



# MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

**Meeting Date:** October 20, 2022

**Agenda Item:** 2023 Annual Work Plan for Elk Management in Areas with Brucellosis

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 15 minutes

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**Background:** In January 2013, the commission endorsed elk management recommendations from a citizen working group for use in areas with brucellosis, which is the Designated Surveillance Area (DSA) as described by the Montana Department of Livestock. Annual work plans describe specific management actions based upon those recommendations to reduce the risk of brucellosis transmission from elk to cattle. The proposed 2023 annual work plan includes many of the same approaches used in the 2022 plan to include elk hazing, stackyard fencing, habitat modification, and lethal removal of no more than 250 elk. The proposed 2023 plan generally maintains previous landownership and date descriptions clarifying where and when elk may be managed, but the group has asked for consideration of additional tools.

**Public Involvement Process and Results:** The Brucellosis Working Group is a public advisory body that provides recommendations for this work plan. Additional public comment will be solicited for a four-week period starting Aug. 26. Public comments will be posted online and provided to commissioners no later than two weeks prior to the October commission meeting.

**Analysis and Alternatives:** The working group provided several recommendations for department consideration. Alternative A: The commission may choose to accept the working group's recommendations and adopt as final the 2023 Work Plan for Elk Management in Areas with Brucellosis.

Alternative B: The commission may choose to reject the plan and default to the planned actions from the 2022 plan.

Alternative C: The commission may choose to ask the working group to reconvene to consider additional alternatives in a new draft plan.

**Agency Recommendation and Rationale:** The department recommends adopting the substantive recommendations from the working group that differ from the 2022 plan:

- 1) Allow the use of elk management tools within the DSA and in other specific areas where brucellosis-exposed elk have been confirmed.
- 2) Add the exploration of new hazing techniques based on the efficacy of past efforts and new research findings. New hazing techniques could include the use of drones, dogs, remote cameras that alert landowners to elk presence, hazing even when elk are not present, or hazing at night. The work group recommends implementing at least one new technique in 2023 followed by an analysis of efficacy.
- 3) Add the expanded opportunity to use fencing that reduces the ability for elk to cross into or use high-risk areas, such as calving pastures. This fencing was previously authorized for use only in the Paradise Valley.
- 4) Add the target of implementing at least one habitat manipulation project that encourages elk to stay away from high-risk areas in 2023 followed by an analysis of efficacy.
- 5) Remove the annual cap of \$2,500 per landowner for fencing material.

**Proposed Motion** I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the 2023 Annual Work Plan for Elk Management in Areas with Brucellosis (Alternative A) as presented by the department.