



MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

CAC R2 Hunting Season Workgroup Meeting Minutes

October 2, 2019

FWP Region 2 Office, 6:00 P.M.

(Notes from a special meeting of the Region 2 Citizens Advisory Committee and other interested groups & individuals)

Attendees: 18, including Jack Kirkendall, Jay Owen, Matt Quinlan, Jim Olson, Hannah Nikonow, Greg Munther, Scott Perkins, Ryan Kelley, Tom Puchlerz, Dan Conn, Chris Marchion and Dave Stone; R2 biologists Julie Golla and Rebecca Mowry; R2 Staff Randy Arnold, Joe Jaquith and Mike Thompson; and Fish and Wildlife Commissioner Tim Aldrich.

Guest representation: Anaconda Sportsmen's Club, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Montana Wildlife Federation, Ravalli County Fish and Wildlife Association, Deer Lodge and Flint Creek Valley ranches, and individuals in the community (unaffiliated). Absent: Hellgate Hunters and Anglers, Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife, and Montana Bowhunters Association.

New Region 2 Wildlife Quarterly—Mike Thompson, FWP Wildlife Manager: Mike offered a brief overview of its contents, focused on results of a large-scale elk mortality study in Idaho. The work addresses elk, habitat and carnivore questions we've shared in Montana.

Quick Note on Spotted Dog Creek restoration project—Mike Thompson, Julie Golla: The Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP) is moving forward with the development of a project to restore natural stream and riparian function to the length of Spotted Dog Creek on the WMA. FWP is joining-in and looking at the opportunity of an expanded role for beaver. This was just a quick announcement with interested parties around the table.

Potential hunting regulation changes for the Upper Clark Fork—Julie Golla, FWP Biologist

WORKGROUP PURPOSE & APPROACH

- Collaboratively develop input that will be used in developing recommendations for Region 2 elk hunting seasons, as per the biennial season-setting process for 2020-2021.
- Bring landowners, hunters, other stakeholders to the table to interact with each other.
- Be open; participants should feel free to share what's on their minds at the meeting, rather than leave the meeting with questions unasked and unresolved.

The focus of this workgroup meeting is to discuss potential changes to elk regulations for the Upper Clark Fork Hunting Districts (HDs) for 2020-21. Julie gave a power point with information to illustrate her thoughts, for scoping purposes.

Potential proposals for Upper Clark Fork HDs regulations for 2020-21:

1. HDs 210, 211, 214 (west), 216

- Elk management occurs on this multi-HD scale
- Variation in elk vs objective by Hunting District
- Need to off-ramp harvest pressure
- Elk move across hunting district boundaries in Philipsburg
- Smaller groups are seen in distribution now
- North 210 is more affected with low counts than South 210

- Chris said it would be interesting to look at bull: cow ratios in the early 2000s vs today, regarding health of the herd.

- Two suggestions by FWP for 210, 211, 214 (west) & 216:
 - A. Limit B licenses (June 1 drawing)
 - Or unlimited or limited if we treat it as a watershed opportunity (issue ~250)
 - Could split 210 North (75) and South (200)
 - B. Antlerless permit on the general (April 1 drawing)
 - Valid private early and late
 - Permit-holders would not be able to hunt bulls in 210-216
 - Could still use the regional B in other districts

- Dan Conn – splitting HD 210 is a problem because elk go back and forth across that boundary. It would be better if we didn't do a split and limited numbers per portion of district.
- Dan—we see elk scattered in smaller groups over a larger landscape.
- Chris—Sportsmen still averse to August hunting. It's ok if the landowner can pick a couple good hunters. And, Sept is ok. It's the issue of the general public picking up a map and seeing that we hunt in August.
- Tom P—Also Feb is an issue; we hear complaints from hunters and nonhunters about the season going that late.
- Julie—In these HDs, we probably could maintain elk at objective now with more harvest focused closer to the general season. Maybe more damage hunts on the extremes.
- Dave Stone—1st Saturday in Sept would give the public a better impression of our hunting.
- Greg Munther—Hate the idea of hunting in August—killing cows with calves in August is bad.
- Chris—don't like shooting 2 elk—prefer the antlerless permit—most people don't get an elk so they hate to see people with two. When we get back to objective, we'd like to get more opportunity for everyone by going to the antlerless permits.
- Scott P—bowhunters on public land around my place are more successful than ever because of the dispersing the herd. In Jan-Feb, we have trouble

getting hunters.

- Chris M—more elk now, but fewer in the wilderness. Large properties harbor elk, but it's not only that. We need to look at the dynamics. In late hunts we're killing the lead cow. So we have a stupider elk population. Not getting better.
- Chris M—Hunting district 214: the 75 permits are wrong.
- Greg M—Too many archers on public land—putting out fires—precluding timber harvest—generally, we want more fire, more timber management—archery either/or regulation.
- Chris M—I've been working for controlled burns & timber harvest on Bitterroot/Deer Lodge Forest lately.
- Dave S—The hoops that the Forest Service has to go through are incredible—Make shoulder season licenses by HD only—not regional.
 - Julie—we did that in 2016-2017—the elk move between hunting districts. She talked about specific examples of this. We could issue licenses for shoulder seasons for a group of hunting districts.
- Dave S—okay, you could do what you say with the group of hunting districts where needed.
- Dan C—having the tools to react quickly to game damage will help.
 - In a trial management hunt one year, we killed 14 elk by Aug 18 and never lost any meat.
- Tom—Can FWP give landowners the names of people with limited permits?
 - Julie—yes, with the hunter's permission.
 - Rebecca—we offered that in hunting district 262—never got a lot of takers on it.
- Dave S—take the names of good hunters and call them.

2. HDs 212, 213, 217 (Deer Lodge EMU)

- Elk broke into smaller groups, except 2019 was weird and we had some big clusters of elk. EMU is above objective. Elk move freely from 212-213.
 - Question—What percent in the count is on private vs public land? Answer is ~90%
- Julie—for Deer Lodge EMU, we need a shoulder season of some kind.
- Maybe limit the "B" to the watershed and maybe even for 217-212-213.
- Maybe Scott Eggeman & Julie would create a group of hunting districts across 291-293 & beyond.
- Could maintain the regional B or go to watershed-specific Bs. A variety of options to address hunting pressure.
 - Dave S—seeing Letticia's elk moving into the prison—can you work with prison to bump them out
 - Julie—We do—Joe Kambic has been working on it
 - Ryan Kelley (landowner)—for management hunts you get people who have never been there before. I like OTC because they are people who are local and we can act promptly—the early tag should be an "irrigated-ground tag." Elk are fine on the dry ground.
 - Dave S—again see the value of hunting district-specific tags to focus people.
 - Dan Conn—hunting district specific tag is ok if you have enough hunters
 - Chris—averse to shoulder season in hunting districts under objective

3. Boundary changes being contemplated: lump 212 East and 213 together. Lump 212 West and 214 West with 211.

- Scott Perkins—I like that “new” 212+213 uses the peaks & eliminates the boundary of a narrow creek (Racetrack Creek)
- Chris—I agree because it makes sense with what the elk do
- Hunting District 214—below objective
 - Chris—East Fork Rd makes sense for splitting existing HD 214. For the future, were getting elk on the revegetation on the smelter site. We think we should get 300 elk on Garrity—we don’t want to be punished in the objective by 150 harbored elk on the smelter site.
 - Julie—unless elk winter on the smelter site, it won’t be a problem on winter counts.
 - Dave S—2 days ago 60 elk moved from Mill creek to the Smelter Stack. Only 1 bull. Few calves.
 - Chris—we only had 1 branched bull a year ago—we’ve not seen more than 10 bulls
 - Dave S—shocking—no bulls. Dave S—again raises the red flag on 214
 - Chris:
 - No shoulder season in 214, 211, & 216
 - Don’t like 8/15
 - No shoulder season prior to Labor Day weekend
 - Give us that history of Pburg late seasons
 - Greg--damage hunt scenario takes too long to react. Is there a mechanism within the agency to speed that up?
 - Dan C—concern about over-correcting too far on shoulder seasons—there will be early damage hunts anyway and some hunts late. Trending harvest numbers down is okay but don’t do too much all at once. Like the flexibility we have now.
 - Ryan Kelley—a lot of shoulder season hunters are limiting themselves.

4. HD 215

- Julie—remove the antlerless opportunity from the general license in 2020
 - Dave S for skyline—concerned about Brown’s Gulch
- Julie—do a split district to take care of Brown’s Gulch
- Dave S--be aware of public image. Killing cows in second trimester. Move late-season close back to end of January.
- Dan Conn--change shoulder season to damage season—as a perception correction
- Jim Olson--damage hunts could be instituted in the manner that his Commission prescribed prior to 2006.
 - Randy—What about a limited tag that you apply for that’s valid general season—then grab those hunters for a damage hunt that is already built—then turn on, turn off
- Mike--Maybe we are a working group and next winter we should get together periodically so we develop confidence in what we’ve heard and where we’re headed.