

**Meeting Date: July 23, 2020**

**Agenda Item No. 11**

**Agenda Item: Update on Hunter congestion/  
Hunter survey**

**Bureau Chief Approval: TB**

**Prepared by:** Dr. Kenneth E. Wallen, University of Idaho

**Background:**

To continue the process of addressing hunter congestion, the Department began a statewide, regionally stratified elk, mule deer, and white-tailed deer hunter survey in March 2020 with the objective of assessing resident hunters' hunting experiences and perceptions of crowding, both overall and specific to 2019, to further address congestion issues.

Based on stakeholder assessments in 2007, 2014, and 2017-18, Idaho elk, mule deer, and white-tailed deer hunters have concerns about crowding. The extent to which these concerns are subjective and value-laden versus objective and density-dependent is unknown. This project will assess perceptions of crowding among 2019 Idaho resident elk, regular deer, and white-tailed deer tag purchasers. To provide data on elk, mule deer, and white-tailed deer hunters, three separate species-specific questionnaires were developed to investigate perceptions of crowding, quality, and satisfaction. The three questionnaires will be administered and distributed on a regional basis to provide both statewide and region-specific information. That is, each region will be provided standalone information on their elk, mule deer, and white-tailed hunters.

On March 18 questionnaires were emailed to 13,386 individuals who purchased regular deer tags in 2019 and to 7,376 individuals who purchased white-tailed deer tags in 2019. On March 20, questionnaires were emailed to 16,400 individuals who purchased elk tags for the 2019 season. Responses were recorded on all three surveys through April 10. Survey response rates exceeded expectations and ranged 30% - 34%. Over 10,500 responses were received.

- Based on a standardized measure of crowding, general season elk, regular deer, and white-tailed deer tag holders perceived moderate crowding during the 2019 season.
- Perception of crowding among general elk and deer tag holders was comparable, whereas white-tailed deer tag holders perceived less crowding.
- Approximately 20% of general elk hunters, 23% of general deer hunters, and 37% of white-tailed deer hunters did not perceive crowding in 2019.
- Other measures of hunting experience expectations, hunting locale, and hunting practices are clear influences of Idaho hunters' perception of crowding.

Additional results will be presented at the meeting.

Following additional analyses, a full report of the 2019-20 hunter crowding survey will be available in fall 2020. This winter a second phase survey will be implemented to understand what elements of elk and deer season structure hunters are willing to trade (accept an alternative) in exchange for improved management policies that reduce hunter congestion. A third phase of the project will begin in winter 2021, replicating the current survey to understand how IDFG management and rule changes influenced perceptions of crowding and hunter expectations.

**Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:**

The Commission has the authority under Idaho Code and Administrative Rule to set harvest seasons, and regulate hunter numbers and methods of take. Species management plans adopted by

the Commission set objectives and provide direction for management. Hunter opinion surveys during the recent mule deer and white-tailed deer management planning cycles, and past assessments of elk hunter experiences, have raised hunter congestion as a primary issue affecting hunter satisfaction.

**Public Involvement Process:**

IDFG staff and the Commission have engaged sportsmen during annual season-setting processes, public meetings, and during development of deer and elk management plans. IDFG staff and the University of Idaho Human Dimensions staff will engage sportsmen to assess their perspectives on crowding and potential solutions in a phased approach.

- Pre-survey interviews with target population
- Targeted pre-test of draft survey
- Statewide pilot study of finalized elk, mule deer, and white-tailed deer hunter surveys
- Regionally stratified elk, mule deer, and white-tailed deer hunter surveys

**Justification:**

This agenda item is for Commission information on the status of the hunter congestion project being conducted in collaboration with the University of Idaho. Information from this agenda item will aid Commissioners as they respond to requests, recommendations, or other input from the public related to hunter congestion, and will guide decision making in future season-setting processes.

**Staff Recommendation:**

N/A. This agenda item is for Commission information.