

# Collaboration between FWP, USFS, BLM & DNRC and Any Other Pertinent Local, State, or Federal Land Management Agencies

**Intent:** To promote collaboration between FWP, USFS, BLM & DNRC

**Justification:** Currently there is a perceived significant disconnect between FWP (the agency in charge of wildlife) and USFS, BLM & DNRC (the agencies in charge of the land). The intent of this recommendation is to reaffirm the relationships FWP has with these organizations/agencies including communicating their collaborations to the public. This perceived disconnect has resulted in a belief that there is a do nothing approach by all agencies. The perception is that this has led to diminished habitat quality and in turn decreased wildlife utilization. To improve stakeholder relationships, communications of the collaborations that are occurring are necessary.

## Description:

FWP should consider/contemplate the following:

- This recommendation is to point out the obvious that when one agency controls the animal and one controls the land and those agencies are not working towards a common goal our elk and other wildlife will suffer.
- Across the state we are experiencing significant conifer encroachment, forests that need thinning, large scale beetle kill and excessive deadfall. The resultant heavy canopy prevents the growth of forbs and grasses critical for elk forage and the excessive deadfall makes the habitat less desirable to elk. The result is that elk are relocating from the public lands and transitioning to private property in search of better forage and sanctuary. FWP needs to inform the land management agencies that these poor management practices are having a detrimental impact on our state's wildlife, specifically elk and causing undo hardship on private landowners.
- Approaching forestry management from the standpoint of habitat enhancement under the guidance of FWP will be better received by the public than current forestry management practices.
- As logging practices of old were abandoned, thick reprod was experienced beyond healthy levels and thinning was prevented from taking place. The result was a series of unnaturally hot and devastating fires that took place specifically in northwest Montana but also other areas in the state. These fires killed everything in their path leaving old growth forests dead. Over the years the old growth has started to come down and thick regrowth of primarily lodgepole pine and larch has taken place. At this point the deadfall is so bad and the regrowth is so thick that the only solution to improve the habitat quality of elk and other wildlife is to implement strategic prescribed burns to reduce fuels and improve forage quality. These targeted prescribed burns should take place under the recommendation of FWP specifically for habitat enhancement.
- FWP should also be providing recommendations to the USFS, BLM and DNRC for revegetation projects specifically designed to enhance forage quality on public lands to specifically attract elk and other wildlife off private lands and back onto public.
- In addition to habitat enhancement projects, rules and regulations that we established long ago for specific wildlife or habitat enhancement need to be revisited to ensure their current applicability. Examples (from above bullet):
  1. In the early 1930's it was realized that elk populations in the Bob Marshall were growing beyond the carrying capacity of the land and causing habitat depletions. Under direction from USFS FWP established what we now know as the "early rifle season" to reduce overpopulated elk. This "early rifle season" is still in place today and we are sticking with a season structure developed to reduce elk populations even after elk populations have been reduced well below the lands carrying capacity.
  2. Conversely, as a measure to protect wintering elk and other wildlife FWP made recommendations to USFS to establish non-motorized use to the iconic "dry parks" winter range as well as spotted bear river and the areas behind the spotted bear ranger station. These non-motorized areas after the reintroduction of wolves have had the converse effect on elk and other ungulates creating a sanctuary for wolves to prey on elk without pressure from trappers. FWP needs to revisit this recommendation and encourage motorized use of these winter areas by licensed trappers so predator management can take place and under objective populations can rebound.
  3. In the northwest there has been a huge push by the USFS to decommission roads and gate many roads year-round. Particularly in the north, middle and south fork drainages of the flathead river it is essentially an inland rainforest in which revegetation occurs very quickly. By closing roads year-round and removing culverts and bridges and using a dozer to create water diversion berms every 50 yards on a decommissioned roads it make access of our vast public lands incredibly difficult. While some hunters will spend their weekends during the summer clearing fallen trees and brush from old roads and trails to access their hunting spots many will not. Without maintenance it is not an overstatement that nature has reclaimed many of these roads and trails and removing an elk from one of these areas is next to if not impossible. The result of this is that hunters are unwilling invest the effort that it takes to hunt this area and they just pick up their bags and choose to hunt other areas of the state. (these are just three specific examples, I'm sure many others exist)

## People/Organizations:

- Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP)
- U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)

## Timeline:

ASAP

## FWP Authority to Take Action:

Yes, it is within FWP's authority to take steps towards better coordination with land management agencies.

## Feasibility of Implementation:

It is feasible for FWP to work with other agencies and improve public perceptions.

## Limitations/Unintended Consequences:

There are no downsides to inter agency coordination and development of common goals.