

**Meeting Date:** May 14, 2020

**Agenda Item No. 13**

**Agenda Item:** Shed Antler pick up briefing

**Bureau Chief Approval:** TB

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**Background:**

Collection of shed deer and elk antlers is a popular winter/spring recreational activity. Sale of shed antlers can generate a significant amount of income, and provides additional incentive for collectors. The apparent increase in shed antler collecting activity in recent years has renewed public, Department staff, and Commissioner concern about the effects of the activity, including disturbance to wintering big game.

Intuitively, additional disturbance, particularly when deer and elk are heavily concentrated in years with deeper snow pack, results in greater energy expenditures of these animals during their greatest period of stress. However, it is difficult to establish a direct correlation between specific disturbance caused by antler collectors and the over-winter survival of deer and elk, and even more difficult to determine the disturbance caused specifically by antler collectors in relation to the cumulative disturbance of all recreational activity during the time period (skiers, snowshoers, snowmobilers, upland game hunters, joggers, dog-walkers, etc.)

From 1994 through January 2003, the Commission prohibited the pick-up of shed antlers of deer, elk, and moose in designated units in the Southeast Region from Jan. 1 to Apr. 30. The Commission rescinded the restriction in January 2003 at Wildlife Bureau recommendation. The Commission determined the restriction was an unnecessary burden for private lands and did not appear to significantly affect the total number of recreational users present on big game winter range on public lands. The Department opted to address recreational disturbance to winter range through USFS and BLM planning processes and land management agency consideration of appropriate seasonal access restrictions for recreational activities more generally.

During the severe winter of 2017, the Department closed several WMAs in eastern Idaho to all public access in response to concerns about disturbance to deer and elk potentially caused by shed-antler collections and other recreationists.

Idaho Code 36-501(b) authorizes possession and sale of naturally shed antlers for most big game species. There is not specific statutory authorization for the Commission to regulate collection/possession of naturally shed antlers.

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

Idaho Code 36-501(b) includes the following language:

It shall be lawful to possess or sell naturally shed antlers or horns of deer, elk, moose, antelope and mountain goat, and antlers or horns of deer, elk, moose, antelope and mountain goat which have died of natural causes.

Consistent with 36-501(b), IDAPA 13.01.10.300 allows the possession and sale of naturally shed deer and elk antlers, as well as antlers from deer and elk that were legally killed, salvaged from road-killed animals, or found dead of natural causes.

Some concerns about antler collection relate to reported pursuit of vulnerable big game by shed collectors using dogs or motorized vehicles. Idaho Code 36-1101 prohibits harassment of wildlife with motorized vehicles and dogs; however, these violations have been difficult to enforce.

**Public Involvement Process:**

The Department has not conducted formal public involvement for this agenda item prior to the meeting. Numerous individuals have expressed concerns to Department personnel, Commissioners, and Legislators about the impacts of shed antler collector activities on wintering big game.

**Justification:**

Commissioners have requested a briefing and an opportunity to discuss concerns about the effects of shed antler collection.

**Staff Recommendation:**

This briefing is for information only and staff has no recommendation. Should Commission regulation of shed collection be an appropriate policy direction, legislation granting the Commission discretionary authority to adopt rules to regulate shed collection would likely be needed, given the current authority provided for collection and sale in Idaho Code 36-501.