



NEWS RELEASE

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Elk brucellosis surveillance operations completed for Horseshoe Hills and Ashland area elk herds

BOZEMAN — As part of the multi-year Targeted Elk Brucellosis Surveillance Project, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks staff conducted elk capture operations in both the Ashland area southwest of Broadus and in the Horseshoe Hills north of Belgrade.

All elk in both areas tested negative for brucellosis.

In the Ashland area, 100 female elk were captured with the aid of a helicopter in Hunting District 704 south of Highway 212 and between the Powder River and Hanging Woman Creek. Forty female elk were outfitted with radio collars to track their movement for three years.

This capture was a collaboration with the Eastern Montana Elk Habitat Use Project, looking to learn more about elk habitat use and movements in an area with a relatively new and growing population of elk.

In the Horseshoe Hills, 100 female elk were captured in Hunting District 312 south of Sixteen Mile Creek and east of the Missouri River. Twenty-nine animals were outfitted with radio collars to track their movement for one year.

The goal of these operations is to evaluate the presence and understand the movement of brucellosis in Montana's elk populations. The research will also help FWP understand the overlap between elk and livestock on the landscape.

The Montana Department of Livestock administers a brucellosis designated surveillance area (DSA) for livestock and determines the boundary partially based on elk brucellosis testing results and movement data. Cattle and domestic bison producers that utilize ground within the DSA are subject to additional testing and identification requirements to protect Montana's livestock industry. The Ashland area and Horseshoe Hills are currently outside of the DSA.

Brucellosis is a bacterial disease that infects cattle, bison and elk and can result in abortion or the birth of weak calves. The disease is primarily transmitted through contact with infected birth tissues and fluids.

Animals that test positive for brucellosis exposure do not necessarily carry or spread the disease, but at one time were exposed to brucellosis and have developed antibodies that can be measured with blood tests.

This project is a joint effort between the Montana Department of Livestock and FWP, with support from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.

“Important on-the-groundwork of this nature couldn’t happen without these partnerships,” said Dr. Kelly Proffitt, FWP’s research wildlife biologist. “We also appreciate landowners who allowed these efforts to take place on their properties.”

“The Department of Livestock appreciates the partnership with FWP and the information and knowledge gained through this collaboration,” said Dr. Eric Liska, the brucellosis program veterinarian with the Montana Department of Livestock.

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