

# FACTSHEET MULE DEER

EST.  2015

WILD HARVEST  
INITIATIVE®

## SPECIES PROFILE *ODOCOILEUS HEMIONUS*

- ▶ Mule deer and black-tailed deer diverged during a glaciation of North America 18,000 years ago, where “true” mule deer found a refuge from the ice in the south and black-tailed deer found a refuge from the ice in the Pacific Northwest.
- ▶ Mule deer are versatile, surviving in places with a monthly average temperature of -2°F (Yukon, Feb) and 88°F (Texas, Aug).
- ▶ Mule deer can successfully interbreed with white-tailed deer. Columbian black-tailed mule deer successfully interbred with white-tailed deer in Tennessee.
- ▶ Mule deer are capable of “stotting”, which involves all four feet coming onto the ground at the same time. In this way, they can reach speeds of 40 km/h for a short time.
- ▶ Mule deer are named for their large ears that move independently.
- ▶ Mule deer have a relatively high fecundity rate (1.70) compared to other ungulates (average 0.82), giving birth to twins, triplets, and rarely, quadruplets. Because of their high fecundity rates, mule deer predation is often “compensatory”, meaning it does not influence deer abundance.

Mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) are native to North America and occupy a wide diversity of habitats, encompassing over 3.8 million km<sup>2</sup>. Mule deer are comprised of 10 different subspecies, with two distinct groups: “true” mule deer and black-tailed deer. Black-tailed deer are smaller than true mule deer and are found in coastal mountainous regions. However, black-tailed deer and true mule deer co-occur in certain jurisdictions and can also hybridize. The Wild Harvest Initiative® team determined the live mass and edible mass of mule deer harvests with respect to the mule deer subspecies present within each jurisdiction. This factsheet summarizes the harvest data of all mule deer subspecies.

Mule deer have been hunted by many Indigenous Peoples in North America, and were of great cultural significance to many groups who used the muscle, heart, liver, intestines, sinew and bones for food and tools. Today, mule deer are hunted for food by over 11 million people annually in Canada, the United States, and Mexico.

During the 1800s, the mule deer population in North America was threatened due to subsistence and market hunting, habitat destruction, and overgrazing of livestock. Fortunately for mule deer, the American Conservation Movement was launched in the mid-1800s, led by recreational hunters passionate about fair chase and preserving an outdoor heritage. In the early 1900s, mule deer were brought to the forefront of conservation. Following changes to land use and harvest laws, mule deer populations increased to record levels, peaking in 1950 at 7.5 million animals.

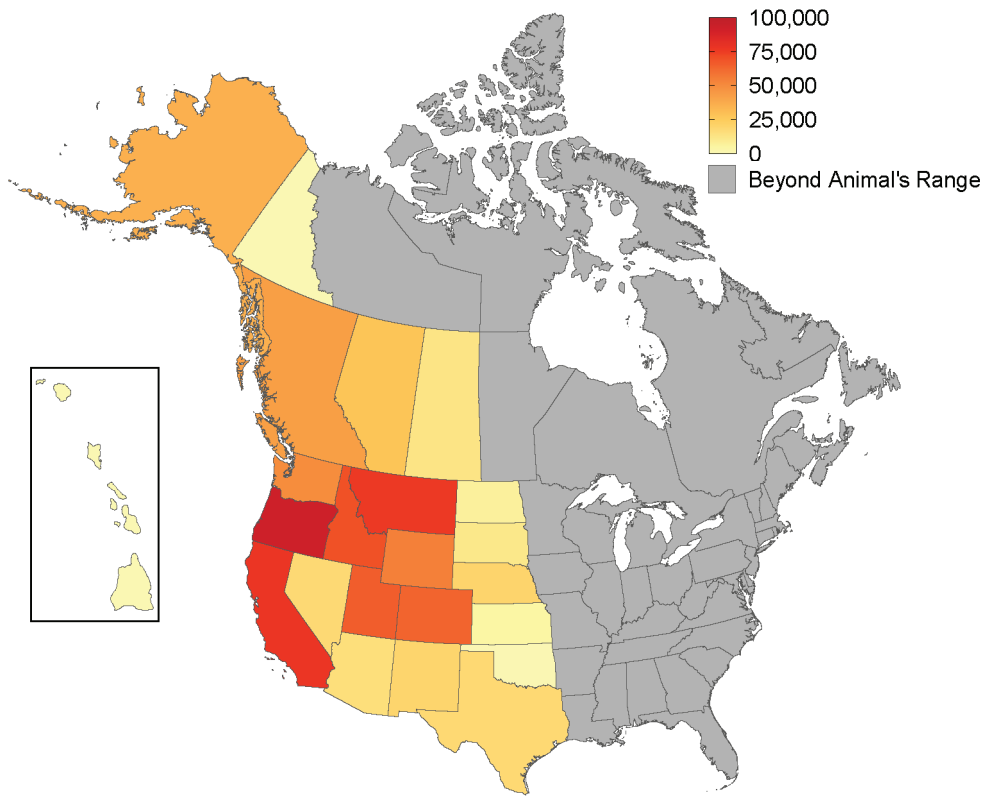
Starting in the 1960’s, however, the mule deer population again declined and the reasons for this decline varied across mule deer range. Their abundance was impacted by a combination of habitat loss and fragmentation, severe weather, competition with other ungulates, disease, poaching and predation. Nonetheless, with persistent conservation efforts by government agencies, NGOs, and individuals, the North American mule deer population now remains stable at around 5 million deer, and has done so since 1980. The species is currently classified as “least concern” on the IUCN red list, meaning there is no forecasted extinction risk.

## WEIGHT OF MULE DEER HARVEST IN THE US AND CANADA (2014/15-2015/16)

	Live Mass (lbs)	Edible Mass (lbs)	Number of Meals (6oz servings)
CANADA	14,101,889	6,365,844	16,975,618
US	122,834,326	54,861,612	146,297,925

Please cite as: Conservation Visions. 2022. Mule deer fact sheet. St. John’s (NL): Conservation Visions Wild Harvest Initiative®

## DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF MULE DEER HARVESTS IN NORTH AMERICA



More than 783,000 mule deer were harvested in the US and Canada during the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 hunting seasons (an average of nearly 392,000 per year).

### A Failed Relocation

In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt made the Kaibab Plateau and the adjacent Grand Canyon a national game preserve due to low mule deer numbers. Without a strong understanding of sustainable use, hunting predators of mule deer was encouraged, while hunting mule deer was prohibited. The mule deer population increased to such a level that tens of thousands were facing starvation. In spite of this, hunting was still not permitted. Instead, in December 1924, an attempt was made to drive mule deer across the Colorado River to the south side of the Grand Canyon where forage was abundant. The attempt was unsuccessful.



Mule deer are selective eaters and depend on relatively small amounts of high quality forage.

### FOOD VALUE

Venison is a healthy lean protein that is packed with vitamins and minerals including zinc, iron and B-vitamins. Did you know that venison contains over 50% more iron than beef, but has less than half the calories and cholesterol?

#### "True" Mule Deer



#### Black-Tailed Deer



	Male	Female
Live Mass (lbs)	200.0	142.5
Edible Mass (lbs)	88.0	66.0

	Male	Female
Live Mass (lbs)	159.7	80.0
Edible Mass (lbs)	71.0	36.0

### ABOUT THE WILD HARVEST INITIATIVE®

The Wild Harvest Initiative® is the first effort to synthesize and evaluate the combined economic, conservation and social benefits of recreational wild animal harvests in the United States and Canada. The program's combined primary emphases on food security and wildlife conservation is tailored to change conversations and provide new ways of communicating the relevance and benefits of recreational hunting and angling.