
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

May 1, 2015

Ministry of Forests Lands and
Natural Resource Operations

Kootenay Private Land Cow/Calf Elk Hunt

1. What is the Kootenay private land cow/calf elk hunt?

The private land cow/calf elk season is intended to maintain hunting and hazing pressure on a few private land properties with high levels of crop depredation. Although the elk population declined overall in the South Trench, some properties continued to have extensive depredation due to elk presence during the growing season.

Small private land hunt zones allow targeted management at a fine scale, with minimal impacts to the overall elk population. The General Open Season was offered as a mitigation tool for a select group of landowners with very high crop depredation levels. Only four landowners were interested in having this season on their property, and hence the General Open Season was implemented on only these properties.

2. Where and when is the private land cow/calf elk hunt open?

In 2014, a General Open Season for cow and calf (i.e. “antlerless”) elk was implemented on select private land properties in the Kootenay Region in Management Units 4-20 and 4-22 (portions of the South Rocky Mountain Trench). These properties have a youth/senior season from September 10 – 19 followed by a season for all hunters from September 20 – 30. The seasons are short and early in the fall to focus the harvest entirely on non-migratory elk.

3. What is the status of the elk population in the South Trench?

The elk population in the South Trench (between Canal Flats and the US border) declined 35% between 2008 and 2013 and is now at or below the target size for this population. The population was intentionally reduced through liberal hunting seasons because of concerns about 1) elk over-grazing and negative impacts on habitat and other wildlife species over the long term, and 2) high levels of crop depredation on private land, as outlined in the 2010-14 Kootenay Elk Management Plan. Both over-grazing and crop depredation were increasing in the mid-2000s because a large component of the elk population is non-migratory, remaining in the valley bottoms on prime winter range year-round.

4. Aren't these considered “canned hunts”, which aren't allowed in B.C.?

As long as wildlife are not enclosed within high fences, and are able to move to and from private land, there is still the opportunity for fair chase. This differs from “canned hunts”, which confine animals that are typically raised on a game farm to an area surrounded by high fencing.

The private properties with cow/calf General Open Seasons do not have fencing that restricts the movement of elk. In fact, most elk were hazed off the properties during the open season and hence very few elk were harvested (staff estimate five cow/calf elk across all four properties).

5. Can landowners sell elk hunts or charge fees for hunter access?

It is not legal for landowners to sell hunts in British Columbia. However they may choose to ask for payment to access their land or for other services, such as lodging or assistance retrieving harvested animals. Private land hunting has a long tradition in British Columbia and has led to many positive relationships between landowners and hunters in the Kootenays and across the province. Landowners may restrict access for any General Open Season or Limited Entry Hunt.

6. Was there consultation with hunters for the cow/calf elk General Open Season on private land?

There was extensive consultation on the cow/calf elk General Open Season on private land with the Kootenay Wildlife Harvest Advisory Committee and the public through web-based consultation. Several management tools and season options for reducing elk/agriculture conflict were considered and analyzed extensively by wildlife staff, conservation officers, agriculture producers and the Harvest Advisory Committee. Options considered included:

- General Open Season for cow/calf elk on all private land in the Trench (with or without a surrounding buffer on Crown Land). Rejected because of concerns over high cow/calf harvest, and enforcement challenges.
- General Open Season for cow/calf elk for youth and/or senior hunters in the Trench. Rejected because of concerns over high cow/calf harvest.
- No General Open Season for cow/calf elk. Rejected because of concerns that crop depredation would remain high in some areas.
- Kill permits for elk issued to landowners on a case-by-case basis to reduce depredation in areas with high damage. Rejected because open seasons, however restrictive, provide at least some opportunity for hunters.
- Limited Entry Hunts on private land. Rejected because landowners have the right to allow or not allow any particular hunter on their property. There is a risk that some hunters drawn for a LEH permit would not be authorized access and hence would have no opportunity to utilize their permit.

Although there were a variety of viewpoints expressed, the Ministry decided that the private land cow/calf elk General Open Season best met objectives for landowner flexibility, hunter opportunity, enforcement, and elk population management.

7. What are the benefits of this hunt?

The private land hunts will likely:

- Reduce crop depredation in the early fall due to hazing pressure on elk on private land that will encourage elk to disperse rather than congregate on agricultural lands.
- Enhance hunting opportunities for people with access to the private land.
- Provide landowners an additional tool to mitigate crop damages.
- Target management of elk populations at a finer scale, focusing harvest on non-migratory elk.
- Discourage the use of wildlife exclusion fencing (i.e., high fences) by providing another crop loss mitigation tool. Accessible private lands provide high quality forage for elk and other wildlife, and allow animals to move freely during migration.

8. What opportunities are there for elk hunters who don't have access to these private land properties?

Although the South Trench elk population has declined, there are still opportunities to hunt 6-point bulls throughout the Kootenay Region (September 10 to October 20), spike bulls in low elevation portions of the South Trench, Creston and Elk Valley (September 10 – 19), cow/calf elk in low elevation portions of the Creston Valley for youth and senior hunters (September 10 – 19), any bull for archery hunters (September 1 – 9), and cow/calf elk in low elevation areas for archery hunters (South Trench from September 1 – 19 and Creston/Elk Valley for September 1 – 9). See www.env.gov.bc.ca/fw/wildlife/hunting/regulations/ for more information.

There are also Limited Entry Hunt opportunities for cow/calf elk throughout the Kootenay Region from September 1 to February 28. See www.env.gov.bc.ca/fw/wildlife/hunting/resident/docs/leh_15_16.pdf for more information.

9. How can I find out more about the private land elk hunt?

Maps of the properties with private land elk hunt are available at www.env.gov.bc.ca/fw/wildlife/hunting/regulations/maps.html (click on "Select Private Land Lots within MU 4-20 or 4-22").

Three Bars Ranch is coordinating scheduling for all four private land properties in 2015. Visit their website at www.pheasanthunt.ca/elk_hunt.php for more information and scheduling. They can be contacted by e-mail at info@pheasanthunt.ca.

10. Are changes to the current cow/calf elk General Open Season anticipated in the future?

Elk hunting seasons, including the private land cow/calf elk General Open Season, will be reviewed and assessed for the 2016-17 season, and as part of the development of the 2015-19 Kootenay Elk Management Plan. Broader General Open Seasons for cow/calf elk on Crown Land will be considered if and when the elk population increases beyond the target population.