

Mule Deer Season Added In Castro County



This white-tailed deer was photographed by Brice West at Buffalo Lake near Umbarger.

By Jim Steiert

Farmers, ranchers, pheasant hunters and highway travelers have been seeing mule deer in growing numbers in Castro County the past few years—particularly around playas and in tracts of CRP grasses. Mule deer have even been sighted within the city of Dimmitt. Enough muleys were present that several deer crossing signs have been scattered by the Texas Department of Transportation at points around the county.

Now, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission has deemed the local mule deer population sufficiently stable to authorize a hunting season on the steel gray, big-eared deer for the first time in Castro County history.

The Parks and Wildlife Commission authorized the addition of a nine-day season in Castro, Hale and Lubbock counties during 2014-2015 at its March 27 meeting in Austin, but passed on adding Lynn County, despite the presence of a large number of deer and some outstanding bucks. A prominent landowner reportedly opposed adding an open season on mule deer in Lynn County and had the ear of legislators. The season had previously been closed in all of the newly-added counties.

Opening a mule deer season in Castro County now gives the entire Magic Triangle area of Castro, Deaf Smith and Parmer counties a brief nine-day mule deer season. Both Deaf Smith and Parmer counties have already had mule deer seasons for several years now.

"People have told us that mule deer have been in playas in Castro, Hale and Lubbock counties for a long time. This is in line with a trend over the past decade or so that has seen growing numbers of mule deer expanding into more Panhandle counties. This expansion has occurred because dense CRP grasses have afforded mule deer with cover and travel lanes, and these deer have been able to take advantage of wheat, grain sorghum and corn for food and cover—the cover particularly applying to sorghum stubble fields and CRP," says Calvin Richardson, Canyon-headquartered Panhandle District 2 wildlife leader with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

This writer has encountered mule deer in playa and CRP habitat adjacent to Highway 194 west of Hart and south of Nazareth along FM 168, and they have also been reported in numbers west of Dimmitt, nearly always in close proximity to tall CRP grass cover.

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