

EVALUATION OF HUNTER MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES UTILIZED BY MONTANA'S BLOCK MANAGEMENT PROGRAM^{TWS}

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The Block Management Program, initiated in 1985, was implemented to encourage private landowners to provide free public hunting access. Currently, the program is very successful with >1200 landowners enrolling >8.7 million acres, and providing > 400,000 hunter days of free public hunting. Surveys were sent to 423 landowners (303 returned) and

1636 hunters (976 returned) to evaluate current perceptions of block management area (BMA) users. Preferences, expectations, and satisfaction levels were determined by calculating frequencies and means using SAS 8.2. Landowners were satisfied with permission methods used, numbers of hunters received annually, and hunter limit and travel restriction rules utilized, but satisfaction levels differ when comparing relative game abundance and harvest success between geographic regions. Hunters are very successful in gaining permission to BMAs and are satisfied with travel restrictions encountered, but satisfaction levels differ when comparing amounts of other hunters seen, game abundance, and harvest success between BMA types and geographic regions. Program success is evident by levels of satisfaction with various hunter management tools evaluated by this study, but some areas need improvement. This study identified management strategies that should be continued and strategies that can be improved on existing BMAs. It also provided insight for designing strategies that meet specific preferences and expectations of program users when developing new BMAs. Implementing these findings will allow the Block Management Program to become an even greater success in providing free public hunting access to private land than it is today.