

**Meeting Date:** January 24, 2019

**Agenda Item No. 13**

**Agenda Item:** Big game season setting process

**Bureau Chief Approval:** 

**Prepared by:** Jon Rachael, State Wildlife Game Manager

**Background:**

The Commission has unique authority to establish seasons via proclamation rather than through IDAPA rulemaking. The Commission has set big game seasons biennially for a two-year period in odd-numbered years since 2015. Although seasons are set biennially, the Commission has authority to make season adjustments to address critical needs in off-cycle years. The Commission's proclamation authority includes setting seasons, limits, size, sex, and harvestable species.

Staff recommendations for big game seasons are the culmination of a continual year-round process that starts with the management direction and objectives in Commission-adopted species management plans (e.g., Elk management plan, mule deer management plan, etc.), predation management plans, and statutory guidance (e.g., Landowner Appreciation Program tags, depredation statutes). Initial proposals for changes to seasons, tag numbers, and bag limits result from annual population and harvest monitoring efforts and comparison of those estimates to established management plan objectives. Additionally, year-round public input received at Commission hearings and open houses, from individual sportsmen, and from collaborative work with sportsmen's groups may initiate change. Proposals are vetted internally in discussions among regional biologists, conservation officers, and headquarters staff, then provided to the public statewide for their input at open houses, through mailed (and/or emailed) surveys, and through the Department's website during a 2-3 week period, typically February – March.

After evaluation of public input, regional staff will develop and submit their recommendations to the Wildlife Bureau. Wildlife Bureau staff will consolidate regional proposals and will ensure compliance with management plan direction and compatibility and consistency across regional boundaries. With concurrence of Director's office staff, a final package of recommendations will be developed for presentation to the Commission for action at the March meeting. At that time, staff will also present recommendations for adjustments to Landowner Appreciation Program tags proportional to recommended changes to corresponding big game controlled hunt tag numbers.

Staff will provide an overview of the season setting process timeline at the Commission meeting and will provide the Commission with a preview of key preliminary proposals we anticipate taking to the public for changes to the 2019 and 2020 big game hunting seasons.

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

Idaho Statute 36-104 authorizes the Commission to establish rules for the taking of wildlife consistent with state policy. Species management plans provide Commission direction for population and harvest management.

**Public Involvement Process:**

Big game hunting season proposals result from multiple levels of public involvement, starting with public input solicited in hunter opinion and preference surveys and during development of species management plans. Recommendations result from year-round public input received through Commission hearings, open houses, from individual sportsmen contacts, from collaborative work with sportsmen's groups, as well as

comments submitted on specific proposals through mail and email surveys and through our website.

Proposed changes to seasons, tag numbers, and bag limits for the 2019 and 2020 big game seasons will be posted on the Department website and input will be solicited during February. Multiple open houses will be held in each region around the state to allow the public an opportunity to interact with staff, ask questions, and provide input.

**Justification:**

Commission action will be required to set big game hunting seasons for mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk, pronghorn, black bears, mountain lions, and gray wolves at the Commission's March meeting. This agenda item is for Commission information on the process, timeline, and preliminary proposals.

**Staff Recommendation:**

This agenda item is an update for Commission information. Staff will make recommendations for Commission action at their March meeting.

**Action Requested:**

No action is requested at this time.