



Large Mammal Advisory Committee

San Luis Reservoir Fixed-wing elk herd composition surveys

Progress Report

Date: November 15, 2011. Merced County

Annual composition counts:

These counts are conducted by the unit biologist and an additional observer utilizing the Departments aircraft following standard fixed wing survey protocol.

Statement of Need:

It is the goal of the elk program to survey these areas on a yearly basis in an effort to track changes in elk herd distribution, composition, and numbers. Data are needed to monitor elk populations within this elk management unit (EMU) as well as set harvest quotas, season length, and justify additional hunts should the data support them.

San Luis Reservoir Herd 11/15/2011

Sighting	Group Size	Bull	Raghorn	Spike	Cow	Calf
1	3	3				
2	59	2	2	4	37	14
3	2	1		1		
4	1	1				
5	12				7	5
6	3				2	1
7	2				1	1
8	2				2	
9	2				2	
10	1	1				
11	1	1				
12	7			1	6	
13	2	1		1		
14	15	2			12	1
15	6			2	2	2
16	3				2	1
17	12				10	2
18	15	2	5	3	5	
19	5	3	1	1		
20	7	7				
21	2	2				
22	4	4				
23	1	1				
24	2	1	1			
25	1				1	
26	1	1				
27	6				3	3
	177	33	9	13	92	30

Ratio **60%** **100** **33%**

Additional Information:

Conditions were clear, calm, and warm. The previous year's vegetation growth was good, with standing grass on most areas. Some rainfall had occurred prior to the survey and some greenup was evident. San Luis Reservoir was high with little vegetation along the shorelines. Observation was difficult due to the dry brown grasses, and most of the elk located under the oak trees. The two observers were Greg Gerstenberg and Evan King. The pilot was Gary Schales from Fresno, and the speed flown was fast throughout. Composition was difficult due to high speeds. This was the first elk survey Evan King has done and some reduction in observations may have occurred due to learning the search image for elk.

Survey area did not include Los Banos Creek and Twin Peaks due to helicopters working along the power transmission lines. Significant time was spent on each group as most observations were of elk under trees. The elk were reluctant to leave the cover of the trees. No elk were observed in open grassland areas typical of some flights.

It appeared that observers missed the cow herd on San Luis Reservoir WLA, and at least 1 cow herd on the western edge of San Luis Reservoir. Also, only 1 group of elk was observed on Mustang Ridge which is low for this area. Many bachelor bull groups were observed and this is the highest bull ratio ever recorded.

No flight time was completed in the western Stanislaus area where bulls are often seen from the Mt Diablo herd.