

Meeting Date: July 24, 2024

Agenda Item No. 5E2

Agenda Item: Falconry: Sage-grouse Tag Use for End of 2024 season/Discount Order (**Action**)

Bureau Chief Approval: SR

Prepared by: Jennifer Struthers, Staff Biologist

Background:

Legislation enacted in 2021 added sage-grouse to the list of species requiring game tags under Idaho Code 36-409. This legislation was a revised version of Commission-sponsored legislation, with the goal of better regulation of sage-grouse harvest and distribution of hunting activity to align with sage-grouse populations across Idaho.

At its July 2024 meeting, the Commission will set sage-grouse season dates and tag limits by zone based on spring 2024 biological data, with a requirement that hunters purchase tags specific to the zone(s) they choose to hunt. This includes tags for falconry hunting of sage-grouse from August 15, 2024 – March 15, 2025.

Under Idaho Code Section 36-403(a), all game tags are valid only during the time the corresponding annual license is valid. As such, 2024 sage-grouse tags will expire December 31, 2024. The requirement for game tags for sage-grouse became effective July 1, 2021, applicable to seasons in the second half of calendar year 2021 and subsequent years. The Commission adopted tag discount orders (Order No. 21-67 and 22-64) applicable to the 2021–2022, 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 falconry seasons for sage-grouse, with discounted tags issued to falconers in the first quarter of the calendar year expiring March 15 of the same calendar year.

Falconers and staff identified the enactment of a game tag requirement for sage-grouse as potentially reducing or confusing tag use for falconer participation. Under the prior permit framework, falconers simply purchased an annual sage- and sharp-tailed grouse permit that allowed falconry hunting of sage-grouse from January 1 – March 15 and from August 15 – December 31 in a calendar year. Staff identified a need to address the use of game tags for the remainder of the 2024–2025 falconry season (January 1 – March 15, 2025) such that their use aligns with the Commission’s tag allocation for each of those seasons.

Staff present a discount order for Commission consideration to address sage-grouse tag use for the remainder of the 2024–2025 falconry sage-grouse season. This discount order would allow the Department to issue tags for the winter portion of the 2024–2025 season at no charge to falconers who do not fill their 2024 sage-grouse tag(s) by the end of the calendar year. Newly issued tags would be valid for the 2025 portion of the 2024–2025 falconry season: January 1 – March 15, 2025.

A falconer who has a license and falconry permit valid for hunting in 2025 but who did not purchase a sage-grouse tag for the fall portion of the 2024–2025 falconry season, or who does not surrender an unused sage-grouse tag, is eligible to purchase an undiscounted sage-grouse tag valid through March 15, 2025, subject to the applicable tag limits set for the season and other applicable requirements.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy issues:

Idaho Code 36-403 and 36-409, along with related administrative rules, establish the valid dates and requirements for use of game tags for sage-grouse and other identified species. Idaho Code 36-415 authorizes the Commission to discount tags for specific species, units, areas, zones or gender to encourage licensed sales or to encourage hunting, fishing or trapping.

Public Involvement Process:

The public has had an opportunity to comment on this issue before in prior Commission meetings, during season-setting for upland game and falconry, and during rulemaking.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends the Commission adopt a discount order for sage-grouse game tags effective for the winter portion of the 2024–2025 season to falconers who do not fill their 2024 tag(s) by the end of the calendar year. Discounted tags would be valid for the 2025 portion of the 2024–2025 falconry season: January 1 – March 15, 2025.

Suggested Motion:

The Commission adopt the discount order for sage-grouse tags for falconry as presented.