

MINUTES – ANNUAL STARKEY IACUC SITE VISIT

19 February 2019

ATT: Dr. (b)(6) (attending veterinarian), Ryan Kennedy (Acting Starkey Area Manager), (b)(6) (citizen representative), Mike Wisdom (IO), and Mary Rowland (Chair)

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

- Winter 2018-19 handling and trapping
 - ~325 elk handled to date, 100 from NE and 225 from Starkey Main
 - Despite above average snow, most of the remaining elk in Main are not coming in to bait lines, will likely winter out
 - Mule deer capture: 17 collars put on this season and about 12 VITs (b)(6) (Univ. NV-Reno) and (b)(6) (ODFW) are still trapping, hope to get VITs in some of the does trapped in December that don't have them
 - Discussed upcoming continued elk reduction with multiple antlerless hunts and increased tags for traditional archery bull elk and rifle elk
 - Question arose whether excess elk not harvested can be trucked out to get down to desired numbers– possibly, but this also may be the last year allowed due to increased scrutiny and regulation of captive cervids, especially in light of CWD
- Tame elk
 - Eight elk in herd, mostly look good
 - Jana on new course of antibiotics, started Sunday, still thin, will see if she rebounds
 - Pellet feeders still doing a good job
 - Electric fence needs new battery unit, but moot for season now
 - Temporary signs about only authorized staff entering tame elk pasture have been erected in 2 places (by feeders, up at handling facility gate into pasture), more permanent signs to go in once area manager info obtained
- Leptospirosis and other diseases
 - (b)(6) brought up cases of leptospirosis in cattle ranch (b)(6) by McKay Reservoir near Pendleton
 - valuable bulls dying, cannot find vaccine that will work
 - elk in area also tested positive for leptospirosis
 - asked about Starkey testing for this – has been done in prior years, not currently tested, no positive results to date for this disease, but test is known for having lots of false positives
 - (b)(6) mentioned long-term testing of both elk and cattle at Elkhorn Wildlife Area for leptospirosis and other diseases, they should have records we can review
 - Also lots of elk harvested in damage hunts near this ranch, may be a source of tissue/samples

- (b)(6) would like to see assistance in developing a vaccine if possible, based on whatever version of leptospirosis is occurring locally, but still unclear what the source of this is in the cattle
- Starkey will work this into larger effort to revisit disease testing at Starkey once new area manager on board, possibly test elk at Starkey for this and other diseases and then put down some of the (excess) elk to be removed and send tissues in for confirmation
- Miscellaneous
 - Mike reported that the new area manager position should be filled soon with the new hire on board in ~ 3 weeks
- Action items:
 - Once new area manager hired, work on revised disease and biological material sampling protocols and monitoring
 - Mike to get information about USDA secretary for (b)(6) to advocate for hiring Dennis Rea replacement
 - Get new tame elk signs in place once all information available

MINUTES – ANNUAL STARKEY IACUC OFFICE MEETING

29 October 2019

ATT: Dr. (b)(6) (attending veterinarian), Hans Hayden (Starkey Area Manager), Ryan Kennedy (range conservationist, Starkey), (b)(6) citizen representative, (b)(6) (NCASI), (b)(6) (ODFW), Mike Wisdom (IO), and Mary Rowland (Chair)

The group met at the La Grande Forestry and Range Sciences Lab from 0800-1030 hrs. No special issues or new proposals needed attention; general discussion topics included:

- Winter 2018-19 handling and trapping
 - Typical winter handling, very few mortalities
 - No corral traps used for elk this last winter
 - 315 elk handled, 96 from NE and 218 from Starkey Main Study Area (Main)
 - Trying to keep NE-E (high density area) at around 80 elk
 - Mule deer capture: 28 collars put on this season; many recaptures of same animals leading to high (156) number of “additional trapping events”
- Upcoming (2019-2020) handling season
 - final year of major elk reduction
 - have volunteers and other crew lined up to help, esp since Dennis Rea job not filled yet (ODFW staff, (b)(6) from UNR, Eric Dewitt, etc.)
 - multiple antlerless hunts and increased tags for traditional archery bull elk and rifle elk this year
 - harvest to date well below what anticipated, last antlerless hunt begins Saturday
 - will operate 3 portable elk traps in Main this winter to move elk to winter area from Main
 - ODFW has authorized transportation of up to 250 elk out of Starkey to Mt. Emily area (off Summit Rd.)
 - Some elk could be moved from NE-E early if snow conditions allow
 - Trucking of Main Study Area elk from winter area will happen in spring once handling completed and flights confirm combined numbers in Main and winter area
 - CTUIR involved with this effort by ODFW
 - No additional disease testing required for this action (according to state ODFW wildlife vet)
 - Highly likely this is last year transport of Starkey elk outside the fence can happen due to CWD concerns, etc.
 - Goal is to maintain ~ 75 cow elk in Starkey Main post-reduction
 - Discussed how to keep numbers at this level for research, given annual recruitment, low hunter harvest, and inability to truck elk outside in future
 - Solutions include thinning forest to increase vulnerability of animals to hunters, an emergency hunt, loosening fence buffer restrictions during hunts
 - Public acceptance of spring hunts of cow elk not high
 - Needs more discussion, as long-term solution needed
 - Elk condition scoring

- (b)(6) to train Starkey staff (with Hans on board now) in body condition scoring, ultrasound, etc. this winter
 - Will use BAM to immobilize 2-3 elk at a time (8-10 total), working around normal handling, to spend ~20 minutes/animal in demonstrating techniques
 - Hans and (b)(6) can drug animals, have materials on hand to do
 - (b)(6) will also “look over shoulders” of Starkey crew while doing same scoring on elk in chutes
 - Some differences in results with animals standing or lying down
 - All prior published BCS validation has been done with animals on ground, not standing
 - Idea to do same next year with mule deer, so that Starkey staff can handle all mule deer condition scoring in future
- Tame elk
 - Four animals remain, ~26.5 years old, all look OK
 - Pellet feeders still doing a good job
 - Good greenup this year, so good native forage conditions also
 - Mule deer eating feed will be watched, but seems OK so far
 - Discussed electric fence on section separating Bull from South Pastures to decrease risk of predation of tame elk by wolves
 - (b)(6) wants to see fence in place this winter
 - Would only work and be needed when snow not high enough to impede wolves
 - Prior discussion by IACUC (fall 2017) led to agreement by IACUC to erect this one section of fence, but was never fully operational
 - Wolf activity near Starkey has decreased dramatically since then
 - Hans described why he thought fence was unnecessary (removed earlier this year), due to very low density of wolves now near Starkey and more abundant cougars, coyotes, etc. year round, concluding risk to tame elk is minimal (only 1 tame elk lost to predation over years)
 - (b)(6) described how effective fences are in Ontario, Canada in eliminating mortality of tame caribou
 - No final resolution; Rowland to discuss further with Hayden and (b)(6)
 - Discussed disposition of euthanized animals from Starkey; all go to composting landfill operated by City of La Grande, so no issue with secondary poisoning of birds, other wildlife
- Disease testing
 - Need to develop protocols for testing for deer and elk
 - Also look back at what has been done since Starkey Project inception
 - Work in (b)(6) request from last year) testing for leptospirosis, possibly put some animals down to confirm test results, and possibility of developing a vaccine
 - (b)(6) described why he thought this was especially important from the public’s point of view – if there are any disease outbreaks in the area, we need to document what we have been testing for in deer and elk and results of those tests to demonstrate our commitment to protecting wild deer and elk outside fence

- Elk at Elkhorn Wildlife Area near Baker have been tested for decades
- Mule deer in particular may be succumbing to disease, not tracked well here or elsewhere
- Decisions include what to test for, how often, species (deer and elk), what % of herd
 - Need to consider false positive rates of tests
- (b)(6) ODFW vet, can provide guidance
- (b)(6) emphasized that if any animals are tested before transport out of fence that test results are in before release
- Cattle – question posed by (b)(6) about whether any cattle grazed at Starkey are ever tested
 - No knowledge of this, suspect not
 - Idea that at least for the OSU herd, and the permittee (b)(6) cattle that are collared, blood draws could easily happen
- Carnivore research update (Proposal STKY-16-01) (b)(6)
 - No longer capturing bobcats (don't prey on mule deer), black bear (hard to catch, only in Starkey short time May-June)
 - Have 4 collars on cougars on air now, need to recapture and replace batteries
 - ~10 coyote collars on air
 - Huge collar failure last year with new batch of Vectronix collars
 - Wildlife Services no longer providing trap tranquilizer devices/tabs for coyote traps, but checking 2x/day, animals seem to be doing OK in terms of not chewing feet/legs if caught
 - One bobcat mortality last year, caught in leghold
- Wolves
 - Very little activity near Starkey now
 - Single collared wolf in area but not hear Starkey
 - One wolf seen on camera on 21 road west of fence
- Miscellaneous
 - Hans reported he has received annual paperwork for the cervid holding license, will complete and pay annual fee
 - Discussed (b)(6) helping push for getting vice Dennis Rea position hired (stuck in HR limbo)

Action items:

- Mary:
 - work with Hans and Ryan on revised disease and biological material sampling protocols and monitoring
 - include as part of this what is currently being done for CWD testing (e.g., ~20-25 obex samples/yr)
 - coordinate with Hans and Ryan on inventory of existing biological material (mostly serum?)
 - See if ORISE student can photograph and create database
 - Work with (b)(6) on obtaining disease data from Elkhorn as example
 - Work with (b)(6) on new carnivore proposal and SOP's

- Set site visit meeting in Jan/Feb once handling begins, coordinate with Starkey crew
- Mike:
 - get information to (b)(6) to advocate for hiring Dennis Rea replacement
- Hans/Ryan:
 - Look at files (hard copy and electronic) to compile what records exist of prior disease testing of deer and elk at Starkey and work with Mary (b)(6) to pull into database
 - Work with intern (if OK'd to do) to document existing blood/serum samples and any other biological materials on hand
 - Check to see if cervid holding rules say anything about CWD
 - Work with Mary on developing standardized disease testing protocols
- (b)(6)
 - Write one-pager describing process for putting down elk for body fat/scoring training this winter
 - Work with Mary on developing SOP for body condition scoring, ultrasound, and other condition measurements for deer and elk
 - Work with Starkey staff this winter in training on measuring body condition in elk
- (b)(6)
 - Draft new carnivore proposal for review by committee
 - Dig out records that ODFW may have (Salem?) on prior disease testing or blood samples from Starkey