OREGON HUNTERS ASSOCIATION
Protecting Oregon's Wildlife, Habitat and Hunting Heritage
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April 21, 2026
Oregon Fish & Wildlife Commission
4034 Fairview Industrial Drive SE
Salem, OR 97302

RE: Panel Discussion Input – Wallowa County Wolf Management

Dear Chair Wahl, Director Colbert, and Oregon Fish & Wildlife Commissioners:

For the past year, Oregon Hunters Association (OHA) has participated with the Wallowa County Wolf Work Group to address the county's wolf situation and formulate a suggested course of action. OHA is asking the Oregon Fish & Wildlife Commission to direct ODFW staff to initiate a wolf management pilot project using controlled take tools along with a monitoring program within the Wallowa District of the Northeast Region. This program should include specific Wildlife Management Units (WMU's) in the East Wolf Management Zone that exhibit both long-term chronic livestock depredations and focus on units with elk populations that are below management objectives.

The Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan states (pages 31-32):
(d.) controlled take may be used in two circumstances as a management response tool to assist ODFW wildlife conservation and management efforts when there exists:

I. Long-term, recurring depredation of livestock

1. The take will only address conflict situations in a specified area, and

2. The take will not impair wolf population viability or reduce overall population health factors within the region.

II. Wild ungulate populations not meeting established management objectives or herd management goals

Livestock depredation has been a constant reality for several years in the Wallowa District. In fact, the Imnaha Pack committed its first confirmed livestock depredation 16 years ago – May 5, 2010. Since that date, livestock depredations by wolves have steadily increased in proportion to wolf population growth. The statewide trend shows depredations increasing 35% from 2024 to 2025. ODFW staff have done an admirable job in recent years responding to these situations. However, these responses have created a significant workload and taken district staff away from other wildlife management responsibilities, and frankly, the wolf population continues to increase, with the latest (2025) count for the Wallowa District being over 70 wolves in 9 or 10 packs. Concurrently, elk numbers are declining, and elk are redistributing to less desirable habitats and landscapes in response to wolf and other predation pressure. A pilot

project including carefully regulated controlled take, and a focused public hunting effort, will provide benefits to the agency, producers, and potentially all ungulates that occur in the area (e.g., elk, deer, and moose).

Regarding areas of ungulate (e.g. elk) population concern, all six WMU's in the Wallowa District are below elk management objectives according to 2025 ODFW data. Elk populations in the Wallowa District range from a low of 31% of management objective in the Wenaha WMU to 91% in the Chesnimnus WMU. The three units where livestock depredation is current and persistent are Minam, Chesnimnus, and Sled Springs which are at 55%, 91%, and 58% of management objective, respectively. Another key indicator of elk population health is cow-calf ratios which currently occur at: 15, 23, and 22 for the Minam, Chesnimnus, and Sled Springs WMU's, respectively. These are not desirable ratios, with a targeted minimum of 30 per 100 desirable to support a healthy elk population.

Oregon's elk hunters need relief and assurance that their favorite form of hunting is going to be available looking into the future. Since 2015 there has been a steady gradual decline in opportunity for bull elk in the three WMU's suggested for pilot project consideration. These WMU's have traditionally been considered a hub for Oregon's east-side elk hunting. The Minam WMU exemplifies this pattern the most with bull elk harvest dropping from 770 hunters taking 134 bulls at an 18% success ratio in 2015, to 677 hunters harvesting just 71 bulls at a 10% success rate in 2024.

Both OHA and the Wallowa County Wolf Work Group realize that the specific focus of a pilot project needs to be determined by ODFW leadership and staff. The Wallowa District is much more advanced on the impacts of wolf population growth than other regions of the state, and more advanced in the time span of years in Phase III conditions from a federal and state delisting perspective. Oregon has a unique opportunity to move into a more balanced phase of wolf management and do so through using a regulated - scale pilot project, with well-designed result monitoring, that will help inform the next revision of the wolf plan.

We strive to see wolves become a more accepted and "normalized" species on the Oregon landscape. We have a unique opportunity, with solid guidance provided within the language of the state's wolf management plan. Please advise ODFW staff to have a pilot project proposal ready for the September 2026 big game rule setting meeting.

Sincerely,

Jim Akenson

Jim Akenson
OHA State Board, Enterprise OR
jim@oregohunters.org
541-398-2636

From: john@enterprise-electric.com
To: ODFW Commission * ODFW
Subject: Wallowa county wolves
Date: Saturday, March 28, 2026 1:06:48 PM

Debbie and commissioners

Some thoughts :

When Wildlife, Agriculture, and Reality Collide in Wallowa County

The growing tension between elk, wolves, cattle, and farmland isn't just a policy discussion—it's something people across Wallowa County are seeing firsthand. One of the most noticeable shifts has been the emergence of farmland as a new "habitat" for elk, and that should concern all of us.

For those who don't know me, I'm John Hillock, Wallowa County Commissioner. I've spent the last 50 years working as an electrician, traveling every corner of this county—from Minam Lodge high in the Wallowa's to the remote stretches of the Snake River and Hells Canyon. My work has given me a unique, ground-level view of how our landscape—and the wildlife within it—has changed.

This week, my job took me to the Leap area, a 145-square-mile region bordered by private, industrial, and U.S. Forest Service land. Before leaving Leap, I asked a local landowner about wolves, knowing he'd have an opinion.

He told me about a day when wolves entered his yard where his horses were grazing. The horses, accustomed to domestic dogs, showed no fear. In fact, one horse and a wolf approached each other, touching noses before the wolves eventually moved on. It's a striking image—but it's what came next that matters more.

The landowner, a third-generation farmer, explained how dramatically elk behavior has changed since wolves were reestablished. Elk used to stay primarily in the timber, occasionally coming out to graze for short periods. It was predictable. Manageable. In most years, he could even harvest an elk behind his home in the timber.

That's no longer the case.

Today, those elk have moved miles away from the timberline—driven out of their traditional habitat.

Later, I visited Tim, a farmer in every sense of the word. He was an early pioneer of no-till farming and now works roughly 5,000 acres with his sons. Not a rancher—he's never owned cattle—but a crop producer.

His message was direct: "John, you have to do something about the elk. They're eating my crops."

The elk that once stayed near the timber behind properties like Dave's are now feeding on farmland like Tim's. Areas that rarely, if ever, saw elk in the past are now dealing with consistent pressure. As stated by Tim, a place known as the Carmel Place—land he previously farmed—sits about 10 miles from forested ground and roughly five miles from Enterprise. Historically, it saw little to no elk activity until after wolves were reintroduced. Notably, it lies just a couple of miles from the first wolf den in Wallowa County.

After 50 years of troubleshooting electrical systems, I've learned to look closely at cause and effect. When something changes, there's usually a reason.

It's hard to ignore the timing: wolves move in, and elk move out—shifting directly into farmland.

That's not coincidence. That's cause and effect.

As a county, we need to acknowledge these changes and work together—farmers, ranchers, and the broader community—to find a collaborative, honest, and sensible way forward for managing wildlife and protecting our livelihoods.

I would like to blog more and hit some more topics, perhaps next Sat. but I have a rancher without stock water my duty has to switch from commissioner to business owner. I'll have Dan water for the cows in an hour.

Sincerely John Hillock Wallowa county commissioner

Scenario Summary

Metric	Value	Comment
Estimated elk population 5 years ago	13942	Back-calculated from the current herd size
Current elk population	12000	User input
Projected elk population 5 years ahead	6622	Forecast result under current assumptions
Current wolf population	67	User input
Projected wolf population 5 years ahead	67	Forecast result under current assumptions

Interpretation

Use the Inputs sheet to test how changing wolves, calf recruitment, kill rate, or hunting take changes the elk forecast.

Estimated 5-Year History and 5-Year Elk Forecast

Rows before the current year are back-calculated estimates using the current assumptions. Rows after the current year are forward projections. Elk population is capped at zero.

Year	Period	Wolf Population	Elk Population (Start of Year)	Cows in Herd	Calf Recruitment (calves/100 cows)	Calves Added	Elk Taken by Hunting	Wolf Kill Rate (elk/wolf/year)	Elk Killed by Wolves	Total Removals	Net Change	Elk Population (End of Year)	Annual Change %
2021	Historical estimate	67	13,942	12,548	18.0	2,259	1,200	20	1,340	2,540	-281	13,661	-2.0%
2022	Historical estimate	67	13,661	12,295	18.0	2,213	1,200	20	1,340	2,540	-327	13,334	-2.4%
2023	Historical estimate	67	13,334	12,001	18.0	2,160	1,200	20	1,340	2,540	-380	12,954	-2.8%
2024	Historical estimate	67	12,954	11,659	18.0	2,099	1,200	20	1,340	2,540	-441	12,513	-3.4%
2025	Historical estimate	67	12,513	11,262	18.0	2,027	1,200	20	1,340	2,540	-513	12,000	-4.1%
2026	Current baseline	67	12,000	10,800	18.0	1,944	1,200	20	1,340	2,540	-596	11,404	-5.0%
2027	Forecast	67	11,404	10,264	18.0	1,847	1,200	20	1,340	2,540	-693	10,711	-6.1%
2028	Forecast	67	10,711	9,640	18.0	1,735	1,200	20	1,340	2,540	-805	9,907	-7.5%
2029	Forecast	67	9,907	8,916	18.0	1,605	1,200	20	1,340	2,540	-935	8,972	-9.4%
2030	Forecast	67	8,972	8,074	18.0	1,453	1,200	20	1,340	2,540	-1,087	7,885	-12.1%
2031	Forecast	67	7,885	7,096	18.0	1,277	1,200	20	1,340	2,540	-1,263	6,622	-16.0%

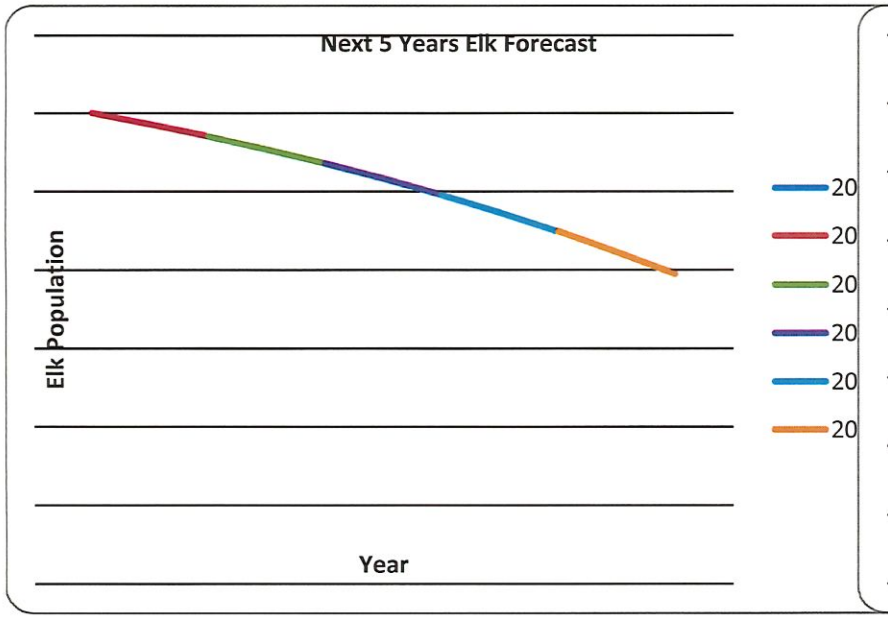
Charts

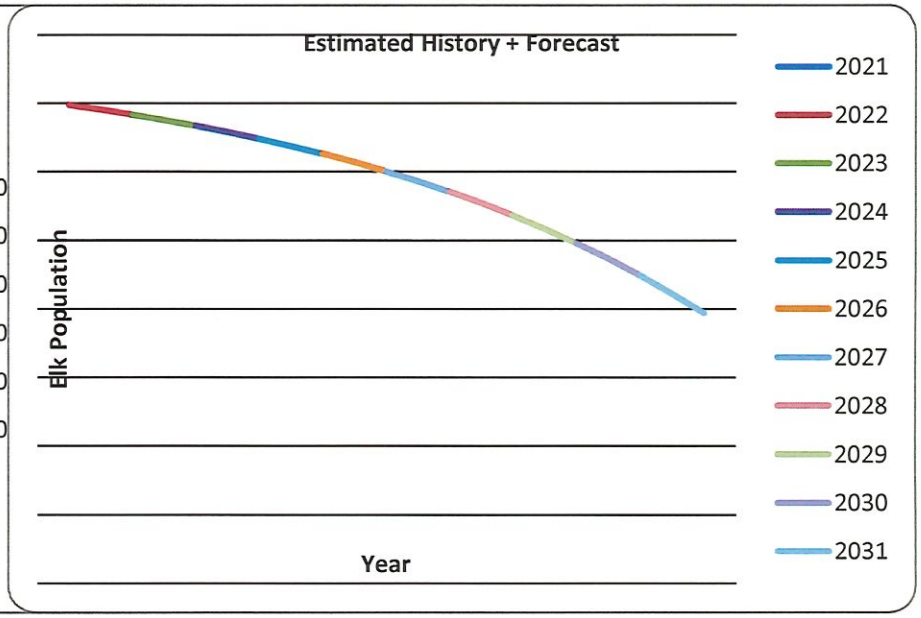
Next 5 Years Forecast

Year	Elk Population (Start of Year)	Wolf Population
2026	12000	67
2027	11404	67
2028	10711.448	67
2029	9906.702576	67
2030	8971.588393	67
2031	7884.985713	67

Estimated History + Forecast

Year	Elk Population (Start of Year)
2021	13942.40911
2022	13661.07939
2023	13334.17425
2024	12954.31048
2025	12512.90878
2026	12000
2027	11404





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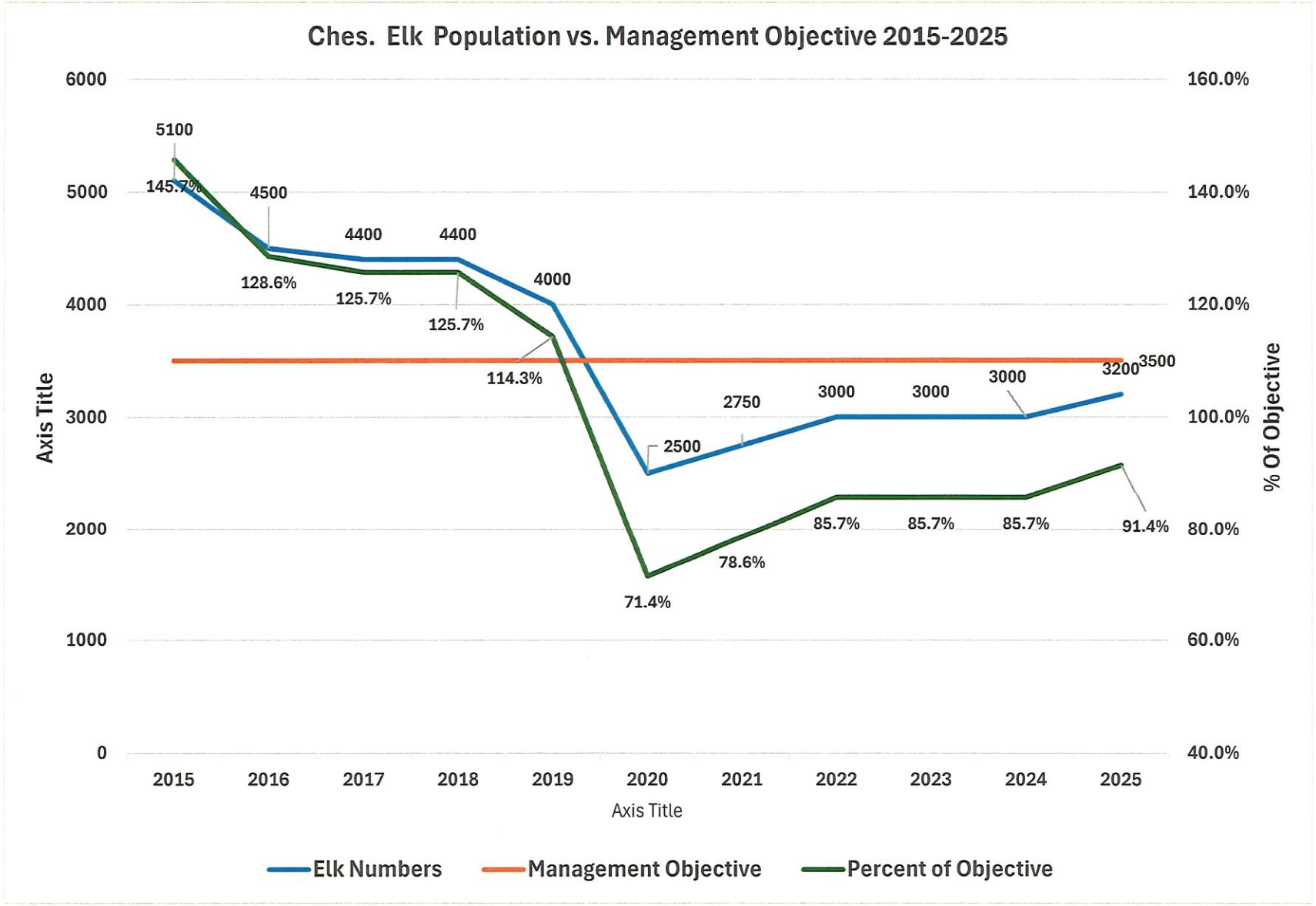
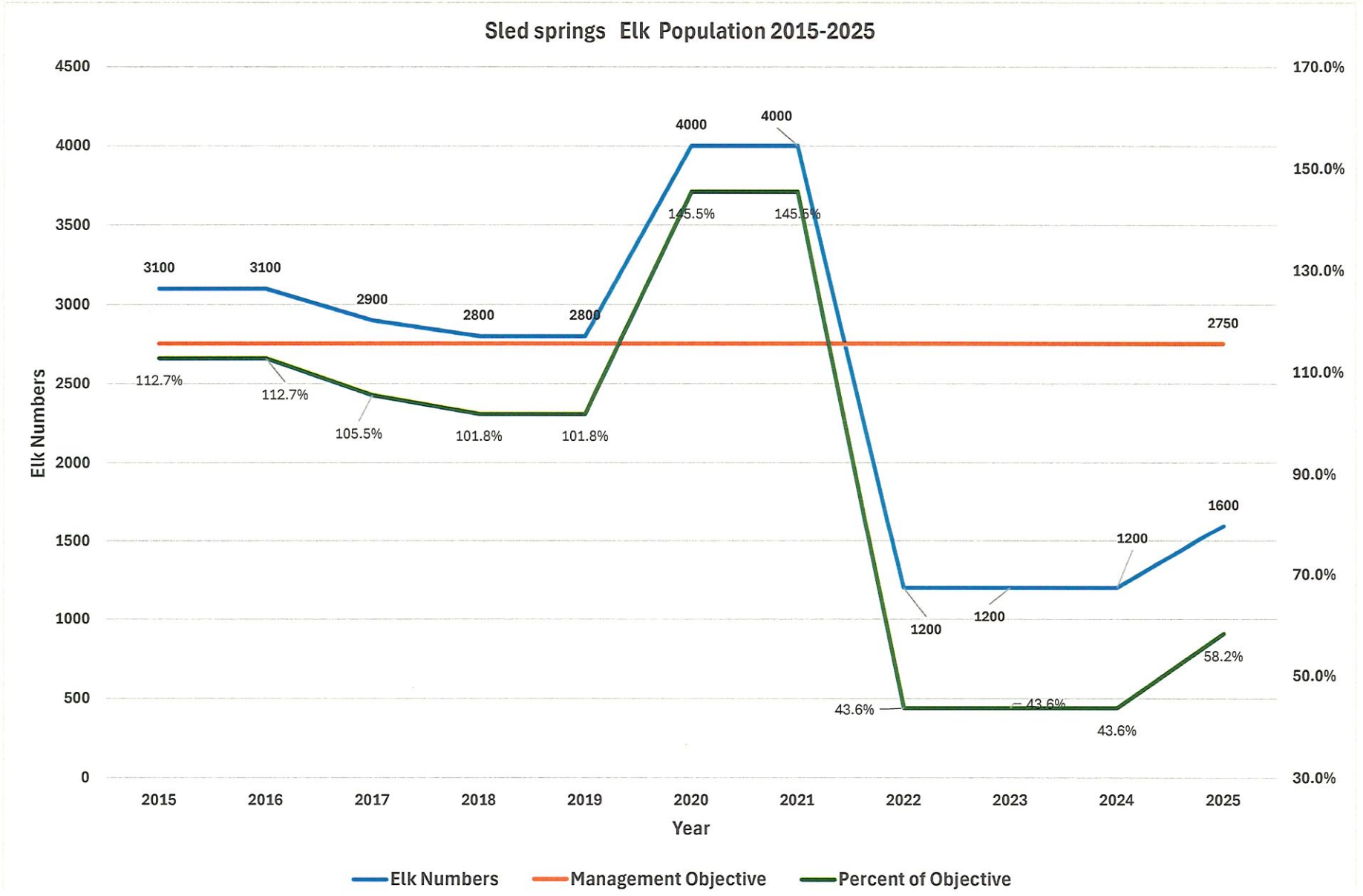
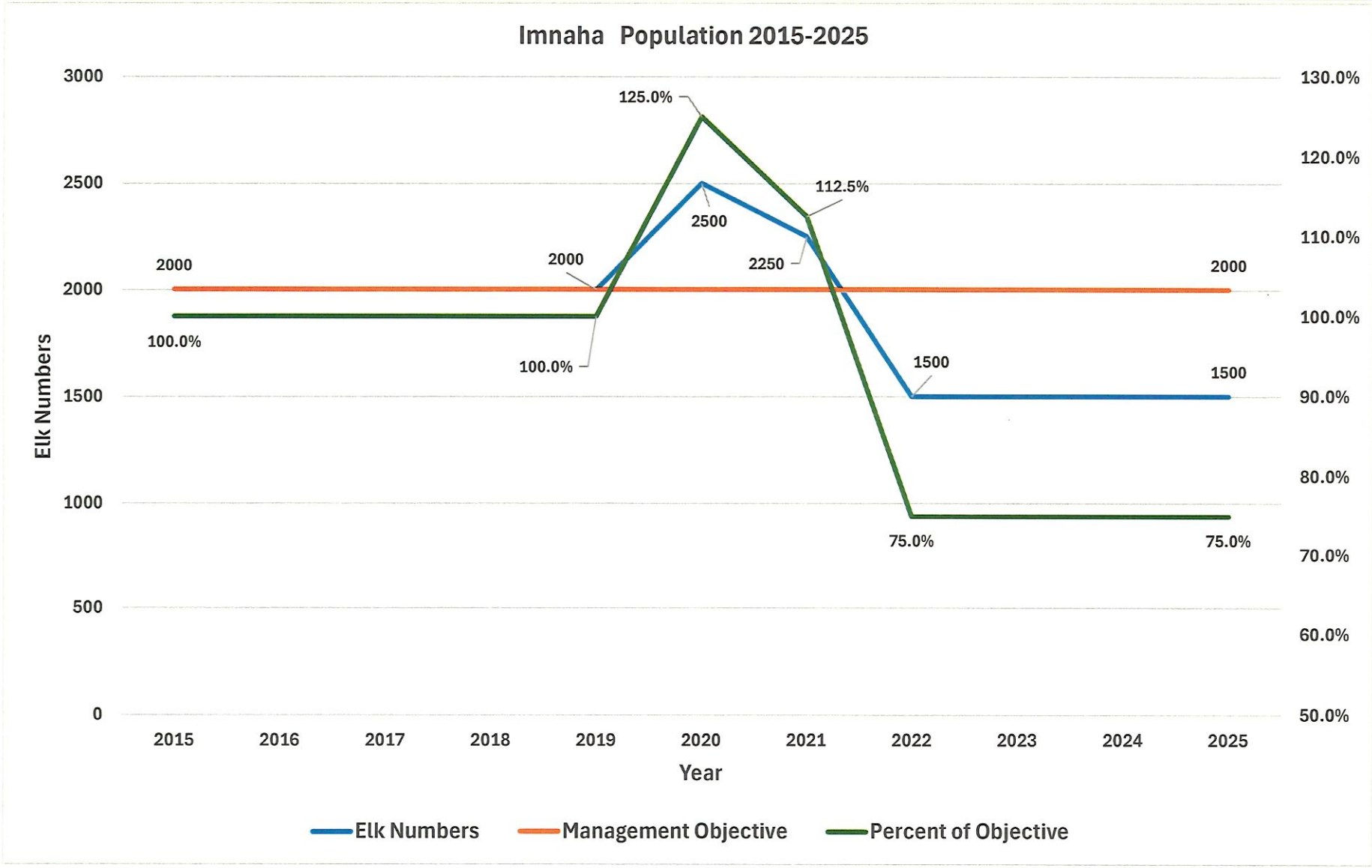
years	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Elk Numbers	5100	4500	4400	4400	4000	2500	2750	3000	3000	3000	3200
Management Objective	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500
Percent of Objective	145.7%	128.6%	125.7%	125.7%	114.3%	71.4%	78.6%	85.7%	85.7%	85.7%	91.4%



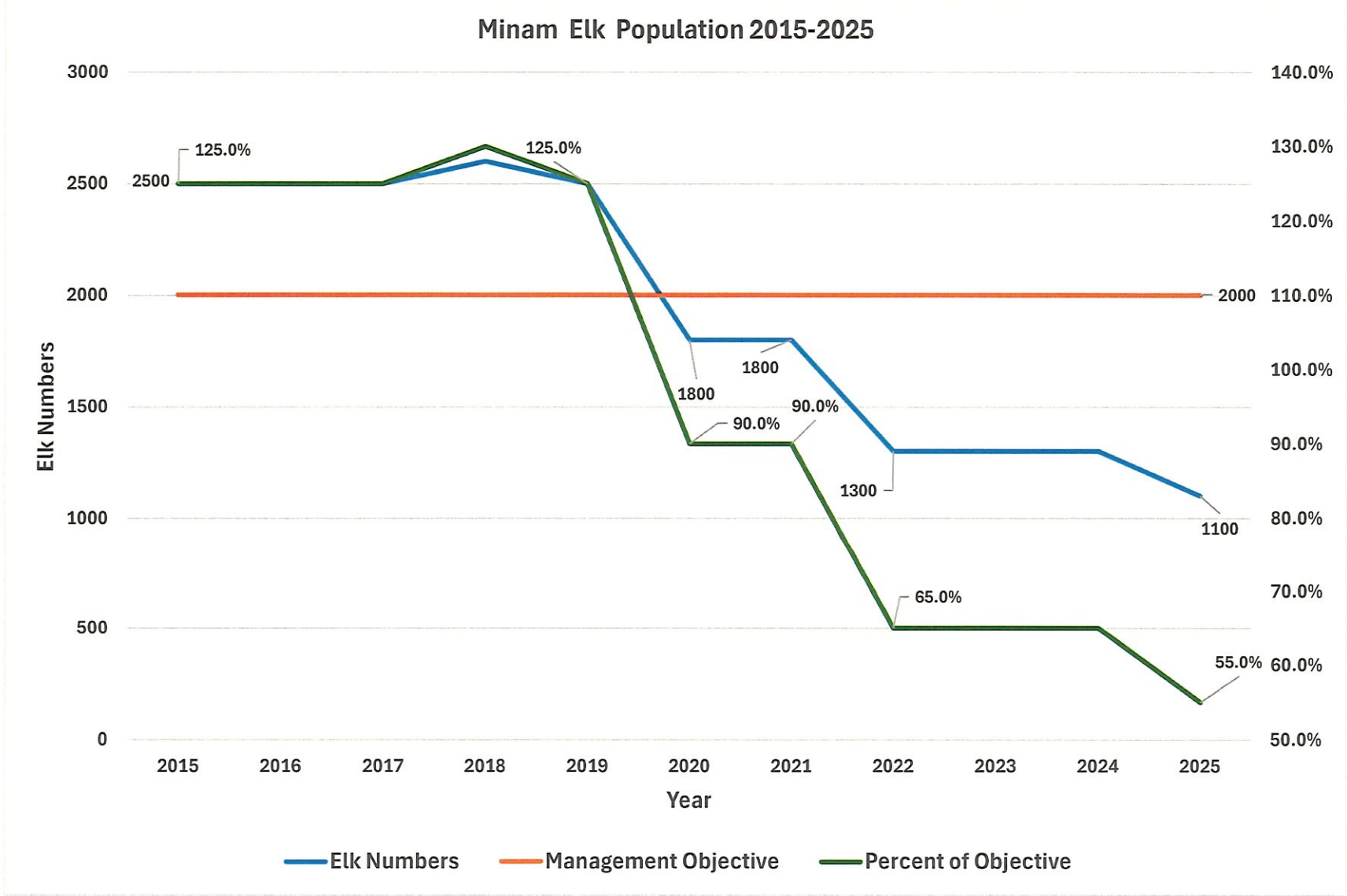
Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Elk Numbers	3100	3100	2900	2800	2800	4000	4000	1200	1200	1200	1600
Management Objective	2750	2750	2750	2750	2750	2750	2750	2750	2750	2750	2750
Percent of Objective	112.7%	112.7%	105.5%	101.8%	101.8%	145.5%	145.5%	43.6%	43.6%	43.6%	58.2%



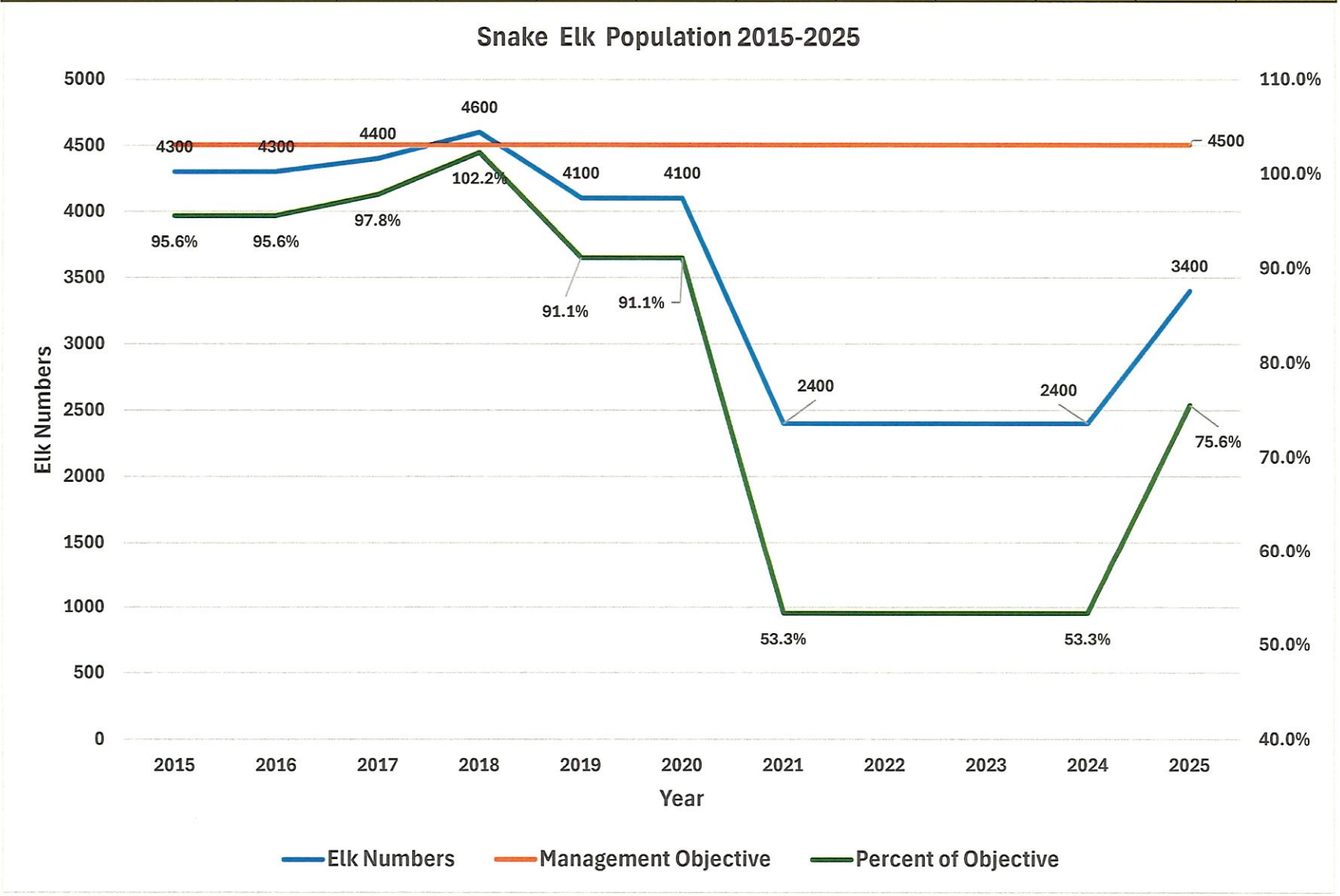
Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Elk Numbers	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2500	2250	1500	1500	1500	1500
Management Objective	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000
Percent of Objective	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	125.0%	112.5%	75.0%	75.0%	75.0%	75.0%



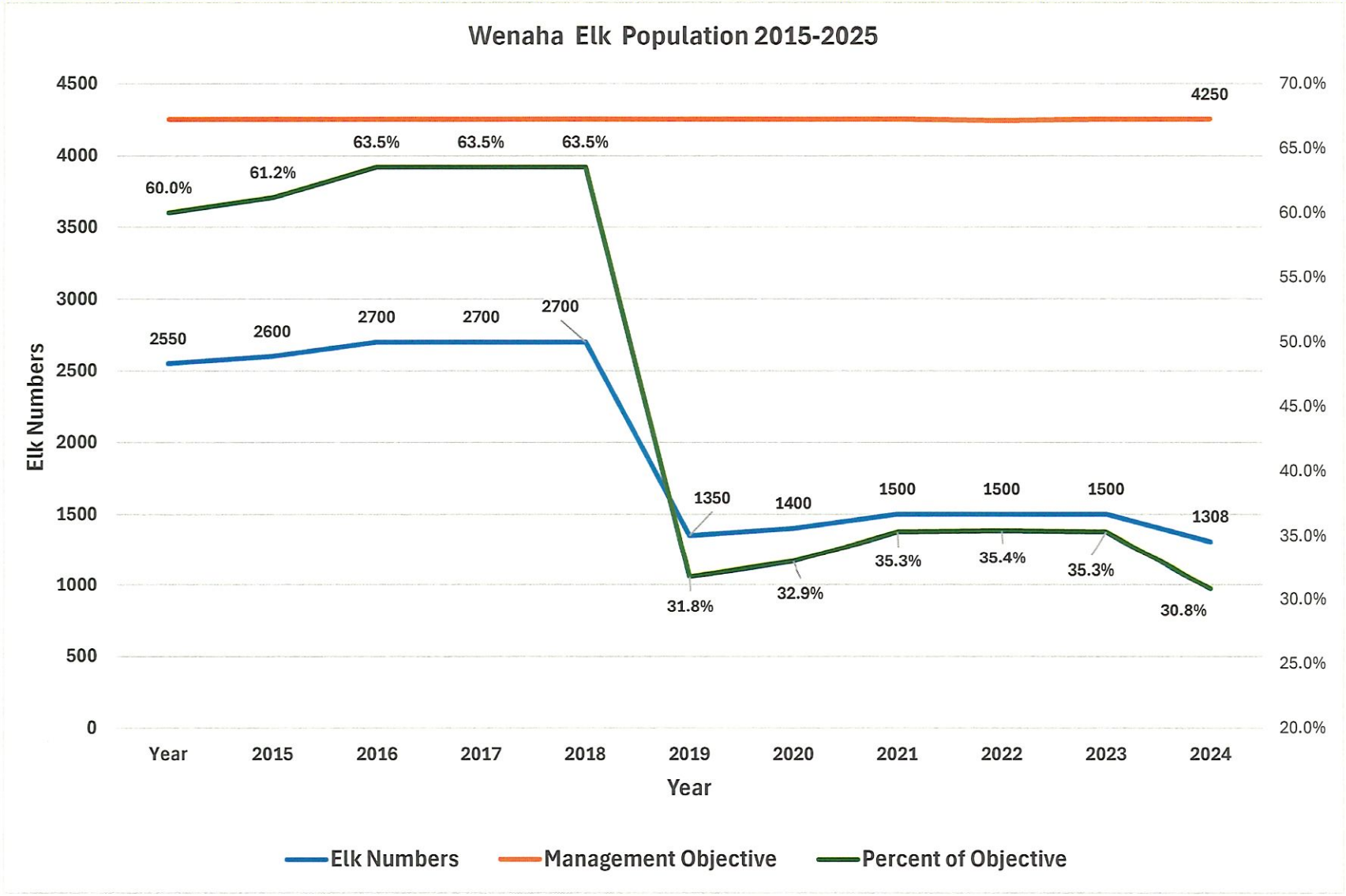
Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Elk Numbers	2500	2500	2500	2600	2500	1800	1800	1300	1300	1300	1100
Management Objective	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000
Percent of Objective	125.0%	125.0%	125.0%	130.0%	125.0%	90.0%	90.0%	65.0%	65.0%	65.0%	55.0%



Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Elk Numbers	4300	4300	4400	4600	4100	4100	2400	2400	2400	2400	3400
Management Objective	4500	4500	4500	4500	4500	4500	4500	4500	4500	4500	4500
Percent of Objective	95.6%	95.6%	97.8%	102.2%	91.1%	91.1%	53.3%	53.3%	53.3%	53.3%	75.6%



Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Elk Numbers	2550	2600	2700	2700	2700	1350	1400	1500	1500	1500	1308
Management Objective	4250	4250	4250	4250	4250	4250	4250	4250	4240	4250	4250
Percent of Objective	60.0%	61.2%	63.5%	63.5%	63.5%	31.8%	32.9%	35.3%	35.4%	35.3%	30.8%



	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Sled Springs	33	18	22	9	20
Wenaha	21	16	12	12	13
Chesnimnus	31	12	29	8	23
Snake River	27	9	20	13	16
Minam	38	11	18	11	15
Imnaha	30	10	24	12	21
State Average	23	19	22	21	23