

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
SEASON CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 3

Hunting Districts: 301

License Year: 2024

1. Describe the proposed season /quota changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.)

The proposed change is to extend shoulder season hunting (not valid on National Forest Lands) into HD 301. The proposal would not change antlerless elk hunting on National Forest Lands.

The current regulation has no B license opportunity and general license rules are as follows:
General elk license: Brow-tined bull or antlerless elk (archery season); brow-tined bull or antlerless elk (first 2 weeks of general rifle season); brow-tined bull elk (last 3 weeks of rifle season); brow-tined bull elk muzzleloader season. Youth and PTHFV may hunt either-sex season-long.

The proposed regulation would introduce a B license opportunity and general license rules as follows:

General elk license: Brow-tined bull or antlerless elk (archery season); brow-tined bull or antlerless elk (first 2 weeks of general rifle season); brow-tined bull elk (last 3 weeks of rifle season); brow-tined bull elk muzzleloader season. Youth and PTHFV may hunt either-sex season-long.

NEW: Antlerless elk end of rifle season until Feb 15, Not valid on National Forest Lands.

NEW: Elk B license 397-00: Antlerless elk Aug 15-Sep 1 (only valid on private land. Valid in HDs 301, 309, 311, 312, 390, and 393). Antlerless elk archery season; general rifle season; and through Feb 15th (Not valid on National Forest Lands. Valid in HDs 301, 309, 311, 312, 390, and 393).

2. What is the objective of this proposed change?

The objectives of the proposed change are to bring elk populations in elk HD 301 and HD 309 to within Elk Plan objectives and to reduce game damage complaints.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured?

The success of this proposal will be measured through annual elk counts and elk game damage reports.

- Annual elk counts should trend downward and stabilize between 400 and 600 elk. The last 3 years, counts have averaged 822 elk.
- Game damage complaints often include more than 5 a year. Game damage complaints should not increase if elk population decreases.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

The elk herd was generally within management objectives from 2008 through 2020 (Figure 1). However, it has been rapidly increasing since, with counts of up to 936 elk. Elk harvest in HD 301 averaged 136 and varied from a low of 92 to a high of 205 (2022 data are not yet available). Hunting

harvest success rates in HD 301 are relatively low, last calculated at 12.8% in 2020, compared with neighboring districts where success rates may exceed 20%.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident or nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, temperature / precipitation information).

HD 301 is linked with HD 309, the herd winters between these districts (Figure 2). HD 309 is a Weapons Restricted hunting district drawn around the private developments in the greater Bozeman area. Its objectives are to keep wildlife numbers low to defray conflict and to safely use hunting to do so. In HD 309, hunting has long included shoulder seasons under the Unlimited B license structure. Elk have learned the line and may move into private lands in HD 301 to avoid the shoulder season hunt. A common regulation allowing late-season hunting would better manage the elk herd which shares these districts.

Elk in HD 301 have been spending more time on the low elevation irrigated agricultural fields and subdivisions instead of the National Forest lands above. Irrigated agricultural fields provide superior nutrition and may provide security if the landowner does not allow hunting. Subdivisions can also provide refuge from hunting with shelter, water from ponds, and forage. Together, this removes the incentive for elk to move back onto public lands where forage quality and habitat security may be lower.

In the past, HD 301 had a stand-alone, limited Elk B license valid on private land only. This tag met virtually no hunter success and was eliminated as part of the regulations simplification effort. However, feedback from area landowners has been that these limited licenses went through the random draw to people who were unable to secure access. HD 301 is highly developed and subdivided, so landowners are often cautious about who they allow to hunt for safety reasons. Unlimited OTC licenses will allow flexibility for hunters who have obtained private access to hunt.

There have been increasing annual game damage complaints from landowners on this winter range, and this winter marked a sizeable uptick in complaints related to elk crossing back and forth across Highway 191, creating traffic hazards and wildlife-vehicle collisions. Elk numbers have increased as has human use in the Gallatin Valley, contributing to conflicts.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

This proposal was vetted as part of the winter HD 309/301 elk flight report and sent to a distribution list serve of nearly 300 people to include landowners, outfitters, sportspersons, and other interested parties. It was also discussed at the Region 3 Season Setting meetings. Feedback was generally positive, especially to keeping the shoulder season hunting generally on private lands only and the general license brow-tined bull only through the majority of hunting season. Landowners were generally positive to this change as they believed it would help them manage the herd and defray agricultural damage. Sportspersons were clear there are not too many elk up on National Forest Land. Some sportspersons asked that this Elk B license be private land only, and not include any of the state DNRC lands. If FWP followed this comment, it would make HD 301's regulation differ from the other Shoulder Season Regulations.

Submitted by:

Date:

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

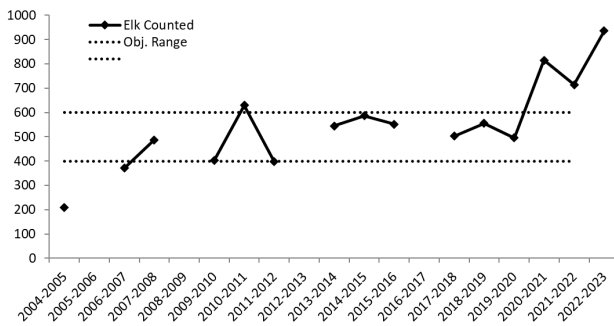


Figure 1: Elk counts in HD 301 and HD 309 from 2004-2005 to present.

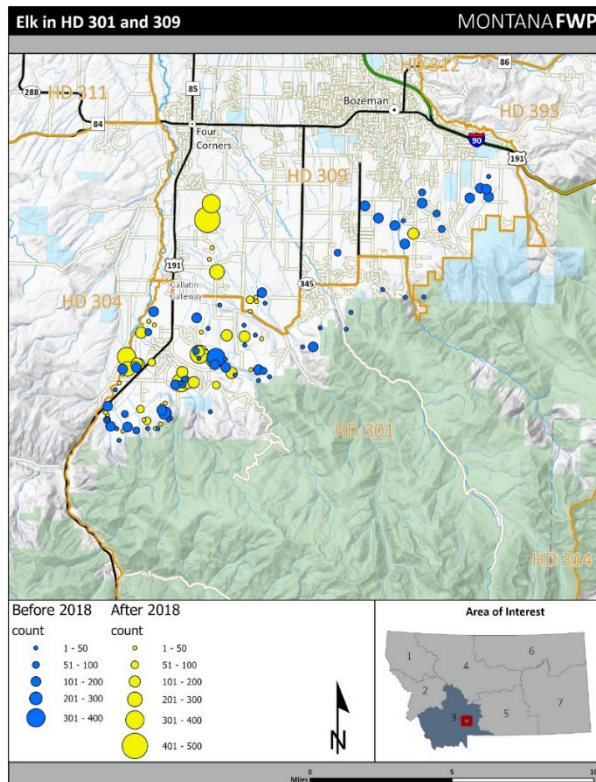


Figure 2: Elk count locations and herd sizes in HD 301 and HD 309.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk, deer, bear, lions, wolves

Region: 3

Hunting District: 309

Year: 2024

1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).

The proposed change is to introduce a weapons-restricted exclusion zone in HD 309. This exclusion zone would allow rifles for hunting on **parcels 160 acres or larger** within the following definition:

Blackwood Exclusion Zone from within HD 309:

Any parcel of land that is 160 acres or larger and that falls within the following described boundaries: Beginning at Highway 191 and Blackwood Road, then east to Cottonwood Road, then south following Cottonwood Road (state route 345) then following Cottonwood Road west to Highway 191, then north along Highway 191 to Blackwood Road, the point of the beginning.

Although this proposal was developed to address elk concerns (justification below), the proposed exclusion zone should apply to all other huntable species to avoid confusion.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

HD 309 is a weapons-restricted district around the greater Bozeman Area. It was created in 2005 with dual objectives of allowing liberal hunting seasons to prevent urban wildlife conflict while enforcing weapons-restrictions for safety in this developing area. However, elk numbers have grown above objective and are causing chronic game damage to larger agricultural producers.

The purpose of this proposed change is to allow rifle hunting on large properties (where rifle hunting would be safer) to increase elk harvest in this over-objective hunting district.

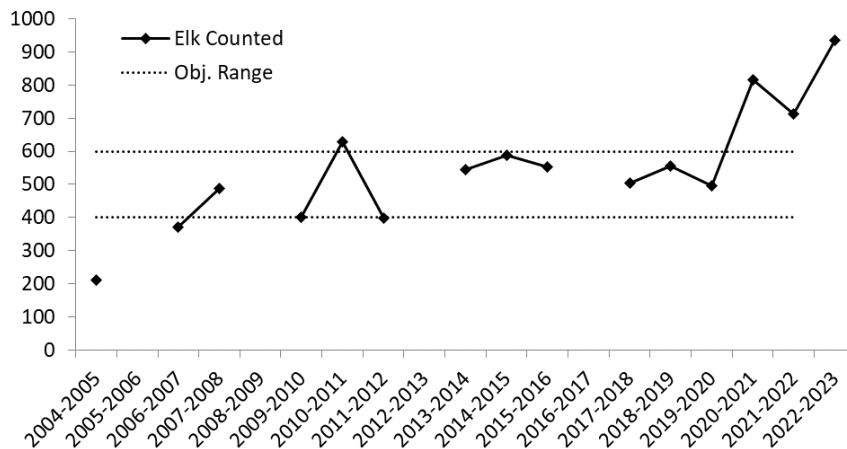
3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints.

The desired outcomes will be to see elk numbers regulate, landowner complaints decrease, and no increased safety risk. These outcomes will be measured as follows:

- 1) Elk numbers taken during winter counts in HD 301 and HD 309 will trend downward and reach objective range in the timespan of the next 3-5 years after the proposed change takes place.
- 2) Harvest surveys indicate above-average harvest in HD 309 after the proposed change takes place.
- 3) Game damage complaints do not increase over the next 3-5 years after the proposed change takes place.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

The 2005 Elk Plan objective range for this herd is 400 to 600 elk. The last 3 years of elk counts have exceeded population objective range, with the most recent count (2023) enumerating 936 elk, which places the herd 50% over objective range and nearly double point objective (500).



5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

As elk numbers have exceeded population objectives, wildlife damage to remaining agricultural properties has been rampant and chronic. Agricultural landowners have approached FWP asking for this change for years. On their larger properties, it is too challenging to get close enough to an elk herd to effectively harvest elk following weapons-restricted guidelines, as shotguns, muzzleloaders, and pistols all have shorter ranges. They believe allowing rifles will increase effective elk harvest, and that it will be safe to do so on their larger properties.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

Aspects of this proposal have been vetted through our Enforcement division to ensure the proposal would be enforceable and clear for hunters and landowners. Individual contacts have been made with several larger landowners, all of whom enthusiastically supported this proposal. The idea of increasing exclusion zones within HD 309 was in the HD 309 flight report sent to a list serve of approximately 300 people including landowners, sportspersons, and NGOs. It was also discussed at the Region 3 season-setting meetings and no feedback was received.

As this proposal develops, it is likely some members of the non-hunting public may express concern. There are property owners in Bozeman who do not like hunting or firearms. It will become important to communicate with all parties and evaluate safety moving forward. It is important to remember that within the HD 309 boundaries, there are not necessarily any rules about firearms discharge in general: landowners and their guests may use rifles to shoot recreationally, or to shoot coyotes or other unregulated species.

Submitted by:
 Date:
 Approved: _____
 Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
 Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

HD 309 Proposed Blackwood Exclusion Zone

MONTANA FWP

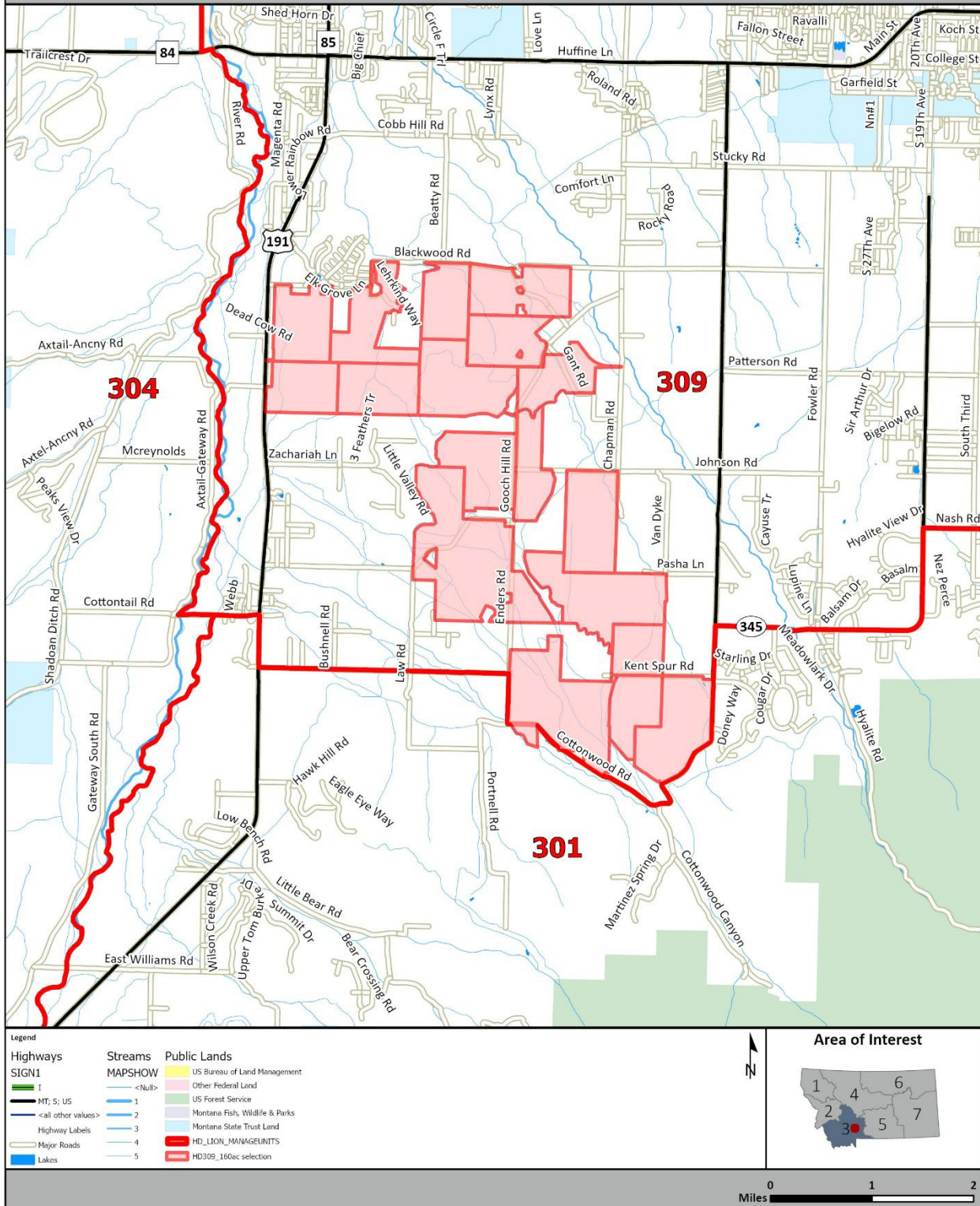


Figure 1: Map shows the properties within HD 309 that would be affected by the proposed exclusion zone, which would run south of Blackwood Road, west of Cottonwood/State 345, North of Cottonwood (the boundary with HD 301) and east of Highway 191.

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Species: All
Region: 3
Hunting District: 313
Year: 2024-2025

- 1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

This proposal is to change the Restricted Area Description for the Gardiner Closure Area to address an area of confusion near the Gardiner Airport and McConnell Fishing Access (a USFS access site). The current description articulates the closure following some straight line from Stephens Creek/Yellowstone River confluence to Hwy 89 S but not does not specify a solid reference on Hwy 89. This allows the recreating public to interpret it as open to hunting depending on where they perceive the line to be. Also, the Forest Service has established a "No Shooting" closure order at McConnell Fishing Access. This Forest Service closure calls for a 150 yard boundary from the site, but there is no clearly defined point of origin which differentiates the Forest Service fishing access from the adjacent Forest Service land which is not part of the fishing access. The current language surrounding these closures results in confusion for hunters and an inability for FWP to adequately enforce the closure in this small area. The new language will provide better direction to hunters and enable FWP to enforce the closure.

The proposed change would not create any new closure area, but instead clearly include the area closed by existing Forest Service order within FWP's Gardiner closure area to reduce confusion.

- 2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

To provide a less confusing and enforceable closure boundary.

- 3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints.**

Success is implied if the current language is changed to the proposed new language.

- 4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

Not applicable.

- 5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

Not applicable.

- 6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

No public outreach has been conducted because this is a minor language clarification. This proposal was requested by the local warden and the local biologist concurs.

Submitted by: Michael Yarnall
Date: 31 July 2023

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

Appendix:

The current language would be changed from:

“Gardiner: Closed to all hunting. Beginning at the Junction of U.S. Hwy 89 and Little Trail Creek, then up Little Trail Creek to the posted line (approx. 1/2 mile above U.S. Hwy 89), then southeasterly along said line to the Travertine-Trail Creek Road, then easterly along said road to its intersection with the Gardiner-Jardine Road, then northeasterly along said road to Eagle Creek, then southerly down said creek to the YNP boundary, then westerly along said boundary to the intersection with Stevens Creek, then northeasterly in a straight line to the intersection with U.S. Hwy 89, then northwesterly along said highway to the junction of Little Trail Creek, the point of beginning.”

To:

“Gardiner: Closed to all hunting. Beginning at the Junction of U.S. Hwy 89 and Little Trail Creek, then up Little Trail Creek to the posted line (approx. 1/2 mile above U.S. Hwy 89), then southeasterly along said line to the Travertine-Trail Creek Road, then easterly along said road to its intersection with the Gardiner-Jardine Road, then northeasterly along said road to Eagle Creek, then southerly down said creek to the YNP boundary, then westerly along said boundary to the intersection with Stevens Creek **at the Stevens Creek/Yellowstone River confluence, then downstream (northwesterly) to the marked line at the USFS boundary on the east bank of the Yellowstone River (the boundary between T9S R8E S17 and T9S R8E S16), then northerly along said section line to Riverview Drive, then easterly along Riverview Drive** ~~then northeasterly in a straight line~~ to the intersection with U.S. Hwy 89, then northwesterly along said highway to the junction of Little Trail Creek, the point of beginning.”

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk
Region: 3
Hunting District: 313
Year: 2024

1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).

This proposal is to reduce the 313-00 (youth-only elk B license) from 60 to 50 and widen the quota range (to 10-100). Additionally, this proposal is to create a new 313-01 B license that is not restricted to youth (quota of 50, range 10-100).

Although the northern Yellowstone herd's recruitment level does not warrant substantial antlerless opportunity, the population can sustain this level of antlerless harvest to provide for hunter opportunity. The antlerless opportunity for adults was eliminated during the 2022-2023 season setting when this was changed from an antlerless permit to a B license opportunity, but subsequent public comment has suggested it is reasonable to reestablish this opportunity in the form of a B license.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The objective is to provide a limited level of antlerless opportunity that is sustainable for the population.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints.

The success of this proposal will be measured via conversations with hunters, annual aerial surveys of this elk herd, and hunter harvest surveys.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

The 2005 Elk Plan's objective is for 3000-5000 elk from the northern Yellowstone Herd wintering in MT (with the balance wintering in YNP). When surveyed via fixed wing aircraft in December 2022, 5142 elk were observed north of YNP.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

Winter 2022-2023 was much harsher than other recent winters past. In addition to reducing elk body condition and survival, this likely increased the proportion of the herd which migrated north into MT last winter.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

This proposal was not specifically presented during summer scoping meetings, but an interest in antlerless opportunity within HD 313 was brought up by the public. It has been discussed multiple times by regional wildlife staff.

Submitted by: Michael Yarnall
Date: 31 July 2023

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk
Region: 3
Hunting District: 314 and 315
Year: 2024-2025

1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).

This proposal is to eliminate elk B licenses 314-00 (current quota 1000) and 315-01 (current quota 500). Instead, these limited-quota single-district B licenses would be replaced with an OTC multi-district opportunity. Both 314 and 315 would be added to the 397-00 elk B license, which is available over the counter and currently valid in 309, 311, 312, 390, and 393.

The current 397-00 restriction to private land only for those units that have an early shoulder season would apply. Additionally, the "Not valid on National Forest Lands" restriction would apply during archery, general, and late shoulder seasons. In HD 314, this license would only be valid north of Rock Creek. In HD 315, this license would be valid only during the archery and general seasons as there is not a shoulder season. In HD 314, this license would be valid during the early shoulder season (private land only) and the archery, general, and later shoulder seasons (not valid on National Forest Lands).

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The objective of this change is to increase flexibility for hunters (by allowing use of a single tag in multiple districts and the ability to purchase OTC) and to more effectively direct antlerless harvest towards elk in conflict on private lands for landowners that use hunters to manage elk numbers and distribution. Additionally, this will provide a limited tool for addressing hunter crowding concerns in select areas on National Forest lands.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints.

The success of this proposal will be measured via annual elk population surveys, hunter harvest surveys, number of game damage complaints, and via conversations with hunters and landowners.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

Both HD 314 (except the southernmost subunit) and HD 315 are above 2005 objectives for elk numbers. Elk Plan revision is ongoing and objectives may be adjusted, but liberal opportunities for antlerless harvest will be maintained for the foreseeable future.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

Winter 2022-2023 was harsher than recent prior winters and resulted in increased winterkill and reduced calf:cow ratios in some areas. However, this past winter will not have altered the long-term population trajectory. Hunters' ability to target concentrations of elk on private land will continue to influence whether antlerless harvest opportunity translates into antlerless harvest sufficient to influence population trend.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

This proposal has been shared with the Park County Rod and Gun Club, during the summer scoping meetings for 2024-2025 season setting, and opportunistically with sportsmen and landowners.

Submitted by: Michael Yarnall

Date: 31 July 2023

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
Mule Deer 2024
Reinstate Antlerless Mule Deer B licenses valid in HDs 318 and 335

Hunting Districts: HDs 318 and 335

1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).

Proposed Changes:

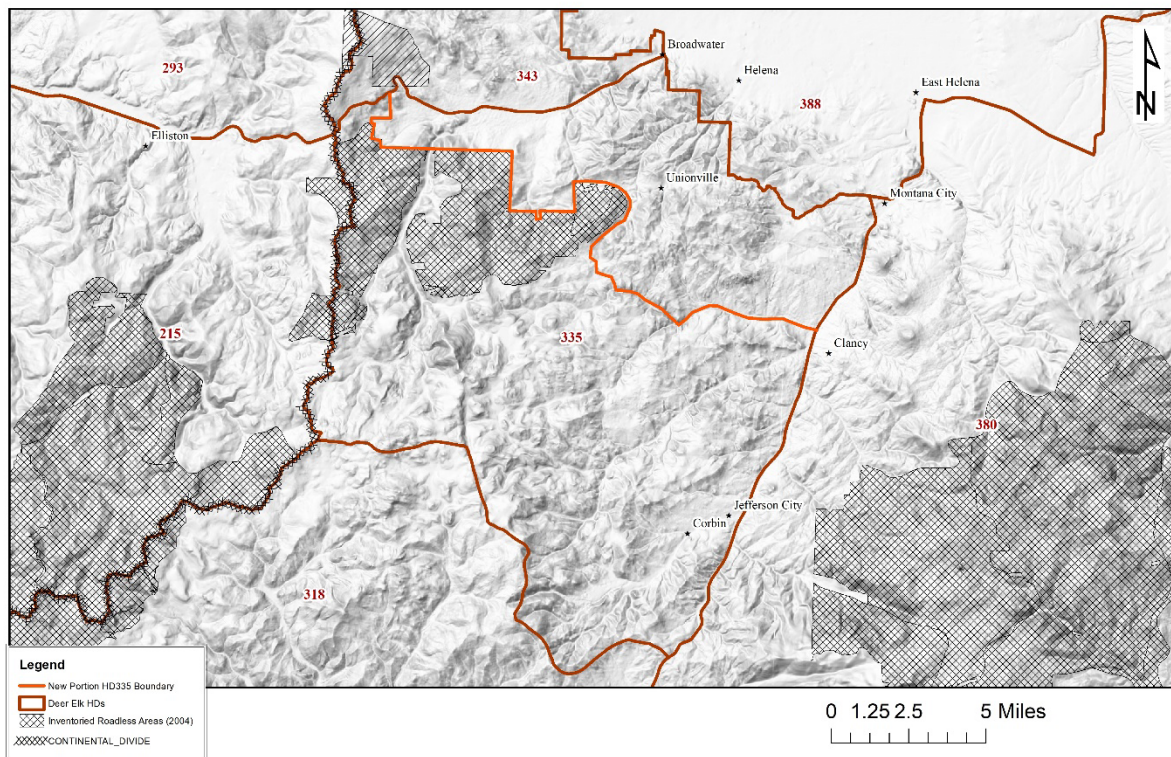
Reinstate antlerless mule deer B licenses in HDs 318 and 335.

Proposed quota would be 50 in HD 335 and 25 in HD 318. This may be adjusted after spring recruitment surveys in 2024 (2024 survey would be done prior to quota deadlines for 2024 seasons).

Add a portion description to HD 335 (OR adding a portion of HD 335 with no weapons restrictions to HD 388), within which liberal either-sex seasons for mule deer, white-tailed deer, and elk could be implemented (Figure 1). This is recommended because the density of deer within the City of Helena was 64 deer/mi² in the fall of 2022. It is only a matter of time before CWD is detected in the greater Helena area or within the City.

The legal description would include:... From I15 along Lump Gulch Road in a westerly direction to Travis Creek Road, then northerly to Grizzly Gulch Road, then northerly to Prospector Gulch Road, then in a westerly direction to the USFS boundary, then westerly along the USFS boundary to its intersection with US Hwy 12 in T10N R5W along section line between S31 and S32.

Figure 1. Proposed new portion of HD 335 boundary, Lewis and Clark and Jefferson Counties, Montana, 2024-2025.



Prior History:

The antlerless seasons in HDs 318 and 335 were closed for the 2022-2023 seasons, because 25 or fewer licenses were issued (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. Number of antlerless mule deer licenses issued in HD 318, Jefferson County, Montana, 2001-2023.

Note: Any changes from the prior year are shown in boldface type.

HD	Year	Num. Licenses Issued
318	2001	50
	2002	150
	2003	150
	2004	50
	2005	50
	2006	50
	2007	25
	2008	25
	2009	25
	2010	0
	2011	0
	2012	0
	2013	0
	2014	0
	2015	0
	2016	25
	2017	25
	2018	25
	2019	25
	2020	25
	2021	25
	2022	0
	2023	0

Table 2. Number of antlerless mule deer licenses issued in HD 335, Lewis and Clark County, Montana, 2001-2023.

Note: Any changes from the prior year are shown in boldface type.

HD	Year	Num. Licenses Issued
335	2001	50
	2002	150
	2003	150
	2004	148
	2005	150
	2006	150
	2007	200
	2008	200
	2009	200
	2010	100
	2011	100
	2012	100
	2013	100
	2014	0
	2015	0
	2016	100
	2017	100
	2018	100
	2019	25
	2020	25
	2021	25
	2022	0
	2023	0

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The objectives include being able to adjust antlerless harvest as needed, for example to address increasing deer numbers adjacent to HD 335 within the City of Helena, and to provide antlerless mule deer hunting in HDs 318 and 335. HD 335 is adjacent to the City of Helena, and the density of deer in the city limits was estimated at 64 deer/mi² (CL: 46 - 88 deer/mi²) in fall 2022.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

This proposal will be considered successful if a modest antlerless mule deer hunting opportunity can be sustained in HDs 318 and 335.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

In spring 2022, the mule deer trend count was within 25% of long-term average, and recruitment was 36 fawns: 100 adults, which was above the long-term average. The count in spring 2023 was not representative of the trend (only 146 deer were observed), but recruitment was 30 fawns: 100 adults. These fawn: adult ratios meet the criteria for reinstating the antlerless mule deer opportunity. In 2021, buck harvest with a General Deer License was within 25% of the LTA buck harvest in Helena Area hunting districts 318 and 343, and harvest was slightly more than 25% above the LTA in HDs 335 and 339. Estimated buck harvest in both HDs 318 and 335 also meets criteria for reinstating antlerless mule deer harvest.

The Helena area trend survey (**HDs 339 and 343**) and harvest survey data (all districts managed by the Helena Area Wildlife Biologist) will be considered closely again in spring 2024. The license quota may be adjusted at that time. Refer to the attached Helena Area Mule Deer Report for detailed information on the population and harvest in all Helena Area districts.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

The winter of 2022-2023 was long and delayed spring green up and surveys by a month or more. The winters of 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 were milder and fawn recruitment improved. In the two preceding winters of 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, which were harsher winters, fawn recruitment was low.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

The reinstatement portion of this proposal was discussed with hunters and FWP R3 biologists, wildlife manager, and enforcement, and all were in support.

Submitted by: Jenny Sika
Date: 05/22/2023

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Species: Elk

Region: 3

Hunting District: 318 & 335 (LPT 394-00) AND 339 & 343 (LPT 396-00)

Year: 2024-2025

- 1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

Remove the restriction that holders of Elk B Licenses 394-00 and 396-00 may only harvest one elk within the area where the license is valid. These antlerless licenses are currently valid in both HD 318 and HD 335 (394-00) and in both HD 339 and HD 343 (396-00).

Both antlerless permits and licenses have been offered in these districts. An antlerless elk license valid in both HDs 318 and 335 has been in place since the 2016 season and in both HDs 339 and 343 since the 2018 season.

- 2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The objectives of this proposal include to respond to public feedback about this restriction and to provide more antlerless opportunity with the intent to increase antlerless harvest. Elk are abundant across all of these districts.

- 3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.**

This proposal will be considered successful if hunters and landowners are satisfied with this change.

- 4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

The trend count for HD 318 was above the 2005 Elk Plan population objective by about 60 elk in winter 2022-2023.

The count for HD 335 tends to fluctuate substantially from within to well above objective from year to year, and this is thought to be largely due to a distribution issue. In winter 2022-2023, the trend count for HD 335 was about 250 elk over the 2005 Elk Plan population objective.

The trend count for HDs 339 and 343 was about 400 elk over the 2005 Elk Plan population objective, and the trend count for the Elk Management Unit (EMU), which includes a survey in HD 293, was about 150 elk over the 2005 Elk Plan population objective.

Please refer to survey reports for these districts for detailed information on the population, harvest and management success in all Helena Area districts included in this proposal.

5. **Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

The winter of 2022-2023 was long, delayed spring green up and surveys, and may impact elk recruitment. The winters of 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 were milder, and elk are abundant across these districts. The two preceding winters of 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, which were harsher winters, did not appear to impact overall trend counts.

6. **Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

This proposal is supported by hunters, landowners, and FWP R3 biologists, wildlife manager, and enforcement.

Submitted by: Jenny Sika

Date: 5/22/2023

Approved:

Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by:

Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Species: All huntable species in area

Region: 3 & 4

Hunting District: Regional Boundary and all HD boundaries that follow regional boundary between Regions 3 and 4 at Lyons Creek (D/E 339 and 421)

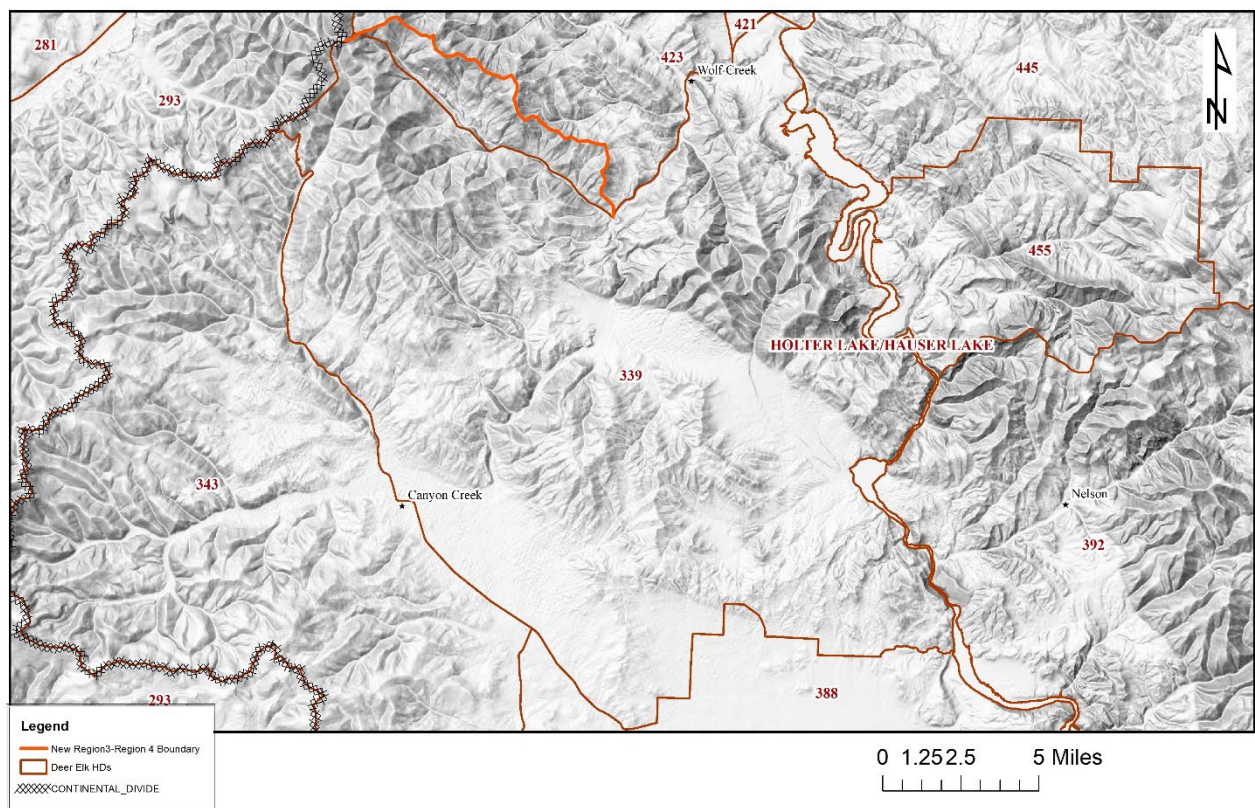
Year: 2024-2025

1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).

Move the boundary between Regions 3 and 4 at Lyons Creek from the stream to the hydrological divide between Lyons Creek and Wolf Creek (Figures 1-2).

Moving the boundary to the divide between these two drainages, and therefore managing the entire Lyons Creek drainage within a single hunting district, would allow management application to wildlife that utilize the entire drainage. Uniform regulations across the drainage would improve the ability to enforce those regulations. Management within the Lyons Creek drainage is already overseen by Region 3 wildlife and enforcement staff, including FWP conservation easements as well as Block Management and other access agreements within the drainage.

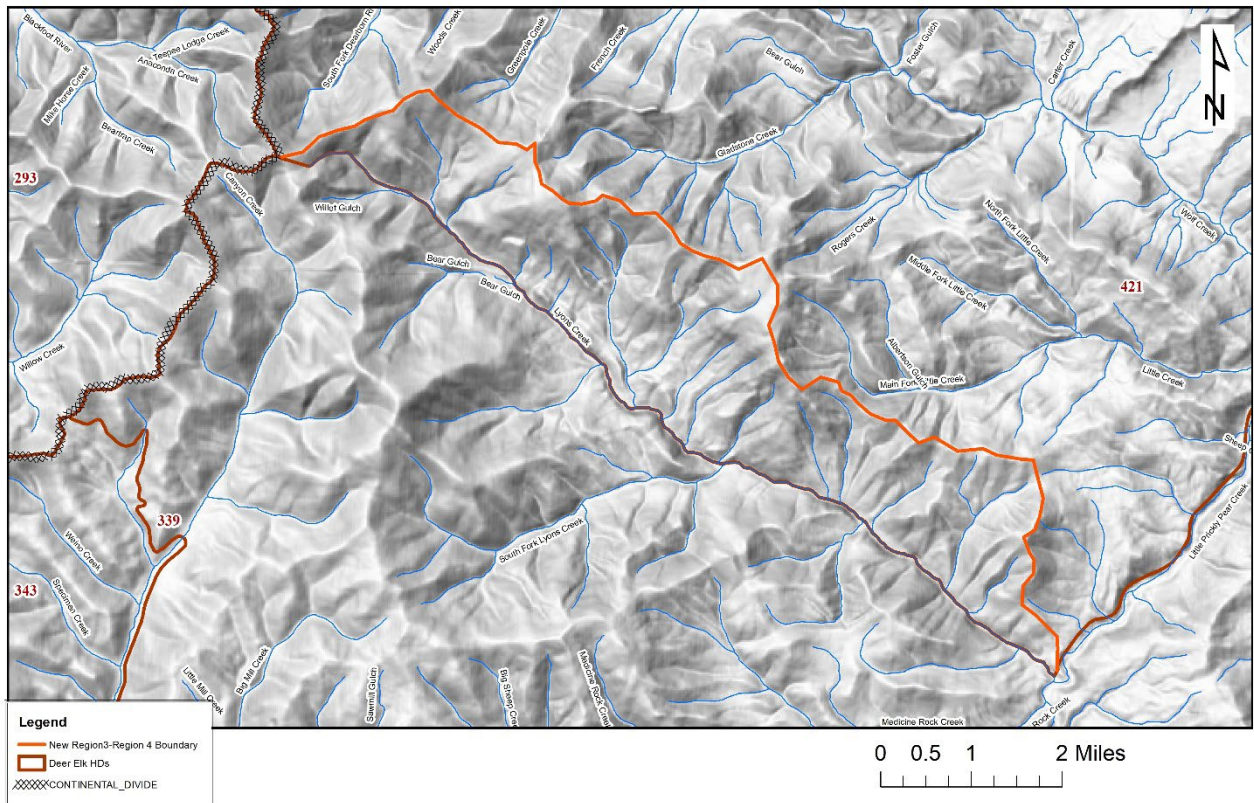
Figure 1. Proposed boundary change between Regions 3 and 4, Lewis and Clark County, Montana, 2024-2025.



2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The objectives are to manage wildlife and apply consistent regulations across the drainage, to improve enforcement ability, and to simplify regulations across private land ownerships that are both north and south of Lyons Creek.

Figure 2. Detail of proposed boundary change between Regions 3 and 4, Lewis and Clark County, Montana, 2024-2025.



3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints.

This is a boundary change, and this proposal may be considered a success: 1) because regulations would be easier to enforce across the drainage than it is when those regulations are different north and south of Lyons Creek, 2) because applying regulations and wildlife management across the drainage is a simplification for this area, and 3) consistent regulations across the drainage would also ease some of the work private landowners contribute toward administering public hunting access.

4. What is the current population’s status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

Wildlife (deer, elk, moose, wolves, bears, lions, etc) in the drainage are likely to utilize both sides of Lyons Creek, the current boundary. From a population management perspective, it makes more sense to use the hydrological divide.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

FWP conservation easements that span both sides of Lyons Creek and public hunter access across the upper reaches of Lyons Creek have been under Region 3 jurisdiction for decades. Lyons Creek is remote, and it can be especially challenging to access the upper reaches of the drainage after snow accumulates in the fall.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

There is support from the public for this proposal, including hunters and private landowners, and there is support at the field level from wildlife and enforcement. This proposal was also discussed with other Region 3 wildlife and enforcement staff and Region 4 wildlife staff, and there is regional support for the proposal as well.

Submitted by: Jenny Sika

Date: 5/22/2023

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Species: Elk
Region: Region 3
Hunting District: 339 & 343
Year: 2024-2025

1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).

We recommend adding a two-week antlerless opportunity during the last two weeks of the general season with the general-A elk license in both hunting districts.

HD 339:

Current General Season: --5-week Spike Bull Elk
--5-week Spike Bull or Antlerless Elk. Only youth ages 12-15 and hunters with PTHFV

Proposed General Season: **--first 3 weeks Spike Bull Elk**
--5-week Spike or Antlerless Elk. Only youth ages 12-15 and hunters with PTHFV
--last 2 weeks Spike Bull or Antlerless Elk

HD 343:

Current General Season: --5-week Brow-tined Bull Elk
--5-week Either-sex Elk. Only youth ages 12-15 and hunters with PTHFV

Proposed General Season: **--first 3 weeks Brow-tined Bull Elk**
--5-week Either-sex Elk. Only youth ages 12-15 and hunters with PTHFV
--last 2 weeks Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk.

See attached Helena Area Elk Report for Granite Butte EMU HDs 339 and 343 for regulation history.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The objective is to increase elk harvest, specifically on that part of the population that is migratory and spends part of the year, including fall hunting seasons, west of the divide in HD 293.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints.

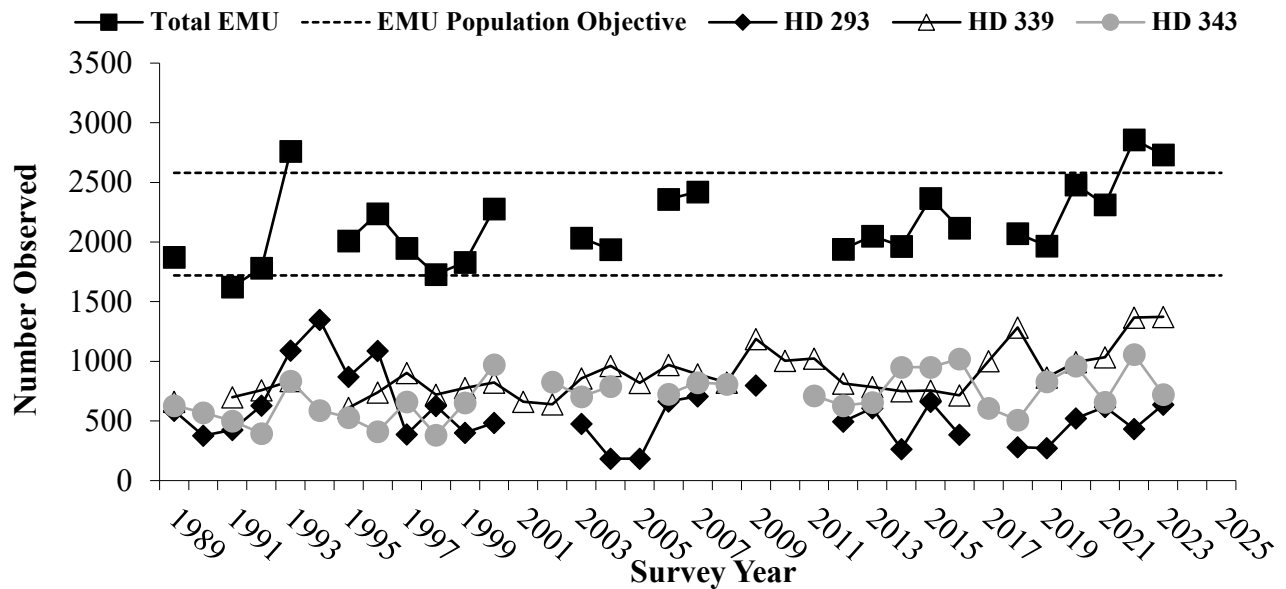
This proposal will be considered successful if over time harvest survey estimates indicate that antlerless elk harvest increases or if over time annual aerial surveys indicate a reduction in elk numbers east of the continental divide in HDs 339 and 343. However, harvest success is largely dependent on weather conditions, and snow cover during fall seasons improves harvest success. Recent fall weather prior to the 2022 season was warmer with little snowfall during hunting seasons. Additionally, prior to winter 2022-2023 winters were more open with less snow. It may take some years before an increase in harvest or a decrease in elk counts is observed.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

Granite Butte EMU

In winters 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, 2,858 and 2,732 elk, respectively, were observed within the Granite Butte Elk Management Unit (EMU), and these counts were above the 2005 Elk Plan EMU population objective for the first time in nearly 30 years (Figure 1). Elk distribution across the EMU is influenced by winter severity, hunting pressure, and elk security.

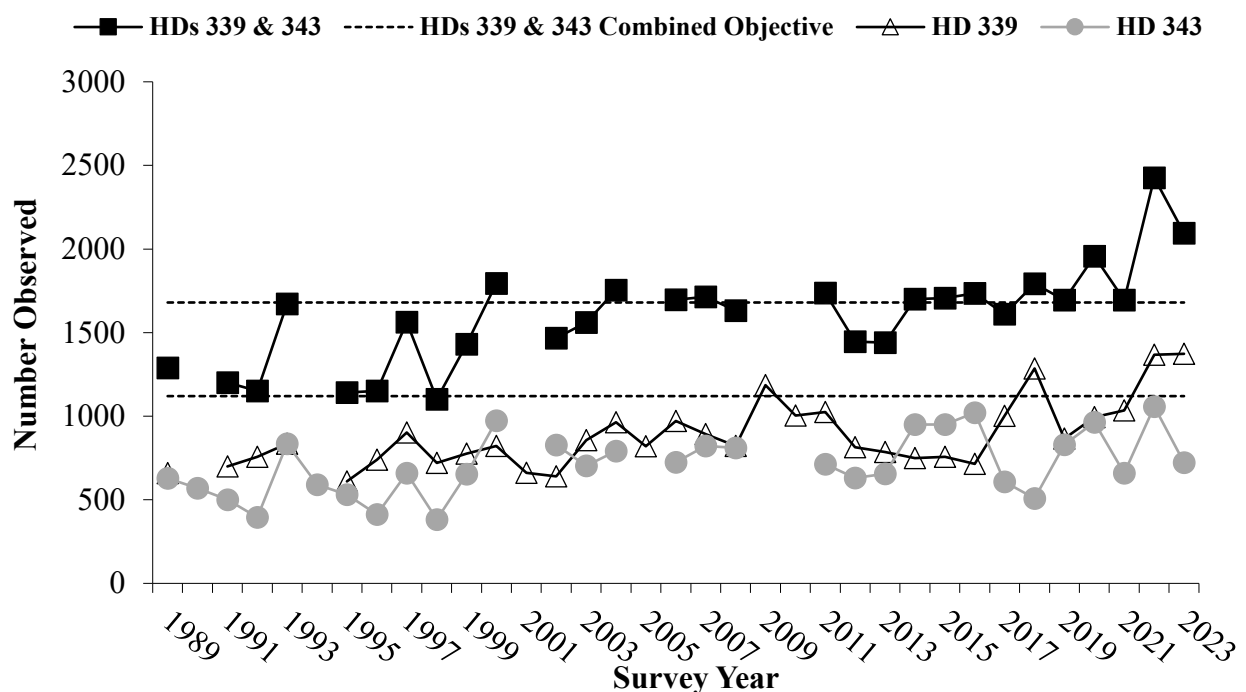
Figure 1. Granite Butte EMU: Plot of the total number of elk observed during winter surveys and the EMU population objective (2150 ±20%; 1720 – 2580) for counts in hunting districts 293, 339, and 343, Lewis and Clark County, Montana, 1989-2023.



HDs 339 & 343

From 2004 through 2021, the annual counts for HDs 339 and 343 were mostly just within or just above the upper end of the population objective for both districts combined (1,400 ±20%, 1,120-1,680; Figure 2). The count of 2,426 elk in winter 2022 marked the highest combined count on record, and in winter 2023 the count was 2,095. See attached Helena Area Elk Report for Granite Butte EMU HDs 339 and 343 for additional information.

Figure 2. HDs 339 & 343: Plot of total number of elk observed during winter surveys from helicopter or fixed-wing aircraft and the population objective (1,400 ±20%), Lewis and Clark County, Montana, 1988-2023.



5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

As stated above, harvest success is largely dependent on weather conditions, and snow cover during fall seasons improves harvest success. Recent fall weather prior to the 2022 season was warmer with little snowfall during hunting seasons. Additionally, prior to winter 2022-2023 winters were more open with less snow for roughly a decade.

HD 339

Hunter access to private lands is extensive in this district. Roughly half of the land in the district is enrolled in FWP's Block Management Program or another FWP access agreement, including the Sieben, Chevalier, O'Connell, Settle, and Grady Ranches. An additional 28% of the district is public land, which amounts to a minimum of about 75% of the district that is open to public hunting. There are additional private landowners that allow public hunting, and they administer that access. There is some private land with no public hunting that may act as a refuge for some elk (≤ 100 elk).

HD 343

Hunter access to public and private lands is extensive in this district. About half the land is publicly owned and half is privately owned. Public land is predominantly USFS with some BLM land. Roughly one-third of private land in the district is enrolled in the Block Management Program, including Grady Ranches and Grady Livestock, Vincent, Weingartner, Settle, Gehring, and Prickly Pear Simmental Ranches. This amounts to a roughly 70% of land within the district open to public hunting. Here, there are also additional private landowners that allow public hunting, and they administer that access.

It is unlikely that hunter access is limiting harvest in either district, especially in comparison to other districts where the majority of the land may be privately owned.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

This proposal is supported by hunters, landowners, and FWP R3 biologists, wildlife manager, and enforcement.

Submitted by: Jenny Sika

Date: 5/17/2023

Approved:

Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by:

Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 3

Hunting District: 340

Year: Biennium 2024-2025

1. Describe the proposed season /quota changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.)

- In Hunting District 340, liberalize the general season by allowing brow-tined bull and antlerless elk harvest on the General License from the 1st Saturday of the general season through the 3rd Sunday of the general season (16 total days). For the remainder of the season, brow-tined bull only will be allowed on the general license.
 - Retain Brow-tined bull or Antlerless elk opportunity on the general license during archery season.
 - Retain Either-sex opportunity on the general license for youth ages 12-15 and hunters with PTHFV during archery, general and muzzleloader seasons.
 - Retain a limited number of 340-00 Elk B licenses valid during archery, general and muzzle-loader seasons. The quota for License Year 2024 will be determined next spring using the most current population data.

From 2004-2013, HD 340 had a standard season type of BTB on the general license and some level of additional antlerless elk harvest via permits/B licenses. From 2014-2021, HD 340 offered a liberal harvest opportunity on the general license for the first 16 days of the general season, the same as what is being proposed here. This split season was removed for the 2022-23 biennium under statewide regulation simplification direction.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change?

The objective of the proposed action is to keep HD 340 elk populations within the range of observed elk during winter surveys, while simultaneously maximizing hunter opportunity and addressing chronic game damage.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured?

The success of the proposal will be measured by comparing the number of elk observed during winter aerial surveys conducted during the biennium to the stated goal in the both the current 2005 FWP Elk Management Plan and in the revised management plan, i.e. 800-1200 elk observed. The proposal will be deemed successful if the number of elk observed remains within this range.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

Currently, the number of elk observed during winter aerial surveys in HD 340 is at the low end of the population objective range (Figure 1). It should be noted that survey conditions for 2023, 2022 and 2021 were rated as “fair”, “good” and “fair” respectively and therefore the actual number of elk was likely higher than what was counted.

From 2014-2021, HD 340 offered a liberal harvest opportunity on the general license for the first 16 days of the general season along with 250 Elk “cow” permits. Average harvest success of the permits was 22%. Antlerless elk harvest during this period averaged 230 animals (Figure 2). Antlerless harvest in LY2022 was 159 antlerless elk with half of that occurring on the 400 Elk B licenses issued (success rate of 20%).

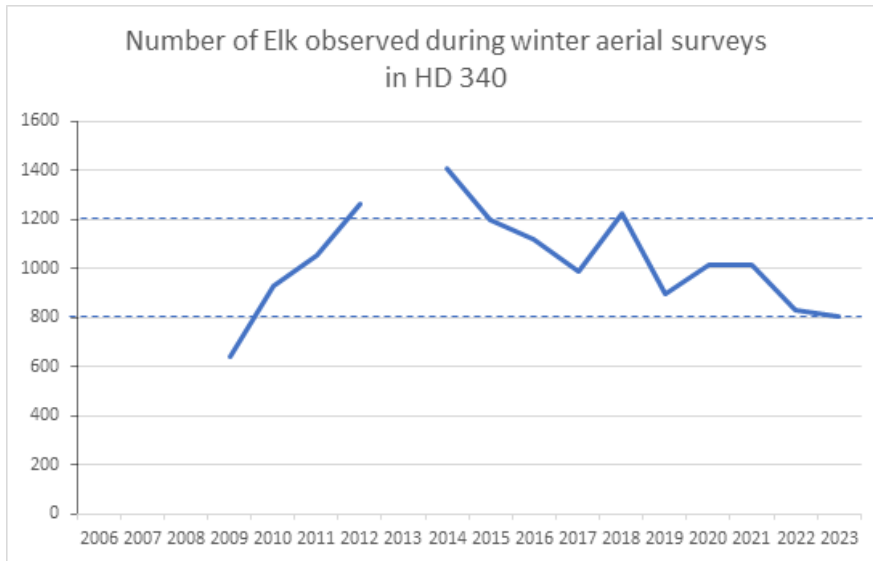


Figure 1: Elk population trends in HD 340. Solid line is the number of elk observed, dashed lines are the population objective range. Data was derived from winter aerial surveys 2008-2023.

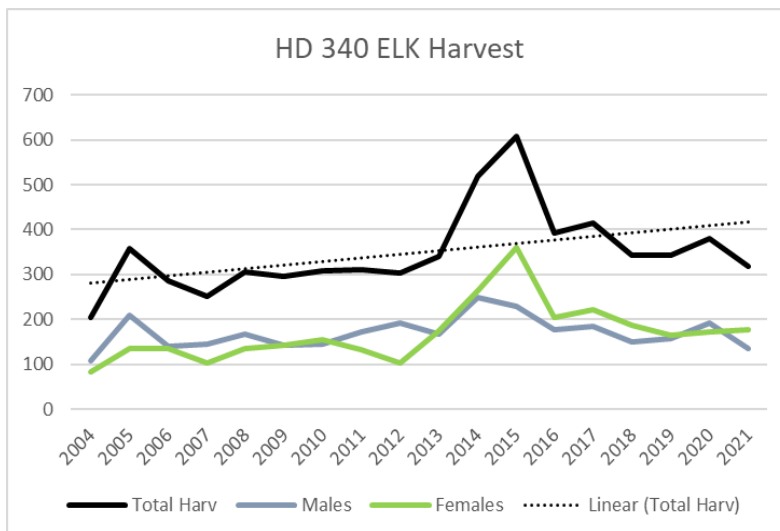


Figure 2: Elk harvest trends in Hunting District 340. Data was derived from FWP hunter phone surveys 2004-2022.

5. **Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident or nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, temperature / precipitation information).**

Overall access to elk in HD 340 is decent and includes numerous open roads on public lands, several ranches enrolled in Block Management and other private lands open to free public hunting. However, HD 340 also provides a lot of elk security in the form of dense forests, steep topography and not much access on the east side of the district. Because of these factors, if weather is not suitable for harvest during any given year, elk population can grow relatively quickly. Past experience has shown that maintaining some level of liberal harvest opportunity has helped to keep elk populations within the objective range.

6. **Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

This proposal has been vetted through FWP's biennial scoping and season setting process.

Submitted by: Vanna Boccadori

Date: 1 August 2023

Approved: _____
Regional Wildlife Manager / Date

Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk
Region: 3
Hunting Districts: 360
License Year: 2023

1. Describe the proposed season /quota changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.)

The proposal is to move from 1,000 antlerless elk B licenses in HD 360 to unlimited OTC antlerless elk B licenses in HD 360.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change?

The objective of this proposed change is to keep the population within Elk Plan objective range and maintain the population closer to its point objective while minimizing elk damage.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured?

The success of this proposal will be measured through annual elk counts, elk harvest data, and through elk game damage reports.

- Annual elk counts should decline and stabilize closer to 4,700 elk. The current 5-year average population size is 5,650 elk. The desired 5-year average should be closer to 4,700 elk (pending future Elk Plan objective changes)
- Elk harvest data should reflect increased elk harvest on the Elk B license. Currently, 500 B licenses have averaged 69 antlerless elk harvested per year. Desired harvest on the Elk B licenses should approach or exceed 100 antlerless elk harvested per year.
- Game damage complaints exceed 15 per winter. Game damage reports should not increase if the elk population decreases.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

Maintaining flexible antlerless hunting opportunity is key for managing the herd within objective ranges. The current Elk Plan objective for HD 360 is 4,700 elk with an objective range of 3,760 to 5,640. The five-year average objective is 5,650 elk with the highest count on record (6,207 elk) in 2022. This population can be productive and, depending on conditions, hunting may not be sufficient in many years to keep the population from growing. Depending on hunting season conditions, total harvest can vary from <300 elk to >900 elk harvested a year. Recent calf:cow recruitment ratios have exceeded 25 calves per 100 cows, indicative of a growing population depending on adult female mortality.

The 2022 hunting season was likely very successful, although hunter harvest data are not yet complete. There was record-breaking harvest seen at the Cameron hunter check station and the highest success during late-season management hunting for the last 10 years. The 2023 post-hunting season elk count did suggest a numeric decline to 4,653 elk, and game damage, winter mortality, and disease in Madison elk were all notable. Although this single count represents a population within current objective range, recent counts have been generally above objective range.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident or nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, temperature / precipitation information).

The population objective under the 2005 Elk Plan was viewed as tentative at the time of its establishment by the Madison Elk Working Group. Ten to fifteen landowners in this local watershed group have petitioned FWP on several occasions to readdress and lower the objective. All of these landowners have allowed generous hunting access, and they have been enrolled for 10+ years in various forms of late-season game damage and management hunts. These landowners struggle with brucellosis risk, and several landowners have had cattle herds contract brucellosis from the elk. The landowners struggle with perennial game damage as elk seek agricultural fields, feedlines, and stackyards during severe winters. About 80% of HD 360 elk winter range falls on agricultural lands.

Allowing B license to become unlimited OTC would increase the flexibility and availability of B licenses to help use the general hunting season to regulate and manage elk populations in HD 360. In 2022, 717 hunters put in for the HD 360-00 B license with remaining licenses sold as surplus. This suggests liberalization from 1,000 B licenses to unlimited B licenses is unlikely to mean hundreds of extra hunters, hopefully assuaging the concerns some may have about this proposal resulting in overharvest. However, the liberalization would allow the flexibility for hunters to secure a license if access to elk hunting becomes available or if their elk hunting plans change. As a limited license type, hunters would have to apply by June 1. If it becomes an unlimited license type, hunters could secure a license at any time.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

This proposal was released to a list serve including nearly 300 sportspersons, landowners, and interest groups. It was discussed at the Region 3 public season-setting meetings, and it was individually vetted with landowners. In general, landowners have appreciated this change because it would allow them greater flexibility to have their local hunters able to harvest an antlerless elk on their lands, and they see it as a means to help address the chronic agricultural damage they endure. Some sportsmen's groups have opposed the change as they believe 1) it could decrease the elk population and they believe the elk population should be higher and 2) it could contribute to increased hunter crowding. Some would rather see this license be on private land only.

Submitted by:

Date:

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Species: Deer/Elk
Region: 3
Hunting District: 388
Year: 2024-2025

1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).

- a) Expand the elk season dates within the Weapons Restriction Area (WRA) of HD 388 to August 15th-January 31st.
- b) Correct the regulations for season dates for antlerless white-tailed deer: antlerless white-tailed deer harvest within the WRA should be valid until January 31st with a General Deer License (error in regulations) and is valid until January 31st with the 003-00 antlerless license.

At present elk season dates are aligned with the standard fall archery and rifle season dates, and antlerless white-tailed deer season dates begin with fall archery and extend to January 31st (except for the error in the printed 2023 regulations as noted above).

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

Game damage complaints about elk and white-tailed deer are known, and expanded dates (August 15th-January 31st) would aid in addressing those complaints earlier and later than standard fall hunting seasons.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints.

This would allow landowners to allow hunters onto their property when these species are present earlier and later than archery and general rifle seasons, and that would be considered successful.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

FWP does not have population objectives for deer or elk in HD 388. It is the Helena Valley, and development across the valley continues. HD 388 was developed to address increasing development as well as concerns about urban deer within the City of Helena.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

HD 388 is predominantly private land and comprised of smaller parcels of land.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

This was discussed amongst HARO, regional, and HQ staff as an additional means to try to address ongoing elk game damage in the northwestern part of the district.

Submitted by: Jenny Sika
Date: 05/22/2023
Approved: _____

Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by:

Name / Date

Reason for Modification: