



IDAHO FISH AND GAME GOLDSHEET

July 2026 Commission Meeting

Agenda Item: 2026 – 2027 Sage-Grouse Season Setting

(Action)

Presented by: Jennifer Struthers

Position/Title: Wildlife Staff Biologist

Agenda Item No.: 5.H.

Supervisor Approval: SR

Background:

Greater Sage-Grouse were a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act from 2010 until 2015, when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined listing sage-grouse as a threatened or endangered species was not warranted. Despite significant investments in habitat restoration and management, the overall sage-grouse population trend continues to decline in Idaho and range-wide. The primary threats to sage-grouse are related to habitat loss, alteration, and degradation (e.g., wildfire, invasive annual grasses, infrastructure development, drought, etc.).

The Department implemented the sage-grouse tag and zone system in 2021. The tag system is designed to limit harvest to no more than 10% of the estimated fall population in each of 12 reporting zones. The ability to manage harvest opportunity by zone and fall population index reduces the potential for harvest to negatively impact populations. The tag and zone structure also allows the Department to provide closely regulated harvest opportunity in areas where a general season could not previously be offered because hunter participation could not be regulated.

The Commission approved 5,030 sage-grouse tags among 12 reporting zones for the 2025–2026 hunting season (a decrease of 61 tags compared to 2024). An estimated 2,112 hunters harvested approximately 1,603 sage-grouse, which was 4% of the 2025 fall population index for the 12 reporting zones.

Statewide, total counts of male sage-grouse on leks for 2026 were down 22% from 2025. The Department used the 2026 lek counts and sage-grouse demographic data (e.g., sex and age ratios) to generate a fall population index for each reporting zone and then calculated proposed tag numbers for 2026–2027 seasons based on that index.

The Commission sets sage-grouse hunting seasons and bag and possession limits annually. The purpose of this agenda item is to set 2026–2027 sage-grouse hunting seasons.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

Idaho Statute 36-104 authorizes the Commission to establish by proclamation seasons and bag limits for the taking of wildlife consistent with state policy.



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Public Involvement Process:

The 2026–2027 sage-grouse season proposals will be available for public comment on the Department website from June 12–July 5, 2026. Staff will provide a summary of public input to the Commission at the meeting. No regional open houses are planned.

Justification:

Commission action is required to establish seasons and bag and possession limits for harvest of sage-grouse, including bag and possession limits for take by falconry, for 2026–2027 seasons.

Staff Recommendations:

Staff recommend the Commission set the 2026–2027 sage-grouse hunting seasons and bag and possession limits, including those specific to take by falconry, according to the final recommendations that will be presented at the Commission meeting.

Suggested Motion:

I move the Commission adopt staff recommendations for 2026–2027 sage-grouse hunting seasons and bag and possession limits, including those specific to sage-grouse take by falconry.