

HUNTING ACCESS MANAGEMENT ON PRIVATE LANDS IN MONTANA

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In the summer of 2008, a study of hunting access on private lands in Montana was conducted cooperatively by Colorado State University, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. The purpose of this effort was to examine the extent to which Montana landowners are providing hunting access and the approaches they use to manage access on their property. The focus was on access for hunting of deer, elk, antelope, and upland game birds (defined to include pheasant, sharp-tailed grouse, and Hungarian partridge). The study also included an assessment of landowner values toward wildlife and wildlife management. Data were collected via a mail survey administered to a randomly-selected sample of landowners with ≥ 160 ac. A total of 1418 landowners participated, resulting in an overall response rate of 47 percent. The majority of landowners indicated that hunting occurs for the species that are present on their lands. Landowners in the eastern region of the state reported the highest levels of hunting occurrence across species, except for elk. The largest difference in hunting occurrence across regions was reported for upland game birds – 63 percent of respondents from the western region with upland game birds on their property allowed access, compared to 80 percent in the East and 74 percent in the central region. For the ungulate species (deer, elk, and antelope), hunting tended to occur more often for male animals. The average number of hunters/year allowed on private lands was highest for elk and lowest for antelope. The two most common forms of access management reported by landowners were “non-Block Management hunting without a fee” involving mostly hunters who are (1) family/friends and (2) NOT family/friends. The third most frequently selected approach was the Block Management Hunting Access Program. By facilitating a better understanding of how hunting is currently managed on private lands in Montana, these results provide a baseline that can assist FWP in developing plans for working with private landowners on issues related to hunting access and wildlife management in the future.