

Choose Your Weapon/Season

Intent: Reduce pressure on elk on public land by easing the crowding on public land.

Justification: Currently there is widespread concern for too much pressure on elk for too long. This proposal would force people to choose which weapon they want to hunt with, therefore limiting the number of people in the field at any given time.

Description:

The hunter training and certificate/badge would be a six week intense certification process that prospective hunters would apply for and update annually. The following would be covered in the course to improve hunter and landowner relationships:

- Elk hunters choose which weapon/season they want to hunt with/in.
- Archery season would start September 1st and run for 5 weeks.
- Rifle season will remain unchanged.
- There would be a two or three week break in which only private land cow hunting would be allowed in October.
- This may lower pressure on all species (deer/elk) as there would be less hunters in the field during each season.

People/Organizations:

- Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks
- Hunters
- Landowners

Timeline:

The current season structure is set for two years, but could be adjusted after this two year period.

FWP Authority to Take Action:

FWP and the Commission

Limitations/Unintended Consequences:

The issue of overcrowding needs to be addressed. It should be noted that while this proposal was carefully considered by the Elk Citizen Advisory Group it is plausible that it in itself may not solve the problem of overcrowding on public ground. If the solution is determined not to be a weapons choice, then alternative solutions must be offered and tested by FWP. It should be noted too that this proposal does not address mule deer and may unintentionally have a negative affect on that species.

Feasibility of Implementation:

FWP should evaluate (e.g., research and polling) the effectiveness of this program in reducing rifle hunters for the overall state prior to implementation. FWP must solicit public comment on this proposal prior to implementation.