

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
Elk 2022
Create New HD 525

Hunting Districts: 525

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

Simplify hunting regulations by combining HD 560 and the western portion of HD 520 into new HD 525. This combines two HDs that are within the Southern Mountain PMU as defined in the Mule Deer AHM Plan. Mule deer population trends are similar throughout the new HD. Elk population trends are also similar.

Add early antlerless season dates, Aug 15 to Sep 3, for Antlerless Elk on the General Elk License and the 005-00 Elk B License that are only valid on private land.

Add late antlerless season dates, Dec 19 to Jan 8, for Antlerless Elk on the General Elk License and the 005-00 Elk B License that are not valid on National Forest Lands or FWP WMAs.

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 hunting regulations by combining HD 560 and a portion of HD 520.

The objective of adding the early and late season dates to the license is to increase the opportunity for both resident and nonresident hunters to harvest antlerless elk in these districts. These additional dates will give private landowners who wish to reduce elk numbers on their lands another tool to utilize if they decide to do so.

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

Harvest will be monitored via the statewide hunter questionnaire survey. Mule deer and elk population trends will be monitored through annual aerial surveys.

With the addition of the early and late season dates we should see the annual growth rates of the antlerless segment of the elk herd gradually decline in these districts. We should also see an increase in antlerless harvest from the annual hunter harvest survey. We also expect a decrease in game damage complaints.

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 populations are below objective. Elk populations are above objective.

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).

Severe winter weather in recent years has resulted in lower mule deer survival. Weather has not significantly impacted elk populations.

Hunter access for antlerless elk hunting varies across the Region. Elk habitat within these districts generally consists of mountain foothills or timbered breaks habitat. These habitat types are highly productive for elk. They generally provide quality summer and winter range resulting in high annual survival and high rates of recruitment. These factors result in robust and increasing elk herds even during periods of unfavorable weather conditions.

Game damage complaints from elk are common, especially during severe winters. Providing the same amount of Elk B Licenses but reducing the confusion of having to pick a B license reduces hunter confusion while maintaining the opportunity. Reducing the elk populations to objective is desirable to reduce game damage complaints from private landowners.

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 for public review during the initial public comment period. Few comments were received, however in past public comment opportunities we received comments against early and late hunting season dates. We anticipate some opposing comments to this proposal because it includes early and late antlerless season dates.

In past public comment sessions we also received comments opposing late season dates on National Forest Land. We listened to that and are not proposing any late season National Forest opportunity for biological reasons. The biological reason is to encourage elk to use winter habitat areas on National Forest Land which the Forest Service manages through habitat and travel closures. Elk wintering on National Forest Land also reduces disease transfer opportunities between elk and livestock. In addition, elk wintering on National Forest are not causing game damage to private lands.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
Elk 2022
Create HD 555

Hunting Districts: 555

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

Creates a hunting district that encompasses the herd range of the Silver Run elk herd. This results in being able to eliminate the portion designation in old HD 520. Elk, especially bulls, in this area interchange with elk in HD 502. Therefore, it is appropriate to manage bulls in both HD 555 and 502 with limited permits. This approach is supported by the Montana Elk Plan.

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.

Simplifies regulations by eliminating a portion designation.

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

Harvest will be measured through the statewide questionnaire survey. Post winter helicopter surveys will assess elk population trends.

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).

Population is below objective.

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).

Robertson Draw fire in the summer of 2021 burned 30,000 acres of elk and mule deer habitat significantly reducing the security cover for elk. Retaining elk permits essential in controlling harvest in the face of this habitat disturbance.

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).

We presented this proposal to the Sunlight Ranch hunting coordination group. The group voiced the need for continued bull and antlerless elk permits to control harvest in the face of lost elk security.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
Elk 2022
590 portion removal

Hunting Districts: 590,590 North Portion, 590 South Portion

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

The proposal is to remove the north and south portions of HD 590. This includes removing the 590-21 either-sex permits which were valid in the south portion of the district. This would also include combining the number of permits from both portions combined and adding an additional 80 permits to the existing 590-20. Early antlerless season would be added starting on August 15th. Late antlerless season would be added and would run Dec 19 to Jan 8. The 900-20 archery permit requirement would also be removed.

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 the proposed change is to simplify regulations and increase elk harvest.

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 in two ways. First, hunter harvest surveys will be used to monitor changes in elk harvest. Second, aerial elk surveys will be used to monitor changes in the elk population.

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).

Two thousand six hundred and ninety elk were observed in the north portion of HD 590 during the 2019 winter survey. Four hundred forty-two elk were observed in the south portion of HD 590 in 2021. The objective for the two portions combined is 1050 elk and there are currently 3,132 elk in this district. The population in the north portion has continued to grow reaching a record high of 2703 in 2017. The southern population has remained relatively stable.

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 proposal is not related to weather or habitat factors. Hunter access to elk on private lands is considered a limiting factor to harvest in district 590. The 2005 Elk Management plan contain language specific to managing for older age class bulls in HD 590.

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 proposal was available for public comment during the initial public comment period. Few comments were received. Some concern was voiced regarding the combination of the north and south portions of HD 590, including a perceived reduction in the opportunity to draw a permit.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
Elk 2022
Combine 511 and 530 into new 535

Hunting Districts: 511, 530, 535

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 combine deer/elk hunting districts 511 and 530 into new deer/elk district 535. Both districts provide similar habitat and access opportunities for elk and deer.

Habitat on the south side of the Big Snowy Mountains (HD 511) and Little Snowy Mountains (HD 530) is characterized by less precipitation, more south facing Ponderosa pine/shortgrass prairie winter range that transitions into sagebrush grassland habitat further south and east. Habitat on the north side of the Big Snowy Mountains (HD 411) is characterized by more precipitation with more aspen, riparian, and timbered habitat with interspersed wet meadows. Elk winter in larger numbers in 511 and 530, in part, because of these habitat differences. In addition, the landownership in HDs 511 and 530 is composed of larger acreage parcels with mountain foothill habitat transitioning to shortgrass prairie. While HD 411 has some large acreage parcels it also has more subdivision and smaller landownership parcels consisting of more timbered habitat with wet meadows. There is some elk movement on the west end of 411 and 511 between the districts and some elk movement on the east end of 411 and 530, which is why the entire Big and Little Snowy Mountains should be managed together for elk.

There are also a growing number of year round resident elk in the ponderosa pine habitat in the southern portion of HD 530. Along with elk that cross back and forth into HD 590 south of the Musselshell River. These elk have been growing in number for the last decade and will be surveyed for the first time in the 2022 winter. They have been counted occasionally when traveling between mule deer surveys in HD 530 or traveling to the Roundup airport as part of other aerial surveys. The current General License spike bull or antlerless elk regulation type increases overall bull and antlerless harvest in these districts that are over objective, while maintaining the either-sex elk permit is needed to manage for older age class bulls is in accordance with the management objective in the elk plan. An increase in the 411-20 Either-sex Elk Permit from 300 to 400 is also proposed. Along with an increase in the 411-00 Elk B License from 800 to 1,200. Both of these increases are proposed to increase harvest in response to increased elk population numbers.

Add early antlerless season dates, Aug 15 to Sep 3, for Antlerless Elk on the General Elk License, the 005-00 Elk B License and the 411-00 Elk B License that are only valid on private land.

Add late antlerless season dates, Dec 19 to Jan 8, for Antlerless Elk on the General Elk License and the 005-00 Elk B License that are not valid on National Forest Lands or FWP WMAs.

Change the late season ending date from Feb 1 to Jan 8 on the 411-00 Elk B License that are valid in HDs 411 and 535.

This proposal maintains the management objective in the elk plan for managing for older age class bulls in the Snowy Mountains. The proposal allows for liberal antlerless harvest. Early and late season dates address game damage concerns on private lands. Simplifies the regulations by having one district on the north side of the Big Snowy Mountains (HD 411) and one hunting district on the south side of the Big Snowy Mountains and Little Snowy Mountains (HD 535).

Deer: The north and south side of the Big and Little Snowy Mountains should not be managed together for other species like mule deer because mule deer populations are at or well below long term averages in HDs 511 and 530 and have been in restrictive season types for many years, while HD 411 mule deer has been under an either-sex standard regulation type. The proposed combination of districts 511/530 allows us to maintain historical harvest and survey data for future population analysis and simplifies the regulations for hunters.

Create a 535-50 Antlered Buck Mule Deer Permit to replace the 530-50 Antlered Buck Mule Deer Permit that was removed. This proposal offers 850 of the 535-50 Antlered Buck Mule Deer permits. These permits would be valid in hunting district 535. These permits would be offered through the drawing, any remaining permits would be sold surplus after the drawing. The associated quota range is proposed to be 500 to 1,100. Permit numbers can be adjusted annually to track changes in mule deer populations. The General Deer License would be valid for Antlerless Mule Deer and Either-Sex White-tailed Deer. In addition 50 of the 535-00 Antlerless Mule Deer B Licenses would be available to address localized game damage concerns.

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.

Elk: The objective of the proposal is to simplify hunting regulations by combining similar districts. These changes should also allow for increased elk harvest on the bull segment and antlerless segment of the population.

The objective of adding the early and late season dates to the license is to increase the opportunity for both resident and nonresident hunters to harvest antlerless elk in these districts. These additional dates will give private landowners who wish to reduce elk numbers on their lands another tool to utilize if they decide to do so.

Mule Deer: The objective of the proposal is to simplify hunting regulations and to increase mule deer buck:doe ratios across the district and increase mule deer numbers on the western side of the district.

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

Elk: This proposal is directed at regulations simplification. With the addition of the early and late season dates we should see the annual growth rates of the antlerless segment of the elk herd gradually decline in these districts. We should also see an increase in antlerless harvest from the annual hunter harvest survey. We also expect a decrease in game damage complaints. Success will be measured by tracking annual elk harvest and population trends. An increase in elk harvest and corresponding reduction in elk numbers would signify success from a biological perspective.

Mule Deer: This proposal is directed at regulations simplification and to address the low buck:doe ratio in HD 511. Success would be an increase in the buck:doe ratio in response to the mule deer buck permit.

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: In February 2021, area biologists observed 8,755 total elk across the Big and Little Snowy Mountains (2,257 bulls, 4,502 calves, 1,884 calves, 112 unclassified antlerless). Overall, elk in the Snowies are 1067% over the objective of 800 total elk. The elk populations in the Snowies have been increasing since the mid 2000's.

Mule Deer: The mule deer buck permit was initially created to address chronically low buck:doe ratios in HD 530 in 1987. These low buck:doe ratios have also been observed in HD 511 more often than not the last 18 years. The low habitat security and hunting access contributes to the low buck:doe ratios in HD 530 and HD 511. Increased permit numbers will allow for the increase in hunting district size covered by the mule deer buck permit. Also the increased permit numbers will help to maintain the buck:doe ratio while still managing the CWD risk of having older age mule deer bucks on the landscape.

The HD 530 mule deer buck permit has proven effective at maintaining a buck:doe ratio over 25 as stated in the AHM guidelines. Permit numbers have been increased the last couple years to maintain higher buck:doe ratios but decrease the risk of CWD transmission. HD 511 has more years of low buck:doe ratios than not in the last 18 years. Many landowners in HD 511 do not allow mule deer hunting because of their concern of low mule deer numbers compared to historical numbers. HD 511 has been in a restrictive season package for 12 years in an effort to increase mule deer numbers but has not been successful. There will be a loss of mule deer buck hunting opportunity in HD 511 by including this area in the mule deer buck permit area.

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 proposal is not related to weather, habitat, or access factors. Hunter access for elk hunting varies across Hunting District 535. Elk habitat within these districts generally consists of mountain foothills and prairie grassland with scattered ponderosa pine savanna habitat. This combination of habitat types generally provides quality summer and winter range resulting in high annual survival and high rates of recruitment. These factors result in robust and increasing elk herds even during periods of unfavorable weather conditions.

Elk and mule deer game damage complaints occur during severe winters. Providing an increased amount of Elk B Licenses along with increased time periods to use the licenses will hopefully result in increased harvest. Reducing the elk populations to objective is desirable to reduce game damage complaints from private landowners. Providing a limited number of Mule Deer B Licenses allows for increased antlerless mule deer harvest in localized game damage situations.

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).

Elk: The proposal was available for public review during the initial comment period. Comments were mixed with no overwhelming support or opposition in either direction. Some landowners voiced concern about increased hunting pressure and hunter access requests when permits increased from 200 to 300 several years ago and now permits are proposed to increase from 300 to 400. Some landowners voiced support for keeping limited-draw permits to manage the number of hunter access requests they receive for access.

Few comments were received, however in past public comment opportunities we received comments against early and late hunting season dates. We anticipate some opposing comments to this proposal because it includes early and late antlerless season dates.

In past public comment sessions we also received comments opposing late season dates on National Forest Land. We listened to that and are proposing limited late season National Forest opportunity for biological reasons. The biological reason is to encourage elk to use winter habitat areas on National Forest Land which the Forest Service manages through habitat and travel closures. Elk wintering on National Forest Land also reduces disease transfer opportunities between elk and livestock. In addition elk wintering on National Forest are not causing game damage to private lands. Allowing a limited number of these B Licenses to be valid throughout the hunting district can help move elk around as hunting pressure changes on the landscape throughout the hunting season.

Mule Deer: The proposal was available for public review during the initial comment period. Some comments supported combining these districts but did not want to see it managed with a mule deer buck permit. Other comments were supportive of the proposed change.

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
Elk 2022
Remove 580-00 Elk B License**

Hunting Districts: 580

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

The proposal is to remove the 580-00 Elk B License opportunity. These B Licenses have been in place in 580 since 2016. They are valid on all lands, including National Forest during late shoulder seasons. Elk harvest on these licenses has been minimal, and they have created confusion for hunters about which B License they can use at different times and locations.

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 the proposed change is to simplify regulations. The 580-00 opportunity will be replaced by the 005-00 B License which is valid in most R5 districts during early, general season, and late shoulder seasons.

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

The proposal is directed at regulations simplification. There are no biological measures for success associated with this proposal.

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).

Four thousand two hundred fifteen (4,215) elk were observed in HD 580 in January and February 2021. This total includes 441 bulls, 2,817 cows, and 957 calves. This was a 9% decline from 2020. The 580 elk population remained mostly stable from 2000 to 2007, averaging 1,477 elk during that time. The population increased steadily from 2008 to 2017 reaching a record high of 4,846 elk in 2017. From 2018-2021 the population appears to have stabilized and started to decline. The population objective for this district is 975 elk.

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 proposal is not related to weather, habitat, or access factors.

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 proposal was available for public comment during the initial comment period. No comments were received regarding this proposal.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
Elk 2022
Create 595-20 Either-Sex Elk Archery Permit

Hunting Districts: 502, 535, 555, and 590

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

Several districts in the 900-20 bundle in Region 5 are proposed to go to General Elk License Either-sex elk opportunity, so an archery permit is not needed. In the remaining Region 5 districts with Either-sex Elk permit hunting we propose the 595-20 Either-sex Elk Archery permit that would be valid in HDs 502, 535, 555, and 590. The elk plan management objectives for all these districts are to manage for older age class bulls. To achieve this management goal, limited-draw permits are needed. Archery permits are needed to manage for older age class bulls and to manage the archery hunting pressure that has steadily increased in these districts over the years.

Create a 595-20 Either-Sex Elk Archery permit to replace the 900-20 Either-Sex Elk Archery permit that was removed. This proposal offers 1,500 of the 595-20 Either-Sex Elk Archery permits. These permits would be valid in hunting districts 502, 535, 555, and 590. These permits would be offered through the drawing, any remaining permits would be sold surplus after the drawing. The associated quota range is proposed to be 800 to 2,000. Permit numbers can be adjusted annually to track changes in elk populations.

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 the proposed change is to simplify the regulations and provide opportunity for both resident and nonresident hunters to harvest either-sex elk during the archery season.

The elk plan management objectives are to manage for older age class bulls in the Snowy Mountains EMU, Bull Mountains EMU, HD 502 and that portion of HD 520 that is now part of HD 555. These districts are proposed to continue being managed with limited entry either-sex elk permits. The remaining R5 districts that are part of the 900-20 archery permit bundle and are currently over objective with elk but don't have elk plan language speaking to the management of older age class bulls are proposed to go to General Elk License Either-sex Elk regulation type.

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

The smaller archery permit hunting district bundle in this proposal allows for more precise archery hunter distribution on the landscape. These smaller archery permit hunting district bundles should address overcrowding complaints from sportsmen, and the local hunter frustration who do not draw the 900-20 permit and the assumption that many 900-20 permit holders are hunting in R7 because of the record bulls harvested in recent years.

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 in the hunting districts covered by this proposal are all over total elk population objective.

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 proposal is not related to weather, habitat, or access issues. Hunter access for either-sex elk hunting varies across the Region. Elk habitat within these districts generally consists of mountain foothills or timbered breaks habitat. These habitat types are highly productive for elk. They generally provide quality summer and winter range resulting in high annual survival and high rates of recruitment. These factors result in robust and increasing elk herds even during periods of unfavorable weather conditions.

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 for public review during the initial public comment period. We initially proposed two archery permits in Region 5. One archery permit valid in the Snowy Mountains HDs 411 and 535 and another archery permit that would cover HDs 502, 555, and 590. We received comments and phone calls from the public requesting one archery permit that would allow them to hunt elk on the north (HD 535) and south (HD 590) sides of Hwy 12 along the Musselshell River in Region 5. Elk move across this boundary in the archery season. All of these hunting districts were together under the 900-20 archery permit that is proposed to be removed so it makes sense biologically and socially to have one Region 5 elk archery permit that is valid in HDs 502, 535, 555, and 590.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
Elk 2022
Increase 005-00 Elk -B Quota and Range

Hunting Districts: 502, 515, 525, 535, 540, 575, 580, 590

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

Increase the 005-00 Elk B License quota and quota range to account for the removal of the 595-00 Elk B License opportunity. Currently 2,500 of the 005-00 Elk B Licenses are available and 3,500 of the 595-00 Elk B Licenses are available.

This proposal offers 6,000 of the 005-00 Elk B Licenses. These licenses would be valid in Hunting Districts 502, 515, 525, 535, 540, 575, 580, and 590. All of these hunting districts have elk populations that are over objective. They will be offered through the drawing, the remaining licenses would be sold surplus after the drawing. The associated quota range is proposed to be 2,000 to 8,000. License numbers can be adjusted annually to track changes in elk populations.

Add early antlerless season dates Aug 15 to Sep 3 that are only valid on private land.

Add late antlerless season dates starting Dec 19 to Jan 8 that are Not valid on National Forest Lands or FWP WMAs.

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 the proposed change is to simplify the regulations and provide more opportunity for hunters to harvest elk in different parts of Region 5 on the same license.

The objective of adding the early and late season dates to the license is to increase the opportunity for both resident and nonresident hunters to harvest antlerless elk in these districts. These additional dates will give private landowners who wish to reduce elk numbers on their lands another tool to utilize if they decide to do so.

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

This proposal is directed at regulations simplification. With the addition of the early and late season dates we should see the annual growth rates of the antlerless segment of the elk herd gradually decline in these districts. We should also see an increase in antlerless harvest from the annual hunter harvest survey. We also expect a decrease in game damage complaints.

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 in the hunting districts covered by this proposal are all over total elk population objective.

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 proposal is not related to weather, habitat, or access issues. Hunter access for antlerless elk hunting varies across the Region. Elk habitat within these districts generally consists of mountain foothills or timbered breaks habitat. These habitat types are highly productive for elk. They generally provide quality summer and winter range

resulting in high annual survival and high rates of recruitment. These factors result in robust and increasing elk herds even during periods of unfavorable weather conditions.

Game damage complaints from elk are common, especially during severe winters. Providing the same amount of Elk B Licenses but reducing the confusion of having to pick a B License reduces hunter confusion while maintaining the opportunity. Reducing the elk populations to objective is desirable to reduce game damage complaints from private landowners.

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 for public review during the initial public comment period. Few comments were received, however in past public comment opportunities we received comments against early and late hunting season dates. We anticipate some opposing comments to this proposal because it includes early and late antlerless season dates.

In past public comment sessions we also received comments opposing late season dates on National Forest Land. We listened to that and are not proposing any late season National Forest opportunity for biological reasons. The biological reason is to encourage elk to use winter habitat areas on National Forest Land which the Forest Service manages through habitat and travel closures. Elk wintering on National Forest Land also reduces disease transfer opportunities between elk and livestock. In addition elk wintering on National Forest are not causing game damage to private lands.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
Elk 2022
Create new deer/elk district 565

Hunting Districts: 560,565

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

The proposal is to take the existing portion of district 560 south of Falls Creek, and make that portion a new deer/elk hunting district.

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 the proposed change is to simplify the hunting regulations for new district 525, and for all R5 elk districts by removing the district portion which has caused confusion in the past. The elk, mule deer, and whitetail deer opportunity in this new district will be the same opportunity as was available in the past.

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

The proposal is directed at regulations simplification. There are no biological measures of success associated with this proposal.

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 Upper Boulder is a timbered winter range with relatively few open areas, which makes counting, and classifying elk extremely difficult. A helicopter survey provides the best opportunity to count elk, but classification is still difficult due to the timber. The population objective for the upper Boulder is 300 elk.

There is considerable movement and mixing of elk herds in the Natural Bridge area especially during the spring. GPS collar data indicate that McLeod Basin elk regularly mix with Main Boulder elk in this area. Some elk counted during the spring helicopter survey of the Main Boulder around Natural Bridge have likely already been counted during the January SuperCub survey of the McLeod Basin area. This adds a degree of uncertainty to actual elk numbers in the upper Main Boulder. Looking only at elk observed south of Falls Creek during the spring helicopter survey may give a more accurate representation of upper Boulder elk herd numbers.

The spring 2021 flight was about a week early of perfect green up. Three hundred thirty-four elk were observed- 17% higher than the last survey in the spring of 2019. However, all but two of these elk were observed north of Falls Creek. No elk were observed around Hawley Mtn or Speculator area. The upper Main Boulder elk appeared to still be at low elevation near Natural Bridge and Baker Draw at the time of survey.

Spring green up in 2019 was about two weeks later than normal. Only 23 elk were observed in the Upper Boulder. These elk consisted of three unclassified bulls, 17 cows and three calves. No elk were observed on the Hawley Mtn winter range. In mid May I received reports of 20-40 elk in the Hawley Mtn area. The 2019 flight was likely too early and many elk were missed because green up had not progressed far enough.

In 2018, there were 140 elk observed including 10 unclassified bulls, 100 cows and 30 calves.

In 2017, 136 elk observed south of Falls Creek including four unclassified bulls, 106 cows and 26 calves.

In 2016, 168 elk were observed south of Falls Creek.

One hundred thirty four elk were observed south of Falls Creek in 2015.

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 proposal is not related to weather, habitat, or access factors.

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 for public comment during the initial public review period. The only comment received expressed concern for clarifying the boundary/legal description. The existing 'portion of 560' description has been in use for more than 10 years with minimal conflict/confusion. FWP has evaluated the boundary/legal description and made it as simple as possible.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
Elk 2022
Remove 595-00 B License

Hunting Districts: 502, 515, 525, 540, 575, 580, and 590

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 595-00 Elk B License and replace these licenses by increasing the 005-00 Elk 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 of the proposed change is to simplify the regulations and provide more opportunity for hunters to harvest elk in different parts of Region 5 on the same license. No change in overall Region 5 elk harvest is recommended or anticipated with this proposal.

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

This proposal is directed at regulations simplifications. No biological measures of success are associated with this proposal.

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 in the hunting districts covered by this proposal are all over total elk population objective.

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 proposal is not related to weather, habitat, or access issues. Hunter access for either-sex elk hunting varies across the Region. Elk habitat within these districts generally consists of mountain foothills or timbered breaks habitat. These habitat types are highly productive for elk. They generally provide quality summer and winter range resulting in high annual survival and high rates of recruitment. These factors result in robust and increasing elk herds even during periods of unfavorable weather conditions.

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 for public review during the initial public comment period. Few comments were received and none opposed this proposal.

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
Elk 2022
HD 575 ES Elk**

Hunting Districts: 575

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

Simplify the hunting regulations by eliminating the ES permit and instituting an ES hunting opportunity for the archery and the general season. Currently 800-900 elk are being counted annually in this hunting district. The elk plan objective for HD 575 is 225 elk. The elk plan does not contain any language regarding bull age structure.

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 season structure and increase hunter opportunity with the goal of reducing elk numbers.

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

Harvest will be monitored via the statewide hunter questionnaire survey. Late winter/spring aerial surveys will track elk population trends.

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 population objective is 225 elk. This population has been over objective since 2011. In the last five years we have typically counted 750 to over 900 elk.

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).

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).

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
Elk 2022
HD 502 Elk Structure

Hunting Districts: 502

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

Increase hunting opportunity in HD 502 by increasing ES permits and establishing early and late shoulder seasons

Elk population objective for this hunting district is 50 elk. The population has been over objective since at least 2002. Over the last five years the average count has been 165 elk.

Elk, especially bulls, from this HD often cross into HD 555 and vice versa necessitating managing bulls with the same season type. The elk plan recognizes the public demand for maintaining ES elk permits in this area.

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.

Increase elk harvest through more liberal season structure.

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

Harvest will be monitored via the statewide hunter questionnaire survey. Annual aerial surveys will track elk population trends.

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 population objective for this hunting district is 50 elk. The population has been over objective since at least 2002. Over the last five years the average count has been 165 elk.

Elk, especially bulls, from this HD often cross into HD 555 and vice versa necessitating managing bulls with the same season type. The elk plan recognizes the public demand for maintaining ES elk permits in this area.

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).

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 Sunlight Ranch is one of the major landowners in this HD and provides the majority of the access. The Sunlight Ranch Hunting Advisory Group supported this proposal.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
Elk 2022
Remove 580 Portion South of Sweet Grass Creek

Hunting Districts: 580

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

The proposal is to remove the portion south of Sweet Grass Creek. This includes removing the 580-20 either sex elk permits which were valid in that portion. The entire district would become a general either sex elk season. The 900-20 archery permit requirement would also be removed. Early antlerless season would be added starting on August 15. Late antlerless season would run Dec 19 to Jan 8.

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 the proposed change is to simplify regulations and increase elk harvest.

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 in two ways. First, hunter harvest surveys will be used to monitor changes in elk harvest. Second, aerial elk surveys will be used to monitor changes in the elk population.

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).

Four thousand two hundred fifteen (4,215) elk were observed in HD 580 in January and February 2021. This total includes 441 bulls, 2,817 cows, and 957 calves. This was an 9% decline from 2020. The 580 elk population remained mostly stable from 2000 to 2007, averaging 1,477 elk during that time. The population increased steadily from 2008 to 2017 reaching a record high of 4,846 elk in 2017. From 2018-2021 the population appears to have stabilized and started to decline. The population objective for this district is 975 elk.

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 proposal is not related to weather or habitat factors. Hunter access to elk on private lands is considered a limiting factor to harvest in district 580. Game damage from elk frequently occurring during average and extreme winters. The district is over objective and the 2005 Elk Management Plan does not contain language specific to managing for older age class bulls. Thus supporting the removal of the either sex permits and additional length of shoulder seasons.

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 proposal was available for public comment during the initial public comment period. Few comments were received and feedback was mixed. Some comments supported the removal of the either sex permits noting increased harvest opportunity. Other comments opposed the permit removal and noted concerns about reduction in older age class bulls and potential access changes.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
Elk 2022
Combine 500 and 570 into new 515

Hunting Districts: 500, 570, 515

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

The proposal is to combine deer/elk hunting districts 500 and 570 into new deer/elk district 515. Both districts provide similar habitat and access opportunities for elk and deer.

Elk: The current elk season structure in both districts allows for antlerless elk and spikes to be taken on a General License. Either-sex elk may be harvested by permit only. The 900-20 archery permit is required to bow hunt elk in both districts. B License opportunity is also available, including early and late shoulder seasons. The elk management goal from the 2005 Elk Management Plan is: *Prevent elk populations from increasing and prevent elk from expanding into new areas where game damage is likely to occur. Elk damage to agricultural crops will be the primary factor driving management in this EMU. Elk numbers should be maintained at no more than current levels and, in most areas, reduced whenever possible.*

The proposed new elk season structure for 515 is a General License either-sex season for both archery and rifle seasons. Both hunting districts are over objective. There is no management direction in the 2005 Elk Management Plan directing FWP to manage for older age class bull elk. Early and late shoulder seasons will continue.

Mule Deer: Both 500 and 570 are managed under the Prairie Breaks Population Management Unit in the Mule Deer Adaptive Harvest Management Plan. Both districts follow similar population trends and it is appropriate to manage them as one district for mule deer. New 515 will continue to have an either-sex archery and rifle season with limited B License opportunity. 200 B Licenses will be offered with a quota range of 50-500. No changes in mule deer numbers, season structure, management direction, or hunter access are anticipated with this proposal.

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.

Elk: The objective of the proposal is to simplify hunting regulations by combining similar districts and removing the limited either-sex permit for archery and rifle seasons. These changes should also allow for increased elk harvest on the bull segment of the population.

Mule Deer: The objective of the proposal is to simplify hunting regulations.

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

Elk: Success will be measured by tracking annual elk harvest and population trends. An increase in elk harvest and corresponding reduction in elk numbers would signify success from a biological perspective.

Mule Deer: This proposal is directed at regulations simplification. There are no biological measures of success associated with this proposal.

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: The management goal for district 500 is 60 elk, with not more than 10 of those elk being bulls. The management goal for district 570 is 100 elk, with not more than 20 of those being bulls. During the most recent

aerial elk survey, district 500 had 372 total elk including 117 bulls. District 570 had 690 total elk with 200 of those being bulls. The elk populations in both districts have been increasing for the past 15 years.

Mule Deer: Mule deer numbers in district 500 are 23% above long-term average. Mule deer numbers in district 570 are currently 17% below long-term average.

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 proposal is not related to weather, habitat, or access factors. Hunter access for elk hunting varies across HD 515. Elk habitat within these districts generally consists of grassland prairie/ag cropland with scattered ponderosa pine savanna habitat. This habitat type generally provides quality summer and winter range resulting in high annual survival and high rates of recruitment. These factors result in robust and increasing elk herds even during periods of unfavorable weather conditions.

Elk game damage complaints occur during severe winters. Providing the same amount of Elk B Licenses but reducing the confusion of having to pick a B License reduces hunter confusion while maintaining the opportunity. Reducing the elk populations to objective is desirable to reduce game damage complaints from private landowners.

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).

Elk: The proposal was available for public review during the initial comment period. Some comments supported removing the either-sex elk permit and going to a General License either-sex season for archery and rifle seasons. Other comments recommended keeping the either-sex permit structure in place for archery and rifle season. Comments were mixed with no overwhelming support or opposition in either direction.

Mule Deer: The proposal was available for public review during the initial comment period. No comments were received specific to mule deer.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
Elk 2022
HD 590-20 quota change

Hunting Districts: 590

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

The proposal is to remove the north and south portions of HD 590. This includes removing the 590-21 either sex permits which were valid in the south portion of the district. This would also include combining the number of permits from both portions combined and adding an additional 80 permits to the existing 590-20. Early antlerless seasons would be added starting on August 15th. Late antlerless season would be added and would run Dec 19 to Jan 8. The 900-20 archery permit requirement would also be removed.

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 the proposed change is to simplify regulations and increase elk harvest.

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 in two ways. First, hunter harvest surveys will be used to monitor changes in elk harvest. Second, aerial elk surveys will be used to monitor changes in the elk population.

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).

Two thousand six hundred and ninety elk were observed in the north portion of HD 590 during the 2019 winter survey. Four hundred forty-two elk were observed in the south portion of HD 590 in 2021. The objective for the two portions combined is 1050 elk and there are currently 3,132 elk in this district. The population in the north portion has continued to grow reaching a record high of 2703 in 2017. The southern population has remained relatively stable.

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 proposal is not related to weather or habitat factors. Hunter access to elk on private lands is considered a limiting factor to harvest in district 590. The 2005 Elk Management plan contain language specific to managing for older age class bulls in HD 590.

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 proposal was available for public comment during the initial public comment period. No comments were received regarding the additional 80 permits in this district.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
Elk 2022
Remove 540-00 license, add early and late dates

Hunting Districts: 540

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 540-00 Elk B License to simplify the regulations. Only the 005-00 Elk B License would be valid in HD 540.

Add early antlerless season dates, Aug 15 to Sep 3, for Antlerless Elk on the General Elk License and the 005-00 Elk B License that are only valid on private land.

Add late season dates, Dec 19 to Jan 8, for Antlerless Elk on the General Elk License and the 005-00 Elk B License that are not valid on National Forest Lands or FWP WMAs.

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 the proposed change is to simplify the regulations and provide more opportunity for hunters to harvest elk in different parts of Region 5 on the same license.

The objective of adding the early and late season dates to the license is to increase the opportunity for both resident and nonresident hunters to harvest antlerless elk in these districts. These additional dates will give private landowners who wish to reduce elk numbers on their lands another tool to utilize if they decide to do so.

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

This proposal is directed at regulations simplification. With the addition of the early and late season dates we should see the annual growth rates of the antlerless segment of the elk herd gradually decline in these districts. We should also see an increase in antlerless harvest from the annual hunter harvest survey. We also expect a decrease in game damage complaints.

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).

One thousand seven hundred sixty-six (1,766) elk were observed in hunting district (HD) 540 in March 2021. This total includes 217 bulls, 1,107 cows and 442 calves (Table 1.) This was a 9% decrease from 2020. Survey conditions were very good with calm winds, clear sky and patchy snow cover.

The population objective for this district is 600 total elk. The second population objective is to maintain a minimum of 5% bulls among the total elk observed during post-season surveys. The 2021 count is 194% above objective and there were 12% bulls among the total elk observed during the survey. Historic elk numbers including bull:cow and calf:cow ratios are shown in Table 1. The observed population ratios were 20 bulls and 40 calves per 100 cows. Forty-eight percent (48%) of bulls observed were yearling (spike) bulls. Fifty-two percent (52%) of observed bulls were brow-tined bulls (2.5 years old or older).

Total harvest has averaged 213 elk per year since 2005 and varied from a low of 88 in 2007, to a high of 366 elk in 2017 (Table 2). In 2020, an estimated 262 total elk were harvested, 23% above the 15-year average. One hundred seventy-six antlerless elk were harvested, 46% above the 15-year average. Antlerless elk harvest decreased 27% from the previous year but was consistent with the previous 5 years harvest.

Table 1. Classification of elk in HD540, 2001-02 to 2020-21. Unclassified = Unc.

Year Month	Bulls				Cows	Calves	Unc	Total	Ratios	
	BTB	Yrl	Unc	Total					Bull:Cow:Calves	Bulls:100 Elk
2001 Mar	0	16		16	45	12	574	647	NA	2
2002 Apr	7	12		19	35	9	640	703	NA	3
2003 Apr	25	11		36	38	6	758	838	NA	4
2004 Apr ¹	2	20		22	107	61	439	629	NA	3
2005 Apr	26	8	21	55	0	0	720	775	NA	7
2006 Apr	6	15	3	24	12	2	856	894	NA	3
2007 Apr	3	5	59	67	82	12	818	979	NA	7
2008 Apr	75	24		99	0	0	1184	1283	NA	8
2009 Apr	24	52	24	100	85	13	1199	1397	NA	7
2010 Apr	3	47	8	58	38	4	1168	1268	NA	5
2011 Apr	29	96		125	17	3	1279	1424	NA	9
2012 Apr	23	96		119	1016	301	0	1436	NA	8
2013 May	-	-		-	-	-	1640	1640	NA	-
2014 May	-	-		-	-	-	1617	1617	NA	-
2015 Apr	58	104		162	36	25	1360	1583	NA	10
2016 Apr	31	67	19	117	523	255	891	1786	22:100:49	7
2017 Jan	96	56		152	34	26	1834	2046	NA	7
2018 Mar ²	40	80		120	1149	572	0	1841	10:100:50	7
2019 Mar	75	123		198	1094	623	0	1915	18:100:57	10
2020 Mar	118	158		276	1190	484	0	1950	23:100:41	14
2021 Mar	113	104		217	1107	442	0	1766	20:100:40	12

¹Very poor survey conditions, cloudy windy and elk may have been undercounted.

²Used the 2016 calf:cow ratio to calculate number of cows and calves in the large elk groups that couldn't be classified from the air.

Figure 1: Table 1. Classification of elk in HD 540, 2001-02 to 2020-21. Unclassified = Unc.

Table 2. Elk harvest trends for HD540, 2004-2020. General regulations have been Antlered Bull (AB), Either-Sex (ES) or Brow-tined Bull (BTB) and Antlerless (Ant-) elk.

Year	General Regulation	No. of Hunters	No. of Permits or Licenses	BTB	Spikes	Cows	Calves	Total
2004	Antlered Bull	938	175	42	12	77	10	141
2005	AB, Last 9 days ES	762	175	59	18	67	3	146
2006	AB, Last 9 days ES	664	175	69	22	54	2	147
2007	AB, Last 9 days ES	761	175	26	8	48	0	83
2008	Either-sex	831	50 ³	54	18	43	3	118
2009	Either-sex	770	50	33	36	42	8	119
2010	Either-sex	1008	50	72	22	102	37	234
2011	Either-sex	1081	50	80	22	127	24	253
2012	Either-sex	1073	50	61	11	73	6	151
2013	Either-sex	-	50	68	19	60	7	153
2014	Either-sex	1012	1200 ⁴	85	31	135	17	268
2015	Either-sex	1134	1200 ⁴	65	44	147	22	278
2016	Either-sex	1178	1300 ^{4,5}	61	19	151	13	243
2017	Either-sex	-	1500 ^{4,5}	128	46	178	15	366
2018	BTB or Ant-	1058	1500 ^{4,5}	88	3	166	21	277
2019	BTB or Ant-			108	3	212	28	350
2020	Either-sex	1091	4657 ^{4,5,6}	65	21	162	14	262
Avg 2005-19		944		71	21	107	14	213
Dev. from Avg		16%		-8%	-1%	51%	2%	23%

¹ Starting in 1991 individuals who possessed an antlerless elk permit could not shoot a bull in the hunting district the antlerless permit was valid for.

² Between 1992 and 2003 antlerless permits for this area were valid 6 days prior to the general season and for the entire season instead of two separate time-periods.

³ Prior to 2008 numbers in this column were for permits. Starting in 2008 the permits became a second license for antlerless elk.

⁴ Elk B-licenses were combined and valid for most Region 5 elk hunting districts (Elk B license 005-00).

⁵ 100 additional B-licenses were available in HD540 that were valid in entire district

⁶ 3001 additional B-licenses were valid in most Region 5 elk hunting districts (Elk B-license 595-00).

Figure 2: Table 2. Elk harvest trends for HD 540, 2004-2020. General regulations have been Antlered Bull (AB), Either-sex (ES), or Brow-tined Bull (BTB) and Antlerless (Ant-) elk.

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 proposal is not related to weather, habitat, or access issues. Hunter access for antlerless elk hunting varies across Hunting District 540. Elk habitat within these districts generally consists of mountain foothills habitat. This

habitat type is highly productive for elk. Mountain foothills habitat generally provides quality summer and winter range resulting in high annual survival and high rates of recruitment. These factors result in robust and increasing elk herds even during periods of unfavorable weather conditions.

Game damage complaints from elk are common, especially during severe winters. Providing the same amount of Elk B Licenses but reducing the confusion of having to pick a B License reduces hunter confusion while maintaining the opportunity. Reducing the elk populations to objective is desirable to reduce game damage complaints from private landowners.

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 for public review during the initial public comment period. Few comments were received, however in past public comment opportunities we received comments against early and late hunting season dates. We anticipate some opposing comments to this proposal because it includes early and late antlerless season dates.

In past public comment sessions we also received comments opposing late season dates on National Forest Land. We listened to that and are not proposing any late season National Forest opportunity for biological reasons. The biological reason is to encourage elk to use winter habitat areas on National Forest Land which the Forest Service manages through habitat and travel closures. Elk wintering on National Forest Land also reduces disease transfer opportunities between elk and livestock. In addition elk wintering on National Forest are not causing game damage to private lands.