



State of Utah

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MEMORANDUM

To: Wildlife Board and Regional Advisory Councils

From: Dax Mangus, Big Game Program Coordinator

Date: Oct. 21, 2022

Subject: **Statewide elk plan revision, proposed rule changes to R657-5 Taking Big Game and R657-62 Drawing Application Procedures**

Utah's current statewide elk management plan was approved in 2015 — with an update in 2020 — and it is set to expire in December 2022. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources has drafted a new plan for management of elk in consultation with a diverse committee of stakeholders.

Below is a summary of the major updates and recommended changes to the statewide elk management plan:

- 1) This plan is proposed as a 10-year plan, with a mid-plan review scheduled for 2028 and a full revision in 2032.
- 2) We have updated the background and natural history information in the plan to reflect current scientific understanding. Key additions include updates from GPS collar studies related to survival, reproduction, migration, habitat use and elk distribution in response to hunting pressure.
- 3) Individual unit plans will be revised in 2023. They will be presented to the RACs and Utah Wildlife Board if the DWR proposes changes to unit population objectives or boundaries.
- 4) The habitat goals, objectives and strategies in the plan were updated with recommended strategies, including:
 - a. Identify and protect migration corridors



- b. Encourage responsible energy development, with a focus on emerging industries in wind and solar
 - c. Support responsible travel management
 - d. Minimize impacts to elk from human recreation
 - e. Control noxious weeds
 - f. Encourage management of feral and wild horses
 - g. Request mitigation for disturbance to elk habitats
- 5) The population management portion of the plan has been supplemented with recommended strategies, including:
- a. Continuing to prioritize and fund studies and research of survival, reproduction, movement, migration and habitat use.
 - b. Taking resident elk — and any elk that spend considerable time in refuge areas — into account when developing unit plans and population objectives.
 - c. Recognizing elk that live primarily outside the management jurisdiction of the DWR and developing effective tools to reduce conflicts with these elk.
 - d. Using strategic and more precise antlerless elk hunting to shift elk distribution in desirable directions. (This will result in less flexibility for antlerless elk hunters but improve targeted management.)
 - e. Expanding the emergency drought permit process to include cows and bulls.
 - f. Facilitating landowners' use of antlerless elk hunters to address conflicts by increasing communication and not using preference points for many private-land antlerless elk hunters.
 - g. Working with law enforcement to protect elk and reduce illegal activities, with a special focus on reducing trespassing, vandalism and theft on private lands.
- 6) The recommended recreation portion of the plan aims to respond to dramatic increases in demand for general-season elk hunting opportunities as well as find ways to address continued “point creep” in the limited-entry system. The major theme for the plan committee — and the plan recommended by the DWR — has been increasing opportunity, while maintaining quality, through increased challenge and creativity. Recommended recreation strategies include the following.
- a. General-season strategies
 - i. Adding additional units/areas to the any bull hunt, including: Nine Mile, Anthro / Paunsaugunt / West Desert, Oquirrh-Stansbury and Deep Creek / Central Mtns, Moroni Hills and Valley Mtns / Book Cliffs, Floy Canyon / Box Elder, Sawtooth.



- ii. Dividing the current 13-day any legal weapon any bull hunt into two separate 7-day hunts.
- iii. Issuing 15,000 permits for the early any legal weapon any bull hunt.
- iv. Having no permit cap on the late any legal weapon any bull hunt.
- v. Capping multi-season any bull permits at 7,500.
- vi. Expanding the general spike hunt to the Diamond Mountain unit.
- vii. Continuing to issue 15,000 spike bull permits, with a cap of 4,500 available as multi-season permits.
- viii. Creating an unlimited youth general-season elk permit that will be valid during all general seasons on both any bull and spike units.

b. Limited-entry strategies

- i. Restructuring harvest age objectives for traditional limited-entry units to include three age objectives: 6.5-7.0, 6.0-6.5 and 5.5-6.0.
- ii. Adding the mid-season any legal weapon hunt on most traditional limited-entry elk units.
- iii. Adjusting the weapon splits for traditional limited-entry hunts to place more of the any legal weapon hunts in the mid-season hunt.
- iv. Moving the season dates for the opener and end of the traditional limited-entry archery season to 4 days later.
- v. Adjusting the length of the early any legal weapon traditional limited-entry elk hunt to 5 days.
- vi. Maximizing opportunity by maintaining units/hunts managed for restricted-weapon hunts, September archery hunts and HAMS hunts (handgun, archery, muzzleloader, shotgun).
- vii. Developing and recommending adaptive opportunity limited-entry hunts to seize unusual opportunities. Examples include December archery hunts on limited-entry units; additional restricted-weapon or HAMS hunts on units with very high success rates and/or high bull-to-cow ratios; and limited-entry hunts on general-season units using unique timing or the migration of available bulls.

7) Changes to R657-5 and R657-62 — these recommendations are intended to ensure consistency within our administrative rules and the recommendations in the elk plan, as well as take care of some clean-up and general housekeeping.

a. R657-5 Taking Big Game recommended changes

- i. Antlerless elk permits would be valid only during stated season dates.
- ii. General-season archery elk permits would be bull-only permits.
- iii. We would offer a new youth general-season elk permit.
- iv. Eliminating hunts that no longer exist, including management bull hunts, buck/bull combo hunts and either-sex muzzleloader hunts.



- v. Restricting hunting inside the high-fenced town of Alton.
- b. Other miscellaneous clean-up and verbiage. (See the rule redline for details.)
- c. R657-62 Drawing Application Procedures recommended changes
 - i. Antlerless elk mitigation permits, vouchers and private-lands-only permits would not use antlerless elk preference points.

For all recommended changes and additional details, please see the attached recommended Statewide Elk Management Plan, the redline version of proposed rule changes and the hunt boundary maps and descriptions included in the RAC packet.

