



Big Hole Watershed Committee
Wildlife Working Group Minutes
Tuesday, March 3, 2009 – 6:00 pm
Beaverhead County 4-H Building

In Attendance: John Peck, Mike Bias, Ray Weaver, Ray Gross, Bill Sporich, Ray Baker, Rick Schmauch, Darrell Johnson, Steve Jennings, Katie Benzel, Craig Fager, Brad Borst, Kurt Alt, Vanna Boccadori, Harold Peterson, Jim Hagenbarth, Jami Murdoch

Purpose of the Wildlife Committee Meeting: Move forward on community based elk management and action plans which promote understanding and collaborative efforts involving wildlife management, landowners, and recreation interests.

Meeting Minutes: Approved from January meeting.

Follow up report on Blood Sample Kit: Craig Fager, FW&P
Results were reported on information received March 3, 2009 from Montana state sources.

- A total of 706 kits were returned, 45 were reactors and have been sent to LSU for further testing.
- Initial results of the sampling in Big Hole area west of I-15 are negative.
- In district 340 in the Highlands there was 1 suspect sample which has come back Yersinia so it is negative.
- District 324 in the Snowcrest Mountains had 2 reactors out of 544.
- Two reactors were found in District 327,
- One reactor was found in District 360
- Nine reactors were found in District 362
- Seven reactors were found in the Paradise Valley.

The above mentioned data is based on preliminary results.

History of Brucellosis and Vaccine: Jim Hagenbarth gave a brief history of brucellosis, brucellosis vaccine and the disease pathway.

Jim Hagenbarth discussed the importance of thorough public education regarding the human, livestock and wildlife risks associated with the brucella bacteria. Objective science and responsible risk management of livestock and wildlife interactions are needed to develop a reasonable solution.

Spontaneous conversation ensued between Jim Hagenbarth and Kurt Alt regarding elk and bison management.

Overview of Elk Management in District 321: Vanna Baccadori

Presentation: Elk Management in the West Big Hole HD 321

Location: Big Hole HD 321 borders management area 270 and 250 and 21A in Idaho.

Presentation thoughts to use as a starting point for discussion:

- Population trends, harvest trends and season structure in HD 321, HD 250/270 shows a general increasing trend on the cows side of the cow/bull ratio.
- Population trends, harvest trends and season structure in Unit 21A in Idaho shows an upward trend on cow population and a flat trend on bulls.
- Hunter access and private land use practices.
- Public land management. Possible impacts of grazing and recreationalist travel.
- Findings from Montana/Idaho Elk Migration study from 1976.
- Wolves
- Quality hunts
- Game Damage

Other Considerations:

- Change harvest regulations to 4 point or larger only.
- Primarily brow tine bull or antlered.
- Present harvest data.
- Question: Why does Fish, Wildlife & Parks not have mandatory reporting?

Idaho Unit 21 A is managed using the following tools:

- A Tag
- B Tag
- Controlled hunt

Hunter Access:

The current situation appears to be a 2 day season in the Upper Big Hole due to the closing of private land which sits against the forest, so the Elk make “3 jumps and they are gone”.

Harold Peterson suggested working with folks to open private land and assist with issues that limit the cooperation of those landowners.

Public Land Management might look at:

- Grazing allotments
- Recreational pressure
- Travel management

1976 Elk Movement Study:

- 15 radio collared elk and 20 elk with identifiable rope bands

Migration of elk:

- Elk moving earlier to spring/summer grounds.
- Snow and hunting pressure triggered movement off summer range.
- Several wolf packs in this system.

What type and quality of hunt do people want:

- Manage for quality or quantity
 - Lack of trophy bulls:
 - Suggestion: Go from an A tag to an A & B tag, make HD 321 a permit only area, different regulations specific to archery and rifle season.
 - Overcrowding:
 - Archery/rifle season regulations.

Game Damage tools:

- Herding contracts
- Game damage hunts
- Management season hunts
- Game damage sign up rooster is available from June 15 – July 15 (out-of-state hunters can also sign up)
- Damage hunt dates August 15 – February 15

Policies:

- Develop management objectives for HD 321. This summer range does not have management objectives, management policy focuses on winter ranges.

General Discussion:

Harold Peterson discussed:

- Time of year conflicts with the elk in late August and September because the elk move into the lush bottom, usually 25 – 150 head.
- There is a numbers problem. Changing district boundaries maybe helpful because at this point-in-time elk are hard to manage due to a lack of landowner participation.
- Use watershed boundaries the same way moose are managed.
- Issue an either sex tag or only bull tags.
- Offer an over-the-counter A9 in 321 and 329 – especially a combined tag in consideration of current economic conditions.

Craig Fager added:

- Perhaps some kind of limit on archery: harvest a cow to get a bull tag.

Points discussed:

- Is archery season pushing the elk around?
- Hunter vs. Harvester
- In late August there are not elk in the high country.
- Feed isn't the problem, something has changed their pattern.
- Sanctuaries are being created within large, privately owned property.

If a plan is going to be effective, the following may need to be considered:

- A different rifle season to harvest elk before they go to Idaho.
- August may be too hot and cooler space is not available.
- Continue community meetings between Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and landowners to discover what is going on with the elk and what the best management policy is.
- Discuss a management season in mid August and revisit the plan after flying in 2009.
- Offer a 5 week hunt for either sex.
- Keep in mind the time frame in regard to any proposed changes to regulations.

Comments from participants:

Darrell Johnson

- Archery starts too early, rifle ends too early.
- Meat is lost during early hunts.
- The Elk have just starting to move into the Badger Pass area during the last week of the season.

Bill Sporich

- Hunting near livestock makes hunters uncomfortable.
- Hunting styles need to be considered; hunting in a field isn't challenging.

Ray Gross

- Best quality hunts have gone by the wayside. The best bull now is a 320.
- Can we get the numbers down and increase quality hunts?
- The number of archery hunters appears to be increasing.
- What is the retrieval rate for archery harvests?

General Comments:

- Appears to be more pressure in Idaho and Idaho has more bull kills.
- Idaho manages for quality, how should the season be managed in the Upper Big Hole area?
- Hunting changed in the 1990's, there seems to be more pressure from out-of-area hunters since then.
- Hunters report seeing less great bulls in the past decade.
- Bull trend- how does this correlate to a genetically diverse community.
- Outfitter input is vital and is missing from this group.
- A9 and 321 would allow for bull archery and cow rifle.
- Stakeholders noticed distributional changes starting about 15 years ago.

- Elk are adaptable and will seek the easiest place to live.
- Other changes include-economic trends, feed/nutrition, wolves and sustainability.
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Action Plan:

Invite Forest Service representatives, guides/outfitters, and out-of-state hunters to help find a solution.

Harold Peterson will contact folks in the Upper Big Hole Basin in an effort to encourage participation.

Vanna Bacoddori will develop proposals, management objectives, season restructure plan, and share the before listed information at the next meeting.

Thank you for your participation.

Next Meeting: June 16, 2009, 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
 Jackson School
 Jackson, MT

For more information please contact Jim Hagenbarth at hagenbarthj@msn.com or 406-490-2121.