

Skeena Wildlife Regulation Change Proposal Form

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NOTE: the details below are DRAFT for discussion purposes

Objective of Proposal (describe what outcomes the regulation change is expected to achieve. For example change to bull:cow ratio, reduce crowding of hunters, etc):

- To mitigate issues of crop depredation and damage to property from elk in agricultural areas of the Bulkley Valley;
- To provide opportunity for licensed harvest of elk;
- To increase opportunity for access to private land for hunting by First Nations and licensed hunters;
- To ensure that populations can continue to evolve in number and geographic occupation of the landscape.

Proposal Description (specific MU's, season dates, bag limits, attach a map if required, # of authorizations, etc):

Portions of 6-04, 6-08 & 6-09:

1. To create/add a Rocky Mountain Antlered and Antlerless Elk, Shared/Partnered Limited Entry Hunts in winter, similar to the existing structure for DEMU in the Francois Lake area. LEH Private Land hunts will mimic current DEMU LEH schedule for hunt codes 7062-7067, inclusive.
These shared/partnered-hunt opportunities must include a minimum of 2 hunters to a maximum of 4 hunters, however only 1 animal per shared hunt group can be harvested. Hunt authorizations will be restricted to mapped Private Lands within the specified MUs. Harvested animals will require Compulsory Inspection or Compulsory Reporting (still to be determined) and provision of samples (i.e., for the first 5 years of the hunt), as specified.
The number of available animals will be authorized for elk on private lands. The intent is to:
 - provide hunter opportunity while attempting to haze/mitigate elk depredation and conflict on agricultural producers' lands by keeping elk moving on the landscape;
 - create both a conventional weapon (i.e., rifle) and archery-only opportunities;
 - initial opportunity will be very low.
2. To create/add a Rocky Mountain Antlered Elk, Shared/Partnered Hunt Limited Entry Hunts in time periods specified (i.e., late fall - winter).

Please submit to Conrad Thiessen at conrad.thiessen@gov.bc.ca

*We encourage early communication with regional wildlife biologists regarding proposed changes particularly for those lacking survey data as we can provide advice on how to collect data to strengthen rationale for proposed change.

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The Resident shared/partnered hunt opportunities must include a minimum of 2 hunters to a maximum of 4 hunters, however only 1 animal per shared hunt group can be harvested.

Hunt authorizations will be restricted to Crown Lands within the specified MUs. The intent is to provide added licensed hunter opportunity while also ensuring that populations can continue to evolve in the Crown Land landscape; initial opportunity will be very low.

Harvested animals will require Compulsory Inspection or Compulsory Reporting (still to be determined) and provision of samples (i.e., for the first 5 years of the hunt), as specified.

The number of available animals will be authorized for antlered elk on Crown Land. Crown Land LEH hunts for 'Any Bull' are currently being considered for November 10 – November 30, to ensure that peak rut activity/breeding is not negatively affected by hunting.

Proposal Rationale (provide supporting survey data*, scientific literature, and/or traditional knowledge):

Ranchers in the Bulkley Valley and Burns lake areas have been experiencing crop and fence damage, and some have suffered injury to their domestic stock animals, from elk and elk competition for domestic feed sources, over the past several years. Large scale conversion of previously forested pine stands to pasture and grass-dominated rangelands has benefitted elk numbers. A working group was formed with Ministry of Agriculture & FLNRO Wildlife Branch staff, and local Cattlemen's representatives. Steps taken over the past 2 years include the provision of fencing materials to protect crop stores, attempts at hazing programs (air canons), constructing forage sheds, and changes to crop/feeding practices, however this has not successfully addressed the impacts to crop growers and ranchers in this narrow geographic landscape of agricultural lands. Local First Nations have previously been invited to hunt on some private land parcels by landowners, with ineffective results in addressing the resident elk depredation and livestock conflict issues. Government and producers are looking for other options to address/curtail the growing impacts associated with a growing population of elk in southern Skeena region (current estimates between 250 – 450 elk), while ensuring that conservation issues do not arise. The proposed series of short, LEH seasons is patterned after similar regulations established for Mule Deer in the Francois Lake area in the mid-2000's, which appear to address the bulk of the socio-agricultural issues in those areas. This approach is intended to disperse the elk and reduce the damage associated with extended periods of occupation on individual farmlands; with hunting activities targeted at keeping elk on the move and to introduce human threat responses in the elk which will also keep elk moving around the landscape. Discussions are underway with the Skeena Regional, Bulkley Valley, Pleasant Valley & BC Cattlemen's Associations, as well as the Skeena Stockmen, Heavy Horsemen & Dairyman to develop a

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process whereby producers can be contacted directly by successful applicants to specific sites where elk damage is occurring. Because trespass and property access/damage issues are a large concern, the associations are also jointly developing an information form that LEH authorization holders will be expected to fill out and can provide landowners to secure their access. It is anticipated that this can be provided to LEH authorization holders via the online LEH service window, or through other means. This harvest/lethal hazing opportunity is intended to manage hunter numbers as well as elk harvest, as well as apportion the hunt. The Crown Land LEH opportunity is being considered solely to ensure that the broad group of hunters/licensed hunters will have access to elk resources, in a way that is being designed to have minimal effect on the local Crown Land population's ability to grow.

Opportunity will be adjusted based on population growth, and the success at meeting stated mitigation objectives.

Pros and Cons of Implementing this Proposal (explain how the benefits of this proposal outweigh the costs):

Pros:

- increased hunting opportunity for licensed hunters;
- increased opportunity for First Nations to hunt on private land;
- increased hunter access to private lands;
- possibility archery-only periods;
- provides for targeted management action at a fine scale (i.e., property level/MU level);
- creates an opportunity to obtain wildlife biological samples;
- improves hunter relations with landowners and relations with NGO's such as the BC Cattlemen's Association and their affiliates;
- will reduce the desire for largescale wildlife exclusion fencing of properties that could generate broader wildlife issues;
- assists the Ministry of Agriculture with addressing issues related to agriculture-wildlife conflict; and
- creates a control mechanism to deal with an increasing problem-wildlife/wildlife-conflict situation.

Cons:

- increased regulation complexity;
- increased cost for compulsory inspection of harvested elk for first 5 years of hunt opportunity.

Demonstrate how support was achieved for this proposal within your First Nation or stakeholder group (e.g., voting results from members including total number polled, # support, # non-support, # indifferent, etc; concerns raised during discussion; efforts taken to reach as many individuals represented by your group):

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List First Nations and stakeholder groups (other than your own) that you contacted regarding the proposed regulation change (include details of support or not for the proposal):

Described in the Rationale section.

Discussions still underway and this is very preliminary.

The purpose of presenting this proposal at SHAC is to inform and obtain feedback/support for this concept. Because the private land options are reliant on landowners providing access to hunters, some aspects of the proposal are shaped specifically to address their priorities; other gov't agencies also made requests for specific outcomes which will be considered during the development of this proposal.

Currently, informal discussions with Office of the Wet'suwet'en are being held in advance of a presentation to the Chiefs and more formal consultation.

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