

## **Fundamental Objectives**

These guidelines also include “fundamental objectives” meant to describe management success and to help ensure a transparent assessment of how overall elk harvest management is progressing. Fundamental objectives address more than just population status and offer multiple metrics for the Commission to consider in their season setting decisions. Balancing private property rights and public trust management, they reflect the different concerns and values of private landowners and the general public. Given inherent different values across landowners and hunters, all fundamental objectives cannot be maximized. However, fundamental objectives can be optimized if landowner and hunter participation is sufficient to increase harvest during general and shoulder seasons in areas over objective. Shoulder seasons can only be successful at reducing elk numbers and should only be maintained in those areas where key landowners are committed to reducing elk to the identified objective. If that commitment is absent or subordinate to other interests shoulder seasons cannot be successful and fundamental objectives cannot be comprehensively addressed. Fundamental objectives are listed below and have no individual priority ranking. The intent of this proposal is for fundamental objectives to be generally achieved when shoulder season harvest criteria are met. An overall failure to meet fundamental objectives, or specific objectives acutely failing even while harvest criteria are met would prompt a review of harvest criteria. Status of fundamental objectives would be routinely assessed using direct measures (for example, number of districts at objective), public experiences (for example, access offered/received), and FWP field staff inputs (for example, landowner/hunter interactions).

### **FUNDAMENTAL OBJECTIVES**

#### **Elk considerations:**

- **Manage elk populations to objective as rapidly as possible.**
- **Increase harvest of elk, where appropriate.**

#### **Hunter and landowner considerations:**

- **Address problematic distributions of elk and elk harvest.**
- **Enhance free public access to bulls and cows on private land during the general seasons.**
- **Reduce exclusive access to elk.**
- **Enhance landowner flexibility to manage elk hunting on their property.**
- **Reduce game damage.**
- **Reduce hunter impacts on landowners (e.g., cost of hiring additional staff, loss of productivity, property damage from hunters, etc.).**
- **Simplify rules and regulations.**

### **Logistical considerations:**

- **Balance statewide consistency with local flexibility of regulations, rules, and policies.**
- **Keep staff time and cost down.**

<sup>a</sup>To account for annual variability in hunting conditions that might affect harvest and to account for variability in recruitment rates, a moving 3-year window is used with recruitment and harvest summed across those three years. While criteria identify a 3-year window, the Commission may remove any shoulder season any time it is determined criteria are not and will not be met.

<sup>b</sup>This applies if elk are present during the archery-only and 5-week general season. The intent is that most of the total annual harvest from all seasons combined occurs during the archery-only and 5-week general season and that shoulder season harvest adds to this rather than replaces it. Therefore, a number of bull elk and antlerless elk that is more than half the annual bull and cow recruitment, respectively, must be taken each year during the combined archery-only and 5-week general seasons. Harvest criteria for both bulls and cows must be met in order to propose maintaining any shoulder season unless it is broadly supported (see criteria 6 above). Once a shoulder season is removed from the regulations general season harvest criteria must be met before any shoulder season is re-proposed unless it is broadly supported (see criteria 6 above). Any proposed bull harvest during a shoulder season must be consistent with management objectives, must be by permit only and must meet the need to reduce bulls in areas that are over objective.

<sup>c</sup>“Recruitment” is the estimated number of 11-12 month old calves in the population in late winter or spring. Annual recruitment for both bulls and cows will be determined by the area biologist using best available data. To estimate the total number of cow and bull calves recruited s/he will need:

- Survey data or another estimator of herd size and composition
- An estimate of sightability
- An estimate of bull:cow ratio among 11-12 month old calves

Example: Using herd count and composition data and adjusting for sightability, a biologist estimates that during the past three years a total of 300 (an average of 100 per year) 11-12 month old calves were recruited. Using check station data, information from wildlife literature, or other data it was estimated that 60%, or 180, of the calves were cow calves and 40%, or 120, were bull calves. Using harvest survey point estimates more than half of the number of animals, or more than 90 cows (an average of 30 per year) and 60 bulls (an average of 20 per year), had to be taken during the combined archery-only and 5-week general seasons over that same three year period. In addition, at least 180 cow elk (an average of 60 per year) and at least 300 total elk (an average of 100 per year) had to be taken during all seasons combined (archery-only, 5-week general and shoulder season) to justify continuing the shoulder season.

<sup>d</sup>The intent is to expand the opportunity to address elk numbers and distribution problems that have not been effectively addressed with this or other season structures. It is not the intent to create an opportunity to continue shoulder seasons in districts where lack of reasonable public harvest opportunities during the general season is the primary cause of elk numbers exceeding population objectives.