Cody Elk Working Group  
February 27, 2012   6:00pm - 9:00pm  
(Approved 3-5-12)

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

Welcome
- Hammer started the meeting at 6:00pm.
- Hammer recognized Commissioner Mike Healy in the audience and commented to the group that the Commission is interested and aware of what the group is doing.
- Hammer acknowledged the large audience group, and reiterated the role of the audience and the working group. He emphasized to the audience that comments would only be allowed during the designated time at the end of the meeting. The audience was welcome to talk to group members during the break, and before and after the meeting.
- Alan Osterland (WGFD Cody Regional Wildlife Supervisor) addressed the group.
  - Thanked the group for their participation and recognized the hard decisions they were making.
  - Commented he was impressed with the dynamics of the group and how they were working together.
  - Gave his thoughts on the working group process:
    - The group has a good facilitator and the group should use his expertise and take the time to let the process work.
    - In the end, the group should have unified recommendations.
  - Recognized to the audience that the Cody Elk Herd is a passionate topic. However, it is important that the working group feels like it can do its job. The audience needs to remain respectful at the meetings.

Approval of Meeting Minutes from February 7, 2012
- Clouse stated that during Chris Queen’s presentation on the Clarks Fork Elk Herd, Queen had stated the herd may need to be split in to two herds. Clouse would like to add the comment to the minutes.
  - Bales commented that Queen thought it would work if the herd was split.
- The group decided to add the following statement to the minutes under Queen’s presentation; “Splitting the herd unit may be an option.”
- Meeting minutes approved with addition.
Ice-Breaker
- Hammer gave a hand-out on the group’s accomplishments to date, and asked them to look it over.
- The accomplishments will help the group answer questions about what has been done so far, and give a sense of where we have been.

Cody Elk Working Group Goals (continued from last meeting)
- **Goal: Redefine Cody Herd Unit.**
  - How would it be redefined?
    - Front country/back country
      - Splitting it now may eliminate hunting in the back country. Should have been split long ago.
    - McWhirter advised that in the Clarks Fork Herd Unit there is a fairly distinct non-migratory group and a migratory group of elk. It could possibly be looked at separately.
      - There are major issues with recruitment, but not with elk numbers.
      - Significant hunting opportunity has been lost in order to keep the elk numbers there.
    - McWhirter advised the Cody Elk Herd has a lot of movement and the elk mix a lot. There are not distinct groups to split apart.
    - Clouse stated the way elk numbers are reported is “not the truth”.
    - Bales commented that elk in all the Cody Elk Herd hunt areas are migrating back to the Thorofare in the summer. How can it be split?
    - There are groups of elk that don’t migrate, but not entire hunt areas. In order to split it, there must be distinct herds.
    - McWhirter advised a herd is defined as a group of elk that occupy a specific area that does not mix with other groups of elk and includes summer and winter range.
    - Do count block objectives get at subpopulations?
      - Count block objectives help the Department divvy up the elk.
    - Could hunt areas 51, 52, and 55 be a herd?
      - Hunt area 55 elk end up on the Southfork and as far as Jim Creek, so they mix with other elk.
      - Maybe hunt areas 51, 52, and the north side of hunt area 55?
    - Clouse stated he would like to keep redefining the herd unit as a goal for the group. The group needs to identify that there is a problem with elk in areas adjacent to Yellowstone National Park.
      - The group is identifying the problem, but there is no distinct group to split off the herd. The count block objective does what this goal is trying to accomplish.
      - Clouse advised his group wants to keep this goal. If there is a problem with the elk, everyone should know it.
• Gaining political power for elk outside of Wyoming (sending a message to Washington) is not part of the group’s charter.
• Bales suggested removing the goal, but discuss it as a recommendation at a later date.
• Lineberger suggested that instead of changing herd boundaries, the group should look at changing how the population numbers are reported.
• Hammer agreed to revisit the topic at a future meeting.
• The group decided to table the goal for now, but consider it as a recommendation.

• **Goal: Manage for minimal conflicts on private property and public lands – includes disease transmission, crop depredation, and grazing pressure.**
  • This goal was suggested by Bales as a combination of three of the original goals.
  • The group accepted the goal as written.

• **Goal: Focus on Problem Statement.**
  • Have to keep an eye on the big picture.
  • The group accepted the goal as written.

• **Goal: Increase hunter recruitment/retention and opportunity.**
  • The group accepted the goal as written.

• **Goal: Ensure healthy and sustainable elk populations over the short and long term.**
  • The group accepted the goal as written.

• **Goal: Design hunting seasons to manage for agreed upon count block numbers.**
  • The group accepted the goal as written.

• Further discussion on tabled goal from previous meeting:
  • **Allocate fair license numbers in each hunt area of the Cody Elk Herd for both resident and non-resident hunters.**
    • Fagan asked if this goal pertained to hunt area 60?
      • Brock advised in hunt area 60, non-resident hunters harvest 85% of the elk. In hunt area 55, residents have 70% of the tags, but only 30% of the harvest.
    • The concern is not only the number of licenses, but the percentage of the harvest by non-residents.
      • Lineberger pointed out that harvest data show that there are hunt areas with a high percentage of resident hunters, that still have a low percentage of harvest.
      • Brock advised that it still should be a goal to work on.
  • How do you help resident hunters harvest more elk?
Brock suggested fewer guided non-resident hunters would leave more elk available for resident hunters to harvest. Resident hunters can’t compete with outfitted hunters, and there is a lot of pressure by the guided hunters.

Livingston commented that everyone on the group may not always agree, but we do not want to become – or even be perceived as becoming – enemies amongst ourselves. The group needs to work together.

- Equity in harvest between resident and non-resident hunters is difficult to achieve.
- The opportunity already exists for all resident hunters to hunt in area 60 on a general license. Residents have more opportunity now than non-resident hunters.
- The total number of non-resident general licenses statewide was 4,511 in 2009 and 4,326 in 2010. There are currently 42 general license areas to hunt statewide.
- The equity issue can be addressed through licensing.
  - Brock agreed if it were changed to limited quota.

Outfitted hunters are generally more successful than non-outfitted hunters.

Overall, non-resident hunters are more successful than resident hunters.

- Perhaps more time or effort is put forth because of the higher expense of the licenses, travel, motels, etc.
- Bales noted that on the TE Ranch, resident hunters do not work as hard as the non-resident hunters do to harvest an elk.

Brock advised that the reason he suggested the goal was that he was looking for a tool to help make it fairer for a resident hunter. Elk belong to Wyoming, and harvest should be more equitable for resident hunters.

- Non-resident hunter numbers are higher, and their harvest is higher in hunt area 60.

Hammer asked if Brock was suggesting fewer outfitters in the Thorofare?

- Brock responded that he had nothing against outfitters as long as the resource could support it. In hunt area 60 the need for fewer outfitters exists.
- Residents should have rights to Wyoming’s wildlife.

Sanders suggested the goal be changed to, “Manage the equitable opportunities between commercialization and WY residents for the Cody Elk Herd.”

- Hammer advised that commercialization (outfitting) was outside the parameters of the group.
- Bales added it needs to be done on a hunt area by hunt area basis as the group makes recommendations.

Fagan suggested the idea of this goal would be covered during the hunt area recommendations for each hunt area. Does it need to be a goal?

Livingston commented that as an outfitter, he provides a service to hunters, - not necessarily non-resident or resident. The group was formed to make recommendations to manage the resource, not the hunters.
Nothing is preventing a resident from hunting or from using an outfitter.
- Even with no outfitters in the Thorofare, the number of resident hunters may not change, and neither may the success.
- The group decided to remove the statement as a goal, and use the idea as a tool during the hunt area discussions.

Cody Elk Survey and Harvest Data Presentation – McWhirter
- Cody elk survey data
  - Observed 7,346 elk – more than ever counted before.
    - The Cody Elk Herd Unit objective is 5,600 elk.
  - McWhirter used charts and tables to display the survey data and count block objectives for each hunt area.
  - McWhirter presented post-season classification data.
- Does the high bull ratio contribute to a high calf ratio? Conversely, would reducing the bull ratio in hunt area 61 reduce the pregnancy rate and therefore reduce the calf ratio? And the opposite in the Thorofare?
  - McWhirter advised that studies show that even single digit bull ratios still produce high pregnancy rates. The number of bull elk in the Thorofare should be sufficient to cover all the cows.
  - To reduce bull ratios in hunt area 61 low enough to affect pregnancy rates would be more than the Department is comfortable doing.
- Is the timing of the migration affecting calf ratios?
  - McWhirter advised that no matter where the elk from the Thorofare calf, the calf numbers are low.” Based on data from the Clarks Fork Herd unit, calving location does not make a difference.

Hunt Area 60
- No count block objective – elk do not winter in hunt area 60.
- August pre-season survey data – hunt area 60 and southern YNP combined:
  - Total number of elk surveyed: 2,515
  - 27:100 calf ratio
  - 10:100 yearling bull ratio
  - 17:100 adult bull ratio
  - 27:100 total bull ratio
- If the general season is removed from Thorofare, what will happen in other areas.
  - Lineberger advised she had heard other areas will follow suit.
- Harvest has been stable over last two years.
  - Gen license hunters – 186 bulls harvested in 2011
  - Gen license hunters – 184 bulls harvested in 2010
- Hunter effort is stable over last two years – 8.7 days/harvest
- Hunt area 61 elk contribute to harvest in hunt areas 59, 60, and 61.
• Concern is over the sustainability of harvest in hunt areas 59 and 60.
• Lineberger presented some data from Doug Brimeyer, WGFD Biologist in Jackson.
  o Jackson elk herd surveys resulted in 17.5:100 calf ratio, and 19:100 bull ratio.
  o Jackson will manage conservatively the back country elk, and more liberally the front
country elk.
  o Jackson will have a general season with spikes excluded in 2012. Jackson is not
considering limited quota seasons at this time.
  o Brimeyer would be happy with calf ratios of 25:100.
• Prior to the high number of elk in the Greybull River, how did hunt area 60 sustain itself?
  o The calf ratios in the Clarks Fork Herd Unit were approximately 35:100 cows. There is
no data for the Cody Herd Unit.
  o McWhirter advised that in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, there were approximately
2,000 elk migrating to the Thorofare with calf ratios of 35:100 cows.
  o Currently the calf ratio in hunt area 61 is 34:100 cows. Summer calf ratios in hunt area
60 are 27:100 cows. McWhirter discussed the idea that when front country elk are
reduced to count objectives, the elk migrating to the Thorofare would have calf
production approximately 23% (not the 8% in the notes) less than in the late 1980’s, early
1990’s. This would result in lower bull numbers than before.
• What percentage of the Greybull River elk migrates to the Thorofare?
  o Approximately 70% go to the Thorofare, 20% to Boulder Basin.
• The discussion was stopped to allow for the public comment portion of the meeting.

Public Comment
• Randy Blackburn (submitted in writing to Justin Sanders)
  o “I would like to see a six point or better elk season on a general license in the areas you
are studying. In addition, I would like to see a “youth any elk” season in these same
areas.”
• Ron Norberg
  o Why has elk management changed on the Northfork, but has not changed in the
Thorofare?
• Keith Dahlem
  o Looks like trend lines in the elk data are trending down.
  o Hunt area 56 – Where is the Department counting elk?
  o Looks like the elk are getting displaced further and further to the east.
• Randy Selby
  o Has attended every meeting and has observed that the group is sidestepping hunt area 55
where there is a general and a late season.
  o Has been counting elk in hunt area 55 since 1958, and there is not a sustainable elk
population for hunting in area 55.
• Rick Adair
When looking at going back to population numbers similar to the 1990’s, does that take into consideration the increase in predator populations (wolves and bears) that have occurred since that time?

**Next Meeting**  
Monday, March 5, 2012, 6:00pm-9:00pm, Big Horn Federal.

**Future Meetings**  
(TENTATIVE) Saturday, March 17, 2012, time TBD, Big Horn Federal.  
(TENTATIVE) Monday, March 26, 2012, 6:00pm-9:00pm, Big Horn Federal.

**Meeting Adjourned at 9:15pm**