

Meeting Date: January 17, 2018

Agenda Item No. 12

Agenda Item: Management Plans Updates

Bureau Chief Approval: _____

Prepared by: Hollie Miyasaki and Jon Rachael

Background:

Department staff are currently working on revisions of multiple big game species management plans, including Mountain Goats and Moose. The Department is also currently checking in with deer hunters to determine if their preferences have changed related to mule deer and white-tailed deer management.

Mountain Goat Management Plan

A team of biologists from around the state was assembled and initiated work to revise our mountain goat management plan in August 2016. The team has compiled all available regional mountain goat observation and survey data, has evaluated predictive habitat mapping efforts, and has completed drafts of portions of the document. Previous research has documented that mountain goats may be especially sensitive to even relatively light harvest; consequently, harvest recommendations have been deliberately conservative. The planning team is currently working with research program staff to develop a model that would provide guidelines to establish criteria for setting harvest numbers in different hunt areas based on population size, composition, and other factors. The planning team will also assess potential improvements to population monitoring. Staff anticipate having a completed draft to the Commission for review prior to the November 2018 Commission meeting.

Moose Management Plan

Staff have initiated the revision of our moose management plan by selecting biologists from around the state to work on the plan. A first formal team meeting has been scheduled following completion of winter big game surveys and will be held in conjunction with the Idaho Chapter of The Wildlife Society annual meeting in Idaho Falls in early March. In the meantime, team members are amassing published literature and moose management plans from other states and provinces to review prior to the first meeting. A schedule for completion will be developed based on discussions at the first meeting.

Mule Deer

The Department's current mule deer management plan was implemented in 2008 and was intended to guide mule deer management decisions through at least 2017. The mule deer management plan was the result of an extensive public input process in which deer hunters were surveyed to identify their preferences and highest priorities. In response, the Department continued to focus on general season over-the-counter hunting opportunities to ensure that sportsmen would retain the opportunity to hunt with family and friends every year. Additionally, in response to hunter desire for more "high quality" hunting opportunities, the Department added additional hunts around the state that are managed to provide better opportunities to harvest trophy bucks in areas with lower hunter densities, a high percentage for 4 pt. bucks in the harvest and higher harvest success rates.

The Department initiated work in July 2017 to determine if preferences of mule deer hunters have changed over the last decade since the last major survey was conducted. We mailed questionnaires to nearly 5,000 mule deer hunters selected at random from deer hunters who purchased a deer tag in 2016 and completed a hunter report at the end

of their season that indicated they hunted for mule deer. Additionally, the same survey was emailed to 24,200 hunters for whom we had email addresses on file and who were not already included in the random mail survey. The same survey was also posted on our website Aug 27 – Sep 18 for anyone else who was interested in participating. We received 2,316 mail surveys, 4,400 email-prompted surveys, and 380 surveys from individuals who completed the questionnaire from the link available to anyone on our website.

Survey results are currently being analyzed. Preliminary results from a couple key items will be presented at the Commission meeting. We will have a completed analysis to share at the Commission's March meeting.

White-tailed Deer

The Department's current white-tailed deer management plan was implemented in 2005. Like the mule deer plan, the white-tailed deer management plan was shaped around the preferences expressed by hunters during an extensive public input effort, and it is time to check back in with hunters to see if their preferences have changed through time. Staff have been working to finalize a revised whitetail hunter survey that will allow us to compare responses to those of hunters who contributed to the last planning survey. The hunter samples have been drawn and the survey questionnaire is nearly completed. We anticipate sending surveys out in late January-early February.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

Species management plans establish management goals largely based on a balance of public desires for hunting opportunity and biological realities. Species management plans establish population objectives and measureable performance targets and provide guidance for how harvest opportunities are offered.

Public Involvement Process:

Public input forms the core of species management plan development. Input is received from sportsmen year-round and through targeted surveys. The public will also have the opportunity to provide input on the drafts of each management plan prior to completion of final plans.

Justification:

This agenda item is to update the Commission on plans and progress to review and revise species management plans for mountain goats, moose, mule deer, and white-tailed deer. This update will aid Commissioners as they respond to requests, recommendations, or other input from the public.

Staff Recommendation:

This agenda item is for Commission information only. No action is requested at this time.