
APPLICATION OF STRUCTURED DECISION MAKING TO ELK ARCHERY REGULATION DECISIONS IN MONTANA

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Prior to 2008, 22 hunting districts (HDs) in Montana had limited-draw, either-sex rifle permits, while the archery season was open for either-sex hunting to anyone possessing a general elk license. In addition, an unlimited number of hunters could obtain an either-sex archery elk permit in the 7 Missouri River Breaks HDs, where rifle hunting of bull elk is also limited. In 2008 the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) Commission implemented limited-draw archery regulations in these districts. These regulations have been very controversial since they were implemented. Certain public sectors have argued fervently for changes to these limited regulations in every MFWP season-setting process since 2008, and legislation that would reverse these regulations was introduced and defeated in the last two legislative sessions. In response to the contentious debate on this topic, in 2011 MFWP staff and the Montana Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit facilitated a 10-citizen working group composed of landowners, public sporting interests and commercial/fee hunting perspectives.

Using a Structured Decision Making (SDM) process, the working group developed a problem statement, fundamental objectives and assessed the performance of multiple archery season options relative to the fundamental objectives to arrive at an elk archery season proposal. In December of 2011 the MFWP Commission used these results as a basis for tentative season proposals that they distributed for wider public input and comment. Here we present the results of the SDM process and the working group proposal, as well as subsequent MFWP Commission action relative to the proposal.