

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

**Species:** Elk  
**Region:** 2  
**Hunting District:** 283  
**Year:** 2019

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

*A. 283-02: Decrease B-licenses from 5 to 1*

*B. 002-00: Close HD 283 to the use of the 002-00 regional Elk B License in the 2019 season. Because this Elk B License may be purchased over-the-counter, and is not made available in the limited license drawing, it is necessary to propose this correction to the approved and printed regulations for the 2019 archery, general and late-shoulder seasons. Currently, this Elk B License is valid on private lands throughout HD 283 for the archery only and general seasons, and only valid on private lands west of both Rattlesnake Creek and the Rattlesnake Wilderness/Recreation Area for the late shoulder season.*

Historically, antlerless elk harvest was challenging to accomplish on the west end of HD 283 because many elk migrated to private property after the general hunting season. Also, some properties were closed to hunting, which aggravated game damage issues.

Due to a growing elk population and lack of opportunity for harvest during the general season, FWP instituted late season game damage hunts on private lands in 2002, and an early elk backcountry rifle season in the Rattlesnake Wilderness and Recreation Area starting in 2006. We were already starting to phase out the 283-02 license in the 2018 biennial season-setting process. Below is the history of permits and licenses for the early backcountry rifle season on antlerless elk in the Rattlesnake:

**2006 - 2009:** 283-02, 75 antlerless permits  
**2010 - 2012:** 283-82, 75 B licenses  
**2013 – 2017:**283-02, 40 B licenses  
**2018:**283-02, 5 B licenses

A large proportion of the annual antlerless harvest usually has resulted from the late season game damage hunts. However, late season damage hunts are difficult to prescribe and administer in this area close to Missoula and we have tried a number of alternative approaches in the hunting regulations.

In 2008, MFWP created 002-80, a single region, unlimited, over-the-counter antlerless elk license for archery-only equipment in HD 283. Due to low harvest, we changed to an unlimited OTC rifle B-license with rifle opportunity in 2014, limited to private lands west of Rattlesnake Creek/Wilderness. In 2018-19 we changed the HD 283 specific OTC B license to the Region 2 OTC B license (002-00). We also instituted a late shoulder season hunt on private lands west of Rattlesnake Creek/Wilderness with the 002-00 B-license to replace the game damage hunt. We proposed the late shoulder season hunt when our most recent survey data indicated the population was still over objective but the population fell to within objective in 2018.

**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 population objective is 240 – 360 elk for the North Hills and Evaro elk herds within the larger HD 283. The spring 2019 aerial count of the North Hills and Evaro elk herds was below the population objective at 146 observed elk. We repeated this count in a separate flight to double-check our results, but we obtained the same count both times. The objective of this proposal is to reduce the harvest of antlerless elk and bring the population back within objective. We are concerned that harvest applied with the current B licenses in place would drive this small elk population sharply downward and diminish its value to Missoula residents.

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

MFWP personnel will measure success of the proposed changes by annually monitoring hunter harvest survey data, as well as spring aerial survey data, including total elk numbers, calf:cow ratios, distribution of elk, and percentage of bulls.

This proposal will be successful if we see the elk population grow back to within objective.

**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).**

Based upon 2019 spring survey data (146 observed elk), the population is now below population objective. The population objective is for 300 elk +/- 20% in the North Hills and Evaro elk herds. This population was over objective for 11 of the past 12 years,

with 2018 being the first year the population was within objective since 2006 (see Fig. 1).

Antlerless harvest increased in 2014 (Fig. 2) when the OTC B license became available. Late season game damage hunts have also been more successful in recent years due to greater landowner participation and improved coordination between landowners and hunters which helped increase harvest.

Because the population was within objective as of spring 2018 we worked with 7 landowners (the primary landowners who allow hunting) to institute a voluntary quota of 20 for the 2018-19 late shoulder season and 17 antlerless elk were reported harvested. An additional 2 elk were reported on neighboring properties. Harvest survey data for the 2018-19 season was not available at the time this proposal was written.

**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, temperature / precipitation information).**

We have now had 3 years of 'harder' winters, and we have seen a decline in calf recruitment (Fig. 3). We had a particularly hard late winter in the Missoula valley this year. This spring we documented 16 calves:100 cows in the North Hills/Evaro herd and in 2018 we documented 18 calves:100 cows.

We did not detect a redistribution of elk in either the Mt Jumbo area (immediately to the east of the North Hills/Evaro herd) or the Mill Creek herd (on west side). Mt Jumbo elk were stable and the Mill Creek herd count was down 16% from the previous year.

**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).**

I shared this information with Hellgate Hunters & Anglers and received initial positive feedback on the proposal. I have also talked individually with several sportsmen who were supportive. I will be presenting this information to the North Hills Elk Working Group on May 29, 2019. I have also shared the spring survey information and proposal info with all North Hills landowners that participated in the coordinated late shoulder hunt, and with Roger Indreland, another large landowner. I am still working on vetting this proposal with more landowners and sportsmen.

**Submitted by:**

**Liz Bradley, Wildlife Biologist**

Date: 5/14/19

Approved:

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Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved/Modified by:

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Name / Date

Figure 1. North Hills and Evaro Elk Trend Counts 1980 – 2019.

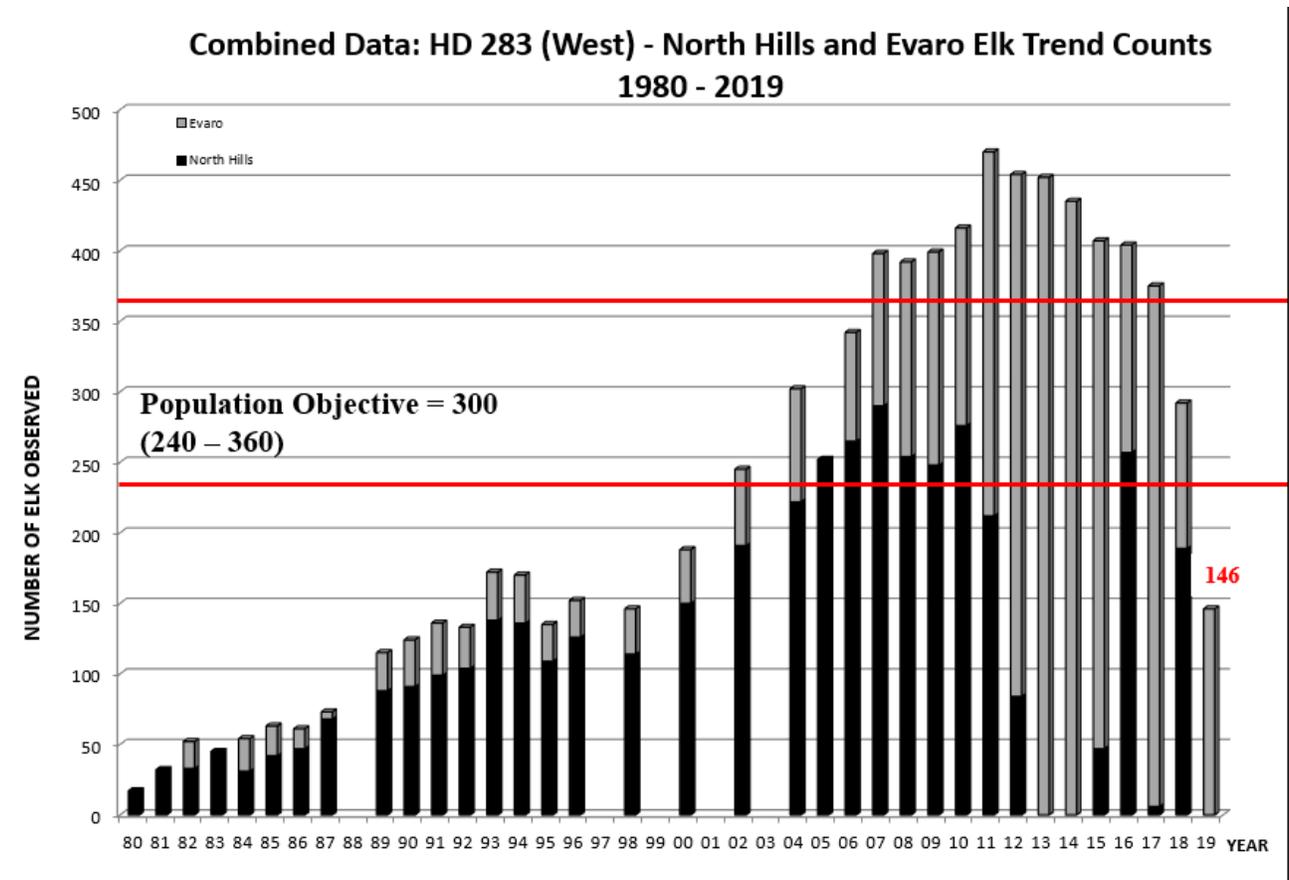


Figure 2. Known antlerless harvest in the North Hills of Missoula during general season and during late season game damage hunts.

### Known Antlerless Elk Harvested in North Hills

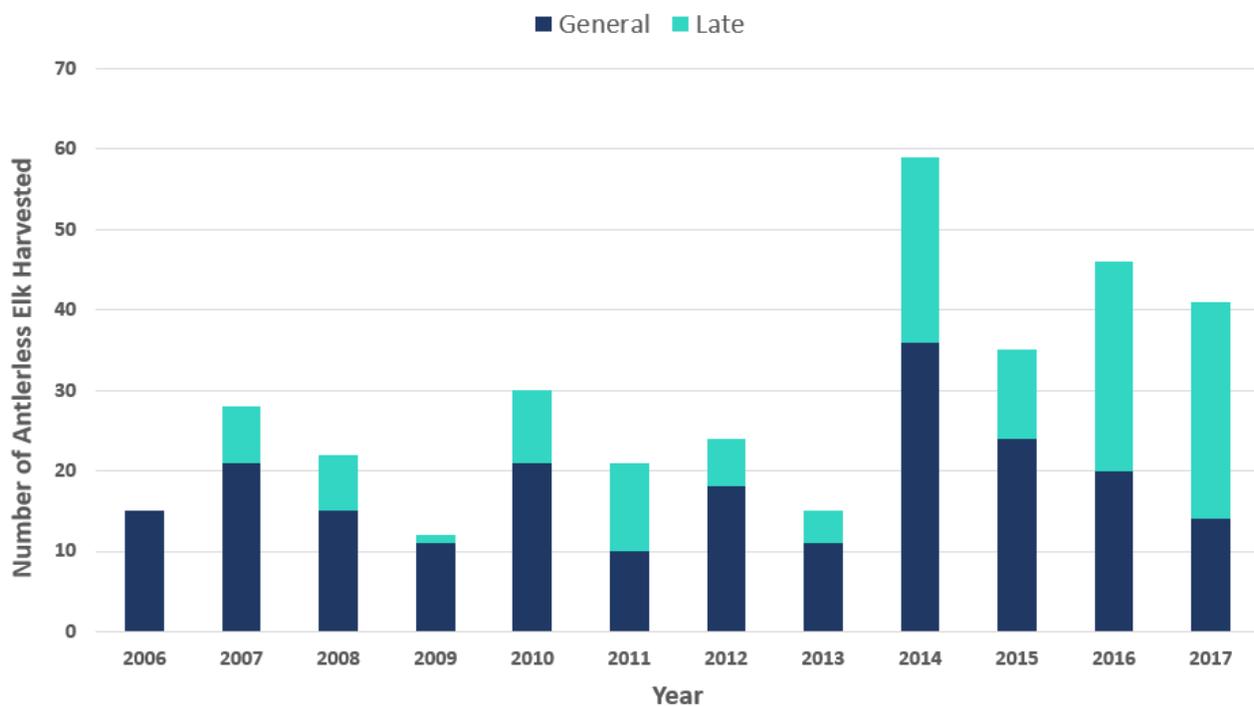


Figure 3. Elk classification (cows & calves) and calf:cow ratios for observed elk in North Hills/Evaro herds from 2013-2019.

### HD 283 North Hills/Evaro - Elk Classification

