ELK MANAGEMENT ACTIONS IN RESPONSE TO BRUCELLOSIS RISK

FWP REGION 5, SPRING 2013

FWP REGION 5 – MANAGEMENT ACTION #1

1. Type of action (dispersal hunt, hazing, fencing, etc.): Dispersal hunt.

2. Brief description of commingling: Approximately 600 elk winter in the western edge of HD 560 between Greeley Creek and Mission Creek. This herd starts the winter near Mt. Greeley around the headwaters of Peterson Creek, Greeley Creek and Locke Creek. As winter progresses the herd moves north and west down to lower elevations in Locke Creek and Work Creek. Elk have established this movement pattern over the last seven years as the herd has increased. This seasonal movement brings elk into the same pastures as cattle and in close proximity with cattle as early as January in some years with heavy snow pack, and as late as February or early March in years with minimal snow pack.

3. General location(s) of landowner(s) involved: This hunt took place in Park County immediately east of Mission Creek and south of I90 along the western edge of hunting district 560. Only one ranch was included in the hunt. No neighboring ranches were included as they did not have a commingling situation. However, neighbors who were likely to have elk displaced onto their lands were notified and visited with periodically throughout the hunt.

4. Do landowners allow public hunting access during general hunting season? Yes, this ranch allows public hunting for deer, elk and antelope during archery and rifle seasons. They meet or exceed department standards to qualify for game damage assistance.

5. Elk population status (below, at or above objective): The elk population objective for this portion of HD 560 is 300 elk combined from two herd units that winter in this area. During the winter of 2012-13 1,065 elk were observed in these two herd units, 255% above objective. The elk herd unit targeted during this hunt has increased from approximately 110 elk in the winter of 2000-01, to approximately 773 elk in the winter of 2012-13.

6. Start and stop date for action implementation (identify if fencing was permanent or temporary): The hunt ran from March 23rd -April 30th 2013.

7. Brief summary of action (include fence delivered, cost/cost shares, number of hunters involved, number/classification of elk harvested, etc.): Five cow elk were taken by 4 different hunters. One hunter took two elk. The hunt was restricted to antlerless elk only. In total, 16 hunters were notified from the HD 560 game damage roster. Most of these hunters did participate in the hunt and most hunted multiple days. No hunt coordinator was used and minimal effort was required to coordinate hunters from FWP. The landowner handled hunter scheduling.

8. Number and results of elk blood collections, if any: Blood samples were collected by hunters from four of the five harvested elk and submitted for brucellosis testing. All samples tested negative for brucellosis. The landowner was very supportive of brucellosis testing.

9. Did action reduce commingling? Based on the opinion of the landowner, commingling between elk and livestock was reduced dramatically as a result of the hunt. Elk frequently moved into cattle pastures during the hunt but only remained there for short periods of time until pushed out by hunters. Elk herd sizes were much smaller and frequency of elk using cattle occupied pastures was dramatically reduced. Elk appeared to 'learn' where the hunt area was and spent most of their time out of the hunt area on upper portions of ranch properties.

10. General summary consensus by cooperators, collaborators and participants: From an FWP perspective the hunt set up and administration worked smoothly, similar to a damage hunt. Minimal time was required for hunter coordination as the landowner handled most of that. Feedback from hunters was all positive. Several of the hunters knew the landowner and had hunted the ranch on previous occasions. Several hunters were new to the ranch but developed a positive relationship with the landowner and plan to return and hunt the ranch during the general season in the future. The landowner was satisfied with the dispersal of elk and the reduction of elk use in close proximity to cattle. The landowner had a positive experience with all hunters and would like to participate in a dispersal hunt again next year if the elk move back onto the ranch during the risk period.

11. Issues, concerns, short/long term circumstances or other comments: Almost half of the ranch was closed to hunting with the intent to maintain large areas on the ranch where elk could remain with relatively little disturbance. Nonetheless, two neighboring landowners expressed concern about elk being pushed onto their lands as a result of the hunt. One landowner was concerned with damage to hay fields; the other was concerned with elk in close proximity to his cattle which has not normally occurred at this time of year. Neither of these two landowners would currently qualify for game damage assistance. The potential for conflict with neighbors is moderate in this situation and probably increases the later into the spring the hunt is conducted. Regardless of efforts to avoid it, elk getting pushed onto neighboring lands may be an unavoidable consequence of these hunts and is an issue that will have to be carefully considered in each case.