

Meeting Date: January 27, 2022

Agenda Item No. 5E

Agenda Item: 2022 Bighorn Sheep Tag Modification Proposals (**Action**)

Bureau Chief Approval: JR

Prepared by: Hollie Miyasaki, Wildlife Staff Biologist

Background:

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission has authority to establish harvest seasons (including season dates, bag limits, size, gender, and harvestable species) via proclamation, rather than through IDAPA rulemaking. The Commission considers proposed changes for season setting and publishes proclamations biennially for moose, bighorn sheep, and mountain goat in January of odd-numbered years. The Commission set the 2021 and 2022 seasons and tag numbers for moose, bighorn sheep, and mountain goats at their January 2021 meeting.

Although the Department focusses efforts for 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, bad winter weather, disease, new data, or other factors.

With the exception of one special bighorn sheep tag issued by auction and one special bighorn sheep tag issued through lottery drawing, all tags for moose, bighorn sheep, and mountain goats are issued through a controlled hunt drawing conducted following the April 1 – April 30 application period.

The Department is proposing the following modifications to tag numbers for 2 bighorn sheep hunts for the 2022 hunting season:

- **Close bighorn sheep season in Controlled Hunt No. 7006 (Controlled Hunt Area 46-1, 1 tag).**

Disease was first detected in the Bruneau-Jarbidge California bighorn sheep herd in 2016. The population has declined since that time. IDFG counted 26 bighorn sheep, including 3 Class I-II rams, during the most recent aerial survey conducted in June 2021. This is a considerable decrease from the 67 bighorn sheep (12 rams including 8 class III-IV) counted during the previous survey in July 2018. Currently the Bruneau-Jarbidge population does not meet the minimum recommended number of individuals or Class III-IV rams needed to support a hunt.

IDFG staff is recommending eliminating Controlled Hunt No. 7006 (1 tag).

- **Reduce bighorn sheep tags in Controlled Hunt No. 7002 (Controlled Hunt Area 41-1) from 2 tags to 1 tag.**

IDFG counted 139 bighorn sheep in the Jacks Creek Population during the June 2021 survey. The total count included 33 rams (14 Class III-IV). This population is divided into 2 hunt areas (41-1 and 41-2). During the June 2021 survey, 62 bighorn sheep were observed in Hunt Area 41-1, including 10 rams (1 Class III-IV). In Hunt Area 41-2, 11 rams were observed in a group that historically moved between hunt areas but has seemed to favor Hunt Area 41-2 in recent years. Current and draft Bighorn Sheep Management Plan guidance is to restrict harvest to no more than 20% of Class III-IV rams. Considering the survey is a minimum count and that some of the Class I-II rams will be maturing into the Class III-IV age group, staff recommends reducing the

total number of ram tags by 1 for the 2022 season in Hunt Area 41-1 because there are fewer rams in that hunt area.

IDFG staff is recommending reducing tag number in Controlled Hunt No. 7002 (Hunt Area 41-1) from 2 tags to 1 tag.

Staff will present additional information to the Commission at the meeting.

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. Species management plans developed by the Department and adopted by the Commission provide long-term direction for population and harvest management.

Public Involvement Process:

Recommendations for the 2021 and 2022 seasons that were set in January 2021 resulted from year-round public involvement, and population and harvest monitoring. Proposals being considered for tag number modifications during the 2022 season were posted via gold sheet for the Commission meeting on the Department's website in January to inform the public and provide an opportunity to provide input.

Justification:

Commission action is required to adopt changes to the 2021-2022 hunting seasons that were set by proclamation by the Commission in January 2021.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends closing the bighorn sheep season in Controlled Hunt No. 7006 (Controlled Hunt Area 46-1, 1 tag) and reducing bighorn sheep tags in Controlled Hunt No. 7002 (Controlled Hunt Area 41-1) from 2 tags to 1 tag.

Action Requested:

Approve adjustments to tag numbers in 2 bighorn sheep hunts for the 2022 hunting season.

Suggested Motion: I motion that the Commission adopt staff recommendations for adjustments to the 2022 bighorn sheep hunting seasons.