

“GREEN SHEET”

Meeting: February 3-4, 2012

Agenda Item 8: Colockum Elk - Briefing

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Presented By: Will Moore and Scott McCorquodale, Wildlife Program

Background:

This briefing is at the request of the Fish and Wildlife Commission on various aspects of the Colockum elk herd. The briefing will include an overview of Colockum elk herd management, including management objectives and historical data on trends in herd size, calf recruitment, and harvest.

Since 2000, the Colockum core-herd, post-hunt population estimate has ranged from 3,306 to 5,258 elk. In the last 3 years, the herd has been consistently at objective or slightly higher, with an increasing trend. As a result, some additional antlerless elk hunting opportunity will be proposed to the Commission in March. Spring calf: cow ratios have been variable through time (range = 17-39 calves: 100 cows); during the last decade, the mean spring calf: cow ratio was 27.7:100. Spring bull: cow ratio estimates have been consistently below the 12-20 bulls: 100 cows objective. Bull elk vulnerability is high on this landscape due to good access, limited security areas, relatively “open” topography, and tribal hunting.

In the last 20 years, Colockum general season bull regulations have been changed twice. In 1994, an “any bull” regulation was replaced with a “spike only” general season rule to improve bull escapement and increase bull:cow ratios. That change did elevate spring bull:cow ratios, but not as much as needed to achieve management objectives. In 2009, a “true spike” general season rule was adopted by the Commission, and that season restriction is still being evaluated. During 1998-2008, data suggest mean yearling bull mortality was about 82%. Since the adoption of the true spike rule, mean yearling bull mortality has been just under 70% (2011 harvest data are not yet available).

In 2008, an experimental Feb. 1 to April 30 access closure for motorized vehicles was adopted for the southern half of the elk winter range. About the same time, WDFW initiated a 3-yr elk study with a number of objectives, including assessing elk responses to the winter range closure. Today’s presentation will provide some background on these efforts.

Information will also be presented regarding an effort to develop a GIS model of potential impacts to the herd associated with the current road network. A GIS analysis known as visibility analysis was used to predict the portion of the landscape where elk might be influenced by road use effects. This analysis suggested that most of the core elk range in the Colockum is potentially affected by roads and traffic. Future road management could reduce those effects; the presentation will include a demonstration of hypothetical results stemming from selective road closures at 2 different scales.

Policy Issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

None- Commission briefing.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

This briefing was also provided to the Game Management Advisory Council Dec. 10, 2011.

Region 3 meets annually with the Big Game Management Roundtable to share annual survey and harvest results for the Colockum elk herd. Region 3 staff members also meet with the Kittitas Field and Stream Club every year to discuss recreation on Department lands, hunting seasons, and wildlife management.

During the last 3 winters, Region 3 has also held public meetings locally to discuss the winter range access closure and provide an update on the ongoing Colockum elk study. The Kittitas Field and Stream club is opposed to the winter access restriction. The Big Game Management Roundtable provided the genesis for the winter access restriction. As membership has changed, that group seems to be currently split on retaining the winter access closure. The Game Management Advisory Council seemed supportive of the winter closure but has not taken an official stand on the topic.

The “3-yr package” public meetings have been the primary venue for taking public comment regarding hunting regulations, such as the “true spike” general season rule.

Action requested (identify the specific Commission decisions you are seeking):

None- Commission briefing.

Draft motion language:

NA

Justification for Commission action:

NA

Communications plan:

These briefing materials have also been provided to the Game Management Advisory Council (GMAC) and the Big Game Management Round Table.
