



Draft Changes for 2022-2023 Hunting Regulations:

- Combine hunting districts 391 and 392 (new HD 391)
- Season structure would be:
 - Brow-tined bull or antlerless elk during the general archery season;
 - General rifle season structure would be five weeks brow-tined bull, with brow-tined bull or antlerless elk off National Forest (USFS) land, i.e. not valid for antlerless elk on USFS land;
 - Shoulder season portion would be eliminated; no shoulder season in HD;
 - One antlerless elk B-license (391-00) for the HD (Not valid on National Forest (USFS) lands); 389-00 elk B-license would be eliminated;
 - Separate youth/PTHFV seasons would be eliminated to match HD 446 (east side of Big Belt Mountains) regulations.

Biological Implications:

Combining the existing observed objectives for the two HDs would yield a point objective of 1,350 (range +/- 20%: 1,100 - 1,650), so current combined observed elk numbers (1,387) would be within the new objective. While the number of observed brow-tined bulls in the current HD 392 have always been low, there usually were a decent number of observed yearling bulls present. However, in 2021, yearling bulls were only 35% of the long-term average, so there is desire to eliminate yearling bull harvest opportunity in the new HD to allow those bulls to at least get another year older for breeding purposes. The desire is to continue to allow antlerless elk harvest off USFS land to address private land elk numbers while allowing elk numbers on USFS land, where relatively few elk are currently found during the general rifle season, to hopefully increase.

Social Implications:

The proposal aligns with the directive to combine HDs and simplify regulations to the extent possible. The proposal is being made in part to make elk regulations across the main body of the Big Belt Mountains (current HDs 391, 392 and 446) more similar. For example, HD 446 has no separate youth/PTHFV regulation.

Some individuals may be opposed to the elimination of the separate youth/PTHFV season which allowed those groups to harvest any antlered bull as opposed to being restricted to brow-tined bulls.

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