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“The survey that used to take over 40 hours is now taking 30 hours or less,” he said. “GPS technology has advanced to where we can now plug all the boundaries into the pilots’ GPS and we can be sure we are getting precise coverage of our units, not double-counting animals and not straying into non-tribal jurisdictions.”

Division Head Steve Whiteman said the annual count

is a crucial part of creating a region-wide picture of wildlife activity.

“Deer and elk within the San Juan Basin are migratory species that cross political boundaries,” he said. “They are really shared resources that all of the jurisdictions have vested interest in managing. The annual game count has been a big part of that coordinated management with our neighbors.”



photos Jeremy Wade Shockley/SU DRUM

The Southern Ute Wildlife Division’s annual aerial game count took place over the Southern Ute Indian Reservation from Thursday, Jan. 5 through Sunday, Jan. 8. Wildlife Technician Danielle Austin disembarks from the aircraft during a refueling stop at Pagosa Junction on Thursday, Jan. 5; mule deer herds, cow elk herds, and solitary bull elk are all taken into account as game numbers are tracked from the air using GPS and visual identification methods; identifying landmarks like Chimney Rock and the Piedra and San Juan rivers help wildlife officials as they navigate the reservation; Wildlife Biologist Aran Johnson uses a map with defined quadrants to break up the game count over several days.

