



Big Hole Watershed Committee
Wildlife Working Group Minutes
Tuesday, September 22, 2009 – 6:00 pm
Jackson School

In Attendance:

Corky Logan, RMEF; Craig Fager, MFWP; Craig Jourdonnais, MFWP; Darren Olsen, USFS; Dean Peterson, rancher; Emma MacKenzie, BHWC; Hans Humbert, rancher; Harold Peterson, rancher; Jim Hagenbarth, rancher; Joe Johnson, rancher; Katie Benzel, BLM; Kyle Malkovich, rancher; Neil Anderson, MFWP; Roy Baker, hunter; Ray Weaver, rancher; Russ Riebe, USFS; Susan Johnson, rancher; Vanna Boccadori, MFWP

Introductions/Review of Minutes

Introductions were made and the June meeting minutes were reviewed and approved.

Brucellosis update

Neil Anderson (MFWP) gave a PowerPoint presentation and passed out the 2008 Elk Brucellosis Surveillance Final Report (both available as a pdf – please email Emma (info@bhwc.org) for a copy). Neil emphasized that the focus in the testing is to discover the boundaries of the brucellosis.

After the presentation, discussion focused on:

- In the GYA, the bison have been pushed into the park, but elk are a different situation. The surrounding areas have come up with collective strategies to move elk off private property. There is more funding available tied to Dept of Livestock plan which is one reason for the need to know the boundaries. The more information, the more targeted the areas can be – especially for ranchers and testing. If brucellosis is found in the wildlife then there will be more restrictions for ranchers, if they rule out brucellosis in an area, it will be removed from restrictions.
- Wyoming feed grounds (used to draw elk away from cattle) have 30% brucellosis rate. Testing will help to see if the feed grounds are the source and its spreading from there, or if this is a distinct population. Elk from Wyoming are currently a bigger risk than bison from GYA.
- The bacteria is spread in birth fluids. It causes pregnant elk and bison to abort and when other animals investigate, they pick up the bacteria. It can remain latent until the female experiences stress (e.g. pregnancy). Elk have been known to clear the bacteria entirely.

Low Calf Recruitment

Craig Jourdonnais (MFWP) gave a PowerPoint presentation and passed out a graph and chart of elk population information (both available as a pdf – please email Emma (info@bhwc.org) for a copy).

Discussion focused on:

- Elk movement is based more on hunting than weather



- 2008 saw 15 calves/100 cows – this is the lowest recruitment since 1963, and is a big concern. Not sure if this is an anomaly or part of a trend. This was a cold and wet year, pneumonia may have played a part.
- Predators – mountain lion, black bears, wolves – each hunt the calves at different part of their first year. No one predator is seen to have a greater impact than the others at this time.
- Some issues related to population changes: drought, invasive weeds, subdivisions, predators
- There is much research that could be done, however funds are limited and there are social pressures as well.
- Study was done suggesting that predator pressures result in hormone imbalances and problems with pregnancies. Craig noted that this graduate study was reviewed and found to be poor science, there were withdrawals from the student's committee.

Proposed Changes to Hunting

Vanna Boccadori (MFWP) passed out information regarding changes to hunting districts for Elk, Moose, and Antelope. Information for Moose and Antelope are summarized below. If you did not get a copy of the Elk information, please contact Emma (info@bhw.org) and she will email a copy to you.

Elk

Vanna noted that it will take at least two years to set benchmarks based on new regulations. Some of the results they hope to see are:

- Movement of cows off private land
- Reduction in overharvesting
- Increase in population and calf recruitment

Discussion followed regarding:

- Use of short-range weapons
- Change of 'branch' to 'brow tine'
 - More bull recruitment
 - Takes branched yearlings out of play
- Cow tags on private lands
- Problems in river bottom, private lands
 - Herding has been successful for some ranchers
- Access to private land
 - this group could help to talk with landowners, set up programs for hunters

Moose

- HD 321: Eliminate antlerless and antlered licenses
- HD 323: Reduce either-sex licenses from 3 to 1
- HD 325: Reduce antlerless licenses from 4 to 1
- HD 326: Reduce antlerless licenses from 6 to 2; reduce antlered licenses from 3 to 1
- HD 327: Reduce antlerless licenses from 3 to 1
 - *If a district is **not listed**, then **no changes** are being proposed.*



- Discussion about declining moose populations focused on:
 - Fewer cows and so fewer calves
 - More predator and road kills
 - Result of past harvest quotas
 - Diseases:
 - Brucellosis is fatal for moose, but they are less likely to come into contact with it
 - There are parasite problems in this population
 - If there is a decrease in population here, is there an increase someplace else? No – populations are decreasing across Montana as well as other states

Antelope

- HD318:
 - Eliminate 250 over-the-counter Doe/Fawn Licenses
 - Replace with 500 Doe/Fawn licenses available via drawing and offer up to 2 per hunter.
 - The intention is to entice hunters. Leftover licenses will go to surplus.
- HD319:
 - Reduce either-sex licenses from 75 to 50
 - Add 25 Doe/Fawn licenses
- It was noted that coyotes are the main predator for antelope fawns.

Current hunting regulations are available on the MFWP website at:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/regulations.html>

Handouts of information on hunting district changes for elk, moose, and antelope from this meeting are available. Please email Emma at info@bhwc.org if you'd like a pdf of any/all.

Wolf Hunt/Management

Craig Fager explained the wolf hunting season is to be concurrent with the deer and elk season. Two wolves had been harvested as of September 21st. The quota for the area east of I-15 is twelve. Northwest Montana has the highest quota of 44, since it has the most concentrated number of wolves. There is a 12-hour mandatory reporting rule and the hide (with tag attached) and skull must be presented to FWP within 10 days. Genetic samples will be taken to look at connectivity issues as well as other research questions. Hunters who are familiar with trapping and mountain lion/black bear are used to this, ungulate hunters may be unfamiliar with these regulation.

Depending on how the hunt goes, there may also be hunting in December – generally, if 80% of the quota has not been met. Anyone who has questions should call Craig.



(Regulations are available at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/content/getItem.aspx?id=39546>).
After this season, regulations and quotas will be re-evaluated.

There was discussion regarding

- Hunting on private lands
- Block management
- Managing wolves: difference between hunting and agency control actions

Develop Action Plan

In October, Vanna will send her final proposals for changes in the various hunting districts. Emma will forward the information to the group and get feedback through email and phone. If necessary, the group will meet in December before the Commissioners meeting on December 10th. Here is a link to the website: (<http://fwp.mt.gov/doingBusiness/insideFwp/commission/meetings.html>)

There will also be a public comment period in January 2010.

Determine Next Meeting Date

The next meeting was tentatively considered for Monday, December 7 at the Jackson School, 6:00 pm. Notice will be sent out once a firm date is set.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

**PROPOSED SEASON CHANGES FOR THE
UPPER BIG HOLE HUNTING DISTRICTS
Fall 2009**

Species: Antelope
Hunting District: 318
Year: 2010/2011

- Eliminate 318-20 over-the-counter doe/fawn licenses.
- Create 318-10 doe/fawn licenses and issue 500 licenses through the annual drawing, up to 2 per hunter.

Species: Antelope
Hunting District: 319
Year: 2010/2011

- Decrease 319-00 Either-sex licenses from 75 to 50.
- Create 319-10 doe/fawn licenses and issue 25 licenses through the annual drawing, one per hunter.

Species: Elk
Hunting Districts: 321
Year: 2010/2011

- Divide Elk HD 321 into two (2) hunting districts along Highway 43. The south half will be Elk HD 321 and the north half will be Elk HD 334 (Figure 1).
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- Change the Bull Elk regulation from Antlered to Brow-tined and apply to both HD's.
- Add 100 Antlerless Elk Licenses (A9/B12) to new HD 321 with a quota range of 50 - 200.
- Add 200 BTB/A- permits to new HD 334 with a quota range of 25 – 250. If these permits get converted to A9/B12 licenses, the conversion would be 125 A9/B12 licenses with a quota range of 25 – 150.
- Apply the following structure to new HD 321:

General Elk License

- 6-week Archery Season Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk.
- 5-week General Season Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk.

Antlerless Elk License (A9/B12). Drawing only. Apply by June 1. 321-80: 100 licenses. Only valid in HD 321 and the north portion of HD 329 from Big Hole Pass along the Big Hole Divide to Skinner Lakes (legal description attached as Appendix I, p.7).

- 6-week Archery Season Antlerless Elk.
- 5-week General Season Antlerless Elk.

- Apply the following structure to the new HD 334:

General Elk License

- 6-week Archery Season Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk.
- 5-week General Season Brow-tined Bull Elk.
- 5-week Brow-tined or Antlerless Elk. Only youth ages 12-15 and hunters with a PTHFV.

Special Elk Permit. Drawing only. Apply by June 1. 334-10: 200 permits.

- 6-week Archery Season Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk.
- 5-week General Season Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk.

Species: Elk
Hunting Districts: 319 and 341
Year: 2010/2011

- Eliminate Brow-tined Bull/Antlerless Permits in 319 and 341;
- Apply the following structure to Hunting Districts 319 and 341:

General Elk License

- 6-week Archery Season Brow-tined Bull Elk.
- 5-week General Season Brow-tined Bull Elk.
- 5-week General Season Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk. Only youth ages 12-15 and hunters with a PTHFV

Species: Moose
Hunting Districts: 321, 323, 326 and 327 (Upper Big Hole)
Year: 2010/2011

- Eliminate 321-10 Antlerless moose licenses.
- Eliminate 321-20 Antlered moose licenses.
- Eliminate 323-00 Late season Either-sex moose licenses.
- Eliminate 326-00 Late season Either-sex moose licenses.
- Eliminate 327-00 Late season Either-sex moose licenses.

NOTE: significant quota reductions, especially to antlerless moose licenses, will be made in the spring when the commission calls for quota changes for the 2010 hunting season.

SEASON TENTATIVES WILL BE PRESENTED AT THE DECEMBER COMMISSION MEETING WHICH WILL BE HELD IN HELENA ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10.