

Meeting Date: March 16, 2023

Agenda Item No. 10

Agenda Item: Western States Shed Antler Season Review

Bureau Chief Approval: JR

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Background:

The popularity of shed antler gathering has been growing among western states. Some states have implemented seasons to regulate shed antler gathering and the disturbance of wintering ungulates. High economic value of antlers is likely driving the increase in participation, and the increased number of participants, along with financial incentive, brings issues of deer and elk harassment on winter range, habitat damage, and trespass complaints.

Intuitively, additional disturbance, particularly when deer and elk are heavily concentrated in years with deeper snow pack, results in greater energy expenditures of these animals during their greatest period of stress. In 1994 Department regulations restricted the pick-up of shed antlers of deer, elk, and moose in Units 60, 60A, 66, 67, and 69 to May 1 through December 31. All Units in the Southeast region were added to this regulation in 1998. This rule was discontinued after 2002.

In response to concerns about disturbance to deer and elk potentially caused by shed-antler hunters and other recreationists during the severe winter of 2017 and 2023, the Department closed several WMAs in eastern Idaho to all public access. Under special circumstances, such as after wildfire on winter range habitat, the federal government has used similar closures to reduce disturbance on wintering wildlife.

An increasing number of states in the west have instituted seasons to regulate shed antler gathering, including Colorado, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming. When states implement season closures on antler pickup, antler gatherers from those state move to adjacent states where there are no closures, compounding issues in those states.

Staff will present a review of the range of statutes and rules governing shed antler hunting in other western states.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

Idaho Code 36-103 declares all wildlife, including all wild animals, wild birds, and fish, within the state of Idaho, is property of the state of Idaho. However, the current statute does not provide the Commission the authority to regulate the gathering of naturally shed antlers.

IDAPA 13.01.10.300 allows the possession and sale of deer and elk antlers from animals legally killed, salvaged from road-killed animals, or animals found dead of natural causes.

Idaho Code 36-106 establishes authority of the Director to close seasons or public access to wildlife management areas in the event of an emergency.

Public Involvement Process:

The Commission and Department have received comments from the public regarding their concerns about the issues associated with shed antler hunting. The Commission has directed the Department to pursue legislation intended to provide the Commission authority to establish shed antler pickup seasons via their proclamation authority. Public

input opportunities would be provided through the legislative process and future rulemaking or season-setting processes.

Justification:

This agenda item is for Commission information and discussion.

Staff Recommendation:

N/A

Action Requested:

N/A