

Supplemental Information for Manage Elk Where They Are Not

- This document has a lot of historical data, references and stats. The point of the document is not to prove the stats, it is to start a conversation that has not been taking place. If FWP is willing to fact check this document and make their historic records public that is highly encouraged. However, that may be unnecessary because the point is bring up that, whatever the cause, there has been a dramatic change in Northwest Montana wildlife populations. Moving forward we would like to see focused efforts by the department that will allow healthier populations of ALL wildlife populations in the northwest, particularly elk.
- Regions 1 & 2 contain ~1/3 of the state's population, they also contain ~1/2 of the USFS property in Montana. In addition to containing ~1/2 the USFS land in the state Regions 1 & 2 are home to the iconic Bob Marshall, Great Bear, Scapegoat, Mission Mountain, Cabinet, Rattlesnake, Welcome Creek, Anaconda Pintler and Selway Bitterroot Wilderness areas offering at one time the purest form of elk hunting that could be experienced in the lower 48. In its prime, northwest Montana was an elk hunting destination that attracted hunters from all over. Unfortunately, now due to mismanagement of habitat and excessive predation the elk hunting experience is a mere fragment of what it used to be. If historic elk populations are restored people will stay home to hunt and pressure will be taken off other areas of the state.
- Some of the hardest hit areas are the Great Bear and Bob Marshall wilderness areas. Historical data from the 1920's – 1950's show elk populations on the Flathead National Forest, which corresponds largely to the Bob Marshall Elk Management Unit (districts 130, 140, 141, 150) fluctuated between 4,000 – 6,000 elk and the annual elk harvest ranged between 700-1,800 animals. Today, this area is home to a mere 300 elk when surveyed in 2019. The historic harvest data for the Bob Marshall Elk Management Unit ranged from 700-1,800 elk, FWP harvest records for 2021 record 89 elk being harvested. (Historic Data per "The Flathead Story" by Charlie Shaw, Shaw was an USFS Ranger on the Flathead National Forest from 1922-1953, <https://foresthistor.org/research-explore/us-forest-service-history/u-s-forest-service-publications/region-1-northern/the-flathead-story/>)
- The elk count data available online from 2008-2019 shows a reduction in elk numbers in the Bob Marshall Elk Management Unit from 603 to 300 animals. A reduction of 50% and this is getting little to no attention by the department when local biologists are contacted, you'll hear "elk populations in these districts are stable or slightly increasing" simply not true and the data shows it.
- Another often overlooked fact about northwest Montana with its vast public land is that most elk can spend their entirety of their lives on public property and do not cause the widescale crop depredation that is experienced in many other areas of the state. These elk are "good" elk in the sense that they do not cause impacts to private land as is common in the rest of the state.
- However, to clarify this is not a proposal to eliminate predators from the northwest. The predator management recommendations are temporary measures that should be considered to ensure

healthy and sustainable predator to prey ratios are maintained. If ungulate populations recover from our current historic low levels, there is the real possibility we could sustainably have predator numbers in excess of what we currently have because there would be a greater food source that those predators depend on. The successful reintroduction and full recovery of wolves in 15 years and the near full recovery of grizzly bears in 30 years show these species ability to quickly rebound and recover so management of these species should not be feared.

- What's in this proposal is nothing new, active forestry and predator management has taken place for ages, we just need to learn a lesson from the past. Unlike many other regions in the state that have many complexities due to competing interests, elk management in the northwest is simple in our areas that contain the majority of our public lands. We need to invest in forestry management, and we need to ensure our predator to prey ratios don't get out of line. It's that simple. If we can fix anything in this state, we can fix the northwest and we can take the burden off the rest of the state.