

Elk Management

Currently there are 35 elk herd units in Wyoming. Because specific management circumstances vary across the state along with the ability of local personnel to collect data, managers can choose from among three objective types. Over the past five years, objectives for every elk herd have been reviewed, provided to the public for comment, and revised as needed. All objectives are presented to the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission for their review, revision if deemed necessary, and ultimate approval. Objectives are official once approved by the Commission.

Post-hunt population estimates are calculated for 13 of the 14 herd units with a post-hunt population objective. The data set for the other herd is inadequate for generating an estimate. Trend count objectives have been established for 14 herds, two of which have incomplete data. For these herds, the actual number counted during late winter flights over winter ranges is used as the estimate for the herd. The final seven herds have a satisfaction objective with the goal of 60% of the landowners providing substantial elk habitat as well as 60% of those hunting in the area the past year being satisfied. For these herds and those herds with incomplete data, field personnel use their experience and insight gained from landowners and hunters to develop an estimate. To generate the statewide elk population estimate published in the Commission's Annual Report, all estimates described above are summed.

The statewide population objective presented in the Commission's Annual Report is based only on the 14 herds with a post hunt population objective and the 14 herds with a trend count objective. Monitoring consists of both aerial and ground observations as well as information obtained through harvest surveys and annuli age of harvested elk. Data for each elk herd are compiled annually and available through the Wyoming Game and Fish website. Population data and status are discussed at public meetings held throughout the state annually. At these meetings Department personnel discuss current trends and management strategies both at the local and statewide scale with the public and take their comments. All harvest management strategies are routed through a public comment process, modified as needed, and then heard by the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission in order to develop annual harvest limits. The Department has quantified population information regarding elk status and management strategies dating back to 1976.