MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
Elk 2027
380-20 permit reduction

Hunting Districts: 380

1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).

The proposal is to decrease the number of 380-20 either-sex elk licenses permits from 100 to 70.
See Table 1 for summary of prior HD 380 license/permit numbers and harvest. (Figure 1)

HD 380 Elk Harvest Information (2004 - 2025)

Year	Total Harvest	Males	SpikeBulls	<6pts	>6pts	Females	Calves	Unk	# 380-20 Permits	Permit Harv	% Success	Total # Antl-Permits/Lic	380-Antl/Perm B-License Harvest	Antl-Harv General
2025	419	169	72	41	55	236	15		103	67	65.3%	227	35	185
2024	474	236	132	48	56	215	23		104	53	51.3%	227	37	187
2023	484	182	102	20	59	281	21		104	64	61.3%	325	50	246
2022	680	247	124	47	76	397	36		105	58	54.9%	676	111	306
2021	583	296	153	35	67	296	28		136	58	42.9%	750	92	224
2020	795	327	182	53	92	426	42		137	88	64.1%	750	110	318
2019	725	320	195	39	87	380	24		135	89	65.6%	575	102	279
2018	644	281	199	21	62	333	29		137	59	43.0%	475	94	249
2017	808	368	237	34	97	394	46		136	98	71.8%	800	168	255
2016	452	219	113	32	74	209	24		120	63	52.6%	800	114	110
2015	716	342	241	11	89	347	27		120	74	61.7%	700	179	169
2014	711	345	242	18	82	330	35		120	75	62.5%	525	127	228
2013	487	248	195	10	43	228	12		80	40	50.0%	525	90	126
2012	489	267	183	18	66	200	21		80	53	66.3%	526	114	106
2011	546	267	199	22	46	267	12		80	46	57.5%	524	144	128
2010	738	312	192	36	84	398	28		110	76	69.1%	900	277	139
2009	638	282	180	30	72	315	41		110	67	60.9%	900	246	108
2008	502	240	153	29	58	236	26		110	52	47.3%	675	133	127
2007	762	420	302	46	72	324	18		110	74	67.3%	675	187	141
2006	737	357	252	39	66	330	44	6	110	72	65.5%	675	219	148
2005	552	299	200	24	75	236	18		110	71	64.5%	300	89	73
2004	405	252	153	24	75	136	13	5	110	66	60.0%	300	59	30
Ave ('04-'25)	**607**	**285**	**182**	**31**	**71**	**296**	**27**	**6**	**112**	**67**	**59.3%**	**583**	**126**	**176**

Note: Numbers are point estimates only (confidence intervals are associated with estimates) and are rounded
Note: Numbers may not add up due to 'illegal' harvest reports, i.e. HD 380 harvest reported on license/permit types not valid in HD 380

Figure 1: HD 380 permit and harvest information

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The objective of the proposed change is to increase the number of larger older age class bulls in the population by reducing the number of adult (2.5+ year-old) bulls that are harvested in the HD annually. The rationale for the proposed quota decrease is based on the following:
1. The total number of brow-tined bulls is believed to have declined over the last several years (see Table 2).
2. Based on voluntary tooth submissions from successful 380-20 permit holders, the average age of harvested bulls in 2025 was 6.6 years old and 6.5 years old in 2024. While still at or above the minimum age called for in the 2023 Elk Plan for HD 380, the average ages the last couple of years are both well below the average age of 7.5 years old for harvested bulls observed from 2012-2023.
3. We observed (Table 2) a lower than desired number of yearling bulls in 2023, 2024, and possibly in 2025 (incomplete survey) as well. We need an observed number of yearling bulls that is at least in the mid to high 50s to sustain a 100 either-sex permits in HD 380. The yearling bulls observed in 2023 and 2024 would be 6.5 and 5.5 years old respectively during the 2027 hunting season which is getting into the age classes where they typically start being potentially targeted by hunters who draw a 380-20 permit (see attached age distribution chart).
(Figure 1) (Figure 2)
4. The fact that the total number of brow-tined bulls reported harvested in HD 380 (see Table 1) continues to be significantly above the reported bull harvest with 380-20 permits (only legal BTB harvest in HD 380) in FWP's harvest surveys year after year is somewhat disconcerting. Based on cases that area wardens have

made in HD 380 the last few years, we know that at least some level of illegal bull harvest is occurring in the HD.
Given the limited number of permits in HD 380 and the older bull age class structure, the HD has developed a reputation as a “trophy” area. As such, there has come to be an expectation from permit holders of a considerable number of high-quality older age-class bulls being available for harvest.

ELK AERIAL TREND COUNT SUMMARY FORM

HUNTING DISTRICT: 380 (data is for 'new' HD 380 effective 2022, result of boundary change with HD 390)

DATE	BTBs	YRLG Bulls	COWS	CALVES	Uncl Antler-	UNCL	TOTAL	Bulls / 100 Cows	Bulls / 100 Antlerless	% Bulls of Total	% BTB of Total	% BTB of Bulls	Calves/ 100 Cows	Calves/ 100 Adults
1/21/26	137	54	1,106	336			1,633	17.3	13.2	11.7%	8.4%	71.7%	30.4	25.9
2/21/25* - Inc	31	11	137	38	73	65	355	30.7	24.0	11.8%	8.7%	73.8%	27.7	21.2
2/10/2024*	168	37	964	218			1,387	21.3	17.3	14.8%	12.1%	82.0%	22.6	18.6
1/30/23	231	41	1,046	283			1,601	26.0	20.5	17.0%	14.4%	84.9%	27.1	21.5
2/25/22	174	63	1,173	384			1,794	20.2	15.2	13.2%	9.7%	73.4%	32.7	27.2
3/12/2021*	77	58	653	230		625	1,643	20.7	15.3	8.2%	4.7%	57.0%	35.2	29.2
3/16/20	100	64	996	281		877	2,318	16.5	12.8	7.1%	4.3%	61.0%	28.2	24.2
3/16/2019*	68	63	852	168		210	1,361	15.4	12.8	9.6%	5.0%	51.9%	19.7	17.1
2/13/18	242	47	1,291	438			2,018	22.4	16.7	14.3%	12.0%	83.7%	33.9	27.7
2/13/17	198	109	1,372	421			2,100	22.4	17.1	14.6%	9.4%	64.5%	30.7	25.1
3/18/16	59	64	1,402	507			2,032	8.8	6.4	6.1%	2.9%	48.0%	36.2	33.2
3/4/15	77	57	1,547	497			2,178	8.7	6.6	6.2%	3.5%	57.5%	32.1	29.6
3/24/14*	14	25	1,083	275		48	1,445	3.6	2.9	2.7%	1.0%	35.9%	25.4	24.5
1/21/13*	107	41	994	295		219	1,656	14.9	11.5	8.9%	6.5%	72.3%	29.7	25.8
2/15/12	155	68	1,206	310			1,739	18.5	14.7	12.8%	8.9%	69.5%	25.7	21.7
3/4/11*	41	26	792	171		82	1,112	8.5	7.0	6.0%	3.7%	61.2%	21.6	19.9
2/28/10*	85	33	1,025	282			1,425	11.5	9.0	8.3%	6.0%	72.0%	27.5	24.7
3/1/09	107	78				2,222	2,407			7.7%	4.4%	57.8%		
2/20/08	177	58	996	246		624	2,101	23.6	18.9	11.2%	8.4%	75.3%	24.7	20.0
2/25/07	165	71	1,387	373		33	2,029	17.0	13.4	11.6%	8.1%	69.9%	26.9	23.0
3/27/06	75	35	455	111		1373	2,049		19.4	5.4%	3.7%	68.2%	24.4	19.6
2/25/05	57	65	1,201	321		39	1,683	10.2	8.0	7.2%	3.4%	46.7%	26.7	24.3
2/12/04	153	45	1,314	279		20	1,811	15.1	12.4	10.9%	8.4%	77.3%	21.2	18.5
2/15/03*	115	21	1,158	191			1,485	11.7	10.1	9.2%	7.7%	84.6%	16.5	14.8
2/15/02	136	88	1,159	307		16	1,706	19.3	15.3	13.1%	8.0%	60.7%	26.5	22.2
2/23/01	136	24	1,373	241			1,774	11.7	9.9	9.0%	7.7%	85.0%	17.6	15.7
2/13/00	142	91	1,122	319		398	2,072	20.8	16.2	11.2%	6.9%	60.9%	28.4	23.5
3/6/99	51	33			1,636		1,720		5.1	4.9%	3.0%	60.7%		
2/6/98	103	80	1,373	258	23		1,837	13.3	11.2	10.0%	5.6%	56.3%	18.8	16.6
2/2/97	56	41			1,979		2,076		4.9	4.7%	2.7%	57.7%		
2/28/96	144	136			2,602	11	2,893		10.8	9.7%	5.0%	51.4%		
1/29/95	115	36			1,748		1,899		8.6	8.0%	6.1%	76.2%		
2/3/94	88	86			1,992		2,166		8.7	8.0%	4.1%	50.6%		
Ave	**117**	**58**	**1117**	**296**	**1663**	**453**	**1855**	**15.9**	**12.0**	**9.4%**	**6.4%**	**65.0%**	**26.4**	**22.7**
('94-'24)														

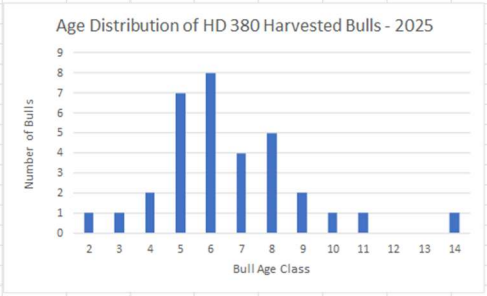
HD 380 Observed Elk Goal Range (1,700 - 2,300)

*Surveys not reliable indicators of trend because of survey quality, elk movement issues, or incomplete survey

Note: Table includes corrections to old survey numbers where errors were discovered, numbers reflect current (2022) HD 380 boundary

Figure 1: HD 380 elk survey information.

Bull Age Class	Number of Bulls	
2025 season		
2	1	2
3	1	3
4	2	8
5	7	35
6	8	48
7	4	28
8	5	40
9	2	18
10	1	10
11	1	11
12	0	0
13	0	0
14	1	14
	33	217
Ave	**6.6**	



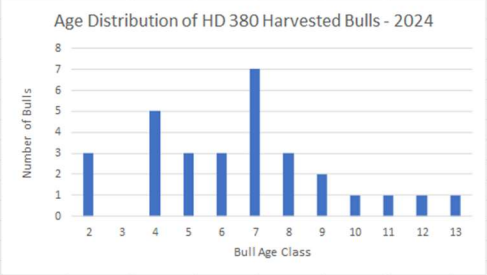


Figure 2: HD 380 bull age distribution information

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

Annual aerial elk surveys of HD 380 will monitor the overall status of the elk population in HD 380 including the number of brow-tined bulls and yearling bulls in the population. Overall harvest success on the various elk permit/license types valid in HD 380 is monitored via the Department's annual telephone harvest survey.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

A total of 1,633 (137 BTBs, 54 yrl bulls, 1,106 cows, 336 calves) elk were observed during this year's survey (2022) – see Table 2. This year's total observed elk numbers (1,633) is below the observed population goal range of 1,700 – 2,300 elk for the HD; although an additional 60-100+ elk were known to be missed during the survey (elk observed during an elk capture operation in HD 380 but not observed during the survey).
In response to overall declining elk numbers in the HD, significant changes were made to the antlerless elk regulations in HD 380 for the 2026 season. These changes include eliminating the 3-week general antlerless elk hunting opportunity off national forest lands in the designated North and South portions of the HD, eliminating the North and South portions and their corresponding elk B-license, and going to only one antlerless elk B-license that is not valid on national forest lands among other restrictions. These changes are designed to increase cow elk numbers in the HD particularly on national forest lands in the HD and on the east side of the HD where most of our elk winter range is on USFS or BLM lands.
(Figure 1) As cow elk numbers increase, the number of elk calves produced on an annual basis will increase which will increase the number of spike bulls (non-branched yearling bulls) available for harvest in the following years. Provided the percentage of spike bulls being harvested (spike bull harvest allowed on a general license in HD 380) on annual basis doesn't significantly increase, the number of yearling bulls being recruited into the brow-tined bull age class will increase over time allowing for the number of either-sex permits to be increased again at some point.

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2/23/01	136	24	1,373	241			1,774	11.7	9.9	9.0%	7.7%	85.0%	17.6	15.7
2/13/00	142	91	1,122	319		398	2,072	20.8	16.2	11.2%	6.9%	60.9%	28.4	23.5
3/6/99	51	33			1,636		1,720		5.1	4.9%	3.0%	60.7%		
2/6/98	103	80	1,373	258	23		1,837	13.3	11.2	10.0%	5.6%	56.3%	18.8	16.6
2/2/97	56	41			1,979		2,076		4.9	4.7%	2.7%	57.7%		
2/28/96	144	136			2,602	11	2,893		10.8	9.7%	5.0%	51.4%		
1/29/95	115	36			1,748		1,899		8.6	8.0%	6.1%	76.2%		
2/3/94	88	86			1,992		2,166		8.7	8.0%	4.1%	50.6%		
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Figure 1: HD 380 elk survey information

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

The Elkhorns Cooperative Management Area (ECMA) within HD 380 is designated as a special USFS wildlife management unit (unique in the nation). The ECMA is managed cooperatively by the USFS (Helena/Lewis & Clark and Beaverhead/Deer Lodge National Forests), Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, BLM and the NRCS. Hunting access is generally good across the HD between all the accessible USFS, BLM, and DNRC land, and the 20+ FWP Block Management areas and EHAs in the HD. That being said, there are a few larger ranches in the HD where hunting access is restricted/limited and where larger numbers of elk can be found during the hunting season, which negatively impacts overall elk harvest in those areas.
The weather was for the most part was very mild this past winter/spring so calf survival and overall elk survival should have been good. While snow accumulations were well below average in the HD, overall precipitation amounts are above normal for the year to date and forage production was pretty good this summer (2026). Obviously, given that this proposed change wouldn't go into effect until 2027, it's unknown what weather and forage conditions will be like this winter and next year.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

Members of the Elkhorn's Working Group and the BEDRC (former Elkhorn's Restoration Committee) were supportive of or at least apparently okay with the recommendation. The few comments received from other landowners and sportspersons contacted about the quota proposal were mixed with most folks being supportive of the quota reduction. The few folks who were opposed were primarily opposed based on philosophical reasons, as they feel that the spike hunting opportunity in the HD should be eliminated or at least significantly reduced to significantly increase the number of brow-tined bulls in the HD which over time would lead to more older, bigger bulls. Any potential change to the 'spike' bull hunting opportunity in HD 380 would need to be addressed through the regular biennial season setting process.

Submitted by: Adam Grove
Date: 09/21/2026