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

Species: Elk
Region: 6
Hunting District: HDs 620, 621, 622
Year: 2027

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

   We propose to reduce either-sex permit quotas as well as antlerless b-license quotas in Hunt Districts 620, 621, and 622. We propose the following reductions.

   Rifle ES Permits
   620-20: 70 permits to 30 permits
   621-20: 50 permits to 25 permits
   622-20: 60 permits to 30 permits

   Archery ES Permits
   620-21: 1000 permits to 400 permits

   Antlerless B-Licenses
   621-01: 100 licenses to 25 licenses, adjusting quota range from 100-600 to 25-300
   698-00: 100 licenses to 50 licenses, adjusting quota range from 100-500 to 50-300

   The number of permits and licenses have been decreasing for multiple years in the hunting districts affected. Despite these reductions in allotted permits and licenses, elk populations have continued to decline and are currently at a decade's level low. We are therefore proposing further reductions beyond established quotas and quota ranges.

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 proposed change is to reduce the total elk harvest in Hunt Districts 620, 621, and 622 in a manner that allows for elk populations to increase and trend towards management objectives established in the 2023 Montana Elk Management Plan. The proposed quotas and other existing licenses would result in an estimated 114 elk harvested in HDs 620, 621, and 622. Furthermore, the suite of license types would continue to allow landowners to address elk congregations on private land to minimize game damage issues.

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

   The success of this proposal will be measured through the annual hunter harvest telephone survey and resulting harvest estimates, as well as aerial surveys conducted biennially by Region 6 biologists.

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).**

   A total of 703 elk were observed on the most recent (February 2026) aerial surveys in HDs 620, 621, 622. This is below both the population objective of 1600-2400 elk in HD 620, 621 and 622 as well as 65% percent below the 1995-2026 long-term average (n = 2659). Beyond being below population objectives, elk populations as measured through biennial elk surveys have been declining since 2020. For example, 2113 elk were observed in 2020, 1292 in 2022, 974 in 2024, and 703 in 2026. Lastly, elk populations in

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HD 621 have especially been declining, with only 105 elk being observed in 2026 aerial surveys, down from 776 in 2020.

This decrease is caused by several factors, but primary drivers are likely weather (drought) and hunter harvest. Annual hunter harvest, for example, has exceeded the number of calves observed on aerial surveys for several years. For example, in 2022 there were 162 calves counted during aerial surveys vs 385 elk being harvested. Furthermore, in 2024 there were 217 calves counted during aerial surveys vs 323 elk being harvested.

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 lower elk numbers observed in these districts are likely due in part to multi-year drought conditions since 2021 that have ranged from mild to severe, along with a severe winter in 2022-2023. Weather conditions in 2023-2024 were more favorable for elk population growth, but 2025 saw drought conditions continue.

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).**

   An overall reduction in the number of allotted elk permits and licenses was presented to the Missouri River Breaks Elk working group in spring 2026. A reduction was also presented to the Region 6 Citizens Advisory Council in June 2026. A reduction in elk licenses and permits was supported by both groups. Local landowners and sportsmen have also primarily supported a reduction in allotted elk licenses/permits and feel that elk populations have been decreasing the last several years.

Submitted by: Jake Barnes, Malta Area Biologist

Date:

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

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