



# Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

## INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mike Thompson  
**FROM:** John Vore  
**DATE:** 16 October 2007  
**RE:** Fall elk count on the CB Ranch

On 15 October 2007 Tony Jones of the Ravalli County Fish & Wildlife Association and I counted elk from an airplane on the CB Ranch east of Darby. We flew during the week between the end of archery season and the beginning of the general rifle season to get some idea of how many elk are on the Ranch, which does not allow any public hunting and becomes an elk "refuge", and are consequently largely unavailable to hunters. We covered the area from the Bitterroot River to the Forest Service boundary between Jerrys Gulch and Stonehouse Gulch. We saw 806 elk. Locations of elk groups and group sizes are shown and the accompanying map. This information will be very useful to the Bitterroot Elk Working Group when discussing elk season types and antlerless elk harvest for HD 270. I want to acknowledge the Ravalli County Fish & Wildlife Association, who wanted to get the flight done to better manage elk, and also paid for the flight.

**Area:** The CB Ranch in HD 270  
**Species:** Elk  
**Date:** 15 October 2007  
**Aircraft:** Maule M7  
**Pilot/observers:** Steve Davidson / John Vore  
Tony Jones

**Time of day:** Daybreak to  $\approx$ 09:30  
**Total flight time:**  $\sim$ 2 hours  
**Weather:** Clear,  $\sim$ 40°F,  $\sim$ 25 MPH wind  
**Total elk:** 806

**CC:** Dave Lockman, USFS  
Dave Romero, USFS  
Dave Majors, Ravalli County Fish & Wildlife Association

**Tony Jones**

**From:** Gary Habeck [garyshorses@msn.com]  
**Sent:** Friday, October 19, 2007 9:48 AM  
**To:** Tony Jones  
**Subject:** Fw: Elk count on the CB Ranch  
**Attachments:** Elk2007Fall CB.doc

here you go.

----- Original Message -----

**From:** Vore, John  
**To:** Bob Wetzsteon ; Craig Thomas ; Dave Romero ; Gary Habeck ; Hedman, Wayne ; Jack Pfau ; Mack Long ; Paul Hopkins ; Powers, Thomas ; Scott Boulanger ; Thompson, "Fearless Leader", Mike  
**Sent:** Thursday, October 18, 2007 7:57 AM  
**Subject:** Elk count on the CB Ranch

Dear Working Group members,

Attached is a memo regarding an October 15<sup>th</sup> Tony Jones of the Ravalli County Fish & Wildlife Association and I did to count elk on the CB Ranch east of Darby. We saw 806 elk. This is important information for us to have when we discuss season types and/or antlerless permits/A-7s for HD 270.

For our upcoming meeting on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, however, I don't want to get sidetracked too much on cow quotas or permit levels since our main focus needs to be on season type. Quota and permit levels will be adjusted at the June FWP commission meeting after my spring flights.

After learning of the elk count on the CB Ranch at their October 15<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Ravalli County Fish & Wildlife Association recommended that the Elk Plan population objective for HD 270 be increased by 1,000 elk, raising it from 3,000 to 4,000. Changes to the Elk Plan will be considered by the FWP commission at their July meeting.

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10/19/2007

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS**  
**HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

**Species:** Elk

**Region:** 2

**Hunting District:** HD 270, Sapphire Elk Management Unit (211, 214, 270, & 321)

**Year:** 2008

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

Clarify that broad guidance given in numbered paragraph 5, on page 55 of the Final Elk Management Plan (January 2005), will apply as follows in Hunting District 270:

- An amended population objective of 3,000 elk for HD 270 was adopted by the Commission at its October 2007 meeting in Havre.**
- The population objective of 3,000 elk will include all elk that are counted during Spring trend counts in HD 270, whether counted on public or private lands, and whether accessible or inaccessible to the hunting public in the Fall.**
- FWP will continue to monitor numbers of elk that may be congregated on private land refugia in the Fall. In October 2007, FWP and a member of the Ravalli County Fish and Wildlife Association counted 806 elk on the CB Ranch, which were assumed to be unavailable for public hunting.**
- FWP may manage under a “sub-objective” for publicly accessible elk to prevent the overharvest of accessible herd units while elk numbers on private “refugia” continue to grow. Publicly accessible elk may be defined for this purpose as the Spring trend count minus the Fall count of elk on the CB Ranch.**
- The “sub-objective” for publicly accessible elk in HD 270 should be 2,600, which is the objective for HD 270 that was printed in the Final Elk Management Plan prior to its amendment. Given a trend count of 3,299 elk in Spring 2008, and the count of 806 elk on the CB Ranch in October 2007, this sub-objective would direct FWP to prescribe harvest in a manner that would halt the decline of publicly accessible elk (i.e., 2,493 elk vs the sub-objective of 2,600), while working to increase the harvest pressure that is applied to elk that use the CB Ranch.**

**2. Why is the proposed change necessary?**

The CB Ranch was established a few years ago upon Craig Barrett’s purchase of the property from Len Wallace. Mr. Wallace operated the place as a game farm for several years. Mr. Barrett removed the “elk-proof” fences and set about restoring the land. To this point, elk hunting has not been allowed. Elk use of the property has

increased, and it was with some surprise that FWP counted as many as 806 elk there on October 15, 2007, just a few days before the opening of hunting season (map attached).

With knowledge of this elk count on the CB Ranch, members of the Ravalli County Fish & Wildlife Association expressed concerns about FWP's continued efforts to bring the elk population in HD 270 to a level that would be at or below objective by January 2009, as now directed by statute. The concern was expressed that if FWP did not adjust its harvest strategy, only elk herd-units on public land or accessible private land would be reduced. These are the only elk that contribute to public hunting recreation; therefore, elk numbers available for public recreation would be reduced further and further as elk numbers on private refugia continued increasing.

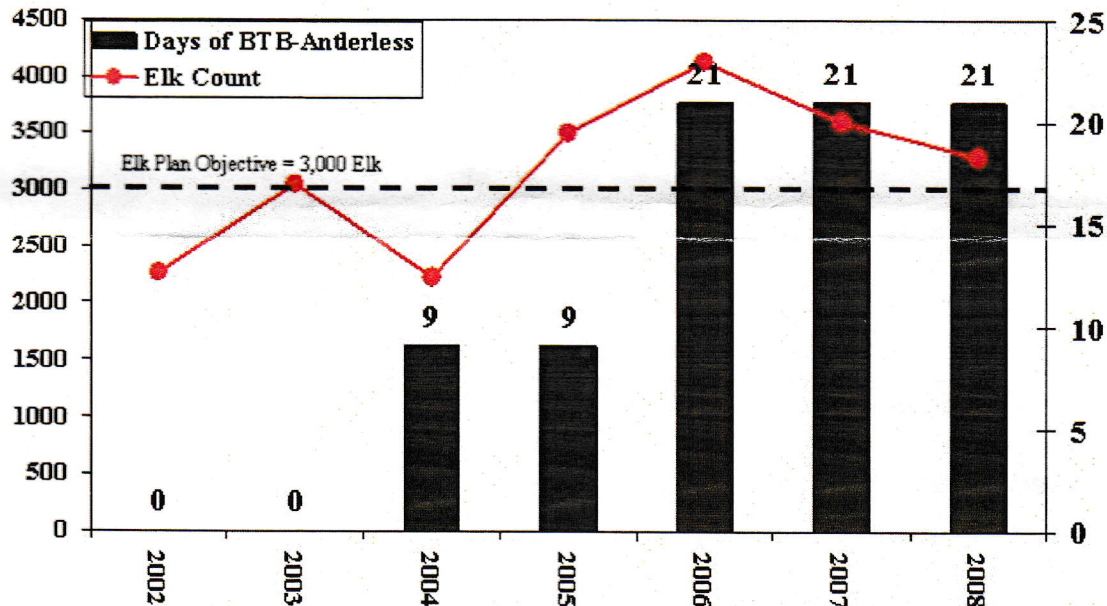
FWP recognizes that elk herd-units in HD 270, which are accessible to public hunting harvest, will be overharvested to the detriment of the public trust if a harvest strategy is employed that is blind to the existence of a large elk "refuge" in its approach toward reaching an objective of 3,000. If elk continue to increase on the "refuge," then the publicly accessible elk must continually decrease to stay at or below objective. Clarification of the guidance on page 55 of the Elk Plan is needed to bring FWP and interested parties together on a harvest strategy that all can agree is intended and effective under the Elk Plan.

3. **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).**

**Table 1. Population objectives and elk counts for the Bitterroot Valley.**

HD	Area	Population objective			2008 count	% over/under objective
		Low	Objective	High		
270		2400	3000	3600	3299	10% over

Elk trend counts in relation to hunting opportunities offered by FWP to harvest antlerless elk on the general license on the East side of the Bitterroot Valley, in Hunting District 270.



Hunting District 270 is a mix of public and private land. In 2004, FWP addressed a growing elk population with the introduction of antlerless-elk hunting on the general license for the last 9 days of the general season. In 2006, FWP expanded that opportunity to 21 days. The elk population fell back to 10% above objective within a 3 year period.

4. Provide information related to any weather / habitat factors that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, temperature / precipitation information).

Typical of the Bitterroot Valley, winters for many years have been mild and conducive to a growing elk population. Winterkill has never been a big factor in the Bitterroot Valley. The biggest management challenge is elk that find refuge on private land that does not allow or has very limited hunting.

5. 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 evolved from ongoing discussions since 2004, primarily involving the Ravalli County Fish & Wildlife Association and the Bitterroot Elk Working Group. The 10-member working group is composed of 2 landowners, a local businessman, an area outfitter, a forester and 1 representative each from the Ravalli County Fish & Wildlife Association, Safari Club International, the Montana Bowhunter's

Association, the U.S. Forest Service and FWP. It was formed as a broad-based advisory group for elk management in the Bitterroot Valley.

FWP met with the Ravalli County Fish & Wildlife Association and the Bitterroot Elk Working Group specific to this proposal on July 8, 2008. At that meeting, formal consensus was reached to support the proposal for establishing a sub-objective of 2,600 "publicly accessible elk." No adverse public comment was received by Region 2 during the ensuing public comment period.

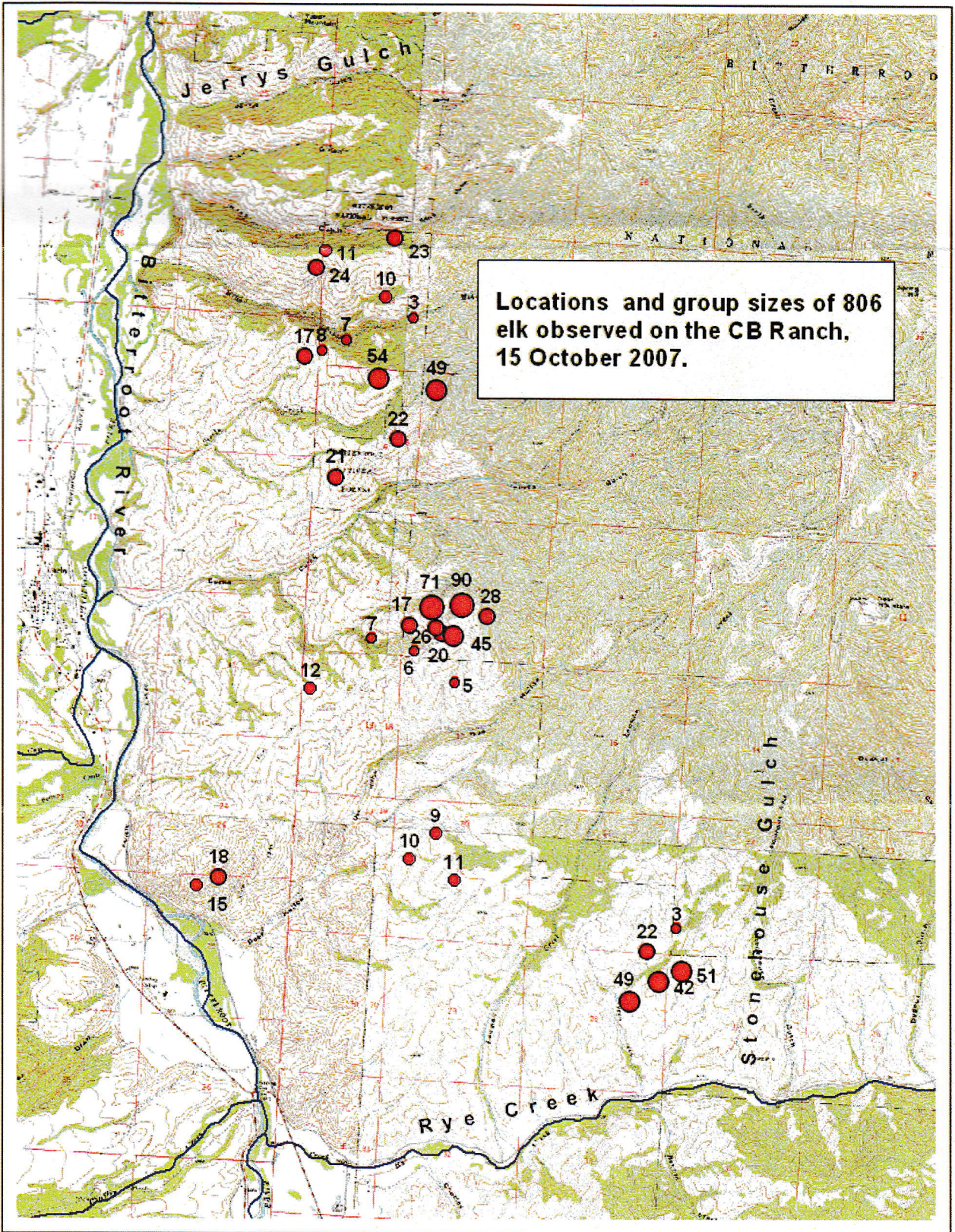
**Submitted by** \_\_\_\_\_Mike Thompson\_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_September 7, 2008\_\_\_\_\_

**Approved:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Regional Supervisor / Date**

**Disapproved / Modified by:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Name / Date**

**Reason for modification:**



**9. 2008 Elk Harvest Quotas and Ranges for HDs 204, 261, and 270 – Final.** Quentin Kujala, FWP Wildlife Management Bureau Chief, stated that there are no changes to the tentatives.

Reduce the 2008 quota through the Darby Check Station that triggers closure of the antlerless portion of the brow-tined bull/antlerless season in HDs 204, 261 and a portion of 270 from 200 to 100 cow elk.

Reduce the 2008 total quota (season-long) through the Darby Check Station, which triggers closure of the antlerless portion of the brow-tined bull/antlerless season in the southern portion of HD 270, from 300 to 200 cow elk.

In HDs 204, 261, and a portion of 270, establish a quota range for 2008-2009 of 50 to 300 cow elk through the Darby Check Station.

In HD 270, establish a quota range for 2008-2009 of 100 to 400 elk through the Darby Check Station, which will close the southern portion of HD 270.

*Action: Colton moved and Doll seconded the motion to adopt the Final 2008 Elk Harvest Quotas and Ranges for HDs 204, 261 and 270 as proposed by the Department.*

Chairman Doherty asked for public comment.

Steve Wilson, Ravalli County Fish & Wildlife Association, expressed concern that two years ago there were over 2,000 elk in HDs 240 and 250, and now there are only 200. It is a serious problem. There is a large predator problem there. Wolves and mountain lions are reducing the resource. FWP needs to be conservative and should reduce the quota to two. He said cattle and sheep producers are compensated, and asked when sportsmen will be compensated as they spend a lot of money and want their money's worth.

Mike Thompson, FWP Region 2 Wildlife Manager, said the total across the hunting districts in the Bitterroot were 7,000 last year, and under 6,000 this year. FWP has taken the management approach, and adjusted down from higher permit levels. He stated that predators are definitely killing wildlife, however hunters have also reduced numbers in public hunting areas.

Dale Burk, Ravalli County Fish & Wildlife Association, believes that serious down turns will be faced in the upper Bitterroot districts. In the original Elk Working Plan there was no mention of wolf involvement, but that component was included in the 2002 revision. There are 15 wolf packs in the Bitterroot.

*Action on Motion – motion carried.*

**10. 2008-2009 Game Damage Permit Authorizations – Final.** Quentin Kujala, FWP Wildlife Management Bureau Chief, stated there were no changes to the tentatives.

*Action: Colton moved and Doll seconded the motion to table this topic until the October Commission meeting to allow Commissioner Vermillion the opportunity to participate in the decision since it is part of his district. Motion carried.*

**11. Sheep and Goat Capture and Transplant – Endorsement.** Quentin Kujala, FWP Wildlife Management Bureau Chief, explained that the proposal is to relocate approximately 60 sheep from Sun River (HDs 422 and 424) to Utah, and approximately 15 goats from Crazy Mountains (HD 313) to Ear Mountain WMA. Washington was originally included in the sheep proposal, however they have since decided they do not want any sheep at this time. This Mountain Goat effort is associated with SCI as far as costs and operations. The release will happen in January 2009. In-state releases will be ready by January 2010.



Mike Thompson, FWP Region 2 Wildlife Manager, stated that the recommended changes are a result of structured public involvement. FWP and the Ravalli County Fish & Wildlife Association jointly formed the ten member Bitterroot Elk Working Group in 2004, and one of the group's first tasks was to assist in the development of the 2005 Elk Management Plan. The group is composed of two landowners, a local businessman, an area outfitter, a forester and one representative from the Ravalli County Fish & Wildlife Association, the Safari Club International, the Montana Bowhunter's Association, the U.S. Forest Service, and Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

Thompson said that as elk numbers are driven down to meet the Elk Plan objective of 3,000, the public is expressing concern, and requesting that FWP back off on the harvest level in HD 270 earlier than the Elk Plan says. The public comfort level with the elk numbers does not match the number specified in the objective for HD 270, therefore an adjustment in the objective is recommended.

In 2008, the Commission adopted new hunting district 298 in the Helmville Valley. There was no objective set for HD298, and the portions of adjacent HDs from which HD 298 was formed had to be adjusted accordingly. In this case, the Region had working groups in place to deal with the elk issues in the affected areas. The participants were important landowners and sportsmen who were personally contacted and invited to the meetings by the local biologists.

Thompson stated that the Helmville meeting was set to address HDs 290, 291, 293 and 298. Twenty-three people attended the meeting on August 28. On August 27, a meeting was held in Potomac to address HD 292, and was specifically located where the biggest game damage issues are focused. Twenty-three people attended this meeting as well.

Thompson said the driving force for the review of elk plan objectives in the Upper Clark Fork was a change in survey methodology. Biologist Ray Vinkey shifted from spring counts to winter counts, which increased his counts in some districts by about 15%. The Region was prepared to decrease objectives in spite of the upward direction indicated by improved survey methodology if the Working Groups came to that consensus. As a result of public involvement and collaboration, the proposed objectives vary from the tentative adoptions in HDs 210, 212, 215, 216, 292, 290/298, and 293, reflecting consensus arrived at with the public.

Thompson said "as a result, we ended up with a proposed sub-objective in HD 212 to conserve publicly accessible elk while providing ample opportunity to harvest elk on private land if access were granted. In contrast with HD 270, where the sub-objective pertains to the greater portion of the HD and the elk herd, the sub-objective in HD 212 would pertain to a relatively small proportion of the elk herd and a relatively small area on the west side of the district. So, HD 270 can be managed to meet the sub-objective with more of a district-wide regulation package, whereas antlerless permits tied to portions of the HD would be needed to implement the proposed direction in HD 212".

*Action: Colton moved and Doll seconded the motion to adopt as Final the Elk Plan objective changes as presented by FWP.*

Chairman Doherty asked for public comment on the changes.

Steve Wilson, Ravalli County Fish and Wildlife, said they accept the subquotas with the idea that they might be addressed and changed as needed.

*Action on Motion: Motion carried.*

**8. Elk Plan Objectives Adjustment – Final.** Quentin Kujala, FWP Wildlife Management Bureau Chief, stated that this plan identifies annual opportunity for adjustment so when set into season setting we have a target. Recommended changes to the tentatives are as follows.

HD 210 – increase objective from 725 to ~~1000~~ 850

HD 216 – ~~increase maintain objective from~~ at 325 to 450

Rock Creek EMU – increase objective from 2370 to ~~2770~~ 2495

HD 212 – increase objective from 850 to ~~1500~~ 1000

HD 212 – establish a sub-objective of 500 for publicly accessible elk; within the HD objective of 1000; Flint Creek EMU objective not influenced by this specific change

HD 213 – increase objective from 650 to 750

Flint Creek EMU – increase objective from 1500 to ~~2250~~ 1750

HD 211 – ~~maintain objective at~~ 600

HD 214 – increase objective from 200 to 450

Sapphire EMU – increase objective from 3800 to 4050

HD 215 – increase objective from 1000 to ~~1200~~ 1400

Deer Lodge EMU – increase objective from 2100 to ~~2300~~ 2500

HD 290/298 – establish objective at ~~800~~ 600 (new hunting district 298)

HD 291 – ~~maintain objective at~~ 600

HD 292 – decrease objective from 1100 to ~~900~~ 800

HD 293 – ~~decrease maintain objective from~~ at 750 to 500

Granite Butte EMU – ~~decrease maintain objective from~~ at 2150 to 1900

HD 270 – establish a sub-objective of 2600 for publicly accessible elk; maintain HD objective of 3000; Sapphire EMU objective is not influenced by this specific change