

ELK MANAGEMENT PLAN
Elk Herd Unit #29
ZION
2023

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Iron, Kane and Washington counties - Boundary begins at the Utah-Arizona state line and I-15; north on I-15 to SR-14; east on SR-14 to US-89; south on US-89 to US-89A; south on US-89A to the Utah-Arizona state line; west on this state line to I-15. This hunt is comprised of all or largely private property. Excludes Zion National Park. EXCLUDES ALL NATIVE AMERICAN TRUST LANDS WITHIN THIS BOUNDARY.

LAND OWNERSHIP

RANGE AREA AND APPROXIMATE OWNERSHIP

| | Yearlong range | | Summer Range | | Winter Range | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|-----|--------------|-----|--------------|-----|
| | Area (acres) | % | Area (acres) | % | Area (acres) | % |
| Forest Service | 0 | 0 | 12,512 | 7 | 0 | 0 |
| Bureau of Land Management | 21,861 | 35 | 13,014 | 8 | 14,550 | 47 |
| Utah State Institutional Trust Lands | 7,318 | 12 | 2,184 | 1 | 2,389 | 8 |
| Native American Trust Lands | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2,088 | 7 |
| Private | 33,446 | 53 | 133,459 | 79 | 5,978 | 20 |
| Water Resources | 0 | 0 | 43 | >1 | 0 | 0 |
| USFWS Refuge | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| National Parks | 184 | <1 | 8,765 | 5 | 5,611 | 18 |
| Utah State Parks | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Utah Division of Wildlife Resources | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 11 |
| TOTAL | 62,809 | 100 | 169,979 | 100 | 30,616 | 100 |

UNIT MANAGEMENT GOALS

Manage for a population of elk capable of providing a broad range of recreational opportunities including hunting and viewing. Maintain healthy elk populations at biologically and socially sustainable levels. Continue with the any bull harvest strategy.

POPULATION MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Target Winter Herd Size: Continue to manage for 300 elk wintering across the unit.

Bull Age Structure: Continue to manage the unit as a general season any-bull unit. No age of harvest data will be collected on this unit.

Recruitment: Aerial surveys and annual pre-season classification surveys (July – August) will be used to monitor the population. Pre-season data collected is limited due to the lack of access to private lands in summering habitat. Population modeling will also be used to generate annual post-season (winter) population estimates.

Harvest: Bulls are harvested under a general season any-bull hunt strategy. Antlerless harvest using a variety of harvest methods and seasons will be the primary means to achieving the wintering population objective.

Current Status: An aerial survey was conducted in early February of 2021. The wintering population at that time was estimated to be 800 elk. The current population has been modeled to be approximately 630 wintering elk. Aggressive permit numbers have been issued through public draw hunts, mitigation permits, private lands only permits and control permits. With all tools being used, we are slowly bringing this population to objective. This population is scheduled to be surveyed in January/February of 2024.

Barriers to Achieving Unit Population Objectives: Due to the large amount of private land and varying tolerances towards elk, depredation permits will continue to be issued on high elevation private range lands. DWR is striving to increase landowner tolerance of elk by issuing more antlerless mitigation and private lands only permits. There are some landowners who enjoy elk and refuse to take antlerless permits and assist in managing to the population objective. These properties have become safe havens for elk. In the later seasons elk move on to land managed by Zion National Park and are not available to harvest.

Strategies for Removing Barriers to Population Objectives:

- Depredation - Take all steps necessary to minimize depredation using management strategies within state law and DWR policies to increase tolerance of elk on private and public lands.
- Support statewide landowner incentive programs within the Statewide Elk Management Plan.
- Use antlerless harvest tools identified in the Statewide Elk Management Plan as needed (private lands permits, control permits, etc.).
- Explore implementation of current private lands programs (LOA, CWMU) through research, public opinion surveys, etc.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Current Status: Overall, range conditions on the Zion WMU are good with stable to increasing range conditions on most of the unit (UDWR Range Trend / USFS and BLM Vegetation Monitoring). Approximately 29,000 acres of elk habitat have been treated through WRI since 2006 (see Appendix 1).

Some challenges facing elk habitat include:

- Conifer encroachment of aspen stands.
- Recovering forests from epidemic of spruce bark beetle.
- Summer home development and recreation in elk calving habitat.

Unit Habitat Objectives:

- Continue to be committed to the statewide goal of supporting habitat projects that increase forage for both big game and livestock.
- Maintain and/or enhance forage production through direct range improvements throughout the unit to achieve population management objectives.
- Work with private, state and federal agencies to maintain and protect crucial ranges. Continue projects with USFS, BLM, state and private entities to enhance habitat across the unit.
- Provide improved habitat security and escapement opportunities for elk through support and cooperation of approved Dixie National Forest Travel Plan.

- Work with land management agencies to improve calving habitat and minimize disturbance in these areas. Seek opportunities to improve aspen communities, and some sagebrush ranges where calving and foraging are occurring.

Barriers to Achieving Unit Habitat Objectives:

Restoration efforts on summer ranges to improve forest health and address watershed productivity are needed. Private landowners, livestock permittees, federal and state land management agencies and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources are encouraged to continue to work together to conduct landscape scale treatments. In an effort to regenerate aspen communities, land managers are encouraged to use fire, mechanical or chemical treatments on landscape level projects.

Strategies for Removing Barriers to Habitat Objectives:

- Encourage improved communication among stakeholders through Utah Partners for Conservation and Development as well as annual interagency coordination meetings.
- Use range trend and habitat improvement data to make appropriate habitat-related decisions.

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.

Appendix1. Recent habitat projects in elk habitat on the Zion WMU #29

| Title | Fiscal Year | Acres |
|--|-------------|--------|
| Laurence Reese Discretionary Seeding | 2006 | 83 |
| RW North Fork Discretionary Seed | 2009 | 16 |
| Duck Creek Aspen Regeneration | 2009 | 188 |
| Muddy Creek | 2010 | 1,581 |
| Lambert Discretionary Seed | 2010 | 9 |
| Crystal K Ranch Discretionary Seed | 2011 | 12 |
| Shingle Fire Browse and Forb Seeding | 2013 | 2,962 |
| Shingle Fire Reforestation | 2016 | 714 |
| DNF FY 2016 Exclosure Repair and Rebuild project | 2016 | 14 |
| Kanab Area Project Maintenance | 2016 | 1,581 |
| Yellowjacket (Farm Canyon) | 2016 | 1,733 |
| Kanab Area Project Maintenance | 2016 | 2,803 |
| Hicks Creek Fire Rehabilitation | 2017 | 1,456 |
| Yellowjacket (Harris Mountain) | 2017 | 1,498 |
| Shingle Fire Reforestation | 2017 | 449 |
| Yellow Jacket Water Distribution Project | 2018 | 0 |
| Duck Creek Aspen Regeneration | 2018 | 298 |
| Yellowjacket (Buck Pasture) | 2018 | 3,078 |
| Deep Creek Fire seeding | 2019 | 21 |
| Yellowjacket (Chris Spring) | 2019 | 3,711 |
| Yellowjacket (Coral Pink) | 2020 | 1,280 |
| Yellowjacket (Sethy's) | 2021 | 2,019 |
| Hogs Heaven Watershed Enhancement Project | 2021 | 1,577 |
| Wayne Canyon SITLA Seeding | 2022 | 71 |
| Yellowjacket (Pine Spring) | 2022 | 1,864 |
| Total acres treated | 2006-2022 | 29,018 |