

MINUTES – ANNUAL STARKEY IACUC SITE VISIT

6 February 2018

ATT: Dr. (b)(6) (attending veterinarian), Brian Dick (Starkey Area Manager), Mike Wisdom (IO), and Mary Rowland (Chair)

The group met at the winter handling facility. No special issues needed attention; general discussion included:

- Winter 2017-18 handling and trapping
 - ~270 elk handled to date
 - w/extremely mild winter, last elk captured on 12/26/17
 - 25 collars pulled off elk from Main, 5 each from NE East and NE West
 - No new bull elk collars going out, but several still operational
 - Used corral traps also this winter, caught 4 cow elk in Doug Prairie
 - With mild winter, may have earlier turnout than normal
 - 4 elk calves with spots on feedground this winter; moms bred on feedground last winter?
 - 2 confirmed dead, very small
 - Mule deer capture, 15 new collars put on this season, including 3 last week; crews shut down for season
 - “Freak” mortality of 2 elk, an emaciated spike and cow, in BC Alley during handling this winter; they both ran into a tree, broke backs
 - Still planning to release about 30 elk from NEE to maintain preferred density in that area; locale as yet unknown, need to work with (b)(6) /ODFW
- Wolf deterrence
 - Hot wire set by Brian and crew along South Pasture fenceline w/Bull
 - Trail cam set up also here
 - 2 more trail cams in NE to check for wolves there
 - Moved Main elk to South Pasture this year (vs Cuhna) to have a lower density of elk (i.e., same number in larger space) and thus make harder for wolves to prey on if present
 - Mostly worked OK but with mud the feedline areas (where trucks could easily get) limited
 - Continued hauling of morts to town
- Tame elk
 - Still 11 being fed, mostly look good, one limping, one a bit skinny
 - Otherwise, feeders still working well and elk doing as well as can be expected given ages
- Chronic wasting disease
 - Mike mentioned increasing attention on this disease across western states
 - Idea posed by some to remove all ungulate feedgrounds, which would obviously have huge ramifications for Starkey
 - Brian has drafted a “contingency plan” for CWD at Starkey in the past
 - Not any action to be taken - just awareness for now
 - Suspect that at a minimum, will soon have to send in lymph nodes and brain tissue from all harvested ungulates at Starkey and elsewhere

MINUTES – STARKEY IACUC MEETING

11 December 2018

Attendees: Mary Rowland (Chair), Dr. (b)(6) (attending DVM), (b)(6) (citizen representative); also (b)(6) (ODFW), Mike Wisdom (PNWRS), (b)(6) (NCASI)

The Starkey IACUC met at 1:30 pm at the La Grande Forestry & Range Sciences Lab. on 12/11/2018 for its annual committee meeting. They discussed a variety of topics; there were no new proposals to review. Highlights of topics discussed included:

2017-18 and Current Season Deer/Elk Handling Update

The group reviewed the handling report prepared by retired Starkey Area Manager Brian Dick for the 2017-18 handling season. It was an unusual winter in terms of weather, which led to good early captures, followed by rain in January that resulted in few additional animals coming to bait. One notable occurrence was that of 4 spotted elk calves on the feedground during winter. Twenty-eight cow elk were trucked to CTUIR lands to keep elk densities in Northeast at desired levels. Ryan Kennedy (Acting Area Manager), who was unable to attend, provided information via (b)(6) about the handling to date for the 2018-19 season. The Main Study Area elk are not going to South Pasture this year. This was tried last year, with the idea to reduce potential issues with wolf depredation by putting these animals in a larger pasture, but conditions were far too muddy for feeding there. Trapping thus far this winter has included ~60 elk from Northeast-East and 30 from Northeast-West. Main elk are not yet coming in but expected to soon with colder temperatures. Deer trapping this season has resulted in 7 captures so far; 3 V-traps have been placed to the north of the 2105 road, in an attempt to capture deer from other areas of Starkey.

Tame Elk

Eight of the tame elk remain. One elk, Jana, has been faring less well lately but has been put on antibiotics and seems to be improving with slightly increased feed. For the tame elk in general, Ryan and staff have increased the pelleted feed offered. (The tame elk still consume some hay, too.) A question arose about whether some of the deer that use the winter area are consuming the pelleted feed out of the automatic feeder and thus diminishing what is available for the tame elk. However, they may just be consuming feed on the ground not consumed by the elk. If deer are eating out of the feeder, one solution might be raising the feeder a little to make it harder for deer to reach. (b)(6) also raised the issue of seasonal technicians who have keys to the winter area entering the tame elk pasture for “selfies” and to pet the elk during the summer. (The most recent event occurred in summer 2018 and was reported to the (b)(6).) Although not allowed, some people appear to be continuing to do this – this behavior can pose significant danger to the people entering the pasture, and could lead to actions taken against an elk that injures someone. A solution proposed by (b)(6) to sign the area indicating no entry is allowed. The electric fencing along the pasture border for the tame elk was also discussed, as the battery appears to be very old and the wires are surrounded by grass. A better charger is also likely needed to ensure the wire stays electrified as needed.

Update on Elk Video Project

(b)(6) reported on the prior research proposal (approved by the Starkey IACUC) to use video cameras mounted on the neck to record feeding by elk, in order to see if diets determined through this technique (identifying species consumed and quantifying, via video analysis) provide estimates of diet composition similar to those recorded through bite counts of tame elk. (b)(6) reported that the camera malfunctioned most of the time, but that the tapes are currently being analyzed to ID species/forage classes. For those who know their plants well, bites can be identified to species from the videos. This work should be completed by May.

CWD and Other Disease Testing

(b)(6) provided an update on current testing for chronic wasting disease (CWD) at Starkey. Tissues (obex, lymph nodes) are being taken from deer and elk harvested at Starkey and sent in for evaluation at the ODFW lab. This year's hunts yielded 28 samples. Local ODFW District biologists are also sampling for CWD again, given its increasing prevalence in western states. Mary mentioned (and sent to the group) the new Best Management Practices developed for guidance to state agencies regarding this disease (prepared by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, with ODFW veterinarian (b)(6) a lead author of the BMPs). Implications of these BMPs relevant to future Starkey research include 1) prohibition of human-assisted live cervid movements; 2) discouraging "unnatural concentrations of cervids," 3) testing all captive cervid deaths, and fencing to keep wild and captive cervids apart, and 4) a detailed response plan to CWD for any captive cervid facility if the disease is detected.

Carnivore Research Update

(b)(6) reported on progress with the carnivore capture in relation to research being conducted by OSU doctoral student (b)(6) to support the larger Starkey mule deer study. There are 5 bobcats on the air, with no plans to capture more given the difficulty in doing so and their limited use of Starkey. Five black bears are also collared, with no plans to increase that number given their use of Starkey primarily during calving and wide distribution the remainder of the year. Nine adult coyotes are on the air, with a new trap "tranquilizing" device uses that seems to do a better job of calming captured coyotes when trapped and awaiting handling. Coyote trapping will continue. Seventeen cougars have been captured, including 11 dependent offspring. One mortality occurred the week prior to the meeting, of unknown cause; the cougar stopped breathing after capture. All captures follow the cougar working group recommendations and are standard cougar capture techniques. One cow elk was temporarily caught in an Aldrich snare and released. Likewise, a few badgers have been caught in the foothold traps.

Current Wolf Status

(b)(6) updated the group on the status of gray wolves in the Starkey area. The wolf OR-30, which historically has been the collared wolf closest to Starkey (with use about 4 times per year, passing through, inside the fence), is near Heppner now, and showing large movements as is common. (A female wolf, likely the breeding female, was shot by a hunter just east of the Starkey fence in fall 2017).

All three wolves in this group are now collared; however, one has moved to California, with OR-30 and a yearling remaining in NE Oregon. One elk in the Northeast area of Starkey was likely depredated by a wolf this year. There are other uncollared wolves in the Starkey area, with tracks seen on the 54 Road and 21 Road near Dark Canyon. Carcasses of deer and elk mortalities on the feedground are still being hauled to town to reduce the likelihood of attracting wolves.

Starkey Area Manager Position Update

Mike reported on the filling of Brian Dick's position of Starkey Area Manager. Numerous delays with the HR department for the Forest Service have occurred. There are three finalists from the last round of applicants, and the hiring committee hopes to offer the job within two weeks. There has been no response from the US Department of Agriculture secretary's office about approving the filling of Dennis Rea's job, which is a key position to assist with running day-to-day operations at Starkey and especially with animal handling during winter. (b)(6) offered to help with this.

Other Business

(b)(6) asked about the fence post replacement at Starkey. Mike responded that this is going well, with about half the needed replacements made to date. Also, there were fewer posts that needed replacing, i.e., they were in better shape after nearly 30 years than expected. The local Oregon Hunters' Association group donated ~\$8K for this effort.

Action Items:

- (b)(6) draft letter to USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue about filing Dennis Rea's position ASAP.
- (b)(6) check with (b)(6) to see if trail cams set up in Starkey near feedground and if wolves detected.
- **Ryan:** make and put up sign about no entry with tame elk; work with Mike/Mary. Check on electric fencing around tame elk to see if working and if not, figure out some solution.
- (b)(6) send ideas for a "no entry" sign to be posted by the tame elk pasture.
- **Mike:** provide (b)(6) with needed information to write a letter to Secretary Perdue about Rea's position
- **Mary:**
 - Schedule Jan. 2019 site visit.
 - Talk to Ryan about deer eating tame elk food out of auto feeder and if a problem see what solutions might work.
 - Talk to Ryan about electric wire around tame elk pasture, how to keep "hot."
 - Ensure that some statement about seasonal help not getting in the pasture with tame elk is added to the Starkey summer lodging "house rules."
 - Work with (b)(6) and Ryan to get sign put up by tame elk.
 - Begin working with Ryan and others on draft "response plan to CWD" as recommended in new AFWA BMPs for this disease.