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## ELK MOVEMENTS AND HARVEST ACROSS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LANDS IN THE SAPPHIRE MOUNTAINS

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Hunting access issues have become increasingly contentious as changes in land ownership and use have influenced elk distributions in some areas. In the Sapphire Mountains of western Montana, hunters have voiced concerns regarding elk aggregations on privately-owned lands that restrict hunter access. To address these concerns, we initiated a survey of landowners and hunters to determine satisfaction with elk management. We also radiocollared 65 elk (45 cows, 20 bulls) to better understand elk distributions across public and private lands. In all seasons, bull elk locations were more likely to occur in publicly accessible areas than cow elk locations. During archery season, 61% of bull locations and 41% of cow locations occurred in publicly accessible areas. These numbers dropped to 48% of bull locations and 14% of cow locations in publicly accessible areas during rifle season. During archery and rifle seasons combined, 1 of 39 radiocollared cows (2.4%) was harvested on private land, and 5 of 19 radiocollared bulls (26.3%) were harvested: 3 on publicly accessible land and 2 on private land. Although hunters reported a lack of elk on public lands as a concern, our radiocollar and harvest data confirm that at least a segment of the bull population was accessible to public hunters, but female elk were aggregated in areas that restricted hunter access. A lack of hunter access to female elk during the hunting season may result in management challenges, including game damage issues, and increases in the population beyond objective levels.