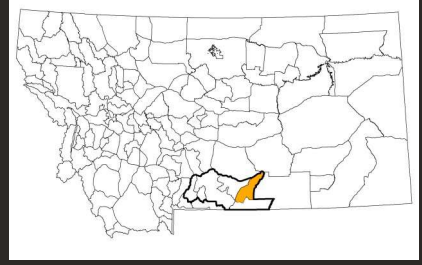


# HD 502

Size: 733 mi<sup>2</sup>

Primary Habitat: Shrubland

Public Ownership: 11%



## Absaroka Elk Management Unit

**\*\*Special Management District for Bull Elk\*\***

### District Summary

Hunting District 502 in south central Montana is bounded on the north by the Yellowstone River and lies between the Crow Reservation on the east and US Highway 212 on the west. The southern boundary is the Bridger Creek/Sage Creek Road and MT Highway 308. Private land in the Clarks Fork valley produces corn, sugar beets, wheat, and alfalfa. Adjacent sagebrush grasslands are primarily used for cattle grazing and alfalfa production. Nearly all the elk habitat is privately owned, and public access is extremely limited. Small parcels of BLM and DNRC lands provide rare opportunities for elk harvest. Elk density is low with elk primarily occupying the southern half of the district. These elk are generally non-migratory but there is interchange with elk from HD 555 to the south. This interchange is highest during the fall as bulls move between cow herds in adjacent HD 555. To date the low numbers of elk have not resulted in many game damage complaints. Historically, elk have been managed with limited either-sex permits and general season antlerless elk hunting in addition to high numbers of antlerless B-licenses. Either-sex permits are valid in both HD 502 and 555 to accommodate for the movement of bulls between these HDs. The proximity of these elk to brucellosis positive elk in Wyoming continues to be a concern. As of 2022, HD 502 was one of only two HDs in Montana to have documented a CWD positive elk.

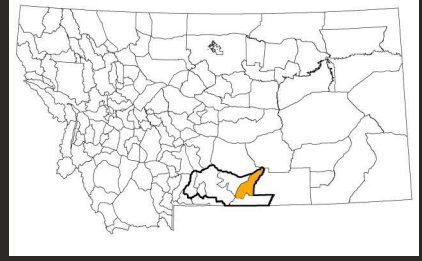
### Management Challenges:

- Over the past 10 years, antlerless harvest roughly stabilized this population. However, recent shifts in distribution from adjacent HD 555 in response to the Robertson Draw fire have complicated this scenario. The population remains above the current population goal.
- Landowner tolerance for elk is mixed; some want high elk numbers and high numbers of older age class bulls whereas others are experiencing damage and would like to see lower elk numbers and are not concerned about bull age structure.
- The majority of the private land occupied by elk either does not allow access, allows very limited access for family and friends, or is leased for elk hunting.
- Elk concentrations increase the potential for disease transmission including brucellosis and CWD.



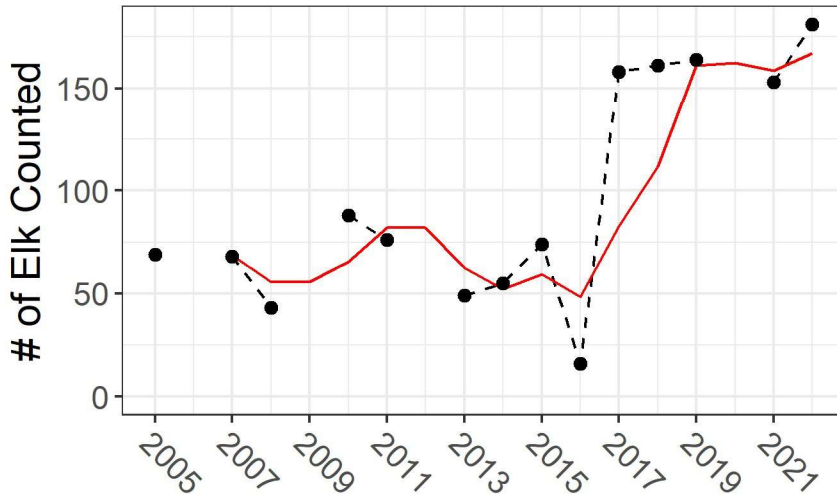
# HD 502

## Absaroka Elk Management Unit



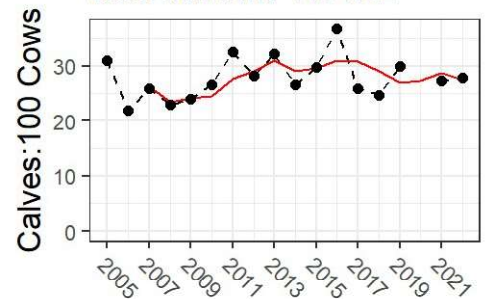
### Current Population Status & Trend

#### Total Elk Counted- HD 502

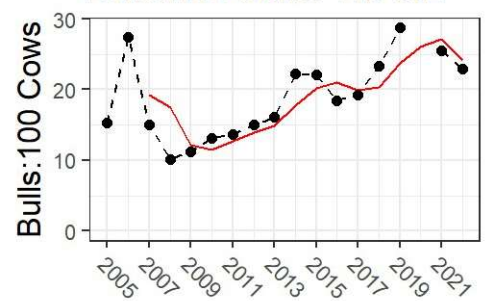


Points show observations from survey flights and the solid red line shows a 3-year moving average.

#### Recruitment- HD 502



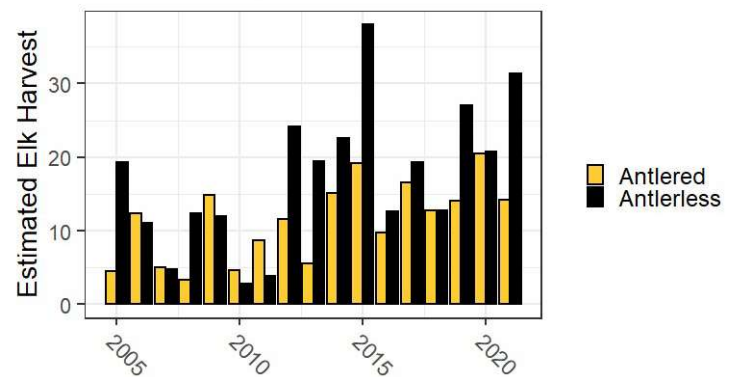
#### Bulls:100 Cows- HD 502



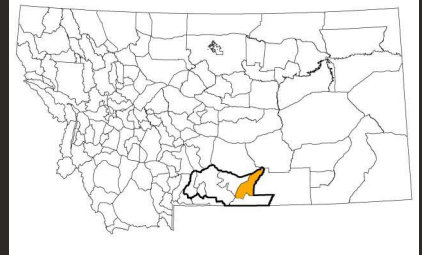
### Hunter Effort and Harvest Statistics

Hunting District	License Year	Hunters	Hunter Days
502	2006	173	898
	2008	143	997
	2010	144	847
	2012	202	1,189
	2014	203	1,104
	2016	201	1,280
	2018	232	1,543
	2020	256	1,832

#### Elk Harvest- HD 502



# HD 502



## Absaroka Elk Management Unit

### Objective: Manage toward elk population size and demographic targets

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Maintain winter aerial survey counts between 150-250 elk observed	3-year average of elk counts is within Goal range for population size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use antlerless harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> <li>• Use antlered harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> </ul>
	If outside Goal range, population is trending toward Goal range	
Maintain bull:cow ratio at 30-45:100	3-year average bull:cow ratio is within Goal range for bull:cow ratio	

### Objective: Maintain an acceptable elk distribution

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Maintain elk distribution across landownerships with available habitat throughout the year	Elk are observed across different landownerships during winter aerial surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage local working groups representing landowners, outfitters, and sportsmen</li> <li>• Work with private landowners to maintain or increase hunting access</li> </ul>
Minimize elk use where tolerance is low	3-year moving average of game damage complaints does not show an increasing trend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use antlerless harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> <li>• Use a season type that accommodates elk harvest on private land and provides landowners with flexibility to manage to their tolerance level</li> </ul>

### Objective: Provide public elk recreation opportunities

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Provide opportunity to harvest antlerless elk	Maintain annual antlerless harvest of $\geq 10\%$ of the observed antlerless population, when population is at or above the goal range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use antlerless and antlered harvest opportunity matrices to adjust season structures and/or quotas</li> </ul>
	No reduction in antlerless harvest compared to 3-year moving average	
Maintain a diversity of bull age classes	$\geq 60\%$ of bull elk observed during aerial surveys are brow-tined bulls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjust archery and rifle limited permit quotas accordingly</li> </ul>
	3-year average of harvested bulls with $\geq 6$ points on one antler is $\geq 50\%$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with private landowners to maintain or increase hunting access</li> </ul>
Maintain equitable allocation of bull elk harvest between rifle and archery hunters	Maintain 3-year average of 40-60% total bull harvest by archers and 40-60% by rifle hunters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use regulations that provide for special youth hunting opportunities</li> </ul>
Promote hunter recruitment and retention	Youth hunters have broader hunting opportunities relative to non-youth hunters	

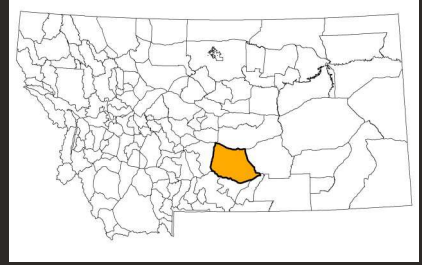


# HD 515

Size: 2,521 mi<sup>2</sup>

Primary Habitat: Grassland

Public Ownership: 7%



## Mid-Yellowstone Elk Management Unit

**\*\*Special Management District for Bull Elk\*\***

### District Summary

Hunting District 515 encompasses the central portion of Region 5 between the Musselshell and Yellowstone Rivers. It is bounded by I-90, and MT Highway 3, and US Highways 12 and 191. Elk habitat consists of sagebrush grasslands, scattered timbered breaks, and agricultural fields. The primary land uses include cattle grazing and agricultural production. Elk distribution changes throughout the year in response to forage and hunting pressure. However, no defined seasonal elk migration occurs in the district. Elk summer and winter range strongly overlap, and most areas occupied by elk are characterized as general year long range. Shoulder seasons and high numbers of B-licenses have been used as a way to manage the growing population. The district is scheduled to receive an aerial survey every other year to monitor population trends. Surveys are conducted in mid-winter. Elk can be widely scattered in small herds or individuals, making detection rates less than some other districts. Elk, especially bulls, are likely undercounted during aerial surveys.

The district is primarily private land with some accessible DNRC and BLM lands. Several ranches are enrolled in FWP's Block Management Program. Some of those lands include elk habitat and provide elk hunting access. Most elk hunting opportunity occurs on private lands not enrolled in FWP's Block Management Program.

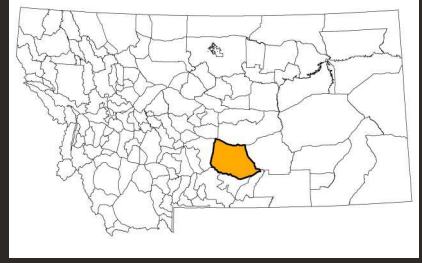
### Management Challenges:

- Over the past 15 years, antlerless harvest has not been adequate to stabilize, or reduce the population.
- Elk congregate in large herds during hunting season. This increases game damage, and the potential for disease transmission including brucellosis and CWD.
- Landowner tolerance for elk is mixed; some want high elk numbers and high numbers of older age class bulls, some are experiencing damage and would like to see lower elk numbers and are not concerned about bull age structure, and some are experiencing damage and would like to see lower elk numbers but maintain high numbers of older age class bulls.
- There is high potential for damage to crops and pasture fields when elk concentrate in larger herds.



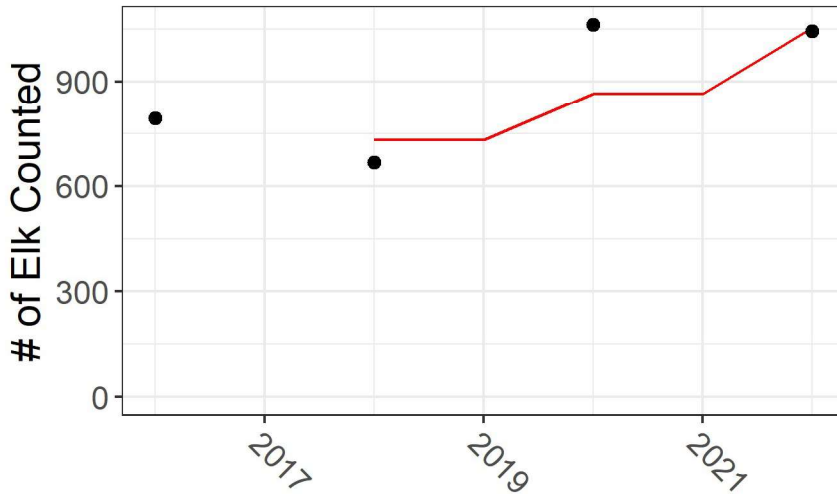
# HD 515

## Mid-Yellowstone Elk Management Unit



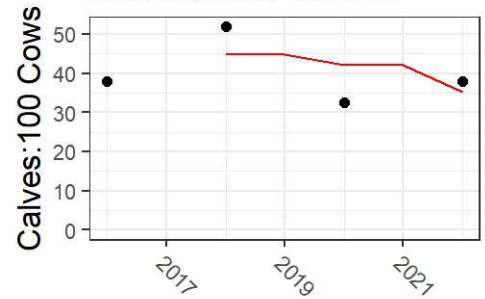
### Current Population Status & Trend

#### Total Elk Counted- HD 515

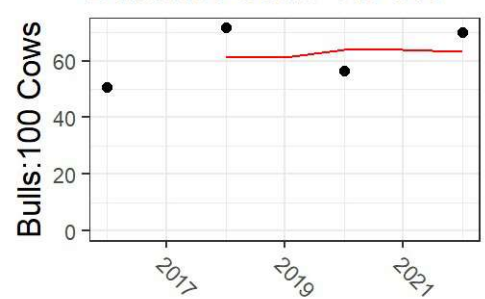


Points show observations from survey flights and the solid red line shows an average of the 2 most recent surveys.

#### Recruitment- HD 515



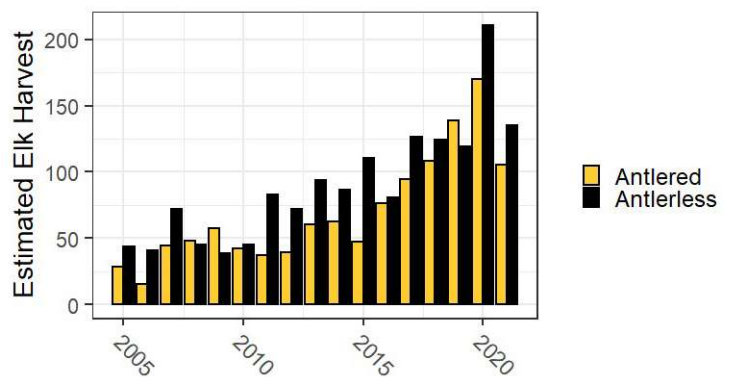
#### Bulls:100 Cows- HD 515



### Hunter Effort and Harvest Statistics

Hunting District	License Year	Hunters	Hunter Days
515	2006	431	2,577
	2008	565	3,336
	2010	569	3,001
	2012	758	4,665
	2014	793	4,504
	2016	917	6,014
	2018	1,049	7,352
	2020	1,303	9,175

#### Elk Harvest- HD 515



# HD 515

## Mid-Yellowstone Elk Management Unit



### Objective: Manage toward elk population size and demographic targets

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Maintain winter aerial survey counts between 900-1500 elk observed	3-survey average of elk counts is within Goal range for population size If outside Goal range, population is trending toward Goal range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use antlerless harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> <li>• Use antlered harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> </ul>
Maintain bull:cow ratio at 30-45:100	3-survey average bull:cow ratio is within Goal range for bull:cow ratio	

### Objective: Maintain an acceptable elk distribution

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Maintain elk distribution across landownerships with available habitat throughout the year	Elk are observed across different landownerships during winter aerial surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage local working groups representing landowners, outfitters, and sportsmen</li> <li>• Work with private landowners to maintain or increase hunting access</li> <li>• Use antlerless harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> <li>• Use a season type that accommodates elk harvest on private land and provides landowners with flexibility to manage to their tolerance level</li> </ul>
Minimize elk use where tolerance is low	3-year moving average of game damage complaints does not show an increasing trend	

### Objective: Provide public elk recreation opportunities

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Provide opportunity to harvest antlerless elk	Maintain annual antlerless harvest of $\geq 10\%$ of the observed antlerless population, when population is at or above the goal range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use antlerless and antlered harvest opportunity matrices to adjust season structures and/or quotas</li> <li>• Work with private landowners to maintain or increase hunting access</li> <li>• Adjust archery and rifle limited permit quotas accordingly</li> </ul>
	No reduction in antlerless harvest compared to 3-year moving average	
Maintain a diversity of bull age classes	3-year average of harvested bulls with $\geq 6$ points on one antler is $\geq 40\%$	
Maximize bull hunting opportunity	3-year average bull harvest is $>120$ when total population is at or above goal range	
Maintain equitable allocation of bull elk harvest between rifle and archery hunters	Maintain 3-year average of 40-60% total bull harvest by archers and 40-60% by rifle hunters	

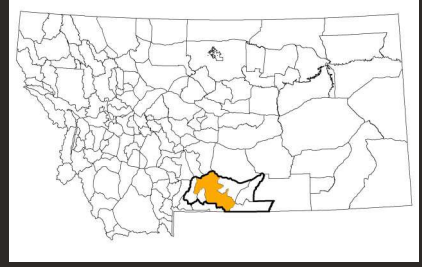


# HD 525

Size: 1,631 mi<sup>2</sup>

Primary Habitat: Forest

Public Ownership: 64%



## Absaroka Elk Management Unit

### District Summary

Hunting District 525 is located on the north flank of the Beartooth and Absaroka Mountains bounded on the east by US Highway 212 and on the west by Mission Creek. The southern boundary is roughly the hydrologic divide of the Yellowstone River along the Absaroka/Beartooth crest. The area is a mixture of public and private lands. Much of the district falls within the boundaries of the Custer Gallatin National Forest and includes the north portion of the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. The Silver Run Wildlife Management Area is located near the eastern boundary of the HD. Many elk are migratory spending the summer months on USFS lands and wintering on lower elevation private lands. In fall, elk shift to lower elevation habitats where they spend most of hunting season and the winter months. This fall migration, or elevation shift, occurs primarily during archery season and early rifle season. Some elk are yearlong residents to lower elevation private lands habitats. Private lands along the mountain face are primarily used for cattle and hay production. The 2006 Derby Fire replaced large expanses of timber and sage with grassland, which favored increasing numbers of elk. FWP and USFS have cooperated in aspen regeneration projects since the mid-1990s further enhancing spring, summer and fall ranges on public land. Brucellosis was detected in the Greeley Winter Herd unit 2015. Other herd units were sampled with negative results. CWD has been detected in the Clarks Fork valley near the eastern end of the HD and there is concern the disease may spread westward.

National Forest access opportunities range from areas with heavily roaded and accessible terrain to rugged backcountry areas only accessible by horseback or hiking long distances. Several ranches are enrolled in FWP's Block Management Program. Some of those lands include elk habitat and provide elk hunting opportunity. Most private land elk hunting opportunity occurs on lands not enrolled in FWP's Block Management Program.

Elk are highly visible during winter aerial surveys providing high quality surveys to track population trends. Traditionally, aerial population surveys have been conducted annually between January–March as favorable weather conditions allow.

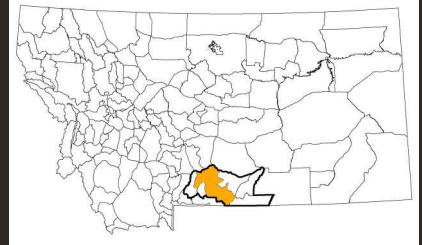
### Management Challenges:

- Over the past 10 years, antlerless harvest has not been adequate to stabilize, or reduce the population.
- Elk congregate in large herds during hunting season into the winter. This increases game damage concerns, and the potential for disease transmission including brucellosis and CWD.
- Landowner tolerance for elk is mixed; some would like to see high elk numbers and high numbers of older age class bulls whereas others are experiencing damage and would like to see lower elk numbers and are not concerned about bull age structure.
- There is high potential for damage to crops and pasture fields when elk concentrate in larger herds on private lands.
- Hunter crowding can be an issue on accessible public lands during archery and rifle seasons.



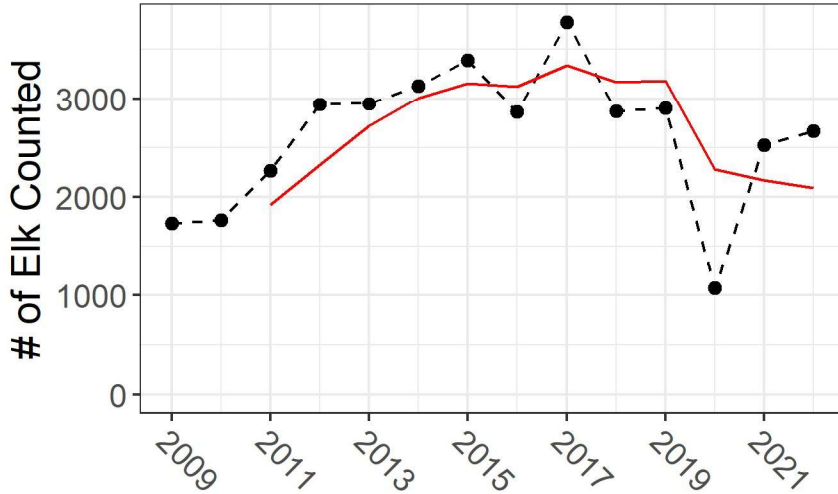
# HD 525

## Absaroka Elk Management Unit



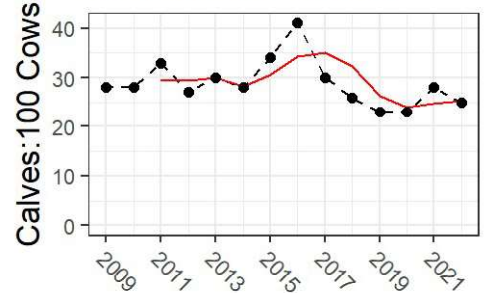
### Current Population Status & Trend

#### Total Elk Counted- HD 525

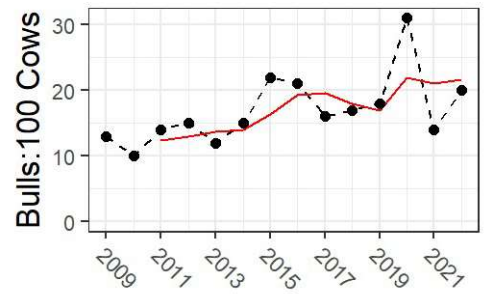


Points show observations from survey flights and the solid red line shows a 3-year moving average.

#### Recruitment- HD 525



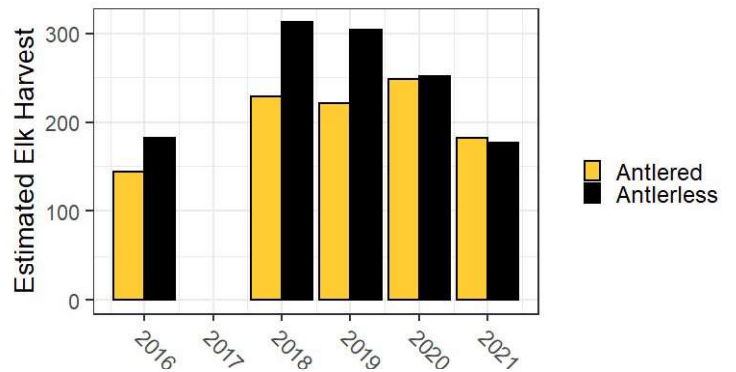
#### Bulls:100 Cows- HD 525



### Hunter Effort and Harvest Statistics

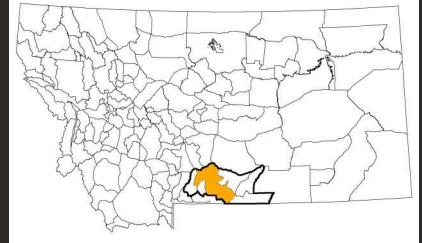
#### Elk Harvest- HD 525

Hunting District	License Year	Hunters	Hunter Days
525	2016	1,562	11,007
	2018	2,239	13,960
	2020	1,956	13,214



# HD 525

## Absaroka Elk Management Unit



### Objective: Manage toward elk population size and demographic targets

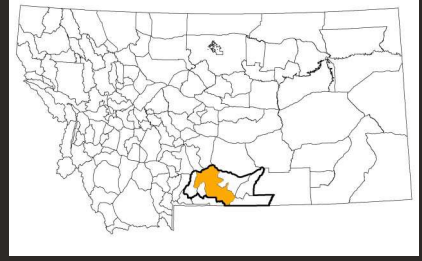
Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Maintain winter aerial survey counts between 2,200-3,300 elk observed	3-year average of elk counts is within Goal range for population size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use antlerless harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> </ul>
	If outside Goal range, population is trending toward Goal range	
Bull:cow ratio is $\geq 10:100$	3-year average bull: cow ratio is meeting or exceeding minimum bull:cow threshold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use antlered harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> </ul>

### Objective: Maintain an acceptable elk distribution

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Distribute elk harvest amongst landownerships with available habitat	Maintain general season public land antlerless harvest of $\geq 3\%$ of the observed antlerless population, when population is at or above the goal range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage local working groups representing landowners, outfitters, and sportsmen</li> <li>• Work with private landowners to maintain or increase hunting access</li> <li>• Improve access to public land</li> <li>• Work with land management agencies to improve elk security by maintaining or improving elk habitat and by providing input on travel management planning</li> <li>• Continue weed management on Silver Run WMA</li> </ul>
	Maintain private land antlerless harvest at $\geq 2\%$ of the estimated observed antlerless population, when population is at or above the goal range.	
	Maintain an average general season public land bull harvest of 6% of the observed antlerless population, when population is at or above the goal range.	
	Maintain an average general season private land bull harvest of 4% of the observed antlerless population, when population is at or above the goal range	
Maintain elk distribution across landownerships with available habitat throughout the year	Elk are observed across different landownerships during winter aerial surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyze and consider grazing options on Silver Run WMA</li> </ul>
Maximize elk use of Silver Run WMA	Increasing level of winter elk use based on aerial surveys and ground observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employ wildlife friendly fence designs where appropriate on Silver Run WMA</li> </ul>
Minimize elk use where tolerance is low	No increase in elk game damage complaints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with public land managers and private landowners to maintain/improve effective elk winter and</li> </ul>
Minimize transmission of brucellosis to livestock	Use Strategies and Measures in statewide table	



# HD 525



## Absaroka Elk Management Unit

### Objective: Provide public elk recreation opportunities

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Provide opportunity to harvest antlerless elk	Maintain annual antlerless harvest of $\geq 10\%$ of the observed antlerless population, when population is at or above the goal range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use antlerless and antlered harvest opportunity matrices to adjust season structures and/or quotas</li> </ul>
	No reduction in antlerless harvest compared to 3-year moving average	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with Forest Service to ensure diversity of access opportunities exist on public lands.</li> </ul>
Maximize bull hunting opportunity	3-year average bull harvest is stable or increasing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage local working groups representing landowners, outfitters and sportsmen to encourage access</li> <li>• Work with private landowners to maintain or increase hunting access</li> </ul>
Provide elk viewing opportunities in areas that the public can reasonably access	Retain public viewing site on West Fork Rock Creek	

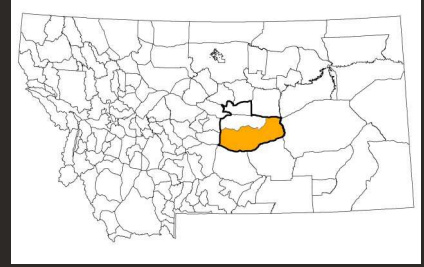


# HD 535

Size: 2,765 mi<sup>2</sup>

Primary Habitat: Grassland

Public Ownership: 18%



## *Snowy Mountains Elk Management Unit*

**\*\*Special Management District for Bull Elk\*\***

### District Summary

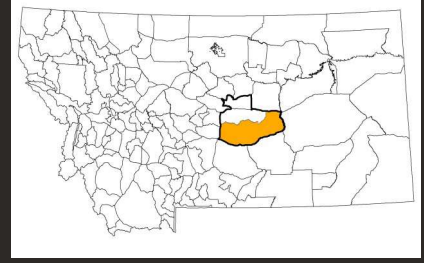
Hunting District 535 is located on the southern side of the Big and Little Snowy Mountains and bounded on the south by US Highway 12. The northern part of the district is included in the Lewis and Clark National Forest and in the Big Snowy Mountains Wilderness Study Area. The BLM Twin Coulee Wilderness Area is on the southeastern corner of the Big Snowy Mountains and is adjacent to the Big Snowy Mountains Wildlife Management Area. FWP purchased the Big Snowy Mountains WMA in 2021 to provide elk winter range, wildlife habitat, and improve public access to public land elk hunting. Elk spend the spring, summer, and early fall scattered across the district from low to high elevations. In fall, elk shift to lower elevation habitats where they spend most of hunting season and the winter months. This fall migration, or elevation shift, occurs primarily during archery season and early rifle season. Some elk are yearlong residents to lower elevation private land habitats. Private lands along the mountains are primarily used for cattle and hay production. High numbers of B-licenses and shoulder seasons have been used to address the growing elk population.

Elk are highly visible during winter aerial surveys providing high quality surveys to track population trends. Traditionally, aerial population surveys have been conducted annually between January–March as favorable weather conditions allow.

Access opportunities on USFS lands range from areas with some motorized ATV trails and county roads to rugged backcountry wilderness areas only accessible by horseback or hiking long distances. Public access to private lands on the periphery of USFS lands is restricted, resulting in increased hunting pressure on adjacent USFS, BLM, DNRC, and Big Snowy Mountains WMA lands, as well as private lands still open to the public. Some landowners have leased hunting rights, and some landowners have closed their property to hunting altogether or to anybody other than immediate family and friends. In some areas, elk security reductions on public lands and large blocks of private land closed to general public hunting, have resulted in concentrations of elk on private lands during the hunting season where they are unavailable to the general public. A few ranches are enrolled in FWP's Block Management Program in the foothills of the Little Snowy Mountains and provide elk hunting opportunity. Most private land elk hunting opportunity occurs on lands not enrolled in FWP's Block Management Program.



# HD 535



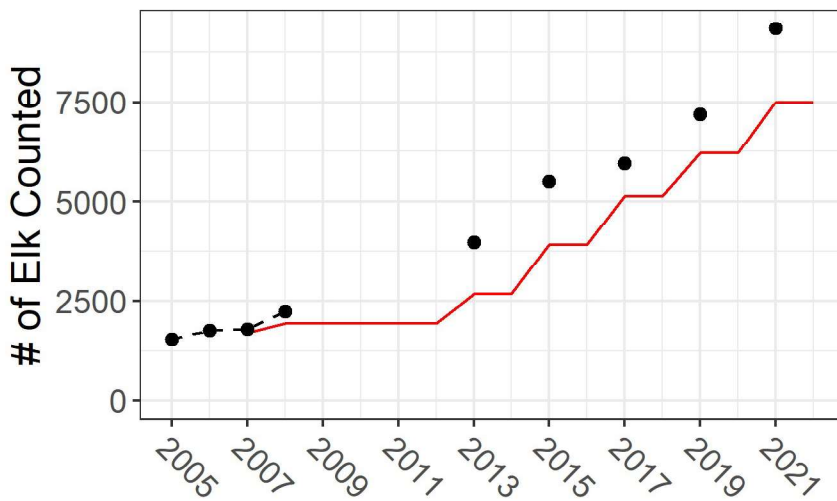
## Snowy Mountains Elk Management Unit

### Management Challenges:

- Antlerless harvest has not been adequate to stabilize, or reduce the population. Severely restricted access to large acreages of private land has historically resulted in failure to cap elk population growth despite liberal antlerless hunting opportunities.
- Elk congregate in large herds during hunting season and throughout the winter increasing game damage conflicts and the potential for disease transmission including brucellosis and CWD. Elk distribution complaints about large concentrations of inaccessible elk are common throughout the hunting season and winter.
- Landowner tolerance for elk is mixed; some want high elk numbers and older age class bulls, some are experiencing damage and would like lower elk numbers and are not concerned about bull age structure, and some are experiencing damage and would like lower elk numbers with older age class bulls.
- There is high potential for damage to crops and pasture fields when elk concentrate in larger herds on private lands.
- Hunter crowding can be an issue on accessible public lands during archery and rifle seasons.

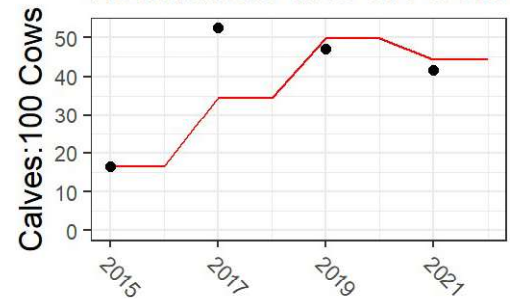
### Current Population Status & Trend

#### Total Elk Counted- HDs 411 & 535

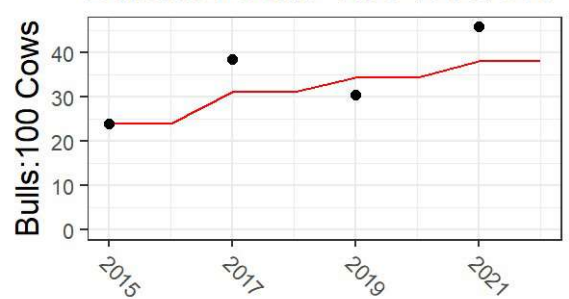


Points show observations from survey flights and the solid red line shows an average of the 2 most recent surveys.

#### Recruitment- HDs 411 & 535



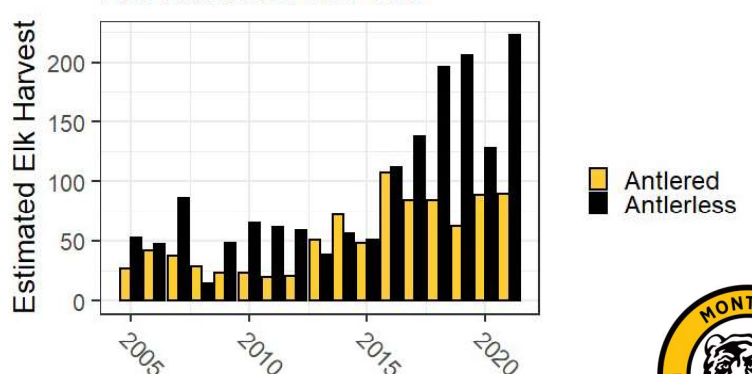
#### Bulls: 100 Cows- HDs 411 & 535



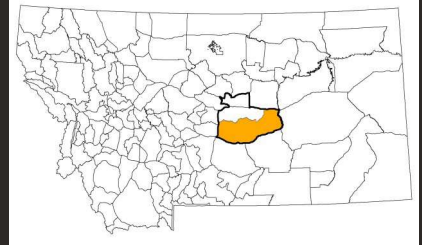
### Hunter Effort and Harvest Statistics

Hunting District	License Year	Hunters	Hunter Days
535	2006	630	3,194
	2008	507	2,393
	2010	587	3,116
	2012	657	3,194
	2014	754	3,972
	2016	987	6,044
	2018	1,173	7,117
	2020	1,198	7,305

#### Elk Harvest- HD 535



# HD 535



## Snowy Mountains Elk Management Unit

### Objective: Manage toward elk population size and demographic targets

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Maintain winter aerial survey counts between 6,000-12,000 elk observed in HDs 411 & 535	3-year average of elk counts is within Goal range for population size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use antlerless harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> </ul>
	If outside Goal range, population is trending toward Goal range	
Maintain bull:cow ratio at 30-45:100	3-year average bull:cow ratio is within Goal range for bull:cow ratio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use antlered harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> </ul>

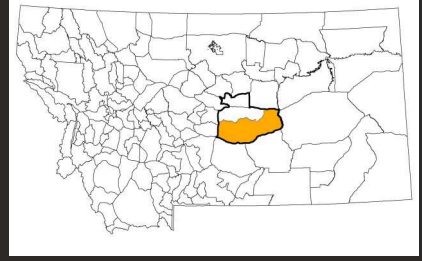
### Objective: Maintain an acceptable elk distribution

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Distribute elk harvest amongst landownerships with available habitat	≥85% of elk harvest occurs on private lands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a season type that accommodates elk harvest on private land and provides landowners with flexibility to manage to their tolerance level</li> <li>• Work with private landowners to maintain or increase hunting access</li> <li>• Work with land management agencies to improve elk security by maintaining or improving elk habitat and by providing input on travel management planning</li> </ul>
Maximize elk use of Big Snowy Mountains WMA	Stable or increasing level of use observed during winter aerial surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage grazing and forested habitats to attract elk use of the Big Snowy Mountains WMA</li> <li>• Manage motorized use to minimize disturbance to elk on the Big Snowy Mountains WMA</li> <li>• Continue weed management on the Big Snowy Mountains WMA</li> </ul>
Minimize elk use of private and agricultural lands where tolerance is low	Elk harvest is increased on private lands where problematic concentrations of elk and/or chronic game damage complaints occur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use antlerless harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> <li>• Work with public land managers to maintain/improve elk habitat on public lands</li> </ul>

(Continued on next page)



# HD 535



## Snowy Mountains Elk Management Unit

### Objective: Provide public elk recreation opportunities

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Reduce hunter crowding	3-year average shows no increase in elk hunter days for archery and general rifle season unless additional hunting access opportunities are created	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with Forest Service to ensure diversity of opportunities exist; encourage access close to roads and access to backcountry</li> </ul>
Provide opportunity to harvest antlerless elk	Maintain annual antlerless harvest of $\geq 10\%$ of the observed antlerless population, when population is at or above the goal range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with private landowners to maintain or increase hunting access</li> </ul>
	No reduction in antlerless harvest compared to 3-year moving average	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use antlerless and antlered harvest opportunity matrices to adjust season structures and/or quotas</li> </ul>
Provide opportunity to harvest mature bulls	$\geq 60\%$ of bull elk observed during aerial surveys are brow-tined bulls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjust archery and rifle limited permit quotas accordingly</li> </ul>
	3-year average of harvested bulls with $\geq 6$ points on one antler is $\geq 75\%$	
Maintain equitable allocation of bull elk harvest between rifle and archery hunters	Maintain 3-year average of 40-60% of the total bull harvest by archers and 40-60% by rifle hunters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjust quotas</li> </ul>

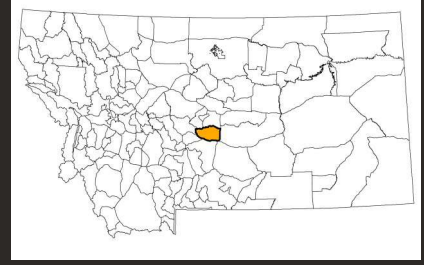


# HD 540

Size: 583 mi<sup>2</sup>

Primary Habitat: Grassland & Forest

Public Ownership: 34%



## *Southeast Little Belt Elk Management Unit*

### District Summary

Hunting District 540 encompasses the southeast side of the Little Belt Mountains. The area is a mixture of private and public lands, including a portion of the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Higher elevation lands are primarily USFS. Lower elevation habitat is dominated by private land. National Forest lands, the Haymaker Wildlife Management Area, and adjacent private lands provide abundant suitable elk habitat. Primary land uses include cattle and sheep grazing, hay and agricultural production, timber management, and recreation. Elk spend the spring, summer, and early fall scattered across the district from low to high elevations. In fall, elk shift to lower elevation habitats where they spend most of hunting season and the winter months. This fall migration, or elevation shift, occurs primarily during archery season and early rifle season. High numbers of B-licenses and shoulder seasons have been used to address the growing elk population. Elk are highly visible during winter aerial surveys providing high quality surveys to track population trends. Aerial population surveys are conducted from January–March as favorable weather conditions allow.

Access opportunities on USFS elk habitat range from areas with heavily roaded and accessible terrain to more rugged habitat only accessible by horseback or hiking long distances. Public access to private lands on the periphery of USFS land is restricted, resulting in increased hunting pressure on adjacent USFS and Haymaker Wildlife Management Area lands, as well as private lands still open to the public. Some landowners have leased hunting rights, and many landowners have closed their property to hunting altogether or to anybody other than immediate family and friends. In some areas, elk security reductions on public lands and large blocks of private land closed to general public hunting, have resulted in concentrations of elk on private lands during the hunting season where they are unavailable to the general public. Landowner participation in FWP's Block Management Program remains relatively stable and is important for public access to elk when the elk are on accessible land during the hunting season. Most private land elk hunting opportunity occurs on lands not enrolled in FWP's Block Management Program.

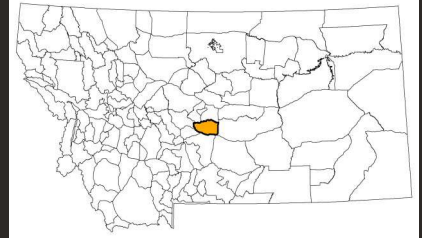
### Management Challenges:

- Restricted hunting access to large acreages of private land has historically resulted in failure to limit elk population growth. However, in recent years, liberal antlerless hunting opportunities appear to have stabilized the population.
- Elk distribution complaints about large concentrations of elk on private lands are common.
- Landowner tolerance for elk is mixed; some landowners would like to see high elk numbers and high numbers of older age class bulls whereas others are experiencing damage and would like to see lower elk numbers and are not concerned about bull age structure.
- Hunter crowding can be an issue on accessible public lands during archery and rifle seasons.
- Elk congregate in large herds during hunting season and throughout the winter. This increases game damage conflicts on private lands, and the potential for disease transmission including brucellosis and CWD.
- Elk distribution complaints about large concentrations of inaccessible elk are common throughout the hunting season and winter.



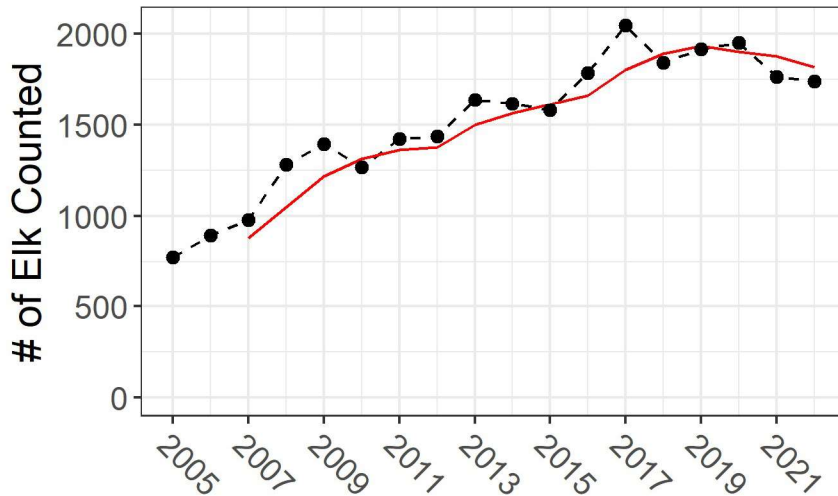
# HD 540

## Southeast Little Belt Elk Management Unit



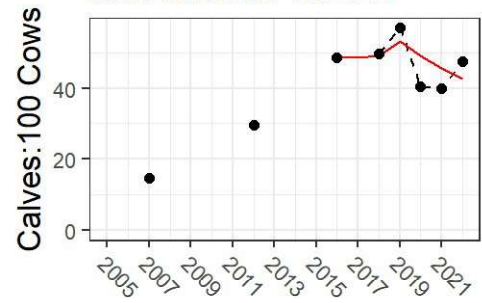
### Current Population Status & Trend

#### Total Elk Counted- HD 540

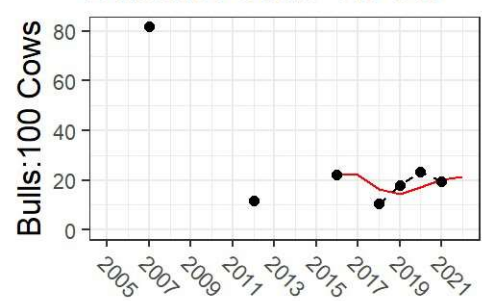


Points show observations from survey flights and the solid red line shows a 3-year moving average.

#### Recruitment- HD 540



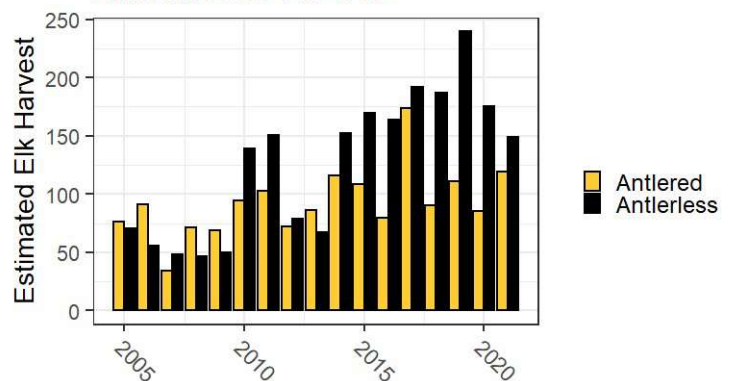
#### Bulls:100 Cows- HD 540



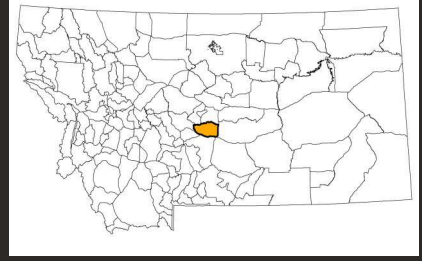
### Hunter Effort and Harvest Statistics

Hunting District	License Year	Hunters	Hunter Days
540	2006	664	3,561
	2008	831	4,829
	2010	1,008	6,608
	2012	1,073	6,272
	2014	1,012	5,715
	2016	1,178	7,985
	2018	1,058	6,074
	2020	1,091	7,267

#### Elk Harvest- HD 540



# HD 540



## Southeast Little Belt Elk Management Unit

### Objective: Manage toward elk population size and demographic targets

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Maintain winter aerial survey counts between 1,500-2,000 elk observed	3-year average of elk counts is within Goal range for population size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use antlerless harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> </ul>
	If outside Goal range, population is trending toward Goal range	
Bull:cow ratio is $\geq 10:100$	3-year average bull: cow ratio is meeting or exceeding minimum bull:cow threshold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use antlered harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> </ul>

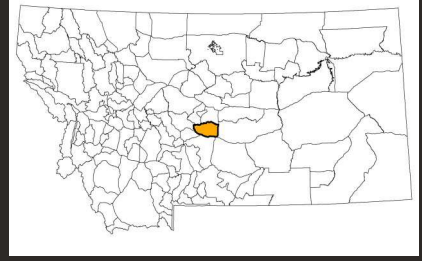
### Objective: Maintain an acceptable elk distribution

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Distribute elk harvest amongst landownerships with available habitat	Maintain general season public land antlerless harvest of > 6% of the observed antlerless population, when population is at or above the goal range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage local working groups representing landowners, outfitters, and sportsmen</li> <li>Work with private landowners to maintain or increase hunting access</li> <li>Improve access to public land</li> <li>Work with land management agencies to improve elk security by maintaining or improving elk habitat and by providing input on travel management planning</li> <li>Work with land management agencies to improve habitat conditions for elk on public lands</li> <li>Manage grazing and forested habitats to attract elk use of the Haymaker WMA</li> <li>Manage motorized use on the Haymaker WMA to minimize disturbance to elk</li> <li>Continue weed management on the Haymaker WMA</li> <li>Use antlered harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> <li>Use a season type that accommodates harvest on private land and provides landowners with flexibility to manage to their tolerance level</li> </ul>
	Maintain general season private land antlerless harvest > 1.5% of the observed antlerless population, when population is at or above the goal range	
	Maintain an average general season public land bull harvest of 8% of the observed antlerless population, when population is at or above the goal range	
	Maintain an average general season private land bull harvest of 2% of the observed antlerless population, when population is at or above the goal range	
Maximize elk use of Haymaker WMA	Stable or increasing level of use observed during winter aerial surveys	
Minimize elk use where tolerance is low	3-year moving average of game damage complaints does not show an increasing trend	



(Continued on next page)

# HD 540



## Southeast Little Belt Elk Management Unit

### Objective: Provide public elk recreation opportunities

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Reduce hunter crowding	3-year average shows no increase in elk hunter days for archery and general rifle season unless additional hunting access opportunities are created	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with Forest Service to ensure diversity of access opportunities exist on public lands</li> <li>• Work with private landowners to maintain or increase hunting access</li> </ul>
Provide opportunity to harvest antlerless elk	Maintain annual antlerless harvest of $\geq 10\%$ of the observed antlerless population, when population is at or above the goal range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve access to public land</li> <li>• Work with land management agencies to improve habitat conditions for elk on public lands</li> </ul>
	No reduction in antlerless harvest compared to 3-year moving average	
Maximize bull hunting opportunity	3-year average bull harvest is stable or increasing when total population is at or above the goal range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with public land managers to maintain or improve elk security</li> <li>• Use antlerless and antlered harvest opportunity matrices to adjust season structures and/or quotas</li> </ul>

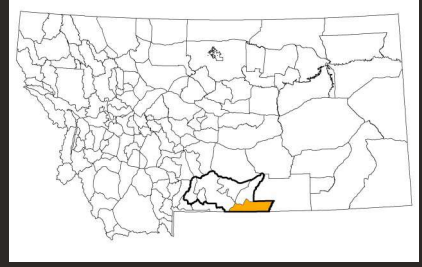


# HD 555

Size: 790 mi<sup>2</sup>

Primary Habitat: Shrubland

Public Ownership: 69%



## *Absaroka Elk Management Unit*

**\*\*Special Management District for Bull Elk\*\***

### District Summary

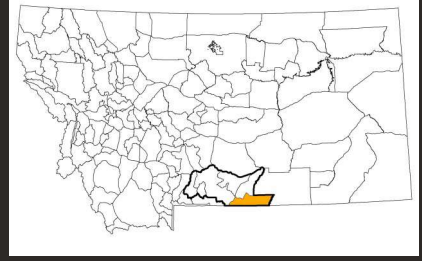
Hunting District 555, located in southern Carbon County, stretches from Bighorn Reservoir on the east to the Beartooth Highway (US Highway 212) on the west and is bounded on the south by the Wyoming state line. The district includes the Pryor Mountains as well as the eastern end of the Beartooth Mountains. This largely desert environment contains large acreages of public land (BLM and USFS) that is primarily used for cattle grazing. Private land in the Clarks Fork valley produces corn, sugar beets, wheat, and alfalfa. Very few elk are found east of the Clarks Fork River. The elk that winter along the east side of the Beartooths mostly migrate to Line Creek, Hellroaring, and Silver Run Plateaus in summer, while some probably move into the Bennett Creek Plateau area in northern Wyoming. During early fall hunting season, bulls move between the cow herds on these summer ranges, as well as moving into adjacent HD 502. Some elk move to private land during mid-summer and fall to access irrigated corn and alfalfa fields. In 2021 the 30,000 acre Robertson Draw fire removed virtually all the conifer security cover on the eastern flank of the Beartooths as well as severely impacting the adjacent sage/grasslands. The impact of this fire on the continued use of this HD by elk remains unknown. During the winter of 2021/22 it appeared that most of the elk either shifted to adjacent HD 502 or dropped south into Wyoming. For the last 30+ years elk in this HD have been managed using limited either-sex permits and limited antlerless permits/antlerless B-licenses. Recently, the either sex permits were made valid for both HD 502 and 555 to accommodate for the movement of bulls between these HDs. While brucellosis has not been documented in this HD, some elk living to the south in Wyoming have been documented to have the disease. Also, the Clarks Fork valley is the area where CWD was first identified in deer in Montana though no elk in this HD have been found to have contracted the disease.

Elk are highly visible during winter aerial surveys providing high quality surveys to track population trends. Traditionally, aerial population surveys have been conducted annually between January–March as favorable weather conditions allow.

Access to huntable numbers of elk is not difficult. Most elk habitat is reachable from the Robertson Draw Road, the Meeteetse Trail, or the Beartooth Highway. Backcountry elk hunting opportunities are available on Line Creek Plateau. Private land access is limited.



# HD 555



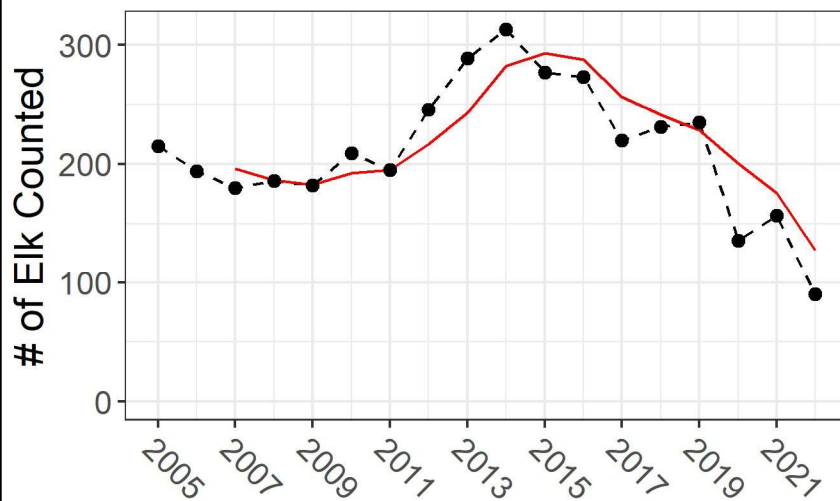
## Absaroka Elk Management Unit

### Management Challenges:

- Currently landowners are generally tolerant of elk that are managed to the stated goal range. At current population levels, elk damage to agricultural fields are within tolerable levels. Significant increase in elk numbers would quickly erode this tolerance.
- Maintaining low densities of elk remain critical in managing for minimal prevalence of brucellosis and CWD.

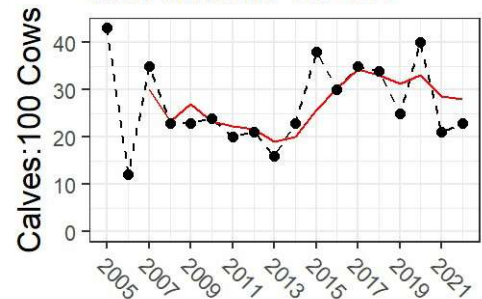
### Current Population Status & Trend

#### Total Elk Counted- HD 555

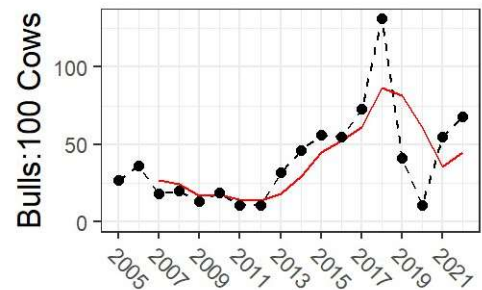


Points show observations from survey flights and the solid red line shows a 3-year moving average.

#### Recruitment- HD 555



#### Bulls:100 Cows- HD 555

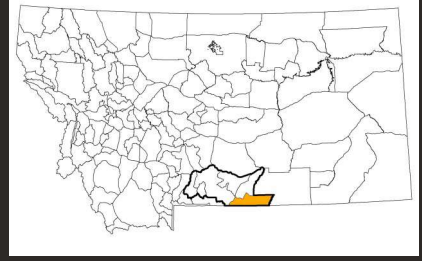


### Hunter Effort and Harvest Statistics

HD 555 is a new Hunting District as of 2022 and therefore harvest and hunter effort data are not yet available within the new HD.



# HD 555



## Absaroka Elk Management Unit

### Objective: Manage toward elk population size and demographic targets

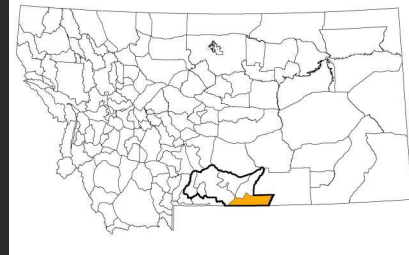
Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Maintain winter aerial survey counts between 150-250 elk observed	3-year average of elk counts is within Goal range for population size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use antlerless harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> <li>• Use antlered harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> </ul>
	If outside Goal range, population is trending toward Goal range	
Maintain bull:cow ratio at 30-45:100	3-year average bull:cow ratio is within Goal range for bull:cow ratio	

### Objective: Maintain an acceptable elk distribution

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Maintain elk distribution across landownerships with available habitat throughout the year	Elk are observed across different landownerships during winter aerial surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage local working groups representing landowners, outfitters, and sportsmen</li> <li>• Work with private landowners to maintain or increase hunting access</li> <li>• Improve access to public land</li> </ul>
Minimize elk use where tolerance is low	3-year moving average of game damage complaints does not show an increasing trend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with land management agencies to improve elk security by maintaining or improving elk habitat and by providing input on travel management planning</li> <li>• Work with land management agencies to improve habitat conditions for elk on public lands</li> </ul>
Maximize elk use of Silver Run WMA in adjacent HD 525	Presence of elk on WMA during winter surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use antlerless harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> <li>• Use a season type that accommodates elk harvest on private land and provides landowners with flexibility to manage to their tolerance level</li> <li>• Implement habitat improvement</li> </ul>
Minimize transmission of brucellosis to livestock	Use Strategies and Measures in statewide table	



# HD 555



## Absaroka Elk Management Unit

### Objective: Provide public elk recreation opportunities

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Provide opportunity to harvest antlerless elk	Maintain annual antlerless harvest of $\geq 10\%$ of the observed antlerless population, when population is at or above the goal range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use antlerless and antlered harvest opportunity matrices to adjust season structures and/or quotas</li> <li>• Adjust archery and rifle limited permit quotas accordingly</li> <li>• Work with private landowners to maintain or increase hunting access</li> <li>• Use regulations that provide for special youth hunting opportunities</li> </ul>
	No reduction in antlerless harvest compared to 3-year moving average	
Provide opportunity to harvest mature bulls	$\geq 60\%$ of bull elk observed during aerial surveys are brow-tined bulls	
	3-year average of harvested bulls with $\geq 6$ points on one antler is $\geq 50\%$	
Maintain equitable allocation of bull elk harvest between rifle and archery hunters	Maintain 3-year average of 40-60% of the total bull harvest by archers and 40-60% by rifle hunters	
Promote hunter recruitment and retention	Youth hunters have broader hunting opportunities relative to non-youth hunters	

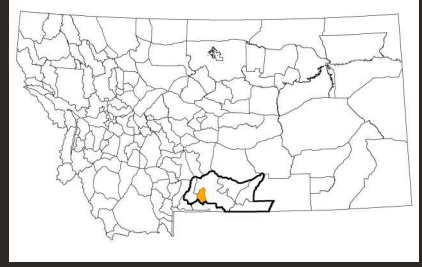


# HD 565

Size: 205 mi<sup>2</sup>

Primary Habitat: Forest

Public Ownership: 99%



## Absaroka Elk Management Unit

### District Summary

Hunting District 565 encompasses the headwaters of the Main Boulder River drainage in Park and Sweet Grass Counties. The elevation ranges from approximately 5,300 ft to 10,000 ft. Lower elevations are characterized by heavily timbered slopes with intermixed small meadows. The higher elevations rise above timberline. Most of the district is within the Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness. The primary land use is recreation, with some timber management in the non-wilderness areas along the Main Boulder Road. Elk inhabit nearly the entire hunting district from the Main Boulder River bottom meadows to the higher elevations near timberline during the summer and fall. The district provides high elevation summer and fall habitat for multiple elk herds that winter outside of HD 565. In winter these elk migrate down slope and utilize meadows along the Main Boulder River. Some elk remain in the district throughout the winter. Others move north along the Main Boulder River corridor and winter around Natural Bridge and Green Mountain in HD 525. Some elk winter as far away as Coal Mine Rim and Greeley Mountain.

The district is primarily wilderness with a small corridor of non-wilderness land following the Main Boulder River bottom. Scattered private land parcels with cabins or summer homes are present along the Boulder River. The Boulder Road allows yearlong motorized access along the river bottom. Numerous USFS trails provide nonmotorized access into the more remote parts of the district. Hunter access opportunity is excellent and only limited by the steep rugged terrain. The difficult terrain combined with minimal motorized access provides high elk security during archery and rifle season.

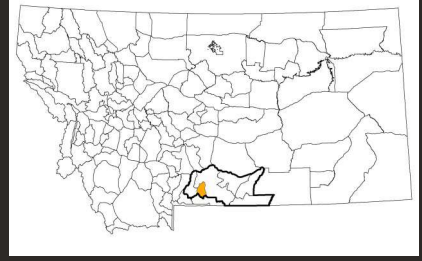
### Management Challenges:

- This elk herd remains below population goal range and may be limited by winter forage and predation.
- Development on private lands along the Main Boulder River may reduce critical winter habitat and forage.
- Heavy snow events during rifle season can concentrate elk along the Boulder Road making them vulnerable to overharvest.
- Most of the elk habitat within the district is heavily timbered, making aerial surveys difficult. Surveys are conducted using a helicopter during spring green up. Variation in surveys is dependent on green up conditions, winter severity and migratory elk thus elk numbers observed during surveys fluctuate dramatically from year to year and may not provide an accurate count of the elk population.
- Bull elk are undercounted due to their solitary nature and preference for more timbered habitats.



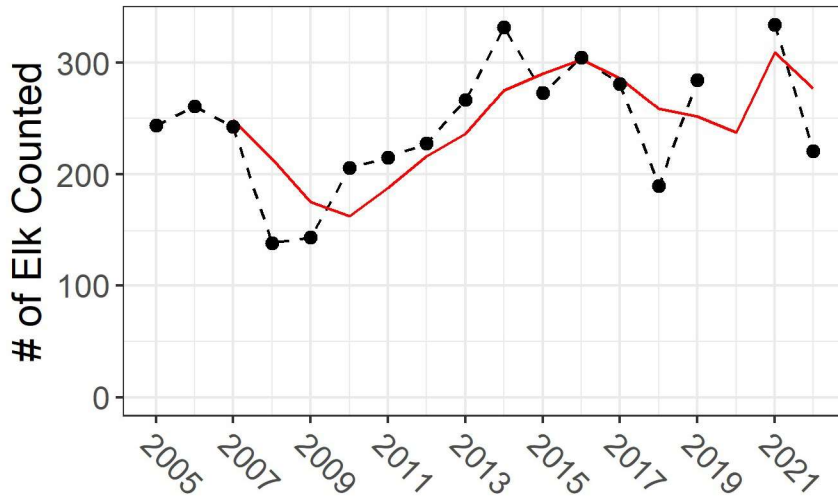
# HD 565

## Absaroka Elk Management Unit



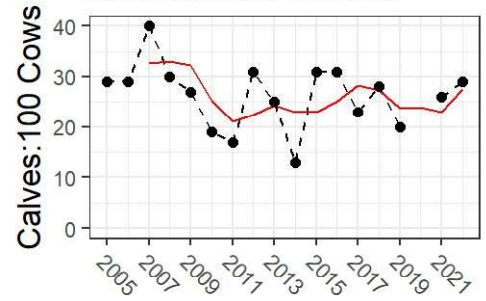
### Current Population Status & Trend

#### Total Elk Counted- HD 565

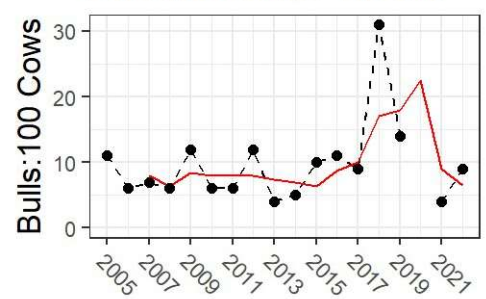


Points show observations from survey flights and the solid red line shows a 3-year moving average.

#### Recruitment- HD 565



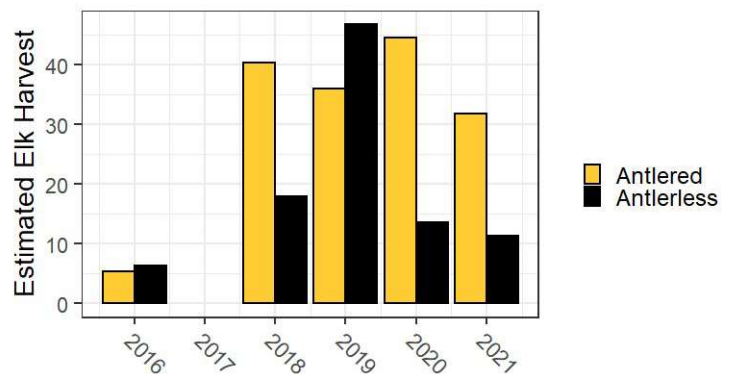
#### Bulls:100 Cows- HD 565



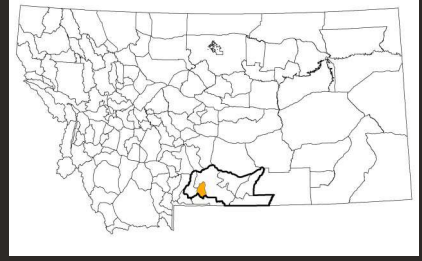
### Hunter Effort and Harvest Statistics

Hunting District	License Year	Hunters	Hunter Days
565	2016	91	419
	2018	295	2,135
	2020	281	1,809

#### Elk Harvest- HD 565



# HD 565



## Absaroka Elk Management Unit

### Objective: Manage toward elk population size and demographic targets

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Maintain winter aerial survey counts between 225-375 elk observed	3-survey average of elk counts is within Goal range for population size If outside Goal range, population is trending toward Goal range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use antlerless harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> </ul>
Bull:cow ratio is $\geq 10:100$	3-survey average bull: cow ratio is meeting or exceeding minimum bull:cow threshold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use antlered harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> </ul>

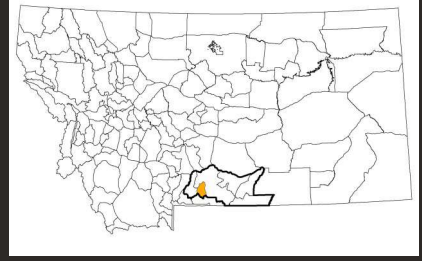
### Objective: Maintain an acceptable elk distribution

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Maintain elk presence and harvest opportunity on USFS Lands during archery and general rifle seasons	3-year average bull harvest is $\geq 30$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage local working groups representing landowners, outfitters, and sportsmen</li> </ul>
Migration corridors remain functional for seasonal elk movement between summer and winter ranges	Elk are observed migrating to and from seasonal ranges through established migration corridors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with land management agencies to improve elk security by maintaining or improving elk habitat and by providing input on travel management planning</li> </ul>
Minimize elk use where tolerance is low	No increase in elk game damage complaints in HD 565 or in the Natural Bridge area in adjacent HD 525	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with land management agencies to improve habitat conditions for elk on public lands</li> <li>Work with public land managers and private landowners/developers to maintain effective elk migration connectivity through the main Boulder River bottom corridor</li> <li>Work with public land managers and private landowners to maintain/improve effective elk winter and spring habitat</li> </ul>
Minimize transmission of brucellosis to livestock	Use Strategies and Measures in statewide table	

(Continued on next page)



# HD 565



## Absaroka Elk Management Unit

### Objective: Provide public elk recreation opportunities

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Maintain a diversity of bull age classes	3-year average of harvested bulls with $\geq 6$ points on one antler is $\geq 40\%$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use antlered harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> </ul>
Maximize bull hunting opportunity	3-year average bull harvest is $\geq 30$	
	3-year average bull harvest success shows no decline	

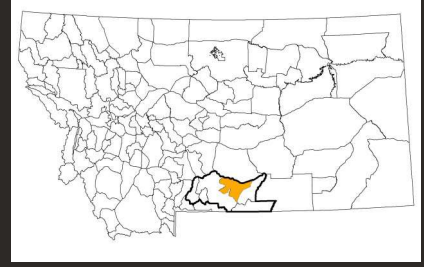


# HD 575

Size: 819 mi<sup>2</sup>

Primary Habitat: Grassland

Public Ownership: 5%



## Absaroka Elk Management Unit

**\*\*Special Management District for Bull Elk\*\***

### District Summary

Hunting District 575, in south-central Montana, lies between US Highway 212 on the east and Bridger Creek on the west and is bounded on the north by I-90 and the Yellowstone River. The primary land uses are cattle and alfalfa production, though some cereal grain production also occurs. The large elk population is primarily non-migratory though some elk do move into adjacent HD 525 during summer/fall. The highest densities of elk are west of the Stillwater River. Nearly all the elk habitat is privately owned, and public access is extremely limited. Small parcels of BLM and DNRC lands provide rare opportunities for elk harvest. Few of the Block Management Areas in the district provide elk harvest opportunity. Historically, the HD has been managed with liberal antlerless opportunities, however these liberal seasons have failed to keep elk numbers in check. CWD has been identified in deer in the eastern portion of the district.

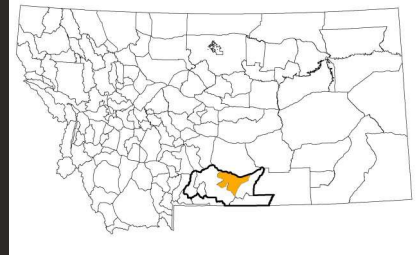
Elk are highly visible during winter aerial surveys providing high quality surveys to track population trends. Traditionally, aerial population surveys have been conducted annually between January–March as favorable weather conditions allow.

### Management Challenges:

- Over the past 10 years, antlerless harvest has not been adequate to stabilize, or reduce the population.
- Severely restricted access to large acreages of private land has resulted in failure to cap elk population growth despite extremely liberal antlerless hunting opportunities.
- Landowner tolerance for elk is mixed; some would like to see high elk numbers and high numbers of older age class bulls whereas others are experiencing damage and would like to see lower elk numbers and are not concerned about bull age structure.
- Elk congregate in large herds. This increases game damage and the potential for disease transmission including brucellosis and CWD.



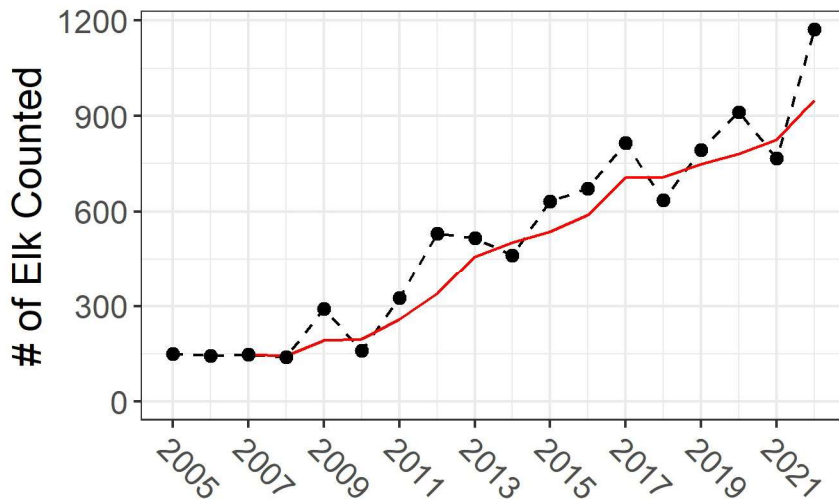
# HD 575



## Absaroka Elk Management Unit

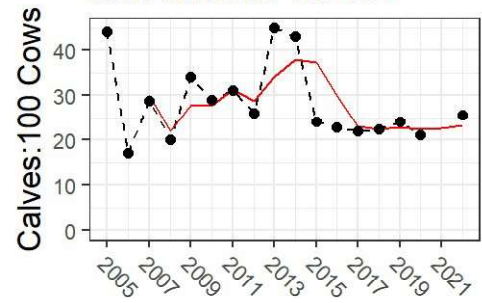
### Current Population Status & Trend

#### Total Elk Counted- HD 575

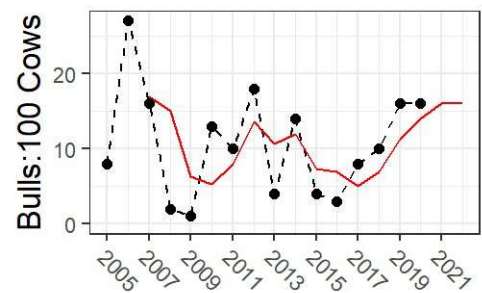


Points show observations from survey flights and the solid red line shows a 3-year moving average.

#### Recruitment- HD 575



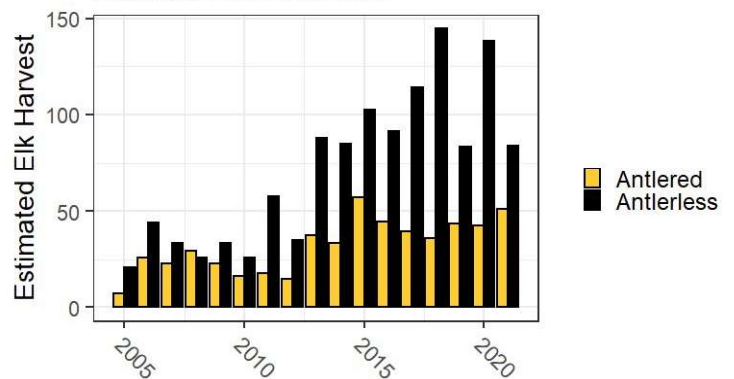
#### Bulls:100 Cows- HD 575



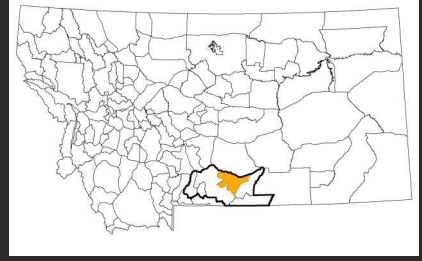
### Hunter Effort and Harvest Statistics

Hunting District	License Year	Hunters	Hunter Days
575	2006	444	2,186
	2008	414	2,611
	2010	414	2,317
	2012	448	2,197
	2014	582	3,037
	2016	722	4,521
	2018	667	4,555
	2020	664	4,174

#### Elk Harvest- HD 575



# HD 575



## Absaroka Elk Management Unit

### Objective: Manage toward elk population size and demographic targets

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Maintain winter aerial survey counts between 650-1,050 elk observed	3-year average of elk counts is within Goal range for population size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use antlered harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> <li>• Use antlered harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> </ul>
	If outside Goal range, population is trending toward Goal range	
Maintain bull:cow ratio at 30-45:100	3-year average bull:cow ratio is within Goal range for bull:cow ratio	

### Objective: Maintain an acceptable elk distribution

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Maintain elk distribution across landownerships with available habitat throughout the year	Elk are observed across different landownerships during winter aerial surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage local working groups representing landowners, outfitters, and sportsmen</li> </ul>
Minimize elk use where tolerance is low	3-year moving average of game damage complaints does not show an increasing trend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with private landowners to maintain or increase hunting access</li> <li>• Use antlerless harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> <li>• Use a season type that accommodates elk harvest on private land and provides landowners with flexibility to manage to their tolerance level</li> </ul>

### Objective: Provide public elk recreation opportunities

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Provide opportunity to harvest antlerless elk	Maintain annual antlerless harvest of $\geq 10\%$ of the observed antlerless population, when population is at or above the goal range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use antlerless and antlered harvest opportunity matrices to adjust season structures and/or quotas</li> </ul>
	No reduction in antlerless harvest compared to 3-year moving average	
Maintain a diversity of bull age classes	$\geq 60\%$ of bull elk observed during aerial surveys are brow-tined bulls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjust archery and rifle limited permit quotas accordingly</li> <li>• Work with private landowners to maintain or increase hunting access</li> </ul>
	3-year average of harvested bulls with $\geq 6$ points on one antler is $\geq 50\%$	
Maintain equitable allocation of bull elk harvest between rifle and archery hunters	Maintain 3-year average of 40-60% of the total bull harvest by archers and 40-60% by rifle hunters	

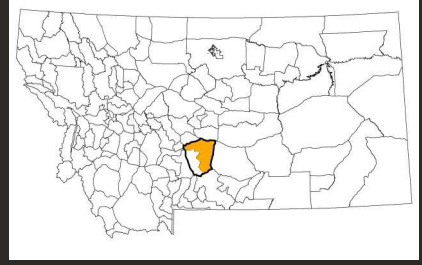


# HD 580

Size: 1,127 mi<sup>2</sup>

Primary Habitat: Grassland

Public Ownership: 22%



## *Crazy Mountains Elk Management Unit*

### District Summary

Hunting District 580 encompasses the east side and north end of the Crazy Mountains. The area is a mixture of private and public lands, including portions of the Custer Gallatin and Lewis and Clark National Forests. Higher elevation lands are primarily USFS with some checkerboard private lands. Lower elevation habitat is dominated by private land. National Forest lands north of Sweet Grass Creek provide abundant suitable elk habitat. National Forest lands south of Sweet Grass Creek are steeper and rockier with less suitable elk habitat on public lands. Primary land uses include cattle grazing, hay and agricultural production, timber management, and recreation. Elk spend the spring, summer, and early fall scattered across the district from low to high elevations. In fall, elk shift to lower elevation habitats where they spend most of hunting season and the winter months. This fall migration, or elevation shift, occurs primarily during archery season and early rifle season. Elk are highly visible during winter aerial surveys providing high quality surveys to track population trends. Aerial population surveys are conducted from January–March, as favorable weather conditions allow.

Hunter access to elk habitat on USFS lands is generally good in the northern half of the district. A new access agreement between the USFS and a private landowner created foot and horseback public access to Big Elk Canyon starting in 2019. Access to USFS lands in the southern half of the district occurs primarily through adjacent private lands or the Big Timber Canyon Trail Head. Hunter access is limited or restrictive on most private lands. Landowner participation in FWP's Block Management Program is minimal across the district.

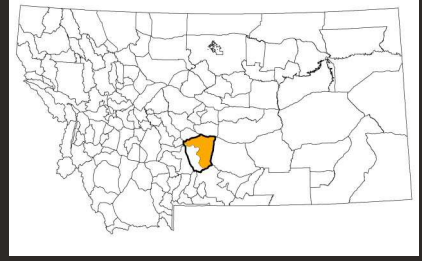
### Management Challenges:

- Over the past 15 years, antlerless harvest has not been adequate to stabilize, or reduce the population.
- Landowner tolerance for elk is mixed; some would like to see high elk numbers and high numbers of older age class bulls whereas others are experiencing damage and would like to see lower elk numbers and are not concerned about bull age structure.
- Checkboard public and private land ownership creates access challenges for hunters and land management challenges for landowners.
- Hunter crowding can be an issue on accessible public lands during archery and rifle seasons.
- Elk congregate in large herds during hunting season and throughout the winter. This increases game damage conflicts on private lands, and the potential for disease transmission including brucellosis and CWD.
- In response to hunting pressure, some elk appear to be shifting distribution to the west side of the Crazy Mountains during winter.



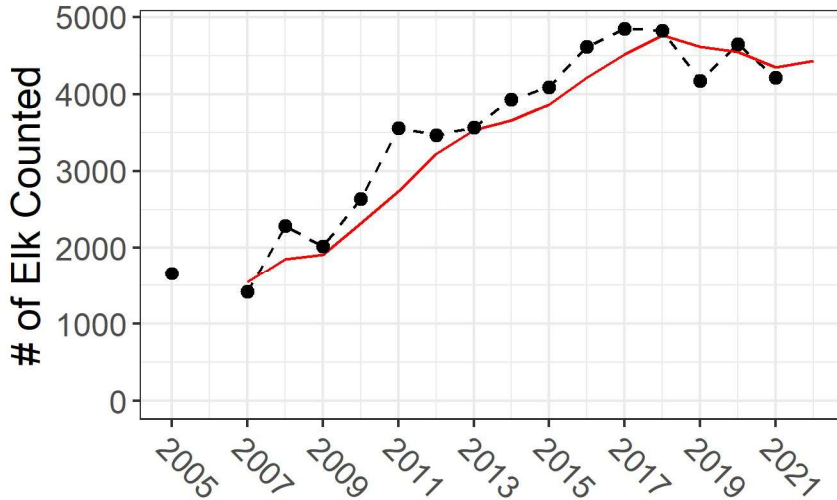
# HD 580

## Crazy Mountains Elk Management Unit



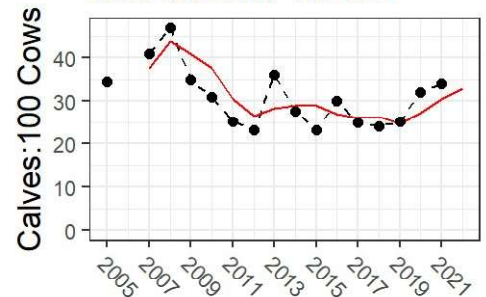
### Current Population Status & Trend

#### Total Elk Counted- HD 580

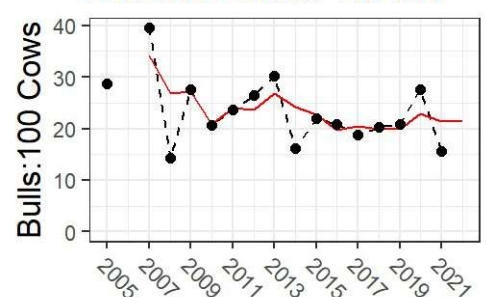


Points show observations from survey flights and the solid red line shows a 3-year moving average.

#### Recruitment- HD 580



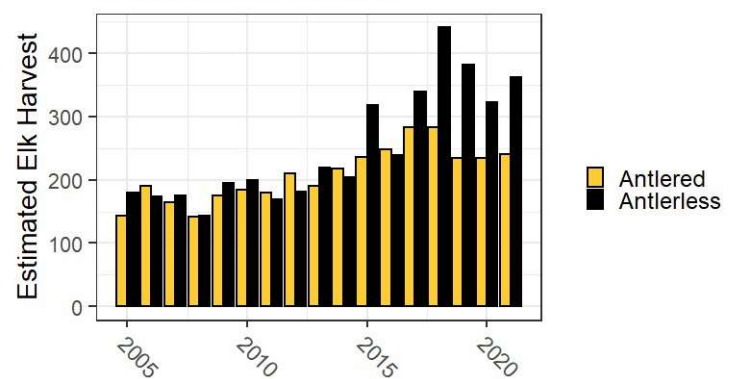
#### Bulls:100 Cows- HD 580



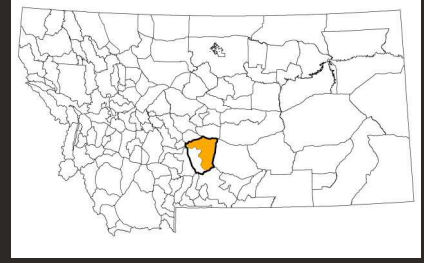
### Hunter Effort and Harvest Statistics

Hunting District	License Year	Hunters	Hunter Days
580	2006	1,000	5,004
	2008	1,039	5,982
	2010	1,201	6,155
	2012	1,269	6,684
	2014	1,262	6,703
	2016	1,585	9,754
	2018	1,656	9,341
	2020	1,522	9,962

#### Elk Harvest- HD 580



# HD 580



## Crazy Mountains Elk Management Unit

### Objective: Manage toward elk population size and demographic targets

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Maintain winter aerial survey counts between 2,500-4,000 elk observed	3-survey average of elk counts is within Goal range for population size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use antlerless harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> </ul>
	If outside Goal range, population is trending toward Goal range	
Bull:cow ratio is $\geq 10:100$	3-survey average bull:cow ratio is meeting or exceeding minimum bull:cow threshold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use antlered harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> </ul>

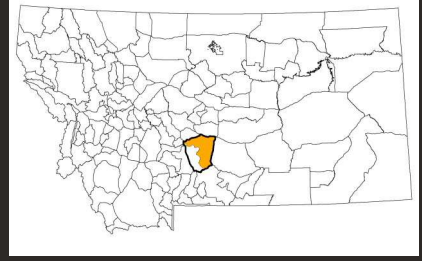
### Objective: Maintain an acceptable elk distribution

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Distribute elk harvest amongst landownerships with available habitat	Maintain general season public land antlerless harvest of $\geq 2\%$ of the observed antlerless population, when population is at or above the goal range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage local working groups representing landowners, outfitters, and sportsmen</li> <li>Work with private landowners to maintain or increase hunting access</li> <li>Improve access to public land</li> <li>Work with land management agencies to improve habitat conditions for elk on public lands</li> <li>Use antlerless harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> <li>Use a season type that accommodates elk harvest on private land and provides landowners with flexibility to manage to their tolerance level</li> </ul>
	Maintain general season private land antlerless harvest $> 3\%$ of the observed antlerless population, when population is at or above the goal range	
	Maintain an average general season public land bull harvest of 4% of the observed antlerless population, when population is at or above the goal range	
	Maintain an average general season private land bull harvest of 6% of the observed antlerless population, when population is at or above the goal range	
Minimize elk use of agricultural lands where tolerance is low	3-year moving average of game damage complaints does not show an increasing trend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with public land managers to maintain or improve elk security</li> </ul>

(Continued on next page)



# HD 580



## Crazy Mountains Elk Management Unit

### Objective: Provide public elk recreation opportunities

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Reduce hunter crowding	3-year average shows no increase in elk hunter days for archery and general rifle season unless additional hunting access opportunities are created	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with Forest Service to ensure diversity of access opportunities exist on public lands</li> <li>• Engage local working groups representing landowners, outfitters and sportsmen</li> </ul>
Provide opportunity to harvest antlerless elk	Maintain annual antlerless harvest of $\geq 10\%$ of the observed antlerless population when the population is at or above the goal range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with private landowners to maintain or increase hunting access</li> <li>• Use antlered and antlerless harvest opportunity matrices to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> </ul>
	No reduction in antlerless harvest compared to 3-year moving average	
Maintain a diversity of bull age classes	3-year average of harvested bulls with $\geq 6$ points on one antler is $\geq 40\%$	
Maximize bull hunting opportunity	3-year average bull harvest is $\geq 200$ when total population is at or above the goal range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve access to public land</li> <li>• Work with land management agencies to improve habitat conditions for elk on public lands</li> <li>• Work with public land managers to maintain or improve elk security</li> </ul>

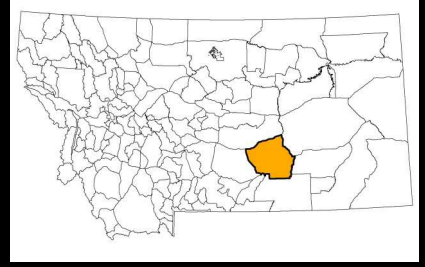


# HD 590

Size: 2,917 mi<sup>2</sup>

Primary Habitat: Shrubland & Grassland

Public Ownership: 10%



## *Bull Mountain Elk Management Unit*

**\*\*Special Management District for Bull Elk\*\***

### District Summary

Hunting District 590 lies south of the Musselshell River and north of the Crow Indian Reservation in the eastern portion of Region 5 and encompasses the Bull Mountains and Pine Ridge. Communities on the perimeter of the district include Billings, Broadview, Lavina, Roundup, Musselshell, Melstone, Custer and Hardin. Elk habitat consists of mostly ponderosa pine and grassy meadows with scattered dry land and irrigated agriculture. Land in this area is predominantly private.

Elk distribution changes throughout the year in response to forage and hunting pressure. However, no defined seasonal elk migration occurs in the district. Elk summer and winter range strongly overlap, and most areas occupied by elk are characterized as general year long range.

In 2022 the north and south portions of the HD were combined to simplify hunting regulations and provide additional opportunities for permit holders. Elk are highly visible during winter aerial surveys providing high quality surveys to track population trends, Aerial population surveys are conducted from January–March as favorable weather conditions (snow cover) allow.

### Management Challenges:

- Over the past 10 years, antlerless harvest has not been adequate to stabilize, or reduce the population.
- Severely restricted access to large acreages of private land has resulted in failure to cap elk population growth despite extremely liberal antlerless hunting opportunities.
- Landowner tolerance for elk is high. There are few game damage complaints in this HD.
- Elk congregate in large herds. This increases game damage and the potential for disease transmission including brucellosis and CWD.
- Hunter crowding can be an issue on accessible public lands during archery and rifle seasons.
- Total counts of this HD require approximately 70 hours of flight time, in prime snow conditions. At times, conditions do not persist long enough to complete the survey of this HD.



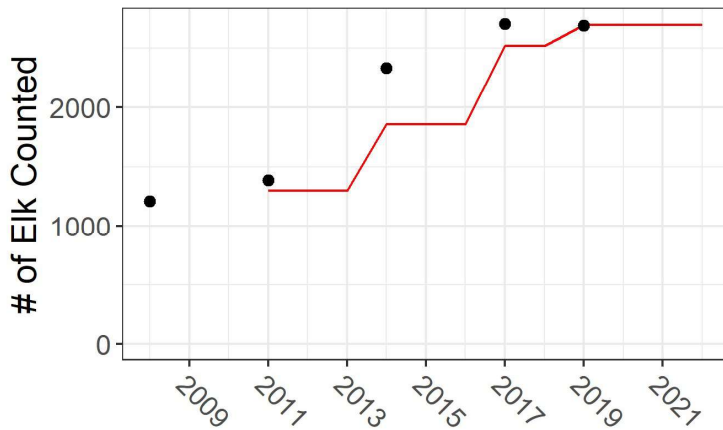
# HD 590

## Bull Mountains Elk Management Unit

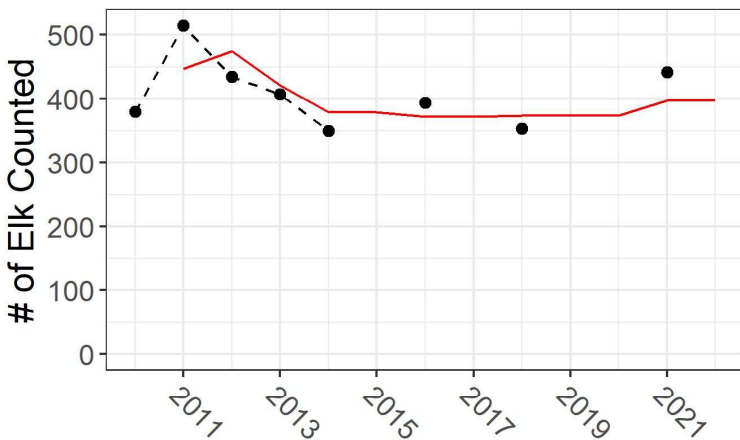


### Current Population Status & Trend

**Total Elk Counted- HD 590 Bull Mtns**

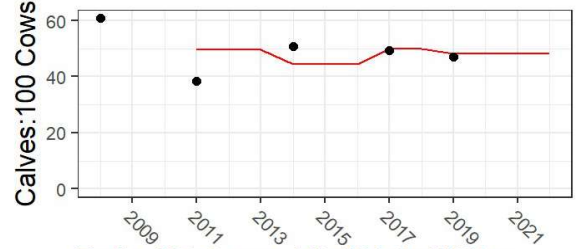


**Total Elk Counted- HD 590 Pine Ridge**

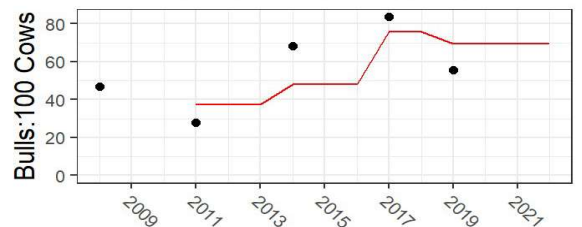


Points show observations from survey flights and the solid red line shows an average of the 2 most recent surveys.

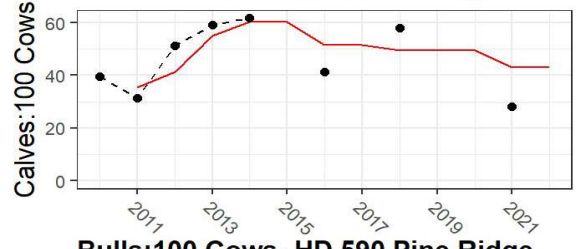
**Recruitment- HD 590 Bull Mtns**



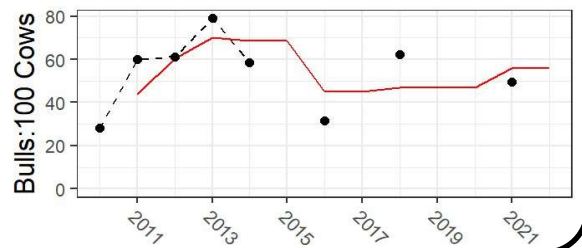
**Bulls:100 Cows- HD 590 Bull Mtns**



**Recruitment- HD 590 Pine Ridge**



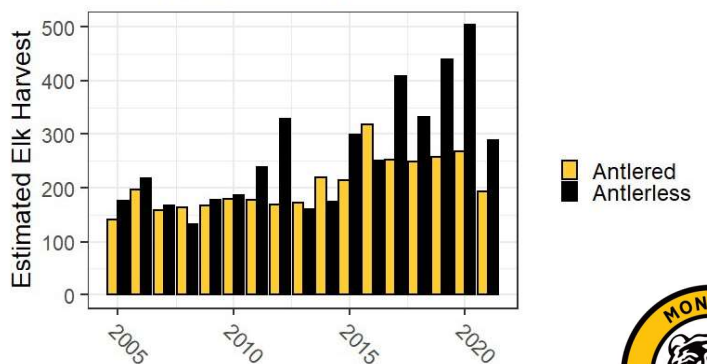
**Bulls:100 Cows- HD 590 Pine Ridge**



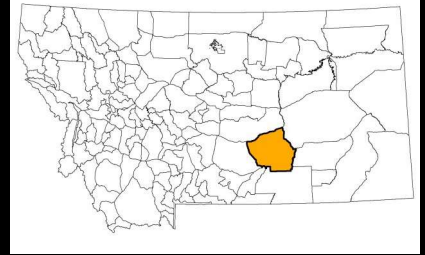
### Hunter Effort and Harvest Statistics

Hunting District	License Year	Hunters	Hunter Days
590	2006	1,304	7,999
	2008	1,472	10,756
	2010	1,414	9,516
	2012	1,795	12,043
	2014	1,780	11,789
	2016	2,114	15,248
	2018	2,282	17,474
	2020	2,361	18,107

**Elk Harvest- HD 590**



# HD 590



## Bull Mountains Elk Management Unit

### Objective: Manage toward elk population size and demographic targets

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Maintain winter aerial survey counts between 2,400-3,600 elk observed	3-survey average of elk counts is within Goal range for population size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use antlerless harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> <li>Use antlered harvest opportunity matrix to adjust season structure and/or quotas</li> </ul>
	If outside Goal range, population trending toward Goal range	
Maintain bull:cow ratio at 30-45:100	3- survey average bull:cow ratio is within Goal range for bull:cow ratio	

### Objective: Maintain an acceptable elk distribution

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Maintain elk distribution across landownerships with available habitat throughout the year	Elk are observed across different land-ownerships during winter aerial surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage local working groups representing landowners, outfitters, and sportsmen</li> <li>Work with private landowners to maintain or increase hunting access</li> </ul>

### Objective: Provide public elk recreation opportunities

Goals	Measures of Success	Strategies
Provide opportunity to harvest antlerless elk	Maintain annual antlerless harvest of $\geq 10\%$ of the observed antlerless population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage local working groups representing landowners, outfitters and sportsmen</li> <li>Work with private landowners to maintain or increase hunting access</li> </ul>
	No reduction in antlerless harvest compared to 3-year moving average	
Provide opportunity to harvest mature bulls	$\geq 60\%$ of elk observed during aerial surveys are brow-tined bulls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use antlerless and antlered harvest opportunity matrices to adjust season structures and/or quotas</li> </ul>
	3-year average bulls harvested on either-sex permit with $\geq 6$ points on one antler is $\geq 40\%$	
Maintain equitable allocation of bull elk harvest between rifle and archery hunters	Maintain 3-year average of 40-60% of the total bull harvest by archers and 40-60% by rifle hunters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adjust archery and rifle limited permit quotas accordingly</li> </ul>

