

Meeting Date: January 17, 2018

Agenda Item No. 5B

Agenda Item: Sawtooth Elk Tag sales guidance for scoping (**Action**)

Bureau Chief Approval: _____

Prepared by: Jon Rachael, State Game Manager

Background:

Due to very high demand and the resulting sales disruptions in 2015 and 2016, for the resident allocation of Sawtooth Zone capped elk tags, the Commission approved an alternative, first-come-first-serve approach to sell these tags in 2017. In 2016, to consider alternative sales options, the Commission deferred the traditional December 1 sale date of the 2017 Sawtooth nonresident tags.

During the February 2016 season-setting public scoping process, staff mailed surveys to randomly selected Sawtooth A and B tag holders asking hunters which of the following options they preferred:

- A. Maintaining the current A and B tag hunt structure with the existing quotas but change the way tags would be distributed;
- B. Converting the general A and B tag seasons to controlled hunts;
- C. Maintain the existing A and B tag quotas and general season hunt formats but reduce the season lengths by 1 week;
- D. No change to A and B tag general season hunt format or season length and no change to the method of distributing tags (first-come, first-served with simultaneous in-person and online sales).

Survey results indicated hunters preferred (49% support) Option A (keeping the existing A and B tag general season hunt structure and quotas but changing the way tags are distributed to residents) compared to Option B (23%), Option C (18%) and Option D (11%).

The Department received the following responses from survey recipients when they were asked to choose their preferred option for distributing tags if the general season A and B tag format remained unchanged: 68% preferred a different approach (48% preferred sales be restricted to in-person sales only, 20% preferred splitting a portion of the tag sales to be available by in-person sale only and the remainder to online sale only), and 32% of respondents preferred no change from the previous approach (first-come-first-served with simultaneous in-person and online sales).

In response to this public input, the Department recommended that the Commission maintain the existing general season A and B tag hunt structure but alter the way tags are sold. At their March 2017 meeting, the Commission adopted these recommendations for the 2017 and 2018 big game seasons with the modified sale format for issuing these over-the-counter tags.

Sale of 2017 resident and nonresident capped elk zone tags were offered for sale as follows:

Nonresident Sawtooth tags went on sale on May 12 at 10 am Mountain Time. The Sawtooth Zone resident elk tags went on sale on July 12 with one-half of the allocation available at vendors only starting at 10 am MT, and the remaining half sold **via internet only** at 1 pm MT.

All other resident capped elk zone tags went on sale July 10 at 10 am MT. The Commission can reconsider the sales options for these tags for 2018.

Under this sales regime, the nonresident Sawtooth Zone tag allocation sold out in roughly 8 minutes. The total Sawtooth Zone nonresident tag allocation is 43A tags and 167B tags.

The *resident* Sawtooth Zone tag allocation is 496A tags, and 1,290B tags; the 10 AM vendor only sale sold out in roughly 12 minutes, and the 1 pm **internet only** sold out in about 15 minutes.

The sales approach in 2017 was more efficient and resulted in fewer complaints. However, demand for these limited tags remained extremely high in proportion to availability, and many customers were disappointed that they did not get tags. To evaluate other sales options, the Commission instructed the Department not to release nonresident Sawtooth Elk Zone tags for sale when other nonresident tags go on sale.

Elk Zone A and B tag quotas were introduced in the 1998 Elk plan as an alternative to Controlled Hunts to limit hunter numbers in zones where hunting pressure compromised the Department's ability to achieve Commission-adopted population metrics. Quotas for A and B tags were divided into subsets in each zone among non-outfitted residents, non-outfitted nonresidents, and outfitted residents and nonresidents in proportion based on historic participation in the zone.

Controlled hunts, in comparison to A and B tag quotas in capped Elk zones, have additional eligibility restrictions. Any person drawing a controlled antlered-only elk hunt may NOT apply for any other controlled antlered-only elk hunt for one (1) year, except that a person may apply for an antlered-only elk tag in the second application period or a leftover antlered-only elk tag the following year. This 1-year waiting period does NOT apply to unlimited controlled hunts. Additionally, any person applying for a bighorn sheep, mountain goat, or moose controlled hunt may NOT apply for any other controlled hunt in the same year. Further, nonresidents are limited to not more than 10% of the total number of tags offered for an individual controlled hunt exceeding 10 tags.

Nonresidents (outfitted and non-outfitted combined) comprise 12% of existing Sawtooth Zone A tag quota and 15% of the B tags.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

Idaho Code 36-104 (b) 2 gives the Commission authority to set seasons and determine the manner in which tags are issued. IDAPA 13.01.08 establishes Elk A and B and rules associated with controlled hunt tag eligibility and nonresident limitations. IDAPA 13.01.04.505 establishes rules for allocation of tags for use by outfitted hunters in elk zones in which the number of tags is restricted and in controlled hunts.

Public Involvement Process:

The Sawtooth Elk season and hunt format proposals, and options for tag distribution, were scoped with the public at meetings around the state, through online input opportunities, and through a random mail survey sent to past participants in the hunt during the big game season-setting process February-March 2017. Additionally, distribution of the tags has been on the Commission agenda for the July and November 2017 meetings.

Any proposed future changes to the hunt structure or season dates would be scoped with the public and the public will be informed of any changes to the tag distribution process.

Justification:

Commission action is required to either release Sawtooth Zone A and B tags for sale or to change season dates or the hunt format. Staff requests Commission guidance for scoping proposals with the public.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends proceeding with the sale of resident and nonresident Sawtooth A and B tags on the same dates and in the same format as 2017. Staff requests Commission direction in regards to proceeding with options for converting the Sawtooth Zone to controlled hunts in 2019, including assessment of impacts to resident and nonresident hunters and outfitters. Proposals will be reviewed with the Commission and scoped with the public to develop a final recommendation to be set in March 2019.

Suggested Motion: That the Commission adopt staff recommendations to release the Sawtooth Zone Elk tags to nonresidents and to residents on the same dates and in the same format as last year, and that the Commission direct the Department to develop controlled hunt proposals for the Sawtooth Elk Zone.