



Big Hole Watershed Committee
Wildlife Working Group Minutes

June 16, 2009 – 6:00 pm
Jackson School

In Attendance:

Brendan Burns, MBA; Corky Logan, RMEF; Craig Fager, MFWP; Dean Peterson, rancher; Hans Humbert, rancher; Harold Peterson, rancher; Jim Hagenbarth, rancher; Joe Johnson, rancher; John Dooling, rancher; Katie Benzel, BLM; Kyle Malkovich, rancher; Mark Kambich, rancher; Mike Bias, BHRF; Ray Baker, hunter; Ray Gross, hunter; Russ Rutner, USFS; Steve Scott, hunter; Susan Johnson, rancher; Vanna Boccadori, MFWP

Introductions/Review of Minutes

Introductions were made and the March meeting minutes were reviewed and approved. Jim Hagenbarth reminded the group of the purpose of this meeting: to value the elk and solve the problem of their management as a community. He noted the ranchers and hunters in the room.

Overview of Elk Brucellosis Surveillance

Craig Fager handed out the most recent report (attached to minutes). Craig noted that all tests of elk west of I-15 came back negative, and that there were only three samples in the Big Hole. He can't say definitively that there is no brucellosis here, but the hot spots right now are Yellowstone and the Madison valley.

FWP's plan for next year is to focus on sampling in districts on the edges of the known areas of infection. They intend to establish harder boundaries based on herds.

Discussion centered around:

- Testing in Idaho

There has been testing in the Salmon area and they haven't found anything. They are testing differently there. Ranchers wonder if brucellosis is coming from both sides since it's been found on the Idaho side of the Centennials. The elk farms in Idaho are not a problem because those are the tested more than any domestic animal in the U.S.

- Getting good samples

The focus for testing will be on the boundaries of the known infected areas, however FWP is willing to distribute kits where anyone is willing. There is a problem with getting good samples as too much heat or cold will invalidate the sample.

- Feeding

The effects of elk feeding in Wyoming were discussed – the feeding began because of starvation and now they are dependent upon it.

- Vaccine

One of the problems with developing a vaccine is that brucellosis has been designated as a biological agent. If it was taken off that list, and recognized as primarily a wildlife disease and not a livestock/human disease it would be easier to manage. It was also

suggested that cleaning up the brucellosis in bison would be easier and effective and would make a big difference in the elk.

- Other diseases

Chronic wasting and TB are also big concerns when the elk herds mix and then take the diseases back to their home ranges.

Fish and Game Proposal for Elk Management in District 321

Vanna Boccadori passed out a copy of the most recent Elk Management Proposal for Hunting District 321 (attached to minutes). This version is not too different than the proposal discussed at the March meeting – Vanna explained this is a work in progress based upon conversations with the stakeholder groups in the area.

Discussion centered around:

- Allowing more liberal boundaries for A9 permits
- Changes in elk recruitment and calf/cow ratio changes (Vanna will bring more information to next meeting)
- Elk population: no population objectives have been set for district 321 since it's a summer area; population is not necessarily increasing – they seem to be staying on private land
- Idaho: FWP is working with counterparts in ID, they're regulations are significantly different with management as trophy bull and not cow area. Perhaps RMEF could help with these discussions?
- Bow hunting and social vs biological issue

Discussion

- Involve non-resident and resident landowners – perhaps lease their land to outfitters during hunting seasons.
- Create hunter/landowner relationships
- Splitting private land from state/federal land in liberality of hunting
- Determining the effects of: motorized vehicles, drought, habitat change, liberal regulations

Develop Action Plan

The group is in general agreement with Vanna's plan. The proposal will be submitted to the Commission in October for approval for the 2010 hunting season. Vanna and Craig will notify the group if they need our help before the next meeting.

Determine Next Meeting Date

The next meeting will be at 6:00 pm on Tuesday, September 22, 2009 at the Jackson School.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.