

# 11 North Hills Elk Sporting Radio Collars

By Bert Lindler, North Hills elk and Weed Volunteer

Thanks to the cooperation of landowners, the skill of the helicopter pilot, the care of the veterinarian who fired tranquilizer darts, and the work of the ground crew who handled the tranquilized elk, 11 cow elk were fitted with radio collars Tuesday and Wednesday.

Four other cow elk were caught in traps earlier this winter. Bull elk aren't being studied because they're not primarily responsible for the growth of the North Hills elk herd.

Eight of the fifteen cow elk have special GPS collars that record their location every two hours. Seven have standard radio collars that biologists use to locate the elk when they can receive a radio signal (usually from an aircraft).

All of the elk were collared between Grant and Butler Creeks. The elk spent much of the time on the highest ground in a patch of trees where they felt safe. The helicopter was able to move a few elk from the fringes of the herd so the veterinarian could pick out one to dart. Eventually, the herd headed toward the Butler Creek Road and darting was stopped to avoid pushing the elk any farther.

No elk were injured during the operation and the ranchers' fences appeared to fare reasonably well. Gates had been opened and wires had been lowered in a few areas to make it easier for the elk to get through.

The only bad news was that the elk on Mount Jumbo weren't in an area where some could have been darted safely from the helicopter.

Biologists had hoped to collar a few elk from that herd to make sure that management actions focused on the rapidly growing North Hills elk herd don't affect the smaller Mount Jumbo herd, which is stable. The helicopter flew over the North Hills between Rattlesnake and Grant Creeks, but no elk were spotted there.

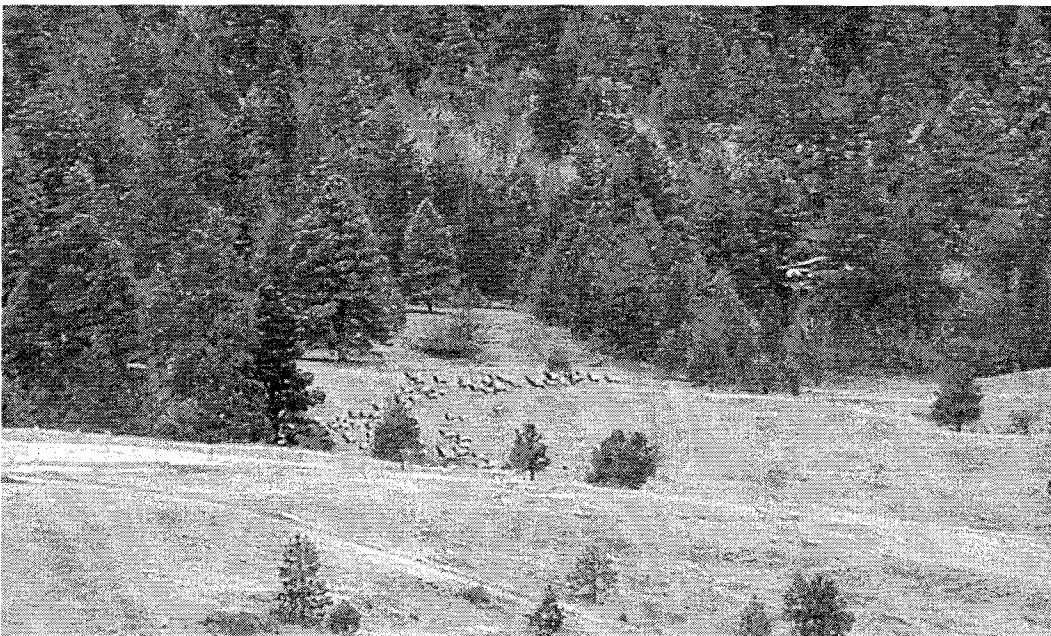
If you have an interest in learning more about the North Hills elk herd, you're welcome to attend the meeting of the North Hills Elk Working Group at 7 p.m. Thursday, May 24, in the Grant Creek Inn. The working group is an informal gathering of folks who care about the welfare of this elk herd and its manage-



*This cow elk is wearing a radio collar that records her position every 2 hours. Photo by Shawn Cleveland*

ment. Biologists will discuss the status of the herd and the limited success of the first early-season, permit-only elk hunt in the Rattlesnake Wilderness. Researchers will discuss the objectives of the study that's now beginning.

I will discuss volunteer work to remove barbed wire from fences where it's no longer needed, encourage installation of elk-friendly fencing where practical, and control weeds to improve forage on the herd's winter range. ☀



*A veterinarian used tranquilizer darts to sedate 11 North Hills elk so they could be outfitted with radio collars for a study conducted by the University of Montana and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Both the Safari Club and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation have provided funds for the study.*

*Photo by Shawn Cleveland*