The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, as part of a statewide information effort, has completed public forums in southwest Nebraska regarding management strategies for elk, pronghorn, mule deer and white-tailed deer.

The meetings followed the conclusion of the November firearm deer season. Biologists utilize data from that season to help form recommendations for the 2009 season, and this year, the Game and Parks Commission is weighing public comments as they relate to current and proposed management strategies.

According to Nebraska Game and Parks Commission district wildlife manager Richard Nelson of North Platte, who facilitated meetings held in McCook and North Platte, “In the area of deer management we addressed two primary concerns. One was the need to further control white-tailed deer numbers in certain areas of the state, and the other was a growing need to manage the harvest of mule deer separately from white-tailed deer.”

Nelson believes that some of the harvest strategies originally designed to put extra pressure on white-tailed deer and provide additional hunting opportunities are beginning to exert excessive pressure on mule deer in some areas of the state.

Nelson cited the provision of unlimited statewide buck permits, youth permits and muzzleloading permits that allow the harvest of either-sex mule deer and white-tailed deer as examples of strategies that are being evaluated for change to assist in mule deer population management in some Nebraska locations.

“When we first established month long unlimited muzzleloading permits, for example, there were few applicants, rifles were primitive, and telescopic sights were not allowed. Now we have a very large contingent of muzzleloader hunters, inline rifles are more common than not and telescopic sights are allowed,” he said.

Several participants at recent meetings expressed concern that the primitive weapon intent of the original muzzleloading season has been compromised by modern technology and that muzzleloader hunting is now producing a substantial mule deer harvest.

“This is an impact that some in Game and Parks didn’t foresee when the muzzleloader hunt was first established,” Nelson said.

Nelson believes that Nebraska has an adequate white-tailed deer population to support unlimited muzzleloader, youth and statewide buck permits, but mule deer populations may not support increasing pressures. He believes it is important to adapt these special hunts to mule deer populations, adding that biologists also are looking at a variety of options to address this.