

Pinedale Elk Herd Unit (E108)

-Feedground Management Action Plan-

February, 2026

Introduction

The Pinedale Elk Herd (PEH; E108) is situated primarily in eastern Sublette and northern Sweetwater Counties, Wyoming, encompassing three elk feedgrounds: Fall Creek, Scab Creek, and Muddy Creek. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) manages these sites with the primary goal to mitigate damage to private lands and reduce elk and livestock commingling. Management strategies focus on elk population management, disease management (particularly brucellosis and chronic wasting disease [CWD]), habitat enhancements, and collaboration with stakeholders.

The priorities and actions in this Feedground Management Action Plan are in addition to ongoing management activities that have and will continue to take place, such as brucellosis monitoring, maintaining separation between elk and livestock, and mitigating damage to private property. These priorities and actions adhere to the Sideboards identified in the Wyoming Elk Feedgrounds Management Plan. These sideboards include:

1. Adhere to standard Department process for elk herd unit population objective review with public process and Commission approval for any proposed changes.
2. Prioritize hunting opportunities as the primary tool to manage elk populations toward the Commission-approved herd unit objectives.
3. Minimize elk damage to private property, disease transmission to livestock, and negative economic impacts to livestock producers.
4. Minimize competition with other wintering wildlife species.

Pinedale Elk Herd Unit Overview

The Pinedale elk herd (PEH; E108), is located on the western slope of the Wind River Mountain Range, primarily within eastern Sublette and northern Sweetwater Counties, Wyoming. The herd encompasses elk hunt areas 97 and 98 (Fig. 1), and is bordered by Pine Creek and Fremont Lake to the northwest, the Continental Divide to the northeast, the Green River to the southwest, and the Big Sandy River to the southeast. Three feedgrounds—Fall Creek, Scab Creek, and Muddy Creek—have been established within the PEH to reduce depredation of private hay supplies, minimize interspecific commingling of elk and livestock, and decrease winter mortality rates.

The PEH covers approximately 2,433 square miles (mi²), with 690 mi² classified as occupied elk habitat. Within this occupied range, 404 mi² are identified as Spring/Summer/Fall range, 113 mi² as Winter range, 99 mi² as Crucial Winter Yearlong range, 61 mi² as Crucial Winter range, and 13 mi² as Winter Yearlong range. Additionally, approximately 185 mi² are recognized as

Parturition range, overlapping with other seasonal ranges. The remaining 1,743 mi² comprise predominantly lower-elevation, lower-precipitation zones historically utilized by elk as winter range.

The USDA Forest Service (USFS) manages the majority of occupied elk habitats within the PEH, with over half designated as wilderness (Bridger Wilderness). Private lands are mostly at lower elevations associated with riparian and floodplain habitats along Big Sandy, East Fork, Boulder Creek, and Pole Creek drainages. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) oversees the majority of unoccupied elk habitats (Fig. 1).

The current herd population objective for the PEH is 1,900 elk (+/-20%; range: 1,520–2,280). Monitoring strategies include feedground counts, helicopter flights, GPS collars and ear-tagging to assess population size, elk distribution and disease risks.

Historical Context

Before feedground establishment, elk migrated from higher elevations to lower-elevation winter habitats. Supplemental elk feeding in the area was first documented during the severe winter of 1948–1949 when approximately 2,000 elk received supplemental feed.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) began official supplemental feeding in the PEH during the winter of 1958–1959 at Muddy Creek, initially feeding 236 elk. Subsequent feedgrounds were established at Fall Creek in 1960–1961 and Scab Creek in 1967–1968.

Originally, WGFD utilized feedground quotas to manage elk distribution. These quotas, 700 elk for Fall Creek, 500 elk for Scab Creek, and 600 elk for Muddy Creek, were established by the WGF Commission, last revised in 1987. With the adoption of the Wyoming Elk Feedgrounds Management Plan (2024), feedground quotas may be discontinued, integrating feedground population management into overall herd objectives.

Feedground Descriptions

Fall Creek feedground spans BLM, USFS, and adjacent WGFD-administered land, and was created to reduce damage to private lands. The site primarily occupies federal land, with supplemental feeding occasionally conducted on state-managed lands.

Scab Creek feedground is located on BLM land, and was created to reduce damage to private lands. This feedground is characterized by rocky terrain and constrained feeding area, making it among the least desirable feeding locations. Feeding typically starts earlier than adjacent feedgrounds to retain elk in the vicinity and minimize damage and elk/cattle commingling on lower elevation livestock operations. Historically, Scab Creek feedground was located at two other sites before its current location; records regarding the reasons for relocation are incomplete.

Muddy Creek feedground is the southernmost feedground in the PEH, located on USFS land, and was intended to mitigate damage to private lands. The site, situated along the Muddy Creek drainage, is relatively small and challenging due to its proximity to several livestock operations. Two elk-proof fences exist west of the feedground, one running north-south along the private and state land boundaries, and another running north-south along the USFS boundary, to minimize elk movements onto private lands, although elk frequently bypass the fences. Prior feeding sites included areas between Pocket Creek and East Fork River, the Leckie property (southeast of current site), and Buckskin crossing.

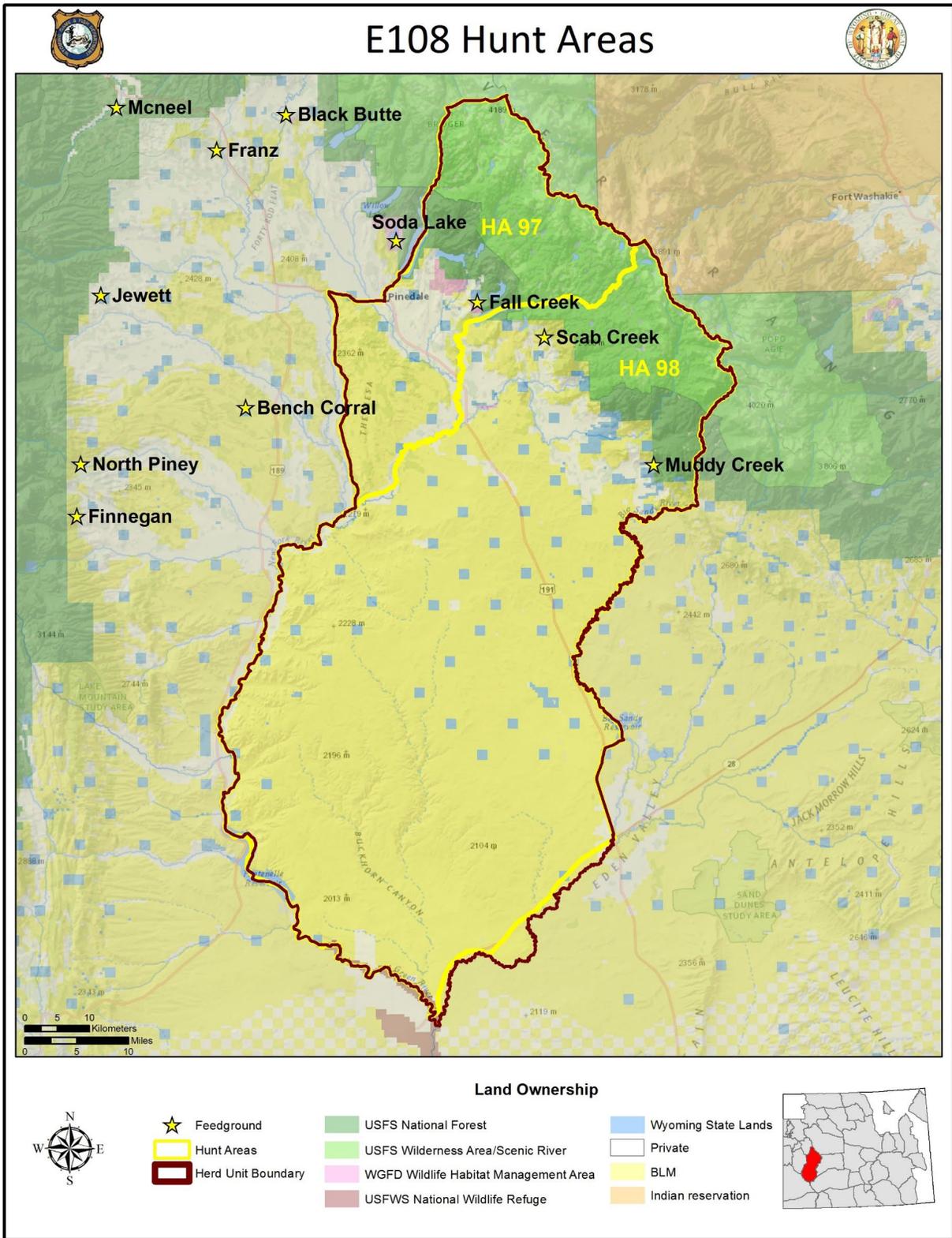


Figure 1. Land ownership, feedground locations, and hunt areas within the PEH.

Key Feedground Priorities:

The management action plans across the three feedgrounds share common priorities, summarized below:

1. **Expand Feeding Areas:**
 - Identify opportunities for expanding feedgrounds onto adjacent public or private lands to reduce elk density and disease transmission risk.
2. **Acquire Heavy Equipment:**
 - Seek to obtain funding to acquire tracked tractors and storage sheds, transitioning from horse-drawn sleighs to allow flexible feeding practices, expand feeding areas and reduce elk density. In addition to Commission budget requests, non-traditional funding alternatives will be explored.
3. **Voluntary Elk Occupancy Agreements:**
 - Assist in development of financial incentive agreements between interested landowners and funding entities to manage elk presence effectively, reducing livestock commingling and associated disease risks.
4. **CWD Sample Collection Incentives:**
 - Identify and attempt to secure funding to encourage taxidermists, outfitters, and meat processors to gather CWD samples from hunter-harvested elk, enhancing data reliability.
5. **Carcass Management:**
 - Seek to purchase and install an incinerator in Sublette County to properly dispose of elk carcasses, aligning with the Carcass Management Plan.
6. **Research Initiatives:**
 - Pursue research funding and partnerships focused on disease management and feedground impacts on elk population dynamics.

These targeted actions are prioritized to facilitate immediate implementation, leveraging collaboration and funding partnerships to ensure effective management and sustainability of the elk herd and associated habitats.

Fall Creek Priorities

Priority Number or Tier	Action	Who is primarily responsible	Budget needs and methods to acquire
1	Seek funding for acquiring a tracked tractor and storage shed.	Regional Wildlife Supervisor, Feedground Manager	~\$400,000; Grants, internal budgets, partnerships.
2	Explore options and landowner interest, and assist with development of elk occupancy agreements between interested landowners and funding entities.	Habitat Biologist	Variable; Private funding sources, grants.
3	Seek funding to incentivize taxidermists, outfitters, and meat processors to collect CWD samples from hunter harvested animals.	Pinedale Region representative on State-wide CWD committee	Variable; Private funding sources, grants.
4	Purchase and install an incinerator to implement the Carcass Management Plan. Includes identifying and securing an appropriate location in Sublette County, Wyoming, collaborating with local officials, obtaining necessary permits, and addressing all other logistical and regulatory requirements.	Regional Wildlife Supervisor, Regional Wildlife Coordinator	~\$200,000-\$400,000; Grants, county and state funds, partnerships, internal budgets.
5	Seek research funding and collaborative research initiatives.	Wildlife Disease Biologist	Variable; Research grants, university partnerships.

Scab Creek Priorities

Priority Number or Tier	Action	Who is primarily responsible	Budget needs and methods to acquire
1	Seek opportunities to expand the feedground onto neighboring private or public lands.	Regional Wildlife Supervisor, Feedground Manager	
2	Seek funding to upgrade to a tracked tractor and storage shed	Regional Wildlife Supervisor, Feedground Manager	~400,000; Grants, internal budgets, partnerships.
3	Explore options and landowner interest, and assist with development of elk occupancy agreements between interested landowners and funding entities.	Habitat Biologist	Variable; Private funding sources, grants.
4	Seek funding to incentivize taxidermists, outfitters, and meat processors to collect CWD samples from hunter harvested animals.	Pinedale Region representative on State-wide CWD committee	Variable
5	Purchase and install an incinerator to implement the Carcass Management Plan. Includes identifying and securing an appropriate location in Sublette County, Wyoming, collaborating with local officials, obtaining necessary permits, and addressing all other logistical and regulatory requirements.	Regional Wildlife Supervisor, Regional Wildlife Coordinator	~\$200,000-\$400,000; Grants, county and state funds, partnerships, internal budgets.
6	Seek research funding and collaborative research initiatives.	Wildlife Disease Biologist	Variable; Research grants, university partnerships.

Muddy Creek Priorities

Priority Number or Tier	Action	Who is primarily responsible	Budget needs and methods to acquire
1	Seek funding for acquiring a tracked tractor and storage shed.	Regional Wildlife Supervisor, Feedground Manager	~\$400,000; Grants, internal budgets, partnerships.
2	Explore options and landowner interest, and assist with development of elk occupancy agreements between interested landowners and funding entities.	Habitat Biologist	Variable; Private funding sources, grants.
3	Seek funding to incentivize taxidermists, outfitters, and meat processors to collect CWD samples from hunter harvested animals.	Pinedale Region representative on State-wide CWD committee	Variable
4	Purchase and install an incinerator to implement the Carcass Management Plan. Includes identifying and securing an appropriate location in Sublette County, Wyoming, collaborating with local officials, obtaining necessary permits, and addressing all other logistical and regulatory requirements.	Regional Wildlife Supervisor, Regional Wildlife Coordinator	~\$200,000-\$400,000; Grants, county and state funds, partnerships, internal budgets.
6	Seek research funding and collaborative research initiatives.	Wildlife Disease Biologist	Variable; Research grants, university partnerships.