A Cooperative Approach to Elk Management in the Wildland/Urban Interface of Missoula, Montana - A Dynamic Strategy for a Growing Problem

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The Missoula Valley in western Montana is home to nearly 800 wintering elk (*Cervus elaphus*), of which 300 are from the North Hills elk herd. From 1980 to 2007, this herd grew from 17 to 290 elk with a 48-percent growth rate occurring between 2000 and 2007. Without an effective harvest, this population is projected to double every five years. With increased residential development in elk winter range, a diverse public's opinion on the management objectives of the herd, and the herd's juxtaposition to the City of Missoula and the Rattlesnake Wilderness and National Recreation Area, wildlife biologists have needed to become more creative with their management strategies. To more effectively manage the herd at a sustainable level and to keep it wild, wildlife biologists from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks have coordinated and collaborated with numerous landowners and staff at the University of Montana and the USDA Forest Service. This presentation is an integration of the social and biological sciences, with discussions on the successes and failures of tested strategies to manage elk in the wildland/urban interface. The discussion will include the perspective and efforts of a North Hills homeowner, and data from a Master student's thesis project on survival, habitat use, daily/seasonal movements, and elk redistribution related to hunting pressure as collected with 10 GPS and 11 VHF collars. The discussion will conclude with a description of the adaptive management approaches utilized by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks' wildlife biologists, and the efficacy of those strategies.