Meeting Date: March 20, 2024 **Agenda Item No.** 5B

Agenda Item: Season Setting: Big Game Season Adjustments for 2024 (**Action**) **Bureau Chief Approval:** SR

Prepared by: Rick Ward, State Wildlife Manager

Background:

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission has authority to establish harvest seasons through proclamation. The Commission considers proposed changes for season setting and publishes proclamations biennially for big game in March of odd-numbered years. The Commission set the 2024 big game seasons and tag numbers at their March 2023 meeting.

The Commission has the authority to consider proposals and adjust seasons when deemed necessary, generally as a result of fire, severe winter weather, disease, new data, or other factors. The 2022/2023 winter was extremely severe in eastern Idaho. In May 2023, the Commission eliminated or modified some 2023 deer and pronghorn seasons or bag limits in areas of the Southeast and Upper Snake Regions where winter was the most severe. The Southeast Region, however, did maintain some antlerless deer hunts, with a goal of targeting urban/private lands groups of deer causing conflict, or in either-sex hunts where very few antlerless deer were harvested annually, or where most deer harvest was made up of white-tailed deer.

Although winter was not as severe west of I15, it resulted in well above-average mortality on mule deer. The 2023 hunter success rates in most of these areas were below average and well below the 2022 harvest. Given the widespread impacts from the 2022/2023 winter, reduced hunter success rates, and public concern relative to mule deer populations, the Department is proposing to again eliminate or modify antlerless mule deer hunts and bag limits and either-sex pronghorn hunts across the Southeast Region and parts of the Upper Snake Region. In addition, the Department is proposing modification or elimination of the remaining antlerless mule deer opportunity in the Southeast Region for the 2024 season.

Staff recommend the following deer hunts be changed to antlered only for the 2024 hunting season:

- **Controlled Hunt No. 1070 (Hunt Area 73, 40 tags, either sex)**
- **LAP Controlled Hunt No. 1357 (Hunt Area 73, 4 tags, either sex)**

- **Controlled Hunt No. 1083 (Hunt Area 68A, Unlimited tags, either sex)**

- **Controlled Hunt No. 1098 (Hunt Area 68, 20 tags, either sex)**
- **LAP Controlled Hunt No. 1377 (Hunt Area 68, 2 tags, either sex)**

- **Controlled Hunt No. 1099 (Controlled Hunt Area 73A, 20 tags, either sex)**
- **LAP Controlled Hunt No. 1378 (Hunt Area 73A, 2 tags, either sex)**

- **Controlled Hunt No. 1100 (Controlled Hunt Area 74, 20 tags, either sex)**
- **LAP Controlled Hunt No. 1379 (Hunt Area 74, 2 tags, either sex)**

Staff recommend the following deer hunts be changed to white-tailed deer only for the 2024 hunting season:

- **Controlled Hunt No. 1140 (Hunt Area 68AX, 50 tags, extra antlerless)**
- **LAP Controlled Hunt No. 1399 (Hunt Area 68AX, 5 tags, extra antlerless)**

Staff recommend the following deer hunts be closed for the 2024 hunting season:

- **Controlled Hunt No. 1064 (Controlled Hunt Area 60-1, 100 tags, antlerless only)**
- **LAP Controlled Hunt No. 1351 (Hunt Area 60-1, 10 tags, antlerless only)**

- **Controlled Hunt No. 1116 (Hunt Area 73-1X, 50 tags, youth only, extra antlerless)**

- **Controlled Hunt No. 1141 (Hunt Area 70-1X, 50 tags, extra antlerless)**
- **LAP Controlled Hunt No. 1400 (Hunt Area 70-1X, 5 tags, extra antlerless)**

Staff recommend the following pronghorn hunts be closed for the 2024 hunting season:

- **Controlled Hunt No. 4022 (Hunt Area 60A-1, 15 tags, either sex)**
- **LAP Controlled Hunt No. 4321 (Hunt Area 60A-1, 2 tags, either sex)**

- **Controlled Hunt No. 4025 (Hunt Area 76-1, 5 tags, either sex)**
- **LAP Controlled Hunt No. 4324 (Hunt Area 76-1, 1 tag, either sex)**

- **Controlled Hunt No. 4027 (Hunt Area 63-2, 10 tags, doe or fawn)**
- **LAP Controlled Hunt No. 4326 (Hunt Area 63-2, 1 tag, doe or fawn)**

- **Controlled Hunt No. 4028 (Hunt Area 63-3, 10 tags, doe or fawn)**
- **LAP Controlled Hunt No. 4327 (Hunt Area 63-3, 1 tag, doe or fawn)**

- **Controlled Hunt No. 4043 (Hunt Area 60A-1, 40 tags, either sex)**
- **LAP Controlled Hunt No. 4332 (Hunt Area 60A-1, 4 tags, either sex)**

- **Controlled Hunt No. 4052 (Hunt Area 61-1, 25 tags, either sex)**
- **LAP Controlled Hunt No. 4341 (Hunt Area 61-1, 3 tags, either sex)**

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 2024 seasons that were set in March 2023 resulted from year-round public involvement, and population and harvest monitoring. Proposals being considered for tag number modifications during the 2024 season were posted via gold sheet for the Commission meeting on the Department's website prior to the meeting to inform the public and provide an opportunity to provide input.

Justification:

Commission action is required to adopt changes to the 2024 hunting seasons that were set by proclamation by the Commission in March 2023.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends the following:

- Change deer hunts 1070, 1357, 1083, 1098, 1377, 1099, 1378, 1100, and 1379 to antlered only for the 2024 hunting season.
- Change deer hunts 1140 and 1399 to white-tailed deer only for the 2024 season.
- Close deer hunts 1064, 1351, 1116, 1141, and 1400 for the 2024 hunting season
- Close pronghorn hunts 4022, 4321, 4025, 4324, 4027, 4326, 4028, 4327, 4043, 4332, 4052, and 4341 for the 2024 season.

Action Requested:

Approve adjustments to the 2024 big game hunting season.

Suggested Motion: Commission adopt modifications to the 2024 big game hunting seasons as proposed.