Landowner Views of Elk in Western North Carolina

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Overall Purpose

• How do western North Carolina landowners view the presence of elk?

• Do their views differ based on parcel size they own?

• Do their views differ based on whether elk currently live in the area?

• Do their views differ based on land use?
Introduction: Elk in North Carolina

• Elk were extirpated from North Carolina by the mid-1800’s

• Elk were reintroduced into the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 2001.

• In 2008, the NC Wildlife Resources Commission assumed responsibility for elk outside Park boundaries.
Introduction: What is the issue?

• Elk have been established in North Carolina.

• In 2011, the Commission asked staff to investigate the feasibility of establishing a “huntable herd” of elk.

• What is the best way to manage these animals?
Introduction:
Survey objectives

To describe:
• Western North Carolina landowners’ experiences with elk
• General support for and opposition to elk
• Opinions of possible outcomes of elk
• Acceptability of possible management options
• Likelihood of participation in elk hunting and elk viewing
Methods

- 9 strata
  - 3 geographic regions
  - 3 parcel size categories
    - 0 to 2 acres
    - >2 to 15 acres
    - >15 acres

- 17,218 landowners
- Mail survey
  - July 22, 2013
  - October 14, 2013
Response

- 40.5% = response rate
  - Response differed by stratum
  - Haywood County, > 15ac = 47%

- 6,521 completed surveys
Landowners’ experiences with elk

• Overall
  o 3% = elk live near property
  o 3% = seen or heard elk
  o 1% = experienced damage

• Haywood > 15 ac tracts
  o 27% = elk live near property
  o 20% = seen or heard elk
  o 12% = experienced damage
Support for/opposition to elk

Overall western NC
• Their largest tract (begin)
  o 72% support/11% oppose
• Their largest tract (end)
  o 68% support/14% oppose
• Private lands
  o 73% support/6% oppose
• Public lands
  o 88% support/3% oppose
Support for/opposition to elk

Haywood > 15 ac tracts
• Their largest tract (begin)
  ○ 58% support/25% oppose
• Their largest tract (end)
  ○ 56% support/27% oppose
• Private lands
  ○ 56% support/22% oppose
• Public lands
  ○ 77% support/10% oppose

More specifically:
• Elk live near property
  ○ 48% support/39% oppose
• Seen or heard elk
  ○ 40% support/39% oppose
• Experienced damage
  ○ 22% support/64% oppose
Opinions of possible outcomes of elk

Most % “positive”

• Elk may returned to part of their historical range
  o 76% overall/66% H. >15 ac

• People may be able to view elk
  o 66% overall/53% H. >15ac

• Elk may bring economic benefits through tourism
  o 62% overall/52% H. >15ac

Most % “negative”

• Increase in auto-wildlife collisions
  o 44% overall/39% H. >15 ac

• Disease transmission to livestock
  o 43% overall/43% H. >15ac

• Disease transmission to other wildlife
  o 43% overall/39% H. >15ac
Acceptability of possible management options

Elk heard, seen, or leave hoof prints on property
- Frighten elk
  - 41% (overall)/43% (H) acceptable
- Kill elk
  - 32% (overall)/39% (H) acceptable

Elk eat hay, knock down fences, disturb livestock
- Frighten elk
  - 48% (overall)/49% (H) acceptable
- Kill elk
  - 36% (overall)/47% (H) acceptable
Likelihood of participation in elk hunting and elk viewing

Elk hunting
- 38% - themselves or family
- 17% - other than family
- 7% - lease land for elk hunting

Elk viewing
- 37% - other than family
- 4% - charge people to view elk

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Management considerations

• Overall, landowners supported elk, but few have experience with elk.
  o As more western NC landowners have interactions with elk, it should be expected that support will decline.

• Finding lands in western NC that will support a huntable herd will be challenging.
  o Landowners demonstrated reluctance to allowing people other than family to hunt on their lands.
  o Most tracts of land are relatively small compared to what is needed to support a huntable elk herd.

• A huntable herd of elk will be supported if it is established on public lands.
Management considerations

• When preparing broad-scale communications about an expanding elk herd – emphasize that elk may be returned to its native range.

• Government and NGO collaboration is necessary to implement management strategies. Clearly defining conditions under which landowners may kill elk will be important.