

# Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve

## Ungulate Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement



# Welcome!

## Ungulate Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement

## Public Scoping Meeting







# Park Management Framework

## Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve Act of 2000

### *Establishes GRSA National Park and National Preserve*

*“The Great Sand Dunes, together with the associated sand sheet and adjacent wetland and upland, contain a variety of rare ecological, geological, paleontological, archaeological, scenic, historical, and wildlife components, which...comprise a setting of irreplaceable national significance.”*

### Park Purpose

The purpose of Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve is to:

1. Preserve spectacular and unique sand dunes and their high elevation watersheds, and perpetuate the entire system for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. Protect the sand deposits associated with the dune mass and the groundwater system on which the sand dune and wetlands systems depend.
2. Provide long-term protection of the geological, hydrological, ecological, scenic, scientific, cultural, wilderness, educational, wildlife, and recreational resources of the area. Preserve the remarkable biodiversity evident in the landscape from the valley floor to the mountain crest.
3. Provide opportunities for visitors to experience, understand, enjoy, and gain a sense of stewardship of the park’s natural and cultural resources.
4. Facilitate research to support park management and to promote scientific knowledge and education.

### General Management Plan Guidance

#### Wildlife Management Strategies

#### Elk/Bison Management:

The National Park Service will...

- Continue its elk/bison management study to determine the status and health of the elk and bison populations that use park lands.
- Continue to work with partners, including CDOW, the USFWS, USFS, The Nature Conservancy, and park neighbors to develop management strategies for elk and bison.
- Develop an elk management plan.
- Continue to cooperate with CDOW to learn more about population dynamics and determine appropriate management actions for game species.
- Work with CDOW to address conflicts between hunters and other recreational users of the preserve.





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# Purpose and Objectives

## Purpose

The purpose of this plan/EIS is to establish a framework for the management of elk, bison and other ungulates that supports attainment of desired habitat conditions at Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve and is compatible with conditions and management activities across the broader eastern San Luis Valley Landscape.

## Need

This draft plan/EIS is needed to identify desired future habitat conditions on newly acquired park land and future land transfers, using the best available science to guide management decisions and responses to changing conditions.

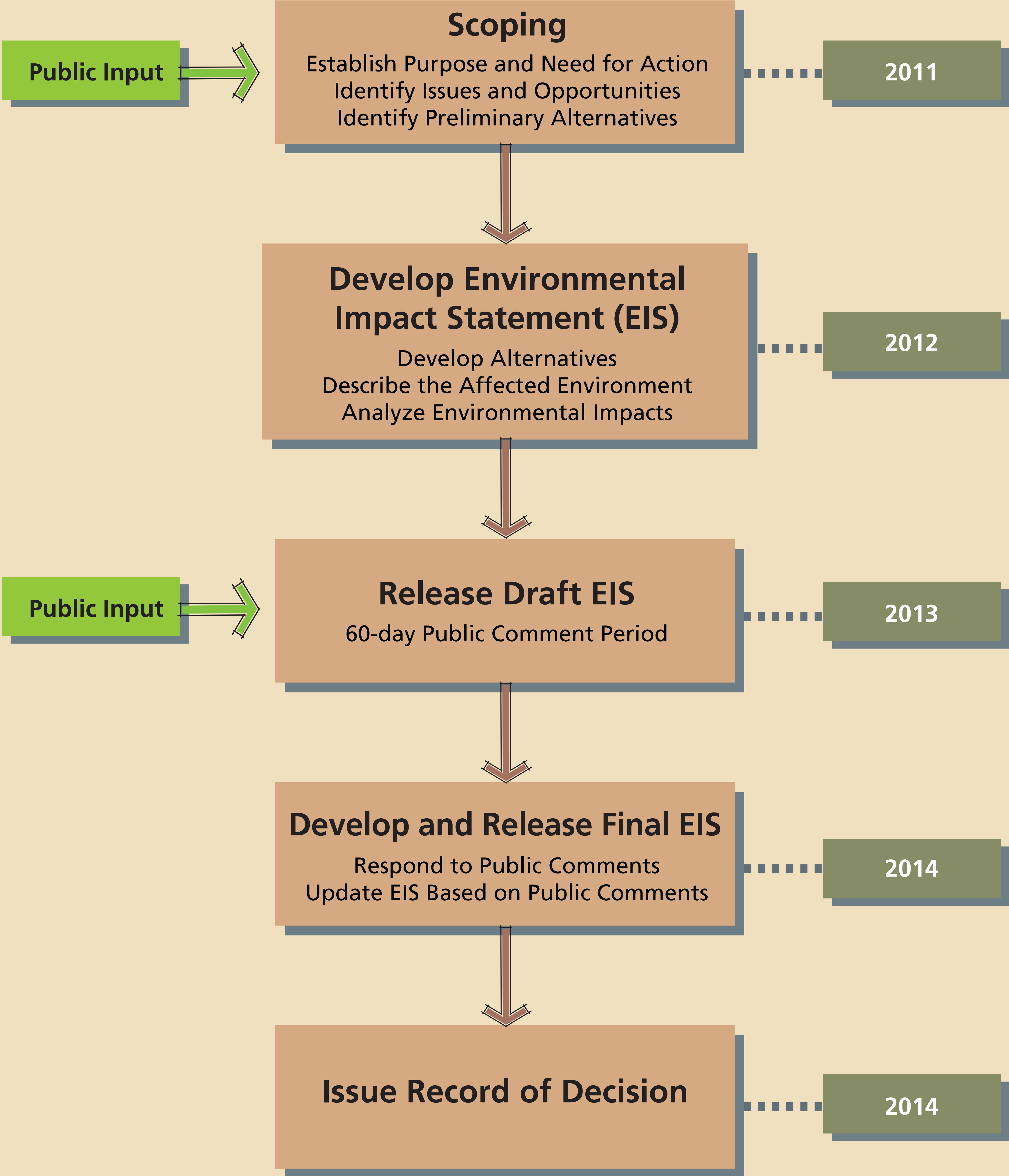
## Objectives

The overall objectives of this plan include:

- Determine whether and how to establish a semi-free-ranging bison population, and the land area and management tools that would be necessary to do so.
- Incorporate long-term monitoring of habitat conditions and ungulate species.
- Identify a suite of ungulate management tools for use in the park and preserve, and a framework to guide how and when those tools would be used.
- Maintain natural processes, including disturbance regimes and movement patterns, to the extent possible.
- Provide ungulate management recommendations that balance a range of issues and concerns and are responsive to cooperating agencies, stakeholder organizations, local communities, and the interested public.
- Minimize wildlife-human conflicts across the landscape while supporting the attainment of desired habitat conditions and appropriate population and distribution of key species on park lands.



# The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Process



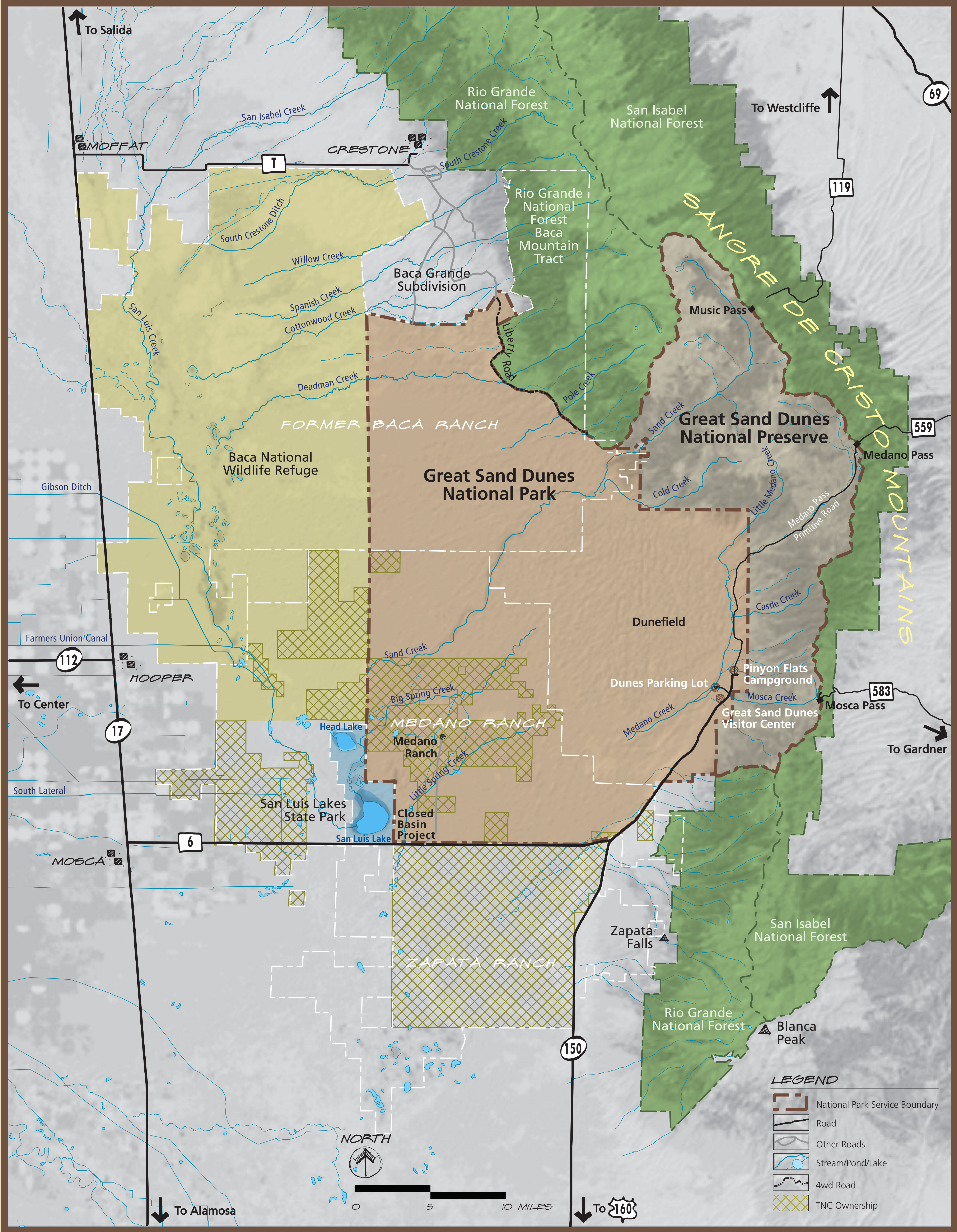


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# Area Ownership





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## Elk

- Nearly eliminated in the early 1900s, elk are now abundant throughout semi-open forests and mountain parks throughout Colorado.
- Elk are generalist feeders, foraging on both grasses, forbs, and shrubs across grassland, shrubland, and forested habitat types.
- The park is considered year-round habitat for elk, which use higher-elevation habitat during the summer.
- The USGS study of elk population dynamics estimated the elk herd to be about 4,500 animals.





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## Bison

- Once found throughout North America, bison are now limited to commercial and conservation herds.
- Primary habitat consists of grasslands and prairies dominated by grasses and sedges.
- Bison domestication and hybridization with cattle has raised concerns about genetic conservation of the species.
- No free ranging bison populations exist in Colorado. The Medano-Zapata Ranch bison herd, about 1,500 animals, is the only conservation herd in the San Luis Valley.
- Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve may present an opportunity to establish a viable conservation herd of wild, undomesticated bison.





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## Other Ungulates

### Mule Deer

- Primary forage consists of browse (trees and shrubs) and forbs.
- Within the park, mule deer are most often found near the pinyon-juniper woodlands along the mountain front.

### Pronghorn

- Primary forage consists mainly of forbs and shrubs such as rabbitbrush.
- The park provides habitat for pronghorn, which generally concentrate in the northern portions of the San Luis Valley.

### Bighorn Sheep

- Primary habitat includes alpine meadows, talus slopes, and rock outcrops that provide grass, low shrubs, and rock cover.
- The park and preserve provide high-elevation habitat in the Sangre de Cristo range north of Medano Pass.





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## Comments

**The scoping comment period will be open until January 6, 2012**

- Provide comments to NPS staff during the open house
- Submit comments on-line at:  
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grsa-ungulates>
- Write your comments on comment sheets provided at the open house
- Mail comments to:  
GRSA Ungulate Management Plan/EIS  
NPS-EQD Academy Place  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, CO 80225

### Questions to Consider:

- What issues should the NPS consider when evaluating the possible establishment of a semi-free ranging bison population?
- What issues should the NPS consider when evaluating if and when management actions should be used to influence elk populations?
- What management tools should the NPS consider for potential use to manage elk, bison, and other ungulates?
- What other issues or opportunities should the NPS consider in this planning process?