

CDFW to conduct helicopter surveys

February 24, 2024



The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is initiating annual helicopter surveys to inventory and monitor mule deer, elk, pronghorn antelope and bighorn sheep populations throughout the state. Flights will be conducted in portions of Solano, Mendocino, Siskiyou, Modoc, Lassen, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside counties during February and March 2024.

CDFW utilizes a variety of survey methods to regularly monitor big game population size, distribution, demographics and trends over time. In more forested environments, CDFW employs the use of trail cameras and fecal DNA. In more open habitats, aerial surveys provide an efficient and rapid method of data collection, affording CDFW biologists the ability to cover larger areas in relatively shorter time periods.

CDFW scientists use the survey data in statistical models to estimate the total population size of each species in different hunt zones or management units. This information helps wildlife managers better understand population performance relative to a variety of factors including climate change, habitat quality, human-wildlife conflict and habitat fragmentation, among others. Results are also used to make regulated harvest recommendations to the California Fish and Game Commission, which is the state regulatory authority that adopts tag quotas, hunting seasons and zone boundaries.

These efforts are important for managing California's wildlife populations and are especially critical due to recent harsh winter conditions that may have had negative impacts on population numbers.

Big game hunters and other members of the public are encouraged to participate in the commission's annual regulatory cycles. Information regarding upcoming meetings, including dates, locations, background documents and virtual meeting links are available at the California Fish and Game Commission website.