



MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

CAC R2 Hunting Season Workgroup Meeting Minutes

September 18, 2019

FWP Region 2 Office, 6:00 P.M.

(Notes from a special meeting of the Region 2 Citizens Advisory Committee and other interested groups & individuals)

Attendees: 27, including R2 biologists (4), Randy Arnold, Vivaca Crowser, Joe Jaquith and Mike Thompson and Fish and Wildlife Commissioner Aldrich.

Guest representation: Anaconda Sportsmen's Club, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Hellgate Hunters and Anglers, MT Bowhunters Association, Blackfoot/Helmville Valley ranches, Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife and individuals in the community (unaffiliated)

Long-term Region 2 elk direction *UPDATED* in second edition of R2 *Common Ground*—Mike Thompson, FWP Wildlife Manager
At the August meeting, Mike passed around a 2013 Region 2 Wildlife handout called *Common Ground*. The handout was prepared ahead of the 2014-15 season-setting process and outlined the region's elk management direction at that time. This workgroup's conversation has helped inform the next edition of a similar document for the region and Mike passed this new document with updated R2 elk management direction/goals. He asked for group review to help him adjust this long-term direction and goals if needed.

Potential hunting regulation changes for the Blackfoot—Scott Eggeman, FWP Biologist

The focus of this workgroup meeting is to discuss potential changes to regulations for the Blackfoot Hunting Districts (HDs) for 2020-21. Scott said that he has been coordinating with other FWP staff and taking early discussions with the Blackfoot community and public into account as he prepared ideas for consideration.

WORKGROUP PURPOSE & APPROACH

- Collaboratively develop input that will be used in developing recommendations for Region 2 elk hunting seasons, as per the biennial season-setting process for 2020-2021.
- Bring landowners, hunters, other stakeholders to the table to interact with each other.
- Be open; participants should feel free to share what's on their minds at the meeting, rather than leave the meeting with questions unasked and unresolved.

Potential changes to Blackfoot HDs regulations for 2020-21:

1. Eliminate the elk antlerless opportunity in 280 (Scapegoat Wilderness area)

- In the backcountry districts, harvest trends have been decreasing; Scott thinks antlerless harvest could be eliminated to be more conservative with the population.
 - Don Burgess asked why there has been a downward trend. Scott replied that part of it may be hunter effort, but predators and perhaps recent changes from forest fires have also impacted this area.
 - Louie Bouma also said that elk may be staying east of the divide and aren't going back and forth anymore.

2. Boundary changes

- Eventually, FWP may consider making the eastern portion of HD 283 part of HD 285, but not this time—will keep in mind for the next season-setting process (2022-23).
- HD 293: Considering getting rid of this district. The north portion of the HD would become part of HD 281, and the south part would become part of HD 291. Scott is considering this because the north part is similar to 281 in geography and regulations and the south part is similar to 291 (more agricultural land and more elk). Making this change could help simplify the regulations.
 - Chris Marchion felt that the south half should remain a separate HD because the south half of 293 has public land and 291 does not.

3. HD 293—elk shoulder season adjustment

- Considering removing the late shoulder season (Dec-Feb) because it is not needed for population management.
- Keep the early shoulder season (Aug-Oct) to help with game damage issues.
 - Chris Marchion represented concerns related to shoulder season elk hunts in general opening on Aug. 15 (believes that it put hunter ethics and fair chase hunting on the line) and wondered if it would still help with game damage to bump the opening back to Sept. 10. Marlon Clapham voiced similar concerns and support of a later shoulder season start date.
 - Scott E. replied that if the opening date was changed until September, earlier (August) game damage hunts would still likely be needed to address those issues. There was general landowner agreement around this sentiment.
 - There was some workgroup support and discussion around considering using game damage hunts for the earliest part of the late summer hunting period and then moving to a shoulder season model in September when there seems to be more general public acceptance.
 - Denny Iverson and other Blackfoot landowners reiterated the importance of needing hunter pressure earlier and liking the shoulder season model—especially in terms of being able to know and select the hunters on their property.

4. Elk B licenses—potential adjustments to how they are issued

- Scott reported that elk shoulder seasons are working but that it might be time to level off a bit in some areas. Accordingly, he has been considering ways to still provide a lot of B license opportunity with a few more limits. Some ideas include:
 - Quota in areas where we want broad hunter opportunity but more limited harvest?
 - Issue B licenses by hunting district or watershed instead of region-wide (this might address the amount of hunter requests that landowners are getting). But, does this add to hunting regulations complexity and reduces

flexibility for hunters. Watershed-wide B licenses might be a nice compromise between where the regulations are now (valid in many R2 hunting districts) vs going too narrow (valid in only one HD).

- General reactions and ideas from the workgroup:
 - Chris M.: Regardless of where B licenses are valid for, would like to see mandatory harvest reporting—he thinks this would help us understand better what shoulder season harvest looks like and then make regulation adjustments as needed.
 - Louie B. wondered about over-the-counter B-licenses but with limits to the number sold or make them part of the drawing instead of limiting to watershed?
 - General support for B licenses valid by watershed (or some similar size geographic area). The group seemed to like this approach better than being as broadly valid as they are now or going as limited as hunting district specific.
 - General feeling that the B licenses that are widely valid across R2 do put too much pressure on landowners by prompting a lot of public requests for access; this would be partially addressed by limiting the B licenses to a smaller geographic area.

5. HD 291—considerations

- Scott explained that HD 291 is at objective based on the last aerial survey but still has a shoulder season, and he is recommending keeping that season---why?
 - He thinks that less elk were counted in the recent winter survey because they had moved somewhere else—not because the numbers have drastically decreased.
 - The district still needs the benefits (decreased game damage) that has resulted from the shoulder season hunts.

Next Steps: Mike reiterated that this group’s work will provide guidance that FWP will use in creating recommendations for 2020-21 hunting seasons. On October 2, this workgroup will meet to hear ideas and collect feedback for the Upper Clark Fork.

Next meeting: October 2, 5:30 P.M (beginning with dinner); meeting at 6:00 P.M. at the R2 Fish, Wildlife & Parks office in Missoula (3201 Spurgin Road).