

Elk Hunt Area 7 – Type 2 License Proposal for 2021

HA	Type	Special Archery		Regular		Quota	Limitations
7	2	Closed	Closed	Nov. 21	Dec. 31	350	Antlered elk four (4) points or less on either antler; valid in Converse County

- Herd unit population estimate is ~12,900 elk, which is more than double the objective of 5,000
- Continued high success rates on Type 1 licenses (was 65% in 2020, averaged 61% over past 10 years)
- **The primary purpose of this season proposal is to increase bull harvest on private land** – There are increasing bull numbers in this herd with very high bull ratios documented during intensive helicopter survey in 2019
 - Classified 9,359 elk from helicopter and observed 51 bulls per 100 cows
 - Special management strategy goal of 30-40 bulls:100 cows
 - During this survey WGFD personnel classified 2,483 bulls, the vast majority of which were yearling or small raghorn (1,798) bulls compared to 6-point or larger bulls (685)
 - The percentage of 6-point or larger bulls has declined significantly since 2008 (first year of classifying bulls based on antler size)
- WGFD can and should provide more opportunity for bull elk harvest, so why not just increase Type 1 licenses?
 - Public land saturation – overcrowding and reduced hunter success on public land – don't want to make worse
 - There is a stark difference in bull distribution in Area 7, with far more bulls occurring in the northern portion of HA7, especially later in the season – therefore proposal to increase bull harvest in Converse County only
 - Increasing Type 1 licenses would likely exert more pressure on older age classes / large antlered bulls
 - Vast majority of bulls on private land late in season – limited access with hunters unwilling to pay access fees
 - More Type 1 licenses could reduce access for cow elk if landowners charge access fees or hunters hold out
 - Proposal to extend Type 1 bull season in Converse County was opposed by hunters and landowners last year
- WGFD has received repeated landowner and hunter complaints about declining bull quality / antler size in HA7 over past decade
 - Bull antler size decreasing in older-aged mature bulls – but, there are now more bulls than ever (including mature bulls), lots of bulls with broken tines, but less very large bulls (WGFD, hunters, landowners all agree)
 - Tooth age data indicates the average age of harvested bulls has increased over past decade yet antler size of older-aged mature bulls is declining
 - Could too many bulls contribute to declining trophy quality? – WGFD suspects, but unknown
- Why a Type 2 “raghorn” season?
 - Will increase overall elk harvest
 - Increase harvest on younger-aged bulls and lower bull ratio without increasing harvest on older-aged bulls
 - Converse County landowners requested and strongly support this season and agreed to provide access
 - Alleviates perception that WGFD is just trying to help landowners/outfitters sell more trophy bull hunts
 - Potential increased access for small bulls later in the season on several landowners
 - Some landowners don't have cows available at that time, but regularly have bachelor groups of bulls
 - Landowners/outfitters not willing to give up high-dollar trophy bull hunts to harvest smaller bulls for free or reduced price during Type 1 season
 - UNKNOWN – having fewer bulls may result in less competition/stress and may improve older bull antler size (which has diminished over past 15 years although there are now more bulls than ever)
 - Primary purpose of “raghorn” season is to increase bull harvest and provide more hunting opportunity
 - Could attract youth/new hunters with ability to harvest a small bull without having to wait to draw a Type 1

- Why a 4-point or less?
 - Relatively few yearling bulls found in bachelor groups, so landowners prefer this to “spike-only” licenses
 - Spreads harvest to more than just one age-class as compared to “spike-only” licenses
- Why not a 5-point or less?
 - 4-point bulls are easier to distinguish by hunters than 5-point bulls with “whale tail” fifth tine curving back
 - Will minimize the number of large 6-point bulls with broken antlers being harvested
- Why won’t archery hunting be allowed on these licenses?
 - Hunters will have to hunt during the rifle season which should maximize harvest success
 - Don’t want to have unsuccessful archery hunters not return to hunt small bulls later in season because they’re “burned out” – want “fresh” set of dedicated hunters when bulls are more concentrated and easily hunted
- Potential issues/concerns
 - Regulation complexity could lead to confusion with “4 points or less” limitation
 - Statewide implications / precedent – concern over complicating regulations across the state
 - Represents “cultural shift” and lends appearance of specialized trophy management
 - Hunters may shoot larger bulls with broken points – a point is defined in regulation
 - Potential confusion when antlers are broken along main beam (which would be a point) and not a tine
 - Weather always has the potential to limit late season access and success
 - Non-residents can’t apply this year unless they modify an existing application
 - Could decrease cow harvest in some areas due to increased pressure or landowners not allowing cow hunters if charging for “raghorn” bull hunters
 - If landowners do not allow as much access as expected then season will be discontinued