

East Kootenay Elk Management Plan 2005-9: Public Consultation

DRAFT

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Executive Summary

Declining elk populations in the East Kootenay, characterized by distorted bull to cow ratios and low calf recruitment, led to intense public controversy during the mid 1990's. In response, the BC Ministry of Environment, Land and Parks initiated various hunting restrictions to limit the harvest of elk. Public concern continued and in 1998 a professional wildlife biologist with extensive elk management experience was contracted to conduct an independent assessment of the elk harvest management in the region and province (Raedeke 1998). The resulting report provided short- and long-term recommendations for managing elk hunting as well as a list of recommendations to promote recovery of the Kootenay elk herds.

A high priority recommendation of the consultant's report was to develop a formal elk management plan for the East Kootenay. A plan with clearly defined management objectives was required to allow evaluation of harvest management options to meet objectives, provide a greater level of certainty for hunters and commercial users of the elk resource and to direct government and public efforts in the areas of population, habitat, elk/agriculture conflict and land management.

The 2000-2004 East Kootenay Elk Management Plan was prepared in-house by Ministry Staff released as the East Kootenay Elk Management Plan 2000-2004 (Bircher et al. 2001). The report contained 22 key management recommendations. The Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection (WLAP) determined that the elk management program for the East Kootenay required formal review and revision of the 2000-2004 plan for application to the period 2005-2009.

This report summarizes the first phase of the building of the new plan; namely, the public consultation phase which began on August 31, 2004 with a workshop in Invermere followed by two others in Cranbrook on September 1st and Fernie on September 2nd. An additional workshop was held on October 5, 2004 in Cranbrook.

Throughout the public consultation process, comments, recommendations and information was requested from the public and from stakeholders who were invited to comment via email, fax, post and a WLAP web site.

The results of the public consultation yielded some useful and reasonably consistent ideas and comments from those who attended the open houses and/or provided written submissions. The following themes emerged:

- There was no criticism of the 2000-2004 East Kootenay Elk Management Plan and many expressed support for its recommendations.
- There was widespread support for the six-point bull elk season. Many hunters said the bull elk hunting was better than it had ever been and many said the hunting experience was much improved, citing the frequency of bugling in numerous bulls (although not all were legal to shoot). This sentiment was tempered with concern by some hunters regarding the long-term implications that the season might have on the age structure of bulls in the population.
- There was general concern by the ranching community that the elk population is increasing and that impacts on their industry are also increasing. The hunting stakeholders, in general, recognized this concern and many suggested ways to ameliorate the impacts. It was clear that both stakeholder groups would like the issue resolved.
- Some in the agricultural community expressed a willingness to support elk on private lands but also made it clear that there must be some economic return for the forage consumed by elk. Some suggested that access fees would be a method of dealing with this issue.
- A prominent issue was that of non-migratory versus migratory elk herds. Many suggestions were received regarding potential ways to deal with the issue. There was wide acceptance in the hunting community to the concept of an increased harvest on "homesteader" elk as long as "migratory" elk are not impacted.

- Many hunters made it clear that they wanted increased opportunities to hunt. The archery community provided strong recommendations for increased opportunities for their members to hunt during exclusive bow-hunting seasons.
- Many hunters expressed concern that increased fencing of private land will negatively impact wintering elk populations and many questioned crown grazing rights that may impact wintering wildlife.
- There was almost universal agreement that Crown range condition had worsened over the past 5 years and that there had been little done to improve the situation. Many expressed the need for a government commitment to reduce forest in-growth in the Trench and to conduct widespread range improvements using various techniques.
- Many in the hunting community stated that, although elk populations had increased, they had not increased everywhere in the East Kootenay. They stated that there were few elk in many suitable, high-elevation summer ranges that were commonly occupied in the past.
- There was general agreement that elk population had not increased in the northern part of the Trench (from Invermere north). In these areas there was little support for additional hunting opportunities.

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Background

Declining elk populations in the East Kootenay, characterized by distorted bull to cow ratios and low calf recruitment, led to intense public controversy during the mid 1990's. In response, the BC Ministry of Environment, Land and Parks initiated various hunting restrictions to limit the harvest of elk. Public concern continued and in 1998 a professional wildlife biologist with extensive elk management experience was contracted to conduct an independent assessment of the elk harvest management in the region and province. The resulting report provided short- and long-term recommendations for managing elk hunting as well as a list of recommendations to promote recovery of the Kootenay elk herds (Raedeke, 1998).

A high priority recommendation of the consultant's report was to develop a formal elk management plan for the East Kootenay. A plan with clearly defined management objectives was required to allow evaluation of harvest management options to meet objectives, provide a greater level of certainty for hunters and commercial users of the elk resource and to direct government and public efforts in the areas of population, habitat, elk/agriculture conflict and land management.

The 2000-2004 East Kootenay Elk Management Plan was prepared in-house by Ministry Staff and was released as the East Kootenay Elk Management Plan 2000-2004 (Bircher et al. 2001). The report contained 22 key management recommendations and was approved by the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks in 2000.

The Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection (WLAP) determined that the elk management program for the East Kootenay required formal review and revision of the 2000-2004 plan for application to the period 2005-2009. WLAP awarded a contract to prepare a new elk management plan to EcoLogic Research (with Twin Spruce Resource Management Consulting as a subcontractor) in late July, 2004.

Methods

The contract for the development of the management plan specified short timelines to complete various components. As a result, the public consultation phase occurred largely during the hunting season. We received a number of complaints regarding this scheduling and, as a result, the Ministry agreed to extend the planning process to January 1, 2005 from December 1, 2004, and to hold an additional open house to provide additional opportunity for the public to participate.

In designing the consultation process, we attempted to focus the public's comments on the following questions related to the 2000-2004 plan:

1. Are the vision and goals articulated in the 2000-4 elk management plan still appropriate?
2. What have been the successes and failures of elk management in the East Kootenay since the original plan was implemented?
3. What additional issues regarding elk management are of concern?
4. To what extent were management objectives and strategies identified in the 2000-4 elk management plan implemented?
5. What data and assumptions that led to the 2000-4 objectives and strategies need to be reconsidered?
6. What objectives and strategies from the 2000-2004 plan need to be revised?
7. What options are available to deal with any new and revised objectives and strategies?

The public were notified of the open houses in early August through a notice in the East Kootenay Advertiser and by announcements on local radio. An e-mail list was assembled from a variety of sources and was used to notify stakeholder groups. A WLAP webpage dedicated to the 2005-2009 East Kootenay elk management planning process was also used to notify the public of the consultation and to provide updates.

Three open houses were held; the first on August 31, 2004 in the Community Hall in Invermere, the second on September 1 in the Heritage Inn, Cranbrook and the third on September 2 in the Legion Hall in Fernie. An additional and fourth open house was held in Cranbrook on October 5, 2004.

Open houses consisted first of a drop-in session from 4-7 pm. The attending public were asked to sign in and to provide a contact address. We used the drop-in sessions to talk with individuals about their views and to provide information to them regarding development of the plan. Following the drop-in session we made a formal presentation that outlined:

- The main issues identified and the recommendations made in the 2000-2004 East Kootenay Elk Management Plan
- The process being used to develop the 2005-2009 Elk Management Plan
- Some of the data collected since the first plan regarding elk populations and hunter harvests
- Questions we were requesting the public to consider in providing their input to the new plan
- Various methods available for the public to provide their input to the development of the new plan

Following the presentation, attendees were encouraged to provide their comments and recommendations. A recorder was present during the open houses to capture comments, recommendations and answers to questions.

Public input was submitted to us in a number of formats:

- Verbally at the open houses
- Written answers to the questions provided at the open houses
- Other written submissions
- E-mails submitted either directly or via the link on the WLAP web site

We summarized input both by key questions and by the following themes:

- Elk population management
- Habitat Management
- Harvest Management
- Elk/Agriculture Conflict Management
- Land Management
- Non-Consumptive Use

Input received that did not fall into these categories is presented separately. Comments are paraphrased except where quoted directly.

Results

General Input from Open Houses

Appendix I presents input recorded at the initial open houses in Invermere, Cranbrook and Fernie, as well as the additional open house held in Cranbrook on October 5, 2004.

Written Submissions in Response to Key Questions

Were you satisfied with the rationale and recommendations of the previous elk management plan (2000-2004)? How could it have been improved?

All answers to this question were positive with the following comments being added in one or more submissions:

- Believes that 6 consecutive winters and closing antlerless LEH seasons had more to do with elk recovery than the 6-point season.
- A general open bull season to be maintained (no LEH).
- The conservative harvest plan had visions and goals for restoring a previous variety of hunting opportunity and these need to be incorporated in the new plan at a progressive level.
- Should have an archery season.
- Agreed with restrictions on bull harvest to increase elk population but increasing it to 6-point. was too much. This reduced opportunity for the average person to the point where it isn't worth bothering any more.
- "I think the last plan is fairly solid and well thought out. However, the harvesting of 6-point bulls exclusively has caused some imbalances within the herd structure."
- "Yes very satisfied. The bull to cow ratio is now where it should be.....the 6-point. season works and must be continued."
- "We should harvest smaller bulls. Many local hunters would prefer tender meat, rather than be forced to kill a prime 6 pointer."

Is it your impression that elk populations in the E.K. are stable, increasing or decreasing? Do you think that current range conditions would allow for a larger population? Why or why not?

Most of the respondents agreed that elk populations have been increasing over the past 5 years and one or more added the following comments:

- "Please give the recommendations of the 2000 plan strong consideration, especially on range management and predator management."
- Logging had created more suitable habitat.
- Elk Valley has seen a dramatic increase (in elk) over the past 4 years but not in all areas like the Flathead. Winter range in the Elk Valley has reached maximum carrying capacity.
- Range conditions have supported larger populations in the past; with ongoing enhancements it should still be capable of this.
- Continue with general 6-point. season.
- "We could have a larger population, as the backcountry (summer) range is in excellent shape."
- "We need to get some real (elk) numbers."
- We need to look at the Elk Valley as a separate area for elk management.
- Elk populations are stable with increases in the valley bottoms and decreases in the higher elevations. There is not enough feed at lower elevations due to overgrazing, competition with cattle, and lack of suitable feed.
- Do not feel the elk population in the northern part of the E.K. has recovered. Would like to see the 6-point season remain for a few more years.
- Noxious weeds are a problem in the north and are spreading.
- Cattle are being allowed into the backcountry and claiming more wildlife habitat.
- Ranchers neglect to bring in their cattle in the fall and there is no enforcement.

- Ranges are being continually reduced by forest in growth.
- Exclusion fencing should not be paid for by government and any ranchers fencing private property should not have Crown leases.
- “In the Elk Valley they are increasing.”

What is your impression of the current state of elk range/habitat? Base on your experience, where should the limited funds available for habitat restoration activities be directed?

Opinion varied on the state of elk habitat/ranges. There was universal agreement that habitat should be enhanced. The following comments were provided:

- “There is too much range land being grazed by cattle.”
- Requires work (range land).....deal with forest in growth.
- Habitat is in need of ongoing management and enhancement through burns, managing forest in growth, enhancing grasslands, weed control and compatible logging practices.
- All funds should be directed to winter range enhancement and forest in growth on winter ranges.
- “The Forest Practices Code (needs to be changed) to allow Tembec to grass seed instead of trees, on south facing slopes, improving habitat in the Elk Valley.”
- More funds and cooperation with the MOF should be directed towards habitat restoration.
- “In the Elk Valley (the habitat) is still fair. Winter range habitat degrading. Habitat restoration to be directed to winter ranges.”

What do you see as the main issues with respect to elk-agriculture conflicts, and what specific suggestions do you have for resolving the issues?

There was general recognition of this issue with the following comments offered:

- “The elk/agriculture conflicts won’t end until this is adequate feed for both cattle and elk. ”Transplanting some elk [out of the trench] in the spring might help.”
- “I fully support a captive elk relocation plan. Many homesteader elk are prime candidates for capture and many areas could handle more elk.”
- Elk predation on private lands needs to be addressed. Target specific problem areas through LEH first and depredation permits where necessary.
- Deal with specific problems. “The ranching community has overstated the problem and wildlife fences have/are going to have a significant negative impact on elk populations.”
- “Implement early season cow/calf hunt to keep land owners happy and not harm migrating elk.”
- We need to limit the number of cattle summering on wildlife winter range.
- “If there is government money for fencing then there should be money for range enhancement and elk transplants.”
- “High subsidized fences are hurting our elk population. Cattle devour three times as much forage as wild game on a per animal basis. I support paying ranchers who have no fences for sharing their crops in spring with ungulates.”
- “I personally do not like them [fences].” They are unnatural barriers to migration.

Have you been satisfied with the hunting opportunities provided by the Province over the past five years? Do you have specific suggestions for providing additional opportunities?

- “Yes, I would like to see later archery seasons for elk.”

- “The 6-point. season was a good idea. We need more opportunity.”
- Hunting opportunities have been reduced to allow for the expansion of wildlife populations. We need to manage for increased populations and restore a variety of hunting opportunities.
- “Don’t support any LEH hunting on bull elk. I do support low level LEH numbers on cows/calves on private land to help reduce the homesteader problem in the trench.”
- “Implement a late black powder season to help elk/rancher problems.”
- “We are the only areas that have sustainable hunting during the rut. There are no better opportunities than that available.”
- “I have always supported the 6-point. season. It’s a very successful strategy to recruit elk. I wanted to continue to have the privilege of hunting elk during the rut.”
- Suggest making the area north of Radium a trophy elk area with permits for cows and even small bulls.
- “Road closures are getting out of hand and there are far too many of them.” Old closures need to be reviewed and some removed.
- “I am completely unsatisfied with my hunting opportunities in the last 5 years. Most hunters do not care to shoot a 6-point. bull and there is not much incentive to hunt anymore. I would like to see harvest size for elk reduced to include 5-point.bulls.”
- “I grudgingly acknowledge that there was some wisdom in imposing the 6-point only season when elk were in trouble.....but that scene has now passed.”
- Six point seasons allows good hunting opportunity.
- In favour of the 6-point season but has concerns regarding the long term health of the population because there are more dominant 5-point bulls now doing the breeding.
- Not in favour of a 3-point hunt.
- Not in favour of trespass fees for hunting on private land.
- Promote primitive weapons seasons and as early as August 20th to deal with non-migratory elk.
- “Please do not put bull elk on LEH, but rather use a short open season. Hunting animals, not a lottery, is the game we want to be involved in.”
- “It is past time to remove a lot of V.A.C.’s, because habitat has changed, and many seem only designed to provide privacy for guides.”
- “Yes, continue with the 6-point.season (no smaller bulls 3-point – 5-point.)”
- A cow/calf season could be used to deal with the agriculture issue but it would have to be small and short. Additional opportunities should be given to bow hunters.

Would you support an expanded LEH hunting season to assist in addressing the elk/agriculture issue?

There was general support for this concept with the following comments:

- “Support but with strong controls. Target homesteader elk.”
- “Yes, if it was done properly.” Advocates an early season beginning in September and leave bulls on 6-point.regulation. If more elk need to be taken hold a late season archery hunt.
- “No antlerless season unless population density is such that a conservative harvest would not cause a decrease in overall elk numbers.”

- “An expanded LEH hunt will not help the problem as most tags presently being issued are going unfilled.”
- Support for the LEH season if it occurred in agricultural areas and took place in September to target the homesteader elk.
- “Yes, only if used to gain information if such a season is affective in addressing the problem.”

Additional Written Submissions

Five briefs from individuals and three briefs from organizations were received. In general, they didn't directly address the questions posed by the consultants but did provide extensive information, much of which related to the questions being asked.

Written information provide from individuals is summarized as follows:

- Decrease the number of elk identified as homesteader elk.
- Manage non-migratory and migratory elk using different strategies.
- There is a need to up date these five years annually.
- Reduce non-migratory elk populations through transplants.
- There should be separate cow, calf and bull LEH permits targeting non-migratory elk with a target of removing 3500 elk by hunting and transplants.
- Disabled hunters should be given special consideration for these permits.
- Some ranchers would be supportive of continuing with the LEH program (on private land) especially if there were economic incentives such as access fees.
- Opposed to any change in the 6-point. season. Since its inception we have seen bull/cow ratios increase, the cow/calf ration increase as well as the number of harvestable bulls. There are now more and better 6-point. bulls than in any previous time.
- Suggest a special any-sex low-elevation hunt.
- Need to move cattle out of the watersheds and ranges earlier than late October.
- Most hunters thought that increased elk numbers would mean more hunting opportunities and this has not happened. Last year's elk cull is an example of a plan gone wrong.
- Bow hunting can be a management tool if given a chance. Most jurisdictions accept this fact.
- Hunters want more opportunity.
- Rifle hunting for 3-point. bulls is a recipe for another slaughter and depletion of stock.
- Adding a weapons restriction in interface areas will address the safety issue.
- Recommend any-sex bow season below 1100 m aimed at homesteader elk.
- Cow/calf LEH's need to be closely scrutinized to prevent over-harvest. They should only be issued for the Trench and no later than October 10th.
- 6-point. season should be continued.
- Recommend an age restriction on LEH bull permits.
- “A part of the new plan has to be means to increase the forage available for wintering elk in the Trench. Money needs to be made available for this.”

Written briefs received from associations/clubs are summarized as follows:

An extensive brief was received from the East Kootenay Wildlife Association (representing 8 clubs in the East Kootenay). This brief recommends the following:

Management Objectives:

1. Manage habitat suitability to expand the sub-regional elk population to 30,000 elk (+ or- 10%) without allowing elk populations to exceed forage availability, or to come into serious conflict with agricultural interests.
2. Undertake habitat enhancement, range unit enhancement, and grassland eco-system restoration to facilitate reaching objective # 1.
3. Implement and enforce recently developed and currently developing access management plans in all regions of the East Kootenay.
4. Optimize and diversify harvesting opportunities where possible. Manage elk to increase harvest potential and move away from management for trophy potential. Harvest allocations must be based on live data and actual inventory.
5. Manage towards post-hunting season bull/cow ratios of 25 bulls per 100 cows, and cow/calf ratios of 40 calves per hundred cows as minimums.
6. Develop a plan to implement supplemental feeding of elk during very severe winters.
7. Reduce agricultural damage caused by elk by implementing harvest strategies directing the maximum possible amount of the annual elk harvest towards non-migratory elk populations. Reduce non-migratory populations to acceptable levels.
8. Develop maximum population density target levels for the core agricultural areas between Skookumchuck and Wardner and implement harvest strategies that will keep elk populations at or slightly below predetermined population densities in these specific areas. These harvest strategies should target mainly the non-migratory populations.

Elk harvest strategy:

1. In recognition of the fact that increased hunter-days of recreation can be provided without significant increases in harvest numbers, we would support increased archery hunting opportunities for elk in the sub-region.
2. We would support the introduction of a youth elk hunt, but only if this can be done in such a way as not to impact archery hunting opportunities. We believe the introduction of a youth hunt should be developed in conjunction with archery season modifications and in consultation with bow hunters.
3. We would support the introduction of a muzzle loading rifle hunting season, or alternatively, the introduction of a short 3 point bull GOS if and when this is considered sustainable. Otherwise we feel the GOS should primarily continue to be a 6-point season.
4. We will support antlerless LEH for population density control when and if required. We feel at this time that any antlerless LEH should apply only to the main Kootenay Valley area where agriculture activities exist.
5. We will support private land depredation hunts where required, but feel that official qualifying guidelines must be developed that clearly outline when agricultural properties would qualify for these hunts. We support the introduction of private land archery depredation hunts in any areas that qualify under the above-mentioned guidelines, but where it is deemed unsafe to discharge firearms. Our members also feel that to protect migratory elk populations from harvesting of antlerless elk, that all antlerless LEH hunts targeting non-migratory elk should end by October 10th.
6. To facilitate continued growth of elk populations in non-agricultural areas we will not support any antlerless LEH in any portion of the Columbia Valley, the Upper Kootenay Valley north of Canal Flats or any of their tributaries, or in the Lower Kootenay Valley above 1100 meters, or in any

tributaries of the Lower Kootenay Valley including the Elk, Wigwam and Flathead River systems. These areas must, in our opinion, remain on a population recovery strategy, and we would recommend the GOS in these areas remain as a 6-point bull season.

Elk habitat management:

It is also our position that the EKWA will not support any harvest of antlerless elk outside of the previously established private land depredation hunts until the commitment made by government in June 2003 regarding eco-system restoration is met.

We believe that grassland eco-system restoration in or near agricultural areas should immediately address the overlap areas between cattle grazing units and elk winter range. We believe these overlap ranges should have the highest restoration priority.

In areas with no agricultural activity, habitat enhancement should be conducted with express goal of maximizing elk populations where competition with bighorn sheep or other species will not become an issue. Elk populations in agricultural areas will need to be maintained at a density that would prevent reaching a regional population goal of 30,000 elk and to reach that goal, habitat management and enhancement for elk production in all non-agricultural areas including the northern MUs must be maximized.

In conclusion we recommend a goal should be established to restore and enhance elk habitat over the next five years to a point that a population of 30,000 elk can be maintained and that economic impacts to the agricultural industry shall be minimal.

Crown Rangeland Allocation:

1. Leaving 50% forage for conservation on ranges with the remainder being split equally between cattle and wildlife.
2. Development of temporary pastures utilizing quick-establishing species.
3. Long term/large scale development of a grasslands ecosystem restoration program utilizing native grass species.
4. Implementation of deferred grazing rotations for cattle on all ranges with monitoring
5. Establishing a special elk management unit for the lower elevation areas in the Trench, extending from Skookumchuck to Wardner, encompassing the areas where agricultural activities, migratory elk winter range and cattle grazing permits are being compromised by non-migratory elk populations. Special range management plans for these areas should be established so elk density can be linked to forage availability.

Habitat, Range Maintenance, and Forage Allocation:

1. Adopt a long-term habitat restoration strategy with timelines based on "A Blueprint for Action" released by the Rocky Mountain Trench Ecosystem Restoration Steering Committee in February 2000.
2. Immediately begin clearing, soil preparation, and seeding of selected sites with a suitable domestic grass species for the purpose of providing forage on an allocated basis of 50/50 for elk and cattle. These sites to be maintained until natural species forage is adequately provided by restoration activities.
3. Maximize the use of enhanced range management strategies on all cattle/elk overlap range. (i.e.: aerial fertilization, invasive weed control, develops natural irrigation opportunities, etc.) In an attempt to manage the Crown range at a higher forage production potential.
4. Range use plans, AUM numbers for cattle, turnout and bring-home dates, etc. (all relevant data) on range used by cattle should be available to other stakeholders. The terms of Range Use Plans must be closely monitored and strictly enforced.

5. Implement and enforce a Deferred Rotational Grazing system for cattle on Crown range.
6. Retain and manage the areas burned by wildfires in NDT4 eco-systems as rangeland.
7. Establish a special elk management zone to facilitate elk management and harvest strategies in low elevation agricultural areas.

Additional recommendations:

1. Work needs to be done regarding access management similar to that done in the Golden area.
2. Increase predator hunting and trapping opportunities.
3. Increase opportunities to hunt grizzly bears based on a conservative and scientific approach.
4. Support liberal harvesting regimes for black bears, cougar and wolves.
5. Encourage Aboriginal hunting of non-migratory elk and the EKWA would welcome participating with Aboriginal peoples in issues related to elk management.

The homesteader elk issue:

- We strongly recommend creation of a special elk management unit, or units. To be more specific regarding this recommendation, we feel that the low elevation portions of MUs 4-21 and 4-20 below 1100 meters elevation and south of Skookumchuck, the low elevation area of MU 4-22 below 1100 meters, and the low elevation area of 4-03 below 1100 meters north of Wardner are the areas of concern. This area may have to be further divided into special management sub-units that would allow specific harvesting regimes, specific to conditions in these areas which can vary significantly.
- This special elk management unit would encompass nearly all of the ranching activity in the Trench as well as the major range of the most damaging homesteader elk herds.
- In order to bring the homesteader elk situation under control, we visualize the special unit as having liberal early season (pre-migration) three-point bull seasons and LEH antlerless seasons as long as is required to bring the homesteader elk problem under control. We feel also that there should be summer and winter maximum elk population densities established by scientific methods for this area to prevent future agricultural issues with elk, keeping in mind that winter population will by necessity be much higher due to the fact that these areas contain a considerable amount of winter range used by migratory elk.
- Following the removal of sufficient homesteader elk that these are no longer considered a problem, these special units can then be utilized using post-migration harvest regimes that will maintain the newly developed population densities with the goal of preventing excessive depredation in the agricultural areas and to take some of the pressure off key grazing permit areas. There also may well be a need to maintain modest early seasons indefinitely to prevent re-expansion of the homesteader elk populations. We would welcome and expect ranching community input into establishing the special unit boundaries and population densities, but we would insist that these be developed by proven scientific methods and not by lobby pressures.
- A single region wide elk management strategy designed to reduce elk/agricultural conflict to acceptable limits is not workable. Micro-management strategies for the agricultural areas such as developing the special management unit must be utilized. In actual fact a very small percentage of the sub-region is used for agricultural purposes and managing the entire sub-region to meet goals for this small portion of the land base is unacceptable to our members. To this end our members are in agreement that two fundamentally different elk management strategies are required in this sub-region, one of which will be specific to the main centers of agricultural activities.

The Kootenay Livestock Association submitted a five page brief. This brief is summarized below:

“The need for the wild ungulate damage project on private agricultural lands was demonstrated after an assessment of forage crop losses due to wild ungulate damage was carried out in 2000-2001. From

information gained in this assessment, as well as data collected on lost forage crops during the nearly-three years the pilot has been running, it is safe to say that there is an average of thirty to forty percent of forage crops lost to wild ungulate damage per year, per producer. Such a loss in any industry year after year would result in its being severely compromised, as it has ours.”

“It is the homesteader segment of the wild ungulate populations we ask that management/reduction of numbers be focused on, and not those wild ungulates who do not rely and/or utilize out private land forage crops which is intended for our own livestock.”

.....”We do not want to negatively affect our relationship with the Guide Outfitting industry. Like them, we have a capital investment at stake. As such, we would rather work with Guide Outfitters not only within the scope of this forthcoming East Kootenay Elk Management Plan, but also toward measures to increase forage on Crown land for both wild ungulates and livestock.”

The Problem:

- Is not new.
- With fire reduction starting 70 years ago forest encroachment and loss of native grasslands has continued at a rate that is greater than treatment can occur.
- Government has managed elk numbers as well as cattle numbers, but has not aggressively addressed the issue of in growth.....thus the Agriculture-elk conflict.....which has continued for decades.
- The label of ‘Agriculture-Elk conflict’ has furthered the misunderstanding between groups.
- KLA wants to work with government, guide outfitters, hunters and wildlife groups to improve native grasslands and a step toward this is to manage the growing numbers of homesteader elk and deer.

The LEH Hunt:

- The program as currently being run is not achieving required results.
- The number of harvested elk does not come any where near the recruitment rate.
- Its not worthwhile assisting the hunt if the number of elk harvested does not lead to reduction of forage damage.
- There is a problem with the lack of coordination between MWLAP and the state of Montana regarding elk movement across the border.
- A more effective program would:
 - Allow land owners to recover an access fee.
 - Must involve hunting on adjacent Crown land
 - Could involve private land permits that land owners could use or sell.
 - The hunting period could be increased and open to elk below 1100 meters in the trench.
 - Hunts should be focused on areas where elk numbers are highest.

KLA suggests these points be considered in writing the Elk Management Plan:

- The plan must be flexible.
- There must be annual input into implementation of the plan regarding the state of the ranges.
- A reduction of homesteader elk is needed immediately.
- KLA requests representation on the EKHOOC.
- The plan must be based on scientific information regarding elk numbers and forage availability.

- Elk management must be site specific.
- The new plan should make reference to action being taken to improve the health of our native grasslands.
- The plan is an opportunity for MWLAP to work with the MOF to open up ingrown grasslands
- The new plan is an opportunity for MWLAP to work with the MOF and the MAFF to address livestock utilization on Crown ranges.
- The 6-point. bull elk season does not promote herd balance or numbers.
- Consideration must be given to the fact that homesteader cow elk are more productive than those not utilizing domestic forage.
- The new plan is an opportunity to put measures in place to focus on restoring the ranges below 1100 m. for the benefit of livestock and wildlife.
- The plan should make reference to the fact that there is money available to improve habitat and forage quantity and quality.

In summary, the elk management plan must be to manage elk populations in balance with habitat availability and to control elk depredation on private agricultural lands. New and modified hunting techniques and decisions based on science are absolutely essential to meet goals.

The Traditional Bow Hunters of B.C. provide these recommendations:

- Bow only any elk season from Sept 1-9
- Bow only any elk special area hunt below 1100 meters in the Rocky Mountain Trench along with the present GOS (6-point.) and LEH.
- Bow only any elk Sept 1 – Oct 20, Dec.1-20 in conjunction with the proposed “interface fire management areas” near city limits of Cranbrook, Kimberley and other East Kootenay cities.
- Muzzle loader/bow, 3-point bulls, September 10 -15 (present units).
- Expansion of the present habitat restoration to double initiatives.

The United Bow Hunters of B.C. provide a brief summarized as follows:

- Dissatisfied bow hunters within the Province are requesting improved opportunity and parity with other elk producing jurisdictions.
- Considers conservation of our wildlife resource a priority.
- Expanded archery seasons should be considered as a management a tool and recreation opportunities within the framework of the revised management plan.
- Suggest seasons: Sept 1-15, bow only any sex, Sept 1 – Oct 20 bow only any sex in special management area below 1100 meters in the Trench (Radium to U.S. border)., Sept 1 – Oct 20, bow only any sex, special management area – interface fire safety areas with specified distances from rural habitation, Dec 1-20 bow only for cows in specified area(s).
- Support for all range enhancement efforts and enhancement of transitional habitats to improve holding potential for ungulates.
- Support for regulations limited the use of ATV’s for game retrieval only with an operating restriction from 0900 to 1500 during legal hunting season.
- Support liberal harvest regulations on wolves, bears, coyotes and cougar.

Recommendations of the East Kootenay Hunter Opportunity Committee:

- Continue the 6-point. GOS for bull elk.
- Issue limited cow/calf permits on private land.
- Could have an earlier cow/calf season on private land.
- Some support for a short open season on 3-point.or larger bull elk.
- Some support for 6-point. season plus a LEH for any bull.
- Suggestion for 3-point.or larger bulls for seniors and junior hunters.
- Golden hunters want 6-point season to remain.
- Generally, hunters are happy with the present season and don't want any change to adversely affect elk numbers.
- Most hunters are opposed to LEH for cow/calves except on private land.

Conclusions

Following are the most prominent, high-level themes that we have inferred from the input to date:

- There was no criticism of the 2000-2004 East Kootenay Elk Management Plan and many expressed support for its recommendations.
- There was widespread support for the six-point bull elk season. Many hunters said the bull elk hunting was better than it had ever been and many said the hunting experience was much improved, citing the frequency of bugling in numerous bulls (although not all were legal to shoot). This sentiment was tempered with concern by some hunters regarding the long-term implications that the season might have on the age structure of bulls in the population.
- There was general concern by the ranching community that the elk population is increasing and that impacts on their industry are also increasing. The hunting stakeholders, in general, recognized this concern and many suggested ways to ameliorate the impacts. It was clear that both stakeholder groups would like the issue resolved.
- Some in the agricultural community expressed a willingness to support elk on private lands but also made it clear that there must be some economic return for the forage consumed by elk. Some suggested that access fees would be a method of dealing with this issue.
- A prominent issue was that of non-migratory versus migratory elk herds. Many suggestions were received regarding potential ways to deal with the issue. There was wide acceptance in the hunting community to the concept of an increased harvest on "homesteader" elk as long as "migratory" elk are not impacted.
- Many hunters made it clear that they wanted increased opportunities to hunt. The archery community provided strong recommendations for increased opportunities for their members to hunt during exclusive bow-hunting seasons.
- Many hunters expressed concern that increased fencing of private land will negatively impact wintering elk populations and many questioned crown grazing rights that may impact wintering wildlife.
- There was almost universal agreement that Crown range condition had worsened over the past 5 years and that there had been little done to improve the situation. Many expressed the need for a government commitment to reduce forest in-growth in the Trench and to conduct widespread range improvements using various techniques.

- Many in the hunting community stated that, although elk populations had increased, they had not increased everywhere in the East Kootenay. They stated that there were few elk in many suitable, high-elevation summer ranges that were commonly occupied in the past.
- There was general agreement that elk population had not increased in the northern part of the Trench (from Invermere north). In these areas there was little support for additional hunting opportunities.

Literature Cited

Bircher, N., D. Janz, I. Hatter, and R. Forbes. 2001. East Kootenay elk management plan 2000-2004. BC Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, Wildlife Branch.

Raedeke Associates, Inc. 1998. Assessment of harvest strategies for Rocky Mountain elk. Prepared for: BC Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks.

Appendix I

Table 1. Notes and discussion recorded at the Invermere open house, August 31, 2004.

Theme	Comment
Population management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> elk are not appearing in their traditional habitats
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> concern that migratory elk being killed and not 'homesteaders'
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cow/calf elk populations appear to be stable
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we are in a lot better position than five years ago
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we should set a target of 30,000 elk in the new plan
Habitat management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> forest in-growth is resulting in shrinking habitat for ungulates
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> forest tenures should also be managed for range
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we have more elk than five years ago and less range available to them
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> need to implement ecosystem restoration plans
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there is a big problem with forest tenure management - can't manage for range
Harvest management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there was better wintering habitat for elk five years ago
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue with the 6-point bull season
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need special season for cow/calf
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to get back to more traditional hunts- more family oriented hunts
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> some suggested special hunts for juniors and seniors for homestead elk
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 95 to 98 % of all elk hunters are hunting for meat and should have more opportunity to hunt
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> need to convince Victoria that a summer hunt for homesteaders is needed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LEH tags in a special zone would help deal with homesteader elk
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> meat hunters need an opportunity to shoot smaller bulls i.e. 3 and 5-point bulls
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a range of dates were mentioned for homesteader hunts: July to Oct.
Elk-agriculture conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> need cow/calf permits prior to Oct.15th
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ranchers aren't allowing hunters to hunt their lands to assist elk issue
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> July and August is when the ranchers experience severe elk problems
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cattle are left out too long on the ranges and no forage left for elk
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> range condition has deteriorated
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> should provide the ranchers with incentives to feed elk
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ranchers have been supporting elk for too long
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we may need to go to 'Z' zones for homestead elk, a hunt for seniors and juniors
Land management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> homesteader elk will always be present; have to put up with some of them
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ranchers putting up fences is an issue for elk populations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> changing access management is a way to increase homesteader harvest
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the forest tenure system needs to change to allow for range management
Non-consumptive use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> implement ecosystem restoration
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> manage for elk in NDT 4 ecosystem
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no recorded input regarding non-consumptive use

Table 2. Notes and discussion recorded at the Cranbrook open house, September 1, 2004.

Theme	Comments
Population management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> elk are on Crown ranges and private lands year round now

Theme	Comments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we need a five year rolling plan so adjustments can take place during the five years
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we need a plan covering below 1100 m and one for above 1100 m
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we should target to remove 3500 elk a year below 1100 m
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we need a more flexible plan for next 5 years
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we need to 'checker board' bottom land winter ranges and have decent feed to entice elk
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> more predators in the back country could be the reason for lack of elk there
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> concern expressed that there may be as many as 32,000 elk present in the E.K.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there was general discussion regarding elk numbers and inventory accuracy
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> why isn't government providing more money for a more accurate elk inventory?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> your plan can't be accurate if your inventory numbers are not accurate
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there was discussion regarding how much a cow versus an elk eats in one day
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the idea to move elk to the backcountry is a good one
Habitat management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> concern expressed regarding government money not being spent on noxious weed control
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we need to keep encouraging government to work on ecosystem restoration
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> need to insure there is enough forage - need a balance between wildlife, industry and agriculture
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> can we be assured of a 5-year budget for restoration (directed to MLA Bill Bennett); answer: we have 3 years of funding now and money from other sources like CBT, CBFWCP, WLAP and MOF....need to find a way for someone to remove trees in the trench and make money at it
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the mines are planting alfalfa and they have plenty of elk.....why don't we plant alfalfa?
Harvest management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> will more permits be issued for cow/calf elk?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> agreement with LEH system but it should be done as it is in Alberta with reduced odds
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> keep the six point season for elk bulls above 1100 m (some spoke against this suggestion)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> habitat enhancement needs to be a top priority
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> what about ecosystem maintenance not just enhancement?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not in favour of more LEH hunts.....recommends a short general open season
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LEH doesn't work on private land.....one elk shot and others disappear only for a short time
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we need to have a 2 week 3 point bull season
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> about half the elk populations live in the trench so we should have a spike season below 1100 m
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> need a separate LEH for cows and calves
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no general open season in the trench
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we need to keep the 6-point season above 1100 m
Elk/Agriculture conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> farmers should be spending money on Crown range improvement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agriculture Canada spends money on range improvement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cattle need to be completely removed from Crown ranges
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> need to set criteria for elk vs. cattle on Crown ranges....need to consider more than 1 industry
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use of Crown ranges has to be fair to all industries

Theme	Comments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can't solve the problem by killing off all the elk
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • need to look at the impact of all ungulates on ranges; not just elk
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one individual explained the value of the agriculture to the E.K. and country in general
Land management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • need to look at capability mapping more closely
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we need to log the trench and we should be getting on with it
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sand Creek needs to be selectively burned to bring the range back
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MOF has more impact than any other Ministry or group on ranch conditions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recommendation that the consultants consult professional agrologists regarding range condition
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if everyone builds fences in the next 5 years you have to take that into account
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • need to establish the availability of feed before setting population targets
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • noxious weeds have got worse in the past 5 years
Non-consumptive use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no comments were recorded regarding non-consumptive use of elk

Table 3. Notes and discussion recorded at the Fernie open house, September 2, 2004.

Theme	Comments
Population management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what is the average age of bulls harvested i.e. from tooth returns
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it is important to know the age class of bulls being harvested
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • concern expressed regarding lack of recent inventory
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • suggest a stocking program to move elk to unused habitats
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • predation is a big factor, especially in the Flathead - grizzlies and wolves
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we've radio collared hundreds of elk over the years; we should be able to
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • determine which are homesteader elk
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • suggestion that migratory cows were largely shot in the 1980's and
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • this has altered migratory patterns
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • need a program to identify just which elk are homesteaders
Habitat management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some believe there is not enough forage because of cattle
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • need a review of what habitat is available for additional elk
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • farmers and ranchers need to form a partnership to restore ranges and
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Ministry of Agriculture needs to be part of this
Harvest management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a LEH season for cows/calves at the end of season for juniors/seniors /disabled
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a late archery season for bulls
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have and LEH season for spike bulls
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • general support for the 6-point season
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archery season works well with the 6-point. season
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • don't like the archery season over lapping with the junior/senior hunts
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • suggest an archery hunt at the end of the 6-point season
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some supported LEH hunt for antlerless on private lands
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • general support for special hunts for juniors/seniors and disabled persons
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seniors need more opportunity to hunt antlerless and smaller bulls
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a short 14 day season for antlerless may be acceptable
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sparwood Club opposes antlerless hunts; suggest a range enhancement program before we start killing antlerless elk
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • suggested some sort of general hunt with a quota to end the season

Theme	Comments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sparwood Club would not support a seniors/juniors hunt for bull elk
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> many expressed lack of support for a 3-point. season
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> need to get unused habitat back into use
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> general support to not have bull elk on LEH
Elk/Agriculture conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there may be an elk problem in the trench but not in the backcountry
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> special management hunts should target only problem areas
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> elk fencing is a problem
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> most ranchers in the Elk Valley have second job so not as much pressure as in the trench
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> hunters have to pay into the HCTF Fund so ranchers should contribute as well based on the number of head they are grazing on Crown ranges
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> are ranchers lobbying for a major elk culling program?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> concern expressed regarding all the new elk fencing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fencing should not be allowed on public rights of way or on easements
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bulk of the grazing is being done by cattle not elk
Land management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> concerned expressed regarding forest in-growth
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> who is checking grazing leases?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> concern expressed that the Ministry responsible for elk is not responsible for range management
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> based on the rate of in growth there won't be any elk left in 40 years
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Victoria needs to get the message that more money and commitment is needed to get something done about the range problem
Non-consumptive use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no comments were recorded regarding the non-consumptive use

Table 4. Notes and discussion recorded at the Cranbrook open house, October 5, 2004.

Theme	Comments
Population management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> discussion regarding the estimate of 25,000 elk, value of the estimate in achieving goals of all stakeholders
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> general agreement to move away from a total population estimate and move toward using harvest numbers and goals and objectives estimating if they are being met
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> discussion regarding cow/bull ratios
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> discussion regarding current predator numbers and their impact on elk populations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> questions regarding why more inventory has not been done when this was a objective of the earlier plan
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we need to know age of bulls harvested
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> when will we know if we have over harvested older bulls?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we need to look at the telemetry work that was done in the 1980's.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we need more 'micro' management of some MU's to deal with problems specific to those areas
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> more elk inventory is needed
Habitat management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> general discussion regarding range management, the ability of the range to support 25,000 elk as well as cattle grazing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> general discussion regarding the ability of crown ranges to support elk numbers during a hard winter
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> it was pointed out that spring and fall range are very important for elk; probably as important as winter range
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> general discussion regarding elk populations in U.S. States, their habitat

Theme	Comments
	value, etc.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> habitat needs more funding; hunters can't pay for it all; need some federal money too
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> roads have had a big impact on elk and that's why they don't migrate out of the trench
Harvest management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> suggested having mandatory reporting of all killed elk with corresponding tooth returns – clubs could volunteer to assist
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> suggestion that hunting seasons should be closed when it is obvious that harsh winter conditions will impact elk populations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there was considerable discussion regarding the use of archery seasons to control 'homesteader' elk populations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bow hunters should be able to hunt elk in the month of August and hunt antlerless elk.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bow hunters do not want their season rolled in with special seasons for young rifle hunters
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bow hunters agree with the 6-point bull GOS for rifle hunters but not for bow hunters; bow hunters should be allowed to harvest any bull
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> suggestion of a spring bow hunt to drive elk out of the trench
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we have good bull populations now so why not liberalize the season for bow hunters
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> nine days is not a significant season for bow hunters
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> suggested designating a couple of MU's as bow hunting only
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> suggested a late season bow hunt
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> suggested moving the junior hunt into August instead of when school is in
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> it would be better to harvest out of all age classes – 6-point season and later 3-point season
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bow hunters are trying to get exclusive hunting opportunities – not right
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6-point season is great for trophy hunters but not those that want elk meat
Elk/Agriculture conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ranchers who don't put up fences should be compensated
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fencing private ranch lands will have a negative impact on elk
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> grazing fees for those ranchers that fence should be tripled
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> hunters work and pay to enhance range values and then the ranchers are given more grazing rights
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> hunters do the majority of enhancement on Crown land
Land management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> general discussion regarding access management and its impact on elk behaviour and populations – no general consensus
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crown ranges are in terrible shape
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> if we assume a 50/50 split in grazing between elk and cattle there isn't enough range out there to support both
Non-consumptive use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there were no comments regarding non-consumptive use of elk