

North Coast Roosevelt Elk Management Unit Draft Refined EMU Plan

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Summary: Fish and Game Code Section 3952 directs the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to develop a statewide elk management plan that emphasizes maintenance of sufficient elk populations in perpetuity, while considering historical and current geographic range, habitat conditions and trends, and major factors affecting Roosevelt, Rocky Mountain, and tule elk in California. The plan is intended to provide guidance and direction to help set elk management priorities, and to establish general policies, goals, and objectives, statewide. The plan is also required to identify, delimit, and describe high priority areas for elk management, referred to as Elk Management Units (EMUs), and to address specific issues, establish population objectives, and describe appropriate management actions to achieve objectives within each EMU. The Elk Conservation and Management Plan was completed in 2018 by CDFW Wildlife Branch staff in collaboration with Tribes and after review and feedback from the general public. The North Coast EMU Management Plan contained within the 2018 Elk Conservation and Management Plan was considered a placeholder document pending greater collaboration with local partners. The following is a draft of the North Coast EMU Refined Management Plan crafted by CDFW Wildlife Branch and Region 1 staff for public review and comment, in the public forum held in Humboldt and Del Norte counties, dated May 22 and May 23, 2023, respectively.

North Coast Roosevelt Elk Management Unit

Draft Refined EMU Plan

Region 1 – Northern Region, Big Game Unit – Wildlife Branch
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
May 2023

Population objective: 1,300–4,000
Demographic objectives: 20–30 bulls:100 cows
40–60 calves:100 cows

Goal 1. Inventory and monitor elk populations and maintain, restore, and enhance suitable elk habitat.

- Objective 1.1. Regularly monitor elk population density and abundance, demographics, distribution, habitat use, genetic diversity, and disease.
 - Action 1.1.1. Periodically generate a robust estimate of population density and abundance to inform population sizes and trends using primary survey methods (ground-based trail camera and fecal-DNA) and secondary survey methods (air-based helicopter and Unoccupied Aerial Systems [UAS]) where feasible. Continue to collaborate with academia to develop, apply, and assess efficacy of additional alternative survey methods as appropriate.
 - Action 1.1.2. Continue to conduct annual road surveys to generate minimum count data and demographic ratios.
 - Action 1.1.3. Continue to capture and attach GPS collars on to elk to assess annual and seasonal space use, resource selection, home range size, habitat use, population connectivity, survival, etc. to assist with evaluating harvest strategies and prioritize landscape conservation and management.
 - Action 1.1.4. Periodically assess genetic diversity and gene flow by analyzing tissue and blood samples collected from hunter harvested elk, elk captured for research and monitoring, and samples opportunistically collected (i.e., roadkill).
 - Action 1.1.5. Collaborate with the Wildlife Health Laboratory (WHL) to regularly monitor and test for disease by analyzing blood and tissue samples collected from hunter harvest elk, elk captured for research and monitoring, and samples opportunistically collected or reported to the Department by external partners.
 - Action 1.1.6. Continue enhanced surveillance and monitoring of Treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD) including application of management actions in adherence to methods described in the *Strategic Surveillance Plan for Treponeme-Associated Hoof Disease in California*.

- Objective 1.2. Maintain, restore, and enhance habitat to promote elk occupancy in desirable areas across the landscape where human-elk conflict is minimal.
 - Action 1.2.1. Partner with state and federal agencies, Tribes, NGOs, and private landowners to identify specific areas for habitat maintenance, enhancement, restoration, manipulation, acquisition, etc., with an emphasis on increasing suitable elk habitat availability on public lands.
 - Action 1.2.2. In identified areas, apply habitat maintenance, restoration, and enhancement techniques including prescribed fires, mechanical and chemical treatment to invasive/noxious vegetation, planting/seeding of native vegetation/deferred food plots, and other methods as appropriate to improve elk habitat suitability and promote elk occupancy.
 - Action 1.2.3. Coordinate with public land agencies, private landowners, Tribes, and NGOs to evaluate the potential for elk translocations and apply if determined necessary as appropriate based on environmental, biological, and social conditions.

Goal 2. Apply a prescriptive harvest regime, in consideration of environmental, biological, social, and economic factors, to provide public hunting opportunities, assist in alleviating human-elk conflict, and to achieve population objectives.

- Objective 2.1. Periodically recommend public harvest quotas informed by population abundance, population trend, sex and age ratios, hunter harvest success, and age-at-harvest data.
 - Action 2.1.1. Annually assess demographic data, hunter harvest success, and age-at-harvest data to inform population performance relative to harvest regime and provide harvest recommendations to the California Fish and Game Commission in tandem with Goal 1-Objective 1.1-Action 1.1.1.
 - Action 2.1.2. Periodically assess appropriate harvest boundaries and hunt seasons informed by data gathered under Goal 1-Objective 1.1 and recommend boundary modifications as appropriate to improve hunter spatial and temporal distribution and hunter satisfaction.
- Objective 2.2. Administer alternative harvest programs to increase public elk hunting opportunities, assist in alleviating human-elk conflict, and to achieve population objectives.
 - Action 2.2.1. Utilize the Shared Habitat Alliance and Recreational Enhancement (SHARE) program to increase public elk hunting opportunities on private property and to alleviate human-elk conflict where feasible and appropriate.
 - Action 2.2.2. Evaluate utility of, and recommend as feasible and appropriate, application of a special hunting season for surplus game, as described under California Fish and Game Code § 325.

- Objective 2.3. Administer the Private Lands Management (PLM) program and Cooperative Elk Hunting Area (Landowner) program to promote elk occupancy on private lands.
 - Action 2.3.1. Continue to collaborate with private landowners enrolled in the PLM program to manage lands to benefit elk and other wildlife.
 - Action 2.3.2. Seek landowners interested in joining the PLM program in strategic areas in accordance with Goal 1-Objective 1.2.
 - Action 2.3.3. Utilize the Cooperative Elk Hunting Area (Landowner) program to encourage protection and enhancement of elk habitat and provide eligible landowners opportunity for limited elk hunting on their lands.
 - Action 2.3.4. Evaluate utility of, and recommend as feasible and appropriate, modifications to the Cooperative Elk Hunting Area program, § 555, Title 14, California Code of Regulations, to enhance the Department's ability to allow for landowner hunting opportunity.

Goal 3. Reduce human-elk conflict, preclude elk from occupying areas where their presence is undesirable, and maintain elk density/activity within socially tolerable levels.

- Objective 3.1. Reduce human-elk conflicts on private property.
 - Action 3.1.1. To the extent possible, apply Goal 2 as the primary tool to reduce human-elk conflict on private property.
 - Action 3.1.2. Continue to document and respond to human-elk conflict reports and provide reporting parties with informational resources on the application of proactive preventative and exclusionary measures, to reduce unwanted elk activity, including hazing techniques, physical barriers, and repellents, as well as applications that reduce elk damage and increase tolerance of elk presence, such as fence modifications (see Appendices C and D).
 - Action 3.1.3. Facilitate relationships with NGOs and private property owners to work together to apply fence modifications, preventative techniques, and exclusionary measures, including application of grant funds to support such work.
 - Action 3.1.4. Issue elk depredation permits (Fish and Game Code § 4181) consistent with statute, regulations, and Department policy at locations experiencing chronic elk depredation issues.
- Objective 3.2. Mitigate elk-vehicle collisions.
 - Action 3.2.1. Collaborate with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to install and maintain elk road crossing signs where appropriate, informed by Goal 1-Objective 1.1.
 - Action 3.2.2. In partnership with local, state, NGOs, private landowners, Tribes, etc., work to identify applications that promote elk use of alternatives to crossing roads, such as undercrossing and overcrossing structures, guide fence, deterrents, etc.

- Action 3.2.3. Collaborate with Caltrans and academia to research and apply novel methods to reduce elk-vehicle collisions.
- Objective 3.3. Reduce elk density in targeted areas and preclude re-establishment where elk presence is unsustainable and simultaneously promote elk occupancy in areas where conflict will be minimal and to provide additional opportunities for public enjoyment.
 - Action 3.3.1. Work with local and state agencies, private landowners, and Tribes to identify and apply feasible methods to remove elk from areas where elk occupancy is undesirable, and Goal 2 and Goal 3-Objective 3.1-Action 3.1.1 is unsafe and impractical.
 - Action 3.3.2. In accordance with Goal 1-Objective 1.2, conduct habitat enhancement and maintenance activities on CDFW-managed lands to attract and promote elk occupancy.
 - Action 3.3.3. Partner with local, state, and federal agencies, private landowners, NGOs, and Tribes to identify and apply strategic preventative/exclusionary measures to preclude elk from reestablishing in “de-emphasis” areas.

Goal 4. Establish and foster positive, cooperative relationships with local Tribes regarding elk management in recognition that the Department and Tribes share authority to regulate elk harvest as elk move across jurisdictional boundaries.

- Objective 4.1. Develop co-management agreements, memoranda of understanding agreements, or similar mechanisms for the management of elk in cooperation with local Tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated within the EMU.
- Objective 4.2. Partner with Tribes to complete Goals 1-3.