



Dear Citizen's Elk Committee Members,

Please find the following comments relative to the recommendation that FWP field staff work with locals to find better solutions to hunter distribution and objectives.

We are wholeheartedly in support of this effort and the biggest part of our work to date has been to work through ways to improve both Block Management and to ensure that local landowners, hunters, and the Department are able to work together. We are including our draft concept paper on a new Type III Block Management effort, as well as some ideas on Types I & II for better results relative to animal harvest, landowner tolerance and hunter satisfaction.

Furthermore, we would point to the successes of areas that have working groups in place such as the Devil's Kitchen, Upper Blackfoot, Rocky Mountain Front, and elsewhere that have helped reduce conflict between landowners, outfitters and hunters, while ensuring that all stakeholders have meaningful dialog and come to mutually beneficial understandings for both humans and wildlife.

We would point out that existing mechanisms to do this exist in the broader context regionally through Citizen Advisory Councils. Each region is different, and regional approaches have served the state well. When power becomes concentrated in Helena, we often see a decline in the local and regional impact of these kinds of councils, with a focus more on centralized planning and a one-size-fits-all approach. We saw what happens when that top-down approach comes around in the last batch of 454 agreements. When the perception is that favor is being curried by the well-connected, favorability for many programs becomes much lower, and unless local biologists and technicians can work with the landowners directly, the likelihood of actually achieving wildlife management goals and objectives is drastically reduced due to the political machinations of a few.

That is a disservice to all Montanans, and only when we have local solutions from a broad swath of stakeholders, do we find meaningful and lasting solutions. Applying this model across the board from season setting to 454 agreements means an open, honest and fair process for all involved. Deals cut behind closed doors may be the Helena way, but it's not the Montana way.

Management of elk is a locally issue, administered best through the regions and through collaborative work with landowners, hunters and outfitters. Ensuring that our wildlife managers continue to work locally means better outcomes for all involved.

We are highly encouraged by this approach, and we stand ready to help the committee follow through with this effort.

Sincerely,

Marcus Strange,  
On Behalf of the Montana Citizen's Elk Management Committee