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(S.D.)-Wind Cave National Park Uses Satellites To Track Elk



By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 02/08/2013 09:50 AM

(WIND CAVE NATIONAL PARK)-The movement patterns of 36 elk at Wind Cave National Park are now being monitored using GPS (Global Positioning System) tracking radio collars. The collars were placed on the elk as part of the final year of a three-year study to document the effects of a recently implemented elk management plan.

This study will evaluate elk movements, distribution, and mortality rates from hunting outside the park during the implementation of the plan. The plan's preferred alternative called for installing drop-down gates along park boundary fences to help with controlling movement at various times of the year.

These gates will allow elk to leave the park in spring and early summer. After the elk's annual movement outside the park is completed in the summer, the gates will be raised to prevent their entry back into the park. Hunters will then be provided an opportunity to harvest the animals outside the park, helping to reduce the number of elk who currently use the park on a seasonal basis.

This study, conducted in partnership with U.S. Geological Survey, called for the attachment of GPS collars that use satellites to record the location of the elk every seven hours. On a rotating base, several elk each day will have their locations recorded every 15 minutes.

The collars will remain on until the late winter or early spring of 2015. Park superintendent Vidal Davila says the collars "will allow us to monitor elk movements in and around the park and help determine whether the plan is working."

The helicopter and animal handling crew were from Leading Edge Aviation out of Clarkston, Washington.

--National Park Service