

Defining Elk Security Habitat in Montana – Ongoing Research and Outreach

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As part of the Montana Statewide Elk Management Plan, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks set a statewide objective of resolving conflicts in concentrations, distributions, and behaviors of elk (*Cervus canadensis*), which included a commitment to formally define elk security habitat. Generally defined, elk security habitat provides areas where elk can reduce their susceptibility to being harvested during the hunting season while still meeting their biological requirements. While security habitat has been formally identified and quantified in previous studies in Montana, recommendations for security habitat have varied considerably, causing confusion for wildlife and land managers seeking to implement these recommendations. Our objective is to develop area-specific recommendations for public land management across Montana, based on elk security needs that will encourage elk use of public lands throughout the hunting seasons. We plan to use a resource selection modeling approach with existing elk GPS location data from 32 herds across Montana from 2001-2025 to identify security thresholds for elk and identify landscapes where additional data is needed to inform land management recommendations. To ensure involvement and ownership by state and federal wildlife managers and biologists, we are currently forming a working group that will help provide guidance on study plans and products. We are still in the early stages of this project, so we encourage participation in working group meetings and any additional feedback on the proposed design.