

## Objection Issue Briefing Paper: Elk Habitat Management

Date: Sept. 29, 2020.  
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**DRAFT:** For purposes of facilitating discussion for objection resolution process only.

### Summary of objection issue:

- 2020 Forest Plan does not provide adequate protection for elk and other big game species
- 2020 Forest Plan and final environmental impact statement did not use the best available scientific information to provide for and carry out analysis of effects to elk and other big game habitat security

### Background information:

1. The 1986 Helena National Forest and Lewis and Clark National Forest plans have two different sets of standards and guidelines for elk and big game habitat. The original supporting science recommended against specific standards to all areas, and suggested site or area specific management, but the 1986 plans (particularly the Helena National Forest Plan) did not provide that flexibility.
  2. The purpose (desired condition) of the standards in the 1986 plans was to provide for harvestable bull elk over time, using habitat management tools of maintaining or creating specified amounts of secure areas or hiding cover.
  3. Issues in the 1980s were low elk numbers, elk vulnerability to harvest resulting from access created by networks of logging roads and maintaining existing levels of bull elk harvest and the 5-week hunting season. Current issues in central Montana are elk distribution (including increasing elk use of private lands), and hunting opportunities. In many areas, elk numbers are higher than Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks' population objectives. Elk viability and persistence in the plan area are not issues of concern now or during the anticipated life of the 2020 Forest Plan.
  4. Prior to 2013 the Forest Service and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks worked together to assess new science, identify current habitat management issues, and make recommendations in anticipation of plan revisions. A key outcome was the 2013 recommendations for project planning and analysis that called for site-specificity based on local or area needs and conditions.
  5. The 2020 Forest Plan guides managers to work with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and to identify local or area habitat needs when developing and implementing projects. Guidance in the 2020 Forest Plan is tied to the desired conditions of maintaining elk availability on National Forest system lands for viewing and hunting opportunities and supporting Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks objectives for harvest and population size. Plan guidance focuses on management of
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motorized access during hunting season but allows flexibility to apply various tools to achieve desired conditions.

Summary examples of proposed resolution(s) submitted by objectors:

- Retain elk/big game standards from 1986 plans or include standards with specific requirements for hiding cover/ secure habitat as defined in various cited literature
- Supplement the analysis in the environmental impact statement about potential impacts to habitat and consequently to elk or other wildlife population numbers.

Objectors/Interested Persons:

Name	Organization	Obj/Interested Person
Zach Angstead	MT Wilderness Assn.	Objector
Matthew Bishop	Helena Hunters and Anglers Assn.	Objector
James Bradley		Interested person
Al Christophersen	Elkhorn Restoration Committee	Objector
Eric Clewis	Montana Wildlife Federation	Objector
Sara Jane Johnson	Native Ecosystems Council	Objector
Gayle Joslin		Interested Person
Rick Kerr		Interested person
Jocelyn Leroux (with Adam Rissien and Michael Garity)	Western Watersheds Project (with WildEarth Guardians and Alliance for the Wild Rockies)	Objector and Interested Person
Peter Nelson	Defenders of Wildlife	Objector
Deb O'Neill	Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks	Interested person
Denny Palmer		Interested person
Eric Sivers		Interested person
John Tubbs	Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation	Interested Person

