

# **GENERAL SUMMARY REVIEW OF 2013 ELK MANAGEMENT IN AREAS WITH BRUCELLOSIS**

## **Elk Management Guidelines in Areas with Brucellosis Working Group**

**July 11, 2013 - Bozeman**

### COMMISSION ADOPTION AND PROCESS

FWP Commission endorsed recommendations in January 2013.

Recognizing transmission risk period had begun and that recommendations represented new management uncertainties with mixed public concern and advocacy, the FWP Commission:

- requested a 2013 work plan be presented at the February 2013 Commission meeting,
- made that 2013 work plan available for implementation, and
- required that a 2013 annual review and any 2014 work plans from any local working groups be presented at August 2013 Commission meeting to include public review and comment with final Commission endorsement at October 2013 meeting.

Given Commission discussion/adoption, management options may be made available again for implementation in 2014 via Commission-endorsed work plan(s) for 2014 and/or beyond.

Commission could re-adopt 2013 work plan as is or with modifications for use in 2014.

Commission discussion identified the need for tolerance and process above as new efforts are explored, applied, measured, and potentially adjusted or confirmed.

### MANAGEMENT EFFORTS/IMPLEMENTATION

For implementation of hazing, dispersal hunts and fencing projects, see management summaries from FWP administrative Regions 3 and 5. For 2013, these efforts were implemented directly from the 2013 work plan in the absence of local working groups and consistent with Commission direction. To date, the long term local working group concept identified in the recommendations has not evolved to the expectation of at least one wildlife advocacy group. Conversely, 2013 methodology appears to be generally supported by some landowners and existing local working groups at least.

In addition to hazing, dispersal hunts and fencing projects, FWP efforts included:

- reference to Montana legislature of recommendations and management efforts,

- three informational presentations by FWP attending local working group meetings to explore those working groups' interest in participation (awaiting meeting date confirmation from a fourth group),
- management summaries to FWP Communications Division to assist additional public education/outreach,
- staff white paper assignment for FWP Commission awareness/consideration of *Brucella* research/vaccine constraints,
- scheduled annual review meeting with original statewide Working Group, and
- response to public information requests.

Surveys to gauge public acceptance/tolerance were generally directed to a later date to ensure and benefit from additional public experience with new management efforts.

## EFFECTIVENESS

**Fundamental Objective #1:** *Minimize transmission from elk to livestock.*

- **PERFORMANCE:** No livestock brucellosis positives confirmed from Montana (pending ongoing surveillance/investigation by Montana Department of Livestock). Commingling events reduced with hazing, dispersal hunts and fencing.

**Fundamental Objective #2:** *Maximize acceptability of elk management tools and populations in the DSA for:*

*Sportspersons (measure with satisfaction survey),*

*Wildlife enthusiasts (measure with satisfaction survey),*

*Landowners (measure with satisfaction survey), and*

*Livestock producers (measure with satisfaction survey).*

- **PERFORMANCE:** By deliberate decision, no formal surveys of these constituents conducted in 2013 given limited public experience with management efforts. Public experience has been initiated with hunters, landowners and general public through direct participation, FWP process/communications and press. Current FWP perception is that hunters and landowners directly involved with implementation of management efforts are generally tolerant at least. Local working groups exposed to information presentation also appear largely tolerant with 2013 process and products. To date, there has been opposition expressed by at least one organized wildlife group.

**Fundamental Objective #3:** *Maximize cost effectiveness.*

- **PERFORMANCE:** Management actions within budget. Resources not spent on formal public surveys in this first year of implementation to allow additional time for public exposure to, awareness of and experience with brucellosis-related elk management efforts.

**Other:**

- Recommendations and 2013 implementation were positive contribution to APHIS review of Montana Designated Surveillance Area.
- Recommendations and 2013 implementation addressed two legislative proposals initiated prior to final Commission adoption. Legislative proposals ultimately did not move forward in large part due to the confirmation of Commission adoption and subsequent implementation.
- For FWP at least, recommendations and 2013 implementation have modified or replaced external discussions advocating such actions as test and slaughter and/or brucellosis eradication in elk.

**CONCLUSION**

Management efforts to date largely reflect the overall intent and desired effectiveness of the working group recommendations.

Implementation to date is within the latitude identified by Commission discussion and adoption.

Additional clarity and efforts required.

**POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS**

Additional clarity and direction needed for 2014 and beyond. This includes potential adjustments or confirmation of process/product to date. Specific reviewing focus should include issues/concerns identified in management summaries and public inputs as well as the local working group concept and/or 2014 work plan development. The Working Group may forward confirmation and/or modifying recommendations for consideration by FWP Commission.

Working Group may choose to develop and submit comment to proposed rule for increased testing of Montana cattle by Texas.