

Meeting Date: March 22, 2018

Agenda Item No. 6D

Agenda Item: 2018 Big Game Regulation
Modification Proposal (**Action**)

Bureau Chief Approval:

Prepared by: Jon Rachael, State Wildlife Game Manager

Background:

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission has unique authority to establish harvest seasons (including season dates, bag limits, size, sex, and harvestable species) via proclamation, rather than through IDAPA rulemaking. The Commission considers proposed changes for season setting and publishes proclamations biennially for moose, bighorn sheep, and mountain goat in January of odd-numbered years and in March of odd-numbered years for all other big game species.

The Commission set the 2017 and 2018 seasons and tag numbers for moose, bighorn sheep, and mountain goats at their January 2017 meeting and set the 2017 and 2018 seasons for all other big game species at their March 2017 meeting.

Although the Department focusses efforts on the season-setting process on a biennial cycle, the Commission has the authority to consider proposals and make adjustments annually if necessary due to fire, bad winter weather, a disease event, or other factors.

The Department and Commission are considering the following proposals for potential modifications to the 2018 hunting seasons:

- **Reduce bighorn sheep tags in Controlled Hunt Area 46 from 5 tags to 3.**

Disease was detected in the Hunt Area 46 portion of the Bruneau-Jarbridge California bighorn sheep herd during 2017. Disease prevalence and impacts to the population are currently being assessed but there is concern over the number of tags offered relative to the number of mature rams in the herd.

IDFG staff is recommending reducing the number of tags in the hunt area from 5 tags to 3 by maintaining CH No. 7006 (3 tags) but eliminating Controlled Hunt No. 7007 (2 tags). Staff proposes extending the season length for CH No. 7006 from the current Aug. 30 – Sep. 14 to Aug. 30 – Oct. 8.

Hunt No.	Controlled Hunt Area	Tags	Season Dates
7006	46-1	3	Aug 30 – Sep 14 Oct 8
7007	46-2	2	Sep 22 Oct 8

- **Prohibit use of second (nonresident) deer tags in Unit 10A.**

Since 2003 the Commission has released nonresident deer tags from the statewide nonresident quota that remained unsold as of August 1 for sale to resident or nonresident hunters (at the nonresident price) for use as a second tag. Unit 10A is a popular unit for the use of second deer tags.

Some hunters in Unit 10A report encountering fewer large mature bucks than they desire. Although the current white-tailed deer management plan objective for % 5-point bucks in the harvest is being met, the Department has received

input from some hunters who want to reduce harvest to attempt to increase the number of mature bucks in this unit.

The Commission is considering a proposal to prohibit the use of second deer tags in Unit 10A.

- **Shorten season for white-tailed deer tag in Unit 10A to Oct 10 – Nov 20.**

In 2008 the Commission extended the deer season in Units 10A, 11, and 11A by 11 days from Oct 10 – Nov 20 to the current season dates (Oct 10 – Dec 1). The lengthening of the season in these units was expected to provide additional opportunity for harvesting mature bucks in these productive units and relieve late-season hunter congestion in adjacent Units 8 and 8A where the season already remained open until Dec 1.

Some hunters in Unit 10A have reported encountering fewer large mature bucks than they desire. Although the current white-tailed deer management plan objective for % 5-point bucks in the harvest is being met, the Department has received input from some hunters who want to reduce harvest by shortening the season by 11 days during the rut when bucks are especially vulnerable.

The Commission is considering a proposal to reduce the white-tailed deer tag general any-weapon season hunt by 11 days (Oct 10 – Nov 20) in Unit 10A to attempt to increase the number of mature bucks in this Unit.

- **Remove the cap on Weiser River Elk Zone A tags.**

In 2017 the Commission added a general season any-weapon cow hunt to the Weiser A tag with the intention of reducing the elk population in this management zone that is over objective. A cap of 1,900 tags was imposed on the hunt. The Weiser A tag was very popular, partly due to the addition of any-weapon cow hunting, and sold out within 45 minutes when tags went on sale in July. Because the hunt sold out so quickly, many archery hunters who had traditionally purchased Weiser A tags were unable to purchase tags. An estimated 835 archers hunted on the Weiser A tag in 2017. During the previous 5 years, the average number of archers hunting on the A tag was 1,437, suggesting that adding any-weapon hunting and a quota may have displaced about 600 archers.

The Commission is considering a proposal to remove the Weiser A tag quota in 2018 to avoid displacement of archers who traditionally hunted in this zone and continue to make progress towards reducing this elk herd towards the Commission-adopted population size.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

Idaho Code 36-104 grants authority to the Commission to promulgate rules for the taking of wildlife consistent with state policy. Species management plans developed by the Department and adopted by the Commission provide long-term direction for population and harvest management.

Public Involvement Process:

Recommendations for the 2017 and 2018 seasons that were set in January and March 2017 resulted from year-round public involvement, and population and harvest monitoring. Proposals being considered for regulation modifications for the 2018

seasons were posted on the Department's website in early March to inform the public and provide an opportunity to provide input.

Justification:

Commission action is required to adopt changes to the 2017-2018 hunting seasons that were set by proclamation by the Commission in January and March 2017.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff will evaluate public input and present a summary to the Commission at the meeting along with any recommendations for adjustments to the 2018 hunting seasons.

Action Requested:

Approve adjustments to the 2018 big game hunting seasons.

Suggested Motion: Commission adopt staff recommendations for adjustments to the 2018 big game hunting seasons.