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

Agenda Item: Chronic Wasting Disease: 2024 Management and Surveillance **Bureau Chief Approval:** SR

Prepared by: Tricia Hebdon, Assistant Wildlife Bureau Chief

Background:

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) was first detected in the state in GMU 14 in late 2021. To date, 67 animals have tested positive for CWD in Idaho (54 white-tailed deer, 12 mule deer, and 1 elk). Most of these animals have been from GMU 14, mostly in and around the Slate Creek drainage, except for one mule deer harvested in 2023 near the GMU 23/32A border and two mule deer taken during the 2024 control action directly across the Salmon River from Slate Creek in GMU 18.

With Commission concurrence, and in accordance with the *2021 Strategy for Chronic Wasting Disease*, IDFG Region 2 staff collaborated with USDA Wildlife Services and private landowners in GMU 14 to implement a control action focused on deer in and around Slate Creek during February 2024. The objective of the control action was to maintain a reduced deer density in the CWD focal area to minimize disease prevalence and spread. CWD samples were collected from all animals; some test results are still pending.

Since 2021, 1,199 deer and elk from GMU 15 have been sampled for CWD and all have tested negative. Since July of 2023, a total of 455 white-tailed deer have been sampled from GMU 15. Given the 2023 sampling effort, we can be 99% confident that if CWD exists in GMU 15 white-tailed deer it is at a prevalence less than 0.5%. Conversely, GMU 18 is directly across the Salmon River from the Slate Creek focal area and direct observations have proven the river is not a barrier to animal movements. Although staff have tried to collect as many samples as possible from GMU 18, voluntary CWD sampling of harvested animals has been insufficient to adequately estimate disease presence or prevalence (only 57 total samples from deer in 2023). Two CWD positive deer were removed from GMU 18 during the 2024 control action, confirming the presence of disease.

During fall 2023, CWD was detected in a mule deer buck harvested in GMU 23 near the boundary with GMU 32A. This area is summer range for migratory mule deer and elk. By the time IDFG received the positive test result, most mule deer had departed the area enroute to winter ranges in neighboring GMUs (mostly in Units 22, 32A and 32). Increased surveillance efforts during the 2024 hunting season will be used to determine the distribution and prevalence of CWD in this area.

A total of 494 elk from GMU 14 have been tested for CWD since the 2021 hunting season and only 1 elk has tested positive. In CWD positive areas of the U.S. where deer and elk coexist, prevalence is almost always significantly higher in deer (mule or white-tailed) than elk. Therefore, it is most efficient to focus CWD monitoring resources on mule deer and white-tailed deer.

The Commission previously adopted modifications to hunting seasons and carcass transport requirements to monitor and manage CWD by implementing a CWD Management Zone and mandatory CWD sampling requirements in GMUs 14 and 15. CWD monitoring and management throughout the state will need to be dynamic to be effective in the long term. In this vein, staff will propose changes to the existing CWD Management Zone and changes to the GMUs where CWD sampling of harvested animals is required. These proposed changes are designed to lessen the regulatory burden on

Idaho's hunting public where possible, while concurrently focusing CWD monitoring and management resources where they are most needed based on our current understanding of the CWD landscape.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

Chronic wasting disease monitoring and management options are described in the *Idaho Department of Fish and Game 2021 Strategy for Chronic Wasting Disease*. The Commission may designate CWD Management Zones (IDAPA 13.01.10.150) and may use proclamation or emergency hunt order to designate seasons and areas in which portions of a carcass must be presented to the Department within a specified timeframe (IDAPA 13.01.08.350.03).

Public Involvement Process:

The Department has conducted outreach on CWD sampling efforts, CWD status, CWD surveillance hunts, and CWD control actions through local public meetings, news releases, website postings, social media posts, and Commission meeting presentations. Public input was solicited and received on the proposed season changes and reporting requirements during big game season-setting in March 2022 and March 2023.

Justification:

Commission action is required to adopt changes to the current CWD Management Zone, implement new mandatory CWD testing requirements, and change existing mandatory CWD testing requirements.

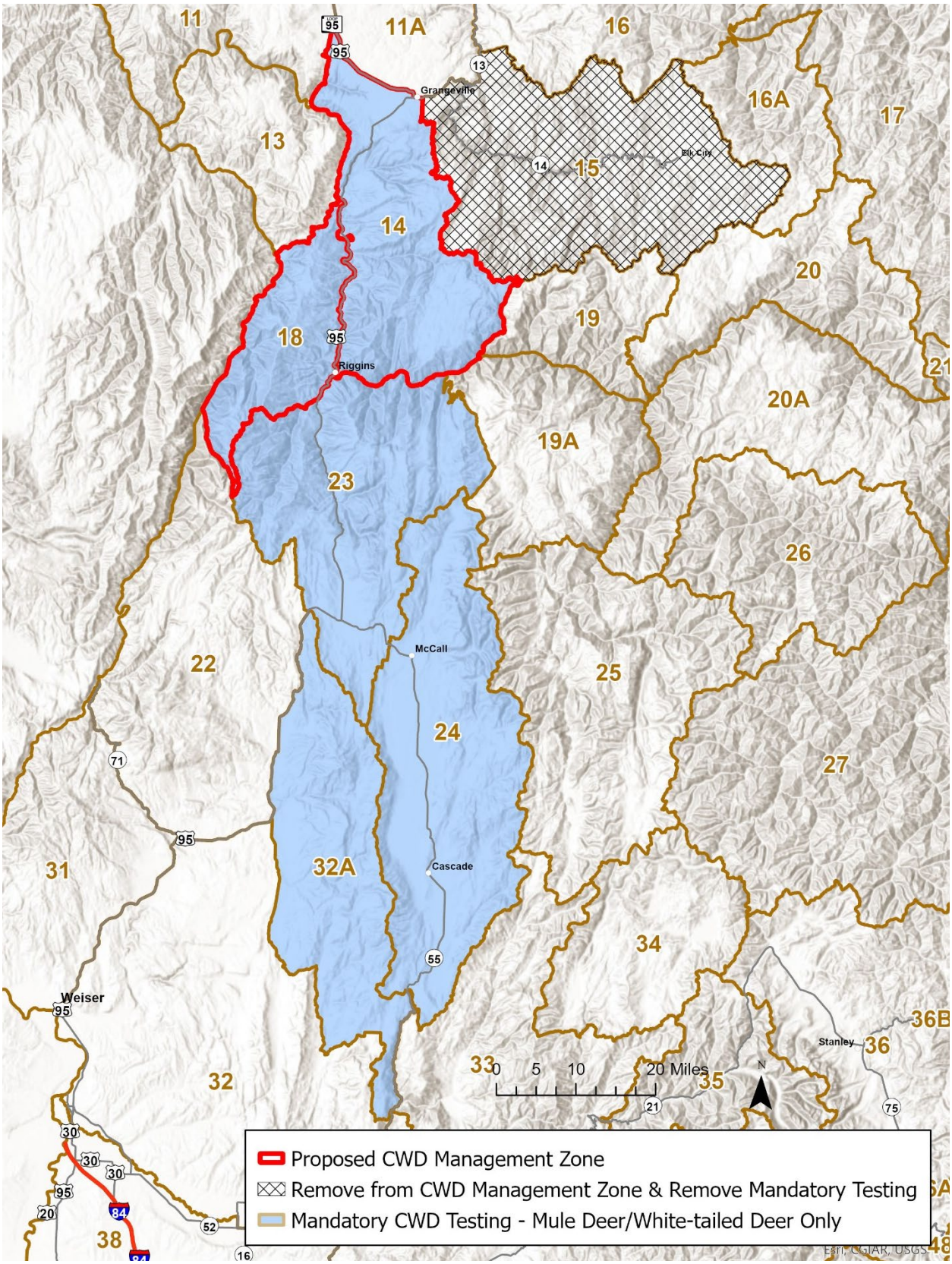
Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommend GMU 15 be removed from the CWD Management Zone and GMU 18 be added to the CWD Management Zone (revised CWD Management Zone would be GMUs 14 and 18); remove mandatory CWD testing requirements for deer, elk, and moose harvested from GMU 15; remove mandatory CWD testing requirements for elk and moose harvested from GMU 14 (retain current mandatory CWD testing requirement for mule deer and white-tailed deer harvested from GMU 14); and implement mandatory CWD testing of mule deer and white-tailed deer harvested from GMUs 18, 23, 24, and 32A within 10 days of harvest. Proposed changes are represented on the map on the following page.

Suggested Motion 1: I move the Commission adopt the staff recommendation to remove GMU 15 from the CWD Management Zone and add GMU 18 to the CWD Management Zone, resulting in the CWD Management Zone being comprised of GMUs 14 and 18.

Suggested Motion 2: I move the Commission adopt staff recommendations to remove the mandatory CWD testing requirements for mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk, and moose harvested in GMU 15 and for elk and moose harvested in GMU 14.

Suggested Motion 3: I move the Commission adopt staff recommendations to implement mandatory CWD testing requirements for mule deer and white-tailed deer harvested in GMUs 18, 23, 24, and 32A.


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Proposed CWD Management Zone
Remove from CWD Management Zone & Remove Mandatory Testing
Mandatory CWD Testing - Mule Deer/White-tailed Deer Only
Esri, CGIAR, USGS