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## **USDA FOREST SERVICE AND MONTANA FISH WILDLIFE AND PARKS COLLABORATIVE OVERVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ELK HABITAT MANAGEMENT ON THE CUSTER, GALLATIN, HELENA AND LEWIS AND CLARK NATIONAL FORESTS**

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A group of wildlife biologists from the USDA Forest Service (FS) and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MFWP) have compiled recommendations for elk (*Cervus elaphus*) habitat management. While we focus on elk habitat considerations in this effort, we do not advocate for single species management. We advocate for ecologically appropriate habitat management under an umbrella of landscape scale ecosystem management, which focuses on providing a range of habitats to support all fauna native to the landscape, including elk.

The recommendations are based on the most current available information and the collective experiences of these biologists. They considered contemporary issues and circumstances such as increases in recreation of all types on these National Forests, changes in the numbers and distribution of elk, the restoration of large predators, the current mountain pine beetle epidemic, and small and large fires on the Custer, Helena, Lewis and Clark, and Gallatin National Forests in the Northern Region of the FS. The shared goal of the two agencies is to provide for elk and other big game on National Forest System (NFS) lands throughout the year, recognizing that with the multiple use mandate of the FS, management for elk will be one of many considerations on NFS lands. The overview and recommendations address an appropriate elk analysis unit, management of cover and recreation on winter ranges, security during the archery and rifle hunting seasons, motorized route management relative to habitat effectiveness, cover on spring-summer-fall ranges, cover patch size, and forage considerations.