

# Takhini and Braeburn Elk Hunt: Overview 2010-2011

## Background

A comprehensive Elk Management Plan, developed with extensive public consultation and input, was endorsed in June 2008. It identifies a series of elk management goals including: maintenance of healthy and viable elk populations, provisions for human use, appreciation of elk, and addressing human concerns regarding elk. One of the tools identified for achieving these goals is the establishment of an elk harvest.

Regulations were passed in 2008 to enable an elk hunt but implementation of the hunt was delayed until 2009 to ensure that it did not conflict with efforts to address winter ticks found in the Takhini and Braeburn herds. In addition to increasing public appreciation of elk by providing hunting opportunities, the hunt is intended to help us meet our goals of maintaining healthy elk populations and addressing human concerns identified in the Elk Management Plan by:

- Reducing/maintaining elk herds at population size objectives identified in the elk management plan
- Providing a source of biological samples to measure herd health;
- Limiting dispersal of elk into areas deemed not appropriate for expansion;
- Addressing and monitoring disease issues such as the winter tick outbreak;
- Reducing elk-agriculture conflicts; and
- Reducing elk-vehicle collisions;

## The first two years

During the first two years of administering an elk hunt in Yukon, the approach was heavily influenced by the objective of addressing/understanding winter ticks in the ranges of the two elk herds. We monitored the distribution and abundance of ticks on elk and other species such as deer, moose and caribou. There was also a need to address the increasing concerns over elk/agricultural conflicts in the areas surrounding the Takhini Core Area.

A relatively high number of permits were issued in each of the 2009 (80 permits) and 2010 (89 permits) seasons in attempting to achieve elk population objectives for the Takhini Herd (175 animals) and Braeburn Herd (85 animals). The outcome of the harvest in the first two years was a total harvest of 65 elk (27 cows and 38 bulls). Three of the bulls were harvested from the Exclusion Area. An additional 18 elk died as a result of handling mortality and vehicle collisions bringing the decrease in elk numbers to 83.

Harvest success from bull permits was relatively high over the first two years with 73% of permits filled (38 of 52 permits). Harvest success of cows was considerably lower at 31% (27 of 87) of available permits filled.

A survey for the Takhini herd was completed in February 2011. The results indicated that the Takhini herd currently stands at about 275 elk, well above the objective of approximately 175 established prior to starting the hunt. The survey also revealed a low proportion of total bulls and a very low number of larger breeding bulls and is consistent with the high harvest success rate for bulls over the last two years.

Finally, an assessment of calf numbers suggested calf survival was relatively low (16 calves/100 cows). No new information is available for the Braeburn herd.

## **Management Objectives for 2011-2012**

To continue to meet the range of management goals, the harvest strategy for the coming season will need to focus on the key objectives of herd reduction, human safety and managing for elk/agriculture conflicts. The following 2011-2012 hunt system has been designed to achieve these objectives.

The following summary outlines Environment Yukon's plans for implementing an elk hunt in 2011. It provides a brief overview of hunt objectives, location, administrative system, season dates, permit numbers, and reporting requirements.

### **1) Reduce herd size in the Takhini Valley**

The permit hunt will be modified for this season as a cow only harvest. One objective and commitment in the elk hunt was to meet population size objectives within a two to three year period after which a revised strategy for an ongoing sustainable harvest was to be put into place. The bull harvest has been heavily subscribed over the last two seasons. To ensure that we are able to meet the current year objective it is necessary to have a clear focus on reducing the breeding population of cows over this next season and to maintain natural sex ratios in the herds.

### **2) Maintain the current herd size in Braeburn**

While a survey is proposed for the Braeburn herd in the fall of 2011, there is no new data to evaluate a change in management. The objective of management in the Buffer Area is to have a reduced number of elk and ensure that dispersal into the exclusion area is limited. Elk are more challenging to find in this range as density is low and there is a clear preference for the core range. The permit hunt will focus on maintenance and provision of a few limited opportunities in the Buffer Area.

### **3) Manage hunter congestion**

There were concerns over the number of hunters pursuing the same animal or group in close proximity to each other or to residences. Two measures are to be implemented this year, a late season permit option and an informed consent for hunter contact information disclosure. Rather than increasing the total number of permits issued to meet harvest management objectives, permits will be spread over time. The initial permit offering for the Takhini herd will be maintained in both the Core Area (switched to cows) and the Buffer Area (all cows). However, pending a review of hunter success and that the desire to increase harvest remains, additional permits may be offered from the original eligibility list following an evaluation near the end of October. These permits will provide additional hunting opportunities to unsuccessful permit applicants. They will provide the ability to increase harvest to meet management objectives, to manage elk/agriculture conflicts and to disperse hunting pressure.

### **4) Manage dispersal of elk outside of core ranges**

To achieve the objective of keeping elk within the Core and to a lesser degree within the Buffer Areas, permits to hunt elk (bulls, cows and calves) outside of these areas will continue to be available upon request throughout the hunting season.

**5) Monitor the distribution and abundance of ticks on elk and other wildlife**

Mandatory hide submissions will continue for this year with a 72 hour submission requirement. Additional hides of elk, deer, moose and caribou will be collected opportunistically (road kills, hunter submitted) and assessed for the presence of ticks. This information will be used to map out the distribution and evaluate the relative abundance of ticks on Yukon wildlife. Evidence of ticks on moose in SE Yukon will be further evaluated.

**2011-2012 Season dates and permits:**

Season dates and permit numbers for the 2011-2012 hunting season are summarized below. As per the management objectives, this year’s hunt will focus exclusively on cow elk within the range of both the Takhini and Braeburn herds. A total of 90 permits will be issued initially, 72 available to resident hunters and 18 permits to First Nations hunters. An evaluation of the harvest rate in late October is planned and additional permits may be issued if required to meet management objectives.

**Number of permits to be issued through PHA system and season dates for the 2011-2012 elk hunt.**

<b>Herd</b>	<b>EMA</b>	<b>Season</b>	<b>Permits Available</b>
Takhini	Core Area EL20	Sep 15 – Oct 15	Cow 10
Takhini	Buffer Area EL22	Sept 1- March 31	Cow 56
Braeburn	Core Area	Sep 15 – Oct 15	0
Braeburn	Buffer Area EL12	Sep 1 – Mar 31	Cow 6
Elk Exclusion Area		April 1 – March 31	Unlimited: valid for either sex

**Note: Pending an evaluation of harvest success and management objectives planned for the end of the rut period (October 2011) additional cow elk permits may be identified for the late season hunt (November 1 to March 31).**

### **Who will be eligible to receive an elk hunt permit?**

All Yukon residents eligible to purchase a hunting licence will be entitled to apply for an elk hunt permit.

Any licensed Yukon hunter requesting a Wildlife Act permit to hunt elk in the **Elk Exclusion Area** will be issued one. This permit will **not** entitle the holder to hunt elk in Permit Hunt Authorization Areas (elk Core and Buffer Areas).

Hunters receiving an elk hunt permit through the **PHA system** will automatically also receive a Wildlife Act permit to hunt elk in the Elk Exclusion Area.

### **Licensing and Fee structure:**

Resident hunting licence: \$10.00

Permit Hunt Authorization Application \$10.00

Permit Hunt Authorization Joint Application \$20.00

Elk seal \$50.00

Wildlife Act Permit to hunt elk in exclusion areas: free, upon request

### **What reporting requirements will apply?**

The following reporting and biological submission requirements will apply to anyone hunting elk.

Regardless of whether an elk is harvested, questions on the back of the Permit Hunt Authorization form must be completed and returned to Environment Yukon no later than 10 days after the end of the season specified on the permit.

Anyone harvesting an elk must report their harvest within 72 hours by:

1. Filling in a Kill Report/Yukon Biological Submission form.
2. Submitting the entire head for collection of tissue samples for disease testing. Sampling will not damage the head and it will be returned to the hunter after the samples have been collected.
3. Submit the entire hide. It will not be returned.