

Summary of Research

Block Management Landowner and Hunter Evaluations: Survey Highlights from 2003 and Comparisons to 1996 Surveys

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Montana's Block Management Program was established in 1985 amid concerns that public hunting access to private land was diminishing. Administered by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), the program has three main goals:

- To maintain public hunting access to private and isolated public land.
- To help landowners manage public hunting on lands under their control, and provide benefits to offset the impacts of those public hunting activities, like increased road maintenance, noxious weed control, time spent dealing with hunters, etc.
- To help FWP accomplish its mission of managing wildlife resources. In a state where nearly 65 percent of the land is privately owned, FWP depends on public hunting to manage populations of deer, elk, and other game animals.

A total of 1,251 landowners were enrolled in the program in 2003, comprising 8.8 million acres of Block Management Areas (BMAs) across the state. Approximately 80,000 people hunted a BMA in 2003 (which resulted in approximately 400,000 hunter days on all BMAs combined).

To measure the success of the program, FWP periodically conducts landowner and hunter evaluations. Two separate surveys were conducted following the 2003 hunting season:

1. **Landowner Evaluation.** All landowners enrolled in the program in 2003 were sent a survey by mail.
2. **Hunter Evaluation.** A randomly selected sample of 1,250 people who hunted on a BMA(s) in 2003 were sent a survey by mail.

These two surveys were replications of similar surveys conducted in 1996 (Charles, 1997). Hence, for the most part, results obtained from the 2003 surveys are directly comparable to 1996 survey results.

This research summary highlights the key findings from the 2003 landowner and hunter evaluations. Wherever possible, survey results obtained in 2003 are compared to those results obtained in 1996.

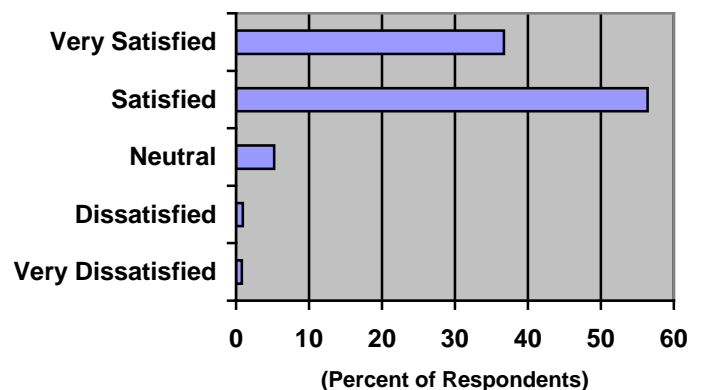
EXCELLENT RESPONSE TO BOTH SURVEYS

Overall, a 73 percent response rate was achieved from the landowner survey. A 64 percent response rate was achieved from the hunter survey. The response rates achieved for both surveys are considered to be very high for a mailback survey of this type.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2003 LANDOWNER EVALUATION

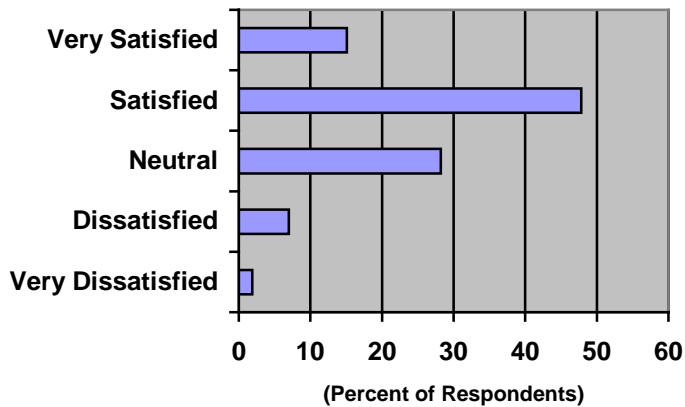
When asked how satisfied they were with the overall Block Management Program, 93 percent of the landowners who responded to the survey reported they were satisfied or very satisfied (see Figure 1). This compares to 80 percent in 1996.

Figure 1. Response to: "How satisfied are you with the overall Block Management Program?" (2003 Landowner Evaluation)



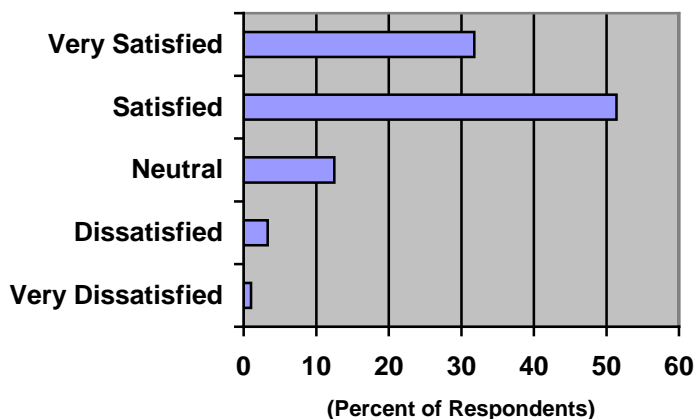
Most of the landowners (79 percent) reported the Block Management Program is an important or very important way for them to manage game numbers on their BMA(s). Related to this, 63 percent of the respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the results of the program in terms of managing game numbers on their BMA(s) in 2003 (see Figure 2). This compares to 60 percent of the respondents in 1996.

Figure 2. Response to: "How satisfied were you with the results of the Block Management Program in managing game numbers on your BMA(s)?" (2003 Landowner Evaluation)



Almost all of the landowners (90 percent) also indicated that the Block Management Program is an important or very important way for them to manage hunter activities. Related to this, 83 percent of the respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the results of the program in terms of managing hunter activities on their BMA(s) in 2003 (see Figure 3), and 81 percent were satisfied with the number of hunters who hunted on their BMA(s). Furthermore, 91 percent rated hunter behavior on their BMA(s) as being good or very good in 2003. In 1996, 77 percent of the respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the program in terms of managing hunter activities.

Figure 3. Response to: "How satisfied were you with the results of the Block Management Program in terms of managing hunter activities?" (2003 Landowner Evaluation)



"Block Management helps preserve Montana's hunting heritage and traditions."

--Jeff Hagener, Director of Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Of note, 81 percent of the landowners who completed and returned a survey for the 2003 season reported that they believe hunter behavior has improved or greatly improved as a result of the Block Management Program. This is a five percent increase from 1996.

Also, 64 percent of the landowners reported that their relationship with hunters has improved or greatly improved as a result of their participation in the program. That's a three percent increase from 1996. Less than two percent of the landowners in 2003 reported that their relationship with hunters has deteriorated or greatly deteriorated as a result of the program.

In terms of the compensation they received for enrolling in the program, 79 percent of the landowners responding to the survey reported they were satisfied or very satisfied with the total compensations they received for the 2003 hunting season. Less than seven percent were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. In 1996, 75 percent of the respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their total compensation.

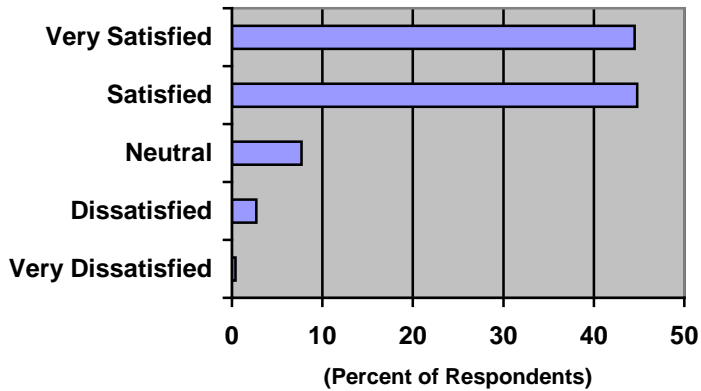
Of the landowners enrolled in 2003 who expressed an opinion, 99 percent said they plan on continuing their participation in the Block Management Program for the 2004 hunting season.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2003 HUNTER EVALUATION

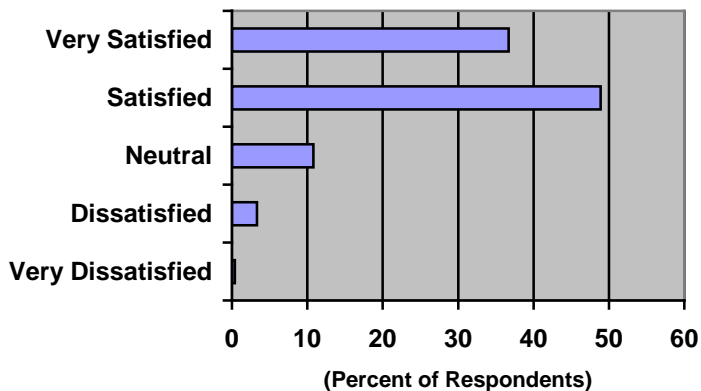
When asked how satisfied they were with the Block Management Program this past fall (2003), 89 percent of the hunters who responded to the survey reported they were satisfied or very satisfied (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Response to: "Overall, how satisfied were you with the Block Management Program this past fall?" (2003 Hunter Evaluation)



Furthermore, 86 percent of the hunters reported they were satisfied or very satisfied with the hunting opportunities provided by the Block Management Program in 2003 (see Figure 5). Of note, this was nearly a ten percent increase from results obtained in 1996.

Figure 5. Response to: "Overall, how satisfied were you with the hunting opportunities provided by the Block Management Program in 2003?" (2003 Hunter Evaluation)



Of the hunters who responded to the survey in 2003, 84 percent reported they believe that the Block Management Program has improved or greatly improved landowner/hunter relationships. Less than two percent believe that landowner/hunter relationships have been harmed or greatly harmed by the program. In 1996, 70 percent of the hunters reported they believe the program has improved or greatly improved landowner/hunter relationships.



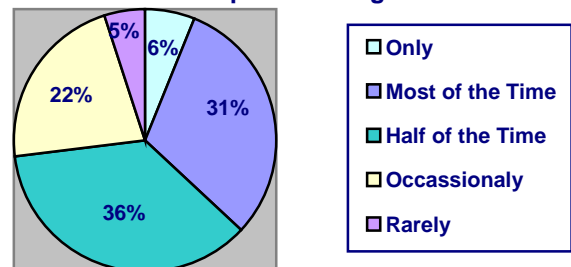
Related to hunting opportunities:

- Sixty-eight percent of the hunters who responded to the survey found game animals on BMAs hunted present in numbers meeting or exceeding their expectations in 2003.
- Seventy-three percent were successful in bagging game on a BMA(s) in 2003.
- Ninety-percent were satisfied with the rules on BMAs hunted in 2003.
- Sixty-four percent were satisfied with the number of hunters encountered on BMAs hunted in 2003.

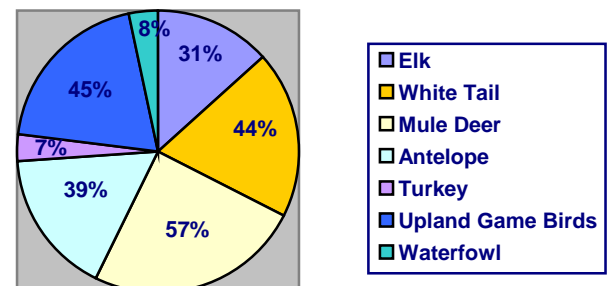
Hunter profile information (2003 season):

- The average hunter spent 9 days hunting BMAs.
- The average hunter hunted on 4 different BMAs.

Time Spent Hunting BMA's



Game Hunted on BMA's



DISCUSSION

The Block Management Program is designed to balance the needs of landowners, hunters, and FWP. Landowners receive assistance in managing public hunting activities and benefits to offset the impacts of allowing public hunting. Hunters receive opportunities to hunt on enrolled lands, offered either on a first-come, first-serve basis or through some other means of allocated use. FWP is able to utilize the program as a tool to help achieve wildlife management goals and objectives.

In 1995, the Block Management Program was enhanced through additional funding and authority, allowing it to grow substantially over the next ten years. During this time, FWP staff explored various ways to implement the program locally to accommodate differences in regional wildlife management needs and hunter use activities.

Results of the 2003 Block Management landowner and hunter evaluations, as well as past evaluations, suggest that the program has been a success both from the perspective of landowners enrolled in the program and hunters hunting on BMAs. FWP staff has been able to use the program to effectively manage big game populations, provide public hunting opportunities, and develop effective Department/landowner/hunter relationships.

Under statutory sunset provisions, the program is due to expire March 1, 2006, meaning that the 2005 Legislature must act to either extend or remove the sunset provisions for the program to continue. Based on the high level of interest expressed by hunters and landowners in participating in the program, and given the high levels of satisfaction expressed by both landowners and hunters in the 2003 and other program evaluations, FWP expects to ask the 2005 Legislature to continue the program.

REFERENCES

Charles, Alan. 1997. *Summary of the 1996 Landowner & Hunter Evaluations*. Field Services Division of FWP. Helena, MT: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

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