



Program Summary

The Medicine Creek Treaty Tribes of Puyallup and Nisqually seek funding to conduct necessary elk management activities and to preserve critical winter habitat for the South Rainier Elk Herd. The South Rainier Elk herd is the primary stock of elk within their Treaty protected hunting area that is harvested by the Puyallup, Nisqually, and Squaxin Island Tribes. The Puyallup Tribe has hunted elk for subsistence and ceremonial purposes since time immemorial. For at least the last 5 years, there has been a steady decline in the overall South Rainier elk herd population. Both the ratio of bulls to cows and ratios of calves to cows have been consistently too low to sustain a healthy population. This steady decline and the poor herd composition ratios are of great concern to the Medicine Creek Treaty Tribes. Medicine Creek Treaty Tribes harvest ~5% of the total South Rainier Elk harvested per year. The tribes are specifically concerned about potential over-harvest of elk by non-tribal hunters. The Tribes must continue to conduct management activities (collect data, continue model development for predicting herd size) to provide sufficient data to substantiate recommendations made regarding non-tribal harvest. There has also been a considerable reduction in the funds allocated by other government entities to gather data on the South Rainer elk herd. Therefore, the Medicine Creek Treaty Tribes feel that it is imperative that funds are sought to continue to perform the essential management activities described in this proposal and to further protect critical elk winter habitat in an area where habitat is rapidly being fragmented and developed.

This project proposes two main elements that are the foundation for maintaining sustainable elk populations for years to come. The first element is elk management activities that include completing the next phase of the sightability model development that the Tribe began in 2004. The model will be used as a reliable management tool for predicting herd composition and size. This project is just one of the components of elk research being conducted by the Tribe that meets Tribal and non-tribal management goals. Also contributing to the continued research efforts, the Puyallup Tribe has plans to maintain 20-30 elk in radio-collars and to continue to use the radio-collared elk to gather further information on migration routes, the timing of migration, home range analysis, survival/mortality analysis, and continued refinement of the sightability model.

The second major element of this proposal is elk habitat conservation. We propose to acquire land and conservation easements in the elk critical winter habitat areas, in order to establish an elk conservation corridor. Preliminary mapping and analysis of the critical winter habitat areas has been completed. Target areas for protection have been identified. A discussion of the preliminary work with maps is included in this proposal as well as a discussion of the next steps to be taken.

The South Rainier Elk population has been steadily declining over the last five years. Better estimates of population size and composition are clearly needed to protect sustainable populations of elk. The work described in this proposal is in line with State and Tribal priority objectives for future management of the South Rainier Elk Herd. The objectives described in this proposal will benefit elk by providing a more accurate picture of herd size and composition, steer harvest management decisions to provide a healthier more robust population, and provide critical winter habitat protection in perpetuity. In turn Medicine Creek Treaty Tribes will benefit from a greater abundance of elk for subsistence and ceremonial purposes in years to come. This project benefits tribal and non-tribal members in providing development of better management tools and habitat protection in perpetuity. The total cost of the project is expected to be \$268,430.87.