



# Impact of Elk Feedground Management on Elk, Other Wildlife Populations & Hunting



# Topics Covered In This Presentation



Elk Population Objective Overview



Hunting Opportunity in Western Wyoming



If Elk Feeding Ended Today



Impacts to Other Big Game Animals



Questions From Phase I

# Elk Population Objectives in Feedground Herds

Elk Herd Unit	Herd Unit Objective	2020 Pop Trend Count
Fall Creek	4400	4,408
Jackson	11,000	10,734
Afton	2,400	2,379
Hoback	1,100	1,520
Piney	2,400	2,005
Upper Green	2,500	2,701
Pinedale	1,900	2,107



Objective Process: Public process, commission approval, etc

# Hunting Opportunity in Western Wyoming (J/P Regions)

- ▶ Estimated average 13,000 - 14,000 hunters per year in herd units managed with elk feedgrounds. 23% of all Wyoming elk hunters hunt in areas managed with elk feedgrounds
- ▶ Western Wyoming provides significant public land opportunities compared to rest of the state
- ▶ Liberal seasons, general licenses, cow-calf licenses
- ▶ Ample opportunities for quality DIY and outfitted hunts

# If Feeding Stopped Today

## Overall impacts:

- ▶ Increased Damage (Stored Crops, Feedlines, etc)
- ▶ Commingling With Livestock/Disease Transmission
- ▶ Highway Mortality/Highway Safety
- ▶ Winter Mortality
- ▶ Interspecific Competition (Mule Deer, Moose, Pronghorn)
- ▶ Ultimately, high potential for decreased elk populations.

## Examples:

Afton: Forest Park would likely see high winter mortality. Grey's River would experience high mortality, increased damage, and increased highway mortality.

Fall Creek: Highway conflicts, damage and commingling would increase.

Jackson: Increased numbers of elk on the National Elk Refuge.

Piney: Significant increase in damage and commingling. Increased highway mortality. High potential for increased competition with wintering mule deer, moose and pronghorn.

Hoback: Significant increase in damage and commingling. Increased highway mortality. High levels of winter mortality would be expected.

Upper Green: Significant increase in damage and commingling. High levels of winter mortality would be expected.

Pinedale: Significant increase in damage and commingling. Increased highway mortality. Elevated levels of winter mortality would be expected. High potential for increased competition with wintering mule deer, moose, and pronghorn.

# Impacts of Feedgrounds to Other Big Game Animals

Elk feedgrounds reduce competition for resources and space on winter ranges

- ▶ Moose: Riparian areas throughout Jackson and Pinedale Regions.
- ▶ Pronghorn: Sublette Pronghorn Herd
- ▶ Bighorn Sheep: Gros Ventre, Camp Creek Winter Range
- ▶ Mule Deer: Sublette and Wyoming Range Herds

# QUESTION: If elk are not fed, what impact will it have on mule deer?

Overall, competition for limited resources on winter ranges would likely increase.

- ▶ Forage
- ▶ Space
- ▶ Cover

Examples: Elk Herd Units

Afton and Fall Creek: Small proportion of wintering mule deer population impacted. High impact to local wintering mule deer.

Jackson: Limited winter mule deer abundance in the Jackson herd unit due to annual migrations, resulting in lower impact to wintering deer populations.

Piney: High potential for increased competition due to significant overlap of wintering deer and elk.

Hoback: Lower potential for competition. Fewer deer wintering in the Hoback area.

Upper Green: Lower potential for competition assuming elk do not migrate long distances south into mule deer winter ranges.

Pinedale: Very high potential for competition, as elk distribution would likely overlap with wintering Sublette mule deer herd.

**QUESTION:** What are the impacts of feedgrounds and elk populations on mule deer populations, including fencing, and summer habitat competition (how do increased elk populations from feedgrounds impact summer survival and recruitment of mule deer)?

Feedgrounds allow for larger (historical) elk population numbers due to increased winter survival and reduced conflict with private property and livestock.

Feedgrounds reduce competition with mule deer on winter ranges.

While difficult to quantify, it is possible there is some level of competition for resources on summer ranges (forage, parturition areas, etc).

Fences associated with feedgrounds can be an obstacle during mule deer migrations, however deer have learned to navigate them well over time.

QUESTION: When CWD becomes established on feedgrounds how will it affect hunting seasons of surrounding areas? (fewer cow tags, shorter seasons, etc...)

This is very difficult to predict and quantify, however some models indicate hunting opportunity would be reduced, including complete elimination of cow harvest. This would entirely depend on CWD transmission rates and ultimately overall prevalence on feedgrounds. Impacts to hunting are expected, however it is very difficult to accurately predict.

# Questions?

