



Draft Changes for 2022-2023 Hunting Regulations

- Combine HD511 and HD530 into a new HD535
- Add early and late shoulder seasons.
- Maintain but increase the either-sex elk permit valid in archery and rifle seasons from 300 permits to 400 permits.
- Create an either-sex archery permit valid in archery seasons
- Maintain the 411-00 elk B license
- Maintain the 005-00 license and increase the number to account for removed 595-00 elk B license.

Biological Implications:

- Habitat on the south side of the Big Snowy Mountains (HD511) and Little Snowy Mountains (HD530) is characterized by less precipitation, more south-facing ponderosa pine/shortgrass prairie winter range that transitions into sagebrush grassland habitat further south and east. Habitat on the north side of the Big Snowy Mountains (HD411) is characterized by more precipitation with more aspen, riparian and timbered habitat with interspersed wet meadows. Elk winter in larger numbers in HD511 and HD530, in part, because of these habitat differences. In addition, the landownership in HD511 and HD530 is composed of larger acreage agricultural landowners with mountain foothill habitat transitioning to shortgrass prairie. While HD411 has some large-acreage agricultural landowners it also has more subdivision and smaller land ownership parcels consisting of more timbered habitat with wet meadows. There is some elk movement on the west end of HD411 and HD511 between the districts and some elk movement on the east end of HD411 and HD530, which is why the entire Big and Little Snowy Mountains should be managed together for elk. They should not be managed together for other species like mule deer because mule deer populations are at or well below long term averages in HD511 and HD530 and have been in restrictive season types for many years, while HD411 mule deer have been under an either-sex standard regulation type. This combination of districts allows us to maintain historical harvest and survey data for future population analysis and simplifies the regulations for hunters. There are also a growing number of year-round resident elk in the ponderosa pine habitat in the southern portion of HD530. These elk have been growing in number for the last decade and will be surveyed for the first time in the 2022 winter. They have been counted

occasionally when traveling between mule deer surveys in HD530 or traveling to the Roundup airport as part of other aerial surveys. The current general license spike bull or antlerless elk regulation type increases overall bull and antlerless harvest in these districts that are over objective, while maintaining the either-sex elk permit needed to manage for older age class bulls is in accordance with the management objective in the species-specific plan.

- May increase either-sex elk harvest and either-sex elk hunting opportunity while continuing to manage for older age class bulls in accordance with the management objective in the species-specific plan. This license is also valid in HD411.
- Maintains elk harvest from archery hunters and the archery elk harvest opportunity that is lost by removing the 900-20 archery permit. This permit is also valid in HD411
- 411-00 elk B license was created to keep limited late-season hunting pressure on elk anywhere in the district including U.S. Forest Service lands. This hunting pressure may keep the elk from seeking refuge and becoming inaccessible on public lands while hunters have access to private land in the late season. This license is also valid in HD411.
- 005-00 license maintains antlerless elk hunting opportunity across the region in addition to the general elk license.

Social Implications:

- Maintains the management objective in the species-specific plan for managing for older age class bulls in the Snowy Mountains.
- Allows for liberal antlerless opportunity.
- Early and late shoulder seasons address game damage concerns on private lands. Simplifies the regulations by having one district on the north side of the Big Snowy Mountains (HD411) and one hunting district on the south side of the Big Snowy Mountains and Little Snowy Mountains (HD535).
- Some landowners voiced concern about increased hunting pressure and hunter access requests when permits increased from 200 to 300 and now permits are proposed to increase from 300 to 400.
- Some landowners voiced support for keeping limited-draw permits to manage the number of hunter access requests they receive for access.
- The increased number of either-sex elk permits may increase bull harvest.
- Some permit holders may have difficulty finding access to elk.
- Some landowners voiced concern about increased hunting pressure and hunter access requests when permits increased from 200 to 300 and now permits are proposed to increase from 300 to 400.
- Some landowners voiced support for keeping limited-draw permits to manage the number of hunter access requests they receive for access.

- B license provides additional antlerless elk harvest opportunity for hunters and gives landowners additional tools to manage elk on their land. Having this additional B license in the regulations increases regulation complexity. There has been opposition to hunting elk in the late season on public lands.
- Provides equitable archery and rifle limited-entry either-sex permit opportunity.
- Increases hunter opportunity and landowner flexibility in managing elk on their property.

Contact: Ashley Taylor, wildlife biologist, ataylor@mt.gov, 406-473-2504