

## Jake Creek Road Collaborative Research Partnership

September 30, 2021  
Deer Lodge, Montana

### AGENDA

- 5:45 – 6:00 PM**      Gathering Time
- 6:00 PM**              Welcome and Introductions
- 6:10 PM**              Review Agenda and Purpose of Meeting

Today's Goals:

1. Inform stakeholders about the opening of Jake Creek Road.
2. Explore stakeholder interest for participating in a collaborative research study to assess the impacts of opening Jake Creek Road.

- 6:20 PM**              Current Status of Jake Creek Road
- 6:50 PM**              BREAK
- 7:00 PM**              Possible Impacts of Opening Jake Creek Road
- 7:10 PM**              Collaborative Research Approach
- 7:20 PM**              Research Timeline and Procedures
- 7:35 PM**              Stakeholder Discussion about Collaborative Research Study
- 7:50 PM**              Wrap-Up and Next Steps

Action Needed: Identify stakeholders willing to participate in a collaborative research study to assess the impacts of opening Jake Creek Road.

- 8:00 PM**              Adjourn and Safe Travels Home

## CURRENT STATUS OF JAKE CREEK ROAD

### Powell County

- Powell County has jurisdiction of Jake Creek Road.
- In 2018 the Spotted Dog Work Group suggested that Powell County Commissioners consider closing Jake Creek Road to wheeled vehicles during hunting season. The Work Group also voiced concerns that snowmobile use of the road during winter might adversely affect wildlife management.
- Earlier in 2021 the Public Land Water Access Association encouraged the Powell County Commissioners to open Jake Creek Road.
- On September 22, 2021, the Powell County Commissioners decided to open Jake Creek Road to motorized vehicle travel. The Commissioners decided to use a phased-in approach to opening Jake Creek Road. During 2022 and 2023, the road will be open May 16-August 31. Beginning May 16, 2024, the road will be open year-round.

### Montana FWP, Montana DNRC, and US Forest Service

- The public access management plan for the Spotted Dog WMA will not change when Jake Creek Road is opened.
- May 15 – November 30: Motorized travel is currently allowed only on open roads; mountain bicycling is allowed on roads and trails; hiking and horseback riding are allowed anywhere.
- December 1 – May 15: Presently closed to all public entry, except snowmobiles are allowed on groomed trail system on USFS Road 314, Tree Farmer Road, and Irish Mine Road.

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## POSSIBLE IMPACTS of OPENING JAKE CREEK ROAD

Opening Jake Creek Road will likely increase human activity on the landscape which may have several possible impacts, including:

1. Altered elk distribution. Elk typically move away from areas where they are disturbed by motorized vehicles or recreational activities such as hunting, hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, snowmobiles, or cross-country skiing. Accordingly, elk may increase their use of privately owned ranch lands adjacent to the Spotted Dog WMA and exacerbate elk-private land conflicts that the WMA was created, in part, to alleviate.
2. Decreased elk reproduction due to increased human disturbance.
3. Increased elk harvest rates by hunters due to easier access of the WMA.
4. Decreased elk harvest rates by hunters due to elk moving off the WMA onto adjacent private lands.
5. Increased recreational use due to easier access of the WMA.
6. Decreased recreational elk viewing opportunities due to elk moving off the WMA onto adjacent private lands.

## SHARED VISION

Who Wants Elk to Stay on WMA: Private Landowners, Hunters, Recreationists, Conservation Groups, FWP

Who Wants Elk to Leave WMA: ????

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## COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

- A collaborative research study could help the Powell County Commissioners identify the advantages and disadvantages of opening the road year-round vs. opening the road during only part of each year.
  - The Jake Creek Road Research Partnership would be a group of researchers and local stakeholders working together to assess the impacts of opening Jake Creek Road.
  - The group would work collaboratively through all stages of the project, including developing the research questions and experimental design, and collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data.
  - With local stakeholders and researchers working together, the Partnership would incorporate local knowledge into the research and enable the Partnership to pool information, expertise, perspectives, and resources among diverse groups.
  - Participation in the Partnership would be entirely voluntary.
  - Regular communication would be coordinated by Bo Walker, MSU Powell County Extension Agriculture & Natural Resources Agent.
  - The research would be coordinated by 3 faculty from Montana State University's Department of Animal and Range Sciences (Jared Beaver, Lance McNew, and Jeff Mosley). These 3 researchers bring expertise in wildlife ecology and management, rangeland ecology and management, livestock-wildlife interactions, and collaborative conservation.
  - Local stakeholders would include ranchers or others owning land adjacent to the WMA, and representatives of conservation groups, sportsmen groups, other recreation groups, Montana FWP, Montana DNRC, US Forest Service, and Powell County government.
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## POSSIBLE RESEARCH TIMELINE & PROCEDURES

The foundational premise of the Jake Creek Road Research Partnership would be collaborative decision-making throughout the project, from beginning to end. This means the exact experimental approach cannot be known until the group is convened and given time to make its decisions. Yet, we understand it is difficult to evaluate the potential merits of this research approach without a few more details about how a collaborative research study might be conducted. Accordingly, based on our imperfect knowledge of the local situation, the MSU and FWP researchers have outlined below a possible way forward. But again, this is only a starting point for discussion that needs improved by input from local stakeholders.

1. The Research Project would have 3 phases:
  1. Phase 1: Road Open Late Spring /Summer Only (May 15 – August 31 in 2022 and 2023)
  2. Phase 2: Road Open Year-round (May 16, 2024 – May 15, 2026)
  3. Phase 3: Investigate Ways to Mitigate Any Negative Impacts Identified in Phases 1 and 2

~~This research timeline would allow for a phased-in approach for opening Jake Creek Road. Research Phases 1 and 2 would be a Before-After Experimental Design. Phase 1 would document the effects of late spring/summer-only road access. Phase 2 would evaluate impacts of opening Jake Creek Road year-round. Results from Phases 1 and 2 would determine what happens in Phase 3, thus research details for Phase 3 are not speculated at this time.~~

2. Quantify elk movements and space use on the Spotted Dog WMA and adjacent private lands (May 16, 2022 – May 15, 2026).
3. Quantify recreational use (hunters, hikers, vehicles, etc.) on the Spotted Dog WMA (May 16, 2022 – May 15, 2026).
4. Quantify elk numbers, harvest rates, and calf/cow proportions (May 16, 2022 – May 15, 2026).
5. Quantify forage use by elk on private lands adjacent to the Spotted Dog WMA (May 16, 2022 – May 15, 2026).
6. Quantify elk-cattle commingling on private lands adjacent to the Spotted Dog WMA (May 16, 2022 – May 15, 2026).

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Respectfully submitted by:

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Lance McNew, MSU Associate Professor of Wildlife Habitat Ecology

Jeff Mosley, MSU Professor of Range Science and Extension Range Management Specialist

Bo Walker, MSU Extension Powell County Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent

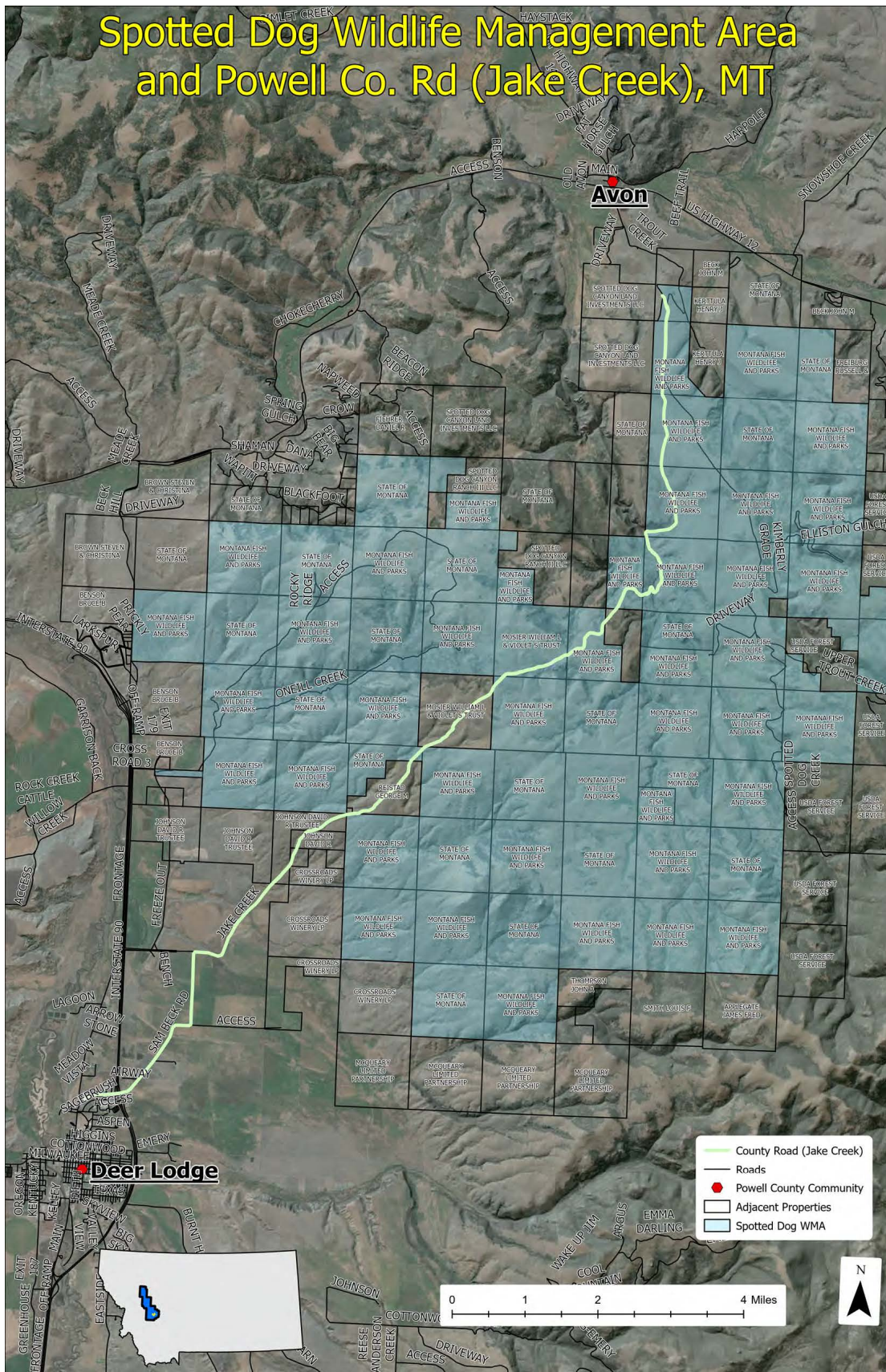


Figure 1. Map of Spotted Dog WMA showing route of Jake Creek Road.

## Elk Winter Observations on Spotted Dog WMA by Year

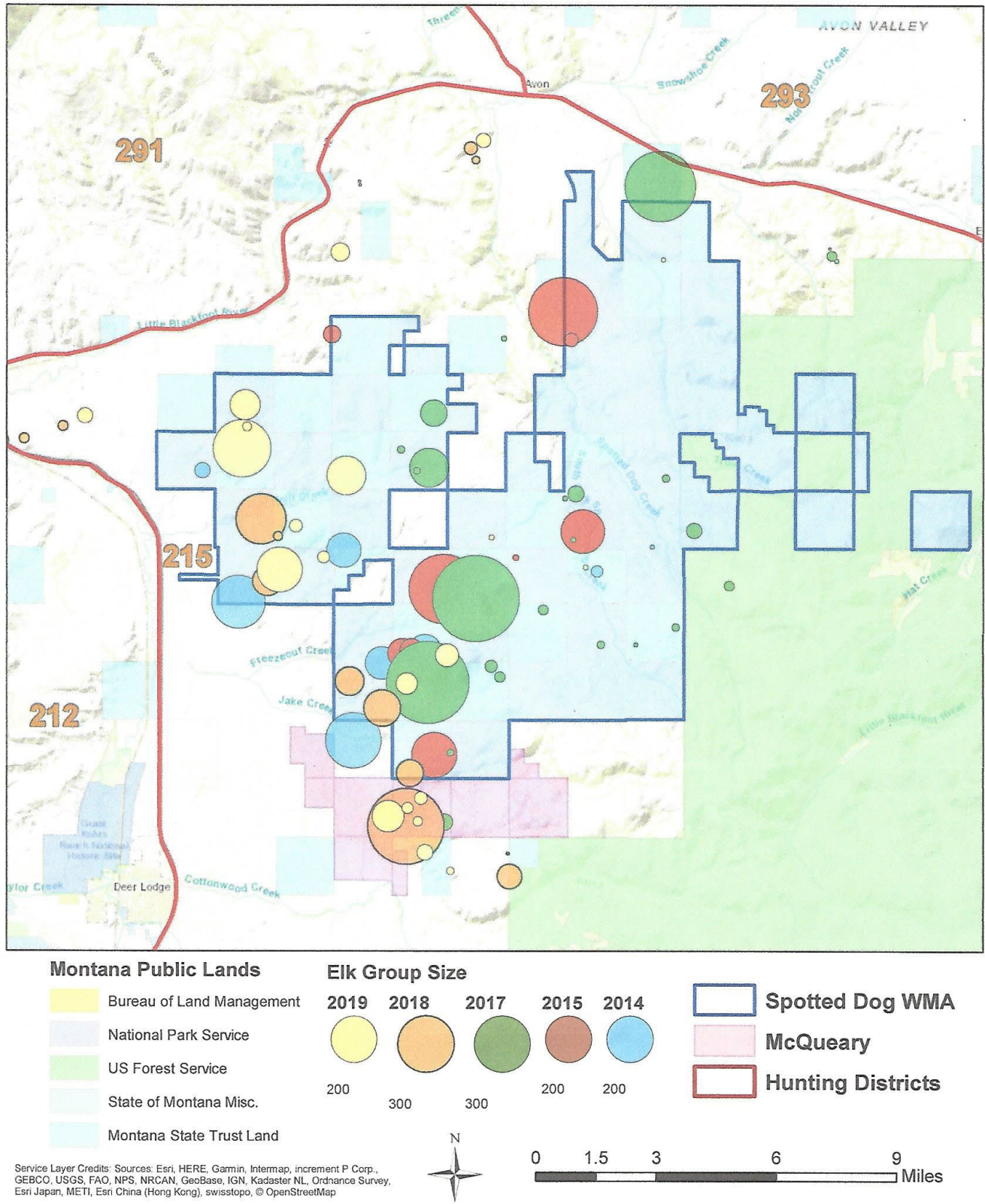


Figure 2. Elk winter use on the Spotted Dog WMA and adjacent private lands, 2014-2019.