

REPORT OF
THE RANCHING FOR WILDLIFE
REVIEW COMMITTEE
TO
THE DIRECTOR
&
WILDLIFE COMMISSION
COLORADO DIVISION OF WILDLIFE
SEPTEMBER 2005

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Because of concerns expressed by members of the public about aspects of the Ranching for Wildlife (RFW) Program, Colorado Division of Wildlife Director Bruce McCloskey appointed a 17-member Review Committee and charged them with making suggestions for improving the program, and not abolishing it or replacing it with something else.

The Director appointed interested and affected groups on the Committee, with representation from four RFW ranches, four sportsmen, four CDOW representatives, and five representatives from neighboring ranches or agricultural groups. This Committee met on March 12th and 28-29, April 21-22, May 16-17, and June 7-8, 2005 to discuss issues and develop recommendations. The draft report was presented to the Director for CDOW discussion at the regulations review meeting on 15 June, and the draft report and proposed regulations changes were presented to the Wildlife Commission at their meeting on July 14-15. The Committee met again on July 18th to consider Wildlife Commission comments and suggestions. Resulting changes to Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, as well as to Director's guidelines for RFW were discussed and approved for Wildlife Commission consideration by CDOW regulations managers at the regulations review meeting on August 16th.

Mike Fraidenburg of Dynamic Solutions Group was hired to facilitate the meetings and the development of recommendations. Mr. Fraidenburg's involvement was funded by the Wildlife Commission, and was very helpful in keeping the group focused on problem solving and ultimately the timely completion of this review.

The Committee worked through issues identification, a needs assessment process, and considered public input in developing draft recommendations. Issues were categorized into four general areas, although there was not agreement on the extent to which issues were real or perceived, or to the extent that issues were caused by, or the responsibility of, the RFW Program. These four areas were equity of opportunity and experience between public and private hunters, impacts of the program on adjoining landowners and non-RFW hunters, administrative issues, and the perception, awareness, and promotion of the program.

Although the Committee did not agree on all aspects of the benefits of this program, there was a consensus that RFW is a valuable program that provides significant public access to large ranches and hunts they would not otherwise have access to. They also agreed there were beneficial aspects to improving and protecting habitat, preventing development, and improving the economic vitality of ranching communities.

The Committee recommended, either by consensus or majority vote, a number of significant changes be made to the program to help resolve these issues, while also recommending some key program elements remain unchanged.

Significant recommended changes:

- Require in-season pressure – a number of hunters equivalent to 25% of the private license allocation (antlered, either sex and antlerless) must hunt during regular rifle

seasons with no significant break in pressure. The intent is to distribute these hunters relatively uniformly across the period of regular rifle seasons.

- Establish 4 mandatory, pass-fail elements to the program (fourth added by CDOW staff in response to Commission request):
 - 1) Habitat enhancement
 - 2) High public hunter satisfaction
 - 3) Assist CDOW in meeting DAU objectives
 - 4) Public hunter success must meet or exceed DAU success rate
- Total number of male and female licenses available for allocation to private and public hunters will be based on DAU harvest objectives, proportional to the amount of habitat for that species the ranch contains.
- Private-public allocation of male licenses will be 80:20, ranches can obtain higher allocations (85:15 or 90:10) by meeting 3 of 7, or 4 of 7, respectively, optional high performance criteria. High performance criteria relate to offering public hunts during premier periods or otherwise increasing public hunter opportunity, success and satisfaction; exceptional habitat management or contribution to herd management, among other criteria.
- All female licenses go to public.
- Ranches new to the program will be eligible for 80% of male licenses, can qualify for higher allocations after 3 years by demonstrating they can achieve optional high performance criteria.
- Added stipulation that ranches cannot charge for additional services unless these service fees are posted in advance.
- Retain the Review Committee in some capacity to review program, recommend improvements, and help promote positive aspects of RFW.

Aspects of the program, which the Committee elected (after considerable discussion and debate) to retain included:

Significant program elements that are recommended not to change:

- Rescind, based on Commission comments, previous recommendation to change the name.
- Keep 12,000 acres as the minimum ranch size for enrollment. There was considerable discussion and support for a program with a smaller acreage requirement to increase public hunting access, but Committee members recommend (see Appendix III) that this be pursued outside RFW.
- Retain 90-day season for ranches, with outside dates from late August to late January.
- Retain opportunity to hunt during the rut, for private and public hunters.
- Retain December deer hunting opportunity, for private and public hunters. The Committee vote (CDOW abstaining) was 9-3 on this issue.
- Retain resident-only draw for RFW public licenses.

RFW Committee and CDOW staff response to Wildlife Commission discussion

The RFW Committee met on July 18th to review input from the Wildlife Commission and respond to Commission suggestions on draft changes to regulation or Director's guidelines. Director McCloskey attended this meeting, and in addition to thanking the group for their effort he offered suggestions in several specific areas. Ten areas of concern highlighted by Commission members were discussed by the Committee and/or CDOW staff. These are described, along with Committee and/or staff response, below.

1. How will the Division ensure that the in-season pressure (25% of private allocation of licenses) occurs and is allocated uniformly across the regular seasons?

Language within Director's guidelines (Part IV, C) states ranches and DOW will strive to distribute hunters over seasons to achieve harvest and elk movement objectives by scheduling at least the number of hunts equivalent to 25% of the total private deer and elk license allocation to time periods concurrent with regular rifle seasons. The Division can ensure both the quantity and timing aspects because the public portion of these hunts will be specified as to time period prior to the draw, and ranches must report on timing of private hunts.

2. How does the Division currently conduct ranch evaluations, who serves on the evaluation group, and how would tier placement be evaluated in the future.

The Commission had questions about how and when evaluations were conducted, rather than suggestions for change. This section of the Director's guidelines has been clarified. Evaluations are conducted by a team of DOW and external managers and range experts. Evaluations are conducted prior to enrollment, at about the midpoint of the contract, and in the final year of the contract prior to renewal. Ranches must also submit an annual performance report to the AWM, DWM, Terrestrial Biologist, and RFW coordinator describing hunter harvest and success, habitat accomplishments for the previous year and plans for the next, and a list of private hunters and dates hunted. DOW also attempts to contact each public hunter to query them on their harvest and various aspects of their satisfaction with the ranch and the program.

Tier placement under the new system of license allocation would be determined by the Director based on a recommendation from a similar evaluation team. Although not explicitly stated, the intent is to have disputes regarding initial tier placement resolved by the Wildlife Commission. New ranches would not be grandfathered in at 90-10, but would be placed at 80:20, 85:15, or 90:10 based on their past performance relative to the new criteria.

3. How will the Division ensure that ranches get no more than their proportional share of bull (male) licenses yet contribute proportionally on the cow side?

We believe that moving to an allocation of licenses based on the amount of habitat for a particular species the ranch has compared to the total habitat base in the DAU will greatly restrict the amount of negotiating that occurs and get us to a proportional allocation. Having a mandatory requirement that ranches must contribute to DAU management gives us greater

leverage. Ranches are evaluated on this mandatory element, and must maintain an average female harvest within 10% of the proportional ranch objective.

4. Is there enforcement of guidelines? General comment that DOW should be more responsive in eliminating poor performers.

The Division has been vigorous in enforcing guidelines in the past. The Division has terminated three ranches for wildlife violations, another for failing to provide equal access for public and private hunters, and has terminated one ranch and notified another they will be terminated for failure to fully implement agreed upon habitat management plans.

5. Commission should resolve conflicts, not a RFW committee.

The Committee agreed to withdraw its request to function in the future in a conflict resolution capacity given the Commission's interest in serving that function.

6. Concern over hunting during the rut. Should rut hunts be capped at 25% of licenses?

The Committee previously had spent many hours debating the rut hunting issue, and in the end could not resolve their differences of opinion. They did not wish to re-open that debate knowing that the same differences of opinion would exist, and instead preferred to stick to their majority recommendation of no change in current season options. Their recommendation was based on the opinion from Division biologists that rut hunting is not a biological issue; that the Wildlife Commission has established numerous seasons and hunt codes that overlap breeding seasons in general and ungulate rut periods in particular; and that this flexibility in season timing and manner of take is fundamental to the economic success of the program. The Committee deferred any further action on rut hunting to DOW staff or the Wildlife Commission.

Jerry Apker developed several alternatives for either creating public hunter equity relative to rut hunting, or restricting hunting during the rut on ranches. The option to limit hunting during peak rut periods (defined as last 7 days of November through first 7 days of December for deer and last 7 days of September and first 7 days of October for elk) to no more than 25% of RFW hunts was not supported by DOW regulation managers and was not advanced. They recommended no change to current season structures, but also advanced an alternative that ranches that provide elk or deer hunting during the rut must offer a public season of at least 5 days during this period. There are many reasons for the intransigence of both groups to propose restrictions on hunting during the rut.

The public is divided as to whether it is an issue or not. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation for instance encourages the highest standards of ethical conduct among elk hunters, but is silent on rut hunting. The extent to which hunting during the rut creates an unfair advantage, if it does, varies by species, location and habitat, and hunter skill level. As with many ethical dilemmas, it may not be an issue well-suited to a one-size fits all regulation.

Perhaps for these reasons, the Commission has conflicting season structures with respect to breeding periods or rut hunting. Turkeys are hunted throughout courtship, egg laying and

incubation periods. Pronghorn seasons statewide completely overlap the rut. Archery and muzzleloader seasons completely overlap the elk rut. Although it can be argued these are primitive, or at least more primitive weapons in the case of muzzleloaders than rifles, “high quality” units such as 1, 2, 10, 201 have early rifle seasons designed to overlap the rut for elk. The Commission has also established a youth-only rifle season from September 24th to October 2nd in Unit 851 that overlaps the rut, and has numerous cow seasons during this period. Although deer seasons on the west slope avoid the peak of the rut in late November and early December, the last combined season overlaps it to some extent. Late plains buck deer seasons (December 1-14), completely overlap the rut, yet have been established in 40 DAUs. The Commission did not take action in their most recent 5-year season structure to either reduce or eliminate these rut hunting opportunities or establish a consistent state-wide policy under which RFW could be judged.

7. Don't change the name of the program.

The Committee was happy to retain the existing name and withdraw its suggested name change.

8. Should Wildlife Commissioners and CDOW employees be restricted from participating in RFW hunts?

The Committee was strongly opposed to any restriction on Division employees participating in Ranching for Wildlife hunts. They were not aware of any abuses by Division employees, and felt current policies governing employees were adequate to punish abuses if they did occur. The Director suggested they defer this to the Division for resolution and they agreed. The Director discussed this at the regulations review meeting with DOW regulations managers, and it was agreed employees drawing RFW or other premier licenses would disclose this to their supervisors and ultimately some form of public disclosure would be made. This did not require any change or addition to regulation or Director’s guidelines to accomplish. No action has been proposed by staff on restricting Commission participation.

9. Consider adding a fourth mandatory element to the program that would benefit sportsmen.

We did not have enough time to discuss this request with the full Committee. Jerry Apker developed a recommendation consistent with this request, namely to add a fourth mandatory element requiring ranches to maintain hunter success rates equal to or higher than rates within the DAU as a whole. This addition, in concert with the mandatory high public satisfaction requirement, will ensure all ranches take accommodating public hunters very seriously or risk contract termination.

10. Consider capping the number of participating ranches at 30, or at present number and allow new ranches to enter only as ranches drop.

The current number of ranches in the program is 26, which will drop to 25 in January. Rather than a cap, staff proposed adding a requirement that the Commission approve contracts of newly entering ranches and thus could enforce a cap when they felt additional ranches were not in the public's interest. This requirement is proposed for addition to Chapter 2 and 3 as item 2 under Part A, Implementation Authority.

INTRODUCTION TO RANCHING FOR WILDLIFE

Ranching for Wildlife is a public-private wildlife management partnership that began as a pilot effort with the 1986 hunting seasons. It has undergone a lot of changes over the past 20 years, and has grown to 26 ranches and 1.26 million acres enrolled in the program. The essence of the program is simple; in exchange for permitting public access to high quality hunting opportunities and managing their habitat to enhance wildlife, participating ranches are given flexibility in season timing, length, and manner of take restrictions, and access to licenses for their clients.

Ranches must have 12,000 or more contiguous acres. Ranches may form partnerships or associations in order to combine enough contiguous private land to meet minimum acreage requirements. Eligible species include deer, elk, pronghorn, black bear, turkey, moose, and bighorn sheep. The public allocation of licenses has been generally 100% of cow and doe licenses, 10% of bull and buck licenses, 40% of bear licenses and 50% of turkey, bull moose and bighorn sheep ram licenses. There is currently a requirement for 30 total public licenses (20 east of I-25), and overall 40% of licenses by species must be public licenses.

Seasons and license levels are negotiated between DOW and the ranch. Ranches have a 90-day period to schedule their seasons, which can begin about August 23 each year and must end by January 31. Public seasons can also be scheduled within this time frame and must be a minimum of 10 days total.

Summary of RFW Program Development and Evolution

Since initiation, the RFW program has undergone three (now four) formal reviews. On an ongoing basis, DOW evaluates operational aspects of the program and makes minor changes as needed.

1985 - The Wildlife Commission asked DOW to investigate the potential for a cooperative private lands wildlife management program based on a similar program in California. Early in 1986, the Wildlife Commission directed the DOW to conduct a 3-year pilot test of the program and to evaluate it through 1986–1988. Basic pilot program aspects:

1. 5,000 acre ranch size minimum.
2. 3-year contract.
3. Wildlife management plan required – habitat management included but not emphasized.
4. Species included: deer, elk, pronghorn, bear, and turkey.
5. Season dates flexible but not prescribed within a certain time frame.
6. Length of public or private seasons not prescribed: for deer and elk private seasons ranged 12 to 91 days, public seasons ranged from 5–19 days.
7. No minimum public allocation of licenses, either in total or by species.
8. Deer, elk, pronghorn license distribution between public and private based on a 4 option sliding scale. Most favorable option for landowners was a 95% private to 5% public antlered/buck, 100% public antlerless/doe.
9. No public: private distribution percentage set for bear or turkey.
10. Ranches were allowed to charge up to \$25 to the public for access.

1988 - Evaluation of the pilot program revealed that participant landowners were generally pleased with the program overall and wanted it continued. Public support was divided. Some supported the program as it was, some supported the program if modified, and some did not support the concept. DOW staff supported the program with modifications. Issues of concern were:

- The minimum acreage was too low.
- The ranch allocation of licenses was perceived as too high relative to public allocation.
- Private season vs. public season length and timing was inequitable.
- Charging a fee for access was inappropriate.
- Ranch coordination of hunts and service to public hunters was poor on too many ranches.

The program was determined to be feasible and beneficial to the DOW, the public, and landowners with modifications. The following changes were adopted by the Wildlife Commission, and the program was fully implemented in 1989.

- Minimum ranch size increased to 10,000 acres, private land only.
- Ranches not eligible for game damage payments.
- Private seasons not to exceed 90 days total time.
- Public seasons: deer and elk - not less than 10 days, pronghorn - 5 days, black bear and turkey - one half the normal season length.
- New public vs. private distribution options were developed based upon a 5-option sliding scale. Most favorable option for landowners was a 90% private to 10% public antlered/either sex/buck, 100% public antlerless/doe.
- Minimum of 40% of licenses by species go to the public.
- No substitution of licenses between species and gender.
- Ranches may not charge a fee for public access.
- Administration of the program was assigned to Regional Coordinators.
- Management plan format created and required so all topics DOW wanted addressed were included in plans.
- Contracts with Ranches were required, could cover up to a 5 year period.

1991-1992 - The Wildlife Commission asked DOW to reevaluate the program and placed a moratorium on new ranch enrollments until the reevaluation was completed. Program concerns were oriented toward:

- Inconsistent operational implementation of the program on different ranches.
- Inconsistent administration of the program between the different Regions.
- Size of ranches and relative license levels for helping DOW meet management objectives and in relation to limited license allocations in limited DAUs/GMUs.
- Equity of seasons and license distribution between the public and private.

The program was modified with an emphasis on more consistent implementation on individual ranches, placing more emphasis on review and performance evaluation of ranches at enrollment

and periodically throughout their contract. Specific program changes and some things that were reviewed and not changed include:

- Minimum ranch size increased again, to 12,000 acres, private, contiguous.
- Number of RFW operations was capped at 22.
- An enrollment application was developed and a pre-enrollment evaluation required.
- Probationary initial enrollment contract of 2 years, 6-year contract after that.
- Development of performance criteria and standards that must be met at formal ranch evaluations – pre-enrollment, mid-contract, and at end of contract.
- Increased emphasis on public hunter satisfaction. Public hunter satisfaction was evaluated via telephone surveys and used in ranch evaluations.
- Increased emphasis placed on habitat management requirements via ranch evaluations, DOW staff consultation in management plan development and revision.
- Use of an Evaluation Team comprised of DOW staff and outside expertise in evaluating management plans and ranch performance.
- Program administration assigned to one position in DOW.
- License allocation in totally limited DAU/GMUs set proportional to the amount of habitat on the ranch to the DAU/GMU, private seasons in limited DAU/GMUs restricted to 60 days.
- Established rules requiring equality of access for both public and private hunters.
- Other season length, timing, and public vs. private license distribution were not changed due to the number of ranches that would drop from the program, if changed.

1994 - Cap on ranch participation was raised to 25 contracts. A program guideline was created requiring ranches to offer at least 30 licenses in total to the public.

1997 - Cap on ranch participation was raised to 30 contracts.

1998 - The Wildlife Commission asked the DOW to review the RFW program as a corollary to the Big Game License Allocation Project, a precursor to 5-year season structure revision at that time. No specific issues of concern were identified by the Wildlife Commission. Rather, DOW staff reviewed program guidelines and recommended changes to improve the operation and administration of the program, and to increase public hunting opportunity through the program.

- Created provisions for including non-contiguous parcels in RFW operations.
- Because of generally lower animal densities, created allowance for ranches East of I-25 to provide 20 public licenses in total, if certain conditions were met.
- Allowance for multiple 5-day seasons, clarified total length of public seasons, and participation rules.
- A series of primarily administrative changes were made to program guidelines dealing with enrollment, land additions/deletions, and termination processes.

2000 - DOW staff reviewed RFW guidelines. Changes adopted by the Wildlife Commission:

- Eliminated cap on enrollments.

- Clarified processes for arriving at license numbers – via a proportional formula.
- Clarified license types valid on RFW properties and circumstances when non-RFW licenses could be used to increase cow elk harvest.
- Specified new, longer season lengths for public bear and turkey hunters.
- Provided that all public seasons must include one full weekend.
- Eliminated restriction of private seasons in limited GMUs to 60 days, set all private season length at 90 days maximum.
- Clarified equality of access between private and public hunters, and required public seasons be set at a time when the species is present.

2001 - Wildlife Commission established primary RFW guidelines in Regulations. The regulations provide the firm parameters for administration of the RFW program. The Wildlife Commission granted authority to the DOW Director to implement the program, set seasons, and license numbers. DOW establishes Guidelines in compliance with Regulations for program implementation. Guidelines may be modified by DOW staff, and now include performance criteria by which contracts will be monitored.

2002 – Bighorn sheep and moose added to program regulations and guidelines with distinct rules for public access and distribution of licenses between the public and private share.

2004 - Present – Commission placed a moratorium on new enrollments and asked for a review of the program. Concerns identified related to timing of public hunts, herd movement and impacts to adjacent non-enrolled ranches, increasing cow harvest, and hunting during the rut. DOW staff identified other program administration issues to address: non-contract species management and DOW access to ranches, participation restrictions on # of contracts or area within DAUs, non-contiguous parcels, youth hunting, and public hunter compliance with ranch rules.

RANCHING FOR WILDLIFE TODAY

There are currently 26 ranches enrolled in RFW, encompassing about 1 and a quarter million acres. Of these, 23 offer public hunting opportunity (by limited draw) for deer, 22 for elk, 15 for pronghorn, 3 for bear, 3 for turkey, two for bighorn sheep, and one for moose. Table 1 shows enrolled ranches, their approximate acreage, location and hunting opportunity offered.

Ranching for Wildlife provides private and public hunters with hunts that are perceived as higher quality than public land hunts, either because of abundance of game, lack of crowding, the size of male animals, or some combination of all 3. Antlered RFW hunts, and to some degree cow/doe hunts, are in considerable demand, as indicated by the preference points required to draw these licenses. In 2004, RFW (private and public) accommodated 3,119 elk hunters who enjoyed an overall 83% success rate (Table 2).

Table 1. Participating ranches, acres, and species for which public opportunity is offered¹.

Ranch	Acres	County	Nearest Town	GMUs	Species
Big Gulch	120,000	Moffat	Craig	214,3,301,4,441	D, E, P
Blue Gravel	54,500	Moffat	Craig	3,301,4	D, E, P
Blue Mountain	21,900	Moffat	Dinosaur	10	D, E, P
Buffalo Horn	14,000	Moffat, Rio Blanco	Meeker	11,211	D, E
Burns Hole	30,000	Eagle, Routt	Burns	25,26,35	D, E
Colorado Nature	14,300	Garfield	DeBeque	31	D, E, T
Crazy French	45,000	Las Animas	Trinidad	140	D, E, P, B
Cross Mountain	32,000	Routt	Hayden	12,13	D, E
Deakins	25,000	Moffat	Craig	301	D, E, P
Forbes Trinchera	180,000	Costilla	Ft. Garland	83	D, E, S
Four-mile	12,130	Moffat	Craig	3,4	D, E, P
Hill	62,000	Las Animas	Weston	851	D, E
Kim	106,500	Las Animas	Kim	136,137,143	D, P
Kiowa Creek	50,000	Elbert, El Paso, Douglas	Castle Rock	104,105,110	D, E, P
Morgan Creek	33,000	Rio Blanco, Moffat	Meeker	211	D, E
Mountain Meadows	10,000	Custer	Rye	84	E
Pinyon Mesa	52,000	Mesa	Glade Park	40	D, E
Purgatoire	93,000	Las Animas	Kim	136,143,147	D, P, S, B, T
Rimrock	94,000	Las Animas, Baca	Kim	130,140,143,147	D, P
Silver Spur	50,100	Jackson	Walden	6,16,161,171	D, E, P, M
Snake River	35,200	Routt, Moffat	Craig	4,5	D, E, P
Three Forks	31,500	Routt	Craig	5	D, E, P
Twin Peaks	17,000	Las Animas	Aguillar	85	D, E, B, T
Ute Prairie	12,000	Custer	Westcliffe	86	P
Williams Fork Mtn.	20,800	Routt	Hayden	13	E
Wolf Springs	45,000	Custer, Huerfano	Westcliffe	84,86,861	D, E, P

¹D = Deer, E = Elk, P = Pronghorn, B = Bear, S = Bighorn Sheep, M = Moose, and T = Turkey.

Although RFW provided only 1.7% of total limited elk hunting opportunity in 2004, and 1 and 4.7% for deer and pronghorn, respectively (Table 2), the program makes a substantial contribution to opportunity for quality hunts. One can get a good feel for this by comparing the number of antlered/either sex licenses available through RFW by preference point category with the number of licenses available through the draw outside the program (Table 2). RFW provides

about 9% of the public antlered elk hunts requiring 3 or more preference points, and 9% of the hunts requiring 6 or more points. If private hunters are included, RFW provides 49% of antlered elk hunts requiring 3 or more points, and 47% of elk hunts requiring 6 or more points. Because of very high success rates, RFW accounted for just over 1% of cow elk hunting opportunity, but 4% of the harvest. Much of this was in E-2 and E-6 where the RFW cow harvest has helped CDOW reduce herd size in an attempt to get down to DAU objective.

Table 2. RFW hunts provided by preference point category compared to all other limited seasons.

Minimum Preference Point Level	ELK Public RFW Only			ELK All RFW Seasons			ELK Non RFW Seasons		
	antlered	antlerless	total	antlered	antlerless	total	antlered	antlerless	total
0-2	48	1,390	1,438	346	1,901	1,765	56,702	123,598	180,300
3-5	74	0	74	800	0	800	775	4	779
6 or greater	63	0	63	554	0	554	616	0	616
Total	185	1,390	1,575	1,700	1,901	3,119	58,093	123,602	181,695
Harvest	89	1,005	1,094	1,185	1,419	2,604	26,605	33,280	59,885
% success	48	72	69	70	75	83	46	27	33
DEER									
Minimum Preference Point Level	DEER Public RFW Only			DEER All RFW Seasons			DEER Non RFW Seasons		
	antlered	antlerless	total	antlered	antlerless	total	antlered	antlerless	total
0-2	7	473	480	55	473	528	91,167	32,062	123,229
3-5	19	0	19	157	0	157	1,578	5	1,583
6 or greater	61	0	61	580	0	580	294	0	294
Total	87	473	560	792	473	1,265	93,039	32,067	125,106
Harvest	64	361	425	497	361	858	32,590	8,053	40,643
% success	74	76	76	63	76	68	35	25	32
PRONGHORN									
Minimum Preference Point Level	PRONGHORN Public RFW Only			PRONGHORN All RFW Seasons			PRONGHORN Non RFW Seasons		
	antlered	antlerless	total	antlered	antlerless	total	antlered	antlerless	total
0-2	0	155	155	0	155	155	2,579	3,789	6,368
3-5	8	5	13	18	5	23	1,016	58	1,074
6 or greater	29	0	29	196	0	196	480	3	483
Total	37	160	197	214	160	374	4,075	3,850	7,925
Harvest	35	147	182	194	147	341	2,928	1,988	4,916
% success	95	92	92	91	92	91	72	52	62

In 2004 RFW provided 4% of antlered public deer hunts requiring 3 or more preference points, but 17% of public antlered hunts requiring 6 or more preference points. If private hunts are

included, RFW provided 28% of antlered hunts requiring 3 or more points, and 66% of antlered deer hunts requiring 6 or more preference points.

It is worth noting that RFW provides a significant avenue for hunters to use their preference points thus directly lowering the competition (and preference points required) for other quality hunting units in the state.

Hunter Satisfaction

The CDOW attempts to survey all public RFW hunters each year, and ask them a series of questions about their hunting experience. Hunters are queried about their harvest, their perception of abundance of the species they are hunting on the ranch, the degree of access and assistance provided by the ranch, their overall satisfaction, and suggestions for improvement. Public hunter satisfaction and success is generally quite high on RFW properties. Pooled across all species and all ranches, from 1994-2002 data (>6,300 hunters), about 97% of hunters were at least slightly satisfied, and 83% were strongly satisfied:

Strongly satisfied - 83%
Somewhat satisfied - 11% **97% combined all levels of positive satisfaction**
Slightly satisfied - 3%
Neutral - 1%
Slightly dissatisfied - <1%
Somewhat dissatisfied -1%
Strongly dissatisfied - <1%

The Division receives from 25–35 letters each year from hunters expressing high levels of satisfaction with their hunting experience and appreciation for the program, and around 3–5 letters each year from hunters that experienced problems with their RFW hunts and had high levels of dissatisfaction. Few of these are unsupportive of the program itself, but sought resolution of the specific problem on a specific hunt.

ESTABLISHMENT OF REVIEW COMMITTEE

Critics of the Ranching for Wildlife Program have frequently taken their concerns to the Wildlife Commission. This culminated in a petition from some Craig-area landowners and sportsmen circulated in early 2004 and presented to the Commission in March, which claimed RFW harbored wildlife and spread CWD. The petitioners demanded significant changes to the program, including making season timing coincident with regular rifle seasons. This initiated tremendous public comment to the Commission, pro and con. In March, 2004, the Commission placed a moratorium on enrollments of new ranches and asked the Division to initiate a review of the program. Because the Division was in the midst of the 5-year, Big Game Season Structure development process, they asked that they not be required to conduct a review, and instead developed draft changes to regulations and Director’s guidelines intended to mitigate concerns about the program. These draft changes were circulated internally, among ranches, and discussed at a public meeting in Denver in advance of the Commission meeting in January 2005.

These draft guideline changes were not presented to the Commission, rather the Division committed to establishing a review committee and conducting this extensive review at that time.

The Director requested nominations for Committee members from the four Regional Sportsmen Advisory Groups (SAGs), from Colorado Farm Bureau, Colorado Cattlemen’s Association, Colorado Outfitter’s Association, and the Colorado Woolgrower’s Association, from Ranching for Wildlife Ranches, and from the Division of Wildlife. He then appointed the following 17 people to the Review Committee:

Program Evaluation Committee			
Project Coordinator: Tom Remington			
RFW Ranches	Sportsmen	Agricultural Neighbor	CDOW
Don Cook <i>Big Gulch</i>	Steve Hilde <i>NE Colorado</i>	Bonnie Kline <i>Colorado Wool Growers Association</i>	Jerry Apker <i>RFW Coordinator</i>
Warren Gore <i>Pinyon Mesa</i>	Mark Smith <i>SW Colorado</i>	Al Johnson <i>Colorado Cattlemen’s Association</i>	Rick Basagoitia <i>Area Wildlife Manager</i>
Ty Ryland <i>Forbes Trinchera</i>	Dan Larkin <i>SE Colorado</i>	Ron Lawton <i>Colorado Farm Bureau</i>	Jeff Madison <i>Senior Terrestrial Biologist</i>
Steve Wooten <i>Purgatoire</i>	Allan Reishus <i>NW Colorado</i>	Dean Gent Kurt Schultz <i>Colorado Outfitters Association</i>	Dan Prenzlou <i>Area Wildlife Manager</i>

At the initial meeting on March 12th, the Director gave the group its charge and established the process and sideboards for their effort. He encouraged the Committee to think outside the box, to suggest new twists to the RFW program – including a possible name change. The Director committed to the Commission that he would bring together a RFW working group to discuss the program from top to bottom. The role of the Committee is to make recommendations for program improvement to the Division, who will then take them to the Commission for discussion, possible modification, and adoption. It was the Director’s hope that the Committee could develop a package of recommendations that the entire group could agree on.

The Director established some sideboards. The Committee cannot do away with the program, but it was apparent to him that it cannot stay the same. Some changes to the program are needed. The Division does not have an “agenda” on this issue. If consensus can’t be reached on recommendations, he would accept alternatives or minority opinions. The Division will hire a facilitator to help this process; but the Division’s role is not to take sides or direct the outcome. The Division will not present recommendations to this group – rather the Division will provide information, then the group as a whole will decide what the issues are and draft potential solutions.

Mike Fraidenburg of Dynamics Solutions Group, LLC, was hired to facilitate subsequent meetings and help the group work through identification of issues, assess their individual and group needs, and then develop recommendations for program changes. Committee meetings were open to the public, but the public was asked to withhold comment until the end of the meeting, at which point they were given the opportunity to provide input to the Committee.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

Public input received by the Division or Commission prior to the establishment of this Committee was provided to and reviewed by the Committee. As mentioned, public testimony was allowed at the end of each days meeting. In addition, the Project Coordinator's (Tom Remington) e-mail address was published in newspaper accounts, press releases, and on-line, until a separate e-mail address was set up for the Committee and posted on the RFW website. We summarize public comment below; much of this was synthesized into the Committee's issue and needs assessment.

The first section outlined below characterizes the public comment received by the Division of Wildlife prior to the establishment of the Committee. Most of this input was in the form of general comments on the RFW program and was in response to a citizen petition to the Wildlife Commission in March 2004 requesting major changes to the program. The second section summarizes the input received throughout the Committee's deliberations – generally in response to the minutes from the Committee meetings from March – June 2005. All informational documents given to the committee and minutes from each meeting were available on the RFW Evaluation Committee's website (<http://wildlife.state.co.us/ranching/review.asp>).

Public input received as a result of the Wildlife Commission deliberations about the program was generally in the form of emails and/or hard copy letters submitted to the Wildlife Commission. Comments have been separated into three stakeholder groups for the purpose of analysis: 1) sportsmen, 2) RFW ranches, and 3) adjacent landowners/agricultural operations. It should be noted that this public input was for the most part solicited by proponents or opponents of the program, and is not a random sample of public opinion. Consequently, although we quantify responses as support, support with modifications, or oppose the program, these percentages should not be viewed as representative of the opinions of these groups at large.

Comments received prior to the March 2005 review of the RFW program.

Characterization of comments

The majority of comments received throughout this time period were in response to a March 2004 citizen's petition requesting an overhaul of the RFW program. Comments were received primarily through email and mailed letters. Also included in the total responses are comments made on an internet forum sponsored by the Colorado Bowhunters Conference where sportsmen posted their comments on the RFW program.

The majority of citizens providing input were sportsmen. The Division or Commission received 242 comments of support for the RFW program. Most of these comments cited a positive experience on a specific ranch and explicitly requested no changes to the program in response to the citizen petition. Fifteen comments stated that they could support the program if it included suggested modifications – in general these comments did not suggest dismantling the program but thought there was room for improvement. And finally, there were 15 comments of opposition – the majority of these requested dismantling the existing program with just a few suggesting a major overhaul.

There were 10 individual comments from ranches currently enrolled in the RFW program and/or their employees or outfitters. The majority of these comments outlined the ranch's reactions to specific portions of the citizen's proposal. They disagreed with most of the major points of the proposal but did acknowledge there may be some room for improvement in the program. They were obviously all in support of maintaining the RFW program.

The Division or Commission received 4 comments in opposition to the RFW program from adjacent landowners/agricultural operations. One comment from this group supported the program, but with some suggested modifications.

In total, 272 comments were received prior to the establishment of the RFW Evaluation Committee; 252 supported the program in general, 16 supported the program with some suggested modification and 19 opposed the program and/or requested it be abolished.

Comments received in response to the March 2005 review and evaluation of the RFW program.

Characterization of Comments

Most comments were received through email, however, included in the sportsmen analysis are comments made on a mule deer internet forum ("MonsterMuleys.com") and an internet forum hosted by the Colorado Bowhunting Conference.

Again, the majority of citizens providing input were sportsmen – we received a total of 109 individual comments from this interest group. We received 29 comments of overall support for the RFW program. Most of the comments indicating support requested no change to the program except possibly an expansion. We received 64 comments that generally supported the RFW program but either had one bad experience or requested some modifications to improve the program. We received 14 comments that were completely unhappy with the program and/or wanted it abolished. And finally, we received 2 emails simply requesting clarification on our RFW statistics and how the program works.

We received 4 comments in support of the RFW program from participating ranches and/or current or former employees of these operations.

We received 19 comments from citizens who we presume to be landowners/neighbors due to the nature of their comments. 15 comments suggested changes to the program, and 3 comments were in opposition to the program as a whole and/or wanted it abolished. The final comment was simply a request for clarification of some of the RFW statistics for easier use in developing analyses of ranches applying to enter the RFW program.

We received a total of 132 individual public comments. Approximately 112 were in general supportive of the program or support with some modifications, 17 comments were in opposition to the program and 3 comments requested clarification of RFW statistics and how the program works.

Summary of Comments

The following is an analysis of the comments received and a more detailed description of some of the issues raised, summarized by interest group.

Sportsmen

The majority of sportsmen who indicated full support of the RFW program had participated in the program, and often indicated the specific ranch on which they had a positive experience. Because of their positive experiences with the program, most requested no changes be made to it.

A large number of the comments submitted from sportsmen were generally supportive, but had suggested modifications for improvement. There were several comments from non-resident sportsmen requesting that non-residents be allowed to participate in the draw for RFW licenses – currently this is restricted to residents only. However, in all cases, resident sportsmen who commented on this issue were not supportive of allowing non-resident participation in the public hunts on RFW properties.

The majority of the rest of the suggestions for modifications fell into the following four categories:

- Services provided and quality of hunt issues
- Equality in seasons and method of take
- Requests for expansion of the program
- Better enforcement on RFW properties by the Division of Wildlife

The majority of sportsmen commenting on service/quality of hunt issues requested that scouting be allowed on the ranch prior to the hunt and/or some type of guide services be made available during the hunt. These sportsmen also requested access to more services such as camping, use of horses, trucks or ATV's, and permission to bring along "non-hunting" partners. There were also several requests that more information be provided up front for the public hunters on these ranches with respect to licenses available, maps of the ranch, the rules and regulations, etc.

Hunters commented on several aspects of perceived inequality between public and private hunters. The most common of these was whether ranches allow public hunters to access the same areas of the ranch that private hunters have access to without additional fees. In addition, these sportsmen would also like the public to have similar seasons as those of the private hunters so that they have equal access to the "peak" seasons. Some other concerns identified were that

the method of take on an RFW property should overlap with the corresponding public seasons (i.e. RFW rifle seasons should be conducted during the same time as the public rifle seasons) and that archery/bowhunting tags be made available on RFW properties. Another concern was that the ranches are hoarding animals and then not allowing public hunters access to their “best” animals. Sportsmen would also like to see an increase in bull/buck tags going to public hunters.

Sportsmen commenting on expanding the RFW program were mostly concerned with increasing their chances to draw for a RFW property and reducing the level of preference points required. As a result, the majority of sportsmen who commented on this issue suggested expanding the program – removing the cap on ranches eligible to participate and possibly lowering the acreage limit so that smaller ranches could participate.

Finally, the sportsmen had some concerns about enforcement of RFW rules and regulations on these properties. In general, they thought the DOW should be doing a better job of monitoring the RFW ranches and suggested allowing DOW officers on RFW properties to monitor all hunts. In addition, they suggested a formal complaint process be established for hunters who have had problems on specific ranches. They suggested these complaints be handled regionally on a case by case basis. Finally, some sportsmen suggested the DOW prepare a comprehensive evaluation on an annual basis that could be made available to the public.

RFW Ranches

All input received from participating RFW ranches was positive and often cited the individual ranch’s hunter satisfaction ratings. In general, the ranches requested that the program not change. However, within their expression of support some ranches suggested changes such as expansion of the program to smaller ranches and re-opening the program to non-residents as a way to support the local economy.

Adjacent landowners/Agricultural Operations

The landowner comments requesting changes to the program suggested lowering the acreage limit for entrance into the RFW program and/or providing some mechanism for all landowners to take advantage of a RFW-like program. The comments made in opposition to the RFW program cited issues such as: the inequity of allowing RFW properties to set their own seasons and method of take, hunting during the rut, hoarding and moving animals inappropriately, and unfair license allocation to specific private lands in a GMU as opposed to licenses available on public land in that same area.

Comments received in response to the Committee Report and recommendations.

Characterization of Comments

The following is a summary of the few comments we received after the draft report was posted for public comment.

All the respondents since the report was posted, as far as we could tell were sportsmen. And, as above, this majority was largely in favor of the program and/or requesting modification. Half of the respondents requesting changes were asking to have the program expanded to include non-

residents and the other half had concerns that fell into the 4 categories of sportsman concern outlined above. Only one sportsman commented directly on the draft report offering the following thoughts: 1) the name change is appropriate but he suggested using “Partners for Wildlife” as he felt it was more “catchy”; 2) support for the in-season pressure requirement; 3) support for the habitat enhancement mandatory criterion as well as support for the high performance criteria in general; 4) support for allocating all the female licenses to the public; 5) felt that license allocation by DAU harvest objective sounded like a good approach but may be contentious. There were 3 sportsmen who opposed the program entirely.

The committee did receive one additional letter during its deliberations from a District Wildlife Manager in the Northwest portion of the state who has had experience with the RFW program and wished to provide his comments prior to the development of the final report. This letter was given to the entire Wildlife Commission at their July meeting at the request of one of the RFW Committee members, and is therefore not summarized here.

ISSUES

Issues discussed and considered by the Committee were grouped into four categories:

- 1) Impacts of program on neighbors and non-RFW public hunters.
- 2) Equity and fairness between public and private hunters.
- 3) Administrative/procedural/role of program in DAU herd management.
- 4) Perception/Awareness/Promotion of Program.

Issues raised and discussed within these categories are listed, although there was not necessarily agreement that all issues listed were real, or that they could or should be resolved.

1. Impacts of program on neighbors and non-RFW public hunters

- The difference in timing of rifle seasons and hunting pressure on and off the ranches can interrupt movements and hold elk on RFW properties.
- RFW season structure and voids in hunter pressure interrupt movements and hold elk on RFW properties.
- Some landowners don’t want elk migrating onto adjoining properties from RFW properties, while others feel their opportunities to hunt these elk are negatively impacted.
- Concentrations of elk can cause damage to neighboring ranches (fence and forage) when they do leave.
- Adjoining lands are now providing spring/summer range for these herds which also causes property damage, but have limited opportunity to hunt them.
- Some natural history of the issue – elk have historically been on RFW properties.
- Impacts of land development affect where elk will stay.
- Hunting pressure and moving animals around.
- Way elk use landscape/ranch properties varies in different regions or locales.
- Alternative solutions (reconfiguring game damage claims).

2. Equity and fairness between public and private hunters.

- A goal of the RFW program is to provide the public with access opportunities that would not exist on private land without the program. However, concerns have been raised that the public is prevented access to some hunting areas on the properties that are made available to private hunters.
- Season length. Private hunters have substantially longer seasons than public hunters do, on or off the ranch.
- Season date consistency inside and outside of program.
- Method of take – RFW hunters can use rifles during periods when public hunters are restricted to archery or muzzleloader.
- Hunting during the rut. Public hunters currently are not permitted to hunt during the rut with rifles.
- Question whether the 90/10 private:public split for male deer, elk, pronghorn licenses is equitable.
- Can we maintain ranch economic viability without all the issues identified under this heading?
- Is it fair than non-residents are excluded from RFW public hunts?
- Hidden charges – are public hunters being charged for “amenities” on the ranch such as hauling animals out?

3. Administrative/procedural/role of program in DAU herd management.

- RFW landowners need to be willing to negotiate on seasons and numbers.
- Negotiate longer term contracts to help with planning and stability in the RFW program.
- DOW staff cooperation, some are not cooperative.
- Need to consider land status circumstances – matrix of land is different in NW than SE. NW is made up primarily of a private/public mix while the SE is mostly private.
- The Land Board wants to be considered private and allowed to participate.
- Inconsistency of application of rules or guidelines over time between areas and/or ranches.
- Ranchers must have flexibility in operation; standardization within program reduces flexibility.
- Is 12,000 acres the appropriate requirement for entrance into the program?
- The RFW program needs to help achieve DAU objectives.
- Question whether ranches might be receiving more of their share of male harvest out of the GMU, and not contributing on the cow side proportionally.
- Recognize regional differences and plan accordingly.
- Recognize license distribution differences and plan accordingly
- Should there be doe harvest on ranch if none available in DAU?
- Should RFW ranches be compensated for providing habitat for public wildlife? Should non-RFW landowners be compensated?
- Management plans should be followed.

4. Perception/Awareness/Promotion of Program

- There is a negative connotation to the name.
- RFW landowners are perceived as wealthy.
- The general public is unaware of the variability statewide.
- The public is unaware of the capital expenditures of ranches participating in the program.
- Perception that RFW landowners are privatizing wildlife.
- RFW reports should be published by DOW so that the public can see what is going on in the program and include:
 - License distribution statistics
 - Animals harvested and by whom
 - Breakdown of bull/buck and cow/doe harvests, success rates
- Include public involvement in program management.
- Promote economic value of RFW to communities.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Part of the facilitation process to identify possible solutions to these issues was asking each group to develop a list of their needs relative to the program. These are repeated below.

RFW neighbors:

- A set of guidelines, enforced by the DOW, to protect natural migration patterns. Northwest neighbors want pressure on herds to prevent the “stockpiling” of animals on RFW properties.
- Adaptive management for each area of the state.
- A local means of resolving RFW-related problems before going before DOW senior staff or the Wildlife Commission.
 - Use of the Habitat Partnership Program (HPP) process, already in place, to give local residents an opportunity to help solve any RFW-related problems at the local level.
 - Separate committees parallel to HPP (for licenses and regulations), working together.
- The ability to work out conflicting interests with season structures.
- A larger share of the male licenses to public hunters; no 90/10 split.
- An increase in public participation in October and November through public regular rifle seasons.
- No gaps in RFW hunting pressure.
- A 45-day season for public hunters on RFW.
- A meeting between the RFW committee and the current License Allocation Working Group.
- Commission members at RFW meetings.

RFW operators:

- A 70/30 split for overall licenses. The split currently stands at 60/40, by species, including male and female licenses (90/10 has to do with male licenses).
- Non-residents should be able to draw for public hunts, as the demand is there.
- No changes to the season structure and male/female license distribution. This is why ranches are in the program, and the past few years have been operating on a net loss. Any changes here could cause ranches to drop out of the program. The ranchers said they operate at a net loss all the time, and if something is taken away, they get nothing in return. They feel they are jumping all the time trying to address the resident hunter or habitat issues.
- Equal burden for other property owners. RFW properties are held to a higher level of accountability than non-RFW ranches around them. RFW properties are trying to keep a sustainable species population.
- A regional program to address individual issues.
- Addressing the misconceptions about license allocation to RFW properties. Residents think 90 percent of the tags are going to RFW and residents only are getting 10 percent. In actuality, by the time private and public tags are added up, the allocation works out to about 50/50.
- Addressing the commercialization issue. Even the name (Ranching for Wildlife) implies commercialization.
- Caution on the part of the DOW in telling ranchers and landowners what to do on their property. RFW properties gave up game damage to get other things out of the program. If the program is taken away, the DOW can't continue to mandate what ranchers do on their property.

Sportsmen:

- An adjustment of the split on licenses, with the removal of the habitat component requirement to create an access-only program. The split could be 60/40, but ranches with a habitat component should get a higher percentage.
- An access program, funded by sportsmen who want access, not by transferable tags.
- Adjustment of the split according to species, for example more pronghorn, less deer.
- Some tags should be allocated to youth hunting.
- A re-launch of the program, with marketing materials to solve perception problems.
- Addressing the perception that the public hunter is not getting a fair chance at the premium animals. Examine modifying when the public hunters hunt to make it more equitable.
- Better communication about why tag numbers fluctuate in a GMU and/or on a ranch.
- A standardization of the license process. Sportsmen said it appeared like a non-standard process, since the license numbers are approved by Tom Remington (license numbers are not approved at the Commission level because mistakes are difficult to remedy through Commission process).
- Addressing DAU concerns (program must help meet DAU objectives?).
- Addressing the bull/buck issue (more equitable allocation of male licenses than 90-10?).

Division of Wildlife:

- A tiered license split. The split would start at 85/15 if a ranch meets harvest goals; the ranch would get a 90/10 split if it meets habitat and harvest goals; and a ranch would get 80/20 if it meets neither. This would be defensible because the DOW could justify this allocation.
- Manage herds to objective. This includes consideration of habitat condition. Harvest on the ranches should be proportional to the level of the species in question on the individual ranch vs the GMU or DAU. This includes both male and female harvest. The type of management on the ranch should also match that established by the DAU plan, ie, it does not work to try to raise lots of trophy bulls in a DAU that is managed for maximum opportunity and harvest.
- Manage distribution problems. It sometimes may take efforts beyond the proportion of licenses normally allocated to address local distribution problems. If the ranches are in a cooperative program with the DOW, they are in a good position to help with this.
- Respect public ownership of wildlife resource.
- When the resource is limited, provide a fair allocation of that resource among the users that want it. Some of the concepts that seem to have some interest are- a change in total days in limited units, additional days for the public antlered hunters in limited units, additional opportunity for other methods of take for the public hunters.
- Logistically realistic program. Consider what suggested changes might do to the amount of ranches that are in the program, the amount of FTE necessary to administer the program, having a program that the public can understand, and a program that can be handled within the natural and administrative time constraints.

CONCLUSIONS OF COMMITTEE

Current 90-Day season framework should be retained. Ranches need the flexibility inherent in this season structure to be profitable, hunting pressure within periods when regular rifle seasons occur outside RFW is discussed elsewhere.

Hunting during the rut on RFW properties should be retained. The Committee had no particular issue with hunting during the rut per se. Biologically it is not a problem, and there are numerous precedents established by the Wildlife Commission where hunting seasons occur during breeding seasons of other species.

Flexibility in methods of take during any RFW season is a key incentive and should be retained. This was an integral component of RFW which helped ranches to maintain profitability, and as long as public hunters have the same opportunity on RFW properties, it was not thought to be a problem.

Late-season (December-mid-January) deer hunting should be retained, and the CDOW should explore additional late season deer hunting opportunity for the public. By a 9-3 vote (CDOW abstaining), the Committee recommends retaining the opportunity for ranches to schedule private and public buck hunts. Flexibility in season timing is a benefit of the program. As long as there is reasonable equity between public and private RFW opportunity, the fact that

the general public seasons end sooner should not be an issue. The Committee as a whole did not feel deer were particularly vulnerable in late seasons in most years. By an 8-4 (CDOW abstaining) vote, the Committee recommended the Division explore more late-season deer hunting opportunity for the public.

Committee consensus was to require hunting on RFW properties concurrent with regular rifle seasons. The issue of whether RFW ranches “hoard” elk, whether this problem was caused by RFW, whether it preceded RFW and would continue if the program ended tomorrow, or what to do about it took up a great deal of discussion and was as polarizing as any other issue the Committee took up. Positions of individual Committee members could be characterized as “private landowners cannot be required to force animals off their property”, “intentionally harassing animals to move them would not be legal”, “no amount of hunter pressure will move those elk, they are there because they want to be”, “weather is the only thing that will move those elk”, all the way to “RFW created this problem and RFW should be changed to fix it”. A compromise recommendation relative to in-season pressure, with no large voids in hunter pressure during the regular hunting seasons was developed. The intent was to distribute some hunter pressure, using public or private hunters, or both, relatively uniformly across the regular rifle season period. The Committee consensus was that private landowners cannot be forced to move animals off of their property.

Criteria for ranch enrollment should stay at 12,000 acres, and habitat improvement is an integral part of RFW. Ranches, sportsmen, and the CDOW value the partnership between large ranches and the CDOW. The Committee discussed an access-only component with a smaller acreage limit and no habitat improvement element. They felt the essence of RFW was very high hunter satisfaction and habitat improvement, and did not want to dilute the program to anything less than that.

Ranches and program should work towards helping CDOW meet DAU objectives. This has been an expectation of the CDOW, but not explicitly stated in guidelines or regulations before. Given the partnership between these large ranches and the CDOW, and the flexibility in season structure and access to public licenses this program affords, it is a reasonable expectation that the ranches will help CDOW meet DAU and other wildlife management objectives. A key finding is that **allocation of male and female licenses should be generally proportional to the amount and quality of habitat for that species on the ranch** relative to the habitat base in the DAU. Ranches can take fewer male licenses than the proportional allocation suggests, and in this case the public allocation is based on the licenses actually used.

Upon entry into the program, new ranches should be eligible for 80% of male licenses; higher allocations should be earned based on a voluntary, incentive-based tiered system. Ranches have had access to 90% of male licenses for deer, elk, and pronghorn for some time, and felt they could not retain economic viability with a significant reduction. The Committee supported a tiered system where higher allocations were awarded for voluntarily meeting high performance criteria in 3 or 4 of seven areas, including habitat management, premier timing of public hunts, exceptional hunter service, youth hunts, herd management, alleviating big game conflicts, or other contributions to wildlife management.

Conservation easements have been donated by several ranches, and because of the permanent commitment to habitat preservation these represent, the Committee felt that donation of a significant perpetual conservation easement should guarantee a ranch a 90:10 allocation. The ranch would still have to meet the 3 mandatory elements of the program.

The Committee feels RFW is a good program that provides high quality hunting experiences to private hunters and public hunters who would otherwise not have access to private land, and maintains, improves, and protects habitat for a variety of species. More public information should be distributed about RFW. The Committee felt the positive aspects of the program should be promoted, and that many public concerns were based on misinformation or lack of information, while some felt information on license allocations should be more public to restore confidence. A name change to something less suggestive of commercial hunting may be beneficial.

General agreement on the need for a conflict resolution group. This concept needs further elaboration. The Committee did not wish to replace the normal CDOW conflict resolution process, but felt there would be value in a group that could step in when conflicts could not be resolved at the AWM, Regional Manager level. There may be value to an external group that could provide oversight, when requested by the Director, and/or could promote the program.

Conditions vary greatly across the state, therefore local and regional customization of ranch contracts is acceptable. This was an argument for retaining much of the implementation aspect of the program in guidelines, and not regulations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee makes the following recommendations, also incorporated into draft changes to Director's guidelines and Chapter 2 and 3 of the CDOW regulations, which are appended. Only changes to guidelines or regulations are shown.

1. Establish 3 mandatory elements which must be satisfied to remain in the program; habitat improvement, high hunter satisfaction, and assisting DOW with meeting DAU objectives. **Following Commission direction to pursue a fourth mandatory element beneficial to sportsmen, Division staff recommended adding a mandatory requirement that public hunter success must be at least equal to or greater than the success rate in the DAU.**
2. Allocate 100% of female licenses to public hunters.
3. Allocate male licenses through a 3-tiered, incentive-based system; new ranches start at 80:20, remain there for 3 years, then can qualify for movement to 85:15 or 90:10. Optional high performance criteria are based on enhancing quality of public hunts, habitat improvement or protection, or exceptional contributions to wildlife management. See Draft guideline changes for specifics. Donation of a significant conservation easement would preclude the need for meeting high performance criteria.

4. Eliminate voids in hunting pressure on ranches during regular rifle season periods by moving a number of private or public hunters which is equivalent to 25% of the private license allocation to regular rifle seasons.
5. Retain opportunity for RFW late-season (December-mid-January) deer hunts. Committee voted 9-3 (CDOW abstaining) to retain this.
6. Establish a conflict resolution group or process which would be initiated if and only if the conflict cannot be resolved at DWM, AWM, or Regional Manager level.
7. Ranches should be required to post charges on ranch rules for additional services such as game retrieval, guiding, etc. Only the charges posted by the ranches should be permitted.
8. Retain the resident-only availability of public licenses.
9. Restrict State Land Board inclusions to no more than 10% of fee-title acreage.
10. Retain the makeup of the Ranching for Wildlife Review Committee, to serve as a Ranching for Wildlife Work Group. This group would make recommendations on program promotion, implementation, and reporting. Work Group would meet annually, and as requested by the Director on an ad-hoc basis to deal with specific program issues.
11. An additional access-only private land, public hunting program independent of RFW should be explored, evaluated, and piloted within the next two years. Examples of concepts that could be explored include Montana's Block Management Program.
12. Retain license allocation for existing ranches through 2006 seasons to allow program administrator to incorporate program changes in new contracts.
13. Retain moratorium on enrollment of new ranches until after 2006 seasons, but permit existing ranches to add new parcels for 2005 season.