

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS**  
**HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**  
**Elk 2022**  
**Antlerless Elk Permit Removal HD 130**

**Hunting Districts:** 130

**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 would remove the antlerless elk permit 130-00 in Hunting District 130.

**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 purpose of this proposal is to simplify the regulations by removing any permit hunt with a quota less than 25. We currently issue 5 permits for antlerless elk in this district. There is no biological justification for removing or maintaining this hunting opportunity.

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

N/A

**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).**

We do not specifically survey elk in HD 130, due to the forested nature of the Swan Valley; however, incidental observations of elk during deer recruitment surveys indicate an increase in elk numbers in the district in recent years.

**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).**

While there is no biological justification for maintaining or removing 130-00, hunters have appreciated this limited opportunity to harvest antlerless elk in HD 120. Due to the small herd size, increasing the number of permits issued to 25 is not possible.

**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 available online for public comment during the 2021 scoping period from Sept 21 - Oct 20. In addition, we held a public virtual open house discussing all regional proposals. We received very few comments regarding this proposal, and most were in favor of removing this opportunity.

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS**  
**HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**  
**Elk 2022**  
**Combine HDs 102 and 103**

**Hunting Districts:** 102,103

**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 would combine HDs 102 and 103, and adjust the northern boundaries of both HDs, creating a new HD 103. The adjusted boundary is created by using well-known landmarks. To our knowledge, there has never been a history of these 2 HDs being combined, and the regulations across both HDs are relatively quite similar.

**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.**

Regulations Simplification.

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

Success could be measured by a reduction in the number of complaints received regarding the difficulty of FWP's regulations.

**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 population status of deer should not decline as a result of combining these 2 HDs.

**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).**

Because the regulations and habitat conditions are similar across both of these HDs, we do not anticipate much difference in hunting pressure if the HDs are combined. This proposal should only change how the deer and elk regulations appear by reducing the total number of HDs in Region 1.

**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).**

Region 1 received a number of comments during the 2021 scoping period ending on 20 October. Few comments were received regarding this proposal, however the majority were in favor of combining HDs 102 and 103. Relevant to this proposal, most respondents either supported or were neutral regarding combining the districts as long as it didn't affect the special mule deer management area in HD 103.

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS**  
**HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**  
**Elk 2022**  
**Antlerless Elk Permit Removal HD 120**

**Hunting Districts:** 120

**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 would remove the antlerless elk permit 120-00 in Hunting District 120.

**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 purpose of this proposal is to simplify the regulations. We currently issue 5 permits for antlerless elk in this district. Follow guidance to remove any permit hunt with a quota of less than 25. There is no biological justification for removing or maintaining this hunting opportunity.

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

N/A

**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).**

We do not specifically survey elk in HD 120, due to the forested nature of the habitat in HD 120. There is a small elk herd in the district, although the actual size of the population fluctuates and is unknown.

**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).**

While there is no biological justification for maintaining or removing 120-00, hunters have appreciated this limited opportunity to harvest antlerless elk in HD 120. Due to the small herd size, increasing the number of permits issued to 25 is not possible.

**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 available online for public comment during the 2021 scoping period from September 21 through October 20th. In addition, we held a public virtual open house discussing all regional proposals. We received no comments regarding this proposal although there were a few general comments both for and against removing antlerless elk opportunity.

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS**  
**HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**  
**Elk 2022**  
**Remove antlerless elk permits for PTHFV holders**

**Hunting Districts:** 100, 103, 104, 120, 121, 122

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

Currently, several districts within Region 1 offer limited numbers of permits (less than 10) that are only available for people who possess a Permit to Hunt From a Vehicle (PTHFV). These permits are available on a limited draw bases. Over the last two years nearly 60% of the applicants did not possess a PTHFV due to confusion over the application process. In addition, the statewide effort to simplify the regulations included removal of small numbers of permits as the large volume of License and Permit Types (LPT) was also viewed as being confusing and overcomplicating the regulations. As a result, we are proposing to remove all limited draw antlerless elk permits for people who possess a PTHFV. As a replacement and to maintain opportunity for disabled hunters, we are proposing to offer PTHFV holders to harvest an antlerless elk during the general hunting season with a General Elk License, allowing the harvest of a brow-tined bull or antlerless elk. This regulation is similar to what other regions have offered PTHFV holders.

**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.**

Simplify the regulations and reduce confusion over the application process, yet allow antlerless elk opportunity for disabled hunters holding a PTHFV.

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

Success will be measured by overall satisfaction with opportunity to hunt elk in Region 1 by holders of a PTHFV and general acceptance of the regulation by the public and other sportsmen and sportswomen.

**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).**

Elk populations are at levels below historic highs but are relatively stable. Districts with available aerial survey information indicate populations at the lower end of the objective range or slightly below objective in terms of brow-tined bull harvest. Even though elk numbers are below historic highs, we can offer some limited antlerless opportunity without impacting populations. This opportunity is typically through the use of limited draw permits or licenses. A summary of historic survey and harvest data is attached.

**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).**

Habitat changes resulting from succession related to timber harvest and fire disturbance has resulted in large-scale shifts in elk use and distributions. Additionally, Region 1 hosts high levels of native carnivores which may also be impacting elk survival and recruitment. Although populations are not at historic highs, elk numbers are sufficient to offer limited harvest opportunity. Overall interest in applying for an antlerless elk permit for PTHFV holders has been limited as has been harvest. The table below indicates the number of applicants for these permits in 2021 as well as the harvest from 2016 and 2020.

HD	No Permit Issueds	2020 PTHFV Applicants	2018 Harvest	2019 Harvest
100	5	16	0	0
101	5	11	2	1
102	5	9	0	0
103	5	31	3	4
104	5	14	5	0
120	5	5	0	0
121	10	21	4	3
122	5	15	5	0
123	5	9	0	0
124	5	1	2	0

**Figure 1:** R1 antlerless elk PTHFV permit statistics.

**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 part of the 2021 regulation simplification scoping process. The public was able to comment on the proposal. Comments received were split with about one-half supporting removing the antlerless permits for PTHFV holders and about one half either against removing the permit or in favor of removing the permit if the opportunity was provided on a General License. Many of those opposed cited concern over antlerless elk harvest in general or providing special opportunity to any individuals. Those in favor of the permit or offering the opportunity on a General License sited limited ability and likelihood to harvest a brow-tined bull during the general season when disabled.

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS**  
**HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**  
**Elk 2022**  
**Region 1 antlerless elk permit conversion to B Licenses**

**Hunting Districts:** 100, 103, 104, 122

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

Antlerless elk harvest in Region 1 is currently administered through the use of antlerless elk permits. Members of the public have expressed confusion over the use of permits for antlerless elk vs the use of B Licenses. As part of a statewide regulations simplification and standardization process, all antlerless elk permits are to be converted to B Licenses. The primary concern we have heard from R1 hunters is the potential to harvest more than one elk in the region. Hunters generally do not support an individual harvesting more than one elk in the region. Harvesting both a bull and a cow in the region doesn't happen often and is not a biological issue, yet most hunters commented against having that opportunity in R1.

**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.**

Convert antlerless elk permits to B Licenses and reduce hunter confusion regarding the hunting regulations and permit/license application process.

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

Less confusion regarding the use of permits vs B Licenses during the application process. A simplification and standardization of language within the regulations regarding permits and B Licenses.

**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).**

Elk populations are at levels below historic highs but are relatively stable. Districts with available aerial survey information indicate populations at the lower end of the objective range or slightly below objective in terms of brow-tined bull harvest. Even though elk numbers are below historic highs, we can offer some limited antlerless opportunity without impacting populations. This opportunity is typically through the use of limited draw permits or licenses. A summary of historic survey and harvest data is attached.

**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).**

Habitat changes resulting from succession related to timber harvest and fire disturbance has resulted in large-scale shifts in elk use and distributions. Additionally, Region 1 hosts high levels of native carnivores which may also be impacting elk survival and recruitment. As a result, antlerless elk harvest opportunity is limited and only available through special drawings.

**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).**

As part of the state-wide regulations simplification process, the proposal to change antlerless elk permits to B Licenses was vetted by the public and opportunity to comment was provided on the FWP website and by submitting written comment. Based on comments received, hunters are split relatively evenly on this topic with about 1/2 in favor and 1/2 opposed to move to B Licenses. Most of the concern for those opposed to moving

away from permits was related to the ability to harvest two elk in Region 1 if we move to an antlerless B License. Some of those supporting moving to a B License also expressed concern over the ability to harvest 2 elk in Region 1. This sentiment has been consistent from the hunting public in Region 1.

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS**  
**HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**  
**Elk 2022**  
**Add antlerless elk opportunity for PTHFV to general season**

**Hunting Districts:** 100, 101, 103, 104, 120, 121, 122, 130

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

Currently, several districts within Region 1 offer limited numbers of permits (less than 10) that are only available for people who possess a Permit to Hunt From a Vehicle (PTHFV). These permits are available on a limited draw bases. Over the last two years nearly 60% of the applicants did not possess a PTHFV due to confusion over the application process. In addition, the statewide effort to simplify the regulations included removal of small numbers of permits as the large volume of License and Permit Types (LPTs) was also viewed as being confusing and overcomplicating the regulations. As a result, we are proposing to remove all limited draw antlerless elk permits for people who possess a PTHFV. As a replacement and to maintain opportunity for disabled hunters, we are proposing to offer PTHFV holders to harvest an antlerless elk during the general hunting season with a General Elk License, allowing the harvest of a brow-tined bull or antlerless elk. This regulation is similar to what other regions have offered PTHFV holders.

**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.**

Simplify the regulations and reduce confusion over the application process, yet allow antlerless elk opportunity for disabled hunters holding a PTHFV.

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

Success will be measured by overall satisfaction with opportunity to hunt elk in Region 1 by holders of a PTHFV and general acceptance of the regulation by the public and other sportsmen and sportswomen.

**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).**

Elk populations are at levels below historic highs but are relatively stable. Districts with available aerial survey information indicate populations at the lower end of the objective range or slightly below objective in terms of brow-tined bull harvest. Even though elk numbers are below historic highs, we can offer some limited antlerless opportunity without impacting populations. This opportunity is typically through the use of limited draw permits or licenses. A summary of historic survey and harvest data is attached.

**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).**

Habitat changes resulting from succession related to timber harvest and fire disturbance has resulted in large-scale shifts in elk use and distributions. Additionally, Region 1 hosts high levels of native carnivores which may also be impacting elk survival and recruitment. Although populations are not at historic highs, elk numbers are sufficient to offer limited harvest opportunity. Overall interest in applying for an antlerless elk permit for PTHFV holders has been limited as has been harvest. The table below indicates the number of applicants for these permits in 2021 as well as the harvest from 2016 and 2020.



HD	No Permit Issueds	2020 PTHFV Applicants	2018 Harvest	2019 Harvest
100	5	16	0	0
101	5	11	2	1
102	5	9	0	0
103	5	31	3	4
104	5	14	5	0
120	5	5	0	0
121	10	21	4	3
122	5	15	5	0
123	5	9	0	0
124	5	1	2	0

**Figure 1: PTHFV statistics.**

**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 part of the 2021 regulation simplification scoping process. The public was able to comment on the proposal. Comments received were split with about one-half supporting removing the antlerless permits for PTHFV holders and about one half either against removing the permit or in favor of removing the permit if the opportunity was provided on a General License. Many of those opposed cited concern over antlerless elk harvest in general or providing special opportunity to any individuals. Those in favor of the permit or offering the opportunity on a General License cited limited ability and likelihood to harvest a brow-tined bull during the general season when disabled.

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS**  
**HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**  
**Elk 2022**  
**Justification for Eliminating HD 110 Antlerless Elk Permits**

Hunting Districts: 110

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

In 2020, 5 antlerless elk permits were issued in HD 110 which requires the permit to be used in combination with a General Elk License. Additionally, permit holders may not hunt antlered elk within HD 110. Antlerless elk permits in HD 110 were first offered during the 2006 season (n=5) in response to landowner complaints in the southern portion of the HD. The number of permits was briefly increased (2007-2009) due to a perceived increase in elk numbers but was reduced back to 5 prior to the 2010 hunting season. Since 2006, average harvest success on the permit has been 22%.

Lic Year	Elk Harvest			Antlerless Permit 110-00			
	Total Harvest	Antlered	Antlerless	Permit Issued	Permit Harvest	% Permit Success	% Total Female Harvest
1986	84	17	67	na	na	na	na
1987	62	16	46	na	na	na	na
1988	92	34	58	na	na	na	na
1989	76	10	66	na	na	na	na
1990	74	25	49	na	na	na	na
1991	85	27	58	na	na	na	na
1992	55	19	36	na	na	na	na
1993	58	27	31	na	na	na	na
1994	61	51	10	na	na	na	na
1995	49	38	11	na	na	na	na
1996	42	40	2	na	na	na	na
1997	No survey	No survey	No survey	No survey	No survey	No survey	No survey
1998	No survey	No survey	No survey	No survey	No survey	No survey	No survey
1999	18	18	0	na	na	na	na
2000	22	22	0	na	na	na	na
2001	23	20	3	na	na	na	na
2002	32	29	3	na	na	na	na
2003	42	37	5	na	na	na	na
2004	85	71	14	0	na	na	na
2005	81	59	22	na	na	na	na
2006	74	52	22	5	0	0	0
2007	80	80	0	25	0	0	na
2008	55	51	5	25	2	8	44
2009	64	45	19	25	5	20	27
2010	84	64	20	5	3	60	15
2011	32	22	10	5	2	40	20
2012	28	22	6	5	0	0	na
2013	35	34	2	5	2	40	100
2014	25	25	0	5	0	0	na
2015	29	26	3	5	3	60	100
2016	23	19	4	5	1	20	23
2017	29	26	3	5	0	0	na
2018	25	16	9	5	3	60	34
2019	12	6	6	5	0	0	0
2020	31	25	6	5	3	60	50
LTA	51	33	18	NA	2	22	36
10-year average	32	26	6	NA	1	28	42

Figure 1: HD 110 elk harvest and permit success derived from hunter survey data 1986-2020.

**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.**

Regulations simplification. The objectives of this proposal are to reduce the number of LPTs offering fewer than 25 licenses/permits and eliminate antlerless permits in favor of B Licenses. Additionally, this proposal will minimize antlerless elk harvest in a HD where populations have declined within the last decade.

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

Success will be measured by a reduction of complaints to FWP staff regarding confusion over hunting regulations and opportunities in HD 110, reduced game violations specific to the proposed change, and general hunter and private landowner satisfaction.

**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).**

As per the 2005 Montana Elk Management Plan, HD 110 falls within the Whitefish EMU. Dense forest and mountainous conditions preclude effective aerial surveys and are not formally conducted within the EMU. As such, there is no set population objective. Population trend is monitored annually through harvest survey estimates and, along with sportsmen and landowner input, indicates that the populations have declined since 2010 (Figure 2). While harvest estimates obtained since 1986 have rarely exceeded 100 animals, recent declines are most likely the cumulative result of habitat changes brought on by forest succession, major forest fires in 2001 and 2003, urban development of winter range in the southern portion of the HD, and a complete predator community. To facilitate population growth in the HD, antlerless harvest is currently limited to the 6-week archery season and the 5 antlerless permits. Due to the limited number of permits and harvest success, eliminating this opportunity will likely not result in a positive change in elk population trend. However, since 2010, permit harvest has accounted for approximately 42% of the total antlerless harvest within the HD.

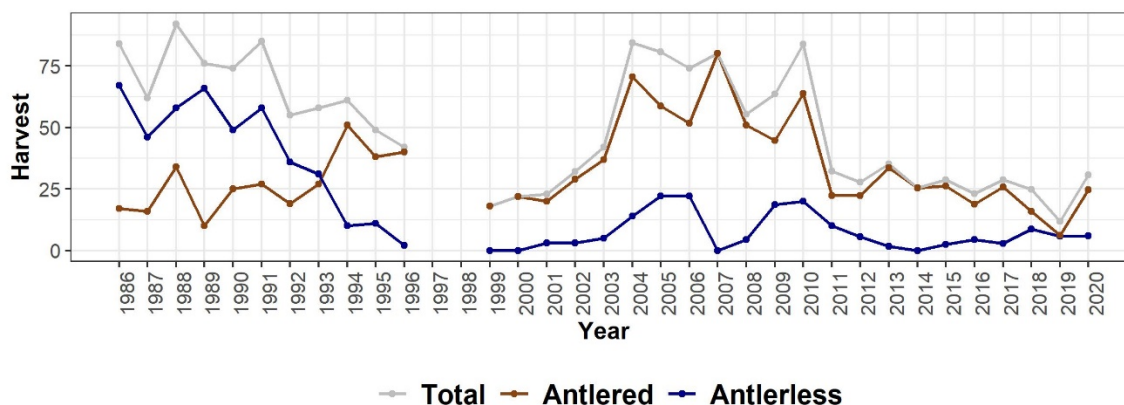


Figure 1: HD 110 elk harvest trends estimated from hunter survey 1986-2020.

**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).**

Game damage complaints involving elk historically occurred in the southern portion of this HD (Whitefish area) and were the original justification for establishing the permit. However, urban expansion and large-scale development of agricultural land in this region have reduced available wintering range for elk and make practical and safe hunting difficult. Few game damage complaints have been received from this area in recent years.

**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).**

Comments were collected online, as part of the 2021 Regulations Simplification Season Setting Package, September 21 through October 20. Seven comments were received, with five in support and two opposing. Both supporting and opposing comments cited limited availability of elk within the HD, though opponents did not

support removing the antlerless opportunity. During a virtual open house held 10/14/21, a clarification question was asked about the proposal but did not indicate support or opposition. Public comments related to replacing antlerless permits with B Licenses are relevant to this proposal, with opinions evenly split between supporters in favor of additional opportunity, and opponents against providing opportunity to harvest multiple elk within Region 1.

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS**  
**HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**  
**Elk 2022**  
**Justification for Combining HD 101 and 109**

**Hunting Districts:** 101,109

**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 would combine HDs 101 and 109 for elk, mule deer, and white-tailed deer. Proposal is being considered for regulations simplification.

Mule deer season structure is not consistent between HDs 101 and 109. Opportunity using a General License in HD 101 is limited to antlered buck during the six-week archery season and five-week general season. Opportunity using a General License in HD 109 is limited to antlered buck during the six-week archery season and the first three weeks of the general season. Limited draw permits (n = 10) are issued for antlered buck during the last two weeks of the season in HD 109. The 109-mule deer season structure was adopted by the commission prior to the 2012 hunting season, and was put in place due to hunter interest in maintaining a mature age-class of antlered mule deer by restricting harvest during the last two weeks when deer are more vulnerable to harvest due to migratory and breeding behavior. If this proposal is adopted, the reformed HD 101 would adopt the HD 109 season structure where opportunity using a General License would be limited to the six-week archery season and the first three weeks of the general season, with the last two weeks of the season restricted to limited draw permit holders. The number of permits issued will need to be adjusted pending commission decision.

Elk season structure is consistent between HDs. Opportunity using a General License is limited to either a brow-tined bull or antlerless elk during the six-week archery season, and brow-tined bull only during the five-week general hunting season. An additional 50 private-land only antlerless elk permits are issued to address game damage issues during an established shoulder season, Aug 15 – Feb 15. Permits are already valid in both HDs. HD 109 was created prior to the 2002 hunting season, primarily as means of effectively addressing elk game damage in the North Tobacco Valley. The establishment of the shoulder season permits has largely resolved the game damage issues that prompted HD 109 establishment. However, adopting this proposal would split HD 101 between two elk management units (EMUs) identified in the 2005 elk management plan.

White-tailed deer season structure is consistent between HDs. Opportunity using a General License is limited to either-sex during the six-week archery season, the first week of the general season and the last week of the general season on private land. Exceptions include youth hunters (ages 10-15), and those with a permit to hunt from a vehicle (PTHFV), who can harvest either-sex white-tailed deer on a General License throughout the general season. Each HD offers limited-draw antlerless licenses, valid on private land, to help address concentrations of deer on private agricultural ground. If the proposal is adopted, the number of 101-00 antlerless licenses issued would increase to 200 and the maximum quota range would be set at 800 to reflect the combined districts.

**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.**

Regulations simplification. The objective of this proposal is to simplify the hunting regulations by reducing the number of HDs. There is no biological justification for this proposal.

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

**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).**

Mule Deer

Dense timber precludes effective aerial surveys for mule deer in HDs 101 and 109. Limited ground surveys are conducted during spring green-up in HD 109, and buck harvest derived from hunter phone survey data is used to estimate population trends. Across Region 1, mule deer populations have declined since the early 1990s. Prior to 1996, Region 1's mule deer general season structure consisted of two weeks either-sex, followed by three weeks antlered only harvest. In 1997, an antlered buck only regulation was adopted for the general five-week season, though antlerless opportunity was allowed during the six-week archery season. Between 1997 and 2012 limited antlerless harvest opportunities were available within the region, and all antlerless mule deer harvest opportunity was discontinued prior to the 2012 season. Based on harvest survey data, mule deer populations in HD 101 and 109 appear to have been relatively stable for the past ten years, albeit at much lower densities than those observed prior to 1996. This proposal will not affect overall population trend.

#### Elk

Dense timber precludes effective aerial surveys for elk in HDs 101 and 109. Generally, elk populations occur at low densities throughout Salish and Whitefish Mountain Ranges in small (<50) localized groups. The Tobacco Valley, which occupies the northern portion of HD 101 and the western portion of HD 109 comprises the largest low-elevation winter range for some resident elk populations as well as migratory populations from British Columbia. The size of the migratory population varies according to winter severity and can result in numerous game damage issues within the predominately privately owned valley. Existing elk season structure is consistent between HD 101 and 109 and this proposal is not expected to have a biological impact on elk populations.

#### White-tailed Deer

Dense timber precludes effective aerial surveys for white-tailed deer in HDs 101 and 109. Ground based recruitment surveys are conducted annually during spring green-up, and buck harvest estimated from hunter phone survey data is used to track changes in population trend. In HD 101 and 109, recruitment has been steadily increasing since 2016 and has been estimated above 40 fawns per 100 adults for the past two years in HD 101, and this past year (2020) in HD 109. Antlered harvest has remained relatively stable during the last three years. The white-tailed deer population is stable to increasing within both HDs. Existing deer season structure is consistent between HD 101 and 109, and this proposal is not expected to have a biological impact on white-tailed deer populations, though may result in a limited compensatory increase in antlered buck harvest if a limited mule-deer season structure is adopted as proposed.

### **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).**

Mule deer populations in HD 101 and 109 are behaviorally distinct, though there is likely some interchange of individuals between populations. Mule deer in HD 109 are predominantly migratory, moving east into the remote and mountainous conditions of the Whitefish Range and British Columbia during the summer and transitioning to the lower elevation foothills of the Whitefish Range (east HD 109) during the late fall. Mule deer within HD 109 are most vulnerable to harvest while on breeding/winter range where hunter access is improved, and habitat offers improved visibility. No movement studies have been conducted on mule deer within HD 101, though observation and movement data from adjacent HDs suggests that both resident and migratory populations occur. Most resident populations occur within the Tobacco Valley and along Koochanusa Reservoir (east HD 101). Unlike HD 109, there is extensive road access throughout HD 101, though densely timbered conditions still provide some measure of security throughout the hunting season.

### **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).**

Public comment was collected online September 21 – October 20, 2021. A virtual open-house public meeting occurred October 14. A total of 19 comments were received specific to the proposed changes, with 9 generally supportive of the proposal and 8 opposed. While in person discussions and public forums were limited by COVID-19 restrictions, discussions with local hunters suggests that division over this proposal is evenly split due to strong contention over what mule deer season structure will be applied to the much larger and combined HD 101. Overall, there is support or neutrality towards the district combination, as it relates to elk and white-tailed deer season structures.

Supporters of the proposal are generally in favor of restricting mule-deer buck harvest within the combined HD during the last two weeks of the season when bucks are perceived to be more vulnerable to harvest due to breeding behavior or late-season spatial distribution. The season structure in HD 109 is popular with hunters, who perceive an increase in older age-class deer within the HD, and value the season structure as a compromise between a limited permit season structure, and an open opportunity season structure (6 week archery, 5 week general).

Opponents of the proposal are not in favor of restricting opportunity for mule deer bucks during the last two weeks of the season and cite differences in geographic characteristics, road densities, and mule deer distributions as justification to maintain an open opportunity season structure within 101. Some indicated general support for the HD 109 season structure within its current boundary but were not supportive of extending the season structure to a combined HD 101.