

Understand and Mitigate the Disease of Brucellosis in Elk

Intent: To recognize the impacts on livestock producers within the DSA who deal with the risk of disease transmission from elk to cattle and improve stakeholder relationships. Remain flexible in solutions to address commingling of cattle and elk during the critical abortive months (March thru June). Raise awareness within the hunting community and general public on what brucellosis is, and how the disease effects landowner tolerance for elk.

Justification: A transmission of brucellosis from elk to cattle puts an entire ranching operation at risk. Quarantines are extensive and expensive. Brucellosis is self-sustaining in elk; therefore, eradicating the disease is not feasible. The brucellosis vaccine for cattle is only 60-70 per cent effective. *Brucella abortus* is on the government select agent list which makes it almost impossible to commit to research and development that improves the vaccine. The formation of the Designated Surveillance Areas in 4 counties is aimed at mitigation strategies, testing, and protecting the rest of the cattle industry in the state. Montana's brucellosis free status will be jeopardized if brucellosis transmissions occur. The cattle industry needs the confidence of its trading partners to survive.

Many distribution factors affect elk—predator increases, climate changes, and poor range conditions. These factors have caused elk to seek the safety and nutrition found on Ag lands. This in turn increases the disease risk for cattle producers, causing the need for mitigation strategies that are applied with flexibility and ingenuity. An associated problem for disease transmission are the Yellowstone National Park bison. The effect bison have on brucellosis in the GYE must be recognized as key to the issue of disease. (bison are the reservoir, elk are the vectors).

Description:

Use existing programs such as hazing to mitigate commingling (FWP). On a yearly basis brainstorm new strategies, tools, or programs that could be helpful. Use local work groups to expand thinking on strategies. FWP will work with livestock producers to implement tools for mitigation. FWP will act as liaisons between the livestock producer and other area landowners to increase understanding of these tools and get participation when necessary to implement tools such as hazing. Work with absentee landowners to help educate them on the need to implement strategies such as hazing, and ask for their help. FWP will work with the hunting community to increase their awareness of brucellosis and what effects it has on livestock producers. FWP could look at partnering with other groups (RMEF, Master Hunters) to improve the general understanding of diseased elk and possible solutions to protect working Ag lands and the habitat they provide. Utilize FWP's position on the IBMP committee to maintain the spatial and temporal separation of bison and cattle within the Designated Surveillance Area and Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

People/Organizations:

FWP at the local, regional, and state levels plus all landowners in an affected area. Other groups such as the ones listed above.

Timeline:

This is an ongoing recommendation. Parts are already in play but all disease issues need to be part of the Statewide Elk Management Plan starting now.

FWP Authority to Take Action:

FWP has the authority to do all tasks.

Limitations/Unintended Consequences:

There may be push back on the bison portion. However, they play a critical role in brucellosis in the GYE.

Feasibility of Implementation:

Not identified by the Elk Management Citizen Advisory Group members.