

Elk field note  
November 20, 2013  
Teagan Hayes



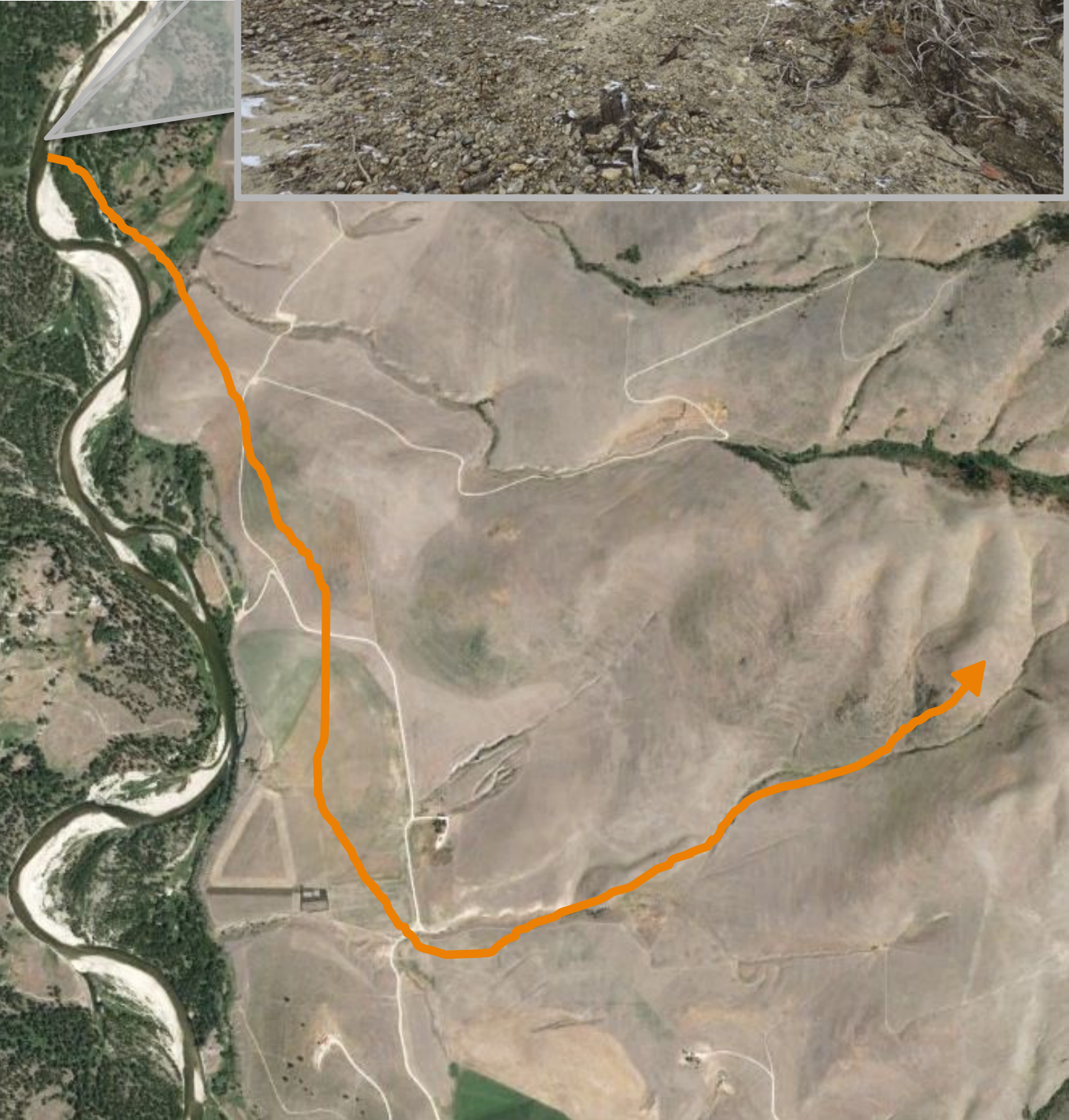


Freshly fallen snow on November 4 provided a chance to track the elk herd's movement from the east shore of the Bitterroot River to their daytime resting spot south of Tongue Creek. Elk begin to move in large numbers during late evening and through early morning hours. By full morning light, this group of 42 elk has found a place to spend the day with good visibility and shelter from prevailing wind.





This group of elk travelled approximately 3.5 total miles from where they crossed the Bitterroot river.







After crossing the river, these elk avoided traveling along the sandy, open shoreline. Instead, most opted to move and graze within the aspen trees (*Populus tremuloides*) of the floodplain. Several sections of the floodplain are dominated by rhizomatous grasses, including Canada bluegrass (*Poa compressa*). It grows in a wide variety of conditions and can outcompete other grasses on sites with low fertility or poor soil drainage. Elk often graze large patches of Canada bluegrass late into the year because it grows new leaves in the fall and is palatable later in the growing season than many other available grasses.







Several paths were heavily used, separating, rejoining, and winding between shrubby areas across the floodplain.



Then the elk moved above the floodplain onto more sparsely vegetated slopes.







Individuals within the moving herd spread out across wide unconstrained landscapes, especially in places with available forage. Early morning on November 4, the majority of the elk herd moved through the south center pivot, stopping to graze along the way. The Buckeye cameras captured a spike elk (shown as a red dot) at the Pump Slough Levy around 6am. The path condensed again as the herd moved up Partridge Alley toward their hilltop lookout.





