Cody Elk Working Group
April 5, 2012     6:00pm – 9:00pm
Big Horn Federal Bank – Cody
(Approved 4-18-12)

Group members in attendance: Curt Bales, Jim Klebba, Chip Clouse, Tim Fagan, Barney Henrich, Theresa Lineberger, Lee Livingston, Tim Woolley (alternate), Steve Brock, Dan Morris, Justin Sanders, and George Weiser (alternate).
Absent: Doug McWhirter, Jim Yockey
Facilitator: Dennie Hammer
Notetaker: Dan Smith

Welcome
- Hammer started the meeting at 6:00pm and went over the agenda.
  - Agenda items:
    - Hunt Area 56
    - Public outreach – Recommendation Letter
    - Review of What the Group has Accomplished

Ice-Breaker
- Hammer handed out a “gift” of a wildlife calendar to each member and asked the group, “What is the significance of the front cover”? Lineberger advised it was the Easter Bunny.

Approval of Meeting Minutes from March 26, 2012
- Corrections:
  - Page 2, under Public Outreach, 2nd bullet. Change first sentence to read, “Clouse – Advised he had talked to one of the County Commissioners.”
  - Page 4, under Boundary Change for Hunt Area 55 and 56 Discussion, 2nd bullet, 3rd, sub-bullet. Add an additional sub-bullet: Clouse – Leave the boundaries as they are.
  - Page 8, 7th bullet, 5th sub-bullet, 2nd sub-bullet. Add Clouse and Bales to the 25 licenses vote.
  - Page 9, under Information on Wilderness Use “Pool”, 1st bullet. Change bullet to read, “Lineberger met with Rick Taylor, Black Rock Ranger Station, Bridger Teton Forest.”
  - Page 9, under Information on Wilderness Use “Pool”, 1st bullet, 1st sub-bullet. Change to read, “There is no “pool” yet.”
  - Page 9, under Information on Wilderness Use “Pool”, 1st bullet, 5th sub-bullet. Change beginning of bullet to read, “Thorofare outfitters requested that no additional permit days…”
- The Group approved the meeting minutes with above changes.
- Klebba – Asked for a clarification on the “pool”. If the pool is coming, what is it for?
Lineberger – If an outfitter is not using 75% of their permitted use, the Forest Service can take those use days away. The Forest Service will use those days as a pool to use as temporary permit days.
  - Clouse – Is that in writing?
  - Lineberger – Yes. It is written in to the outfitters use permit.

Hunt Area 56 Discussion (continued from last meeting)
- At the last meeting, the group had discussed a couple of options for possible season structure in hunt area 56.
  - 14-day general season with a late limited quota season
  - 21-day season
  - 14-day season off wilderness with 21-day season on wilderness
- Bales – would like to see a 14-day general season.
  - To reduce pressure during the general season.
  - Getting a mixed message on migrating elk.
    - Brock – Some elk are migrating from Yellowstone National Park (YNP) through hunt area 55 and in to hunt area 56.
    - Livingston – What determines a migratory elk? An elk that lives completely outside YNP in the front country is considered non-migratory. Movement still occurs.
  - Bales – Having a shorter general season will kill fewer of the non-migratory elk.
    - Have a late season to target YNP elk.
  - Livingston – A shorter season cuts in to opportunity. Not sure you are gaining much.
    - Hard to target one specific group of elk.
- Brock – There was an article in the Billings Gazette about the Northern Yellowstone elk.
  - 20,000 elk in 1992. The herd has declined 80%.
  - Population dropping despite all the things Montana is trying to do.
- Brock – Did some playing with the numbers looking at bulls harvested in 2011, and looking at calves and yearling bulls observed during survey flights. With the hunts designed by the group for hunt area 55, not saving a lot of bulls.
- Clouse – Type 9 licenses in hunt areas 55 and 56 harvested zero elk in 2011.
  - Brock – McWhirter advised at an earlier meeting that the long term average was about 20% hunter success.
  - Clouse – Elk are wild. Elk are counted in one place in August, and counted in another place in February. The group is trying to project a year and a half out. The number fluctuates each year.
    - Based on current numbers, hunt area 56 should stay the same.
    - May not be the same next year.
    - Concerned what the changes in hunt area 56 will do to hunt area 59. Changes in both areas will reduce opportunity.
- SFW wants to maintain opportunity.
- Hammer – Need to look at the trends.

- Fagan – Going back and forth between 14 days or 21 days. Could make a good argument for both ways.
  - Trying to consider the resident hunter, the elk, and the outfitter.
  - As far as the elk, for the short term, 3-5 years, it doesn’t matter.
  - Can hunt area 59 stand alone if hunt area 56 changes to 14 days? Probably wouldn’t want to do that.
  - As far as triggers, hunt area 56 looks good.
  - Need to maintain a general season as long as we can maintain it.
  - Short-term, can handle a 21-day season; mid-term, we may need to look at it; long term may need a 14-day season.

- Lineberger – Wasn’t there a concern about cutting back in hunt area 56? Not wanting to grow elk?
  - Fagan – Not wanting to grow resident elk, but growing bull elk is not a problem.

- Clouse – Was the high count in February a fluke?
  - Lineberger – McWhirter stated earlier that the numbers fluctuate up and down.
  - Clouse – It has been fluctuating since 1987.
  - Brock – Without this year’s count, the number has been steadily declining.
  - Fagan – Since 1994, it has been pretty steady.
  - Fagan – There were a lot of bulls observed this year in hunt area 56.
    - Brock – Predation could have pushed bulls there from somewhere else.
    - Bales – Fewer bulls were observed in hunt area 61.

- Clouse – Is it the Game and Fish’s desire to stay at 21 days?
  - Fagan – For the short term, it is.
  - Bales – Do you want a 21-day hunt with no late season hunt?
    - It would affect the local elk numbers.
    - Fagan – Taking 46 bull elk in hunt area 56 is ok.
      - Could go either way on a late hunt.
    - Bales – Would rather save some bulls in the early season, and take some migratory bulls in a late season.
    - Fagan – For now, would do it with one 21-day season. If trend continues, add a late season in the future.

- Clouse – Are we heading toward a 14-day general season and a late limited quota season in both hunt area 56 and hunt area 59?
  - Bales – Yes. Similar to that in hunt area 59. A wilderness hunt makes more sense in hunt area 59 to take some of the pressure off the front country bulls.
    - From a landowner perspective in hunt area 56, there are not a lot of bulls to hunt early. Would like the opportunity to hunt bulls on their own land late in the season.
December season to take advantage of a migratory bull.
- Livingston – Agrees w/ Fagan. Should watch for a while.

Brock – Has hunted elk for a long time. Big bulls tend to stay in the higher country. He has never lived in a place where people want to shoot the big bulls when they come down. Sometimes it’s just nice to see big bulls. They are not wasted.

Hammer – Would a late season provide opportunity for the general public? Are there enough places for the public to hunt?
- Bales – Yes. There is plenty of public land available to hunt.

Clouse – Would a late season discourage elk from migrating to hunt area 61?
- Klebba – The elk migration was different last year. That may be the reason there were so many elk in hunt area 56.
  - Livingston – Agree the migration was different, but surveys didn’t show any places missing elk.
  - Fagan – The elk migrate a long way before getting hunted. The late hunt would not discourage the migration.
  - Woolley – When does the typical migration occur?
    - Livingston – Historically it occurs in late October to early November.
    - Brock – There is some movement (trickling) that begins in early October.

Sanders – Is starting to think the entire herd unit should go to limited quota.
- Hunt area 55 has changed to limited quota. Hunt areas 58 and 61 are limited quota.
- The group is talking about removing a week off the season in hunt area 56.
- The group is narrowing down the opportunity to hunt.
- Hunt areas 55, 56, 59, and 60 are tough areas for the average Joe hunter to hunt. Those are the only general areas left in the herd unit.
- The group should either leave area 56 as it is (with no changes), or shift it all to limited quota.
  - “If you’re going to swallow a frog, swallow it fast.”
  - Instead of cutting a week, go to limited quota, or leave it as it is.

Klebba – There had been some earlier discussion of on wilderness and off wilderness hunts.
- Fagan – It will be tough for the public to follow. It complicates the regulation.
- Livingston – Hunters are more savvy than that.
- Fagan – The wilderness boundary is a lot to ask of the public.

Henrich – The 21-day hunt may work for now, but at what point does it change? Is it better to start early?
- Fagan – Right now things are fine. Watch for triggers, and then make a change. The season can be shortened when it is needed.
- Henrich – If it’s probably going to happen, then why not do it now?
- Fagan – If it can be maintained over time, then maintain it.

Clouse – The triggers should be defined.

Hammer – Should the season remain a 21-day season from October 1-21 as it currently is?
Yes – Fagan, Clouse, Morris, Lineberger, Woolley, Bales, Livingston, Sanders, Weiser.
No – Brock, Klebba, Henrich

- Brock – Suggested restricting the North Fork side of hunt area 56 to two weeks instead of three.
  - Clouse – That would push all the hunters in to the South Fork.
  - Brock – The herd is not producing many calves in the North Fork.
- Bales – Should institute a “spikes excluded” season.
- Livingston – One way to save bulls is to change the season to 6-point or better.
- Henrich – With the number of bulls observed, things might be a little better than we think.
  - Lineberger – According to the data McWhirter supplied at the previous meetings, there was a total bull ratio of 36:100 cows, adult bull ratio of 26:100 cows, and calf ratio of 29:100 cows in hunt area 56.
- Klebba – The flight survey in February is not what is hunted during the season in October.
  - Lineberger – The August flight numbers is not what was used for setting season in the other areas. The group needs to stay consistent.
  - Bales – Need to look at trends.
- Fagan – Hunter success in hunt area 56 was higher this year.
  - Brock – Harvest was at the low end. Harvest trend line overall is down.
- Clouse – In 2010, 84% of the hunters were residents.
- Sanders – For the three “no votes”, what are your thoughts?
  - Brock – Concerned about the North Fork part of hunt area 56. Would like to see the old hunt area 57 come back.
  - Henrich – Agrees with Brock. When do you say when? If it’s going to happen, let’s do it now.
  - Klebba – If triggers were in place, he could agree to leave it as it is.
    - Fagan – If there is a mandate from the group, than that will be good.
    - Clouse – What will the trigger point be?
    - Klebba – The group should not specify the trigger points, but let the biologists do their jobs.
    - Hammer – Trigger points are all the things the group has talked about. It is basically what the Department already does.
    - Livingston – Would like to see the trigger points in writing.
    - Brock – Trigger points cannot be on a one year basis. Need to look at a period of time, like three years.
      - Predators have an impact on the herd; it cannot bounce back as fast.
      - Limited quota seasons allow for a quicker response.
      - Weiser – In a general license hunt area, only season dates can be adjusted, not the number of hunters.

Break 7:30-7:45
Hunt Are 56 Discussion (continued)

- Clouse – Has mentioned the average age of harvest before.
  - Trigger points should include average age of harvest and date of harvest.
  - The department needs a better way to collect harvest data.
    - Currently don’t know the age of the animal or the date it was harvested.
    - Check stations don’t get the opportunity to check every hunter or animal harvested.
  - Trigger points right now seem to be everything the Department collects.
  - The department should also collect the date of harvest and the location.
  - If there is any doubt about the harvest data, then there is doubt about all the other data, too.
  - Hammer – The group has already made a recommendation to collect teeth of harvested animals and reopen the Cody check station.
  - Clouse – Suggested the implementation of a mandatory check-in for hunters.
    - Henrich – Agreed with mandatory check-in.
    - Klebba – If teeth are collected and hunters complete the hunter surveys, then mandatory check-in is not needed.
    - Clouse – Should collect the drainage the animal was harvested in, the date of harvest, the age of the animal.
      - The department would then know whether to change the number of licenses or not.

- Bales – The group has been asked to make meaningful changes for the herd unit because of triggers the Department has observed. The group has only made meaningful changes in one area.
  - Hammer – Do the outfitters agree with that assessment?
    - Livingston – No.
  - Hammer – The group has made changes. The group was brought together so that the Department would not find itself in the same situation it did 20 years ago with a very angry public.
    - The Department was starting to see trends in the Cody herd somewhat similar to what was observed in the Clarks Fork herd.
    - McWhirter has advised that he feels the “wheels are not falling off”.
    - The Department wanted to get some other insight to the situation.

- Clouse – If the Department collected the age of harvest, date, and location, would the “no votes”, specifically Brock, move toward a general season?
  - Brock – Would go for a two week season in the North Fork and a three week season in the South Fork.

- Lineberger – Bales had suggested an idea of a 21-day season in the wilderness, and a 14-day season outside the wilderness. October 1-21 in the wilderness, October 1-14 outside the wilderness.
Livingston – Advised all major trails into the wilderness are marked at the boundary.

Regulation would read; October 1-14, General license, Antlered elk. October 15-21, General license, Antlered elk valid in that portion of hunt area 56 in the Washakie Wilderness.

What does this accomplish?
- It saves some bull elk outside the wilderness.
- Sanders – The recommendation would reduce opportunity to those without horses.
- Lineberger – It is a compromise to protect some elk in the front country, but keep the season open to general license hunting.

Vote on the proposal:
- Yes – All members of the group.
- The group agreed to the proposed recommendation.

The Group's hunting season recommendation for Hunt Area 56:
- General license – October 1-14 – Antlered elk, spikes excluded.
- General license – October 15-21 – Antlered elk, spikes excluded, valid in that portion of hunt area 56 in the Washakie Wilderness.

Bales – Suggested implementing a late limited quota season: Type 1 license in December for 10 days.
- Fagan – Would prefer to wait another year to see what happens with the elk. If there is another good year of survey data, then a late season would be ok.
- Lineberger – In hunt area 59, the late season is November 1-15, in hunt area 58 the limited quota season in October 10-November 30.
  - Bales – Desired a later season to try to take advantage of migratory YNP elk.
  - Fagan – Hunt area 56 is a destination for elk, so later is better.
- Brock – Agreed w/ Fagan about waiting another year.
  - Woolley – Advised McWhirter would probably also agree with waiting.
- Bales – With the season recommendation made, there would be 10 bulls saved in the early season, so 10 could be harvested later.
- Sanders – Likes the concept of a late season, but wants to remain conservative and wait to be sure the trend holds.
- Livingston – In areas with less than a certain number of tags, Commissioner Licenses could not go there.
  - Lineberger – Suggested tabling the discussion until the Commissioner License information is known.
  - The group tabled the discussion.

ACTION: At what license level are Commissioner Licenses restricted from hunting an area.

Hammer – How many antlerless tags should there be?
- Lineberger – Advised she prefers the 2012 recommendation for antlerless licenses.
Bales – Agreed with Lineberger. Some cow hunting should be maintained in the South Fork.

Clouse – In 2011, 81 cows were harvested in hunt area 56.

The group decided to keep the same recommendation as is proposed for the 2012 season in hunt area 56.

- **Type 4** – November 1- November 15; 50 licenses antlerless elk valid in that portion of Area 56 off national forest
- **Type 5** – November 1-December 23; 100 Licenses antlerless elk valid in that portion of Area 56 off national forest.
- **Type 6** – November 16-December 23; 100 licenses valid in that portion of area 56 in the South Fork of the Shoshone River.

Public Outreach Discussion

- Sanders – Decided to wait until after this meeting to get started on presentation.
- Lineberger – Has been going through all of the notes to determine what information needed to be relayed to the public.

Hunt Area 59 Revisited

- Bales – Would like to see hunt area 59 mirror hunt area 56.
  - Would reduce some harvest in Rock Creek and Aldrich Creek.
  - It is important to try and harvest some bulls trying to get to hunt area 61.
  - The general license should be valid for any elk.
  - Lineberger – If we are trying to harvest bulls before they get to hunt area 61, we could have harvested more bulls in hunt area 60.
  - Clouse – Agrees with Bales that hunt area 59 should match hunt area 56.
  - Bales – The general season could run later in October.
- Clouse – Could the type 1 season be moved later to December?
  - Bales – No. It is a different situation in hunt area 59.
- Klebba – Changing hunt area 56 and 59 is going against one of the goals of recruiting hunters. The group seems to be cutting some new hunters out.
- Bales – For the local bulls, the current season is too long.
- Lineberger – The change would seem to impact resident hunters more than non-resident hunters.
- Fagan – Still thinks that if the area can support a general license hunt, then it should stay that way.
  - Bull numbers are better in hunt area 59 than in hunt area 56.
  - All things are doing well.
  - Would be cutting out 1/3 of the season.
- Lineberger – There were a lot of spikes taken in hunt area 59. Should spikes be excluded?
  - Maybe younger or newer hunters were harvesting spikes.
  - Bales – Had already suggested that a youth could harvest any elk.
- Reasons not to match hunt area 56:
  - Hunter recruitment.
  - Elk numbers are good.
- Lineberger – During the seven days only in the wilderness, will it push elk to a place we really don’t want them?
  - Bales – May push some elk down on to private property, but will probably push them toward hunt area 61. Don’t think it will really have an effect.
- Vote on changing hunt area 59 to the same general season as hunt area 56.
  - Yes – All members of the group. Brock stated he had “swallowed the frog”.
- The Group’s hunting amended season recommendation for Hunt Area 59:
  - General license – October 1-14 – Any elk, spikes excluded.
  - General license – October 15-21 – Any elk, spikes excluded, valid in that portion of 59 in the Washakie Wilderness.

Public Comment
- Ken Heinrich
  - Wyoming is about the only state that does not have some type of mandatory check in for harvest data collection.
  - Youth hunters have lots of opportunities to harvest antlerless elk.

**ACTION:** Go through the accomplishment sheet and verify accomplishments.

**Next Meeting** Wednesday, April 18, 2012, 6:00pm – 9:00pm, Big Horn Federal.

**Meeting Adjourned at 9:00pm**