

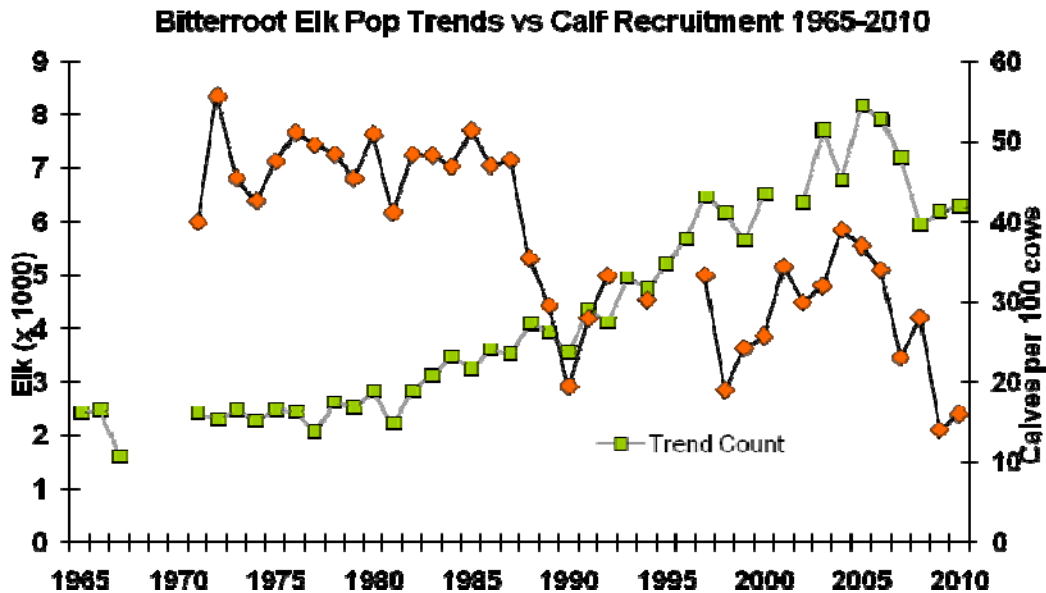
Bitterroot Wolf / Elk Study Request For Funding

The Bitterroot Elk Herd is in Crisis

The Bitterroot Elk Herd has declined by 22% since 2005 due primarily to predation and overharvest brought about by a flawed elk management plan. The spiraling upward population increase of wolves, lions and bears has reduced the calf to cow ratio to unsustainable levels in five of the six Bitterroot hunting districts and the post-season bull to cow ratio in 3 districts are at critical levels.

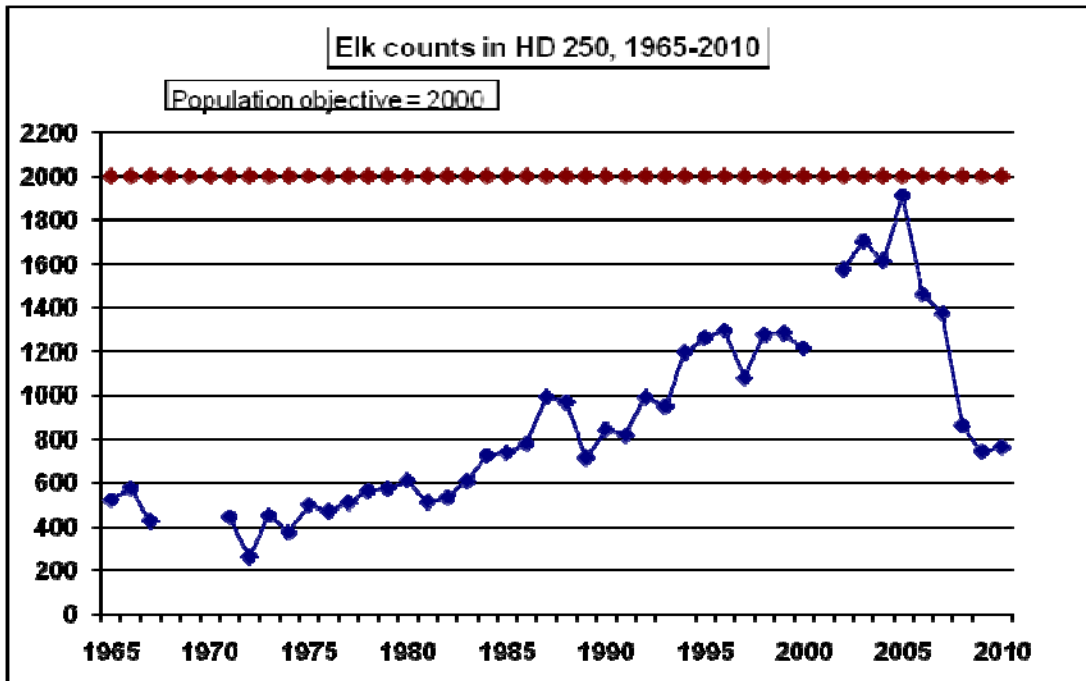
Cows

Calves



Elk in the West Fork of the Bitterroot, HD 250, are 63% Below Objective

Nowhere is the problem more acute than in the West Fork of the Bitterroot, HD 250. The 2010 spring population trend survey counted 764 elk with 11 calves:100 cows and 4 bulls:100 cows. This represents the second year of poor calf recruitment, poor bull survival, and very low overall population trend. The bulls:100 cows figures, for the second consecutive year, are below the Elk Plan recommendations for HD 250.



Predation from wolves has, without a doubt, contributed mightily to the current problem. FWP biologists estimated the wolf population in 2009 at a minimum of between 45 to 60 wolves in 11 packs for the Bitterroot. They are uncertain of wolf numbers in the West Fork of Bitterroot, HD 250. Efforts to document the number of wolves in the district have been unproductive due to its status as a low priority non-cattle producing area. However, USFS biologist Andrea Shortsleeve estimates there may be 5 or 6 wolf packs roaming the West Fork district.

Elk Survival and Recruitment Study

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks have approval a \$200,000 three study to evaluate the factors affecting elk survival and recruitment. Factors affecting population declines may include poor body condition in cow elk, reduced pregnancy rates, or increases in calf predation by black bears, lions, or wolves. The Department will investigate the effects of nutrition, body condition, and predation on elk productivity, survival, and recruitment.

The study involves putting GPS collars on 40 cow elk, 20 from the East Fork of the Bitterroot (HD 270), and 20 from the West Fork (HD 250) beginning in February 2011.

Radio location data will provide information on movement patterns, location of calving areas, and interchange with adjacent herds. Beginning in spring 2011, 60 elk calves will receive radio collars and monitored daily for one year to determine survival and mortalities. In addition, wolves will be fitted with radio collars in the West Fork with the intent of targeting packs that are presently unmarked.

We Need Answers

A few folks may question the need for this seemingly expensive study and its benefits. FWP Biologist for the Bitterroot area Craig Jourdonnais best sums up the answer to the question as to why we need this study.

“What doesn't seem right to me is to manage our phenomenal wildlife resource in the Bitterroot with more emotion than science. The residents of this valley deserve to have some of their most important questions regarding elk and predators answered. We all have a chance to bring some excellent science to the forefront. The Bitterroot is not the Yellowstone or the Madison. It is not the North Fork of the Flathead. It is unique on many levels. Our watershed and the wildlife it supports are every bit as important to us as any elk or wolf in the other highly researched areas.”

“We have a chance to compare our system with those that have been the focus of intense wildlife research projects for decades. We have a chance to bring some incredible resources to this valley that will assist all of us in managing elk and carnivores using quality data. The proposed three-year research effort goes well beyond predation influences on elk.”

The driving force behind this study is science over opinion. The results of this study could potentially have a profound impact of the future direction of the elk management as well as the court. The study will allow FWP to set predator quotas based on science to help achieve elk objectives.

Funding the Study

Some of the funding for this study project will come from hunter license dollars. The majority of funding will have to come from private sources and grant programs such as those offered by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Bitterroot National Forest's RAC program.

The MBA has a proud history of being one of Montana's strongest wildlife advocates and benefactors. Providing support for programs dedicated to the conservation and preservation of wild game is central to the MBA's mission. This study will answer questions related to how predators, particularly wolves, are affecting elk survival and recruitment.

Support the Study

I respectfully request the MBA members and the Sportsman of Montana to contribute to the funding of this crucial study that is so vital to the survival of an essential Montana elk herd. More importantly, it will provide benefits to all Montanans' and the elk we all treasure. Every dollar could save a life of an unborn elk. Please send your contributions to the MBA PO Box 23611 Billings, MT 59104-3611, or contact your local MBA rep. Make sure you provide your contact info with the contribution. Please provide your contribution by June 30th.

Thank you for your consideration. Respectively, yours in Bowhunting,

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Special thanks to former MBA president Charlie Johnson for providing us information about this Study.