the TDC priority areas encompass a variety of CDOW mapped elk habitats. The upper elevations contain valued summer range and production areas with the lower elevations closer to the Crystal River containing winter range, severe winter range and winter concentration areas. The upper elevation summer concentration/solitude areas are extremely important for elk and possibly some of the more important at the higher elevations. These areas provide solitude for elk to graze undisturbed throughout the summer while nursing calves and putting on enough fat reserves to make it through the next winter. The defined elk production areas are of extreme importance. These areas need to be free of disturbance during the calving period May 15-June 15. Studies have documented that repeated human disturbance during the calving season contributes to decreased cow: calf ratios.

The TDC priority areas provide an important link between the Hightower area and the Crystal River valley. Moose are readily using this link moving from the original release area on the Grand Mesa and beginning to occupy valuable habitat in the Crystal River valley. This entire corridor provides adequate habitat for moose with the numerous willow- choked streams and grazing opportunities.

The lower elevation areas along the Crystal River west to Lake Ridge, north of Coal Basin are mapped as winter range and contain several areas designated as severe winter range and winter concentration areas for mule deer. These critical winter habitats on the lower elevations are extremely important to deer survival in the area during the winter months.

Black bear use the entire TDC priority area as part of its overall range. The many aspen stands provide important spring and summer forage areas with much of the lower elevation service berry and gambel oak stands comprising fall concentration areas. These fall concentration areas are heavily used from August 15 through the end of September while bears feed almost nonstop in an attempt to put on the necessary fat reserves before hibernation.

Much of the upper elevation area listed as a TDC priority is mapped as potential lynx habitat. The sub-alpine forest and willow-choked corridors along the streams and avalanche chutes provide adequate habitat for its favored prey species, the snowshoe hare. Thus far this potential range has been used sporadically with only a few verified occurrences of lynx occupying the area and most likely only traveling through. As lynx populations in Colorado increase these areas are likely to be occupied more frequently.

The cold water streams of the TDC area provide great fisheries habitat and recreational opportunities. These streams generally contain or have been stocked with rainbow, brook, brown and Colorado River native cutthroat trout as well as native species like mottled sculpin. Of particular importance are the headwaters of North and Middle Thompson Creeks which contain viable populations of Colorado River native cutthroat trout. Furthermore, the Middle Thompson Creek is especially noteworthy because of the large, isolated population that exists without invasive non-native trout near Middle Thompson Park. This population has been sampled and identified as a genetically pure strain of CRN.

The wildlife habitat identified in the TDC priority areas are highly valuable to the many species listed. This area is also very important from a recreational aspect. Hunting, fishing and other wildlife-related activities provided more than 33,000 jobs in Colorado and nearly \$1.8 billion in direct spending by participants in those activities which generated a total economic impact of more than \$3 billion during 2007.

Detailed mapping of many of the wildlife habitat areas can be viewed on-line at <http://ndis.nrel.colostate.edu/>.

DIVISION OF WILDLIFE INFORMATION RELATED TO HUNTING AND FISHING:

Economic Impact of Hunting, Fishing, And Wildlife Watching: Prepared for the Division of Wildlife by BBC Research & Consulting, Denver, CO

Statewide Economic Impacts of Hunting and Fishing in 2002

Hunting and fishing is an important and sizeable portion of Colorado's tourism economy.

Activity	Direct Expenditures (\$ in thousands)	Total Impact (\$ in thousands)	Total Jobs
Elk Hunting	\$ 191,500	\$ 340,100	4,500
Deer Hunting	54,600	97,500	1,330
Other Big Game	6,600	12,000	180
Small Game	85,100	153,700	2,240
Fishing	458,700	820,000	10,950
CDOW Expenditures	<u>48,800</u>	<u>91,200</u>	<u>1,010</u>
TOTAL	\$ 845,300	\$1,514,500	20,210

Thompson Divide Area Hunting Sales:

Sales for big game species, i.e., elk, deer, pronghorn, etc. for hunting Unit #42 is 10,335 licenses issued. Unit #43 was issued 3,666 licenses. (Information provided by Lisa Dale, DOW, Legislative Program Manager).

Estimated Hunting And Fishing Economic Impacts by County, 2002

County	Total Expenditures	Total Impact	Jobs
Delta	\$ 14,600,000	\$ 25,900,000	340
Garfield	30,000,000	53,100,000	690
Gunnison	23,000,000	40,600,000	540
Mesa	32,600,000	58,100,000	750
Pitkin	<u>13,000,000</u>	<u>23,600,000</u>	<u>340</u>
TOTAL	\$ 113,200,000	\$ 314,500,000	2,660

Recreation impacts – Year-round recreational use, including hiking, dog-walking, dogs off leash, cross-country skiing, mountain biking, 4 wheeling, and snowmobiling, has increased tremendously in the past 10 years. This heightened level of human activity on the landscape is a disturbance to both deer and elk on production grounds and on winter range. These behavioral stresses are additional mortality can negatively affect the deer population directly by limiting fawn survival, as well as indirectly by pushing deer off of preferred feeding and bedding areas. (1)

Potential natural gas development – Mineral rights in the Thompson Creek area have been leased already and many leases are soon to be considered for renewal. Gas development in the area is likely to be detrimental to mule deer and other wildlife. Potential negative impacts to deer include habitat fragmentation; habitat loss; increased vehicle traffic; noise, sound and light pollution, leading to displacement of deer from traditional fawning grounds and summering areas and direct mortalities due to vehicle strikes. (1)

(1) Data Analysis Unit Plan, Game Managements Units 43, 47 and 471. Division of Wildlife, February 18, 2011