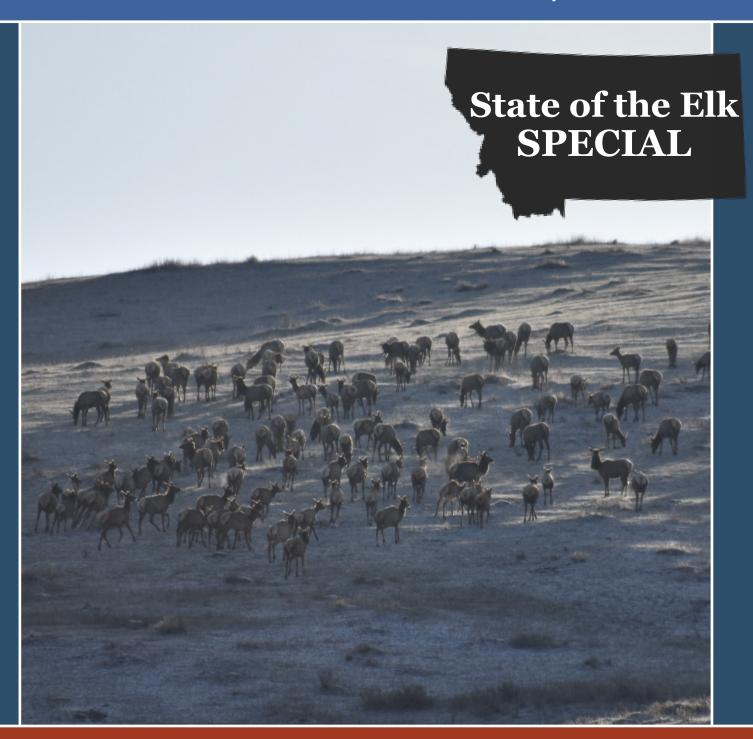
### Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Region 2 Wildlife Quarterly July 2022



### Technical Bulletin No. 34



### Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Region 2 Wildlife Quarterly

3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula MT 59804, 406-542-5500

#### Region 2 Wildlife Staff

Liz Bradley, Wildlife Manager, <a href="mailto:lbradley@mt.gov">lbradley@mt.gov</a>, 406-542-5515</a>
Mike Ebinger, Wildlife Biologist, Blackfoot, <a href="mailto:michael.ebinger@mt.gov">michael.ebinger@mt.gov</a>, 406-210-3479
Eli Hampson, Cougar and Bear Management Specialist, 406-542-5508
James Jonkel, Bear and Cougar Management Specialist, <a href="mailto:jajonkel@mt.gov">jajonkel@mt.gov</a>, 406-542-5508
Ryan Klimstra, Wildlife Biologist, Missoula West, coming soon!
Bruce Montgomery, Bear Management Specialist, contact info TBD
Rebecca Mowry, Wildlife Biologist, Bitterroot, <a href="mailto:rmowry@mt.gov">rmowry@mt.gov</a>, 406-363-7141
Dave Nikonow, Cooperative Biologist, Natl Wild Turkey Federation, <a href="mailto:dnikonow@nwtf.net">dnikonow@nwtf.net</a>
Tyler Parks, Wolf-Carnivore Management Specialist, <a href="mailto:tylerparks@mt.gov">tylerparks@mt.gov</a>, 406-542-5500
Torrey Ritter, Wildlife Biologist, Nongame, <a href="mailto:torrey.ritter@mt.gov">torrey.ritter@mt.gov</a>, 406-542-5551
Kirstie Yeager, Wildlife Biologist, Upper Clark Fork, <a href="mailto:kirstie.yeager@mt.gov">kirstie.yeager@mt.gov</a>, 406-270-6998

#### **Statewide Staff Housed at Region 2 Headquarters:**

Nick DeCesare, Wildlife Biologist, Moose Research, <a href="mailto:ndecesare@mt.gov">ndecesare@mt.gov</a>, 406-542-5500 Molly Parks, Carnivore Coordinator, <a href="mailto:molly.parks@mt.gov">molly.parks@mt.gov</a>, 406-542-5500

#### **Communication & Education Division:**

Vivaca Crowser, R2 Information & Education Manager, vcrowser@mt.gov, 406-542-5518



The Region 2 Wildlife Quarterly is a product of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks; 3201 Spurgin Road; Missoula 59804. Its intent is to provide an outlet for a depth of technical information that normally cannot be accommodated by commercial media, yet we hope to retain a readable product for a wide audience. While we strive for accuracy and integrity, this is not a peer-refereed outlet for original scientific research, and results are preliminary. While this periodic publication was conceived and edited by Mike Thompson prior to his retirement, we hope to continue producing these reports as time allows. October 2015 was the inaugural issue.

Photos: Above, a pair of pileated woodpeckers in the Bitterroot (photo by R. Mowry). Below, elk in the Blackfoot (photo by L. Parsons).



Every spring, we get a call from *Hellgate Hunters & Anglers*, a Missoulabased, nonprofit organization "conserving Montana's wildlife, wild places, and fair-chase hunting and fishing heritage." And with that call, FWP wildlife biologists are reminded that the job's not done until the paperwork's finished. Nowadays, the "State of the Elk" address, originated and sponsored by HHA, is a June event, attended by HHA members and the public, with this publication serving as a hard-copy summary.



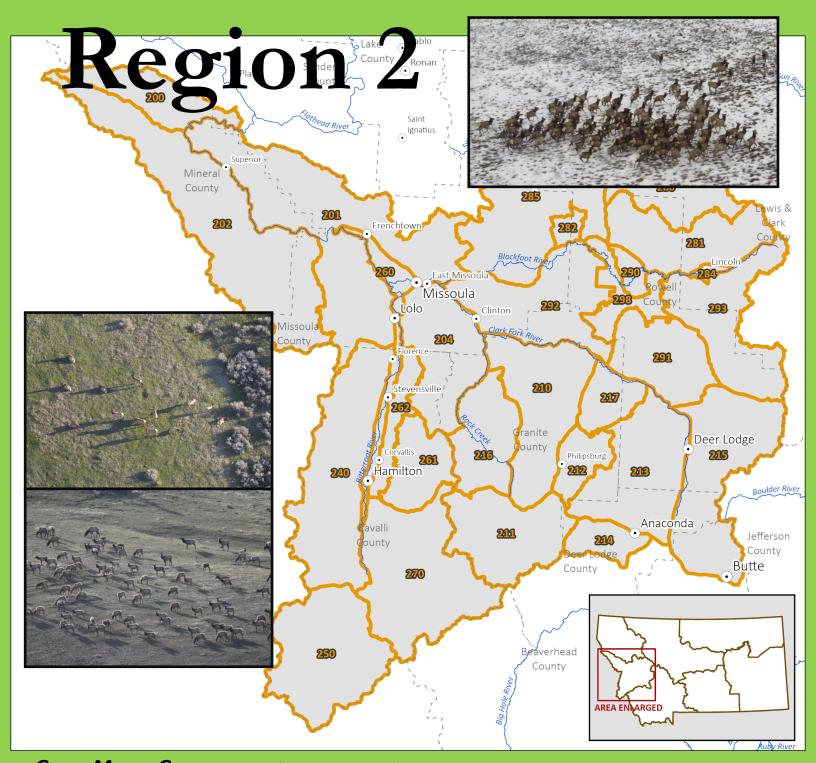
Things were in flux for Region 2 this year, with the departure of our Anaconda and Seeley Lake-based wildlife biologists Julie Golla and Scott Eggeman, the retirement of long-time wildlife manager Mike Thompson, and then Missoula-area biologist Liz Bradley's promotion into the manager position. That left three out of four biologist areas vacant, right in the midst of survey season.

Fortunately, we were able to complete our surveys with the help of seasonal technician Kara Clarke (Upper and Lower Clark Fork areas) and Helena-based Deer and Elk Coordinator Lindsey Parsons (Blackfoot area). Liz Bradley reprised her biologist role for several weeks in the Lower Clark Fork, and Rebecca Mowry did what she always does in the Bitterroot (with assistance from Craig Jourdonnais of MPG Ranch). As of this publication, we have filled the vacant positions; we welcome Mike Ebinger, most recently the FWP biologist out of Thompson Falls, to his new role in the Blackfoot, Kirstie Yeager most recently from Colorado Parks & Wildlife as the Upper Clark Fork biologist, and Ryan Klimstra most recently from Alaska Fish & Game will start in August as the new biologist in the Missoula and Lower Clark Fork.

We would like to thank (profusely) Kara, Lindsey, and Craig for their valuable assistance completing our surveys. And with that, we invite you to inspect FWP's latest elk survey data in the pages herein. As Mike Thompson used to say, it's the next best thing to greeting the sunrise in the back of a Super Cub yourself.



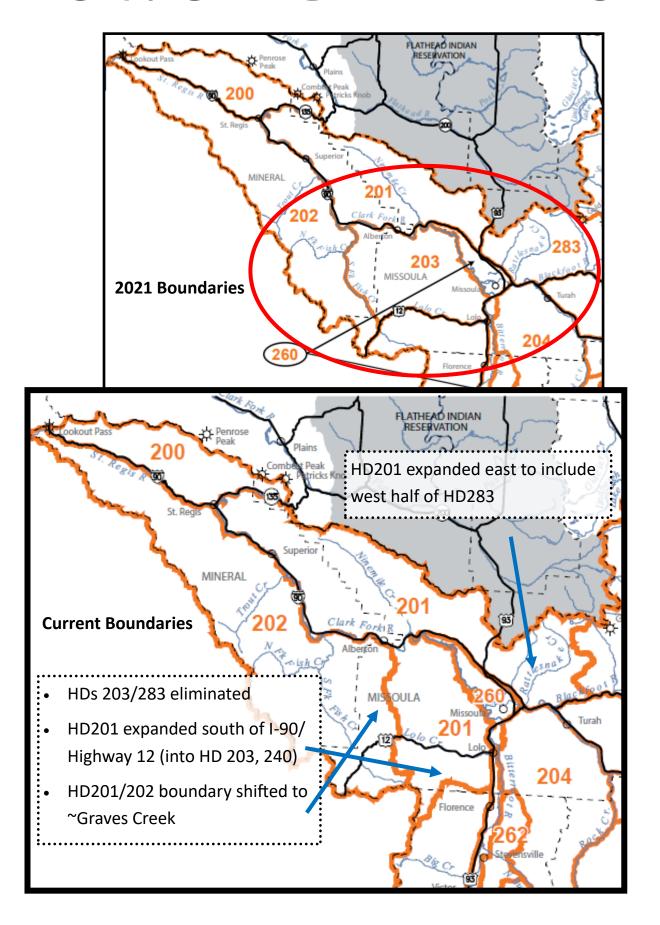
Elk in French Basin (probably the same herd from the cover) photographed from the air on April 25, 2022.



**Green Means Go.** The majority of R2 elk surveys are flown during spring green-up, which typically begins in late March/early April and varies by climate, habitat, and elevation. Elk are starving for nutritious, green forage after a long winter of slim pickings, and 75% or more of the cows and last year's calves, as well as many bulls, will feed out in the open and be available for counting in the first and last hours of daylight (photos on left). In early spring, when there's a reasonably good snowpack, green-up is available mostly in the open, if not only in the open. If elk are going to feed on the green-up, they are concentrated in the open where a pilot and observer can count them, and they will continue to congregate in the open until the snow melts and the grass starts to green up under the trees.

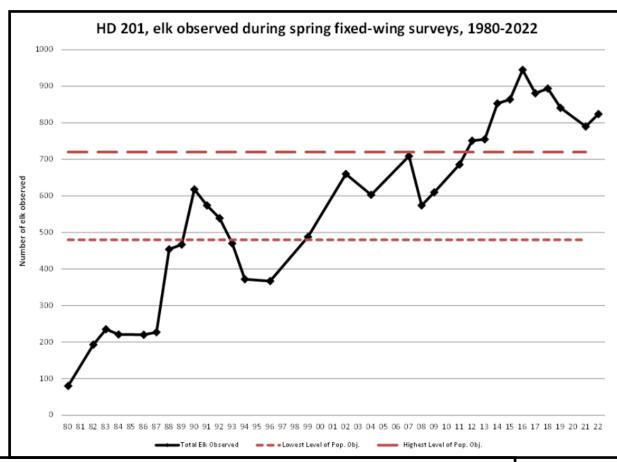
**Snow and Cold.** While spring green-up offers the only chance to count elk in forested elk country, elk in eastern Region 2 can be counted in winter. Especially when snow is deep and temperatures dip below zero, our eastern elk concentrate in big groups (photo on upper right), while their cousins in western Region 2 withdraw deeper under cover. Currently, all Upper Clark Fork HDs and some Blackfoot HDs are flown in the winter.

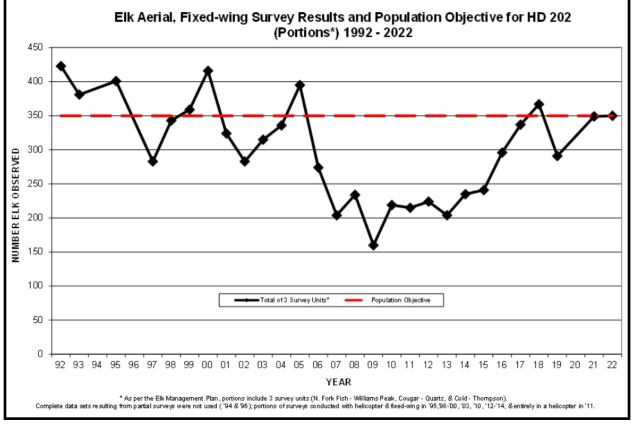
## Lower Clark Fork



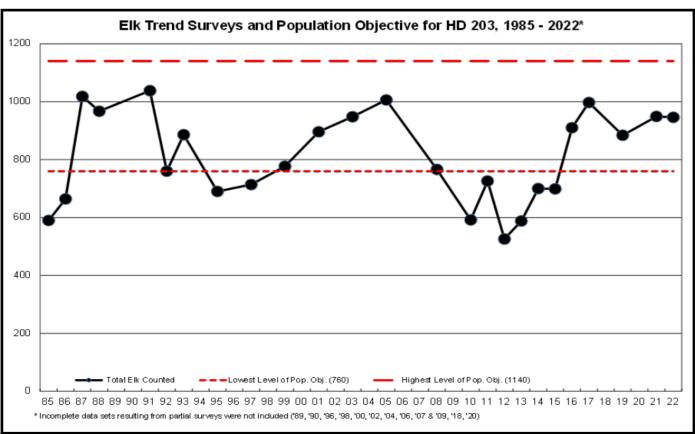
## Lower Clark Fork

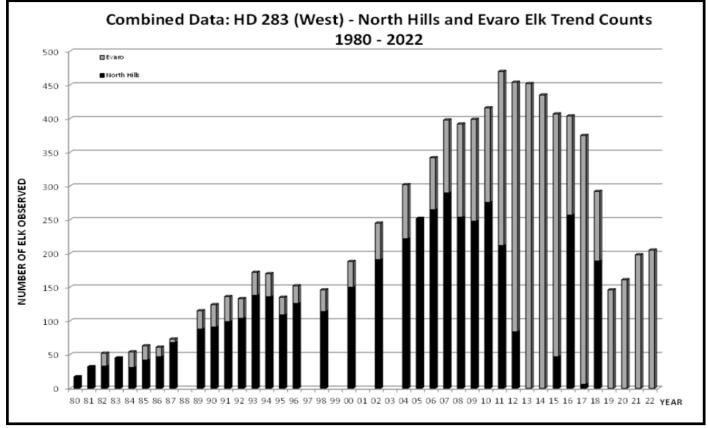
\*\*\*Note: Counts not yet adjusted for boundary changes

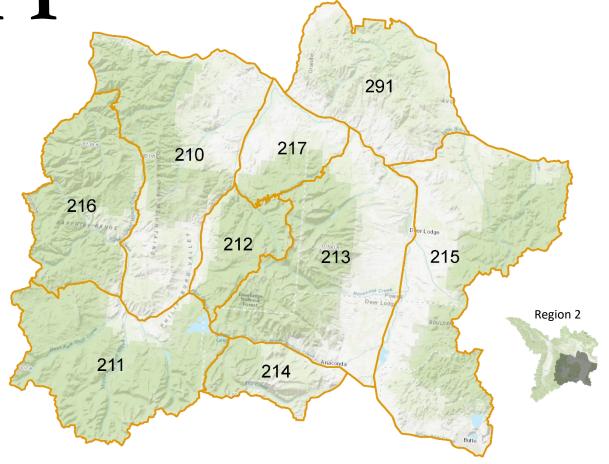


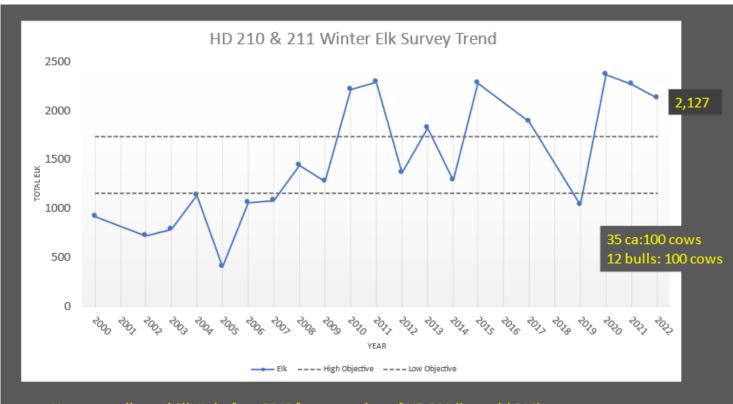


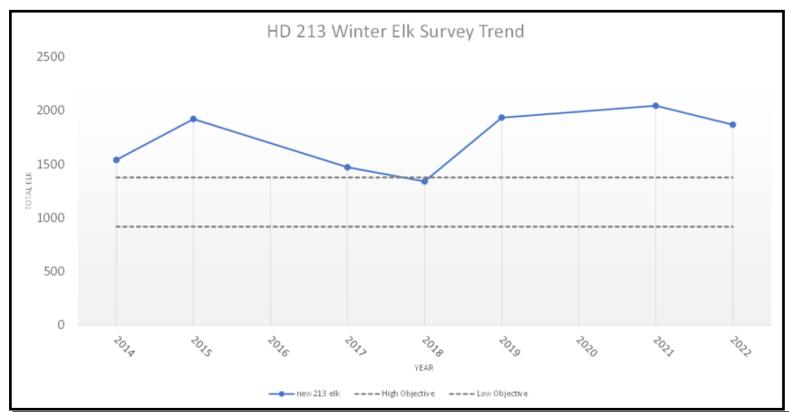
### Lower Clark Fork

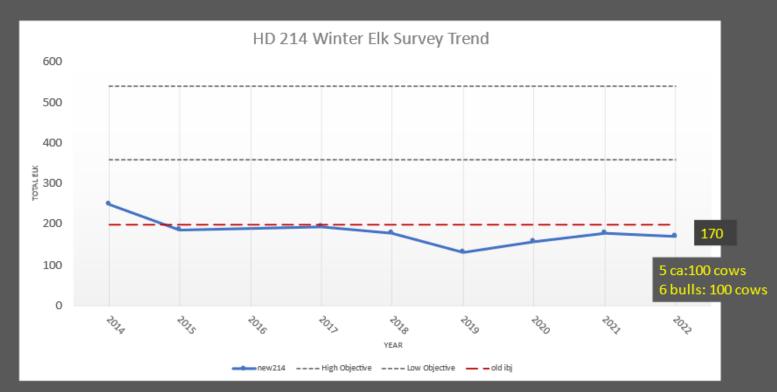


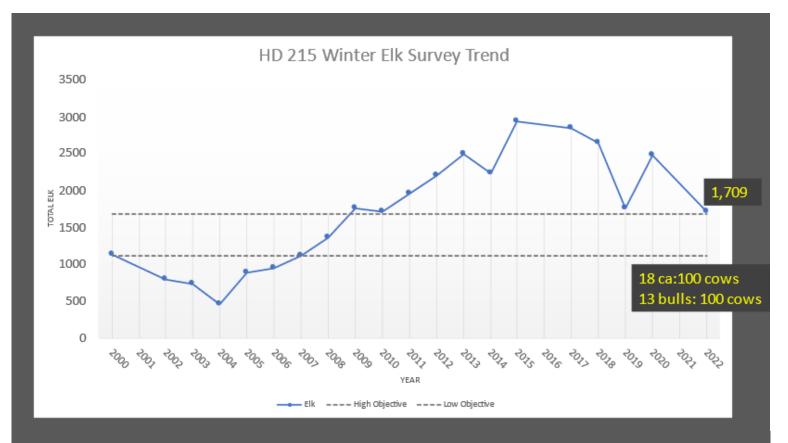


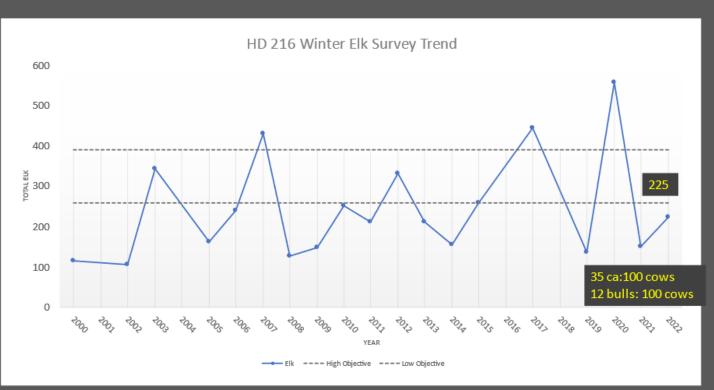


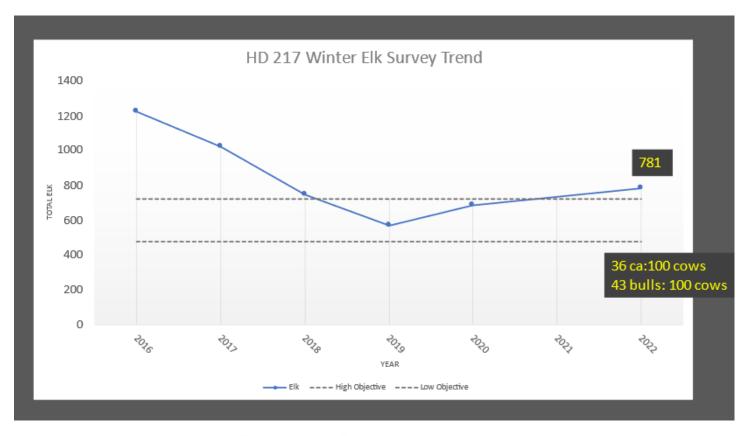




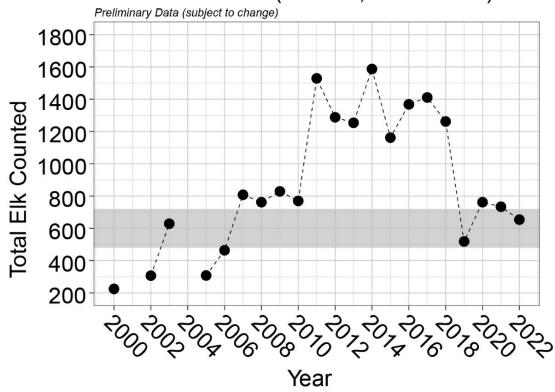


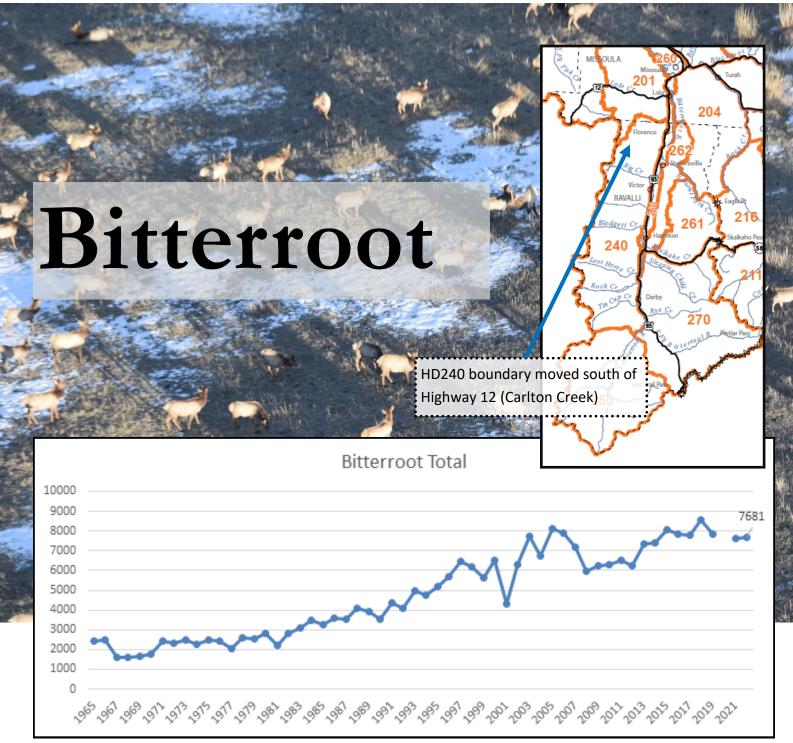




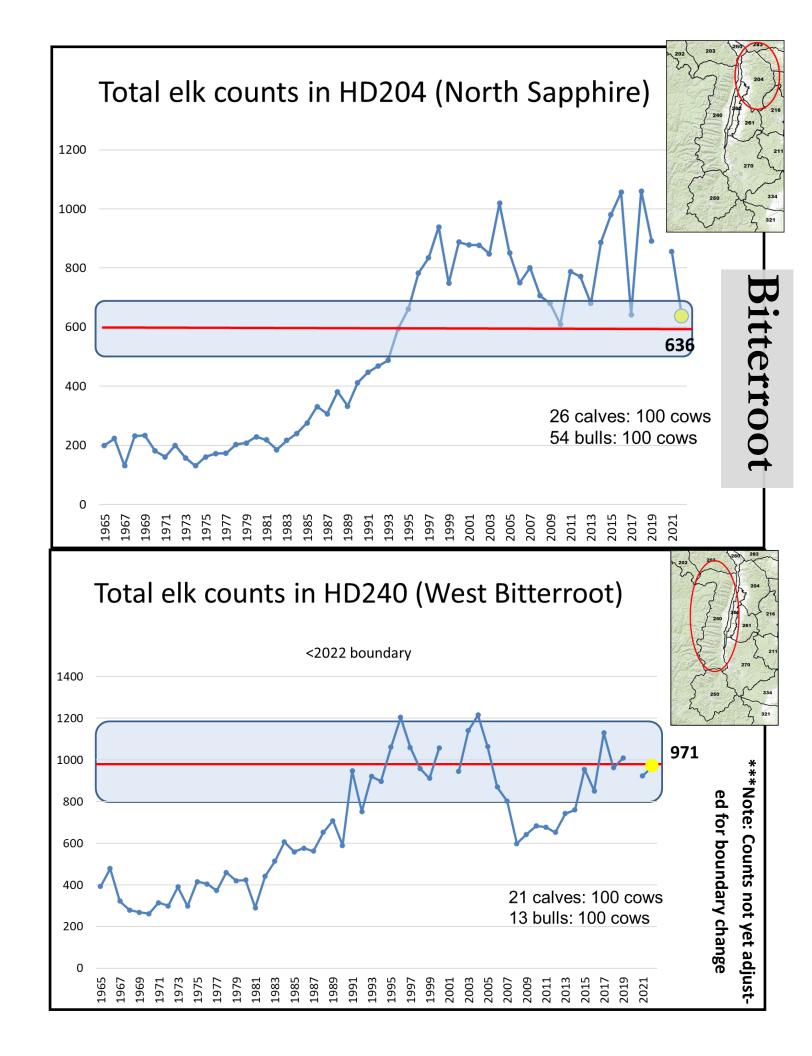


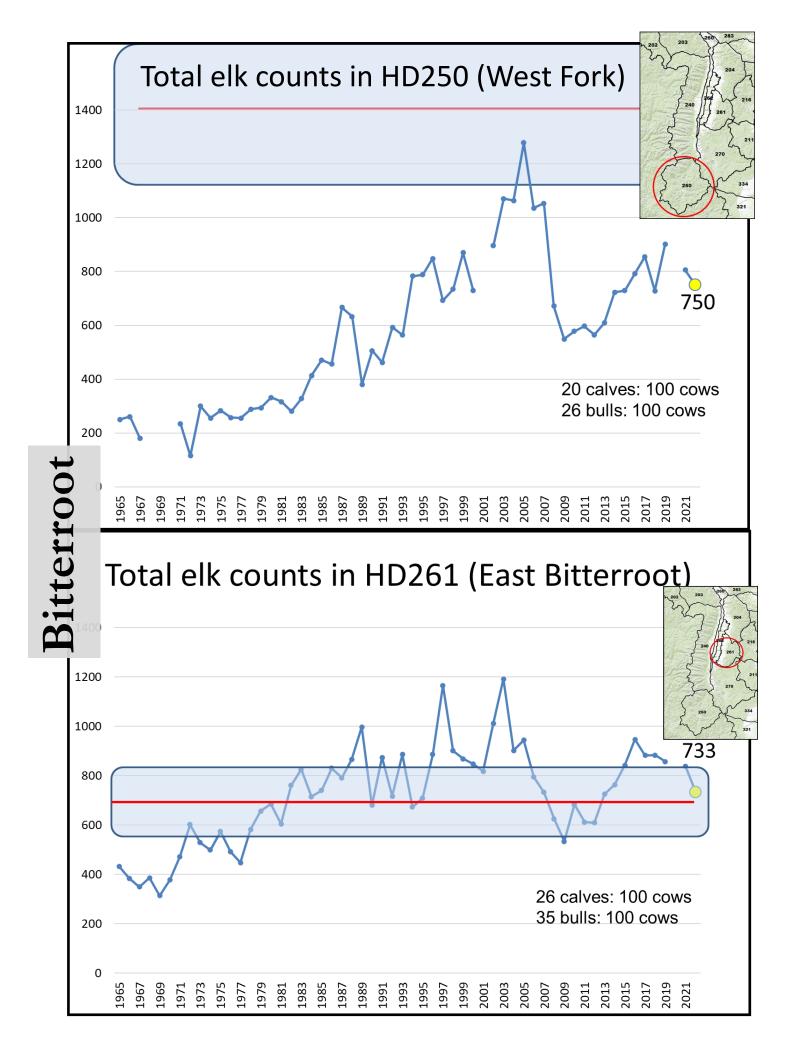


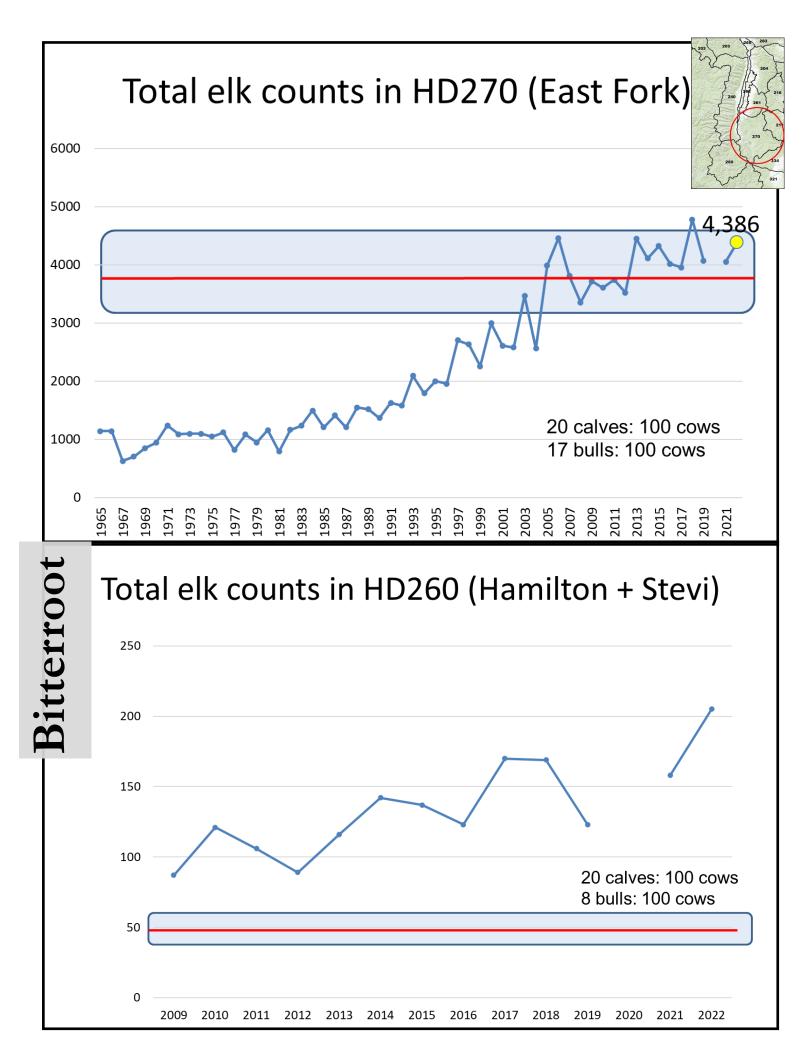


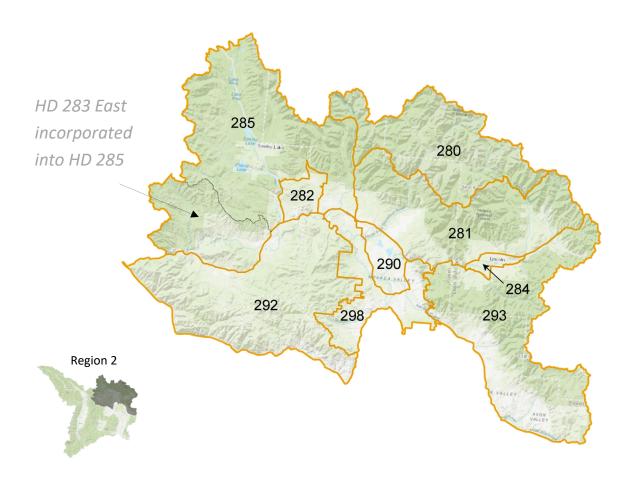


| HD    | Total | Cows | Calves | Bulls | Calf:cow | Bull:cow | 2021 count | Objective | Above or Below |
|-------|-------|------|--------|-------|----------|----------|------------|-----------|----------------|
| 204   | 636   | 353  | 91     | 192   | 0.26     | 0.54     | 855        | 600       | Within         |
| 240   | 971   | 725  | 149    | 97    | 0.21     | 0.13     | 923        | 1000      | Within         |
| 250   | 750   | 512  | 100    | 134   | 0.20     | 0.26     | 806        | 1400      | Below          |
| 261   | 733   | 455  | 119    | 159   | 0.26     | 0.35     | 837        | 700       | Within         |
| 270   | 4386  | 3132 | 632    | 526   | 0.20     | 0.17     | 4052       | 3800      | Within         |
| River | 205   | 160  | 32     | 13    | 0.20     | 0.09     | 158        | 50        | Above          |
| TOTAL | 7681  | 5337 | 1123   | 1121  | 0.21     | 0.21     | 7631       | 7550      |                |









#### 2022 Elk Survey Results

| Hunt<br>District | Total<br>Count | Calves per<br>100 cows | Bulls per<br>100 cows | 2021 Total<br>Count | Objective<br>Range | Objective<br>Status |
|------------------|----------------|------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 281              | 463            | 15                     | 7                     | 608                 | 500 - 700          | Below               |
| 282-285          | 863            | 27                     | 22                    | 584                 | 900 - 1000         | Below               |
| 283 (East)       | 206            | 18                     | 3                     | 233                 | 240 - 360          | Below               |
| 290-298          | 1006           | 22                     | 11                    | 902                 | 480 - 720          | Above               |
| 292              | 540            | 18                     | 13                    | 679                 | 640 - 960          | Below               |
| 293              | 432            | 23                     | 19                    | 619                 | 600 - 900          | Below               |
| Total            | 3510           | Avg.= 20.5             | Avg. = 12.5           | 3625                | 3360 - 4640        |                     |

Total Elk Counted (HD 281; 2000-2022)

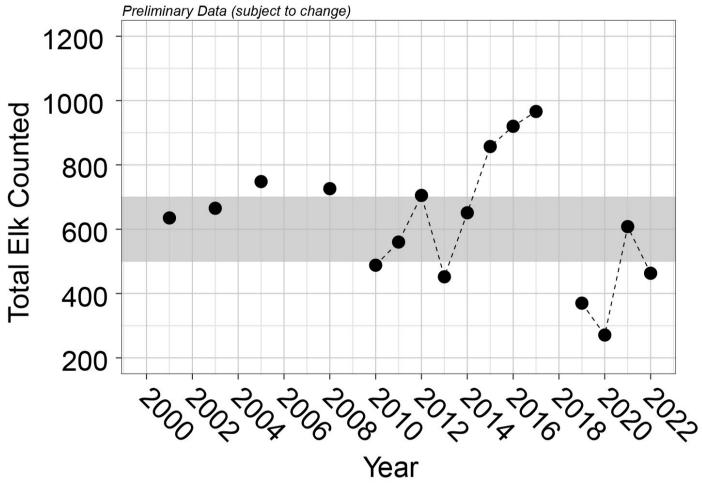


Figure 1. Total Elk counted in HD 281 (2000-2022). Black points indicate total survey results and dashed lines connect consecutive survey years. The shaded grey region is the population objective from the 2005 Elk Management Plan.



| Survey Summary       |             |      |  |  |  |
|----------------------|-------------|------|--|--|--|
| Survey Metric        | 5-yr. Avg.* | 2022 |  |  |  |
| <b>Total Counted</b> | 554         | 463  |  |  |  |
| Calves:100 Cows      | 22          | 15   |  |  |  |
| Bulls:100 Cows       | 14          | 7    |  |  |  |

<sup>\* 2017-2021</sup> 

Total Elk Counted (HD 282/285; 2000-2022)

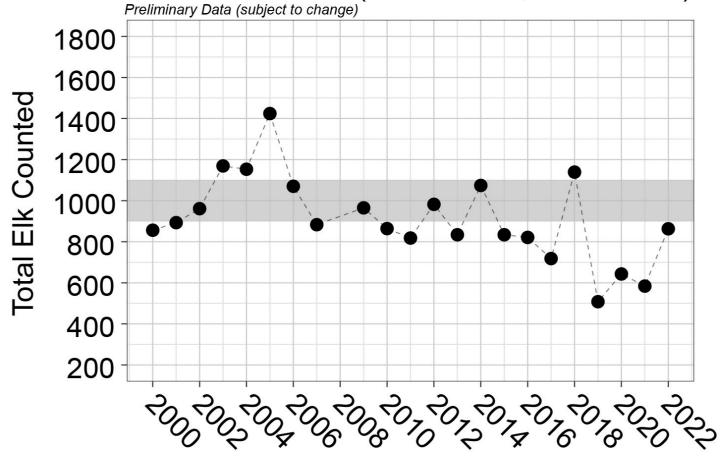


Figure 2. Total Elk counted in HD 282 (2000-2022). Black points indicate total survey results and dashed lines connect consecutive survey years. The shaded grey region is the population objective from the 2005 Elk Management Plan.



| Survey Summary       |             |      |  |  |  |
|----------------------|-------------|------|--|--|--|
| Survey Metric        | 5-yr. Avg.* | 2022 |  |  |  |
| <b>Total Counted</b> | 718         | 863  |  |  |  |
| Calves:100 Cows      | 20          | 27   |  |  |  |
| Bulls:100 Cows       | 18          | 22   |  |  |  |

<sup>\* 2017-2021</sup> 

Total Elk Counted (HD 283 (East); 2000-2022)

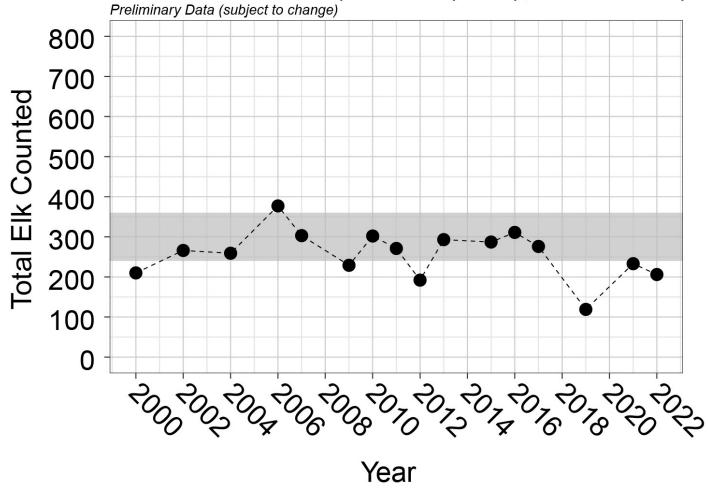


Figure 3. Total Elk counted in HD 283 East (2000-2022). Black points indicate total survey results and dashed lines connect consecutive survey years. The shaded grey region is the population objective from the 2005 Elk Management Plan. Note: 283 East was incorporated in HD 285 in the 2022-23 Season Setting process.



| Survey Summary  |             |      |  |  |  |
|-----------------|-------------|------|--|--|--|
| Survey Metric   | 5-yr. Avg.* | 2022 |  |  |  |
| Total Counted   | 209         | 206  |  |  |  |
| Calves:100 Cows | 11          | 18   |  |  |  |
| Bulls:100 Cows  | 8           | 3    |  |  |  |

<sup>\* 2017-2021</sup> 

Total Elk Counted (HD 290-298; 2000-2022)

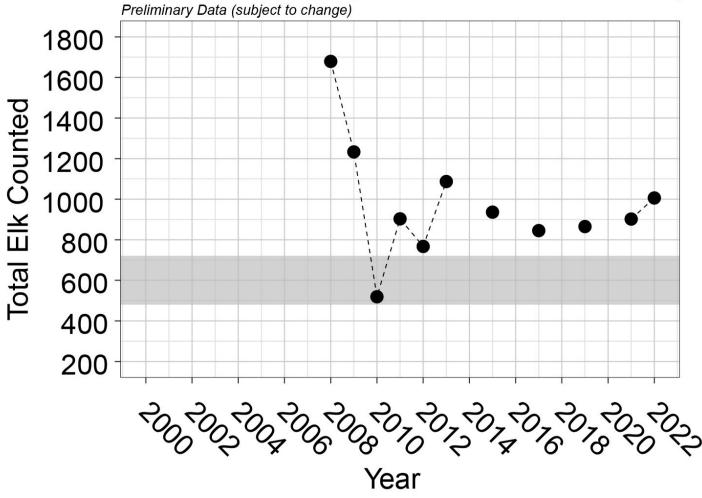
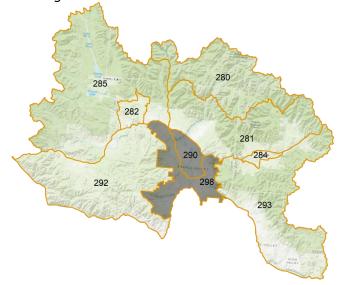


Figure 4. Total Elk counted in HD 290-298 (2000-2022). Black points indicate total survey results and dashed lines connect consecutive survey years. The shaded grey region is the population objective from the 2005 Elk Management Plan.



| Survey Summary       |                          |      |  |  |  |
|----------------------|--------------------------|------|--|--|--|
| Survey Metric        | 5-yr. Avg <sup>*</sup> . | 2022 |  |  |  |
| <b>Total Counted</b> | 887                      | 1006 |  |  |  |
| Calves:100 Cows      | 21                       | 23   |  |  |  |
| Bulls:100 Cows       | 14                       | 15   |  |  |  |

<sup>\* 2017-2021</sup> 

Total Elk Counted (HD 292; 2000-2022)

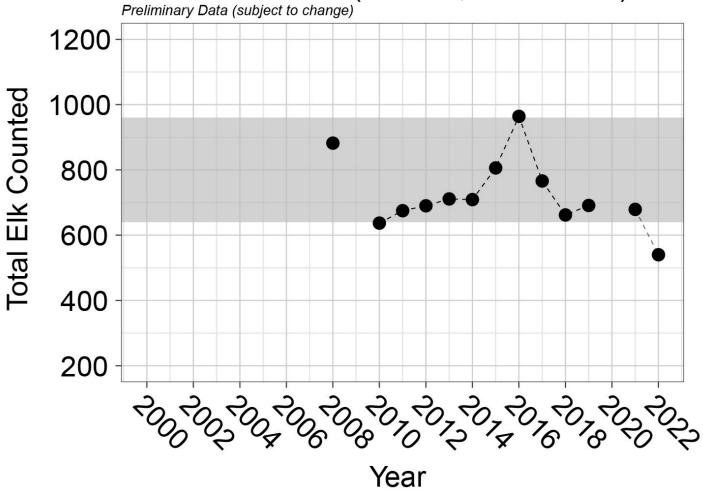


Figure 5. Total Elk counted in HD 292 (2000-2022). Black points indicate total survey results and dashed lines connect consecutive survey years. The shaded grey region is the population objective from the 2005 Elk Management Plan.



| Survey Summary       |             |      |  |  |  |
|----------------------|-------------|------|--|--|--|
| Survey Metric        | 5-yr. Avg.* | 2022 |  |  |  |
| <b>Total Counted</b> | 700         | 540  |  |  |  |
| Calves:100 Cows      | 24          | 18   |  |  |  |
| Bulls:100 Cows       | 20          | 13   |  |  |  |

<sup>\* 2017-2021</sup> 

Total Elk Counted (HD 293; 2000–2022)

Preliminary Data (subject to change)

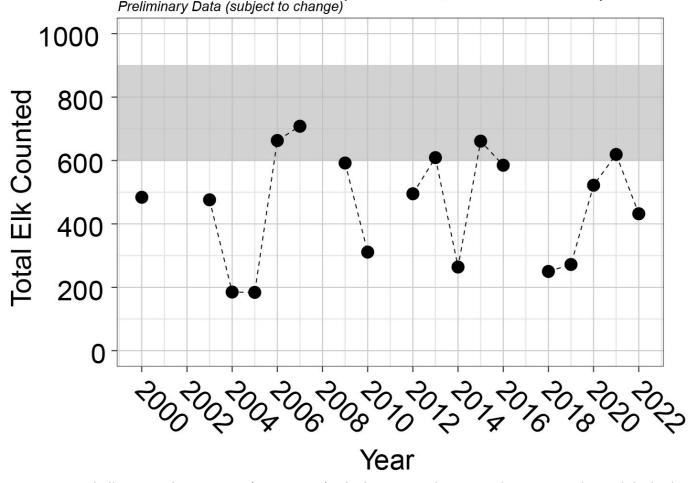


Figure 6. Total Elk counted in HD 293 (2000-2022). Black points indicate total survey results and dashed lines connect consecutive survey years. The shaded grey region is the population objective from the 2005 Elk Management Plan.



| Survey Summary       |             |      |  |  |  |
|----------------------|-------------|------|--|--|--|
| Survey Metric        | 5-yr. Avg.* | 2022 |  |  |  |
| <b>Total Counted</b> | 416         | 432  |  |  |  |
| Calves:100 Cows      | 25          | 23   |  |  |  |
| Bulls:100 Cows       | 17          | 19   |  |  |  |

<sup>\* 2017-2021</sup> 

Total Elk Counted (Granite Butte EMU; 2004-2022)

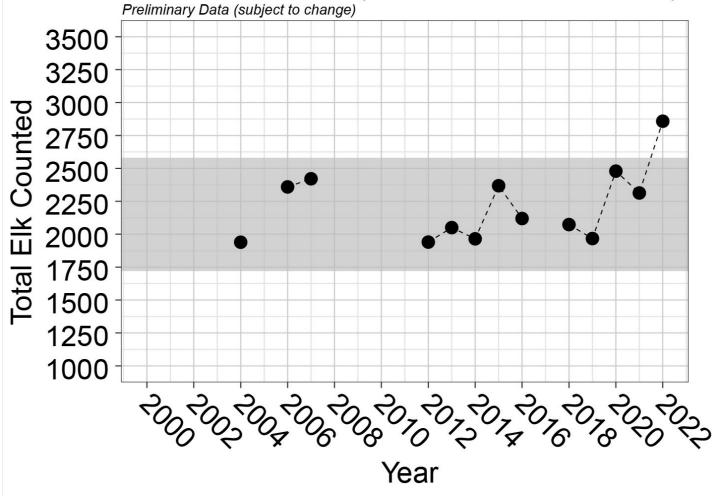
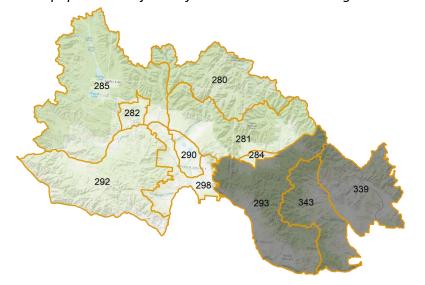


Figure 7. Total Elk counted for the Granite Butte Elk Management Unit (EMU; 2000-2022). Black points indicate total survey results and dashed lines connect consecutive survey years. The shaded grey region is the EMU population objective from the 2005 Elk Management Plan.





#### Elk Regulation Changes for 2022

#### **Region 2**

Boundary changes: elimination of HDs 203, 283; changes to HDs 201, 202, 240, 285)

All antlerless permits changed to B-licenses

Permits for either-sex elk or brow-tined bull-antlerless elk will limit the holder to hunting for antlered elk within only the designated HD for the period identified on the permit (exception = HD 270)

#### **Lower Clark Fork**

HD 201: Addition of over-the-counter B-license 201-01 (also valid in HD 260, see below) on private land only (excluding MKH) but not valid east of Hwy 93. Youth/PTHFV antlerless harvest allowed district wide on private land with general license.

HD 260: Addition of over-the-counter B-license <u>201-01</u>, valid on private land only with special weapons (shotgun, muzzleloader, handgun, crossbow). Valid until Jan 15.

#### **Upper Clark Fork**

Quota reductions to <u>210-02</u>, <u>210-03</u>, <u>217-02</u> and <u>291-03</u> B-licenses

Removal of 214-00 and 291-02 antlerless permits

B-licenses <u>213-01</u> and <u>215-02</u> valid until Jan 8

#### **Bitterroot**

Quota reductions to <u>204-00</u> and <u>240-01</u> B-licenses

Quota increases to <u>261-01</u>, <u>270-01</u> and <u>270-02</u> B-licenses

HD204: <u>262-01</u> B-license valid on private land until Jan 8

HD260: Remove 262-01, add over-the-counter B-license 201-01, valid on private land only with special weapons (shotgun, muzzleloader, handgun, crossbow) until Jan 15

#### **Blackfoot**

Quota reduction to <u>290-01</u> B-license

Removal of 281-01 antlerless elk permit

HD282: 282-00 B-license valid until end of general rifle season

HDs 290 and 298: 290-01 valid until Jan 8 on private lands excluding Nature Conservancy



Find all the Region Wildlife Quarterlies at https://fwp.mt.gov/r2-wildlife-quarterlies



Blackfoot elk. Photos by Lindsey Parsons.