A quick look at a concept or term commonly used in fisheries, wildlife, or state parks management.

**“Recruitment”**

Recruitment is a concept in wildlife management that refers to the number of baby elk, deer, moose, and other animals that survive to adulthood (breeding age), which for most species is one year old.

Recruitment largely determines whether a population grows or declines during a given year. If recruitment is high—for instance, when lots of elk calves and deer fawns are born and survive their first year, thus “recruiting” into the adult population—a population will usually increase. But if recruitment is low (with steady adult mortality), a population will usually decrease.

During their first year, and especially their first winter, young big game animals are particularly vulnerable to dying from starvation, predation, or disease. But once they make it past that first year, survival greatly improves, as does their chance to breed and contribute to future population numbers. This key life-stage milestone is when wildlife biologists consider young deer and elk as part of populations.

Many things affect recruitment rates, which with elk are measured each spring by the number of calves per 100 cow elk (such as 10:100, a low recruitment rate, or 40:100, a high rate). These include whether a cow even becomes pregnant in the fall, the condition of a pregnant cow during winter and spring (which affects the health of the newborn calf), the number of predators in an area, and the harshness of the calf’s first winter.

FWP biologists can’t control weather, but they can help improve recruitment rates—if the goal is to increase a population—by protecting and improving elk summer habitat and winter range and, if necessary, reducing predator numbers.