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Kootenay Region Wildlife Regulations Proposed Changes for Comment (2010-11)

INTRODUCTION

This document summarizes changes to hunting regulations currently under consideration by Wildlife staff in the Kootenay Region. Regulation change proposals go through many levels of review and can only be approved by the Minister of Environment. These changes, if approved, will be effective and appear in the Hunting and Trapping Regulations Synopsis beginning July 1, 2010. We welcome and will consider your comments as we assess regulation change proposals.

Proposals for regulation changes result from internal objectives in the Ministry of Environment, requests by Rod and Gun Clubs, other non-government organizations, and the public at large. Others we develop from technical studies of trends in wildlife populations and hunter use and success in the region. This document provides some of this background to assist you in understanding the rationale for each regulation change proposal.

WILL THERE BE A PUBLIC MEETING?

Due to poor past attendance, we are not holding public meetings for comment this year; instead, we are asking that you follow the approach this document outlines to contact us with your concerns and recommendations. This will allow you time to discuss with your colleagues and organize your ideas in writing. We hope to hear from a range of people, including those who may otherwise be unable to attend a meeting or are reluctant to speak in public.

WHO CAN COMMENT?

Anyone with an interest in hunting or trapping in British Columbia can comment.

HOW CAN I COMMENT?

We will accept comments in a number of forms. In order of preference, your options are:

- (a) electronically via email to Anne.Reichert@gov.bc.ca;
- (b) conventional mail to the Nelson office of the Ministry of Environment, at the address noted at the top of this document;
- (c) via FAX to Nelson office of the Ministry of Environment at 250-354-6332.

To assist us in getting the best possible information, **please use the forms we provide in this package**. An MS Word file is available from the web site should you wish to use a computer. Paper copies of this form can be acquired from the Ministry of Environment office in Nelson or Cranbrook.

WHAT IS THE DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS?

The deadline for submission of comments is December 1, 2009. Comments received later will still be reviewed. However we cannot guarantee that they will be incorporated in developing 2010/11 regulation proposals.

HOW WILL THE MINISTRY USE MY COMMENTS?

Hunting and trapping regulations contribute to the three main goals of the wildlife program:

- (a) Maintain the diversity and abundance of native species and their habitats throughout British Columbia
- (b) Provide a variety of opportunities for the use and enjoyment of wildlife
- (c) People and wildlife living in harmony

In addition, the Ministry currently places a high emphasis on hunter recruitment and retention. Complex regulations are a barrier to recruiting and retaining hunters and hence regulation simplicity is a current priority.

PRIVACY POLICY

The Government of British Columbia is committed to protecting the privacy of people whose personal information is held by government through responsible information management practices. Any personal information provided to the Government of B.C. is collected, used and disclosed in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act or other applicable legislation.

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Proposal: Change mule deer buck seasons to:

1. Sept 10-30 4 pt; Oct 1-31 any buck; Nov 1-15 4 pt region-wide,
2. An antlerless harvest throughout the region via LEH and based on conservative population extrapolations by MU from October 1 to November 15,
3. A late season archery season for any buck beginning either November 16 or December 1 and ending December 10,
4. An any buck youth season from September 10 to 30,
5. An LEH for antlerless deer for youth hunters from September 10 to 30, and
6. A 1 mule deer bag limit in Region 4; and drop the aggregate deer bag limit

Regulation number: R41011-01

Location: Region-wide

Management Units: all

Species: Mule deer

Objectives: 1) Reduce regulation complexity within and among regions, 2) Increase hunter opportunity, 3) Maintain a diversity of hunting options.

Rationale: Current mule deer regulations are complex in Region 4 because there are different seasons and bag limits within the Region. Recent mule deer buck harvests appear modest in the Kootenays and 8 years of moderate weather and no doe harvest have allowed mule deer to recover from the declines experienced in the late 1990's (see Mowat and Kuzyk. 2009. Mule deer and White-tailed Deer population review for the Kootenay Region of British Columbia. Unpublished report, BC Ministry of Environment, Nelson, BC). Greater hunting opportunity is available although doe harvests must be managed conservatively for mule deer, hence the limited entry hunt instead of a general open season. We are concerned the increase in buck opportunity in the East Kootenay may reduce buck:doe ratios to unacceptably low levels and we have HCTF funding to measure buck:doe ratios in 5 representative areas across the region for the next 5 years. This proposal will simplify the bag limit and seasons within the region and align them with neighboring regions.

Proposal: Change white-tailed deer seasons to:

1. An antlerless GOS region-wide (along with other regions), from October 10 to November 30
2. A 2 white-tailed deer bag limit in Region 4, one buck and one doe, and drop the aggregate deer bag limit.

Regulation number: R41011-02

Location: Region-wide

Management Units: All

Species: White-tailed deer

Objectives: 1) Reduce regulation complexity among and within regions, 2) Increase hunter opportunity.

Rationale: Current white-tailed deer regulations are complex in Region 4 because there are different seasons and bag limits within the Region. Recent white-tailed deer harvests appear modest (see Mowat and Kuzyk. 2009. Mule deer and White-tailed Deer population review for the Kootenay Region of British Columbia. Unpublished report, BC Ministry of Environment, Nelson, BC.) and this species is known to be very resilient to harvest. Greater hunting opportunity is available and a GOS for antlerless deer will allow increased opportunity and should result in a higher kill which will likely benefit landowners where crop damage is significant. We have HCTF funding to measure mule deer buck:doe ratios in 5 representative areas across the region for the next 5 years and we hope to collect buck composition data for

white-tailed deer as well during these surveys. This proposal will simply the bag limit and seasons within the region and align them with neighboring regions.

Proposal: Change the lynx hunting season from November 15 to February 15, and extend the closing date of the lynx trapping season from December 31 to February 15.

Regulation number: R41011-03

Location: Region-wide

Management Units: all

Species: Lynx

Objectives: 1) Reduce regulation complexity among regions, 2) Increase hunter and trapper opportunity.

Rationale: The lynx hunting season currently opens on December 1 when there is already deep snow in most lynx habitat (i.e., high elevation areas) in the Kootenays. All neighboring regions open the hunting season November 15. The later season in Region 4 greatly limits hunting opportunities. Opening the season earlier will increase hunter opportunity, which is currently very low. The hunting season closes December 31 and we propose to change this to February 15 to align with Regions 3 and 5 and the trapping season. Opening the season later will align our season with Regions 3 and 5 and all southern trapping seasons but likely allow little new hunting opportunity. Extending the closing date of the trapping season will allow greater trapper opportunity and align the Region 4 season with all other Regions in BC.

Proposal: Change the Crawford Bay shotgun only shooting area to a no shooting area.

Regulation number: R41011-04

Location: Crawford Bay and surrounding rural land.

Management Units: 4-06

Species: all

Objectives: Increase public safety.

Rationale: MOE has received a few complaints about the shotgun only zone in Crawford Bay, which is map D11 in the 2009-2010 Hunting Synopsis. This shotgun with shot only zone was put in place because of safety issues especially near the golf course. Since that time, Crawford Bay has expanded with lots of new houses and development. The shotgun only area is mostly private land with a very small amount of crown land and much of the area has been developed with walking trails. Residents in the area are concerned about having shotguns fired where people walk and live. A no shooting area would still allow the use of a bow to hunt elk or deer. In 2008 MOE received complaints of hunters discharging shotguns on the highway, on private land and also using rifles in the shotgun area. A no shooting area would address public safety and still allow bow hunting opportunities.

Proposal: Add a bow season for full curl sheep from either 1) October 26 to November 4 or, 2) October 26 to October 31.

Regulation number: R41011-05

Location: Region-wide

Management Units: All units that have a GOS sheep hunt

Species: Bighorn sheep

Objectives: Increase hunter opportunity.

Rationale: An early season bow only hunt for sheep was not supported resident hunters because bow hunting may create pre-season disturbance for rifle hunters. The proposed late season would allow bow hunters a period to hunt without competition with rifle hunters. The increase in kill level is likely to be small given the low archery success that is expected for

sheep. One concern raised by several groups is that hunting should not occur on winter ranges. Closing the hunt on Nov 4 should minimize this risk but an alternative is to close the hunt October 31 to reduce the risk that sheep move to winter ranges before the hunt ends.

Proposal: Open an LEH season for ewe bighorn sheep.

Regulation number: R41011-06

Location: Bull River

Management Units: 4-22

Species: Bighorn sheep

Objectives: Improve sheep body condition and reduce the risk of disease outbreak.

Rationale: Winter ranges in the Bull River are in fair to poor condition. The elk population is estimated at 3417 elk for MU 4-22. During the non-winter months, domestic cattle also utilize ungulate winter ranges. Domestic sheep occur on private land within the Bull River, elevating the risk for disease transmission. The population estimate for bighorn sheep in MU 4-22 is 140 sheep which is higher than estimates for sheep in the 1980's and 1990's (MOE bighorn sheep inventory 2007). Bighorn sheep ewes were hunted in the Bull River area from 1989 – 1997. With increasing herd size, reduced suitability of winter ranges (which may result in increased bighorn sheep non-traditional movements) and the close proximity of domestic sheep, we feel that it would be prudent to reduce the Bull River bighorn sheep herd. The Domestic/wild sheep separation coordinator (Dave Zehnder) is working with the domestic sheep producer to reduce the threat of disease transmission however a solution has not yet been achieved. In addition we are in consultation with MOFR to remove cattle grazing on the Bull River (Red Barn) conservation property for at least 2 years in an attempt to increase forage production and carryover. MOE is proposing a ewe/lamb season for the Bull River herd for Nov 1 – Nov 30. We would like to remove 5-7 ewes or 5% of the population annually until the population goal has been achieved (Jorgenson et. al. 1993). Ewes/lambs will be compulsory inspected thereby providing harvest data. The LEH zone would be smaller than the 4-22 A subzone from the 1990's and terminate at Sunken Creek. Emphasis would be to harvest young ewes; it would be best not to remove the older ewes as they contain the traditional knowledge of the herd. The goal is to reduce the population to 100 – 115 bighorn sheep. An alternative is to transplant the required number of sheep to an area in which the population needs to recover.

Proposal: Close a portion of 4-32 to goat hunting.

Regulation number: R41011-07

Location: Monashee Mountains

Management Units: 4-32

Species: Mountain goats

Objectives: Reduce hunter harvest in a partially isolated goat population

Rationale: Mountain goat hunting was closed in MU 8-23 (west of 4-32) in 2007 when inventory results of selected areas obtained in 2003 and 2006 indicated declining populations. MU 4-32 has never been inventoried but the goat population was estimated at 50. An inventory was conducted within 8-23 and 4-32 in September 2008. The results indicated that the goat population was split into 3 subpopulations and the southern population was estimated to support 22 goats. The southern population may be isolated from the two populations to the north which had population estimates of 35 and 73. The total population estimate in 4-32 and 8-23 was 130. We propose closing the southern portion of MU 4-32 (south of Plant Creek) to goat hunting while allowing hunting to occur in the herds that are contiguous north of Plant Creek. From 1995-2008, 17 goats have been harvested (53% female); 76% of harvest occurred south of Plant Creek.

Proposal: Move from an LEH to a GOS system for mountain goats in some MUs where conservation risk is low.

Regulation number: R41011-08

Location: Region-wide

Management Units: To be determined

Species: Mountain goats

Objectives: 1) reduce regulation complexity, 2) increase hunter opportunity.

Rationale: Both resident and non-resident hunters are not harvesting their allocation for mountain goats and one barrier to residents achieving their allocation may be the LEH system. Access is difficult in parts of this region and harvest rates have been declining since the early 1990's. Harvest rates are currently at about half the maximum allowable harvest (2.2%) which is 4%. The number of resident hunters has also declined since the mid 1990's. Units to open to GOS will be chosen based on: 1) large population estimates (> 50 in a population which could include adjacent LEH zones because not all LEH zones are isolated), 2) undersubscribed or close to 1:1 odds, 3) low harvest relative to the population estimate (a couple of zones with >100 goats have had a harvest near zero for many years) and 4) female harvest ratio is less important when sample size is very small because a high female ratio may be due to random chance than some population problem. Female ratios must be calculated for adjacent units when harvest numbers are small. When harvest numbers are large (>50) then units that have female harvest ratios >30% may not be good candidates for GOS.

The number of LEH goat permits was increased 38% for the 2009 hunting season in the Kootenays and it will take several years before we are able to evaluate the impact of this move on hunter opportunity and harvest. A provincial goat management plan is currently under revision and may provide direction on this issue.

Note: The following elk regulation proposals are being considered as part of a 2010-2015 Kootenay Elk Management Plan. If you wish to provide feedback on the elk management plan, please visit http://wwwd.env.gov.bc.ca/kootenay/wld/Proposed_reg_changes.html in early October.

Proposal: Open a General Open Season for 6-point or better bull elk in West Kootenay MUs currently on LEH, from September 10 to October 20.

Regulation number: R41011-09

Location: West Kootenay

Management Units: 4-8, 4-9, 4-14 to 4-17, 4-31 to 4-33, 4-38 and 4-39

Species: Bull elk

Objectives: 1) Increase hunter opportunity, 2) Simplify hunting regulations

Rationale: The elk population in the West Kootenay has increased substantially in recent years (http://www.fwcp.ca/version2/reports/pdfs/South_Selkirk_Ungulate_Aerial_Survey_Analysis.pdf) and bull to cow ratios are currently high. The odds of being drawn for a bull Limited Entry Hunt are very low and many resident hunters have requested more bull hunting opportunities in the West Kootenay. A 6-point bull season will likely increase the bull kill, and reduce bull to cow ratios. However since the season focuses on older males only, there is minimal conservation risk to the population, and bull to cow ratios are expected to remain well above 20 bulls:100 cows required for breeding.

To minimize high harvest initially, we are considering implementing a short GOS in 2010 and 2011 (e.g., October 1-20), and then aligning with the rest of the region in 2012. If you do support

a 6-point season, please indicate whether you support a full length season in 2010, or a shorter season initially.

If there is public interest, we could also consider establishing vehicle access hunting closures (i.e., areas that can be hunted without the use of motorized access), to limit harvest under a 6-point general open season and create trophy opportunities.

Proposal: Open a hunt for younger bull elk (spike or 3-point)

Option 1: Open a general 3-point bull elk season in Kootenay agriculture/winter range zones

Option 2: Open a general spike bull elk season throughout the Kootenay Region, from September 1 to 19

Option 3: Open a general 3-point bull elk season throughout the Kootenay Region, from October 10 to 20

Regulation number: R41011-10

Location: **Option 1:** Agriculture/winter range zones in the Slocan/Castlegar, Creston, East Kootenay Trench, and Elk Valley

Options 2 and 3: Kootenay Region

Management Units: **Option 1:** Zone C of 4-08 (Slocan/Castlegar), Zone C of 4-06, 4-07 (Creston), Zone X of 4-02 to 4-05, 4-20 to 4-22, 4-26 (East Kootenay Trench; may be expanded), Zone A of 4-23 (Elk Valley; may be expanded)

Options 2 and 3: All MUs

Species: Bull elk (spike or 3-point)

Objectives: Increase hunter opportunity

Rationale:

Option 1: A 3-point or better bull season in agriculture/winter range zones would substantially increase bull hunting opportunities in the Kootenay Region, although less so than a region-wide 3-point season. The proposed agriculture/winter range zone season would be early in the fall, and therefore would focus harvest primarily on non-migratory animals. This would ensure that the season poses minimal risk to the elk population, or bull to cow ratios. Still, some migratory bulls do move in to low elevation areas during the rut, particularly in areas with abundant non-migratory cows, so monitoring would be required to ensure that there is not an overharvest, and that bull to cow ratios remain above 20 bulls:100 cows.

This season would provide additional hunting pressure on non-migratory elk, which may decrease the non-migratory population and/or encourage movement out of agriculture/winter range zones. This in turn would reduce crop depredation and late summer overgrazing on winter range.

The proposed September 1 to 19 season overlaps with the proposed new season for the youth/senior hunt in agriculture/winter range zones. This would provide opportunities for people across various age groups to hunt together in early September. For example, a parent could hunt 3-point bulls while their son or daughter hunts antlerless elk.

Option 2: A spike bull season would increase hunting opportunities for bull elk in the Kootenay Region with minimal conservation risk. Tooth data from the region indicate that less than 40% of yearling bulls and <1% of older bulls are spikes; thus most bull elk would be protected under this season. Yearling bull elk typically have a higher natural mortality rate than older bulls, and this natural mortality may decline with hunting (i.e., hunters remove animals that would die anyway). Therefore this season is expected to have less of an impact on the population, bull to cow ratios and the number of mature bulls than 3-point seasons.

There are currently no spike bull seasons in the province, nor have there been historically, so this season does not meet objectives for regulation simplicity or harmonization. The proposed September 1 to 19 season overlaps with the new proposed season for the youth/senior hunt in agriculture/winter range zones, which would provide opportunities for people across various age groups to hunt together.

Option 3: A 3-point or better bull GOS across the region would substantially increase hunter opportunity. Many resident hunters have requested a hunt for younger bull elk, since a 6-point or better season is restrictive, and caters more to trophy hunters. The proposed 3-point season was in place in 1996 and 1997 in the East Kootenay, but was then cancelled to allow low bull to cow ratios to recover.

A 3-point GOS would decrease the number of 6-point bull elk in subsequent years, because most 3-point elk grow larger antlers with more tines as they age. This would therefore decrease 6-point hunting opportunities over the long term. A 3-point GOS could result in a substantial harvest of 3 point bulls, and there are many historic examples of high harvests even under very short seasons. The 2004-2009 East Kootenay Elk Management Plan recommended that any 3-point bull season be restricted to low elevations only, to avoid excessive harvest levels. A high harvest would skew the sex ratios in favor of cows which could result in fewer than 20 bulls per 100 cows. This could negatively affect breeding and future hunting opportunities. In 2008, the bull to cow ratio was 29 bulls per 100 cows in the southern East Kootenay Trench, which indicates only a moderate surplus of bulls beyond the 20 bulls per 100 cows that is a minimum management target in BC. By holding the season later in October, the peak of the rut will be over, which will somewhat reduce the harvest of younger bulls. One option for further reducing the risk of over-harvest would be to initially open this season to youth, or youth and senior hunters only. This would support MoE's hunter recruitment objectives.

Proposal: Expand the youth/senior and bow-only general open season for antlerless elk to all agriculture/winter range zones; change the season dates to August 15 to September 9 for bow hunters and September 1 to 19 for youth/senior hunters.

Regulation number: R41011-11

Location: Agriculture/winter range zones in the Slocan/Castlegar, Creston, East Kootenay Trench, and Elk Valley areas.

Management Units: Zone C of 4-08 (Slocan/Castlegar), Zone C of 4-06, 4-07 (Creston), Zone X of 4-02 to 4-05, 4-20 to 4-22, 4-26 (East Kootenay Trench; zone may be expanded), Zone A of 4-23 (Elk Valley; zone may be expanded)

Species: Antlerless elk

Objectives: 1) Increase hunter recruitment and retention, 2) Reduce elk crop depredation and overgrazing on Crown Land, 3) Standardize regulations within the region.

Rationale: The current bow-only and youth/senior general open seasons for antlerless elk occur in the East Kootenay Trench and Creston agriculture/winter range zones only; there are no open seasons for antlerless elk in the Slocan/Castlegar or Elk Valley zones. Elk populations in the Elk Valley appear to be increasing and over grazing some winter range habitat. This is leading to competition with bighorn sheep. The elk population in the Slocan/Castlegar area is also increasing and can likely sustain a higher harvest on cow and calf elk. The proposed bow-only and youth/senior general open seasons are unlikely to have major population impacts on the elk population since they will be restricted to low elevation areas only early in the fall. Migratory elk are still in the mountains at this time.

The current bow-only season runs from September 1 to 9, and the youth/senior season runs from September 10 to 20. Many hunters have suggested opening a youth/senior season earlier in the fall, so that youth hunters have an opportunity to hunt prior to school. However a September 1 to 19 youth/senior season will result in a loss of exclusive hunting opportunity for bow hunters in early September. We are proposing to open the bow season much earlier (August 15) to partially offset this loss, as well as to disturb non-migratory elk during the growing season (which will hopefully encourage movement out of agriculture/winter range zones). These longer seasons may increase the antlerless elk harvest. We plan on monitoring the harvest, and will adjust Limited Entry Hunt opportunities accordingly to achieve population targets.

Proposal: Align Limited Entry Hunt seasons for antlerless elk from September 20 to January 30 in agriculture/winter range zones across the Kootenay Region. There would be 6 seasons: September 20 to 30, October 1 to 9, October 10 to 31, November 1 to 30, December 1 to 31, and January 1 to 31. This would substantially increase the length of the East Kootenay Trench and Elk Valley seasons; however hunts after October 10 could be restricted to private land only.

Regulation number: R41011-12

Location: Agriculture/winter range zones in the Slocan/Castlegar, Creston, East Kootenay Trench, and Elk Valley

Management Units: Zone C of 4-08, Zone C of 4-06, 4-07, Zone X of 4-02 to 4-05, 4-20 to 4-22, 4-26 (may be expanded), Zone A of 4-23 (may be expanded)

Species: Antlerless elk

Objectives: 1) Increase hunter recruitment and retention, 2) Reduce elk crop depredation and overgrazing on Crown Land, 3) Simplify regulations within the region by standardizing all season dates.

Rationale: Currently, LEH seasons for antlerless elk run from September 1 to January 10 in Slocan/Castlegar, September 21 to January 31 in Creston, September 21 to October 10 in the Trench, and September 10 to October 10 in the Elk Valley (where only youth and senior hunters can apply). We are proposing to standardize antlerless seasons across all agriculture/winter range zones with a bow GOS from August 15 to September 9, a youth/senior GOS from September 1 to 19, and then Limited Entry Hunting (where all hunters can apply) starting on September 20. LEH seasons after October 10 would primarily be disturbance hunts designed to discourage elk from becoming habituated to private land, and to provide some relief to landowners who experience elk depredation and harassment of domestic livestock in winter. We would issue a small number of permits only for hunts after October 10 to avoid overharvesting migratory elk (the component of elk populations that we wish to protect).

This proposed change would result in a much longer season in the East Kootenay Trench and Elk Valley, and concerns have been raised with disturbing animals on their traditional winter range during a critical time of year. This concern may be addressed by restricting LEH hunts after October 10 to private land only, although this would increase regulation complexity. In the Slocan/Castlegar and Creston agriculture/winter range zones, most of the area is private land, so this concern has been less of an issue, and late season hunts have been successful for several years.

Proposal: Open limited entry hunts for antlerless elk outside of agriculture/winter range zones, from October 10 to 31

Regulation number: R41011-12

Location: Option 1: region-wide or Option 2: select MUs (to be determined based on public feedback)

Management Units: Option 1: all or Option 2: select MUs

Species: Antlerless elk

Objectives: 1) Increase hunting opportunity, 2) Manage elk populations within the habitat's carrying capacity, 3) Reduce negative impacts of elk on other wildlife species, such as bighorn sheep and mule deer.

Rationale: In some areas, such as the southern Trench, we can likely achieve overall elk population objectives (i.e., reductions in most cases) by hunting elk in low elevation areas only. This is because there are either large populations of non-migratory elk, which are hunted early season in agriculture/winter range zones, or because most or all elk move in to agriculture/winter range zones later in the winter and can be hunted during late seasons. However in many management units, there are no agriculture/winter range zones, or these zones are too small to target the elk population throughout the management unit, where populations may be too high to meet objectives for hunting opportunity, ecosystem health and impacts on other wildlife species. Examples include the Elk Valley (MU 4-2), Wigwam Flats (MU 4-02) and Kitchener (MU 4-06), where concerns have been raised with high elk populations and negative impacts on other wildlife species. Restricting antlerless harvest to agriculture/winter range zones in these units will be insufficient to decrease the elk population.

In addition, in areas with large or increasing elk populations, antlerless elk hunts would be sustainable and increase hunting opportunities beyond agriculture/winter range zones. Reducing populations below the habitat's carrying capacity generally increases an elk herd's productivity, and increases hunting opportunities. Even where populations are below carrying capacity, there can be opportunities for a small antlerless hunt without negatively impacting the population. We are proposing to open these antlerless seasons after the rut, when animals have started moving to their winter range, or are on their winter range, to avoid disturbance of migratory animals during the rut. The season would close prior to winter, to avoid disturbing animals on their winter range during a particularly critical time of year.

Option 1: Open antlerless elk seasons throughout the Kootenay Region. In many MUs, where populations are below carrying capacity, we would issue a very small number of permits (<10).

Option 2: Open antlerless elk seasons in select MUs, where populations are at or near carrying capacity, and where an antlerless season could increase hunting opportunities and meet ecosystem health objectives (including reducing impacts on other wildlife species). So far, stakeholders have recommended opening 4-02, 4-04, 4-05, 4-06, and 4-23, however others may be considered as well.

Proposal: Expand the agriculture/winter range zone in the Elk Valley and East Kootenay Trench

Regulation number: R41011-13

Location: Elk Valley and East Kootenay Trench

Management Units: 4-23 (Elk Valley), 4-24, 4-25, 4-34, 4-35 (north East Kootenay Trench)

Species: Elk

Objectives: 1) Increase hunter opportunity, 2) Decrease elk overgrazing, 3) Reduce elk competition with other wildlife species

Rationale: The current agriculture/winter range zone in the Elk Valley is small, and likely insufficient to manage the elk population within the habitat's carrying capacity. Additional hunting opportunities could be provided sustainably in a larger zone. As discussed above, the elk population in the Elk Valley is increasing, and there are concerns with over-grazing and impacts on other wildlife species in some areas. If you support increasing the Elk Valley agriculture/winter range zone, please indicate what areas you believe should be included.

Elk populations appear to be increasing between Invermere and Golden, and on the east side of the Columbia Valley north of Canal Flats. Although there is less agriculture and crop depredation issues in these areas, compared to the southern Trench, there are conflicts with landowners, and the winter range may be overused as populations continue to increase (e.g., on the east side of Columbia Lake in 4-25). Only a small portion of MU 4-24 is under 1100 m, however including this MU would create a continuous Trench zone for the bow and youth/senior general open seasons. LEH permits would not be issued for 4-24. We are proposing to expand the southern Trench X zone in to MUs 4-25, 4-34 and 4-35, to include areas below 1100 m (as in the southern Trench). In this area the target harvest would be much lower than in the southern part of the Trench, and the number of permits under LEH would likely be small.

These expanded zones would have the same seasons as other agriculture/winter range zones, beginning with a bow GOS, then a youth/senior GOS, and finally a LEH season.

Proposal: Increase sub regional quotas for cougar from 15 to 20 in the East Kootenay and from 5 – 12 in caribou areas of the south Kootenay.

Regulation number: R41011-14

Location: East Kootenay and caribou recovery areas of the south Kootenay

Management Units: East Kootenay: 4-1 to 4-4, 4-21 to 4-26, 4-34 to 4-37, 4-40; Caribou areas of South Kootenay: 4-5 to 4-8, 4-20

Species: Cougar

Objectives: 1) Reduce predation pressure on mountain caribou

Rationale: Cougar numbers appear to be increasing in the above mentioned management units. Virtually all users have reported increased cougar sign. Problem kills of cougars have increased fourfold in the past two years, strongly suggesting an increase in population. This level of agreement is rare and would suggest there is a real increase in numbers.

There is strong evidence that high cougar densities cause declines in caribou populations. Mountain caribou are a threatened species and recovery of these caribou to higher populations is a high priority of the British Columbia government. Reducing cougar populations through increasing the hunting quotas not only reduces the predation risk to caribou but also provides increased hunting opportunities.

We are proposing to increase the cougar quota in East Kootenay in addition to the caribou recovery areas of the south Kootenay because cougar are known to quickly move in to new areas if they are not occupied. High cougar densities in the East Kootenay would likely allow cougars to quickly move into areas of lower cougar densities, such as the caribou recovery zones to the west. Caribou recovery zones in the central and north Kootenay are not included in this regulation change because cougar densities in these locations appear to be low and the hunter kill does not appear to be limited by the current quota.