

Nevada's elk are doing great



Elk near Elko County's Maggie Creek

The five elk ran past me, running along the bluffs above Maggie Creek. I used to never see a Nevada elk, but as these animals increase across northern Nevada, even I begin to spot them. Elk are a success story across Nevada, especially in Elko County.

Ken Gray is the Regional Game Supervisor for the Nevada Department of Wildlife's Elko office. I checked with Ken to get the latest figures. Nevada's estimated population is 13,500 elk with 7,620 in Elko County. The state's population is up 10% over last year. These population numbers for Elko County's elk herds are at or above population goals.

Elk are spreading out across northern Nevada and now probably occupy every mountain range within their range. The Ruby Mountains continue to be an "elk restricted" zone and probably only contain 50-100 animals.

The rising elk populations show in the number of tags being issued. Rifle tags for bulls this year will be 881, up from 801 in 2010. Antlerless rifle tags will be 2,669, up from 1,688 last year.

Ken said much of the increase is due to good calf-to-cow ratios showing good calf survival. Often, one good calf year is followed by a lower year, since the second year has more yearling cows, but recent years have produced good back to back calf years. Our recent large wild fires have converted a lot of brush to grasslands, helping grazers like elk. Good precipitation in recent years has also helped.

Nevada is also at record highs for pronghorn antelope, at 27,000 head. Both desert and Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep are at record highs. Rocky Mountain bighorns probably would be at record levels if they had not suffered a die-off this last winter. Mule deer, at 109,000 head, are the only big game animal with lower than wanted population numbers.

Ranchers can obtain incentive tags, and then sell each tag for perhaps \$8,000-10,000. The number of tags issued a ranch is based on how many elk can be proven to use their private land. Across Nevada, 89 incentive tags were issued this year. Since some large ranches may receive up to 13 incentive tags, this adds up to some important income.

Ken feels the best part of our increasing elk herds is the opportunity it presents for Nevada hunters to hunt these big game animals and Nevada hikers to see them.

Elko Daily Free Press, "Nature Notes", 5/20/2011
© Gray Jay Press, Elko, NV

Return to [Elko Nature Notes](#)