

Summary of Research



Perceptions and Preferences of Missouri River Breaks Archery Elk Hunters

Michael S. Lewis and Jeff Herbert

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Located in central Montana just north of Lewistown and stretching to the east along the scenic Missouri River, the Missouri River Breaks offers quality hunting opportunities for many, including archery elk hunters. In October 2000, the Wildlife Division of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) surveyed Missouri River Breaks archery elk hunters. Archery elk hunters offered their perceptions of the hunting conditions they encountered this past hunting season and provided information about the nature of their hunting trips. Additionally, they offered their thoughts about how archery elk hunting in the Breaks should be managed over time. Wildlife managers will use this information to ensure quality archery elk hunting experiences are provided over time.

This research summary highlights the key findings of the 2000 study. In addition to this research summary, a more detailed report of the study is available from FWP (Lewis and King, 2001).

ARCHERY ELK HUNTERS WERE EAGER TO EXPRESS THEIR OPINIONS

A randomly selected sample of 2,350 Missouri River Breaks archery elk permit holders were mailed a survey questionnaire. A 63 percent response rate to the mailback questionnaire was achieved, which is considered to be a high response rate for a survey of this type.



HUNTING CONDITIONS IN THE BREAKS WERE RATED FAVORABLY

Survey participants were asked to rate the acceptability of a number of hunting related conditions in the Breaks including the number of other hunters observed while hunting in the field, the number of elk observed while hunting, the number of large antlered bull elk observed while hunting, the number of available campsites, and the number of roads that are (or have been) closed to vehicles. Sixty-two percent or more of the respondents rated these hunting conditions as acceptable or very acceptable:

The number of available campsites.
 80%

The number of elk observed while hunting.
 79%

The number of large antlered bull elk observed while hunting.
 69%

The number of other hunters observed while hunting in the field.
 65%

The number of roads that are (or have been) closed to vehicles.
 62%

(The above percentages indicate the percent of respondents who reported the hunting condition to be acceptable or very acceptable.)

DON'T CHANGE CURRENT MANAGEMENT OF ARCHERY ELK HUNTING IN THE BREAKS

Currently, archery elk hunting in the Breaks is managed under three season types/structures (Table 1). Survey participants were asked the extent to which they would oppose or support a number of potential archery elk management actions in the Breaks ranging from making no changes to the current hunting season types/structures to further limiting the number of archery elk hunters or prohibiting Missouri River Breaks archery elk permit holders from archery elk hunting or rifle elk hunting in other areas of the state.

Survey respondents were most supportive of making no changes to the current Breaks archery elk hunting season types/structures. Nearly 60 percent of the respondents supported or strongly supported this notion.

Overall, respondents were very opposed to making any changes to the current hunting season types/structures that would limit archery elk hunters in the Breaks from elk hunting (archery or rifle) in other areas of the state or limit archery elk hunters in the Breaks to hunting only during specific blocks of time, and not during the entire archery elk season. These potential management actions were opposed or strongly opposed by no fewer than 70 percent of the respondents.

A total of 735 respondents provided additional written comments about how to manage archery elk hunting in the Breaks over time. This information should be viewed as supplemental to the results just described above. Nonetheless, this anecdotal information is

Table 1. Current archery elk season types/structures in the Missouri River Breaks.

1. *North side of the Missouri River (Hunting Districts 620, 621, 622, & 623).* In these districts, there are an **unlimited number** of either sex archery elk permits available which are valid for use in all four hunting districts. Applicants must select one of these districts as their first and only choice (thereby eliminating the possibility of applying for a rifle permit). Holders of these permits may hunt any other general archery or general rifle elk season in Montana.
2. *North side of the Missouri River (Hunting Districts 631 & 632).* In these districts, there are a **limited number** of either sex archery elk permits which are issued through a special drawing. These permits may also be used in HD 630. Applicants may select one of these districts as their first, second, or third choice, however, HD 632 is typically oversubscribed with first choice applicants. Applicants who successfully draw a permit can hunt any other general archery or general rifle elk season in Montana. Because a limited number of permits are issued, nonresidents are restricted to no more than 10 percent of the permits.
3. *South side of the Missouri River (Hunting Districts 410, 417, & 700).* In these districts, there are an **unlimited number** of either sex archery elk permits available. Applicants may select one of these districts as their first, second, or third choice. This allows applicants the option of applying for a rifle elk permit with their first and/or second choice(s). If unsuccessful, they can still receive an unlimited elk archery permit for one of the three south side hunting districts in the Missouri River Breaks. Holders of these permits may hunt any other general archery or general rifle elk season in Montana.

important. The two most frequently mentioned written comments were:

1. *Make no changes to the current Missouri River Breaks archery elk hunting types/structures.*
2. *Further limit or place some type of limit on the number of nonresident archery elk hunters.*

SUMMARY

This study focused on identifying the perceptions, preferences, and characteristics of individuals who archery elk hunted in the Missouri River Breaks this past hunting season (2000). Findings suggest that the range of archery elk hunting opportunities provided by the current mix of Breaks archery elk season types/structures are meeting the diverse needs and expectations of current Missouri River Breaks archery elk hunters. Whether or not there are archery elk hunters out there who no longer hunt the Breaks because of the current season types/structures is unknown, as are the opinions of these individuals.

The purpose of this study was to provide wildlife managers with information that will be used to ensure that quality archery elk hunting experiences are provided in the Missouri River Breaks over time. The information gathered, in combination with additional input offered by the public at various season setting related public meetings, also will be used to help set elk hunting regulations for the 2001 hunting season and beyond.

LITERATURE CITED

Lewis, M. S. and Z. King. 2001. *2000 Study of Missouri River Breaks Archery Elk Hunters*. Technical report submitted to the Wildlife Division of FWP by the Responsive Management Unit of FWP. Helena, MT: Wildlife Division, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Michael S. Lewis, Human Dimensions Specialist, Responsive Management Unit of FWP, Helena, Montana.

Jeff Herbert, Research and Technical Service Supervisor, Wildlife Division of FWP, Helena, Montana.

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Contact the Responsive Management Unit of FWP by phone at (406) 444-4758.