

FWP proposal to be amended: Elk Regulations

Commissioner: Pat Tabor

Date received by Commission:

Proposed amendment: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission increase either-sex season elk quotas for HD 700-20 (rifle) from 200 to 250 and HD 700-21 (archery) from 660 to 800.

Requested by FWP: No

Rationale and Background:

- It seems that the changes made by the region were under the belief that HD 700 is or should be managed as a “trophy district” but the district has never been formally designated a trophy area. The imposition of the reduced permits in 2023 was a product of regional preference and not a product of formal public and Commission process.
- Results from the 2023 Montana Elk Hunter survey data clearly show there is little appetite for this kind of management. Almost 70% of respondents indicated a desire to hunt bull elk every year versus giving up opportunity to hunt a mature bull.
- The removal of 168 resident hunters and 19 nonresidents for a total of 187 hunters not only takes away sustainable public hunting opportunities, but has also has an immediate economic effect on the rural communities supporting the hunting opportunities.

Department response:

The department adjusted permits to address surveyed 2022 bull to cow ratios to meet objectives described in the 2005 and 2023 Elk Plan, but the department does not anticipate any adverse biological effects as a result of this amendment. Bull to cow ratios will be assessed during 2024 spring surveys and recommendations to address population goals may be recommended by the department to the commission in future season setting proposals.