

ELK HERD UNIT MANAGEMENT PLAN
Elk Herd Unit # 4
Morgan-South Rich
August 2016

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Morgan, Rich, Summit and Weber counties - Boundary begins at I-80 and the Utah-Wyoming state line; west on I-80 to Echo Junction and I-84; west on I-84 to SR-167 at Mountain Green (Trappers Loop Road); north along SR-167 to SR-39; east along SR-39 to Woodruff and SR-16; southeast on SR-16 to the Utah-Wyoming state line; south along the state line to I-80.

UNIT MANAGEMENT GOALS

The unit management goals are to maintain the population at a level that is within the long-term capability of the available habitat to support. Much of the unit is privately owned and enrolled in the Cooperative Wildlife Management Unit program with limited bull harvest. Actively work and cooperate with private landowners in the rehabilitation and/or acquisition of critical winter range and other range improvement projects as opportunity permits. Try to secure conservation easements on private properties to slow the rapid development occurring on critical ranges within the unit. Encourage and educate private landowners and Cooperative Wildlife Management Unit operators to continue the harvest of antlerless elk in sufficient numbers to maintain the winter elk population at objective.

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 elk population at levels that allow for healthy mule deer populations on shared year-round ranges.

Continue to work on habitat projects on UDWR owned properties within the unit and set management objective numbers of elk for Wildlife Management Areas.

UNIT MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Habitat

Maintain and improve current acreages of summer and winter range (298,309 acres summer range, 246,532 acres winter range) through conservation easements and habitat projects. Much of the winter range is privately owned could be at risk of being sold and developed. Strive to improve 500 acres/year of winter habitat on public and/or private property for deer and elk winter range. Work with private landowners on proper grazing techniques to enhance wildlife habitat.

HABITAT PROJECTS COMPLETED AND PROPOSED

| Completed Projects – 2010 through 2016 | | Proposed Projects – 2016 and beyond | |
|---|-----------------|--|--|
| Henefer/Echo WMA reseeding | 30 acres | None | |
| H/E Water project | | | |
| Fencing to help manage grazing | 7.5 miles | | |
| Project total acreage | 30 acres | | |

Population

Target Winter Herd Size – Achieve a target winter population of 3,800 elk (computer modeled population).

CURRENT STATUS OF ELK MANAGEMENT

Habitat (Current Status (2016))

Habitat conditions for the Morgan-South Rich unit are stable but may deteriorate with continued high elk populations. Some of the private landowners are making habitat improvements for livestock and wildlife, benefiting elk on summer and winter range.

The current modeled population (2016) is at the herd management objective. Elk-deer competition on common winter ranges can be a major factor for this unit. The population objective for this unit is 3,800 elk. A large percentage of the elk in the unit winter on the Deseret Land and Livestock (DLL) Ranch in Rich Co. The DLL Ranch is doing extensive range treatments to increase the winter capacity of the elk herds that in the past have been supplemented with hay in winter months. The yearly need for supplementation of hay and the duration of feeding of elk has been greatly reduced as a result of these successful projects.

Housing encroachment and development in the Morgan County portion of the unit is a factor that is reducing habitat of elk in that portion of the unit. With average to above average snow depths, human conflicts with depredation, livestock competition, and ornamental damage occur. There are planned housing developments on current elk winter ranges in the Morgan area.

There is concern about where the elk are being harvested. A high percentage of cow harvest occurs on the Henefer/Echo WMA. This is in large part because it is public land. In order to spread the harvest around the unit more evenly we will meet with landowners and discuss sub-objectives in the unit.

Currently, private property owners within the unit place a high value on elk and many derive a portion of their income from wildlife inhabiting private rangelands. Many landowners are members of a private habitat improvement organization called Quality Resource Management that helps landowners design and acquire funding for habitat improvement projects. Members meet annually to plan projects and discuss wildlife herd management objectives and harvest strategies. Habitat projects for the Henefer-Echo WMA, are being planned to be implemented on a yearly basis. A conservation easement is being donated to the Nature Conservancy on a 28,000 acre ranch in the Weber County portion of the unit.

RANGE AREA AND APPROXIMATE OWNERSHIP*

| Ownership | Yearlong range | | Summer Range | | Winter Range | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|---|--------------|-----|--------------|-----|
| | Area (acres) | % | Area (acres) | % | Area (acres) | % |
| Forest Service | 0 | 0 | 21700 | 7.3 | 15943 | 6.4 |
| Bureau of Land Management | 0 | 0 | 5023 | 1.7 | 22523 | 9 |
| Utah State Institutional Trust Lands | 0 | 0 | 632 | .2 | 3123 | 1.2 |
| Native American Trust Lands | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Private | 0 | 0 | 265436 | 89 | 192549 | 78 |
| Department of Defense | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| USFWS Refuge | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Water | 0 | 0 | 324 | 0 | 198 | <1 |
| Utah State Parks | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Utah Division of Wildlife Resources | 0 | 0 | 5194 | 1.7 | 12196 | 5 |
| TOTAL | 0 | 0 | 298309 | 100 | 246532 | 100 |

Population (Current (2007) Status)

The Morgan-South Rich elk unit was counted in February 2016. The population estimate is 3,800 elk, which is at the population objective. The elk are on a downward trend and within a year or two we will need to scale back on antlerless harvest in order to maintain our objective.

Harvest

| Year | Bull Harvest | Antlerless Harvest |
|------|--------------|--------------------|
| 2009 | 369 | 563 |
| 2010 | 292 | 662 |
| 2011 | 299 | 451 |
| 2012 | 381 | 599 |
| 2013 | 362 | 671 |
| 2014 | 355 | 491 |
| 2015 | 380 | 540 |

BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING UNIT MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Habitat

The population objective of 3,800 elk is based on current range conditions and supplemental feeding of elk by a private ranch in the Rich County portion of the unit. If supplemental feeding were to permanently stop in this portion of the elk herd, the population objective would have to be lowered to reflect the capacity of the natural winter range and its carrying capacity. The feeding program was started to maintain numbers of elk and to keep elk from haystacks and feeding with livestock in the surrounding areas. Where much of the land in the unit is privately owned, habitat development and enhancement is out of the control of the UDWR.

Population

The main barrier to reaching the population objective is the inability to achieve an adequate harvest of antlerless elk on private lands within the unit. There is very limited bull harvest on the private properties. There is no harvest age objective for this unit; it is not a limited entry unit.

STRATEGIES FOR REMOVING BARRIERS AND REACHING UNIT MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Habitat Monitoring

Continue to monitor permanent range trend studies located throughout the winter range. Continue to monitor range conditions on the Henefer-Echo WMA and the impacts of current high elk numbers on critical deer winter range.

Actions to Remove Habitat Barriers

Develop a plan to rehabilitate 500 acres of Henefer-Echo WMA property; targeting old fires that are dominated with annual grasses. Continue to work on acquiring conservation easements to protect remaining habitat. Continue to work with private landowners and the Quality Resource Management group on habitat projects and range improvement methods.

Population

Monitoring

Population Size - Utilizing harvest data, aerial trend counts (every three years), postseason classification and mortality estimates, a computer model has been developed to estimate winter population size. The wintering population on this unit varies because of the influx of animals from the Chalk Creek, Ogden, and Cache units.

Bull Age Structure - Monitor age class structure of the bull population through the use of uniform harvest surveys, mandatory reporting, field bag checks, postseason classification and aerial classification.

Harvest - The primary means of monitoring harvest will be through the statewide uniform harvest survey. Achieve the target population size by use of antlerless harvest using a variety of harvest methods and seasons. Bull harvest strategies will be developed through the RAC and Wildlife Board process.

Management Actions to Remove Population Barriers

The foremost need for the Morgan-South Rich elk herd is to maintain the population to the target herd management objective. Continue to educate landowners on the importance of antlerless harvest. Hold annual meetings to inform landowners of harvest results and discuss antlerless hunt strategies. Continue to adapt hunt seasons, areas, and numbers to changing elk movements and numbers. Continue to look for new strategies to incorporate public hunters on private lands for antlerless harvest (ie. Walk-in access program).