

Meeting Date: March 22, 2018

Agenda Item No. 23

Agenda Item: Mandatory Hunter Reports

Bureau Chief Approval:

Prepared by: Jon Rachael, State Wildlife Game Manager

Background:

Estimation of harvest is an important component of game management and provides information critical to assessment of trends in population size, population age structure, and demographics of harvested species and is often the best measure of the effectiveness of harvest seasons to meet species management plan objectives.

The Department's mandatory hunter report program to estimate harvest of deer, elk, and pronghorn was initiated by temporary rule by Commission action in March 1999. The Commission adoption of the harvest report card approach was largely in response to dissatisfaction among some hunters with the Department's existing telephone survey that was used to contact and interview a randomly-selected sample of deer and elk tag holders about their hunting activities and success. Hunters who were not drawn in the survey sample tended to mistrust the Department's harvest estimates because they had never been contacted to provide their harvest information.

In theory, if all hunters reported on their hunting activity and harvest on each tag in a timely manner, the Department would have the best available information on participation and harvest. The Commission-adopted mandatory report program was designed after a program in another state that experienced very high compliance (~96%) with their reporting requirement that resulted in hunters being ineligible to apply for future hunts if they did not submit their report within the required timeframe unless they paid a \$50 reinstatement fee.

The Idaho mandatory report regulation (IDAPA 13.01.08.421) requires that any hunter that obtains a pronghorn, deer and/or elk tag must complete a report and submit to the Department or authorized agent within 10 days of kill. Hunters who do not harvest must submit a report within 10 days of the closing date of the appropriate season. By rule, failure to report by January 31 renders the hunter ineligible to obtain any subsequent year's license until a late mandatory report is filed. The Department is not authorized to charge a fine or require a reinstatement fee. Late mandatory reports filed months after the harvest season are not useful for informing management decisions for the subsequent seasons.

During the initial years of implementation, the Department was able to achieve compliance near 95% through a combination of multiple reminder letters and the lure of entering those that did comply into a drawing for one of 10 Super tags. Despite the mandatory requirement to report and the incentive of the drawing, hunter compliance waned progressively through time. To compensate for lower reporting rates, Department staff initiated a non-response bias survey and contacted hunters who had not reported in order to estimate participation and success rates of non-respondents and create a correction factor to estimate harvest. As voluntary compliance continued to decline, the Department adjusted again by adopting a hybrid harvest report and random sample survey approach to estimate harvest. To enhance data collection and harvest reporting compliance, Department staff:

- Captured all harvest report data from successful hunters encountered at check stations and entered their reports for them (over 1,000 reports recorded at check stations in fall 2017).

- Sent post cards to 81,667 households where hunters had 1 or more un-submitted reports.
- Sent 61,500 emails to hunters who had 1 or more un-submitted reports.

Of 136,426 tags randomly selected for our survey sample, 40,810 (30%) had voluntarily reported before we began making phone calls on 12/7 (some hunts were still open). Our contract vendor conducted 61,487 phone call attempts and completed 10,676 additional reports.

Through the combined efforts described above, participation and harvest information on approximately 64% of tags in the sample had been reported and were used to generate 2017 harvest estimates. Mailing costs for post cards plus vendor costs for phone calls totaled approximately \$158,000 for the 2017 season.

Harvest estimates were posted to the IDFG website on March 2.

Staff will provide additional information on the hunter report program at the meeting.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

IDAPA 13.01.08.421 establishes the requirement for deer, elk, and pronghorn hunters to submit a completed report on their hunt for each tag within 10 days of killing a deer, elk, or pronghorn, or within 10 days of the closing date of the appropriate season for which their tag was valid.

Public Involvement Process:

The mandatory report program originated in 1999 through requests from the public and an extensive public involvement process. The Commission and Department staff continually receive input, both supportive and unsupportive, on the harvest reporting program and quality of big game harvest data.

Justification:

This discussion of the mandatory hunter reporting program is provided for Commission information.

Staff Recommendation:

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

Action Requested:

None.