

Elk Surveys in WMUs 523, 526, 527 and 537

Introduction

Elk populations in the Lower Peace Region continue to expand and are managed as part of the wildlife biodiversity of the region. Annual hunting of elk by licenced and non-licenced (Aboriginal) hunters is very popular. Surveys are undertaken to determine elk population size and distribution and provide updated data for licencing allocations.

Survey Method

On January 25, 26, 27 and February 8, 2016 a three person crew in a Bell 206 Jet Ranger surveyed known and suspected elk herd locations in WMUS 523, 526, 527 and 537. These surveys are a minimum total-count (mtc) method. Prior to the survey information is gathered from Alberta Environment and Parks Resource Management and Justice and Solicitor General, Fish and Wildlife Officer staff on known, suspected and historical elk locations. A survey flight plan was constructed based on this information. Elk location (and tracks encountered while surveying) were investigated and total elk numbers were counted and marked using a handheld GPS unit, when encountered. Attempts were made to classify and record elk as calves, cows and size of bulls where applicable. In some cases, due to elk movements to avoid the helicopter, accurate classification of spike bulls, cows and calves was not possible.

Results

Snow conditions were generally very poor to marginal for the surveys. Snow conditions were extremely poor in WMU 537 and the survey was cancelled. A total of 456 elk were found in the northern half of WMU 523; 539 elk in WMU 526; 608 elk in 527 and 49 elk in WMU 537. The findings would not indicate the total elk population as it is recognized that herds were/can be missed given the poor snow conditions. These findings do show a continued trend of elk population increase and distribution in the WMUs surveyed. A total of 24.7 hours of R/W time was used for the surveys.

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