

**ELK HERD UNIT MANAGEMENT PLAN**  
**Elk Herd Unit # 5**  
**EAST CANYON**  
**December 2023**

**BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

Davis, Morgan, Salt Lake and Summit Counties - Boundary begins at Echo Junction and I-80; southwest along I-80 to I-15; north on I-15 to its junction with I-84 near Ogden; east on I-84 to Echo Junction.

**UNIT MANAGEMENT GOALS**

Manage for a population of healthy animals capable of providing a broad range of recreational opportunities, including hunting and viewing. Consider impacts of the elk herd on other land uses and public interests, including private property rights, agricultural crops, and local economies. Maintain the population at a level that is within the long-term capability of the available habitat to support.

Work to protect and improve existing habitat through a variety of strategies to maximize the number of animals the unit can support.

Build and maintain professional relationships with private landowners, city and county officials, residents, and CWMU operators across the unit to garner support for hunting as a management tool and achieve population objectives.

**UNIT MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES**

**Habitat -**

- (HO1) Make efforts to prevent loss of elk habitat, especially winter range.
- (HO2) Reduce noxious weeds and restore damaged winter ranges to healthy native vegetation.
- (HO3) Protect and enhance summer range on private and public property by increasing quality and quantity of summer range forage and encouraging optimal animal distribution across the landscape with water improvements.
- (HO4) Protect and facilitate elk seasonal migration across roads and private/public land.

**Population -**

- (PO1) Manage the population to a target winter herd size of 1,800 elk.
- (PO2) Educate landowners and residents on the role hunting plays in sustaining healthy wildlife populations and gain support from the non-hunting community.
- (PO3) Monitor the prevalence of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and take measures to mitigate its spread.
- (PO4) Determine annual recruitment and status of the population.

**Bull Elk Harvest Objectives** - As per the Statewide Elk Management Plan, harvest strategies are used to provide diverse hunting opportunities for the public. The subunit specific harvest strategies are as follows:

- **East Canyon** - This is a general season any bull hunting unit.

**CURRENT STATUS OF ELK MANAGEMENT**

**Habitat** - The quality of existing habitat within the East Canyon unit is generally in good condition, although some local areas require attention and improvement. The summer range is gradually shifting toward more conifer-dominated landscapes, necessitating treatments to reduce conifer growth and promote the rejuvenation of aspen stands. In Morgan County, particularly along the Wasatch Back, oak stands have become very dense, hindering some animal movement. Implementing mechanical thinning

treatments would greatly benefit this area. On parts of winter range in Morgan County, invasive cheatgrass and other annual grasses have replaced native forage. However, individuals committed to habitat enhancement have recently acquired some affected land parcels throughout the unit. These landowners are actively engaged in practices such as improved grazing management, water development, and noxious weed control.

One of the most significant threats to habitat is the ongoing development of summer and winter ranges. The majority of the unit consists of privately owned land, and the rapid pace of development raises substantial concerns for effective elk management. Along the Wasatch Back, a large private ski resort and housing development is encroaching upon summer and winter ranges. In Coalville, significant portions of critical winter range are being converted into housing and a golf course. Summit County is experiencing a similar trend as neighborhoods continue to expand into mountainous areas, encroaching on summer and winter ranges. The Wasatch Front has already lost substantial amounts of winter range, but development potential slows as it approaches Federal land boundaries. Fortunately, a handful of properties, crucial for elk, have been safeguarded through conservation easements, precluding any future development.

Preservation of wildlife habitat is paramount. Ongoing commitment to practices such as conservation easements protects lands and contributes significantly to the long-term sustainability of elk populations on the unit. In addition to conservation easements, programs like the Walk-in Access and the CWMU programs can be used to incentivize landowners to maintain their lands as productive habitat for wildlife. Furthermore, efforts to protect and improve critical winter range should be pursued whenever opportunities arise. UDWR and other partners have worked to restore over 1,500 acres of habitat through the Watershed Restoration Initiative (WRI) since the elk plan was revised eight years ago.

#### Range Area and Approximate Ownership

Ownership	Yearlong range		Summer Range		Winter Range	
	Area (acres)	%	Area (acres)	%	Area (acres)	%
Forest Service	0	0	30,715	26	0	8
Bureau of Land Management	85	1	0	0	32	<1
Private	11,388	90	87,887	74	24,646	99
Utah Division of Wildlife Resources	1,122	9	77	<1	72	<1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12,595</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>118,679</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>24,750</b>	<b>100</b>

#### Habitat Projects Completed and Proposed 2016-2023

Salt Lake County Yellow Starthistle Mitigation	23 acres
Yellow Starthistle Control- SL County	473 acres
SL County Yellow Starthistle Mitigation FY19	137 acres
East Canyon Creek- Mormon Flat- Beaver Dam Analogs	10 acres
I-80 UDOT Wildlife Fence Repair- Toll Gate Fire	N/A
Richins Seed Donation	191 acres
East Canyon WMA Post Fire Rehabilitation	190 acres
Three Fire Shrub and Erosion	489 acres

**Population** - The unit is managed as a general season any bull hunt intended to provide a guaranteed opportunity to hunt, with relatively low success rates. The unit faces a unique challenge due to the presence of expansive private lands where hunting is not allowed. This leads to difficulties in elk management, as these areas become refuges where elk gather without any hunting pressure. Consequently, elk populations increase and the effectiveness of hunting declines when elk have unrestricted access to these large non-huntable parcels of land. For instance, Summit County's recent acquisition of an 8,500 acre undeveloped property, with a perpetual hunting prohibition clause, underscores the limitations on controlling elk numbers on such parcels. Yet, human conflicts including depredation, competition with livestock, wildlife-vehicle collisions, and ornamental landscaping damages continue to escalate, especially in harsh winters.

To achieve the population objective and maintain healthy elk numbers, it becomes imperative to explore methods to encourage elk to move away from these non-huntable private lands or to alter the current restrictions and garner support for hunting within these areas. This will necessitate the development of partnerships, fostering trust and providing educational resources to residents and landowners.

The majority of the elk population within the unit is concentrated in Salt Lake and Summit Counties, and this population continues to expand despite habitat loss due to rapid development. Conversely, Morgan County has experienced a reduction in elk densities due to antlerless harvest efforts by CWMU operators and local landowners. These populations currently hover at or below acceptable levels, allowing for a modest reduction in harvest in these areas.

It is worth noting that in the winter of 2022/23, Morgan and Summit Counties experienced record snowfall and prolonged cold temperatures resulting in an alarming 80% mortality rate among deer. This mortality event emphasizes a critical issue: the quantity and quality of winter range proved insufficient to sustain the number of animals relying on it. As development continues, biological thresholds will continue to decrease and population objectives should be reevaluated. The current population estimate is 2,900, which is 1,100 over objective. The average annual antlerless elk harvest is 368 and the average annual bull elk harvest is 146. Population and harvest statistics are shown below.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Population Estimate</b>	<b>Bull Harvest</b>	<b>Antlerless Harvest</b>
2010	2,400	198	420
2011	3,000	108	344
2012	3,100	50	227
2013	3,000	70	288
2014	3,100	52	476
2015	2,600	49	241
2016	2,450	60	651
2017	2,400	219	516
2018	2,400	226	348
2019	2,300	213	342
2020	2,800	243	397
2021	3,000	171	297
2022	2,900	245	238

**STRATEGIES FOR REMOVING BARRIERS AND REACHING UNIT MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES**

**Habitat** - Strategies that may be used to achieve the objectives. These are linked with the (HO) number to the objectives listed above. Additional strategies may also be implemented as new options become

available and needs arise.

- (HO1) Encourage landowner enrollment in conservation easements, the Walk-in Access program, the CWMU program, and other incentivized programs that motivate property owners to maintain their land for the benefit of wildlife.
- (HO1) Allocate current funds and collaborate with sportsmen groups to secure additional funding for the long-term protection of elk habitat within critical winter range when opportunities arise.
- (HO2) Combat annual grasses with chemical treatments in winter range understory.
- (HO2) Implement seeding and shrub planting.
- (HO2) Use mechanical treatments to revitalize decadent shrub stands and open up the understory of oakbrush stands.
- (HO2) Redirect run-off with on-contour furrows on more gradual slopes from flowing directly out of a system and out to the ridges to increase soil moisture.
- (HO3) Implement controlled burns or other mechanical treatments in areas where conifer encroaches aspen stands.
- (HO3) Reintroduce or augment current beaver populations or use BDAs to raise water tables to maintain higher forage protein content longer into the summer and fall.
- (HO3) Establish new water sources and improve existing ones; such as catch basins, guzzlers, and springs.
- (HO4) Collaborate with UDOT and private landowners to build exclusionary fences on roads with high mortality.
- (HO4) Improve range fencing to be more permeable to elk along migration corridors.

**Population** - Strategies that may be used to achieve the objectives. These are linked with the objectives above via the (PO) numbers. Additional strategies may also be implemented as new options become available and needs arise.

- (PO1) Implement a variety of antlerless hunts, including but not limited to, CWMU antlerless, public draw antlerless, private lands only, mitigation, and antlerless control.
- (PO1) Work closely with CWMUs, residents, and private landowners to apply hunting pressure so that elk distribute across private and public land instead of congregating to areas of refuge.
- (PO1) Use “outside-of-the-box” thinking on ways to reduce elk numbers on large tracts of private land, when the population exceeds biological carrying capacity or human wildlife conflict becomes exorbitant.
- (PO1) Alter season dates, boundaries, and permit numbers to achieve sufficient antlerless harvest.
- (PO2) Hold open houses, or other informal meetings to speak with residents about wildlife and the role of hunting.
- (PO2) Engage with the non-hunting community on social media and at in-person events, such as wildlife viewing opportunities, to build trust and support for the agency.
- (PO2) While responding to nuisance calls or spending time in the field, take the opportunity to engage with residents and build rapport with them.
- (PO2) Disseminate hunting-related information in a reader-friendly and relatable manner through local newspapers, magazines, and community websites.
- (PO3) Conduct rotational hunter harvest surveillance and encourage hunters to test animals harvested within the unit for CWD.
- (PO3) Involve CWMUs in sample collection to monitor the distribution and prevalence of CWD within the unit.
- (PO3) Implement water improvement projects to distribute animals more evenly across the landscape and reduce the number of deer and elk congregating at limited water sources.
- (PO3) Encourage residents to not feed deer and elk, and provide them with educational material about CWD.
- (PO3) Utilize hunting as a means to control population sizes and disperse animals more evenly throughout the landscape.
- (PO4) Collect and use preseason classification data, collar survival data, harvest survey data, and winter aerial survey data to determine population estimates.

**Duration of This Management Plan** - This Unit Management Plan was revised in 2023 following the revision of the Statewide Elk Management Plan. This Unit Management Plan will be revised after the next Statewide Elk Management Plan revision to ensure all current management tools are being used. Revision of this plan may also take place as needed to address future issues or incorporate new management strategies. Unit elk plan goals, objectives, recommendations and strategies are constrained within the sideboards set in the Statewide Elk Plan, which supersedes unit plans. It is possible that changes to the Statewide Elk Plan may affect unit plans. Additionally, changes to Utah State Code and/or Administrative Rule may also affect elk plans.