

## Summary

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**Meeting dates:** June 7-8, 2013

**Agenda item 9:** Colockum Elk Herd Status and Management - **Briefing**

**Presenter(s):** Ted Clausing, Region 3 Program Manager

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**Background summary:** This briefing is at the request of the Fish and Wildlife Commission on various aspects of the Colockum elk herd.

The Colockum elk herd occupies a small range in the center of Washington, primarily in the Wenatchee Mountains and east to the Columbia River in Chelan and Kittitas Counties. Due to the central location, the open habitat and relatively easy road access, Colockum elk have always been very popular with hunters and wildlife enthusiasts. Private agricultural lands adjoin the Colockum range in the Wenatchee and Kittitas Valleys, so crop damage issues are common. The combination of high interest, high visibility and crop damage creates some challenging management issues.

**Population Status:** The post season population objectives for the Colockum herd are 4,500 elk and a bull to cow ratio of at least 12 bulls per 100 cows. Conservative hunting regulations were implemented when the herd was significantly below these objectives for several years, but the trends have recently improved. The latest estimates from the spring survey are 5,700 elk with a bull:cow ratio of 10:100.

**Hunting Regulations:** A small number of antlerless permits were restored during 2012 and the numbers of permits have been increased for this fall. If the trends continue, we expect to recommend a significant increase in antlerless hunting opportunity for 2014. The bull ratio remains a little below objective, but the "true spike" regulation has improved the survival of yearling bulls, so we expect to recommend additional branched bull permits, as well.

**Agricultural Damage:** Crop damage continues to occur in several locations in each county, but the levels are more manageable than in the past and we expect the new Wildlife Conflict Specialist positions to help reduce them further. Having Master Hunters available to hunt in Elk Area 3911 and volunteering to guard crops, herd elk and repair stock fences has been effective.

**Winter Range:** We first closed the Whiskey Dick Winter Range to motor vehicles on a trial basis during February through March in 2008, in an attempt to reduce disturbance to elk on the Wildlife Area and reduce the numbers that moved west toward private agricultural lands near Parke Creek. This winter/spring closure to motorized access is very controversial and has polarized some landowners and recreationists. Long term decisions about management of the winter range are now included within the Naneum Ridge to Columbia River Recreation Plan.

**Naneum Ridge to Columbia River Recreation Plan:** Washington Department of Natural Resources started a recreation planning effort for the Naneum State Forest during spring of 2012. Later that year, the planning area was expanded to include all state managed lands between the Columbia River and the Wenatchee National Forest lands to the west. WDFW and DNR are now partners in the planning effort for approximately 230,000 acres.

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**Range Fires:** Two major wild fires occurred within the Colockum area last summer. The Table Mountain Fire and the Taylor Bridge Fire were not in the core of the Colockum range, but we expect they may change the distribution of the herd somewhat over time. The Table Mountain fire in particular burned a large area of high elevation forest near the western edge of the Colockum range. The more open habitat and more productive forage will likely attract more elk to this portion of the summer range in the next few years.

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**Policy issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:**

N/A- Briefing Only

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**Public involvement process used and what you learned:**

N/A- Briefing Only

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**Action requested:**

N/A Briefing Only

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**Draft motion language:**

N/A Briefing Only

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**Justification for Commission action:**

N/A Briefing Only

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**Communications Plan:** N/A