

Meeting Date: May 10, 2018

Agenda Item No. 10

Agenda Item: Sawtooth Elk Zone Hunting Seasons
Update for 2019

Bureau Chief Approval: _____

Prepared by: Jon Rachael, State Wildlife Manager

Background:

Elk populations within the Sawtooth Zone (Units 33, 34, 35, and 36) have been improving, but remain below elk management plan objectives. The cap on A and B tags remains in place to limit hunter participation and harvest. This hunt has become very popular as elk numbers, and harvest, have increased. Tags are sold on a first-come, first-served basis with half being sold at Fish and Game offices and license vendors and the other half sold online. Tags sell out very quickly leaving many questioning the fairness of the process.

At the January 2018 Commission meeting, the Commission directed the Department to implement controlled hunts for the Sawtooth Elk Zone beginning in 2019, but in March asked Department staff to further develop options for their consideration as alternatives to converting to controlled hunts.

Options for consideration:

1. Convert current A and B tags to controlled hunts

The simplest implementation of a conversion to controlled hunts would be to convert the current A-tag to an Archery-only controlled hunt in a Controlled Hunt Area that includes all 4 of the Sawtooth Zone game management units (33, 34, 35, 36), and to convert the B-tag to an Any-weapon hunt for antlered elk. Season dates would match the current dates and tag numbers would be set to match the existing A and B tag caps. Nonresident tag numbers would decrease slightly, as controlled hunts would limit nonresidents to not more than 10% of the total number of tags in the hunt. Outfitter allocated tags would be set *in addition* to the number of tags provided in the hunt to non-outfitted hunters. Landowner Appreciation Program tags would be implemented. Landownership records indicate that up to 31 landowners have sufficient acreage in the zone to qualify for LAP tags. Game Management Units could also be managed in separate Controlled Hunt Areas, seasons, and tag numbers if needed (e.g., Unit 36 could be managed separately).

Pros:

- Ability to tailor hunts to address population objectives.
- Addresses supply and demand/fairness issue for tag issuance.
- Potentially provides small benefit to outfitters with reallocation.

Cons:

- Inconsistent with Elk Plan direction to maintain a general elk hunt in the zone.
- Concern by some that other capped zones would be converted to controlled hunts.
- Inconsistent with managing controlled hunts as quality hunts and zone objective of providing general opportunity.
- Applicants for antlered-only hunts could not apply for controlled hunts for moose, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, or other antlered-only elk hunts in the same year.
- Successful applicants for an antlered-only controlled hunt in the Sawtooth zone could not apply for another limited antlered-only controlled hunt for elk the next year.

Sawtooth Zone (Units 33, 34, 35, 36)				
	August/September	October	November	December
A Tag	No A Tags in this Zone – See Controlled Hunts			
B Tag	No B Tags in this Zone – See Controlled Hunts			

2019 Controlled Elk Hunts Antlered Elk				
Hunt No.	Controlled Hunt Areas	Tags	Season Dates	Notes
New Hunt	33-1 ^a	1526	Oct 15 - Nov 8	

2019 Controlled Hunts Archery Only Elk - Archery Permit Required				
Hunt No.	Controlled Hunt Areas	Tags	Season Dates	Notes
New Hunt	33-1 ^a	566	Aug 30 - Sep 30	<i>Either Sex</i>

^a Hunt Area 33-1: All of Units 33, 34, 35 and 36.

2. Modify hunts within the Sawtooth Zone

Remove A-Tag cap zone-wide, maintain general season hunt with existing dates. Maintain B-tag general season hunt structure for Unit 36 only with cap (1,005 tags proposed). Convert the B-tag antlered hunt in Units 33, 34, and 35 to controlled hunts.

Pros:

- Consistent with Elk Plan direction to maintain a general elk hunt opportunity (A tag remains for entire zone and B tag remains in Unit 36).
- Ability to tailor hunts to address population objectives (adjust quota and CH tag numbers).
- Addresses supply and demand/fairness issue associated with tag issuance from rapid sell out of over-the-counter tags in Units 33, 34 and 35 any-weapon hunts.
- Increase in outfitter opportunity on the A Tag.
- Does not require rule making.

Cons:

- Replaces general capped hunts with any weapon controlled hunts in Units 33, 34 and 35.
- Same Cons as listed in CH proposal #1 above.

Sawtooth Zone (Units 33, 34, 35, 36)				
	August/September	October	November	December
A Tag	Archery only — any elk Aug 30 - Sep 30			
B Tag		Any weapon — antlered only Unit 36 only Oct 15 - Nov 8		
	Note: 1,526 TBD B Tag Quota Available First-Come, First-Served. <i>Resident capped tag sales will be sold separately at vendors and online.</i> <i>For details see “What’s New” on page 6.</i>		2019 Capped tags go on sale for Residents 7/12/2019 and Nonresidents 5/10/2019.	

2019 Controlled Elk Hunts Antlered Elk				
Hunt No.	Controlled Hunt Areas	Tags	Season Dates	Notes
New Hunt	33-2 ^a	TBD	Oct 15 - Nov 8	

^a Hunt Area 33-2 – All of Units 33, 34 and 35.

3. Modify season structure to reduce demand for A/B tags

A-Tag: Remove cap zone-wide. Shorten A-tag archery only season by 7 days (Aug 30 – Sep 23) and add restriction of ANTLERED ONLY in Units 33, 34, & 35 ONLY (Aug 30 – Sep 30 and either-sex could remain in Unit 36)

Pros:

- Consistent with Elk Plan direction to maintain a general elk hunt in the zone.
- May partially address supply and demand issue.
- Removes the cap and provides additional A-tag opportunity.
- No limit on outfitted hunters.

Cons:

- Reduces season length and opportunity (negative impact on outfitters).
- Reduces opportunity for antlerless harvest on A-tag in Units 33, 34, & 35.

B-Tag – Reduce season length to October 25 – Nov 3 for Units 33, 34, & 35 ONLY (same as Weiser Zone). Keep season length the same in Unit 36 (Oct 15 – Nov 8).

Pros:

- Consistent with Elk Plan direction to maintain a general elk hunt in the zone
- May address supply and demand issue

Cons:

- Reduces opportunity for bull harvest on B-tag in Units 33, 34, & 35.
- Negative effect on outfitters.

Sawtooth Zone (Units 33, 34, 35, 36)				
	August/September	October	November	December
A Tag	Archery only — any elk antlered only Units 33, 34 & 35 only Aug 30 - Sep 30 23 Archery only — any elk Unit 36 only Aug 30 - Sep 30			
B Tag		Any weapon — antlered only Units 33, 34 & 35 only Oct 15 25 - Nov 8 3 Any weapon — antlered only Unit 36 only Oct 15 - Nov 8		
Note: 1,526 B Tag Quota Available First-Come, First-Served. <i>Resident capped tag sales will be sold separately at vendors and online.</i> <i>For details see “What’s New” on page 6.</i>			2019 Capped tags go on sale for Residents 7/12/2019 and Nonresidents 5/10/2019.	

4. Release general season Sawtooth A and B zone tags for purchase on June 10 ONLY to individuals who did not apply for any controlled hunts for elk, moose, mountain goat, or bighorn sheep.

Pros:

- Complies with Elk Plan direction to maintain a general Sawtooth elk hunt.
- Maintains current hunt structure.
- May address supply and demand/fairness issue by reducing competition for tags.
- Maintains current outfitter allocation.

Cons:

- Introduces additional complexity to the tag sale process.
- Some sportsmen may give up the chance to draw a controlled hunt tag and still not get a Sawtooth tag.
- Would require rule-making to provide Commission authority to implement this restriction.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

Idaho Code 36-104 (b) 2 gives the Commission authority to set seasons and determine the manner in which tags are issued. IDAPA 13.01.08 establishes Elk A and B and rules associated with controlled hunt tag eligibility and nonresident limitations. IDAPA 13.01.04.505 establishes rules for allocation of tags for use by outfitted hunters in elk zones in which the number of tags is restricted and in controlled hunts. Rules pertaining to Landowner Appreciation Program registration, eligibility, and tag issuance are contained in IDAPA 13.01.04.400.

Public Involvement Process:

The Sawtooth Elk season and hunt format proposals, and options for tag distribution, were scoped with the public at meetings around the state, through online input opportunities, and through a random mail survey sent to past participants in the hunt during the big game season-setting process February-March 2017. Additionally, distribution of the tags has been on the Commission agenda for the July and November 2017 meetings and the January and March 2018 meetings.

Any proposed future changes to the hunt structure or season dates would be scoped with the public and the public will be informed of any changes to the tag distribution process.

Justification:

This information will aid Commissioners as they respond to requests, recommendations or other input from the public regarding Sawtooth Zone tag options and allocation.

Staff Recommendation:

None. This agenda item is for Commission information.

Action Requested:

N/A.