-----Original Message----
From: Nancy Hilding [mailto:nhilshat@rapidnet.com]
Sent: Wednesday, April 04, 2012 2:09 PM
To: Schlueter, Chuck; GFP Wild Info
Subject: Comments on various Elk seasons in the Black Hills, and CSP

Nancy Hilding, President
Prairie Hills Audubon Society
P.O. Box 788, Black Hawk, SD 57718
nhilshat@rapidnet.com, 605-787-6779

Nancy Hilding
6300 West Elm, Black Hawk, SD 57719

SD Game, Fish, and Parks Commission
523 E Capitol Avenue, Pierre, SD 57501

Dear Commission,

Comments on Black Hills, Custer State Park, Archery Elk Hunting Seasons,

I realize that the concern today (April 4th, 2012) is the elk harvest levels. However decisions today, may effect decisions in the fall about the mountain lion season. We ask that SD Game, Fish and Parks not plan to increase the quota on Mt. Lions, in order to maximize elk populations, but rather limit your cure for the elk population issues, to reducing elk hunting by humans. We also ask that you use the power of the state to get the Black Hills National Forest to manage the forest for more elk and better elk habitat.

Of the deaths/mortality of Elk in SD, 11% are from mt. lions, 80% from hunters (either ones taken or that die later of hunting wounds) and 9% from other causes such as vehicle collisions. We believe that the predators other than humans should be allowed their natural function in the ecosystem and to hunt their normal prey. We believe the human predators need to share the "prey" with wildlife predators.

There is a 80% overlap in diet between elk and cattle. We also express concern about the BHNF management of elk habitat and ask the GFP Commission to pressure the FS to improve elk habitat across the forest, to reduce the annual numbers of livestock on the forest so more elk can be grown on the forest (instead of livestock) and to improve monitoring of cattle grazing to insure the required residual grass is actually left after cows leave. Cattle are a human "prey". and thus all the grass consumed by cows, ends up supporting human predators (All of us who eat beef).. Besides forage, elks need low road densities, and hiding and thermal cover (trees/bushes to hide behind or live under in winter). The management of the BHs influences the elk numbers.

Folks wanting more elk, should not be blaming the non-human predators, who only seek to live, We need to share some of the "prey" with other predators. Predators serve ecological purposes in the forest.

We support reductions in the harvest of elks by humans, not increased quotas on lions.

Thanks, Nancy Hilding, For self and Society

Original Message----
From: Joel Wagner [mailto:wagnerjw27@hotmail.com]
Sent: Monday, April 02, 2012 10:58 PM
To: GFP Wild Info
Subject:

Please consider eliminating or severly reducing the cow elk tags in the Hills this year and increasing or even unlimiting the number of mountain lions to be taken. We need to get the elk herd numbers going in the right direction before it is too late.

Thanks

Joel Wagner

-----Original Message-----
From: bzastrow [mailto:bzastrow@venturecomm.net]
Sent: Monday, April 02, 2012 10:35 PM
To: GFP Wild Info
Subject: Testimony on Elk Proposals for April 4, 2012 Commission Meeting

Comments for staff and all commission members regarding 2012 elk proposals:

Management of our elk herds in all of the Black Hills has become a debacle. The shrinking numbers in Custer State Park are especially unbelievable and unacceptable. I was told six years ago we were headed in the wrong direction by issuing so many tags. Sadly, reality has hit and we are at the bottom.

Mountain lions are blamed for huge elk losses, but with the elk herd rapidly diminishing due to over harvest, elk numbers are lower and elk calf losses attributed to lions would of course be higher in number. It's only common sense.

The landowner preference situation must also be reviewed in management directives.

Please offer NO antlerless licenses in Custer State Park or any Black Hills unit. Our elk populations need to recover and return to acceptable levels when common sense and biology prevail.

Thank you.

Berdette Zastrow
Former GFP Commissioner
Outdoor Writer

Berdette Zastrow
1401 N. Lakeview Dr.
Grenville, SD 57239

-----Original Message-----
From: Lien [mailto:4walleye@midstatesd.net]
Sent: Monday, April 02, 2012 9:19 PM
To: GFP Wild Info
Subject: Comments on the CSP Elk Season

South Dakota Game Commission:

I would like to know is how many tags will be available for CSP for 2012? One tag no tags? The park did their elk study last year and fed one cow and the 2011 elk calf crop to the lions. Now I understand the Park plans on doing the same study for two more years, which most likely means feeding the 2012 and 2013 calf crop to the lions. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. When will something actually be done to reverse the continuing decline of the CSP elk population? I don't think you realize how upset South Dakota residents are that have been applying for 20 years or more in the hopes of drawing a CSP elk tag, and enjoy a quality hunt. Most people 50 and older will never draw the CSP once in a life time elk tag now. Hopefully, some action will be taken so that maybe my 18 year old son will have a chance to hunt elk in CSP like it was less than six years ago.

Alan Lien
Chamberlain, SD 57325

-----Original Message-----
From: Bob Koski [mailto:jstbkoz@spe.midco.net]
Sent: Tuesday, April 03, 2012 8:49 PM
To: GFP Wild Info
Subject: elk hunting

Hi,
Quit hunting elk till the herd stabilizes. Allow hunting with guides in Custer State park for Mountain Lions using dogs until the numbers of lions goes down at least enough to allow elk to reproduce.

Thanks,
Bob Koski

-----Original Message-----
From: Dave Templeton [mailto:dtempleton@pie.midco.net]
Sent: Wednesday, April 04, 2012 9:12 PM
To: GFP Wild Info
Subject: SD Elk Seasons

David Templeton
1701 Flag Mountain Drive
Pierre, SD 57501

I encourage the Commission to take an aggressive approach and deal with the causes of the elk/deer declines in the Black Hills. I have seen dramatic deer number declines in the past 7 or so years in the area I hunt NW of Custer. I suspect Mountain Lions are the cause but will leave that determination to the wildlife biologist to pinpoint. While high elk numbers can be problemmatic to area landowners, deer have a lesser impact and both seem to be well below what I would consider an acceptable number.

Don' t let the emotional and irrational thoughts of a few (i.e. - Custer veterinarian and others) sway what is best for the overall wildlife situation in the Black Hills.

-----Original Message-----
From: Jeremy Wells [mailto:sdbullfighter@gmail.com]
Sent: Wednesday, April 04, 2012 7:58 PM
To: GFP Wild Info
Subject: Proposal

I would like to propose a hound season in custer state park for mt. lions. I know the elk numbers are way down as well as the bighorn sheep and mountain goats if there are even any left. I cant speak for all the houndsman but myself and a handful more of us are as a responsible of hunters as any one that hunts in this state and if given the opportunity we could help manage the lions that are doing the damage to these herds. I know that a 28 lb. cat is not killing our elk. Thank you for your time!

Jeremy Wells
P.O. Box 45
Rapid City S.D. 57709

--
Bullman

-----Original Message-----
From: Janice Cronin [mailto:jkc54@vcn.com]
Sent: Tuesday, April 03, 2012 1:16 PM
To: GFP Wild Info
Cc: jkc54@wildblue.net
Subject: Black Hills Elk & Custer State Park Elk

South Dakota Game Fish and Parks Commission:

In sending this e-mail of concern, I would like the Commissioners to know that this is the first time I have chosen to send, contact or become involved in a commenting process regarding the proposals set for Big Game Hunting seasons. As a concerned resident of South Dakota, wildlife supporter and hunter, I am expressing my grave concern over the decline of the elk populations in the greater Black Hills. Understanding that it is a VERY delicate balancing act between hunting, landowners and an ever increasing population of mountain lions, the pendulum has now swung against a wonderful wildlife species in the Black Hills; Elk. Not unlike other areas of the Western United States, due to inadequate predator control we are facing the possibility of a decimation of the elk population in the greater Black Hills area.

This is a prime example of reactionary wildlife management. The elk numbers have declined so bad and efforts by the SDGF & P are now at the point of a reactive action vs. a proactive position. I have stated areas of concern, and must add that I feel the most imperative & critical point is better control over the primary predator; the mountain lion. I have spent many days in the forest of the Black Hills over the past 30 years exploring, fishing and hunting. I no longer will walk the forest without a firearm at side. In broad day light, I have witnessed a mountain lion on my rural acreage. No longer can you go for a fall evening drive and hear the magnificent sound of elk in the wild. They have been silenced.

Your chosen option of reducing hunting quotas is a must, but more importantly, you MUST increase the quota of mountain lions hunted in the Black Hills. The time has come to take action against the problem...the mountain lion.

A very concerned South Dakota resident.....

Janice Cronin

-----Original Message-----
From: Les Wolff [mailto:lwolff@wrctctech.com]
Sent: Tuesday, April 03, 2012 10:55 AM
To: GFP Wild Info
Subject: Comments on waterfowl and elk

As ranchers, we build our herds by reduced culling of females and keeping young females for breeding much as a bull only season would do for us with our Black Hills elk population. With this system along with proper lion control, we could have great numbers in 3 years.

I will also add, six years ago, we had deer in and around our cabin camp throughout the day and early evening and few lion tracks. The opposite is now the case seldom seeing deer and often finding lion tracks.

We also own land in Perkins County. My son a non resident from MT complained to me of his inability to license and duck hunt our property. I truly believe there would have to be a dark side to limiting federal waterfowl hunting when you don't limit the pheasant tags taking a bird we landowners have spent thousands of our own money to help protect. BTW, duck nesting on my property is not at all uncommon, unfortunately that is not conisidered.

Thanks for you attention,

Les Wolff
10676 Airport Rd
Lemmon, SD 57638

21381 US Highway 85
Lead, SD 57754

-----Original Message-----
From: Randy Schaefer [mailto:randy.schaefer.lo1q@statefarm.com]
Sent: Tuesday, April 03, 2012 10:42 AM
To: GFP Wild Info
Subject: Elk

I've hunted elk with family the past four years in the Black Hills. You already know and have documented that elk numbers are alarmingly low. You can argue all you want about the effect of an increasing lion and wolf population in the Black Hills... like wildlife experts in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming did. My question is: How low are you going to allow the elk and deer populations in the Black Hills to go before you do something to stop the decline?

Three bad winters, too many lions and years of cow elk and antlerless deer overharvest have resulted in unacceptably low deer and elk populations. Now we have wolves.

A simple solution to attempt to curb the declining elk population is to eliminate all cow tags in the Black Hills for one year. There cannot be just cause to kill a cow elk this year. No cow elk tags this fall please.

Randy Schaefer
randyschaefer.com
randy@randyschaefer.com
605-256-2363
605-599-7000 fax
See us in the Washington Plaza 8:30-5.00 M-F

-----Original Message-----
From: Rusty's [mailto:rustysstore@alliancecom.net]
Sent: Tuesday, April 03, 2012 10:12 AM
To: Spies, Jim; beatis@aol.com; Knippling, Susie (GFP); jlcoop11@aol.com; barryj@gwtc.net; Peterson, Cathy; bpcerny@gwtc.net; Sather, Duane; GFP Wild Info
Subject: No Cow Elk Tags!

With the rapid decline in elk numbers I think it is imperative that the number of cow elk tags (antlerless) be reduced from the proposed 260 tags. The decline in Black Hills firearm elk tags from 2005 (2670 tags) to 2011 (870 tags) shows how serious this is. We simply cannot continue at this time to harvest cow elk at this rate !! The time is here, now to reduce cow elk tags until the population regains itself. We have been lead to believe there are currently 50 plus calves per 100 adult elk in the Black Hills outside CSP. I do not think this is correct, having hunted elk in the Hills myself and with numerous friends over the past 20 years, it has become obvious to us that the calf survival rate has declined. Last year alone in a herd of over 80 elk, the calf number was not even close to being 50% and was maybe close to 20 %. With the CSP study of 30 calves collared , 11 collars found on fences, of the remaining 19 there was 16 confirmed lion kills, 2 undermined predator kills and 1 survival calf. We need to get our elk herd back to a middle of the road number class. The time to start is now!! Thank You,

Rick Hiltunen, 401 South Arthur St. , Howard SD 57349

From: Dick Pearson [mailto:pearsondp@yahoo.com]
Sent: Tuesday, April 03, 2012 10:05 AM
To: GFP Wild Info
Subject: Commission proposals

Hi.I want to comment on Commission proposals as follows:
1.I think elk tags should be reduced in all seasons and perhaps the seasons-or at least cow seasons should be closed for 2 years.
2.Mt Lion numbers must be reduced quickly and substantially.
3.No changes should be made in the non-res waterfowl seasons.
Thank you.

Richard Pearson
43623 132nd st
Webster,SD 57274

---Original Message----
From: Gene & Susan Vostad [mailto:gsvostad@tnics.com]
Sent: Tuesday, April 03, 2012 9:57 AM
To: GFP Wild Info
Subject: CSP Elk Proposal

I have been applying for a CSP elk license for maybe the last 10 years after moving back to South Dakota. Prior to that I had for maybe 5 years prior to leaving SD. When I left I lost my preference. The number of available licenses has declined significantly especially for the past few years.

I am assuming the decline in licenses is due to a decline in available elk to harvest. I understand why there are less licenses. What is the reason for the decline? Is there a management problem, disease or what?

I knew applying annually was a long shot for success when I started. The shot just seems to be getting longer. I plan to apply again this year but $5.00 is $ that can be spent elsewhere. I'm also not getting any younger.

Is anything being done to increase the herd?

Gene Vostad
47990 Fish Haven Road
Big Stone City, SD
57216
605-432-1825

-----Original Message-----
From: Dupres, Ralph E Jr WG10 USAF ACC 28 CES/CEOFE [mailto:Ralph.Dupres.Jr@ellsworth.af.mil]
Sent: Tuesday, April 03, 2012 9:47 AM
To: GFP Wild Info
Subject: elk

My comment is about the" in the park elk season". Since introducing the mountain lion, the heard in the park has diminished. That was once a premier trophy hunt for resident South Dakota hunters. If you take the time to look I believe you'd see that the number of requests for "preference points only" has increased because hunters are hopeful that the herd will grow again and return to the trophy hunt we enjoyed before the lions

Ralph Dupres Jr, Ellsworth AFB

Members of the South Dakota Game & Fish Commission March 26, 2012

500 East Capitol Avenue

Pierre, S.D. 57501

Dear Commission Members: My name is Wayne Henderson. I am currently a member of the Perkins County Commission, a registered Republican, am an ex rancher living on the original land my greatgrandfather homesteaded in 1907. After some tough times, I sold my livestock in 2002, leased out the ranch and went back to school at the age of 49, and am currently a licensed real estate appraiser in both Dakotas. I also own and operate Paradise Outfitters, (www.sdhuntingparadise.com), a small mom and pop business outfitting hunters in the fall. I feel compelled to write you on 2 issues that I would appreciate your attention on.

The first is a matter concerning the firing of Dr. Lowell Schmitz, a biologist that had been working for the S.D. G,F,&P in Rapid City for years. I have had the pleasure of knowing Lowell for a number of years. I don't know anyone that was more dedicated to and knowledgeable about the wildlife, sportsman, and State of South Dakota. You no doubt know the story, but I would only hope that you seriously investigate this matter. It is my opinion that the reason Lowell was fired was politics and standing up to his superiors and disagreeing about quotas for big game being implemented by his superiors. It is probably fair to say that Lowell was probably not the most popular employee in the Regional office in Rapid City because he refused to be a yes man, never make waves, and compromise his integrity. If Lowell had not been a G & F employee, this would have never happened. Why should he be held to a different set of standards than any other legally licensed sportsman in South Dakota? Mr. Schmitz broke no laws, did nothing wrong, and should be reinstated as soon as possible. If Jon Doe, the average SD hunter with a valid SD lion tag had done the exact same thing that Dr. Schmitz did, this would have never happened, been in the paper, nor would any of us heard about this.

IT WAS A SAD DAY FOR SOUTH DAKOTA'S LANDOWNERS, SPORTSMEN & SPORTSWOMEN... If you happen to be one of those folks, and you expect honesty and integrity from our Game, Fish & Parks Department, please take the time to read the rest of this email.

It is a bit lengthy, but that is out of necessity to get the truth out there to the people who are most affected by this incredible miscarriage of justice.

The front page headline of the March 9, 2012 Rapid City Journal read **"Job lost after late report of lion kill"**. Kevin Woster goes on to write:

"State Game, Fish & Parks Department officials have fired one of their big-game biologist after he waited almost a day to report killing a mountain lion that would have ended the season."

"Lowell Schmitz of Rapid City waited until the morning of March 1 to check in a mountain lion he had shot in the early afternoon on February 29. It would have been the 70th lion of the 2012 season if checked in that day, prompting an automatic season closure."

This is a classic example of what happens when an article is written and there is no fact checking prior to publishing it. **IT IS TIME TO SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT!**

Steve Bulle was hunting with Lowell on February 29th, 2012. Lowell shot his lion around 1:00pm, after cutting a track early in the morning and tracking the cat for many miles in rough terrain (100% fair chase). After some quick pictures they hurried to get the lion out of the woods and loaded into his vehicle so that Lowell could get back to town to pick up his kids from school. After doing so, Lowell helped them with their homework, then developed a migraine which resulted in him going to bed between 7:30 and 8:00pm. He checked GF&P's website before going to bed and the count was at 67. Lowell planned to check his lion in first thing the next morning (well within the 24 hour reporting period required by GF&P regulations) with the full expectation that his lion would be #68.

It turns out that 2 lions were checked in that night - #68 at 9:06 pm and #69 at 9:44 pm, although #69 was not posted on GF&P's Facebook page until 6:32 am the next morning (GF&P's Mountain Lion page of their website lists their Facebook page as one of the methods of keeping track of the lion count). At 6:47 am the morning of March 1, Lowell received a text message that Lion #69 had been harvested, and 3 minutes later, at 6:50 am, he called in and reported his lion. Before he had it physically checked in later that morning, another lion was physically checked in and recorded as #70, making his #71 when he checked his in. **IF LOWELL HAD CHECKED IN HIS LION THE DAY HE SHOT IT, PRIOR TO 9:06 pm, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN #68, NOT #70** as stated in the newspaper article.

Keep this in mind as you read on: On February 7, 2011, Lauren Dahl, Resource Biologist, received the second call from a landowner near Piedmont complaining of a nuisance lion that had been hanging around in his yard. Lauren gave the call information to Luke Meduna, another GF&P Biologist, who in turn contacted the landowner for details. He then left the Regional Office in his personal vehicle with his gun and his mountain lion tag, travelled to the residence and shot and tagged a 136# male mountain lion before returning to work. This was a nuisance lion that was slated to be removed by GF&P and would not have been counted toward the quota, but was in fact counted after being shot and tagged by Luke Meduna. No repercussions whatsoever. (Lowell has no doubt that if that had been him - he would have been fired on the spot. Different rules for different folks?)

On March 9, 2012, Steve Bulle posted a comment on the on-line Rapid City Journal article about Lowell's firing in which he spelled out the time line of events as they actually occurred, and informed readers that they could look at the times that lions #68, #69 and #70 had been posted on GF&P's Facebook page, ***"if they don't pull those posts after reading this"***. On March 10, another reader came to Lowell's defense and pasted Steve's post into their comment. The next day, March 11, Steve was rechecking something on the Facebook page and discovered that GF&P had **ROLLED ALL THOSE TIMES BACK BY ONE HOUR**! It certainly appears that this was done to discredit Steve's timeline, but what GF&P likely didn't count on is that Steve had printed a copy of the Facebook page showing the original times prior to the rollback.

One other very relevant issue is that on March 8, SOUTH DAKOTANS FOR RESPONSIBLE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT started an email campaign to encourage sportsmen and sportswomen to email the GF&P Commission with their concerns over GF&P's proposals to issue 285 cow elk tags in spite of the continuing rapid decline of elk populations in Custer State Park and the Black Hills. Steve is one of the 3 people whose names appear at the bottom of that email. At the time that they started sending that email out, GF&P's ELK page on their website stated that South Dakota's elk herd numbered over **2,000 ELK**. Subsequent to the overwhelming response to that email, GF&P

recently ***changed*** that number on the webpage to over **4,000 ELK**. Once again, GF&P likely didn't count on someone having copies of the webpage showing both the before and after numbers.

Scott Huber, a 24 1/2 year veteran of the Department of Game, Fish & Parks, couldn't have summed it up any better in his March 15 post on the Rapid City Journal Take It Outside blog:

"Lowell had a history of standing on the science of mountain lion management in the Black Hills, as opposed to the politically driven mountain lion agenda coming from the current GF&P administration in Pierre. The check-in issue was a "red herring" and a convenient excuse to get rid of Lowell and replace him with a "company man" who would click their heels and salute the brass when given any direction on how mountain lions should be managed. Lowell refused to sacrifice his principles on the issue and met the same fate as numerous other GF&P employees who dared to think for themselves in the face of similar issues. The current GF&P administration has the misguided belief that they know more about any issue related to wildlife in SD than the collective minds of their long time employees. Trust me, it's a sad state of affairs. I know this from a 24 1/2 year career with them." And ***..."GF&P has become a rogue state agency that is accountable to nobody. The arrogance and corruption at the upper levels of the agency have reached epic proportions and you have just witnessed one of many examples."***

The truly sad part of this story is that Lowell's firing had nothing whatsoever to do with the "late" reporting of a mountain lion, but had everything to do with getting rid of the one Biologist in the Rapid City Regional Office who truly cared and was passionate about the future of our big game populations and protecting the hunting opportunities of sportsmen and sportswomen in the Black Hills. That passion caused him to go against the flow on several occasions in recent years when he gave harvest recommendations for elk and mountain lions which, if they had been followed, would have helped to reverse/prevent the rapid decline in our elk populations over the past 6 years. Instead, he was ostracized and denigrated for those recommendations. GF&P was looking for any reason they could find to get him out of the picture, and we have seen proof of that.

Lowell is an extremely honest and honorable family man, and was highly respected by the many landowners he dealt with and the hundreds of sportsmen and sportswomen he came into contact with during his 11 year career with GF&P.

Back to the March 9, 2012 article by Kevin Woster: ***"GF&P Secretary Jeff Vonk confirmed Thursday that Schmitz had been given a letter of termination earlier in the day."*** Lowell had actually been given a "Letter of Intent to Terminate" the morning of Thursday, March 8 before his cell phone and keys were confiscated, and he was told to be at the office at 5:00 pm that day to tell his side of the story. He did so, and was told upon conclusion of his testimony that "they would discuss the situation and make a decision as to termination or disciplinary action". They said they would notify him of their decision by Certified Mail. Imagine Lowell's surprise when he got up the next morning and saw the headline and photo of him splashed across the front page of the Rapid City Journal and read the article that said he had been fired. Obviously, the 5:00 pm meeting the day before was nothing but a charade. **The decision had obviously already been made before he could present his side of the story**.

Lowell's reputation has been tarnished by the inaccurate reporting in this article, and his career virtually destroyed by the totally unwarranted actions taken by GF&P. As you can imagine, his wife and children were extremely upset. His children were crying, angry and embarrassed that

their dad was fired and that they learned it from the front page of the Rapid City Journal. His wife has had to pick up extra shifts to try to help make ends meet. Lowell has started the appeals process, but that could take up to 6 months or even more to resolve, especially if it has to go to court following the lengthy appeals process. In the meantime, this situation has been very upsetting and emotionally draining for the family, and they are struggling to keep it all together.

The second issue concerns the big game populations, or lack of, of South Dakota, **I ask you to please research** the big game populations of today compared with 5 years ago. Primarily due to 3 bad winters in 2008-09, 2009-10, 2010-11, western South Dakota's antelope population has plummeted to numbers that are similar to 1997 after that terrible, record breaking winter that had record snow accumulation and temperatures, and killed all the livestock. Being an appraiser, I get out in the rural areas and see a lot of country. I have always loved to hunt antelope and have pleaded with your policy makers in the Rapid City office who are responsible for recommending the quotas to the Commission, to close the antelope season for a couple years and let these animals rebound.

There response in 2009 and 2010 was to continue issuing triple tags in Perkins, Harding, Butte, Meade, Corson, and Ziebach counties for animals that did not even exist. In 2011 they only issued double tags for animals that did not exist. I don't know for sure what formula they use, aerial counts, expected birth rates, expected migration, etc., but there is a problem. For the last 3 years there have been sportsman running around up here looking for a doe antelope to shoot, and being lucky to see any?? These people used up all their preference points to finally draw an antelope tag and can't even find a buck to shoot? This is unfair to not only the antelope but especially the sportsmen of South Dakota, both deserve better.

Concerning mountain lions, when I tell other outfitters from other states that hunt lions with hounds, the number of lions that South Dakota hunters kill, in the number of days it takes to reach the quota, and without the use of dogs, they question my sanity and think I'm exaggerating. A couple well respected outfitter friends of mine have told me that if we can reach that quota without the use of dogs, we have a real problem, and if we don't address it very soon, there will not be any elk and deer in the Black Hills left to hunt. **I ask you to please research** the elk and deer populations of today compared with 5 years ago. Do you think the lion population could have something to do with this? I personally think the quota should be an unlimited number taken within a 60 season. I have been told by friends that are lion hunters in other states that without the use of hounds, sportsmen could never overharvest the lion resource. These are some tag numbers for elk that I received, although I can't tell you they are completely accurate, I believe they are from SD Game and Fish.

NUMBER OF LICENSES ISSUED

YEAR	Black Hills Firearm Elk	Black Hills Archery Elk	CSP Archery Elk	CSP Firearms Elk
2005	2,670	267	57	166
2006	2,470	247	56	167
2007	2,075	237	58	101
2008	1,675	202	58	76
2009	1,366	185	58	56
2010	1,059	144	35	26
2011	870	126	18	10
2012 proposed	655-proposed	107-proposed	3-proposed	4-

Commissioners, I would only hope that you could provide the leadership and foresight to see what is going on with SD's big game populations, and take steps to correct some of these trends while we still can. I only ask that SD's big game herds are managed with common sense and science, like Dr Lowell Schmitz advocated, not politics and meeting revenue projections. The sportsmen of SD deserve that. I don't consider the members of the Game and Fish Commission at fault on these issues as they take advice from and rely on recommendations given to them by people in power at the Regional offices within the Game and Fish. In fairness to the Game and Fish Department, it is not an easy job nor is it possible in keeping everyone happy as they have to balance between managing wildlife numbers with landowners and hunters. But I honestly feel we currently have a problem that we need to correct ASAP. In saying that, please don't be misled into thinking I'm anti G&F, I'm not. I enjoy the State Parks, the Walk-In Hunting available and have benefitted from the tree cost share, and food plot programs available. The G,F, & Ps do a lot of good things that benefit the public, I just feel these big game quotas have been mismanaged and some changes need to be **made soon** to correct the situation.

Being a county commissioner I have some experience with controversy and making some tough decisions. All a person can do is research the subject as best one can, look at both sides of the story, and make the best decision you can, based on your research. This is all I am asking of you folks. It is my opinion that the SD GFP needs way more people like Lowell Schmitz, not less people like him.

I thank you in advance for your consideration on these matters and would really appreciate a response from yourself addressing them as I know your time is precious and limited and you probably have more important issues to deal with. I would not bother you with my concerns if I did not feel they were important not only to myself, the sportsmen and sportswomen of South Dakota, and the future generations of hunters coming up. Thanks again for your time,

Sincerely,

Wayne Henderson

Wayne Henderson

16994 111th Street

Lodgepole, SD 57640

605-564-2370

henappram@hotmail.com

www.sdhuntingparadise.com

March 24, 2012

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission
South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks
523 East Capitol Avenue
Pierre, South Dakota 57501

Re: Black Hills and Custer State Park Elk Hunting proposals:

Dear Commissioners:

I write to request that you take great caution in establishing big game hunting seasons in the Black Hills and particularly the Black Hills and Custer State Park Elk Hunting seasons. In my 65 year tenure living, working and hunting in the Black Hills since 1960, I have not seen such meager elk populations since the late 1970's and early 1980's when the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks began working very hard to rebuild a viable and stable elk herd consistent with habitat and range carrying capacities.

While I fully endorse the approach advanced by the South Dakota Wildlife Federation in these matters, I have more specific recommendations that I'd like to share that are based on over 25 years of personal and professional experience working with elk in the Black Hills. I beg your indulgence as I provide suggestions by management unit starting with Custer State Park.

Please keep in mind that Custer State Park as well as Wind Cave National Park are the two source populations for the Black Hills Elk herd. Historically, these two parks have provided essential elk, pioneering behavior that operates to sustain and improve elk herds in all other areas of the Black Hills Region! It is tantamount to understand the seasonal behaviors and home ranging characteristics of these landscape scale animals, perhaps indifferent to the overly steady diet of biological management mumbo jumbo of the recent past. To be absolutely clear, I will not agree in any measure, that the cougar has caused these enormous declines in elk populations, either in or out of Custer State Park. Wind Cave proves that! In terms of the Custer State Park elk seasons, please consider the following:

Custer State Park Seasons:

1. Eliminate CSP Late archery season entirely by repealing 41:06:48.
2. Reduce Archery Any Elk licenses to 2 and promulgate a 4 point or better rule to preserve and enhance bull age structure which will in turn improve age class, reproduction and territorial distribution! Shorten Season
3. Reduce CSP Firearm Any Elk licenses to 2 and promulgate a 4 point or better rule!
4. Strongly consider passing a 5 year moratorium on the annual execution of the provisions of ARSD: 41:06:27:02.01 through 41:06:27:02.01 inclusive by resolution or other means. Also, consider promulgating a direct Commission membership link to the organizations that successfully apply for the license as provided in ARSD 41:06:27:02.01 to better ensure comprehensive oversight in project selection and fund expenditure! The money raised from these funds has not always gone toward purposes precisely specified by the Commission in these rules.

Black Hills Seasons:

General:

1. Promulgate rules restricting antlered elk harvest to bulls with 4 points or more on one antler. This will better distribute bull age structures, improve age class, reproduction and territorial distribution of elk.

2. Shorten season lengths across the board making archery elk extend from the first Saturday through the third Sunday in September and the firearms season to run from the first Saturday in October through the third Sunday in October, dates inclusive. Cancel all December seasons! (Disturbance moves elk into places of security and creates conflict with private property. They need to be allowed to settle quietly in secure places on public land where they are secure for the winter)
3. Keep unit boundaries and descriptions the same for the 2012 season with the understanding that future unit revisions for all seasons require further study and alignment with historical elk movement studies and clear, herd management objectives.
4. Landowner preference regulation is completely unreasonable and unfair. Please consider repealing the entire regulation and promulgating rules that permit agricultural owner only preference every 5 to 9 years based upon an annual lease agreement wherein lease/rental rates are based on monthly verified, owner documented, annual, animal unit months of use by elk. Rates would be determined by federal land grazing permit rates established by Congress at the equivalent of 2 elk = 1 AUM. Preference eligibility should depend entirely upon some measure of annual elk use over the 3 or 5 year period. If a landowner had no elk use, he would not be eligible to apply for preference until he could demonstrate excessive use to qualify for both leasing and license eligibility.

Black Hills Archery Elk:

Unit 1.	5 Any elk.....	0 Antlerless Elk
Unit 2	10 Any elk	0 Antlerless Elk
Unit 3	5 Any elk	0 Antlerless Elk
Unit 4	3 Any elk	2 Antlerless Elk
Unit 5	1 Any elk	0 Antlerless Elk
Unit 7	2 Any elk	2 Antlerless Elk east of Interstate 90 in proposed H7A area
Unit 9	2 Any elk	1 Antlerless Elk

Black Hills Rifle Elk:

Unit 1 Total	30 Any elk	10 Antlerless Elk
Unit 2 Total	80 Any elk	20 Antlerless Elk
Unit 3 Total	40 Any elk	20 Antlerless Elk south of Pringle and the 18 mile road only!
Unit 4 Total	3 Any elk	2 Antlerless Elk private land only
Unit 5 Total	0 Any elk	0 Antlerless Elk
Unit 7 Total	3 Any elk	2 Antlerless Elk private land only
Unit 9 Total	1 Any elk	1 Antlerless Elk private land only

In addition to these recommendations, I would request that much greater care and consideration be given to coordinating with the States of Nebraska and Wyoming in planning and conserving this elk resource. It is a single meta-population of animals that deserves much greater care and management precision than has been extended to it in the past 10 years! Thank you for your interest and consideration and I remain;

Sincerely yours,

John Wrede

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