

ELK MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES IN AREAS WITH BRUCELLOSIS WORKING GROUP BRIEFING PAPER, AUGUST 2012

BACKGROUND: Livestock brucellosis infections attributed to elk is a concern within the Designated Surveillance Area (DSA) established by the Montana Board of Livestock in January 2010 when its predecessor, the Brucellosis Action Plan, expired. From the Department of Livestock website, “Both the Action Plan and DSA were created and implemented to help the state regain and maintain its brucellosis-free status after the disease was found twice in a 12-month period (May 2007, May 2008).” Montana’s DSA is entirely within FWP Region 3 and has had two boundary expansions since 2010. Elk testing positive for exposure to brucellosis (seroprevalence) appear to be increasing in some elk populations and there is considerable debate over elk management in the DSA. In response to these circumstances FWP and the FWP Commission initiated the Elk Management Guidelines in Areas with Brucellosis Working Group in the fall of 2011. From the initial call for interest, it was noted any consensus products by this group would be directed to the FWP Director and FWP Commission for consideration and potential endorsement. A Commission-endorsed product will represent focus and direction for elk management in areas with brucellosis.

WORKING GROUP CHARTER: *Collaboratively identify a problem statement, fundamental objectives and potential management options relative to effective management of elk in areas where brucellosis has been identified and where there is concern about brucellosis transmission between livestock and elk.*

WORKING GROUP MEMBER SELECTION AND COMPOSITION: A call for nominations was made with over 40 applicants submitting their names for consideration. In pursuit of a diverse working group the following twelve individuals (listed in alphabetical order) were selected by FWP Director Joe Maurier.

Mr. Mark R. Albrecht is a hunter and veterinarian from Bozeman.

Mr. John C. Anderson is a livestock producer and Block Management Cooperator from Alder.

Mr. Ed Bukoskey is a hunter and an agricultural landowner from Rosebud.

Mr. Joe Cohenour is a hunter from East Helena.

Mr. Rick Douglass is a hunter involved with disease research as a MT Tech professor in Butte.

Mr. Rick Gibson is a hunter and livestock producer from Livingston.

Mr. Lorents Grosfield is a livestock producer and former legislator from Big Timber.

Mr. Ken Hamlin is a hunter and retired elk research biologist from Bozeman.

Mr. Raymond Marxer is a hunter and livestock producer from Twin Bridges.

Mr. Charlie Noland is a hunter and veterinarian from Huntley.

Mr. William Raths is a hunter and veterinarian from Lewistown.

Mr. C. Thomas Rice is a hunter, livestock producer and County Commissioner from Dillon.

MEETINGS: A total of six meetings took place on January 26-27, February 21-22, March 20-21, April 26-27, May 30-31 and June 26-27. All meetings ran for approximately twelve hours across 1-1/2 days for a total of 72 possible meeting hours for each participant (not counting travel or “homework” between meetings). Attendance for working group members was at or near 100% throughout this effort. All meetings were held at the FWP Region 3 office in Bozeman, were noticed with press releases or on the FWP website and were open to the public with opportunities for public comment. Public attendance and comment was limited. The first meeting included informational research and management presentations from wildlife agency staff from Idaho, Wyoming and Yellowstone National Park. FWP and Department of Livestock staff also presented information at that first meeting. Presentations were made available on the FWP website.

STAFF: Agency staff routinely assisting the working group included Dr. Mike Mitchell from the University of Montana Wildlife Research Cooperative Unit, FWP Research and Technical Services Section Supervisor Justin Gude, Montana Department of Livestock Brucellosis Veterinarian Eric Liska and FWP Sections Coordinator Quentin Kujala. Other agency staff that routinely attended and/or presented information included FWP Wildlife Veterinarian Jennifer Ramsey and FWP Lab Supervisor Neil Anderson along with FWP Region 3 staff and personnel from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA/APHIS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

PROCESS: Structured decision making (SDM) was used to facilitate this effort. SDM is the formalized application of common sense to decision-making and is designed to improve the quality, efficacy and transparency of difficult decisions. There are five steps arranged in iterative sequence: defining the PROBLEM (or ISSUE STATEMENT), identifying OBJECTIVES that would characterize successful resolution of the problem, developing management ALTERNATIVES to meeting those objectives, identifying CONSEQUENCES for each of the alternatives, and evaluating TRADE-OFFS among the alternatives.

NEXT STEPS: Recognizing the complexity of the topic, the working group recommendations will be presented to the FWP Commission on August 30 in an “Informational” context; there will be no decision required by the Commission on that day. The recommendations will be presented again to the FWP Commissioner later in the fall when the Commission will be asked to make an initial endorsement of the recommendations and initiate a formal public comment period. Any final endorsement by the Commission would likely occur in early 2013 after public comment has been received.

MANAGEMENT UTILITY: A Commission-endorsed product will represent focus and direction for elk management in areas with brucellosis.