

Fiordland Wapiti

Rationale for the Current Game Management Approach....



*What do we want for the Fiordland
Wapiti...?*





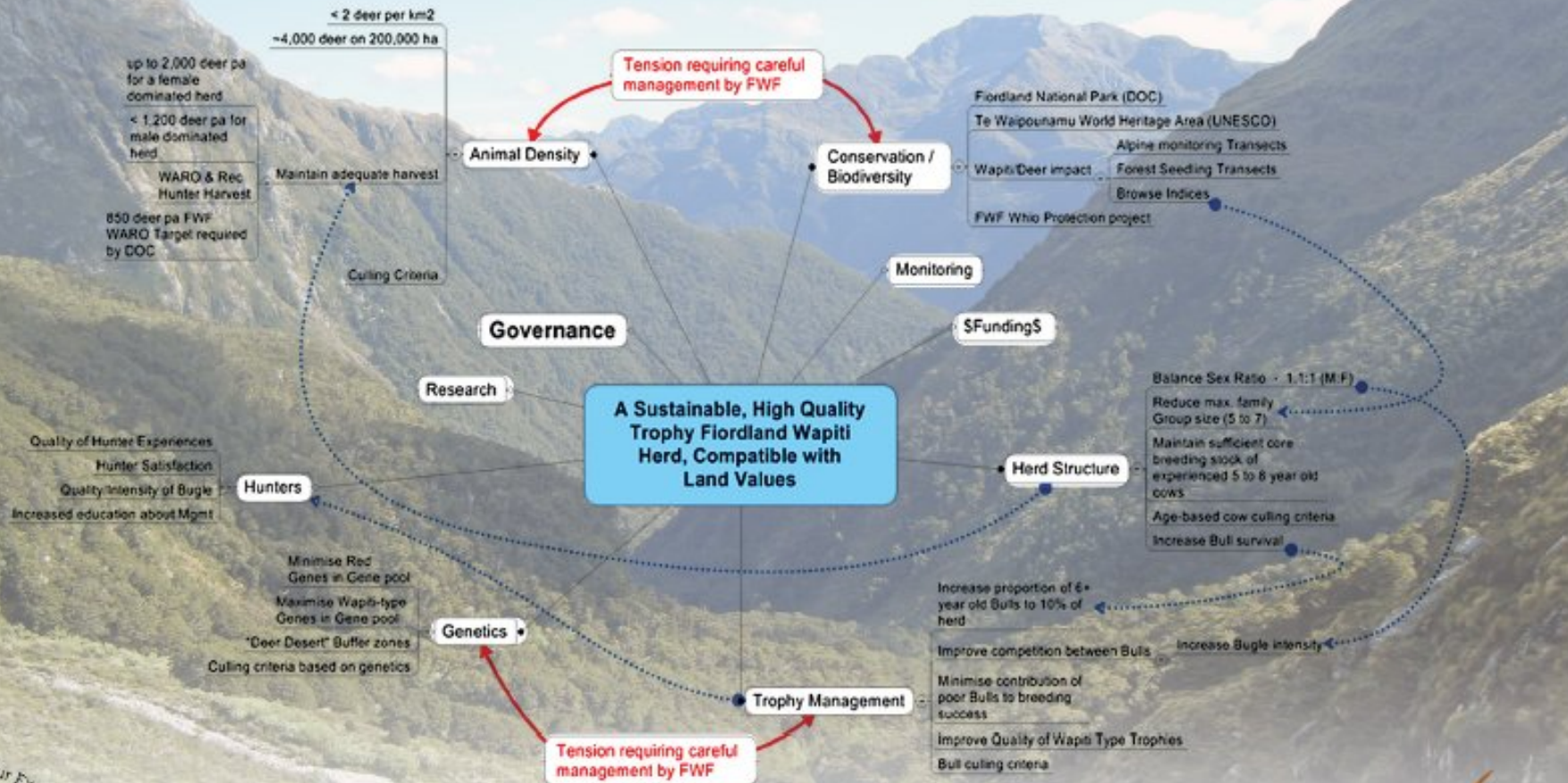
← 'Rocky Mountain Elk'
Is this realistic...?

'Fiordland Wapiti'
Is this good enough...?



There is a lot to consider...

Managing the Fiordland Wapiti Herd is More Complex than Most Hunters Realise!

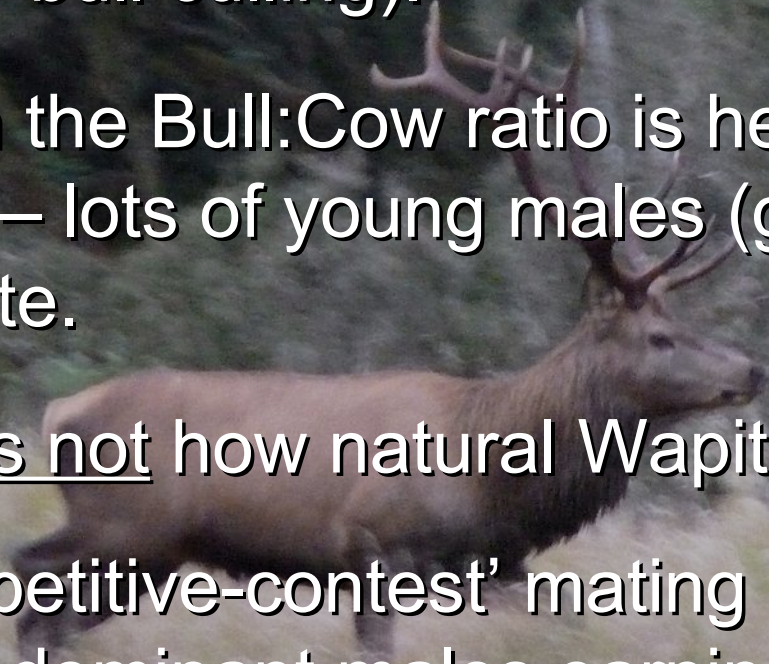


Fiordland Wapiti Herd Management

- What has heavy bull culling based on “appearance” achieved over the last decade:
 - *Lots of nice looking cows!*
 - *A highly productive (female biased) herd.*
 - *Increasing family group sizes...!*
 - *But isn't the 'Objective' a Trophy Herd...?*
- If you always do what you've done, you'll always have what you've got...
- Where do we go from here...?

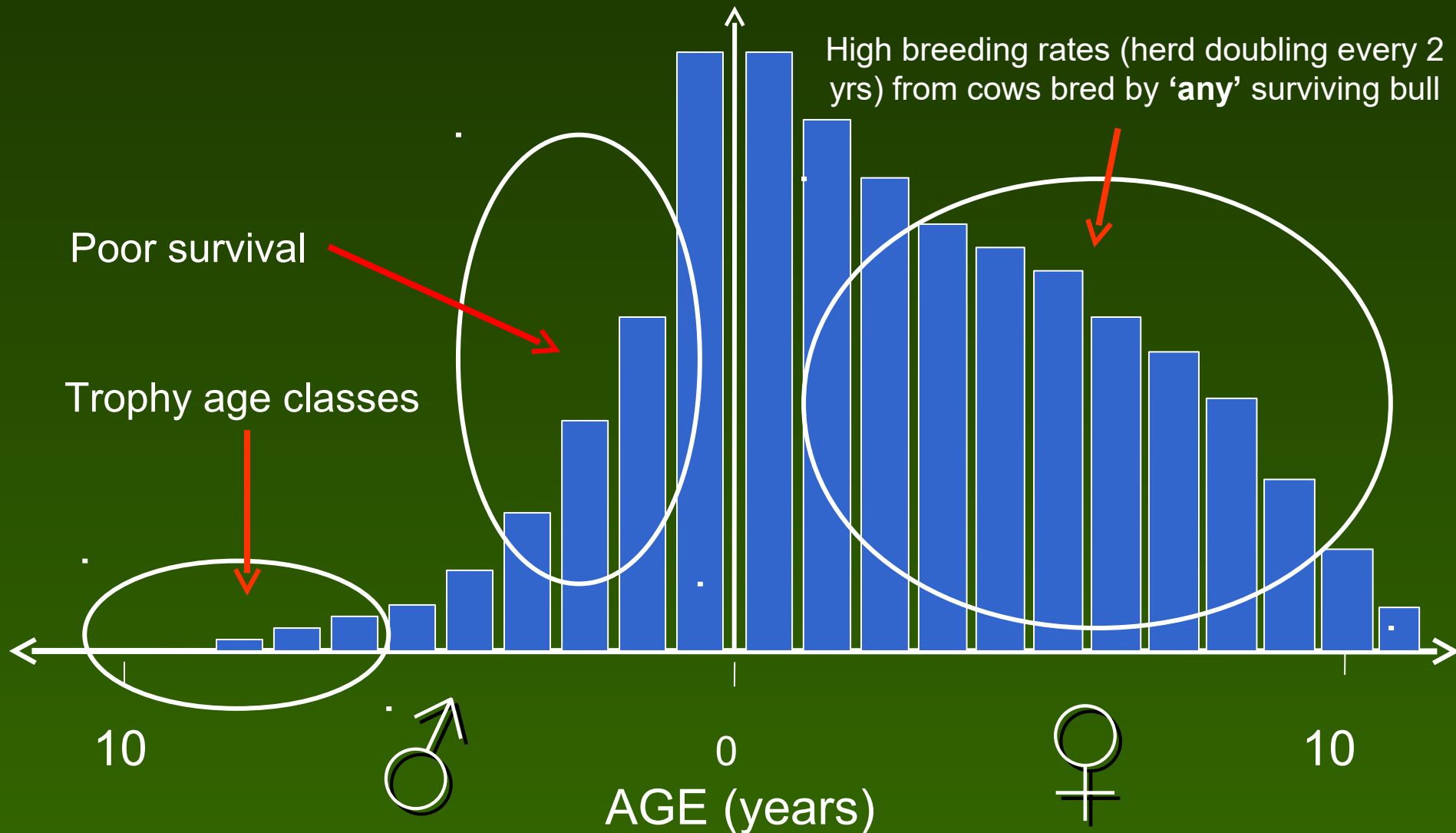
Fiordland is not a FARM!

- We can't control who mates with who (even with heavy bull culling).
- When the Bull:Cow ratio is heavily biased towards cows – lots of young males (good, bad & ugly) get to mate.
- This is not how natural Wapiti herds operate.
- 'Competitive-contest' mating systems are based on a few dominant males earning the 'right' to control most of the gene flow.
- Herd Structure is the key...



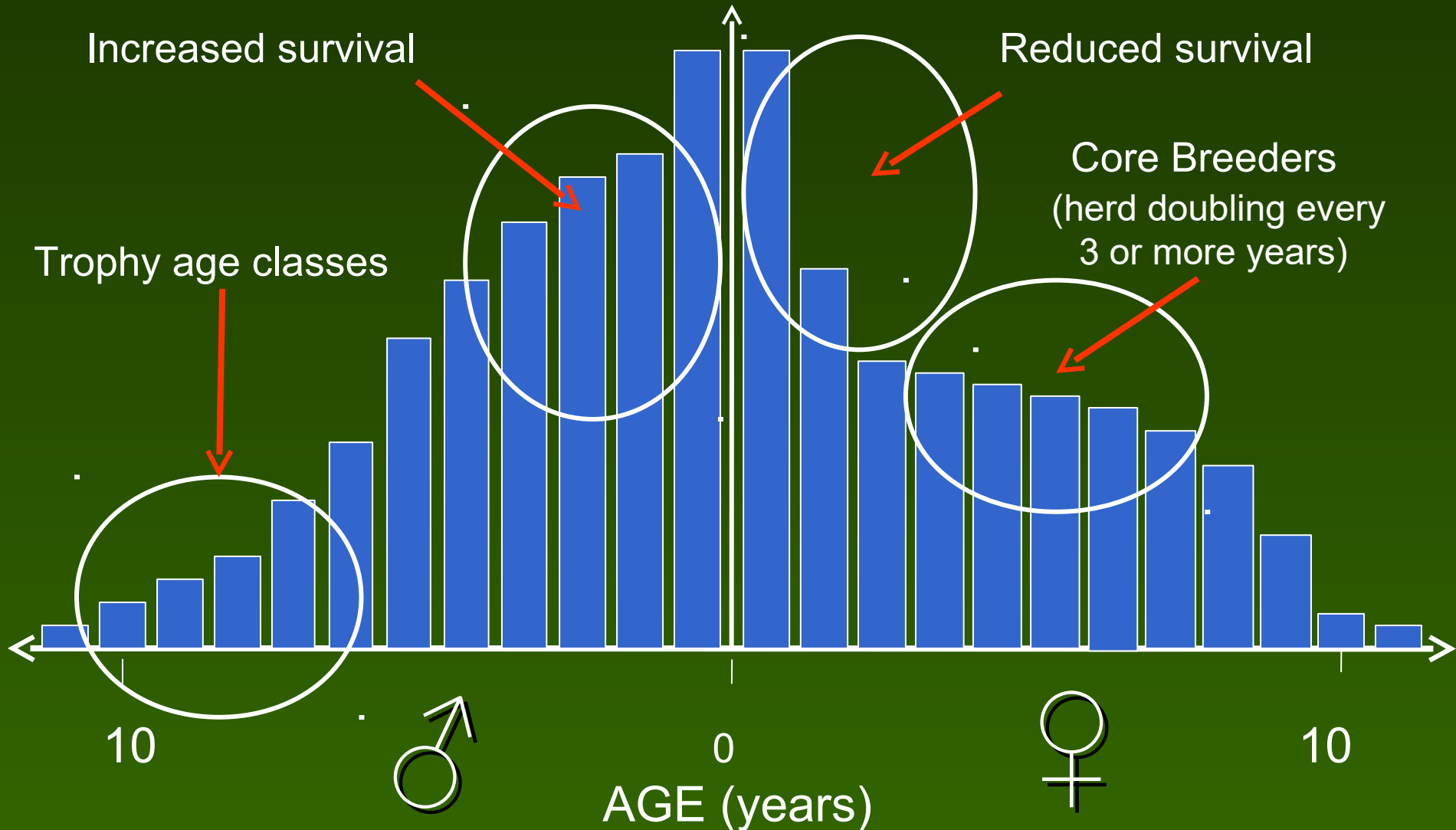
Estimated Wapiti Herd Structure Pre 2012 (1 Bull : 2-3 Cows):

Relative proportion of herd in each age class



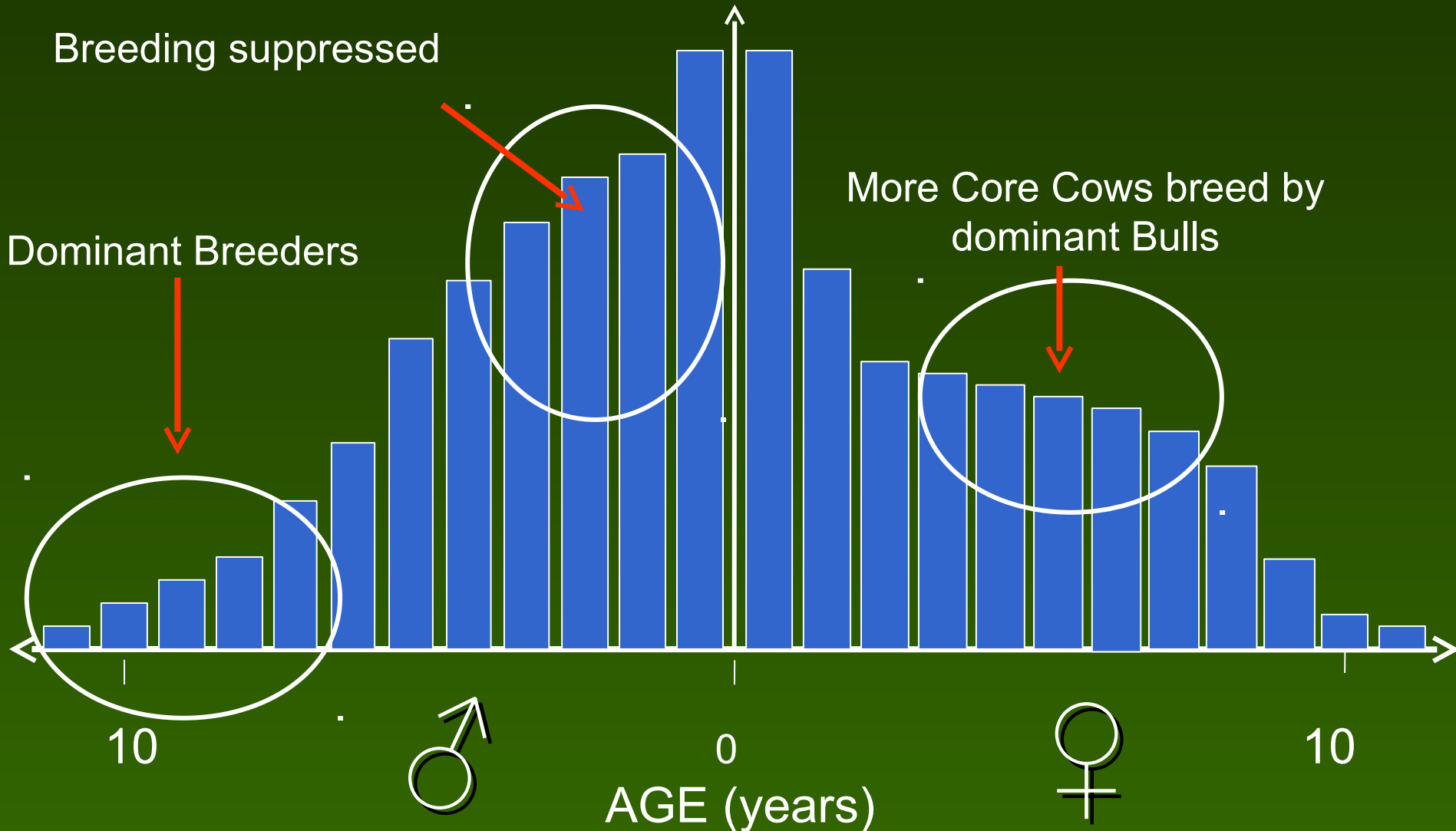
Desired Herd Structure (1.1 Bulls: 1 Cow)

Relative proportion of herd in each age class



Impact on Genetics (1.1 Bulls: 1 Cow)

Relative proportion of herd in each age class



Trophy Management - 3 Key Factors:

What can we control?

✓ Age

- Males > 6 years old (for Wapiti)
- improve survival of young males (manage WARO culling & educate hunters)

✓ Quality Nutrition

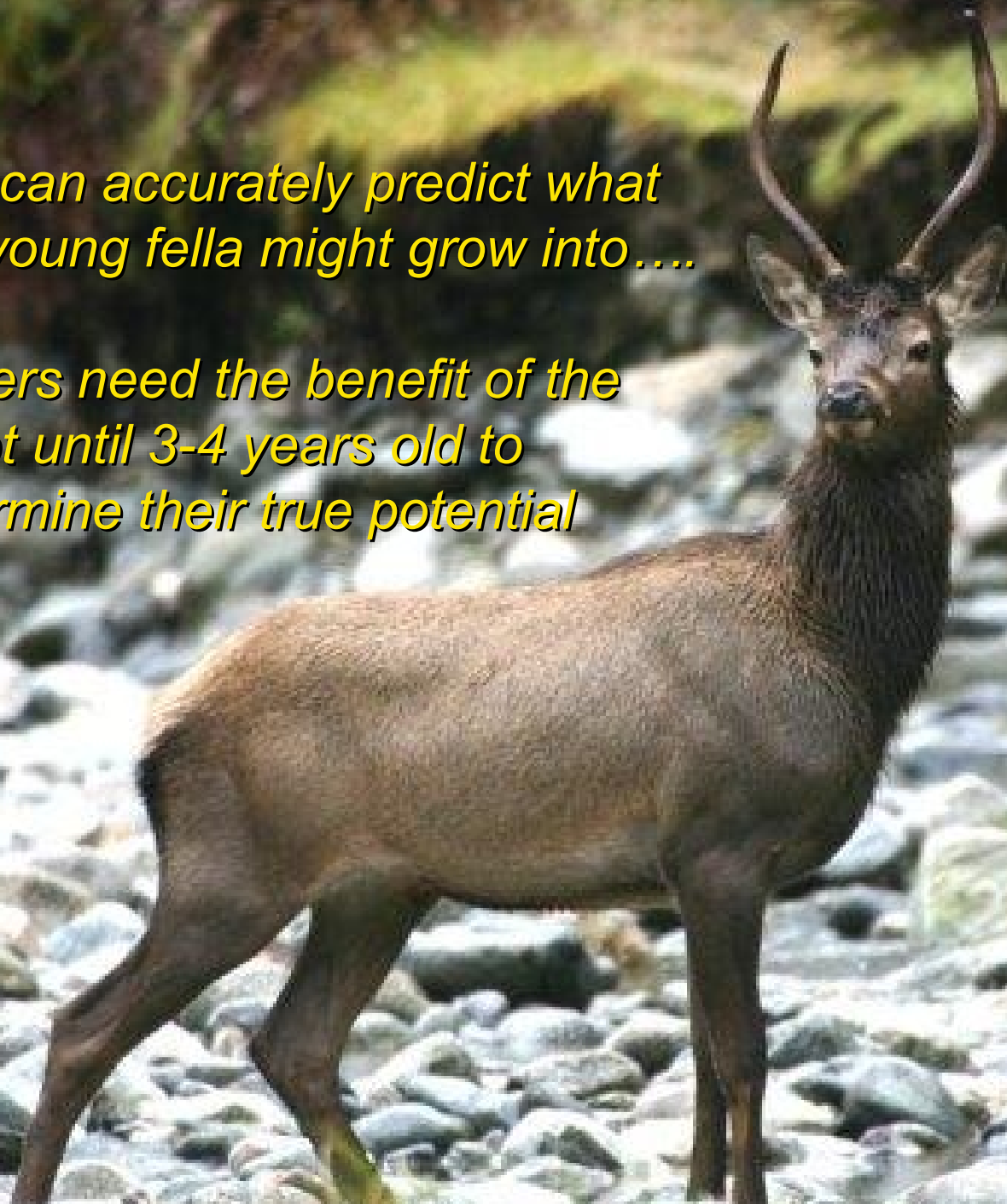
- Low density
- Female population mgmt (WARO) = reduced breeding output
- Improved habitat = quality feed
- Maintain biodiversity values = support from stakeholders (DoC)

✗ Genetics

- Humans can't control genetics in a truly wild herd
- Lots of mature males are required to increase competition for mating
- Better Wapiti-type gene flow through strongest males (best suited to Fiordland conditions) controlling the breeding under "Competitive Contest" mating system

*Few can accurately predict what
this young fella might grow into....*

*Spikers need the benefit of the
doubt until 3-4 years old to
determine their true potential*



Should this bull be culled?



What about this one...?



It's the same young bull photographed minutes later... culling decisions are not easy!









A much higher proportion of mature bulls
is critical!



The largest, strongest, mature bulls control breeding if herd structure is right...



The Current FWF Culling Regime...

A.	<u>Core Area</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
	'Straight' red deer	> 2 yr (i.e. no spikers)	All
	'Uncertain' / Hybrid Wapiti	≥ 4 yr only	All
	Strong Wapiti	> 4 yr if no trophy potential	2–3 and >8
B.	<u>Fringe Areas</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
	Red deer (even where there is uncertainty)	All	All
	Wapiti	> 4 yr if no trophy potential	None

The 2014/15 FWF Cull...

Year 2014-2015, 53 flights			Number of killed animal								
		Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	May	Jun	Grand Total
SL		20	62	40	61	44	20	120	60	14	441
▪ Female		11	36	21	32	34	13	79	48	8	282
Male		9	26	19	29	10	7	41	12	6	159
FH		8	57	75	63	0	33	72	51	33	392
▪ Female		6	28	50	41	0	19	51	40	19	254
Male		2	29	25	22	0	14	21	11	14	138
Total		28	119	115	124	44	53	192	111	47	833

Recovery total for the season was 833 and we also culled another 77 animals so total for the season was -----910

Summary

- A low density, high quality, **Trophy** Wapiti herd is the most sustainable management outcome for Fiordland.
- The iconic conservation values of Fiordland demand it.
- Conservative female harvesting increases breeding rates & habitat impact → increased political opposition to the herd.
- Trophy Wapiti Bulls are a 6-8 year investment.
- Bulls mature very slowly - it is very hard to determine what they will turn into from their appearance as young animals.
- Fiordland **IS NOT** a Farm – you can't control who mates, especially with heavy bull culling.

Summary

- Heavy bull culling will allow most surviving bulls (young, old, good, bad and ugly) to pass on their genes.
- If the herd structure is right, the contribution of young (or poor bulls) to gene flow is minimal – give young bulls the benefit of the doubt!
- Landcare Research Review has modeled this management approach out 50 years - it will work.
- Hunters need to get behind the FWF Committee and support the management programme.
- A Wapiti Herd of Special Interest under the GAC Act (2013) will greatly help the cause