



Parks & Open Space

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Approved

Board of County Commissioners of Boulder County
Time/Date of Meeting: 1:00 p.m., Tuesday, June 15, 2021
Location: Virtual Meeting

TO:	Board of County Commissioners
FROM/PRESENTER:	Therese Glowacki, POS Resource Management Division Manager Janis Whisman, Interim Co-Director
AGENDA ITEM:	Elk Management Update
ACTION REQUESTED:	Approval of amendment to the Ron Stewart Preserve Elk Management Plan

Boulder County Parks and Open Space (BCPOS) has been implementing elk management in two areas of the county to address non-migrating elk populations that are causing resource damage on valuable natural landscapes at the Ron Stewart Preserve at Rabbit Mountain and Red Hill. This management includes using licensed, approved hunters to attempt to harvest elk from open space properties to reduce the refuge created on our open spaces. This is our annual update on elk management, including numbers and movement of elk and progress on meeting our objectives.

Ron Stewart Preserve

Parks and Open Space concluded the 4th year of hunting lands associated with herd using the Ron Stewart Preserve at Rabbit Mountain (RSP/RM). Hunting around RSP/RM continued to move animals away from congregating on open space, dispersing the herd and contributing to the overall herd size reduction. The season lasted from September 21, 2020 through January 31, 2021. It included weeklong breaks over Thanksgiving and Christmas. We received positive public feedback for suspending the hunting during those holiday weeks and on the Martin Luther King holiday.

Harvest Overview 2020-2021

- 1) Total participants = 50
- 2) Total harvest on BCPOS = 19 (38% success)
- 3) Harvest data from the subunit is 70 (the subunit includes both herds)

Recent counts of the elk herd conducted this winter had a high count of 81 elk in February 2021. Our objective for this herd is 30 elk using RSP/RM if they are not migrating, 70 if they are migrating.

Since we haven't reached our objective, we plan to continue the elk management on RSP/RM in the fall of 2021 with the same time parameters as 2020.

Red Hill

Red Hill refers to the east side of Heil Valley Ranch where a migrating herd use the area regularly. This herd used to migrate to the continental divide every year, but a portion of the herd, as many as 120, have stopped migrating and now spend the summer in the area.

The fall of 2020 marked the first season of elk management on the Red Hill herd on open space properties around US Highway 36 and on a part of Heil Valley Ranch. This program was conducted similarly to the hunting at RSP/RM with required orientation and proficiency testing. The program also required short-range weapons only (archery, muzzleloader, shotgun).

The season ran from August 17, 2020 to November 7, 2020 with a week off at the end of October due to the Cal-Wood Fire. This short season attempted to harvest and influence non-migratory elk.

There was good communication with neighbors, residents, and commuters via several avenues. We held a concerned neighbors meeting, established an extra safety zone relative to a small residential enclave west of US36, and employed up to 3 lighted highway road signs warning of potential elk crossing.

Harvest Overview

- 1) Total participants = 37
- 2) Total harvests on BCPOS = 13 (35%)
- 3) Total subunit harvest is 70 for the season, six of these from the Red Hill area.

We are not requesting any approvals or changes to the Red Hill Elk Management Plan. Last year it was approved for the first 2 years so 2021 will be year two. We plan on conducting a second season this fall with the same time parameters. We also plan on some changes relative to efficiency and safety. We are adding an additional parking point to allow an access from the north, restricting archery to west of Highway 36 since it was not effective on the properties east of Highway 36, and reducing the number of hunters from 4 to 3 per week since 3 hunters can put the same pressure on the herd and coordinate their activities better.

Proposed Changes

The Red Hill Elk Management Plan allows BCPOS to coordinate lethal hazing on county owned properties that are under an agricultural lease. This provision was not put into the Ron Stewart Preserve at Rabbit Mountain Elk Management Plan because it was not an issue when we began elk management 4 years ago. We are requesting to modify the plan to allow this for the following reason.

Game damage issues arose on open space agricultural properties east of RSP/RM in 2020. Tenants at both the John Clark and Darby properties, located about a mile east of the RSP/RM, experienced damage from elk. Elk are eating the vegetables and hay produced on those properties. However, due to our restrictions on the use of firearms on county land, only limited measures could be taken to deter elk or attempt to move them out of the crops, like using noise making devices.

We are proposing to add a game damage hunting procedure to allow approved program hunters to attempt to harvest on properties east of Rabbit Mountain, just like the process approved for the Red Hill hunt and adjacent agricultural open space properties. We will work with Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the tenants on the methods and timing for this lethal hazing. This will reduce the likelihood of elk moving from RSP/RM and finding refuge on county open space where hunting is not allowed.

Action Requested

Approval of the amendment to the Ron Stewart Preserve at Rabbit Mountain Elk and Vegetation Management Plan as staff has described.

Suggested motion language: I move approval of the amendment to the Ron Stewart Preserve at Rabbit Mountain Elk and Vegetation Management Plan to allow BCPOS program hunters to be used for lethal hazing on leased agricultural land.

Approved 6/15/2021