

COLORADO MULE DEER — BY THE — NUMBERS

By Justin E. Spring

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It comes as no surprise to anyone who follows mule deer that Colorado is the place to go to take a book deer. While the famed Arizona Strip or some of the New Mexico units have the potential for an absolute tank of a buck, so does Colorado, and the odds of finding a buck mature enough to grace the trophy listing in Boone and Crockett's magazine is higher than anywhere else. This holds true especially when you factor in draw odds, or if your pocketbook allows you this luxury, the cost of a landowner tag to bypass these odds. Since mine does not, finding a hand up on the odds is what I want, and since I have access to the largest big game dataset in the world, as do all subscribers to B&C's Trophy Search. I rely on this info to do my pre-game research. Together, let's "walk through" Colorado's mule deer and see all the ways we can locate a unit to fulfill your desires for a hunt.





ABOVE: Mike Duplan took this typical mule deer in Eagle County, Colorado, in 2006. The buck scores 208-1/8 points and is ranked 15th in the state.

For this, I want to find a unit with big buck potential that may not be listed in other places as a top unit. There are many out there that will tell you the top units for which to apply. Having these lists in hand isn't a bad idea. They will be a good reference in the end to check against.. In most cases, these lists are correct, but commonly the points required to draw makes many units unattainable. I will go through and classify a state by counties, then narrowed to units, and ultimately arrive at some units that fit my criteria for what I want in Colorado in the next few years. As a check, we will see if the top units (ranked by difficulty to draw) appear in my list. If they do, we have an indicator that we are on the right track. This hopefully will mean some units in that list are in the same class as the top units without all the popularity. For this analysis that is what I am looking for.

You may be thinking that you don't have the time for such an in-depth search, but how much money and time do you already spend? Each year you apply in Colorado you have to purchase a license. If you do the research of finding the top units from a magazine or website, you already have that cost. If you go with an application service, tack on some more money to your yearly contribution. You know that it will take you

some 15 years to draw, assuming the unit stays on top that whole time. Hunting license fees will not drop in the near future, so calculating those costs is a minimum of what it will cost you. Colorado is a straight-point state so you have to have the points to play. How many licenses do you have to buy to get the points before you get into the possibility zone for the top units you may be interested in? All of a sudden, that \$5,000 landowner tag is approaching the affordable point. Even if you figure your time is worth \$100 an hour, if you can bypass 10 years of applications with a couple hours of research, that is \$200 well spent. You can hunt the year you want, with a minimal investment, and take great pride if your rankings results in a trophy deer that comes from a unit most sources might overlook.

That said, can you kill a trophy buck in a state you have never been to without waiting 20 years to draw a tag? I believe so, and this breakdown will take readily available data from current sources to get you thinking about what is possible.

B&C's Trophy Search

This database is the complete collection of all Boone and Crockett trophies in 38 categories from the beginning of recorded trophies to date (1830 through today). Data searches can be queried in a number of different ways depending on the type and amount of information in which you are interested. It is set up by species and you can ask it to search for trophy listings by a specific year or range of years; by state, county, or province; or by the hunter/owner's last name if you are looking for one particular trophy.

The "Advance Search" option allows you to ask specific questions about a trophy category. For example:

- Highest score
- Greatest or smallest spread
- Greatest or smallest inside spread
- Greatest number of specified points (4x4, 5x5, 5x4, etc.)
- Greatest or smallest sum of abnormal points
- Longest point
- Greatest or smallest main beam
- Greatest circumference.

TROPHY DATABASE SEARCH [TERMS OF AGREEMENT](#)

WELCOME TO THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB'S ON-LINE TROPHY DATABASE. SUBSCRIPTION EXPIRES ON 11/17/2015.

NEW FEATURE - Click the camera to see field photographs.

TROPHY QUERY BY CATEGORY

Categories:

Kill Date: TO Include Expanded

Location:

Number To Display:

Search Options:

TROPHY QUERY BY HUNTER/OWNER

Last Name: Include Expanded Date

STATE/PROVINCE RANK FOR SPECIFIC CATEGORIES

Categories:

Kill Date: TO

Number To Display:

NUMER OF TROPHIES BY COUNTY OR LOCATION

Categories:

Kill Date: TO

Location:

Number To Display:

1. Mule Deer Entries (Typical and Non-Typical) By County Since 2000

County	Entries	Typical	Non-Typ
Eagle	38	31	7
Garfield	22	18	4
Mesa	22	16	6
Gunnison	21	19	2
La Plata	21	20	1
Montezuma	20	19	1
Montrose	17	14	3
Rio Blanco	15	12	3
Douglas	13	11	2
Moffat	12	9	3
Delta	12	10	2
Grand	11	9	2
Yuma	11	5	6
Archuleta	10	10	0
Pitkin	9	6	3
Las Animas	9	9	0
Jefferson	7	7	0
Dolores	7	7	0
Conejos	6	4	6
Jackson	5	3	2
Routt	5	4	1
Pueblo	5	4	1
San Miguel	5	4	1
Morgan	4	1	3
Park	4	4	0
El Paso	4	1	3
Teller	4	2	2
Chaffee	4	3	1
Cheyenne	3	2	1
Fremont	3	2	1
Custer	3	2	1
Rio Grande	3	2	1
Larimer	2	2	0
Boulder	2	2	0
Adams	2	2	0
Summit	2	2	0
Clear Creek	2	2	0
Kit Carson	2	0	2
Elbert	2	1	1
Saguache	2	2	0
Otero	2	2	0
Washington	1	0	1
Arapahoe	1	0	1
Kiowa	1	0	1
Huerfano	1	1	0
San Juan	1	1	0
Baca	1	1	0

2. Square Mile Per Entry By County

County	Sq_Mi/Trop
Eagle	44.5
Douglas	64.8
La Plata	80.9
Delta	95.7
Montezuma	102.0
Pitkin	108.1
Jefferson	110.6
Montrose	131.9
Garfield	134.4
Archuleta	135.5
Teller	139.8
Mesa	151.9
Dolores	152.6
Gunnison	155.2
Grand	170.0
Clear Creek	198.3
Rio Blanco	214.9
Conejos	215.2
Yuma	215.4
Custer	246.6
Chaffee	253.8
San Miguel	257.7
Rio Grande	304.4
Summit	309.7
Morgan	323.5
Jackson	324.2
Boulder	370.3
San Juan	388.3
Moffat	395.9
Routt	473.6
Pueblo	479.5
Fremont	511.3
Las Animas	530.6
El Paso	532.4
Park	552.7
Adams	591.6
Cheyenne	593.8
Otero	634.9
Arapahoe	805.9
Elbert	925.4
Kit Carson	1080.8
Larimer	1317.1
Saguache	1585.1
Huerfano	1593.4
Kiowa	1785.8
Washington	2524.1
Baca	2557.1

3. Number Of Entries Combined with Square Miles Per Entry

County	Combination
Eagle	1.0
La Plata	3.5
Douglas	5.5
Montezuma	5.5
Garfield	5.5
Delta	7.0
Mesa	7.0
Montrose	7.5
Gunnison	9.0
Pitkin	10.5
Jefferson	12.0
Archuleta	12.0
Rio Blanco	12.5
Grand	13.5

These counties reported zero entries: Weld, Logan, Sedgwick, Phillips, Gilpin, Denver, Lincoln, Lake, Crowley, Ouray, Prowers, Bent, Hinsdale, Mineral, Alamosa, Costilla, and Broomfield

Table 1 (cont)

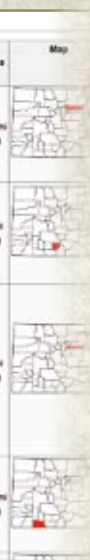
County	FIPS code	County seat	Established	Formed from	Ethymology	Population	Area
Adams County	001-F	Brighton	1862-11-15	Split from Arapahoe County	Named in honor of Alva Adams, the 8th, 10th, and 94th Governor of the State of Colorado.	441,603	1,182.29 sq mi (3,062 km ²)
Alamosa County	003-F	Alamosa	1913-03-08	Split from Costilla County and Conejos County counties.	Named for the cottonwood trees which grow along the Rio Grande and its tributaries. Alamosa is a Spanish word for a cottonwood grove.	15,445	733.21 sq mi (1,879 km ²)
Arapahoe County	005-F	Litton	1861-11-01	Created as one of the 17 original counties of the Territory of Colorado. Renamed South Arapahoe County for the five months from November 15, 1862 to April 11, 1863.	Named for predecessor Arapahoe County, Kansas Territory, which in turn was named for the Arapaho Nation of Native Americans.	672,009	804.41 sq mi (2,083 km ²)
Archuleta County	007-F	Pagosa Springs	1883-04-14	Split from Conejos County.	Named in honor of Colorado State Senator Antonio C. Archuleta.	12,094	1,364.03 sq mi (3,508 km ²)



The first step in my process is to rank each county in Colorado by number of entries. This is a fairly straightforward process using B&C's Trophy Search, and I only included typical and non-typical mule deer taken since January 1, 2000 (Table 1). The last decade for me is more telling. Many historic hotspots are no longer producing and vice versa; new units don't have a long history of entries, but lately they have out-performed some classics when historic numbers are thrown out.

From this we find the top counties for numbers. While interesting, we can break it down further; all counties are not uniform in size, so a larger county may have better totals than actual entry density. For my second calculation, I found areas of each county on my GIS software from the census data. (If you do not have this at your disposal, a quick Google search of "areas of counties in Colorado" will bring you to Wikipedia. While Wikipedia isn't a source worthy of most publications, it gives you what you need for this calculation.) I exported the data to a spreadsheet, manually input the square mileage for each county, and then divided the number of entries per county by square mileage, giving me square miles per entry in the given time frame selected (Table 2).

From these two lists, I formulated a basic way to combine the two numbers: Table 1 rank plus Table 2 rank divided by two. If you want a public-land hunt, the percentage of county covered by national forest or BLM as a third factor could be added by ranking all the counties you are interested in from No. 1 to whatever you want to include, and combine this score with the number or entries. At some point, you will find a few counties that rise to the top. Once you get here, it's time to start identifying units for further analysis. A county may cover dozens of units, so I recommend concentrating on three or four counties.



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ABOVE LEFT: If you do not have access to GIS software a quick Google search of "Areas of counties in Colorado" will bring you to Wikipedia. While Wikipedia isn't a source worthy of most publications, it gives you what you need for this calculation. **LEFT:** While on a 2005 hunt in Yuma County, Colorado, Rodney A. Lindsten took this 246-1/8 point non-typical mule deer. **RIGHT:** This typical mule deer, scoring 202-2/8 points, was taken by Gregory S. Hunt. He was hunting in Mesa County, Colorado, during the 2008 season.



Some states, such as Oregon, break down percentage of unit as public or private. Again, create a spreadsheet table with the units you want in the county you identified and include percentage of public or private land. Sort by that number from lowest to highest, and then rank those in a separate column to further weight your preferences into your analysis. One place to look for additional information in a visual format is OnXHUNT app or chip. They have data available in different forms that increases by the day in terms of states available and in what formats; I have used all their formats extensively for my hunt planning. Their newest product is a web based mapping tool called OnXMaps Viewer that is a user-friendly GIS platform where numerous layers can be added to further refine your unit identification. This is what I used to find the units within the counties I identified. It also can list landowner names which can be used to contact the particular landowner or perhaps identify a resource management company or group that may allow access.

By employing available data with a little creativity, you can develop your own personal ranking for units on paper. It is completely customizable with a minimal investment and a home computer. Combining number of entries and square miles per entry seems to address my particular needs for this research, so I take my top results on the combination of the two (Table 3).

For my calculation, I am looking purely at getting a tag one to three years out for a decent hunt with the chance at a book-caliber buck. I like the area of central-western Colorado, so I will refine my search to look at eight counties: Rio Blanco, Garfield, Mesa, Delta, Gunnison, Montrose, Eagle, and Pitkin. Going to B&C's Trophy Search, I pull the information for these counties in the last 10 years by including expanded kill dates, which gives me the best dates to be there—helpful when I search for draw odds. (Table 4).

I am now looking for a unit in one of those counties that dates fall between 10/31 and 11/10 within the 33 units that my eight counties completely cover. Looking at the units, I identify 12 of them that have significant forest service cover from my OnX maps program, so I know I will have a place to go. Referencing my list, I now go to Colorado's draw odds on the Colorado Parks and Wildlife website and start searching for my hunt. The interesting part as I go through, I see the breakdown this year shows third rifle season being Nov 1-9, meaning that third season rifle is the better choice statistically to kill a book deer. This well could be that later seasons are harder to draw, and less people are

4. Top Eight Colorado Counties Entries Over The Past 10 Years, By Date

Date	Entries
9/1-9/5	
9/6-9/10	4
9/11-9/15	6
9/16-9/20	4
9/21-9/25	
9/26-9/30	2
10/15-10/20	17
10/21-10/25	17
10/26-10/30	12
10/31-11/4	33
11/5-11/10	41
11/11-11/15	9
11/16+	10

Additional information in a visual format is OnXmaps by Hunt GPS Maps. They have data available in different forms for many states. There are Google Earth layers available great for hunt planning. Their newest product is their own mapping software where numerous layers can be added and can list landowner names which can be used to contact the particular landowner or perhaps identify a resource management company or group that may allow access.



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Deer				
Hunt Recap Summaries	Drawing Summaries	Preference Points Required	Estimated Harvest	Population Estimates
2014 Report	Report	Report	Report	Report
2013 Report	Report	Report	Report	Report
2012 Report	Report	Report	Report	Report
2011 Report	Report	Report	Report	Report
2010 Report	Report	Report	Report	Report

In an effort to assist Colorado’s big game hunters applying for the draw, Colorado Parks and Wildlife provides the following hunting season information. These reports show how many licenses were available in all big game management units throughout Colorado, how many hunters applied for those limited licenses, how many of those hunters were successful drawing and how many preference points it took to be successful.

hunting; this is a call you have to make on your own. In my mind, with around 70 of the bucks taken during the time the third rifle season falls this year, my attention is on finding a tag for the third rifle season.

I have limited my choices by my criteria to the following units and the odds for a third season rifle tag (Table 5):

These tables are all available for Colorado Parks and Wildlife at this address <http://cpw.state.co.us/thingstodo/Pages/Statistics.aspx>

Now, you have a unit that has promise, you can draw it in under two years, OnXMaps tells you it is 70 percent public land, and you know there are numerous trails and areas closed to motorized access. Time to put boots to the ground. Many units look good on paper, but once you get into them, it’s never a deer behind every rock as you imagined, so the first order of business in most cases is a scouting trip. But other than deer numbers, what are you looking for? What type of antler configurations are present in that area that result in the number of inches of antler you are looking for? Some deer score well with spindly racks and long points, others are very massive deer with good point length, and some just throw 70 inches of abnormal, putting a 140-class frame into book-range in the non-typical category. Here is where Trophy Search can help further. You can query it, for example, to show only bucks for LaPlata County taken since 2010. The photos are then brought up so you find the attributes of the deer that score well. Don’t overlook the habitat the pictures are taken in. Notice the clothing the hunters are wearing—is it hot and sunny, rainy, snowing? This all should be factored into your preparations. This will give you a unit with potential and get you well on your way to preparing for the hunt.

Hunting and technology in many cases mix about as well as oil and water, though in other cases can save you time, money, and ultimately result in a better hunt. If you go into a unit with confidence, it’s far easier to hike farther, stay longer, have realistic expectations, and enjoy the hunt more for what the original founders of the Club promoted—exploring new lands. Club founders may have been the first, but thanks to their efforts, the public lands available today are far more expansive than one could ever hope to cover in a hundred lifetimes. Not everyone can travel abroad to hunt—or even to different parts of the country—but if you wish to hear a bull scream from an aspen patch on a crisp September morning

5. Top Eight Colorado Counties Entries Over The Past 10 Years, By Date

Unit	Non-Resident Points in 2013 for 3rd Season	Success/All Seasons	Number of Hunters in all seasons
23	0	33	680
24	0	22	226
36	1	44	649
41	0	46	987
421	0	38	1032
44	16	43	243
45	1	39	365
521	1	41	295
53	8	81	313
54	7	54	381
55	9	69	271
62	2	59	1271



ABOVE: Youth hunter Kyle Lopez took this non-typical mule deer in 2007 while hunting in Douglas County, Colorado. It scores 306-3/8 points and is ranked second in the state. It ranked first place at the 27th Big Game Awards Program.

with a bow in your hand or watch a giant mule deer buck lip curl towards a doe as the sun drops behind the ridge on which he is skylined, the opportunity is there. Boone and Crockett members have set aside the lands to ensure that game populations recovered and now publish the data necessary to enjoy what this great nation has to offer. ■