



Dear Citizen's Elk Committee Members,

Please find the following comments in support of your work to bring about better outcomes relative to the length and breadth of hunting seasons in Montana. The Montana Citizens' Elk Management Coalition supports the concept of finding better season structure to help eliminate pressure on both elk, and the landowners who have to deal with what is now 6 months of constant elk hunting pressure on public and private land.

Hunting pressure is well known to be the driving factor of elk vacating public lands for private lands where refuge exists. Complicating this is the long standing tradition of long general seasons for both archery and rifle hunters, and the legislatively mandated muzzleloader season.

The Director often says that doing the same thing over and over while expecting a different outcome is the definition of insanity. We agree. Adding more and more seasons simply exacerbates the issue of pushing elk onto private property while also ensuring that hunters are less effective in the field. Since 2015, Coalition members have expressed their consternation with the approach the agency has taken relative to expanded shoulder seasons and a less than strategic approach to elk management issues.

Our recommendation to the committee is to continue to explore this path, especially in light of other recommendations relative to season structure during the general hunting seasons. Other states, for example, offer late season cow hunts as part of the regular management regime, rather than as a way to try and massively reduce a population. We also suggest looking at those states with higher success ratios under more traditional season structures, while also working with absentee landowners to educate them on the impacts their decisions have to traditional family agricultural operations, and to lower hunter success rates during the general season.

While shoulder seasons may work in some instances, the approach that the agency has taken over the last 7 years has gone from that small, targeted approach to a shotgun pattern with an open choke. Many hunters believe that this is leading to elk selecting unavailable lands in August, and keeping them there through February, rather than having the intended effect of herd reduction in over-objective areas.

Furthermore, we encourage the committee to examine past hunting season structures that featured late season cow hunts rather than the blanket approach to shoulder seasons.

We also encourage the committee to look at ways to reform the damage roster in order to achieve better outcomes for landowners and increase participation from hunters.

Sincerely,

Marcus Strange

On behalf of the Montana Citizen's Elk Management Coalition