DETERMINING THE INFLUENCE OF LAND ACCESS ON ANTLERLESS ELK HARVEST IN SELECT AREAS OF MONTANA, USA

Results From a Survey of 2010 Antlerless Elk B License Holders

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At a minimum, this project aimed to do the following:

- Determine the extent to which respondents were able to access land to hunt antlerless elk (*Cervus elaphus*).

- Determine what types of properties respondents were able to gain access to hunt—using six property categories developed from a landowner study conducted by MFWP and Colorado State University in 2008 (McCoy et al. 2009).

- Determine the extent to which respondents were able to successfully harvest antlerless elk on each of the property/access types.

*(Antlerless elk = female and young of the year elk)*
Methods:

- Mail-back questionnaires were mailed to a sample of license holders, or to all license holders for specific areas, depending on the number licenses available for the area.

- Reminder postcards were mailed to non-respondents after two weeks.

- Replacement questionnaires were mailed to non-respondents for licenses which possessed low license quotas.
The survey was designed using insight from hunters and field biologists. Important questions asked of survey respondents included:

- On what types of properties did they attempt to hunt using their 2010 Antlerless Elk B License? *(The “B” license is a specially designated license for antlerless elk.)*

- On what types of property did they successfully access or secure permission to hunt using their B License?

- For each type of property they successfully accessed to hunt, did they harvest an antlerless elk using their B License?
Note: Private property rights are strongly defended in the United States.

Property owners have the right to prohibit access, and in Montana hunters are required to have owner permission before they can access or cross private property.

Hunters must even have permission from the property owner to cross private land to get to isolated state and federal managed public lands.
Explanation Property Types used in the Study

Publicly Owned Land

Privately Owned Land Enrolled in Block Management

Private Land That is Owned by Family, Relatives, a Close Friend, or Friends of Family/Relatives (No Fee Is Charged)

Private Land That is NOT Owned by Family, Relatives, a Close Friend, or Friends of Family/Relatives (No Fee Is Charged) [THIS IS THE MOST ABUNDANT PROPERTY TYPE IN MONTANA]

Privately Owned Land Guided by a Hunting Outfitter

Privately Owned Land With Access Fees Charged
RESULTS:
## 2010 Antlerless Elk B Licenses Discussed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2010 Antlerless Elk B License</th>
<th>2010 License Quota</th>
<th>Survey Sample Size</th>
<th>Number of Surveys Successfully Delivered</th>
<th>Number of Survey Respondents</th>
<th>Survey Response Rate (Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>343-80</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>004-80</td>
<td>2200</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>992</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>540-80</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Percent of respondents who sought and successfully secured permission to hunt on privately owned land (without a fee) that is NOT owned by family, relatives, or a close friend using their Antlerless Elk B Licenses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antlerless Elk B Licenses Included in the Survey</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>343-80</td>
<td>004-80</td>
<td>540-80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Types of properties respondents reported they hunted using their Elk B Licenses and the percent that hunted each type.

- Publicly Owned Land: n=166
- Private-Block Management: n=434
- Private-Family/Friends: n=25

Recall:
- 90% could secure this type of access
- 68% could secure this type of access
- Only 50% could secure this type of access
Of those respondents that hunted each property type, the percent that successfully harvested an antlerless elk using their Elk B License.

(Statewide average = 26%)
Antlerless Elk B License harvest distribution by type of property hunted.
Response rates ranged from 55% to 60% for the three licenses discussed, good for a mail-back survey of this kind.

Across all of the Antlerless Elk B Licenses included in the survey, the majority of survey respondents reported they attempted to hunt for antlerless elk using their Elk B License.
Where Did Respondents Report They Hunted Using Their Antlerless Elk B Licenses?

All access/property types were utilized to varying extents and access types used most were highly dependent on the particular license that respondents possessed.

But, this study revealed that securing access to hunt antlerless elk on privately owned land that is NOT owned by family, relatives, a close friend, or friends of family/relatives can be difficult and result in relatively low antlerless elk harvest where needed.
SUMMARY

How Successful Were Respondents at Harvesting Antlerless Elk?

With a few exceptions, respondents experienced near average to well above average success rates at harvesting an antlerless elk with their B license.

Across most of the licenses studied, respondents who had access to non-Block Management privately owned land (without a fee) owned by family, relatives, a close friend, or friends of family/relatives were likely to enjoy above average harvest success.
What do the study findings mean for elk population management in Montana?

1) It is evident that the Friends/Family access/property type in particular is playing a key role in antlerless elk hunting and harvest in some areas of Montana.

A large majority of hunters in Montana may not have access to many areas where elk populations are over management objectives.
What do the study findings mean for elk population management in Montana?

2) It is unlikely that hunting will be an effective population management tool in areas with limited hunter access and low antlerless elk harvest.

In these areas, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks can implement very liberal seasons with nearly unlimited numbers of licenses and it will not translate into increased antlerless elk harvest.
What do the study findings mean for elk population management in Montana?

3) In areas with limited hunter access and increasing elk populations, other means of population management may become increasingly important.

4) It may greatly benefit hunters to work harder to establish friendly relationships with private landowners in areas they want to hunt elk in Montana.
Questions...

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