

Use of Shoulder Seasons

Intent: The intent would be to assess the benefits of shoulder seasons, redistribute elk, and reduce landowner hunting fatigue thereby improving relationships between landowners and hunters.

Justification: The elk in Montana are hunted for an extended time in Montana. Some feel this extended pressure actually pushes the elk onto less accessible private lands (supported by FWP research). As long as there is hunting, the landowner community will be dealing with hunting requests (thus the fatigue).

Description:

The recommendation is not to totally remove shoulder seasons, but to assess and evaluate shoulder seasons and become more strategic in their application such as;

- Wait two weeks after the general season to initiate the shoulder season
- Have a shoulder season from the end of archery season to the beginning of rifle season.
- Shoulder seasons are not applicable on public land
- Utilize damage hunts to replace early shoulder seasons
- Shoulder seasons should run until February 15th and/or be based on biologist recommendations
- Shoulder seasons should be focused on areas that are over objective, except in areas to help mitigate disease
- Also realizing that in areas where there are diseased elk that only appear on private property after the general season is closed, FWP would need to be flexible enough to recognize that a shoulder season is the only method available to mitigate disease.

People/Organizations:

- Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks biologist
- Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks regional folks
- Private landowners

Timeline:

I don't think a timeline is necessary.

FWP Authority to Take Action:

FWP has the authority.

Limitations/Unintended Consequences:

This recommendation should not take tools away from the biologists to manage elk to objective and mitigate disease.

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.