

January, 2022 Newsletter

Newsletter Editor Chuck Hunt
President Jim Vashro

Membership meeting: Membership meeting, Wednesday, January 12, 7-9 in the Kalispell FWP Public Meeting Room.

The January meeting will focus on potential hunting regulation changes for 2022-23. Regional Wildlife Manager Neil Anderson will provide an update of tentative hunting regulation changes adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission on December 14. Neil gives an excellent presentation on Region 1 and some of the major changes statewide. Comments will be accepted through January 21, plan to attend to find out about proposed changes and how to comment. See more information below. Covid and flu are in the Flathead, if you feel ill please stay home to protect everyone. **We hope to see you on January 12!**



Big Game Hunting Regulations Tentative Changes, 2022-23

FWP started on simplifying hunting regulations several years ago. Simplification is a worthy goal but what will it look like on the ground? Getting rid of regulations that serve no biological or social purpose is a good goal. Simplifying or getting rid of hopelessly confusing regulations is a good goal. But one-size-fits-all isn't always a good fit. Current regulations have been crafted over several decades to reflect game populations, their abundance and distribution, and hunter desires. Combining districts makes it harder to direct hunter distribution and harvest. When combining districts you need to manage for the weaker populations so some opportunity may go away.

The FW Commission adopted tentative changes on December 14. The proposals are out for public comment up to 5 PM on January 21. The FW Commission will adopt final changes on February 4. You can find all the proposed statewide changes and means to comment here:

<https://fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/public-comment-opportunities/reg-proposals>

Some of the proposed changes for Region 1 are:

- Convert all antlerless elk permits to antlerless B tags. Simpler but a hunter could theoretically kill 2 elk in some districts (general elk tag + B tag).
- Eliminate low number of antlerless elk permits (5) in Districts 110, 120 and 130 to reduce clutter. This will mean a low loss of opportunity.
- Currently, the 1st week of the season in Region 1 is either-sex for whitetail deer. The last week has also been either-sex whitetail deer in most districts on private land other than corporate timberlands. Due to the major changes in land ownership, the last week either-sex whitetail deer regulation is eliminated.
- Hunting District 100 (Yaak), increase from 5 antlerless elk permits to 25 elk B tags.
- Combine Hunting Districts 101 and 109 (Eureka area) to Hunting District 101. Expand the 3 week general hunt/2 week limited permits for buck mule deer.

- Combine Hunting Districts 102 and 103. Retain the limited draw mule deer buck permit in northeast portion of 103 (Fisher River).
- Increase HD 121 (Clark Fork) from 20 elk B tags to 25 B tags.
- HD 122 and HD 130 were antlered buck only for whitetail deer for the entire season to allow herds to rebuild. For simplification, all districts in Region 1 will now be either-sex whitetail deer for the 1st week and then antlered buck only for the remaining 4 weeks.
- Combine Hunting Districts 123, 124 and 200, renamed HD 200. To reflect differing game populations across those districts, whitetail deer B tags would be dropped by 15 to 75 B tags. Elk B tags would be increased by 35 to 50 B tags.

Statewide

- A hunter who draws a limited entry either-sex elk or antlered bull permit may hunt elk only in that hunting district during the specified season. This does not apply to antlerless elk B tags.
- Add an unlimited elk B tag valid on private land during open seasons in 14 hunting districts in Regions 4, 5, 6 and 7 that are more than 200% over objective.
- Unbundle and remove the 900-20 archery only either-sex elk permits in 22 hunting districts in Regions 4, 5 and 7. Convert to general tags or unlimited permits.
- Increase the limited entry either-sex elk permits in 8 hunting districts in Regions 4, 5 and 7 by 50%. No biological reason given.

There are a number of proposals in other hunting districts/Regions. You need to check proposed changes for any Districts you hunt regularly.

<https://fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/public-comment-opportunities/reg-proposals>

Comment by 5 PM, January 21.

Nonresident Hunters

As hunting gets more crowded and challenging, we all like to grumble about competing interests, particularly out of state hunters. We get to hunt here every year, for many nonresidents a Montana hunt is the trip of a lifetime, something they saved for years for. And let's face it, they get charged license fees far above residents and pay for a large portion of the wildlife budget. Whether guided or DIY, nonresident hunters contribute to the Montana economy. Trying to keep nonresident hunting in balance, the Montana Legislature long ago put a cap of 17,000 on the Nonresident Combo Licenses (elk, deer, fish, birds) and dictated that no more than 10% of limited entry permits would go to nonresidents. Recently I've heard a number of people say there are only 17,000 nonresidents. That is no longer the case as the Legislature has adopted other licenses in addition to the 17,000, often at a reduced price.

- NR Elk/Deer Combo – 17,000 quota
- NR Elk Only Combo – included in the 17,000 quota?
- NR Deer Only Combo – 4,600. 2,000 of those can be landowner sponsored.
- Come Home To Hunt – hunters who used to live in Montana, still have family here. 500 each of Deer/Elk Combo, Elk and Deer licenses.
- Montana Native born with resident relative – no limit on licenses
- NR College Student combos – no limit
- Elk B (antlerless) and Deer B (antlerless) Tags – unlimited in many districts
- 10% Cap – when permits or licenses are unlimited, nonresidents are not limited to 10%
- Nonresidents can also hunt for antelope (10% cap) or bears (unlimited).

I tried as best I could between license type lists and actual laws to determine the number of licenses that could be sold under each category. It is confusing, I may have made some mistakes. But, yes, there are more than 17,000 nonresident hunters out there. Most of them are regular hunters just like you and me, let's figure out how to accommodate each other.

This page explains the different license types, deadlines and drawing dates, bonus points, etc. for both resident and nonresident hunters:

<https://fwp.mt.gov/myfwp>

FWP has created a new FAQ page that will answer many of your questions about licenses and permits, Hunter Ed and residency requirements, obtaining access, etc.

<https://fwp.mt.gov/binaries/content/assets/fwp/hunt/hunter-faq-09-9-2021-final.pdf>

President's Message

January, 2022

Jim Vashro

I recently signed onto the Op-Ed below with 17 other elk hunters. Moose, sheep and goats are ultimate trophies but luck of the draw means most of us will have few, if any, chances to hunt them. That makes elk the top hunting trophy for most Montanans. But elk are at a crossroads. Access is getting more difficult, different interests are competing for an advantage over others in bagging an elk. The Montana Elk Management Plan is getting a much needed make-over, adopted 16 years ago many parts are no longer relevant. FWP Director Hank Worsech also just announced he was going to form an additional elk management group. There's no word what that will look like or how that will interact with the ongoing Management Plan committee. And the Montana Legislature has introduced many bills to impact hunting for elk and other wildlife. Concerned Montana hunters are forming a citizens' coalition, The Montana Citizens' Elk Management Coalition, to hopefully find some common points of interest amongst all the users – hunters, landowners and outfitters, to offer up common sense solutions and ensure average Montanans have a voice in the process. It won't be easy but elk are worth it.

The thoughts below are mine and don't necessarily reflect the goals or policies of Flathead Wildlife, Inc. FWI will have an opportunity to decide whether to join the Coalition. Jim Vashro

Montana Citizens' Elk Management Coalition

Elk hunting is everything to Montanans. We guard our vacation days with jealousy in anticipation of elk camp deep in the forests or Breaks country. We choose our sick days wisely and work hard for just the chance of harvesting an elk. Elk hunting is where our families make memories and traditions while hoping to fill the freezer for the coming winter. Even our clothing reflects our love of hunting elk on public lands. Unfortunately, these traditions are in danger of changing forever or, in some cases, disappearing forever.

Private lands are changing hands, access to prime hunting land is becoming more difficult, and elk congregate where they know they are safe. Meanwhile, a Montana public land hunter has a roughly 13% chance of putting a bull elk in a freezer, and according to FWP data, one district in NW Montana takes more than 530 hunter days to harvest a single elk. Six months of constant pressure from hunters, more gates and no trespassing signs than ever, changing habitat, increased development on winter range, and the monetization of the resource has created quite the predicament.

Further complicating the issue is the fact that our wildlife — as guaranteed by Montana's constitution — is publicly owned, and their management is to be a shared responsibility. They are not to be owned and sold by private interests.

Dramatic changes in elk management have Montanans concerned. But, unfortunately, on top of all of the other factors, political opportunism impacting our wildlife management has become the standard operating procedure for the Legislature. Since 2011, 489 bills have been introduced on wildlife issues, and 906 bills have been drafted. That doesn't count the budget bills that would defund wildlife management or habitat work, legislation that threatened public lands, bills that tried to eliminate the

citizens' voice in management decisions while amplifying the power of politicians and the unelected bureaucrats that are beholden to them.

As we saw during the last legislative session, politicians continue to think they know better than Montanans who spend months outdoors hunting, fishing, and exploring our public lands. Think tanks spend countless hours and dollars spinning new ways to make Montana more like Texas, where wildlife is a commodity and not part of the public trust. This isn't the Montana way. Conflict and anger might be potent political currencies of our times, but it doesn't have to be, at least not for Montana's elk. For more than 150 years, Montanans have worked together to find consensus paths forward that keep the public trust intact and ensure that future generations of Montanans will have the same opportunities to fill their freezers. While some elected leaders may benefit from conflict, we believe that most Montanans are tired of it; it's time to sit down together, without interference from politicians and narrow, big-moneyed interests, and find a better path forward.

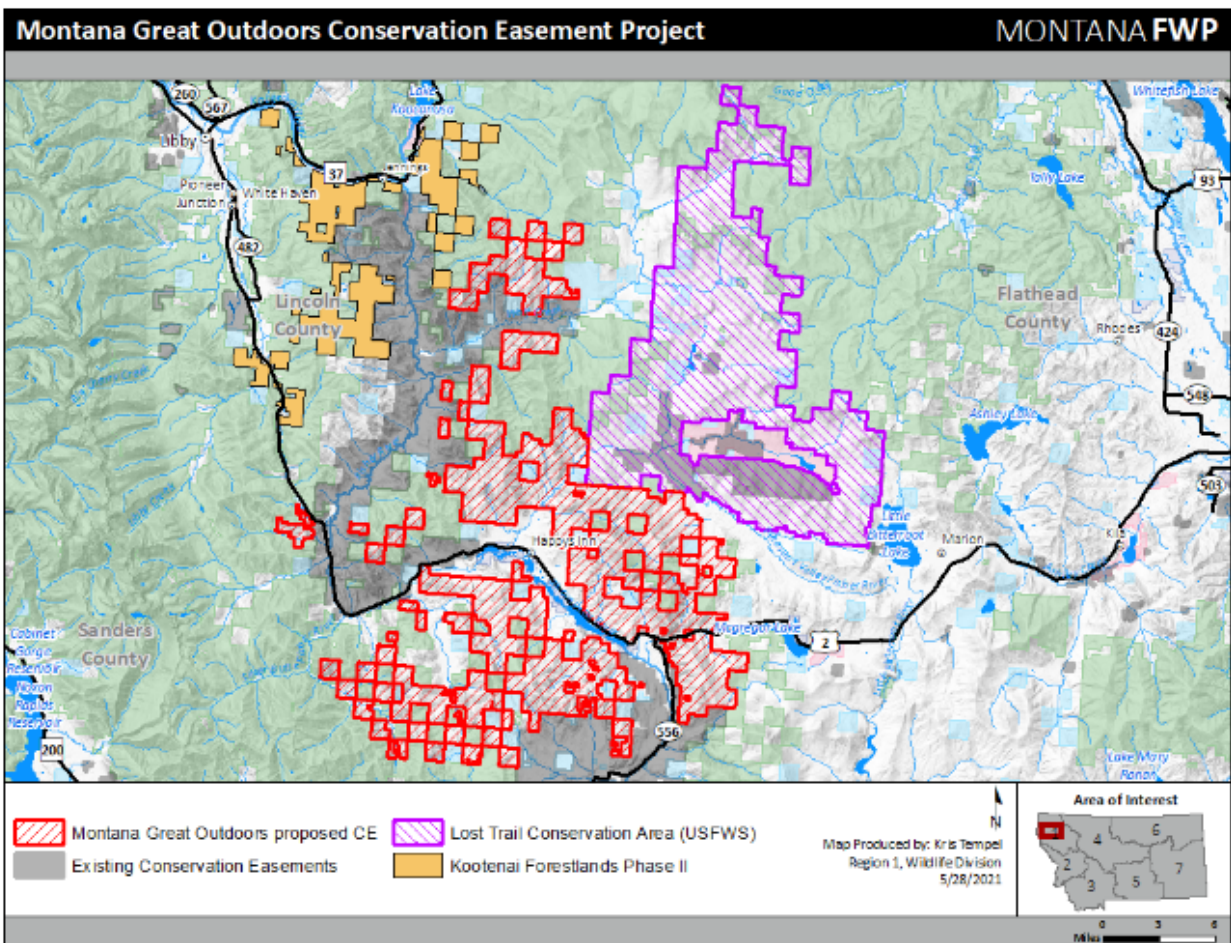
Our elk management must return to being for all Montanans, not just the wealthy. We don't expect elk hunting ever to be easy. Like so many things in life, Montanans know we'll have to earn it. But our opportunity should always remain. Help us keep it that way. To ensure that our voices — and your voice — are heard, we are forming a coalition to develop a citizens' elk management proposal. To learn more, and become involved in this effort, visit www.montanaelk.org Jim Vashro and 17 other elk hunters

New Archery Range Proposals

Bowhunting is a great sport but requires lots of practice to make clean, ethical shots. Many bowhunters struggle to find safe places to practice that also simulate conditions you will encounter in the wild. FWP has an archery range at Lone Pine State Park, several FWI members helped build the original range and FWI recently donated a target. Taking advantage of increased funding from the recently approved Great Outdoors Recreation Act/LWCF, FWP proposed purchasing an additional 9.3 acres at Lone Pine to expand the archery range. In addition, Big Arm State Park near Elmo has some acreage west of highway 93. FWP proposed building a new archery range there where there are no options now. FWI provided comments in support of both projects and a decision was just made to move ahead.

Montana Great Outdoors Recreation Project

For decades, Montanans had nearly unfettered access to 800,000 acres of corporate timberlands in northwest Montana. Changes in market economies and corporate direction have resulted in a majority of those acres changing ownership in recent years. Fortunately, many of the new owners also are agreeable to public use and hard work by state and federal agencies have crafted land purchases and conservation easements (CE) that will preserve public access, wildlife habitat and timber economies. FWI has recently commented on and highlighted a number of recent transactions including Bad Rock WMA (now completed) and the Kootenai Forestlands CEs with Stimson Lumber. At the December 14 FW Commission meeting FWP presented the Montana Great Outdoors Conservation Project and received preliminary approval from the FW Commission to proceed with negotiations and preparation of an environmental assessment (EA). As shown in the map below, the proposal would put conservation easements on about 114,000 acres north and south of the Thompson Chain of Lakes. Those acres are shown in red in the map below. The light orange acreage is the just completed Kootenai Forestlands II project and the US Fish and Wildlife Service is attempting to negotiate CEs on the lilac shaded area around Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge. If all goes as hoped, nearly 70% of the former and present timberlands will be protected.



Fish, Wildlife and Parks Enforcement

For most recreationists, their most common FWP interaction is with a game warden. But for some reason the Enforcement Division is very reluctant to blow its own horn. For those that don't have anything to hide, I think most of us like to think the bad guys are being caught, that our purchase of licenses is necessary and justified and keeps us from getting a ticket, that the resource is being protected by that thin, green line. FWP has about 75 game wardens, 11 warden sergeants, 7 warden captains statewide plus some Helena staff. A lot of ground for not many wardens, citizen tips (1-800-TIPMONT) are always appreciated.

This is a link to the most recent Enforcement summary:

<https://fwp.mt.gov/binaries/content/assets/fwp/aboutfwp/legislature/enforcement-division-overview.pdf>

- In 2019-2020 enforcement wardens made 229,000 personal contacts with the sporting and recreating public
- Detected and/or investigated over 12,000 possible fish, wildlife and parks violations

- Issued over 8,700 citations, 6,100 written warnings and countless verbal warnings including multiple felony level cases
- Responded to 7,600 TIPMONT reports
- Supported AIS programs, issued 402 citations and 565 warnings for violations
- Dedicated 1,807 hours to education and community outreach events

Bluebird Nesting Boxes Building and selling bluebird nesting boxes is one of the primary fundraisers for FWI as well as providing nesting habitat. Sales were great this last spring thanks to support from Murdoch's Ranch and Home Supply and Sliters Lumber and Building Supply. We're now sold out, watch for a BBNB Build Party in January or February.

Flathead Wildlife, Inc. Memberships

FWI memberships run on the calendar year. Please renew your membership for 2022 so we can continue to represent your interests in the outdoors. Thanks!

Do you believe in Preserving our Hunting and Fishing Heritage, Promoting Public Access and Youth in the Outdoors? Join Flathead Wildlife, Inc. Today! Thank You For Your Continued Support.

__ Single \$20 __ Family \$25 __ Sustaining / Business \$35 __ Habitat \$50 __ Conservation \$100
Mail to PO Box 4, Kalispell, Montana 59903 or use PayPal on our website.

Flathead Wildlife Inc. Website Address: <http://flatheadwildlife.org/>

Flathead Wildlife Inc. Facebook Address: <https://www.facebook.com/ProtectingMontanasAccess/>

E-Mail for sending photos to be posted on Website / Facebook: flatheadwildlife.inc@gmail.com

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