

Meeting Date: March 24, 2022

Agenda Item No. 5A

Agenda Item: 2022 Big game deer and elk season changes and mandatory check
(**Action**)

Bureau Chief Approval: JR

Prepared by: Rick Ward, State Wildlife Manager

Background:

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission has unique authority to establish harvest seasons (including season dates, bag limits, size, sex, and harvestable species) via proclamation rather than through IDAPA rulemaking. The Commission considers proposed changes for season setting and publishes proclamations biennially in March of odd-numbered years for big game species.

The Commission set the 2021 and 2022 seasons and tag numbers for big game species at their March 2021 meeting. Although the Department focusses efforts on the season-setting process on a biennial cycle, the Commission has the authority to consider proposals and make adjustments annually if necessary due to fire, severe winter weather, a disease event, or other factors.

Chronic Wasting Disease

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) was detected for the first time in Idaho in two hunter-harvested mule deer bucks in the Slate Creek drainage of Game Management Unit 14 in late 2021. Additional samples collected through hunter harvest detected two CWD-positive white-tailed deer, one buck and one doe, both in Unit 14. In addition, two suspect animals in Unit 14 tested positive for CWD, one whitetail buck and one cow elk. Proposals for potential modifications to the 2022 hunting seasons in Unit 14 are intended to use traditional hunting seasons to manage CWD in deer and elk herds, consistent with IDFG's 2021 Strategy for Chronic Wasting Disease.

The Department and Commission are considering the following proposals for modifications to the 2022 hunting seasons in response to CWD in Unit 14:

- **Increase mule deer buck harvest in Unit 14**
Option 1: Increase antlered mule deer controlled hunt tags from 180 to 400 tags with the hunting season running from Oct. 10 – Nov. 20.

Option 2: Replace existing antlered controlled hunt (180 tags) with a general-season, antlered-only hunt from Oct. 10 – Nov. 20.
- **Add antlerless mule deer hunt in Unit 14**
Add new mule deer extra antlerless hunt with 200 tags from Oct. 10 – Nov. 20.
- **Add White-tailed deer extra tags in Unit 14**
Option 1: In addition to the existing general season, either-sex whitetail hunt, add a new extra antlerless whitetail hunt with 250 tags, and a new whitetail, extra antlered tag with 250 tags. Each hunt would run Oct. 10 – Nov. 20.

Option 2: Extend the existing general, either-sex hunt from Oct. 10 – Dec. 31.
- **Increase elk tags**
Increase elk tags in one Landowner Permission Hunt in Controlled Hunt 14-1 from 50 tags to 80 tags and expand the southern boundary of the hunt unit approximately three miles.

To provide information critical to understanding the prevalence and distribution of CWD, the Department and Commission are also considering implementing a mandatory check requirement for deer and elk harvested in areas under surveillance for CWD.

Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease

During summer 2021, white-tailed deer in the Clearwater Region experienced an outbreak of epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) primarily in Game Management Units 8, 8A, 10A, 11, 11A, 14 and 16. Staff estimate 6,000 – 10,000 white-tailed deer died as a direct result of EHD. The Department is recommending changes to extra antlerless white-tailed deer hunting opportunity to reduce harvest in the affected areas.

The Department and Commission are considering the following proposals for potential modifications to the 2022 hunting seasons in response to EHD in the Clearwater Region:

- **Eliminate extra antlerless deer controlled hunts in the following units:**
 - 8-1X (Youth) (200 tags)
 - 8-2X (350 tags)
 - 8A-1X (350 tags)
 - 10A-1X (300 tags)
 - 11A-1X (300 tags)

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

Idaho Code 36-104 grants authority to the Commission to promulgate rules for the taking of wildlife consistent with state policy. Management plans developed by the Department and adopted by the Commission provide long-term direction for population and harvest management. IDAPA 13.01.08.350.03 provides the Commission authority by proclamation or emergency hunt order to designate seasons and areas in which portions of carcasses must be presented to the Department within a specified time frame.

Public Involvement Process:

Recommendations for the 2021 and 2022 seasons set in March 2021 resulted from year-round public involvement, and population and harvest monitoring. Proposals being considered for regulation modifications for the 2022 seasons were posted on the Department's website in February to inform the public and provide an opportunity to provide input. In addition, Department staff held a virtual live event on March 8, 2022 and an in-person event in Grangeville on March 10. Public input summaries will be provided to the Commission as part of the presentation.

Justification:

Commission action is required to adopt changes to the 2021-2022 hunting seasons that were set by proclamation by the Commission in March 2021 and to implement a mandatory check requirement.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff will evaluate public input and present a summary to the Commission at the meeting along with any recommendations for adjustments to the 2022 hunting seasons and for implementation of a mandatory check requirement.

Action Requested:

Approve adjustments to the 2022 big game hunting seasons and mandatory check requirement.

Suggested Motion: Commission adopt staff recommendations for adjustments to the 2022 big game hunting seasons and mandatory check requirement.