



Dear Citizen's Elk Committee Members,

Please find the following comments relative to the recommendation to improving hunter/landowner relationships through expanded Hunter Education.

We are strongly in support of this effort. Coalition members and groups are already engaging in this effort through the One Montana Master Hunter program (some of our members have taken the course or are instructors) while Coalition member Ravalli County Fish & Wildlife Association is enjoying success with their Hunter Enhancement program. Both of these programs are well run, but are oftentimes unavailable to large swaths of the public due to space and financial concerns. An FWP-hosted landowner education program with a low barrier to entry is needed.

Incorporating some kind of meaningful enhanced hunter education, perhaps along with requiring the in-person field day, could do a lot to help ensure better relationships between hunters and landowners. Adding a new layer of the existing Landowner-Hunter Stewardship program that exists within FWP as a sort of proficiency test before allowing people to sign up for Block Management could help provide an extra layer of education that helps ensure that hunters and landowners start to see each other as neighbors rather than as adversaries.

We also strongly recommend that the committee work with the Hunter Education instructors to bring about better outcomes in this realm. With the advent of mentored & apprenticed hunters, we need to be sure that some level of education exists with those mentors so that we are not simply passing down bad traditions to the youth before they have a chance to go through hunter's education.

Lastly, we strongly encourage the committee to recommend going back to in-person requirements for hunter's education and not simply rely on the online version. Ease of taking the course should not trump the need for better education and in-person demonstration of proficiency. The Hunter Education Instructors of Montana are tremendous resources and should be supported, bolstered and encouraged to continue to produce well-rounded, ethical hunters.

Sincerely,

Marcus Strange

On Behalf of the Montana Citizen's Elk Management Coalition