



proud past, promising future

CLARK COUNTY
WASHINGTON

March 1, 2013

Miranda Wecker, Chair
Fish and Wildlife Commission
600 Capitol Way North
Olympia, WA 98501-1091

RE: Severe hoof deformities in Southwest Washington elk

Dear Chair Wecker,

We write to you with concern about the health of elk herds in southwest Washington. For us, as elsewhere around the Northwest, conservation and resource management are paramount. Our citizens have long-standing ties to the woods, rivers, and wildlife and proud family traditions of fishing and hunting. Our hope is that in addressing our concern, our shared values and traditions will endure for generations to come.

In a 2011 study, Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) estimated that “between 2000 and 2009, limping elk were observed in 15 game management units (GMUs) encompassing 3.4 million acres in southwest Washington.” Alarming, WDFW concluded these elk were initially observed in three GMUs, but were found in 15 GMUs only 10 years later. In affected groups of elk, 30-90 percent of animals were lame or had deformed hooves, regardless of sex or age. This study corroborated impressions of local wildlife biologists and officers regarding the severity and spread of the elks’ poor health.

Disturbingly, these conclusions were made after a 2010 Washington State University and WDFW study failed to determine a cause for the elks’ hoof deformities or why the condition spread. We are concerned hoof rot could be related to disquieting numbers in the most recent Region 5 Elk Status and Trend Report. Specifically, hunters in 2011 were able to harvest only about half the number of elk they took six years earlier. Also, we wonder whether the disease contributed to the number of winter-killed elk last year, the highest since 2008.

We appreciate Region 5 Director Guy Norman’s attention to our concern and that another elk study is on the horizon. We hope the commission and state will provide the resources

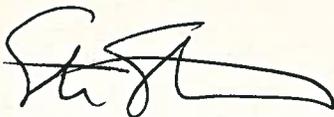
necessary to get to the bottom of this brutal affliction and solve the problem.

We respectfully ask the commission for a response to the following questions:

- (1) Will the commission put elk hoof rot and deformity in southwest Washington on a pending meeting agenda so citizens have the opportunity to speak with commissioners about this important topic?
- (2) Will the commission please ask staff to research the public health and safety risks involved with butchering, eating or having any contact with animals stricken by hoof rot? Can it create a public education campaign about the findings?
- (3) Will the commission help Region 5 create and provide more detailed field protocols regarding hoof rot for hunters or people making the decision to hunt? Should cattle owners follow a different protocol until we know whether other species are susceptible to the same conditions or disease, if it is contagious?
- (4) Can the commission help ensure that updated hoof rot information is available each year as part of the Region 5 Elk Status and Trends Report? That way, hunters will be better informed on conditions, progress and new information about the issue, and better able to make decisions that will safeguard both their families' health and that of elk herds.

Again, we thank the commission and Region 5 WDFW for their work to resolve this problem. Please help us protect and stabilize this important species so it can remain a foundation of our ecosystem, family traditions and lifestyle.

Sincerely,



Steve Stuart, Chair



Tom Mielke, Commissioner



David Madore, Commissioner