

Summary of Research



Selected Results from a Survey of 2010 Antlerless Elk B License Holders in Montana

HD Unit Research Summary No. 33

Joe Weigand, Michael S. Lewis, and Zoe King

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Antlerless elk hunting is a critically important tool for wildlife managers to help manage populations of elk, especially in areas of the state where elk numbers are exceeding population objectives. In these areas, Montana's elk hunting regulations have become more liberal during the past decade. In many instances, hunters have the opportunity to harvest an antlerless elk using their General Elk License. And, increasingly, wildlife managers are offering additional opportunities to hunt antlerless elk in these areas, including the use of supplemental Antlerless Elk B Licenses.

Following the 2009 general big game hunting season, several Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) biologists commented that it is important to understand whether or not antlerless elk hunters are gaining access to places where they have a chance of effectively harvesting elk. In particular, concern was expressed about areas of the state where increases in the elk population have not led to increases in hunter harvest despite more liberalized elk hunting and harvest regulations. The key question here is, "Are antlerless elk hunters having difficulty obtaining access to places where elk are located?"

With these concerns in mind, FWP conducted a survey following the 2010 general big game hunting season to evaluate the effectiveness of Antlerless Elk B Licenses in

helping to manage populations of elk in selected area of the state where there have been concerns expressed about hunting access. This survey aimed to do the following:

1. **Determine the extent to which 2010 Antlerless Elk B License holders were able to gain access to hunt antlerless elk.**
2. **Determine what type of properties 2010 Antlerless Elk B License holders were able to secure permission to hunt-- using six property categories developed from a landowner study conducted by FWP and Colorado State University in 2008 (McCoy et. al., 2009)¹.**
3. **Determine the extent to which 2010 Antlerless Elk B License holders were able to successfully harvest antlerless elk.**
4. **Determine hunter satisfaction with the Antlerless Elk B Licenses they received in 2010.**

Sixteen different Antlerless Elk B Licenses in the southwest, central, and eastern portions of Montana were selected for the survey². All but two of these Elk B Licenses were deemed to have some level of concern regarding elk hunting access in the hunting districts (HDs) for which they were valid. The 339-80 and 343-80 Antlerless Elk B Licenses were selected as control groups for the survey because of relative well known, good access to both publicly and privately owned lands in HDs 339 and 343.

Surveys were successfully mailed out to a total of N= 5,297 randomly selected Elk B License holders. There were a total of N=2,954 survey respondents, resulting in an overall 56 percent response rate for the survey. Response rates for each of the Antlerless Elk B Licenses included in the survey ranged from a low of 51 percent to a high of 66 percent. These response rates are considered to be very good for a mailback survey of this kind.



¹ The property categories used for the survey included: (1) publicly owned land; (2) privately owned land enrolled in FWP's Block Management Program; (3) non-Block Management private land (without a fee) that is owned by family, relatives, a close friend, or friends of family/relatives; (4) non-Block Management private land (without a fee) that is NOT owned by family, relatives, a close friend, or friends of family/relatives; (5) privately owned land guided by a hunting outfitter (licensed outfitter or landowner outfitter); and, (6) privately owned land with access fees charged (e.g., hunting lease, daily fees charged per hunter or group of hunters, etc.).

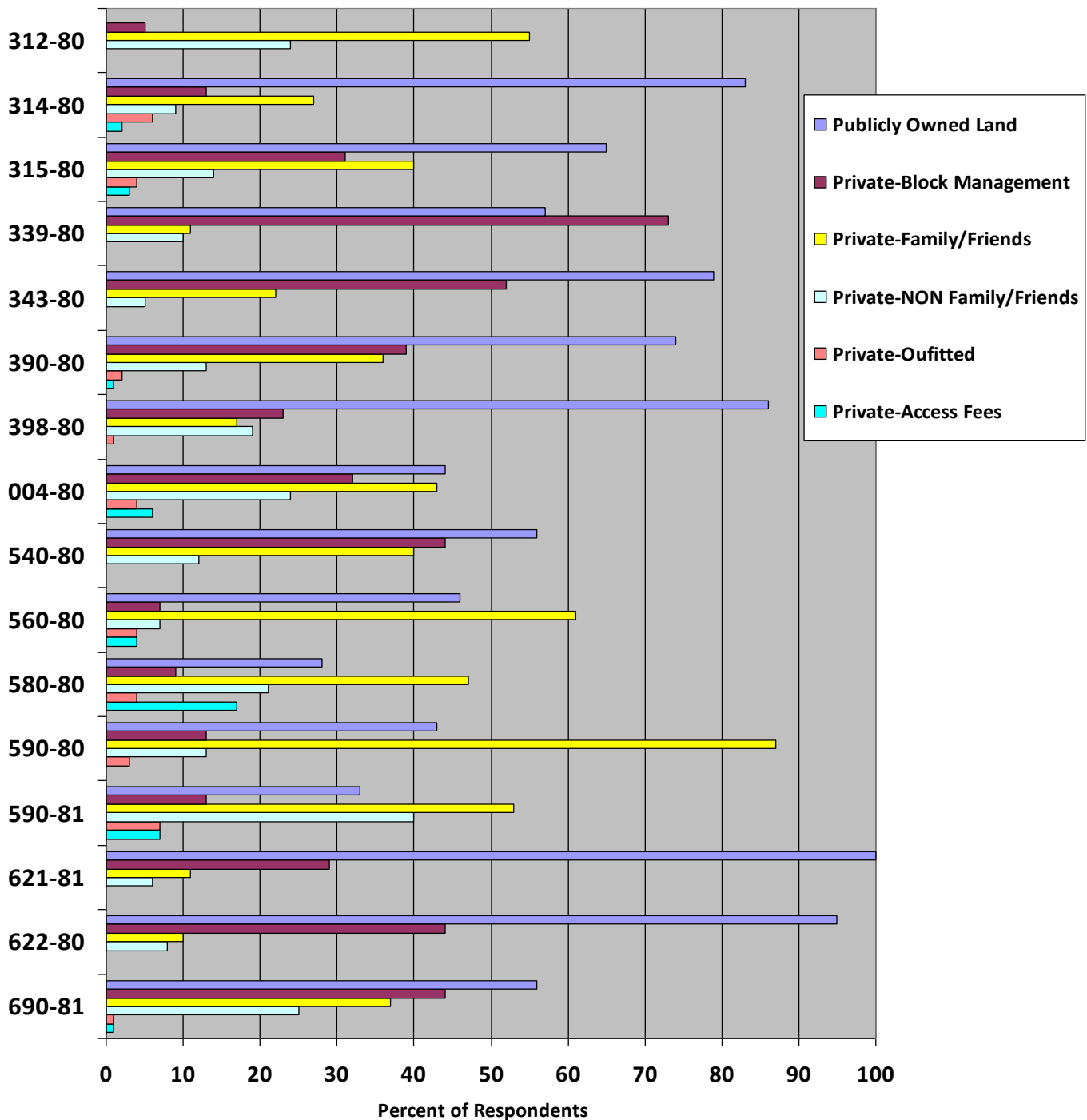
² Antlerless Elk B Licenses included in the survey: 312-80, 314-80, 315-80, 339-80, 343-80, 390-80, 398-80, 004-80, 540-80, 560-80, 580-80, 590-80, 590-81, 621-81, 622-80, and 690-81.

WHERE DID SURVEY RESPONDENTS REPORT THEY HUNTED USING THEIR ELK B LICENSES?

Figure 1, below, depicts the types of properties respondents reported they hunted using their Elk B Licenses.

Of note, hunting on non-Block Management private land (without a fee) that is NOT owned by family, relatives, a close friend, or friends of family/relatives was reported by 15 percent or fewer of the respondents for 10 of the 16 Antlerless Elk B Licenses included in the survey. Successfully securing permission to hunt on this type of property varied across the Elk B Licenses included in the survey. Respondents found it particularly problematic securing access to this type of property using the 312-80, 314-80, 390-80, 540-80, 580-80, and 621-81 Antlerless Elk B Licenses.

Figure 1. Types of properties respondents reported they hunted using their Elk B Licenses (results for each of the Antlerless Elk B Licenses included in the survey).

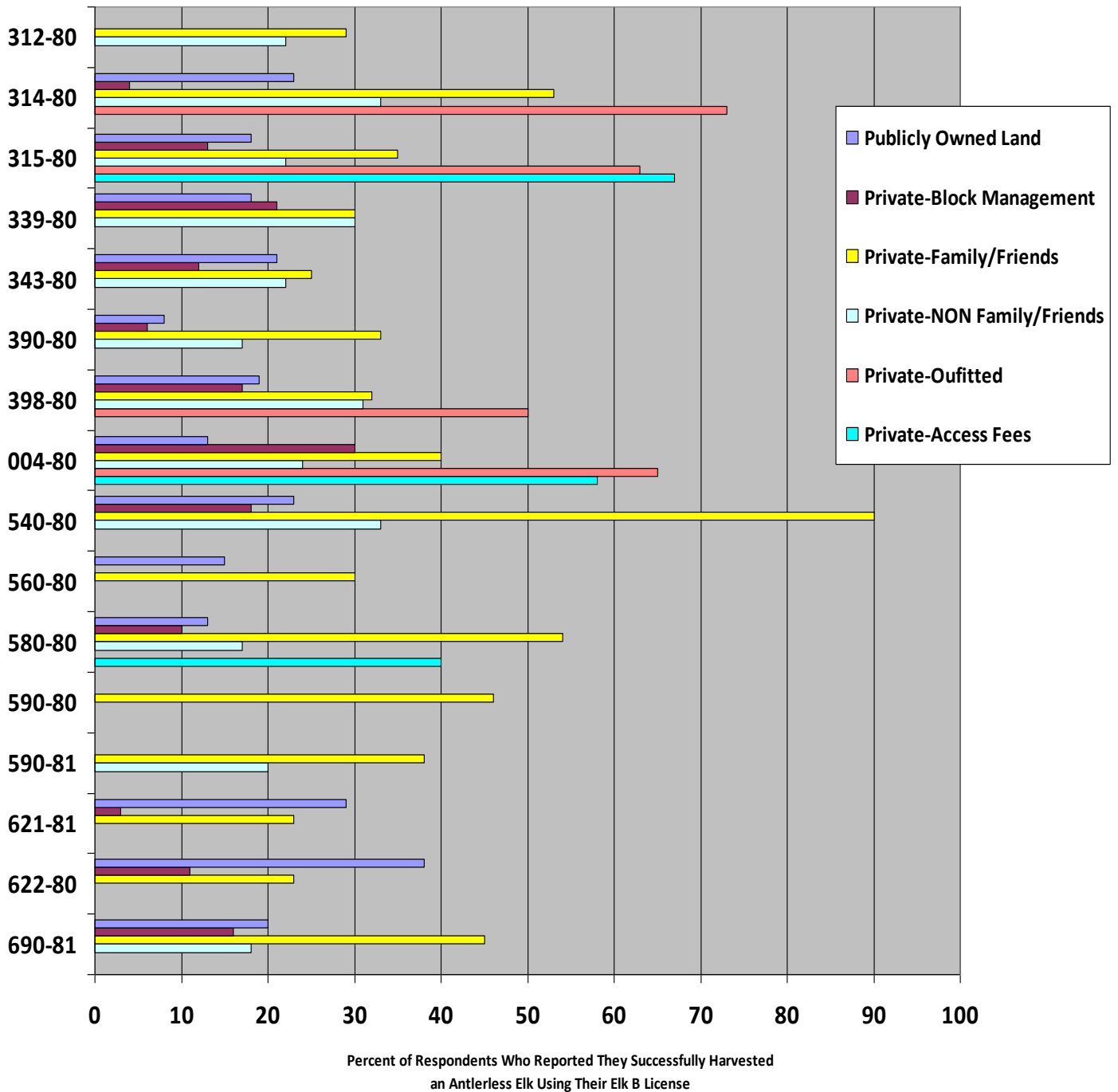


HOW SUCCESSFUL WERE SURVEY RESPONDENTS IN HARVESTING ANTLERLESS ELK?

Figure 2, below, depicts the percent of respondents who harvested an antlerless elk using their Elk B License by type of property hunted. For general reference, the statewide Antlerless Elk B License harvest success rate as determined by FWP's Hunter Harvest Telephone Survey was 26.6 percent in 2010.

Antlerless elk harvest success varied across the six different property types included in this survey. Harvest success on publicly owned lands appeared to be closely tied to quantity and accessibility of public lands for each of the Elk B Licenses included in the survey. Similarly, harvest on privately owned lands enrolled in Block Management for each license included in the survey appeared to be closely tied to the number of Block Management Areas with suitable elk habitat. Harvest success rates on non-Block

Figure 2. Antlerless elk harvest success reported by survey respondents by type of property hunted (results for each of the Antlerless Elk B Licenses included in the survey).



Management private land (without a fee) that is owned by family, relatives, a close friend, or friends of family/relatives was well above average for the majority of the licenses included in the survey. On the other hand, harvest success varied considerably on non-Block Management private land (without a fee) that is NOT owned by family, relatives, a close friend, or friends of family/relatives. Of note, harvest success rates were well above average for the 314-80 and 540-80 Antlerless Elk B Licenses on this type of property. However, a majority of the survey respondents reported they were unable to secure access to this type of property to use these two Elk B Licenses. Lastly, harvest success on privately owned land guided by an outfitting business (or on privately owned land where access fees are charged) was well above average—with some notable exceptions³.

Data from Figure 2 was used in combination with overall antlerless elk harvest estimates from the 2010 Hunter Harvest Telephone Survey to come up with estimates of harvest distribution across the six different property types for each of the Antlerless Elk B Licenses included in the survey. Of particular interest, harvest on non-Block Management private land (without a fee) owned by family, relatives, a close friend, or friends of family/relatives accounted for the greatest percentage of harvest for 10 of the 16 Antlerless Elk B Licenses included in the survey. And, 50 percent or more of estimated antlerless elk harvest occurred on this type of property for the 312-80, 390-80, 540-80, 560-80, 580-80, 590-80, and 590-81 Antlerless Elk B Licenses.

SATISFACTION WITH ANTLERLESS ELK B LICENSES

Overall, 82 percent of the survey respondents who hunted or attempted to hunt reported they were satisfied with the Antlerless Elk B License they received in 2010. Two licenses, 315-80 and 560-80, exceeded 90 percent satisfaction. The 390-80 Antlerless Elk B License experienced the lowest reported satisfaction at 59 percent.

Respondents who were dissatisfied with their Elk B License were asked to provide reasons for their dissatisfaction. The most frequently mentioned reasons included: (1) not seeing any elk while hunting and (2) elk were located on inaccessible privately owned property with no hunting access or limited hunting access.

³ No harvest was reported on privately owned land guided by an outfitter (and on privately owned land where access fees are charged) for a majority of the Elk B Licenses included in the survey. The open-ended comments provided by outfitted respondents (and respondents who paid private land access fees) strongly suggest that the primary reason for failure to harvest an antlerless elk was that an Elk B License was acquired to increase the chances of success and many respondents passed up opportunities at antlerless elk in favor of harvesting or attempting to harvest an antlered elk.

DISCUSSION

Over the past 20 years, hunters have increasingly come to rely on public lands and Block Management to hunt elk in Montana. During that same timeframe, public comment and other limited research has indicated that securing access to hunt elk on non-Block Management private land (without a fee) that is NOT owned by family, relatives, a close friend, or friends of family/relatives has increasingly become a challenge for many hunters. The survey results presented herein reinforce both of these notions.

Overall, survey respondents reported a high level of satisfaction with their 2010 Antlerless Elk B Licenses. And, overall harvest success reported by survey respondents was near the state average. That said, an analysis of the open-ended comments provided by survey respondents suggest that resident elk hunters continue to be concerned about gaining access to where elk are located. Survey results for the 314-80 and 540-80 Antlerless Elk B Licenses highlight these concerns.

FWP intends to use results from this survey as an important piece of information in helping to manage population of elk in Montana. Use of this information will aid wildlife managers in reviewing the appropriate license type and associated harvest distribution to determine if hunter harvest is adequately accomplishing elk population management objectives. It is hoped that results from this survey, and future research of this type, will provide critical insight and help FWP in working with the public to manage one of Montana's premier big game animals. 🌲

REFERENCES

McCoy, C., Teel, T. L., & Lewis, M. S. (2009). *Findings from a research project entitled: "Hunting Access Management on Private Lands in Montana."* (Project Report No. 82). Project Report for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. Fort Collins, CO: Colorado State University, Department of Human Dimensions of Natural Resources.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Joe Weigand, Private Land Wildlife Specialist. Wildlife Bureau, FWP, Helena, Montana.

Michael S. Lewis, Human Dimensions Unit Supervisor. Human Dimensions Unit of FWP, Helena, Montana.

Zoe King, Human Dimensions Statistical Technician. Human Dimensions Unit of FWP, Helena, Montana.

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Contact the Human Dimensions Unit of FWP by phone (406) 444-4758 or visit FWP's website at <http://fwp.mt.gov> (and click on the following links..."Doing Business", "Reference Information", "Surveys", Social & Economic Surveys").