Cody Elk Working Group  
January 25, 2012  
6:00-9:00 p.m.  
(Approved Jan. 30, 2012)

**Group Members In Attendance:** Curt Bales, Jim Klebba, Chip Clouse, Tim Fagan, Barney Henrich, Theresa Lineberger, Lee Livingston, Doug McWhirter, Steve Brock, Dan Morris, Justin Sanders, and Jim Yockey.  
**Absent:** None  
**Facilitator:** Dennie Hammer  
**Notetaker:** Dan Smith

**Observers:** Tim Metzler, Wesley Livingston, George Weiser, Rick Adair, Leslie Nistico, Jake Clark, Alan Osterland, Travis Crane, Michael Darby, and Andy Pills (USFS).

**Welcome**
- Hammer started the meeting at 6:00pm.  
- Hammer recognized some new faces in the audience, and reviewed the roles of the group and of the observers in the room.  
- Reviewed agenda for the meeting and asked for additional agenda items.  
  - Clouse added the following agenda items:  
    - Department website’s link to the working group notes, presentations, and meeting minutes was not working.  Hammer advised the Department has a new webpage, and the problem with the broken link was being resolved.  
    - A discussion of the elk signs on Highway 120.  
    - A discussion of publicity of previous meetings.  
  - Livingston added the following agenda item:  
    - A discussion on the definition of “quality”.

**Elk Warning Signs On Highway 120 near Meeteetse**
- Wyoming Department of Transportation has located dynamic message signs for elk along Highway 120 to notify drivers of potential elk along the highway.  
- A lot of elk are being observed on and near the highway. Where are they coming from? McWhirter stated they are most likely hunt area 61 elk more rather than hunt area 66 elk.  
- McWhirter advised the group that during recent post-season classification survey flights, Bart Kroger, Worland wildlife biologist, counted more than 4,000 elk in hunt area 61, and that over 700 elk were observed in that portion of hunt area 58 south of the Hoodoo Headquarters. This is the highest number of elk ever counted in these areas.  
- McWhirter stated that the 2011 Meeteetse area hunt management coordinator effort was considered successful. The two coordinators worked with landowners and hunters in areas 61, 62 and 63; approximately 170 elk were harvested—103 from the Meeteetse Creek drainage.

**Publicity/Coverage of the elk working group**
- Is the public recognizing that information being published in the newspapers is draft recommendations, and not the final season that will be in place? The group may still revisit hunt area recommendations before they are presented to the Game and Fish Commission, and ultimately the Commission will have the final say. Everything is currently in draft form.  
  - Most of the group believed the public was aware it was in draft or recommendation form, and believed it was being presented that way in the media.
Clouse advised members were quitting SFW because of what they believe the group is or is not doing. He advised since Christmas he has taken 44 phone calls and six e-mails. People are confused, and the confusion leads to anger. Do upper levels in the Department (in Cheyenne) realize this working group is a “hot bed” topic?

Saunders advised he is getting requests from the Cody Chamber of Commerce and the County Commissioners to get updates from the group.

- Should this be done as a group? Or as an article for the newspaper? Should it be now, or when all areas are done? It was decided to wait for now and give it more thought.

Ice-Breaker

- No ice-breaker needed tonight after above discussions.

Approval of Minutes from November 17, 2011

- Group approved meeting minutes as written.

Overview of economics discussion

- Fagan, Lineberger, McWhirter, Clouse, Yockey, and Sanders met on December 15, 2011 to discuss the economic effects of elk hunting.

- Handout:
  - Based on historic values, total elk hunter expenditure averaged statewide is $762.84/hunter.
  - 2,728 elk hunters hunted in the Cody elk herd in 2009 for a total expenditure of $2,081,026.00
  - Using a multiplier effect of 3 (most economists use 6-8) and a 3% inflation rate, the estimated economic impact for the Cody elk herd unit is $6,623,238.95. Everyone considered this a very conservative estimate.

- Discussion:
  - Is there, or what is the difference between resident and non-resident hunters?
    - Very hard to break out. Non-resident hunters spend more while they are here.
    - Numbers are based on the four months of hunting seasons.
    - Resident and non-resident were grouped all together to get an average number per hunter.
    - Clouse tried to break it out, but the process blew up with issues such as special, full and reduced priced licenses for non-resident hunters.
  - Economic impact seems very low at $762.84/hunter. Most felt that with scouting, livestock, etc. the number should be higher.
  - It is important to reflect this economic value in the recommendations, including stuff not included in estimating expenses.
  - Clearly there is an economic benefit, but we are here to make management decisions, not economic decisions. However it must be a consideration.
  - Are there state-wide resident versus non-resident ratios?

Overview of Bales’ summary sheet

- Bales stated he wasn’t completely satisfied with the results for hunt area 59 after he went home and thought about it some more. He took the time to create a spreadsheet (model) of the elk in hunt area 59. It appears we are killing more bulls than we have.

- Discussion of spreadsheet:
  - It appears we are killing all the bulls, but they’re still there.
  - This is why the Department uses adaptive management. It is not an exact science. The department tries methods of hunting, then evaluates if we are leaning too far one way or the other.
    - The Game and Fish feel that bull ratios are the least reliable piece of classification data in many areas. Hard to get an accurate count of wintering bulls.
Elk are counted on winter range. Migration is very important. However, elk numbers in Yellowstone National Park are also declining.

All agree there is a declining bull elk population, but the situation may not be as dire as presented in the Bales model. The wheels are not going to fall off of the Cody elk herd.

Survey numbers are increasing in most of the areas we are looking at.

Brock advised he had done a spreadsheet model earlier in the process, and had also come up with a declining bull population.

- McWhirter again reiterated that it is an adaptive management strategy. When the model says $x$, and you actually see $y$, you make adjustments.

Clouse questioned why elk do not move in to the Northfork Shoshone River valley anymore?

- Livingston advised elk are still moving in from the south, but just not as many. From the north, less elk results in more feed for the remaining elk, and less need to move.

Does hunting pressure prevent the migration from the park?

- No. When snow levels hit a certain point, the elk migrate. Hunting may temporarily disrupt it, but the migration still occurs.

**Public Comment**

- Brock suggested public comment should be taken in the middle of the meeting. This may allow for additional discussion on a topic, or provide other topics for discussion. The group agreed.

  - Leslie Nestico – See Handout.
    - If Wyoming’s revised wolf management plan is adopted and wolves are delisted, the Game and Fish will have the authority to control predation in areas where elk are being unacceptably impacted.
    - JCR (Job Completion Report) reports total population of the Cody elk herd as being above objective, but certain areas within the herd unit are being impacted. This needs to be reported to the Commission.
    - Population objective is 18 years old and needs to be addressed.

**Break – 7:25-7:35**

**Review of season limitations and their effects**

- PowerPoint presentation by McWhirter
  - What do hunters want? What is quality?
  - Management Strategies
    - General license, limited quota, full price license, reduced price license, archery only license
    - Season length, open/close dates, point restrictions
  - Biological potential
    - The growth rate of the herd.
    - The larger the growth rate, the more animals available for harvest.

**Discussion on Quality vs. Opportunity**

- Two different definitions of quality: quality of experience vs. quality of the animal.
  - All in the eyes of the beholder.
  - Trophy hunting. Trophy hunters want a big 6-point bull in order to call it quality.
  - Whole hunting experience. The idea of hunting with friends and family and successfully harvesting an elk is considered quality.

Hammer noted that the group needs to be able to explain to the public why they make the recommendations they make and how it ties to quality and opportunity.

Does the group need to define “quality” and “opportunity”?
There is a segment of the hunting public that thinks “quality” has diminished.

The group may not be able to come to consensus on what quality is.

The group decided to move on to recommendations without trying to define quality.

Use of Public Comments

- Hammer questioned the group on how they wanted to use public comment. They had heard some public input before the break, now what do they do with it.
  - Listen, digest, and address at a later time.
  - If pertinent immediately, then respond. If not absorb and address later.
  - Any member of the group should be able to discuss an issue if they want to.
- The group agreed to digest the public comment and advise Chairperson Sanders if an item needed to be added to a future agenda.

Hunt Area 60

- No count block objective in hunt area 60—no elk winter in the Thorofare.
- How many elk end up in hunt area 60, and how many pass through to the park?
  - Fagan advised the survey flight counted approximately 2,400 elk in August; about ½ in hunt area 60 and ½ in the Thorofare.
  - McWhirter estimated there were 2,500-3,000 elk that summer in the Thorofare.
- Increasing harvest in hunt areas 58, 59, and 61 may affect hunt area 60 because of the migration.
  - The group has recommended a reduction of approximately 1,500 elk in the front country in the draft recommendations suggested to this point.
  - A lot of that harvest will be non-migratory.
- Fagan advised that parts of hunt area 60 are good, other parts are not.
  - The approximate breakdown of Thorofare hunters is 80% non-resident (outfitted) hunters, 20% resident hunters. Hunter success averaged 59%.
  - Some parts are hunted too hard.
  - Some parts need to be regulated.
  - Some parts of hunt area 60 have low hunter success.
  - Resident hunters tend to self-regulate. If the hunting is bad, they stop going. Outfitted hunters are harder to self-regulate because it is a business.
- Since 2001, the number of non-resident hunters has remained about the same at approximately 300. The number of resident hunters has declined. What happened to the resident hunters?
  - Area is overhunted.
  - Hunting was bad in the early 80’s and then the fires occurred and elk numbers climbed. As a result, hunters were spoiled in the 90’s. Instead of killing any bull, hunters were looking for 350 point or better bulls. Now, it’s more like it was in the 80’s—but not as dire.
  - Hunting not as good, grizzly bears, hunters moving more toward trophy hunting.
  - How can we limit hunting to make it better?
    - Reduce non-resident general quota.
    - Point restrictions.
    - Some outfitters are self regulating – imposing a 6-point limit on their hunters.
    - There are a number of factors affecting resident hunters decline in the Thorofare;
    - Economy. People are selling off livestock and equipment.
    - Grizzly bear numbers and conflicts have increased.
    - Getting over Deer Creek Pass when it snows.
    - Dangers of being so remote.
- McWhirter noted that calf production may be 20-25% less now than it was in the 1980’s.
  - Reducing cow populations will reduce the number of bulls produced.
Harvest in the front country will be focused on non-migratory elk.

- Hammer posed the question, “What is good hunter success?”
  - Varies area to area.
    - Difficult terrain decreases success.
    - High access areas increase success.
  - In antlered elk seasons around Cody, 30-35% success is pretty good.
  - In outfitted hunts:
    - Lineberger noted that it had been a long time since any of their hunters had not had an opportunity at a 5-point or better bull.
      - They limit their hunters to 6/hunt. Only 30/year.
- Without further discussion, what is each members recommendation for Area 60 right now:
  - Henrich – Need more information.
  - Klebba – 6-point season or split season.
  - Morris – Need more information.
  - Yockey – Need to look at it more.
  - Fagan – Need to look at season lengths.
  - Brock – The group needs to be really conservative around the park. Need to go to limited quota.
    Consider moving Mountain Creek and Hollow Creek in to hunt areas 55 and shorten season.
  - Lineberger – The area is 100% migratory elk. There is reason to protect spikes and cows. Bull hunter numbers are correcting themselves and decreasing. There needs to be some back-country harvest before they move to private land. No need for limited quota.
  - Sanders – Need more time to digest.
  - Livingston – No change without further discussion.
  - McWhirter – There is an issue of fairness. Should we reduce bull harvest in the Thorofare to have them available to hunters in the Northfork valley later in the season? Productivity (calf recruitment) of the herd is not what it was. Bull harvest is going to decline. We need to address that.
  - Bales – Need to reduce harvest, not necessarily opportunity.
  - Clouse – Need to protect the resource and have opportunity. Propose a non-resident regional area similar to deer areas. What does it take to get the word to Cheyenne that this is a “big deal?”

Next Meeting
January 30, 2012 – 6:00-9:00pm – Cody Regional Office

Future Meeting
February 7, 2012 – 6:00-9:00pm – Cody Regional Office

Meeting Adjourned at 9:25pm