

**Upper Snoqualmie Valley Elk Management Group
(USVEMG) Meeting
Meadowbrook Farm Interpretive Center
North Bend, WA 98045**

September 10, 2008 (Microsoft Word 2003)

Meeting called to order at 6:40 P.M. by DFW District Biologist, Russell Link. Welcome to all. Jim Gildersleeve has been asked to be the meeting facilitator. I will be stepping out of that role so that I can more fully participate in the discussions as a representative of DFW. I am a member of the newly created Steering Committee, along with Mary Norton, Harold Erland, Maura Callahan, Jennifer Vanderhoof, and Mike McCarty.

Introductions: Russell asked that we start with introductions of all present and what our principal concerns are. Details are at Enclosure 1.

Russell inquired where the sign up sheet was and explained that it was important that all sign it and include email addresses. It makes up our distribution list.

Meeting turned over to facilitator, Jim Gildersleeve, who briefly summarized previous meetings and concerns, and then turned to the agenda and introduced Captain Bill Hebner, to talk about elk damage and management options.

Elk Damage and Options Management: Bill's briefing is a 22 page power point presentation and paper copies of it are available upon request from Russell (linkrel@dfw.wa.gov). It provides a comprehensive look at the subject from the Department of Fish & Wildlife's perspective and existing law.

Some interesting items discussed were:

- o Commercial agriculture damage is handled differently than non-commercial, residential damage. In fact there are laws on the books that establish a program and procedures for handling damage claims on commercial agriculture properties. There appear to be limited initiatives for remediating claims on smaller non-commercial properties, such as the hobby farms, small scale orchards or nurseries, etc.

- o Special Permits may be available from WDFW to Reduce Damage. These are described at enclosure 2 and are an extract of Regulation 7.50. Some added details are included below:

- **Damage Control Permits**—These are special hunts that are listed in the current hunting pamphlet and are available to all who apply and are selected for them.

- **Hot Spot Hunts**—Have only been used in eastern Washington when a herd of animals is causing major agricultural damage to a landowner engaged in commercial agriculture. There is a process. Landowner must report the damage and request remediation. District biologist, landowner, and local enforcement captain assess the situation and make a determination is made how many animals need to be harvested. Unsuccessful special permit applicants in the GMU are contacted and asked if they would be interesting in participating in a limited special hunt and if so, their names go into a special drawing. Those who win the special drawing then go on the hunt. The permit is normally for two antlerless deer and/or one antlerless elk.

- **Agency Kill Authority:** This applies to dangerous situations where an animal must be shot quickly. Law enforcement officers have the authority to make this determination and take appropriate action. The animal is usually a bear or a cougar.

- **Kill Permit:** Issued to landowner to take care of immediate situations usually involving one animal. Landowner receives permit to kill animal and is expected to field dress it, but is not authorized to keep the meat. F&W picks them up and the meat is given to a charitable entity, or an Indian Tribe.

- **Landowner Preference Hunts:** Landowner incurs over \$10,000 in damages and decides he would prefer to harvest some of the offending animals, rather than file a claim and receive payment. He and all family members are given permits to harvest antlerless animals on his property and keep the meat.

- **Landowner Damage Prevention Permits:** This is one of the most desired types of permit. Landowner is not a hunter, but experiences of elk damage. Between August 1 and March 30 of each year he may apply for permits to harvest animals on his property. He cannot sell the permits, but he can sell access to his property for a fee and give the permit to whom he pleases. This way he may cover some of his losses. This has been a very useful tool.

There was substantial discussion about these permits.

There is also a claims process for seeking reimbursements for wildlife damages. Requirements and procedures were discussed in some detail. There is a \$10,000 limit to these claims. Legislature authorizes \$150,000 per year for these types of claims and it goes very quickly.

Questions:

Scott Stringfellow: We have experienced increasing damages over the year and now the elk are coming into the tree farm in greater numbers. Do past years damages count if putting in a claim? Answer: Yes, they would be considered. Second question: If we know damages will increase this year and next year, can we put in ahead of time to obtain special permits? Answer: Need info by March 2009, to get into special permit cycle and by March generally for future years. If the trends support it, yes.

Fred Lawrence: What percentage of elk in GMU 460 are here in the valley? Answer: It is currently estimated that there are about 500 elk in the upper Snoqualmie Valley and they comprise about 75% of the elk in GMU 460 (which includes much of King and Snohomish counties). Russel Link followed this answer with discussion of carrying capacity of the land versus social carrying capacity. Bottom line: Someone in this group or a study, or survey, needs to determine the answer this question. We may have already exceeded the social carrying capacity of the upper valley with respect to elk. This is a critical question.

Mike Trask: Reviewed history of antlerless elk hunting in the valley over the past ten years and limited muzzleloader seasons, too. He asserted that allowing antlerless to be bagged by bowhunters and muzzleloaders would help slow the elk population growth. He also asserted that sanctuaries for elk-like Meadowbrook Farm—need to be opened to hunting. There was general agreement with his view.

Unidentified attendee: Doesn't want hunting in the valley. It is too dangerous. Hunters have killed elk in his front yard, have trespassed. Major enforcement problems. He has been unable to get the police or game enforcement people to go after these game killers. Lively discussion ensued.

Nelson—Why don't we eradicate non-native species, i.e. the Rocky Mountain elk. Answer. Other options are available.

Capt. Hebner discusses current cases of elk damage. Several persons attending have legitimate needs. Need to look at options. Various permits are OK, but long term one is fencing. Then it doesn't matter how many elk. So for commercial agricultural landowners, that is probably the best long term solution.

Fred Lawrence: Question: There are a lot of elk in satellite herds around the valley that can be found in safe hunting areas in GMU 460. Projecting ahead to seasons in 2009-2010, if we provided liberal cow permits and a longer season—say ten days, wouldn't help lower the number of animals? **Answer by Russell:** Good question. I have posed it to a lot a biologists. Consensus is that elk that have plenty of food and safety are going to stay in place.

Capt. Hebner adds that he had an instructive experience along those lines in the upper Skagit River area. There were about 1500 elk in an area north of Hwy 20 between Sedro

Wooley and Rockport that were hunted heavily by the Tribes and numbers were reduced somewhat, but the hunting pressure caused the elk to move to the south of Hwy 20 along the Skagit River. They found an accommodating environment among the farms and riparian areas near the river. They stayed there until hunting pressure was increased substantially and hunting was stopped north of Hwy 20. So they go to where they are safest and have sufficient habitat. Today elk are hunted lightly in the area north of Hwy 20, but they are staying there.

Jim Gildersleeve: This is an excellent explanation and model that we can use here. We should look for and find habitat outside the valley floor that will sustain elk. We may want to improve that habitat if we can in coordination with stakeholders, hunters and landowners. Then we may want to encourage the elk to leave the valley floor during certain times—like during hunting season--through a combination of hazing and hunting activities. Working together we can do this. This may lower their numbers somewhat.

Mike Trask: It appears to me that the solution may be a combination of all these things. Habitat improvement, longer seasons, antlerless permits, hazing, more hunting and so on. Several others agreed.

Ken Hearing: The largest landowner in our area is Hancock Timber. They are doing a lot of logging which should provide suitable habitat for elk for the short term. We need to ask them to plant more grass! (Big laugh among audience because at Meeting No 2, the biologist working for Hancock was attending the meeting and in his introduction, he said he wanted to make it clear that Hancock Timber was in the tree growing business, not the elk growing business).

Russell Link: Hancock Timber has 100,000 acres of land between here and Hwy 2, and something is going to grow there (in conducive habitat).

Bob Stokke: This is a big problem. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation is finding it hard to find big landowners to work with on habitat acquisition.

Jim Gildersleeve: We need to involve the Forest Service and DNR (WA Dept. of Natural Resources) in this discussion, too.

Consensus of discussion: This is major objective of the group and a strategy for engaging these large landowners must be found.

Tape change: a couple minutes lost.

Question from unidentified attendee: Asked questions about resources of F&W to address the totality of concerns in the area. **Capt. Hebner answered:** F&W has no where near the resources to address the elk situation here. It starts with staffing. It extends to other resources and will take several years to just address the problems for commercial agricultural landowners. And we need to wait and see what initiatives come

from this group and others like it. And we also have to pursue funding for new initiatives. It takes time.

But back to Nels problem: I want to do something on his case right away and want this group to be aware of it. It will take three years to get fencing in place for him and his ten acres. That is the cycle. So we need to look at other options. Archery season opened on Sept. 8th, and bow hunting is pretty safe. Second option, is depredation permit. Landowner Prevention Permit. He invites hunters in who have a permit to shoot the animal and he keeps the meat. Another option is the Landowner Preference Permit. The hunter keeps the meat on those permits. A bow hunter makes elk very nervous and is usually effective at moving the elk out of the area.

Question about hunting in city limits: **Capt Hebner answered.** The city is cooperating and understands our concerns and will work with us on allowing selective hunting.

There was a long discussion involving many about the need for suitable habitat outside the valley floor.

Question about decision making: Who is going to make the decision on these changes and initiatives? Jim explained his understanding of how that process will work. We have four committees that will research the issues assigned to them and develop recommendation for the group as a whole to consider and act upon. These will be reviewed by the Steering Committee and DFW and presented to the Advisory Committee which is made up of the mayors, county officials, county council, and elected legislators at the state level. Resources will be sought as appropriate as will enabling legislation, if needed. So this is a complex process, but it is important to remember that these entities, the cities, the county, DFW and the State have statutory responsibilities and procedures they must exercise.

Jim Gildersleeve: One last concern that I have is the small property owner. We heard many stories of how the elk have damaged their crops, gardens, orchards, or tree farms. In all of our discussions I have not heard about any DFW programs that can assist. I am concerned about it. I would hope that our committees could brainstorm this and develop some recommendations for the group to consider. Bill could you address that concern in a future meeting?

Capt. Hebner: I would be glad to do that and have some ideas.

Jim Gildersleeve: OK we are about finished, do you have anything to add? Earlier I shut off some questions from the left side of the audience. Are those still burning issues or have we answered many?

Nelson- Do we know about how many animals should be harvested? Gildersleeve answered: We do not. The count that we have taken is preliminary and must be refined and secondly we do not know what the carrying capacity of the land is. Those are tasks which must be accomplished by the appropriate committee in coordination with DFW.

Someone: Do we know we know what the desired ratio is of bulls to cows? Yes, the Game Management Plan for GMU states it is 12 bulls to 100 cows. Does anyone know what the ratio is for GMU 460? Answer: No, we do not have good enough data yet. Gildersleeve offered from his counts on the Meadowbrook herd, he has seen a ratio of 12 bulls (of all ages-spikes, upward to 6X6's) for 38 cows and some were female calves. He counted on three separate occasions and noted the same numbers.

Last question for the night: When will the committees proceed on their appropriate tasks? **Jim Gildersleeve answered:** Separate meetings of the committees should be scheduled and they should develop lists of what they think they need to do; those initial lists should be presented to the group as a whole and passed to steering committee for comments and guidance. It has been previously mentioned that we should group these tasks and projects into short term, mid term and long term projects, and then coordinate for approval and support, and funding if appropriate. It will take us beyond our present stage.

Meeting adjourned 0900 P.M.

Minutes transcribed and summarized by Jim Gildersleeve, who is wholly responsible for their accuracy, or lack thereof. Email your comments and corrections to Jim at jlgbsggild@comcast.net and they will be attached to the minutes.

