



WGFD

Conserving Wildlife, Serving People

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Second Week of Test-and-Removal

[Pinedale]— Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) personnel trapped 255 elk at Fall Creek and Muddy Creek feedgrounds this past week. This was the most successful second attempt at trapping that has occurred in three years of the five-year project. Cold weather and elk behavior likely contributed to the success, along with adaptive techniques used by personnel.

At Fall Creek feedground, one additional elk tested positive for brucellosis. This brought the total to 22 elk, or 11.6% of the test eligible females, processed in this first year of trapping at the feedground. Personnel from Wyoming State Veterinary Laboratory, University of Wyoming, and WGFD removed the necessary biological samples to be cultured for valuable *Brucella abortus* research.

At Muddy Creek feedground, six additional female elk tested seropositive and were removed from the feedground, bringing the total to 36 for the year, or 13.6%. One of the seropositive elk that previously escaped at the Muddy Creek trap was recaptured and removed. The remaining three will likely be culled off of feedlines later this winter when a team is available to collect biological samples for crucial research.

"I can't commend our personnel enough on the professionalism that has been shown throughout this project," said Assistant Wildlife Division Chief, Scott Talbott. "With the

adversity of trapping two traps simultaneously, unpredictable weather, and elk behavior, this year was very successful and continues to build on what we've learned in this experiment."

Numbers decreased in the second attempt, as elk were hesitant to enter the traps. In fact, personnel used night vision technology in the capture at Fall Creek feedground because elk would only enter the trap after sunset. Only 97 elk were in the trap at the time, of which six were test eligible animals that hadn't previously been tested.

At Muddy Creek, 41 new elk were captured and tested. This brought the total elk tested on the feedground to 154, or 62% of the test eligible females on the feedground.

"We caught fewer elk in our second attempt, but our experience shows that we'll be most successful at trapping the first time we try for the year," said Scott Werbelow, Game Warden Coordinator, who supervised the trapping operation. "We've likely completed trapping for the season."

However, this year's catch at Muddy Creek is the highest proportion of test eligible cows to date in three years of trapping, exceeding the first year's efforts by 2%. A final comprehensive report on this year's trapping efforts will be published and available to the public later this year.

A total of 36 seropositive elk, or those that were considered most likely to transmit the disease, were transported to a USDA approved slaughter facility in Idaho this year. The meat from these animals will be donated to the public through the Rocky Mountain Food Distribution Center, which donates to qualified individuals throughout Wyoming.

The Wyoming Governor's Brucellosis Coordination Team outlined the pilot project and complementary research as a critical component of managing brucellosis in wildlife. Brucellosis transmitted to cattle herds from elk caused Wyoming to lose its brucellosis free status in 2004. Wyoming regained its Brucellosis Class Free status in September 2006, however a reservoir of

brucellosis remains in western Wyoming's elk and bison herds. Ongoing research is part of the effort to eliminate brucellosis in wildlife and maintain Class Free status for the state's livestock producers.

The Governor's Brucellosis Coordination Team recommended the pilot test-and-removal experiment last five years. Currently, the WGFD plans to expand the project to the nearby Scab Creek feedground in 2009. This feedground is also in the Pinedale Elk Herd Unit. During this test-and-removal experiment no more than 10% (about 191 elk) can be removed from the population each year.