

Meeting Date: November 16, 2023

Agenda Item No. 5H

Agenda Item: Bighorn Sheep Tag Raincheck Requests (**Action**)

Bureau Chief Approval: SR

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Background:

The Department received two requests from resident hunters for rainchecks on bighorn sheep tags because of medical conditions requiring surgery that precluded them from hunting during the 2023 season. Oddly, both hunters who are requesting rainchecks drew tags in the same hunt—Controlled Hunt No. 7003 (Unit 42, August 30 – Oct 8, 2023). Bighorn sheep tags are highly prized and drawing odds are very low. In 2023, 230 hunters applied for the 6 tags available in Controlled Hunt 7003, calculating to drawing odds of only 2.6%. Given the unlikely probability of ever drawing these tags again in their lifetimes, both hunters filed requests for rainchecks and surrendered their tags prior to the opening of the hunt.

As a result of these 2 hunters not participating this year, there were only 4 hunters in the hunt area this fall. At their January 2023 meeting, the Commission set seasons and tag numbers for bighorn sheep for both the 2023 and 2024 seasons. There are 6 tags approved for the 2024 season.

Options for Commission response options to these raincheck requests include:

1. Deny the requests (with or without waiver of waiting period for future application).
 - By rule (IDAPA 13.01.08.257.01), the wait-out period for applicants drawn for bighorn sheep controlled hunts is two years. The Commission may choose to waive the wait-out period for these individuals based on these circumstances.
2. Grant both raincheck requests and issue tags for the same hunt for the 2024 hunting season without modifying the 6 tags approved for 2024 for Controlled Hunt 7003.
 - Outcome - there would be 8 hunters in the hunt area in 2024 instead of 6. Hunter crowding and increased competition for trophy rams is expected to be significant and a decreased hunt quality experience is anticipated for participants.
3. Grant both raincheck requests and issue tags for the same hunt for the 2024 hunting season but reduce the 6 tags approved for 2024 to 4 tags.
 - Outcome – there would be 6 hunters in the hunt area in 2024 as originally approved, however there would be a net loss of opportunity for 2 new hunters.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

Pursuant to Idaho Code Section 36-408, the Commission has authority to prescribe the number and kind of wildlife that may be taken under authority of the several types of tags and permits provided for in Title 36, and the manner in which those tags and permits must be used and validated. Consideration of requests for refunds, rain checks, and other customer service accommodations regarding license, tags and permits, is within the Commission's statutory discretionary authority. The Commission has not adopted rules related to issuance of refunds for resident licenses or tags in general.

IDAPA 13.01.08.257 defines eligibility for applying for controlled hunts and states that any person whose name was drawn on a controlled hunt for any bighorn sheep is not eligible to apply for any bighorn tag for two (2) years.

Justification:

Bighorn sheep tags are some of the most sought-after hunting opportunities the Department offers. Consequently, drawing odds are low, and rain check requests affect availability of future-year opportunities to other hunters. The Commission has authority to consider requests for bighorn sheep tag rainchecks.

Action Requested:

That the Commission consider and take action on the 2 hunter requests for rainchecks for bighorn sheep controlled hunt 7003.

Possible Sample Motions:

- *That the Commission honor both requests for rainchecks for bighorn sheep Controlled Hunt 7003 for the 2024 season and reduce the number of tags in the 2024 drawing from 6 tags to 4 tags.*
- *That the Commission honor both requests for rainchecks for bighorn sheep Controlled Hunt 7003 for the 2024 season and maintain the number of tags in the 2024 drawing at 6 tags as previously approved by the Commission in January 2023.*
- *That the Commission deny both raincheck requests.*
- *That the Commission deny both raincheck requests but waive the 2-year wait-out requirement so that the hunters could apply again during the 2024 drawing.*