

Elk Research & Habitat Improvement Committee Meeting

April 20, 2015

Meeting was called to order by Harold Erland, Committee Chair, at 6:05 P.M. Twenty-two persons were in attendance.

Agenda:

1. Wolf Update. WDFW was unable to provide a wolf specialist to brief this topic to the EMG on the date scheduled due to other priorities and lack of funds, so Harold pulled the WA Gray Wolf Conservation and Management 2014 Annual Report (wdfw.wa.gov/publications/01717/) and did the briefing. Those who desire a detailed status should read the report. Some of its highlights are:

a. WDFW estimates there are 68 gray wolves in WA. There are 16 packs and 5 breeding pairs. The wolf population grew by 30 percent in 2014.

b. The State objective is to have 4 successful breeding pairs in each of the three recovery areas(NE WA, N Cascade and SW Cascade and NW), plus 3 successful breeding pairs anywhere in the State for three consecutive years, OR 4 successful breeding pairs in each area and 6 more successful pairs anywhere in the State for one year. A successful breeding pair is defined as a pair whose pups live through December of the year in which born.

c. Wolf depredation is an active issue between the WDFW and ranchers. In 2014 there were two cattle and 28 sheep lost to confirmed wolf depredation.

d. Wolf mortality is a concern, too. In 2014, 10 known wolves died (3 natural causes; 4 human caused; 1 control killed; and 2 unknown causes).

2. Collaring Update. Four elk were caught and collared in the 2014-2015 cycle. Of those one has disappeared. She has not been seen or heard on telemetry. A second recent capturee was caught a second time in the trap this year, but was discovered to have antler bulbs growing on its head, so its collar was removed and it was released. The upside of this capture was that the GPS collar was partially inoperable and would not download the elk's locations. Recovery allow us to download those locations and send the collar in for repairs and refurbishing.

A discussion ensued to explain the low capture rate for this year. There are several factors to consider:

a. We caught an unusually high number of deer this year (12-15) plus we possess good evidence that two, may be three, bears activated the traps' gate. They are able to escape. One caused major damage to the netting requiring considerable repairs and the others apparently were able to life the gate and crawl out.

b. Another factor contributing to the lower capture rate was placement of the traps in peripheral areas around the research area where we had few cow elk collared. Our goal was to obtain better information on these groups. Elk populations in these areas are smaller than other areas such as Meadowbrook and Mountain Meadows, and forage extensively through residential areas.

c. EMG members have observed that cow elk are more wary this year which is likely the result of increased hunting pressure that resulted from more antlerless permits available and the antlerless seasons (muzzleloader and late archery).

It was concluded that in the next capture/collaring cycle we will start earlier in the fall. We also need to reemphasize sex determination in our collaring procedures. Being antlerless only is insufficient evidence by itself.

3. 2015 Census Results. The 2015 Annual Elk Census for the Upper Valley was conducted from March 30 through April 17, 2015. On twelve days during the period valley elk were counted from 6:00 A.M. to 8:00 A.M. Five different routes were driven each day of the survey and all elk heads and necks seen were counted and those animals marked by a collar or ear tags were noted as well. These observations are reviewed for validity using Chauvenet's Criterion and then input to the Noremark Algorithm and averaged. The formula indicates that our elk population has grown to about 511 animals, which is 19% increase. The formula also provides hi/low range of 449 to 591 animals. Data confidence is 95%. See inclosure 1.

4. I90 Fence Repair. Scott Phelps, VP, reported on the status of interstate fencing. Scott had a crew out this past weekend and survey the northside fence from Kimball Creek wetlands up to Exit 31 (Casino) and found that the fence was down in several places due to winter tree falls. He will organize crews to repair the fence and check out the remainder of the fences. Work will be scheduled throughout the Spring and Summer 2015. He is seeking volunteers.

5. Habitat Improvement. Harold has estimated that we have created 37 acres of linear meadows on the CCC Flats since starting the initiative four years ago. We have good data that shows excellent wildlife usage of the improvement. We also have telemetry data which confirms that elk sub-herds are spending more and more time there. In addition to the improved habitat, they may be escaping increased hunting pressure along the Mt. Si Road. Harold and Matt intend to schedule another work party there this spring.

Jim Gildersleeve

Secretary