Private lands, public wildlife...

Comparing & contrasting resident hunter and private landowner data and thoughts regarding hunting access in Montana

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There’s a lot of confusion regarding what is...

PUBLIC HUNTING?

or

PUBLIC HUNTING ACCESS?
Clearly, publicly owned lands offer public hunting opportunities.

There are approximately 32 million acres of publicly owned land in Montana that offer public hunting access open to common on general use.
Private land hunting is much more complex...

There are approximately 59 million acres of privately owned land in Montana.
There are eight systems used by private landowners to manage hunting access in Montana.

Do any of these systems offer public hunting access?

Results from a 2008 private landowner hunting access management study in Montana.
TERMINOLOGY IS IMPORTANT HERE!

Every hunter is a member of the public.

Each of the eight systems used by Montana private landowners to manage hunting access on their lands offers opportunities to members of the hunting public.

The distinction between the different systems used include specifically how hunting is managed and, as a result, who typically hunts on property managed under a particular system.
Two of the systems used by private landowners in Montana...

...do in fact offer public hunting access that is open to common or general use.

Block Management Hunting Access Program

-and-

Non-Block Management hunting without a fee involving mostly hunters who are NOT family or friends of the landowner.

For both of these systems, if hunter numbers are limited, hunters are typically selected on an equal opportunity, first-come-first-serve basis.
The remaining six systems used by private landowners…

…offer **private hunting access** intended for or restricted to the use of a particular person or group of people.

Non-Block Management hunting without a fee involving mostly hunters who ARE family or friends of the landowner.

Outfitting by the landowner.

Outfitting by a licensed outfitter other than the landowner.

Lease agreement with a non-outfitting business that markets hunting opportunities.

Lease agreement with a hunter or group of hunters.

Access fees (non-lease) charged per hunter or group of hunters.

Only hunters who are willing to pay fees or have a direct connection to the landowner typically hunt under these six systems.
Let’s talk about elk hunting in Montana…
Each year, more and more hunters are reporting seeing fewer elk on publicly owned lands in Montana...

Yet, elk numbers are robust in most parts of the state. In fact, elk populations are over objective in 50 percent of Montana’s elk hunting districts.

Of note...most resident elk hunters focus their efforts on hunting elk on publicly owned lands in Montana.
A recent article from the September-October 2014 issue of Montana Outdoors Magazine
Elk used to be readily found on publicly owned lands... both before and during the hunting season.
Elk now prefer to go to private land with limited hunting access rather than stay on public lands where there is more hunting pressure.
Most landowners in Montana offer only private elk hunting access

Results from a 2008 private landowner hunting access management study in Montana.
Right now we are in the midst of conducting an additional study of private land hunting access management in Montana...

- This study builds upon our 2008 landowner study.

- The methodology for the 2014 study was enhanced to make acreage estimates regarding how private land hunting access is managed across Montana.

- N= 7,000 surveys administered statewide.

- 50 percent survey response rate.

We hope to have study results available sometime later this year.
With respect to elk hunters...

From a 2010 antlerless elk hunter study and a 2014 statewide resident elk hunter study we learned that securing access to hunt elk on non-Block Management privately owned land is in fact becoming more of a challenge for...

... Hunters who are NOT willing to pay a fee.

- and -

... Hunters who do NOT have a direct connection with a landowner.
Furthermore, both the 2010 and 2014 hunter studies also show that elk harvest success varies greatly depending on what type of property is being hunted.

Above...a 2½ year old bull harvested on privately owned land enrolled in Montana’s Block Management Program.
For example, from our 2014 resident elk hunter study we learned that...

a) 85 percent of hunters reported they hunted elk on publicly owned land  
   (14 percent reported successful harvest)

b) 29 percent reported they hunted elk on private land enrolled in Block Management  
   (8 percent reported successful harvest)

c) 10 percent reported they hunted elk on non-Block Mgt private land (without a fee) that is NOT owned by family, relatives, a close friend, or friends of family/relatives  
   (16 percent reported successful harvest)

Public elk hunting access.
e) 24 percent reported they hunted elk non-Block Mgt private land (without a fee) that is owned by family, relatives, a close friend, or friends of family/relatives  
(23 percent reported successful harvest)

f) One percent reported they hunted elk on private land (guided by a hunting outfitter)  
(44 percent reported successful harvest)

g) One percent reported they hunted elk on private land with access fees charged (e.g., hunting lease, fees charged per hunter or group of hunters, hunting club, etc.)  
(54 percent reported successful harvest)
Is elk hunting in Montana, particularly bull elk hunting, turning into a game of “haves” and “have-nots”? 

Increasingly, resident hunters are expressing frustration about the “harboring” of publicly owned wildlife for private gain and exclusive use.
PRAYER IS THE BEST WAY TO MEET THE LORD.
TRESPASSING IS FASTEN.
In summary, elk hunting in Montana illustrates the many diverse hunting access related challenges being faced by wildlife managers...

- How do you manage populations of elk that are over objective when most hunters can’t gain access to where the elk are?

- How do you address inequity issues that are arising as a result of more and more private landowners offering only private elk hunting access?

- How do you satisfy both hunters and private landowners who often have very different ideas about how to manage wildlife?

And, let’s not forget about non-consumptive wildlife enthusiasts who simply like seeing elk in Montana.
These challenges are not just limited to elk hunting and elk management in Montana...

Hunting access & private land/public wildlife issues are on the forefront of the challenges currently being addressed by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.
Thank you for the opportunity to speak today!

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