

Meeting Date: November 15, 2022

Agenda Item No. 5C

Agenda Item: Falconry: Sage Grouse Tag Use for End of 2022 and 2023 seasons / Discount Order (**Action**)

Bureau Chief Approval: JR

Prepared by: Jon Rachael, Wildlife Bureau Chief

Background:

Legislation enacted in 2021 added sage grouse to the list of species requiring game tags under Idaho Code 36-409. This legislation was a revised version of Commission-sponsored legislation, with the goal of better regulation of sage-grouse harvest and distribution of hunting activity to align with sage grouse populations across the state.

At its July 2022 meeting, the Commission set sage grouse tag limits by zones based on spring 2022 biological data, with a requirement that hunters purchase tags specific to the zone(s) they choose to hunt. The Commission intends to set tag limits by zone for 2023 hunts after it reviews population data based on spring 2023 biological data.

The Commission previously adopted falconry seasons for 2022-2023 and 2023-2024, which included seasons for falconry hunting of sage grouse from August 15, 2022-March 15- 2023 and August 15, 2023-March 15, 2024.

Under Idaho Code Section 36-403(a), all game tags are valid only during the time that the corresponding annual license for the tag is valid. As such, 2022 sage grouse tags expire on December 31, 2022, and 2023 sage-grouse tags expire December 31, 2023. The requirement for game tags for sage grouse became effective July 1, 2021, applicable to seasons in the second half of calendar year 2021 and subsequent years. The Commission adopted a tag discount order (Order No. 21-67) applicable to 2021-2022 falconry season for sage grouse, with discounted tags issued to falconers in the first quarter of calendar year 2022 expiring on March 15, 2022.

Falconers and staff identified the enactment of a game tag requirement for sage grouse as potentially reducing or confusing tag use for falconer participation. Under the prior permit framework, falconers simply purchased an annual sage/sharp-tailed permit that allowed falconry hunting of sage grouse from January 1 – March 15 and from August 15 – December 31 in a calendar year. Staff have identified a need to address the use of game tags for the remainder of the 2022 – 2023 falconry season (January 1 – March 15, 2023) and the 2023 – 2024 falconry season (January 1 – March 15, 2024) such that their use aligns with the Commission’s tag allocation for each of those seasons.

Staff present a discount order for the Commission’s consideration to address sage grouse tag use for the remainder of the falconry seasons previously set for fall 2022/winter 2023 and fall 2023/winter 2024 for sage grouse. This discount order would allow IDFG to issue tags for the winter portion of the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 seasons at no charge to falconers who had not yet filled their 2022 or 2023 sage-grouse tags, respectively. Newly issued tags would be valid for the 2023 portion of the 2022 – 2023 falconry season: January 1 - March 15, 2023 or for the 2024 portion of the 2023 – 2024 falconry season: January 1– March 15, 2024.

A falconry hunter who has a license and falconry permit valid for hunting in 2023 or 2024 but who did not purchase a sage grouse tag for the fall portion of the applicable 2022-2023 or 2023-2024 falconry season, or who does not surrender an unused sage grouse tag, is eligible to purchase an undiscounted sage grouse tag valid through March 15 of the applicable winter portion of the 2022-2023 or 2023-2024 falconry season, subject to the applicable tag limits set for the season and other applicable requirements.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy issues:

Idaho Code 36-403 and 36-409, along with related administrative rules, establish the valid dates and requirements for use of game tags for sage grouse and other identified species. Idaho Code 36-415 authorizes the Commission to discount tags for specific species, units, areas, zones or gender to encourage licensed sales or to encourage hunting, fishing or trapping.

Public Involvement Process:

The public has had an opportunity to comment on this issue before prior Commission meetings, during season-setting for upland game and falconry, and during rulemaking.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Commission adopt a discount order for sage grouse game tags effective for the winter portion of the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 seasons to falconers who had not yet filled their 2022 or 2023 sage-grouse tags, respectively. The discounted tags would be valid for the 2023 portion of the 2022 – 2023 falconry season: January 1 – March 15, 2023 and for the 2024 portion of the 2023 – 2024 falconry season: January 1– March 15, 2024.

Suggested Motion: The Commission adopt the discount order for sage grouse tags for falconry as presented.