



Grant Creek Elk Working Group 2005 Meetings

During meetings in May, two dozen Missoula residents suggested ways to improve management of the rapidly growing elk herd that winters in Grant Creek. The two most preferred suggestions were to:

- Improve elk habitat, particularly by controlling weeds.
- Help ranchers address the problems caused by elk, such as helping with fencing and weed control, offering volunteer labor, or providing depredation payments.

The herd, which now numbers more than 250 elk, has been growing 15 percent a year since 2000. One reason the herd can grow so rapidly is that it spends much of the hunting season on private lands where hunting is limited or forbidden and in portions of the Rattlesnake drainage that are not easily accessible or where rifles cannot be used.

Ranchers on the west side of Grant Creek have been expressing concern about the size of the herd for a number of years. The herd's continued growth and the amount of time the herd is spending west of Grant Creek are creating problems for these ranchers. Meanwhile, some other landowners and many subdivision residents are thrilled to have a large, rapidly growing elk herd living nearby.

The elk herd that winters in Grant Creek is distinct from the herd that winters on Mount Jumbo in the Rattlesnake. The Jumbo herd of somewhat more than 50 elk is smaller than the Grant Creek herd and is more vulnerable during the hunting season. Both herds summer in the mountains above their winter ranges, sometimes as far away as the Jocko and Gold Creek drainages.

The first of the two meetings, from 7 to 9 p.m. May 4, was attended by about 20 persons. Speakers at that informational meeting included:

- Gary Marbut, whose family donated land for the elk when subdividing the family ranch 25 years ago
- Paul Hanson, rancher
- Scott Nicolarsen, who has hunted the Grant Creek elk unsuccessfully
- Bob Henderson, Fish, Wildlife and Parks biologist
- Tom France, National Wildlife Federation
- Rick van den Pol; a homeowner in the Prospect Meadows Homeowners Association
- Mike Mueller, lands director for the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

The second meeting, May 18, was attended by about a dozen persons who broke into two groups to develop suggestions for improving management of the herd. After the suggestions had been posted on flip charts, participants were given 10 paper stars each to stick on the suggestions they preferred.

Besides the two most preferred ideas, other ideas (in order of their support) included:

- Acquire additional habitat for the elk.
- Do a better job of moving elk away from ranches where they cause problems.
- Do nothing other than habitat improvement.
- Improve general and early-season hunting opportunity.
- Study the elk herd to learn how to manage it better.

The meetings were organized by Bert Lindler, a resident of the Prospect Meadows subdivision. The Grant Creek Elk Working Group has no formal structure, although a formal organization could be established if that proves important.

In the meantime, Bert plans to use the results of the May meetings to organize volunteers to tackle some of the group's suggestions. He has begun discussions with the Missoula County Weed District to apply for grants that would help the National Wildlife Federation (which owns more than 700 acres in Grant Creek that is set aside for wildlife) and neighboring landowners control weeds.

Next May, Bert plans to organize a follow-up meeting to discuss the status of the elk herd and the results of work that will take place over the coming year.

If you would like to volunteer for tasks that could help improve management of the Grant Creek elk, if you would like to be invited to next year's meeting and weren't invited this year, or if you have suggestions or comments, contact:

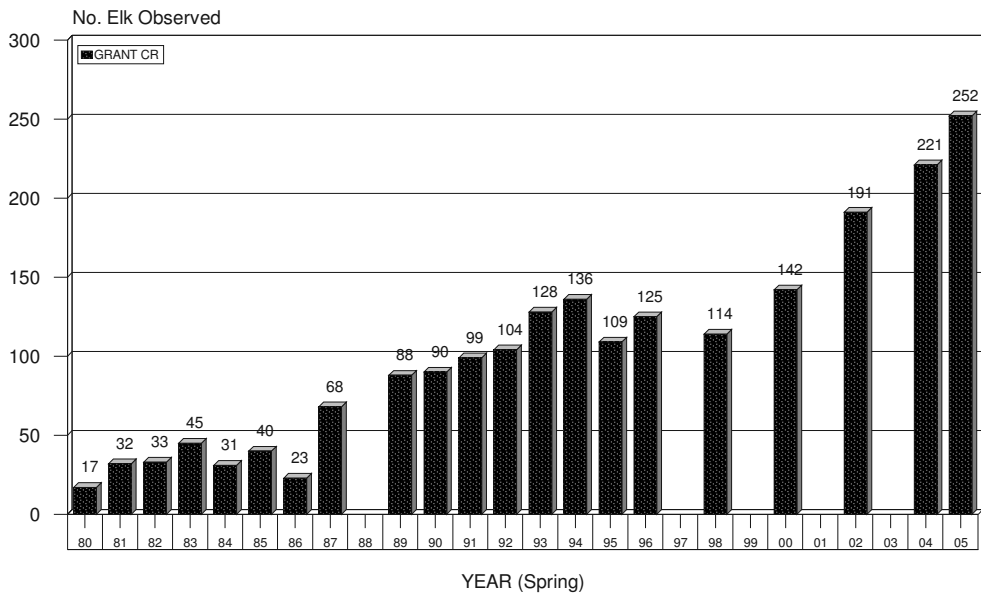
Bert Lindler 2523 Klondike Court Missoula, MT 59808 542-7645 blindler@montana.com

If you would like to talk to the biologist responsible for setting seasons and organizing damage hunts for the elk that winter in Grant Creek, contact Bob Henderson at the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks: 542-5515.

Attachments:

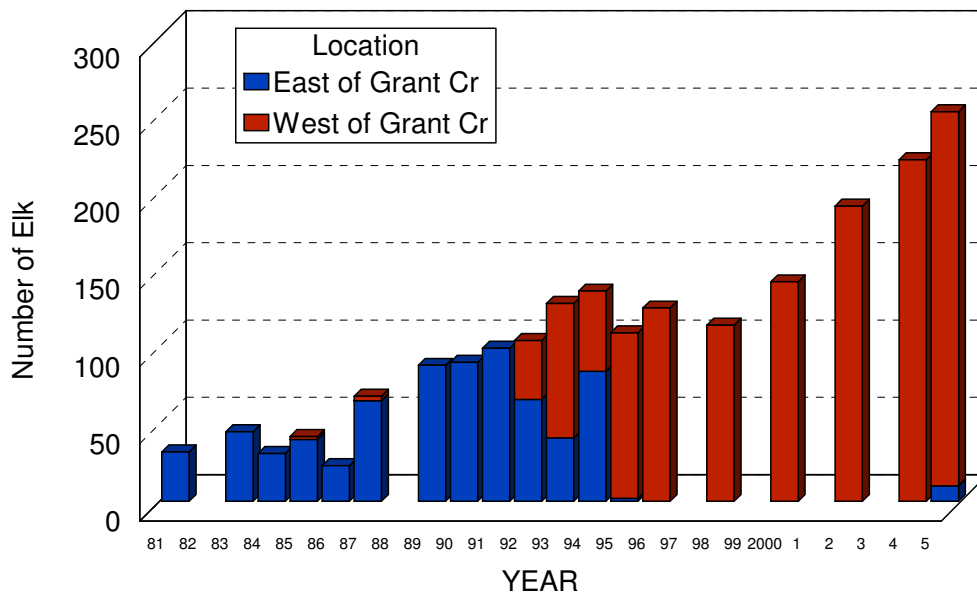
- The elk population counted each spring for the past 25 years
 - The preferred suggestions from the May 18 meetings
 - The list of participants at the May 4 and May 18 meetings
 - The initial suggestions from the two tables during the May 18 meeting
 - The agendas for both meetings
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Trends of Elk Observed in Grant Creek
During Aerial Surveys



Spatial Distribution of Grant Creek Elk Herd

During Spring Aerial Surveys



Preferences Expressed During the May 18 Meeting



Improve habitat (29 stars)

Weed control



Help ranchers with problems caused by elk (20 stars)

Fencing, weeds, volunteer labor, depredation payments



Acquire additional habitat for the elk (11 stars)



Do a better job of moving the elk (9 stars)

Hazing, head them to safe places where they are wanted



Do nothing (9 stars)



Improve general and early season hunting opportunity (9 stars)

Earlier hunting season for herd (bow and rifle)



Study (7 stars)

How large should the herd be?

Follow up on graduate study 25 years ago



Better management of late hunts (6 stars)

Mix up days elk are hunted (not just weekends)

Harvest more elk and do a better job of moving them around



Education (5 stars)



Control herd with means other than standard hunting (2 stars)

Professional hunters

Move elk



Public Involvement (1 star)

More diverse representation on working group

Master hunter/youth hunter approach to allow additional hunting (no stars)

**Meetings of the Grant Creek Elk Working Group
Grant Creek Inn (7 to 9 p.m.)**

May 4, 2005

Name

Gary Marbut	Family donated land for elk habitat 25 years ago
Ron Hoff	Organized volunteer fence pull to benefit elk
Randy White	Rancher
Rick Vanden Pol	Homeowner, Prospect Meadows
Scott Nicolarsen	Elk hunter, homeowner Prospect Meadows
Mike Mueller	Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Sandy Kratville	Lolo National Forest
Joe Kiphut	Lolo National Forest
Tom France	National Wildlife Federation (NWF)
Don Nicholson	Missoula City Council, Ward 2
Harriet Spurlock	Rancher
Jim Berkey	Five Valleys Land Trust
Daniel Ryan	Rancher
Mike Flynn	Rancher
Paul Hanson	Rancher
John Firebaugh	Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Bob Henderson	Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Tim Aldrich	Member, Region 2 FWP Citizen's Advisory Council
Bert Lindler	Prospect Meadows Homeowners Association

May 18, 2005

Ron Hoff	Volunteer who organized fence pull to benefit elk
Mark Denton	Landowner (above Glen Eagle)
Ken Knie	Landowner (above Glen Eagle)
Mike Flynn	Rancher
Harriet Spurlock	Rancher
Paul Hanson	Rancher
Emily Lauchnor	Friends of Grant Creek
Anne Dalton	Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Tim Aldrich	Member, Region 2 FWP Citizen's Advisory Council
Scott Nicolarsen	Elk hunter, homeowner Prospect Meadows
Rick Vanden Pol	Homeowner, Prospect Meadows
Bob Henderson	Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Bert Lindler	Prospect Meadows Homeowners Association

May 18 Working Meeting
(Two tables, each with about half-a-dozen participants)

Suggestions—Table 1

- **Early season elk hunt in the Rattlesnake (2- to 4-week hunt)**
Protect the Jumbo herd
- **National Wildlife Federation property**
Allow bowhunting
Protect weeds
Consider arranging a hunt that includes adjoining landowners
- **Work with the Grant Creek Ranch to allow hunting there**
- **Improve the late-season hunts**
Get more hunters there when the elk are there
- **Education**
Salting and feeding elk and deer are not a good idea
Help homeowners understand the situation the ranchers are facing
One rancher said elk double the grazing pressure (animal unit months)
Another rancher said he could stand 50 to 80 elk, not 250 to 300
- **Haze elk to move them around**
Especially after February 15 when hunting is not allowed
- **Mix up the days elk are hunted during the late-season hunt**
Elk figure out hunters only show up on weekends
- **Disperse the elk as they come out of the Rattlesnake**
Dispersed elk would not be as much of a problem as the one big herd

Suggestions—Table 2

- **Do nothing but spray weeds**
Habitat improvement
- **Manage public and National Wildlife Federation lands to keep elk there.**
Forage improvement
- **Why do they come to Grant Creek?**
Hunting pressure
Forage
- **Hunt to reduce herds?**
- **Fence herd out of controversial areas**
Reimburse ranchers for damaged fences
One rancher said elk used to tear out 1/4 mile of fence each spring.
Fence elk out of ranches, subdivisions
- **More diverse group of people in the committee on 'Grant Creek' elk**
Rattlesnake residents
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe (elk go all the way to the Jocko)
Missoula city
Tourists
Hunters

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Five Valleys Land Trust
National Wildlife Federation

- **Compensate ranchers from public funds for elk depredation**
- **Diversity in hunting practice**
 - Behavior management
 - Early season in Rattlesnake
 - Earlier archery season that overlaps with hunting in Rattlesnake, other backcountry areas
 - Start all hunting earlier in the areas where these elk spend late summer, early fall
- **Develop a target population size for the herd**
 - Based on habitat, numbers of elk, and rancher tolerance
- **Change ownership**
 - If some owners can't tolerate elk pressure, can they be bought out, helped to move to a place where the problem doesn't exist?
- **Protect the remaining private lands used by the elk**
 - Land trusts and agencies protecting habitat from development to keep elk on lands with security and food and off more sensitive or controversial areas (ranches where the owners are making a living off the land).
- **Volunteers to remove/replace damaged fences**
 - A liaison with ranchers they could report problems and get help.
- **Types of controls**
 - Professional hunters or wardens killing the elk
 - More tags for hunters
 - Tranquilize the elk and put them to sleep
 - Fencing
 - Trapping/relocation
- **Landowners hold the key to any solution**
 - Without working together, any attempt to manage the herd will be difficult
- **Master hunter/youth hunter program**
 - To allow hunting near subdivisions while providing for safety

Introductory Meeting of the Grant Creek Elk Working Group

7 p.m. May 4, 2005

Grant Creek Inn

Introduction: Bert Lindler (5 minutes)

History of Protection of Land for the Grant Creek Elk: Gary Marbut (10 minutes)

Welcome from Grant Creek's Newest Neighbor (RMEF): Mike Mueller (5 minutes)

History, Status, and Future of the Grant Creek Elk: Bob Henderson (20 minutes)

Management of National Wildlife Federation Lands: Tom France (10 minutes)

Perspective of a Rancher: Paul Hanson (10 minutes)

Perspective of a Hunter: Scott Nicolarsen (10 minutes)

Perspective of a Homeowner: Rick van den Pol (10 minutes)

Introductions of Participants: (25 minutes, about 1 minute each)

Discussion: (20 to 30 minutes)

Thanks to:

Grant Creek Inn

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks

Working Meeting of the Grant Creek Elk Working Group

7 p.m. May 18, 2005

Grant Creek Inn

7 p.m.

Please take a seat at one of the tables. Each table will prepare several suggestions to improve management of the Grant Creek elk herd.

General Rules

- Ask questions if you don't understand what someone has in mind: "What do you mean by ...?"
- Don't dismiss suggestions that may prove impractical—practicality can be dealt with later.
- Don't criticize individuals who have ideas; discuss the merits of the ideas themselves.
- Don't get bogged down in details: "Improve weed control on private lands" would be better than "Hand spray 2-4 D in early spring to control leafy spurge on private lands."

Each table will formulate several suggestions and write them on a flip chart page.

8 p.m.—5-Minute Break

Discussion

The flip charts will be posted on the walls. Each suggestion will be discussed to make sure everyone understands what it means. Similar suggestions will be combined.

8:45 p.m.—Stars Awarded

Participants receive paper stars, which they can place by the suggestion or suggestions they would prefer to see implemented.

Followup

Bert will send a written summary of the suggestions to all participants, indicating the suggestions that were the most preferred. Assuming participants are interested in doing so, subcommittees will be formed to pursue some of the preferred alternatives.