

# North Rainier Elk Herd-Snoqualmie Sub-Herd Collection Plan-2009-2010

Subject: Elk Collection and Collaring Plan for the Upper Snoqualmie Valley Sub-Herd

February 17, 2009

## INTRODUCTION

The Upper Snoqualmie Valley Elk Management Group (USVEMG), advised by Russell Link, WDFW District Biologist for Region Five, proposes to capture, tag, and collar as many as thirty Rocky Mountain cow elk that inhabit the upper Snoqualmie Valley area between the City of Snoqualmie and Snoqualmie Pass between the period March 1, 2009, and February 28, 2010. Activities will be suspended during the calf rearing season.

The goal of this effort is to collect reliable scientific information about the movements of several sub-herds within the targeted area over several years and to facilitate direct observation of the herds which will allow reliable bull, cow and calf counts to be taken several times throughout the year, for several years. The underlying purpose of this effort is to develop scientifically sound information upon which effective game management decisions may be made.

At present there is little authoritative information available on the Snoqualmie Sub-Herd. This was confirmed by Spencer in the 2002 North Rainier Elk Herd Plan, the latest update of that plan. There is, however, recent anecdotal information suggesting rapid growth of the elk herd in the upper Snoqualmie Valley. Frequent sightings, preliminary surveys, increasing frequency of elk damage reports and road kill reports, provide evidence.

Fall counts in 2008, done by volunteer members of the USVEMG, suggests that there are about 460 elk in the upper Snoqualmie Valley, by itself. Annual recruitment was projected to be 100 animals per year. The 2002 Plan indicated that the desired elk population for all of GMU 460 is 500 animals.

The USVEMG began an additional survey of elk numbers in January 2009, but it was suspended because elk counts were surprisingly low in the typical areas. It is theorized that the elk are more dispersed during the winter months in order to find enough forage. Secondly, hunting season caused them to disperse to find safety. Little is known about winter migration patterns.

The USVEMG will use two types of capture—remote triggered corral-type traps and simple, baiting and darting. The corral trap is of the design advocated by Jack Woods of

Seaside, OR. It is labor intensive and may take five to ten days for capture time, but it is low impact and less visible to the public compared with other capture techniques. It also allows for selective capture of several elk at one site.

Simple baiting and darting is even more manpower intensive because it is based on an elk coming to bait located within forty yards of a dart gun shooter. Helicopter darting in the collection area is not feasible for safety reasons.

Both techniques have low mortality experience; however, if an elk dies incidental to collaring activities, its meat will be taken by one of the participating Indian nations.

## CAPTURE SITES

The principal trap capture site is located on public owned property belonging jointly to the cities of North Bend and Snoqualmie and is known as the Meadowbrook Farm; however, technically, the site is located within the city limits of Snoqualmie. A map of the site and surrounding features is provided can be accessed on-line at <http://www.meadowbrookfarmpreserve.org/visit.html>. The trap/corral would be located in Scout Meadow. The site was selected for several reasons: 1) the local Meadowbrook Farm sub-herd is routinely present because the site offers security, cover, water and abundant browse. 2) It cannot be seen from State Route 202 or Boalch Ave., which are nearby. 3) The terrain is fairly flat allowing for easy set up of a corral trap. 4) There is an undeveloped gravel farm road/path which allows vehicular access to the site even though one must go through a shallow creek.

At the other four collection sites different techniques will be used. At the holly/blueberry farm, baiting and a blind will be used. At the Mt. Si Road location, the Cedar Falls site, and the Edgewick site, are not fixed, but will be opportunistic. With the landowners' consent, elk will be darted at close range from back porches or balconies. These are elk that regularly browse on landscaping plants and lawns in residential areas. Several of these elk will be tagged and collared.

## BAITING

Areas in and around the trap or darting site will be baited with alfalfa and apples prior to capture/darting. Baiting will commence as soon as our permit is approved. Baiting will be done each morning before daylight.

## PROCESSING

For elk in the trap, they will be processed through the "squeeze gate." These activities will be under the supervision of David Vales, Biologist with the Muckleshoot Indian Nation. David has extensive experience collaring elk. Individual animals will be tagged

and four will be collared and released. Average processing time is about five minutes. It is expected that WDFW will have a biologist present, too.

For those animals shot with the tranquilizing gun, processing time will be about the same. All will be observed until they return to normal behavior.

### Resources and Costs

The USVEMG has many stakeholders so this planned tag and collar operation is truly a cooperative initiative. The elk trap will be provided by the Stillaguamish; The Muckleshoot will provide the radio and global positioning systems (GPS) collars on a fast track pending replacement by WDFW, as well as the dart gun, drugs and technical expertise of David Vales, Muckleshoot Biologist and others; local WDFW Enforcement will also provide a dart gun, drugs and technical expertise in support of the plan.

The Elk Management Sub-committee will provide transportation, manpower for putting up the trap, baiting, processing elk, and removing the trap. Members will provide the alfalfa and apples without charge. USVEMG members will monitor the radios and GPS equipment and will mentor high student volunteers who wish to participate. The USVEMG's Elk Management Sub-Committee will compile and publish the results of monitoring and surveys. The USVEMG will require analytic assistance from the Department of Fish & Wildlife and other stakeholders' biologists for the more complex aspects of analysis, e.g. modeling and statistical analyses.