

Meeting Date: January 26, 2023

Agenda Item No. 5.A.

Agenda Item: Season Setting for Moose, Bighorn Sheep, and Mountain Goat (**Action**)

Bureau Chief Approval: JR

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Background:

Dates and tag numbers for moose, bighorn sheep, and mountain goat harvest seasons are established for a two-year period and are presented to the Commission for approval in January of each odd-numbered year. Regional staff scoped proposals for season changes and controlled hunt tag limits through the Department's website and in person regional meetings December 13 – 29, 2022. Following assessment of public input, regional staff submit recommendations to the Wildlife Bureau and a final package of recommendations will be developed for the 2023-2024 hunting seasons for presentation to the Commission.

Recommendations are not finalized here, but a summary of preliminary recommended season changes scoped with the public includes:

Moose

The Department is proposing changes in moose tags using management guidance from the *Idaho Moose Management Plan 2020-2025*, information gathered during aerial surveys, and other population metrics including calf survival and recruitment, adult female survival, and harvest metrics. Proposed statewide changes total a reduction of 28 bull tags (from 542 to 514 total tags).

- Proposed decrease of antlered tags in the Panhandle, Clearwater, and Salmon Regions.
- Proposed increase of antlered tags and proposed new hunts in the Magic Valley, Southeast, and Upper Snake Regions.
- Proposed boundary changes to Hunt Areas 44, 54-1, 68-1, and 60A.

Bighorn Sheep

The Department is proposing changes to bighorn sheep tags using management guidance from the *Idaho Bighorn Sheep Management Plan 2022-2027*, the number of rams observed in recent counts, and harvest information. Proposed statewide changes total an increase in Rocky Mountain bighorn ram tags from 78 to 83 and a decrease in California bighorn ram tags from 15 to 14.

- Proposed changes in Hunt Area boundaries in Hunt Areas 41-1 and 41-2.
- Proposed increase in Rocky Mountain ram tags in the Clearwater and Salmon Regions.
- Proposed two new late hunts in the Salmon Region.
- Proposed reduction of one California ram tag in the Southwest Region.

Mountain Goat

The Department is proposing changes in mountain goat tags using management guidance from the *Idaho Mountain Goat Management Plan 2019-2024*, recent counts, and harvest information. Proposed statewide changes result in no net change to the number of mountain goat tags (41 total tags).

- Proposed reduction of tags in the Clearwater and Salmon Regions.
- Proposed increase of tags in the Magic Valley and Upper Snake Regions.

- Close hunt in the Upper Snake Region.
- New hunt in the Upper Snake Region.

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. This agenda item is to establish statewide hunting seasons and number of tags for moose, bighorn sheep, and mountain goat hunts for the 2023 and 2024 seasons.

Public Involvement Process:

Initial proposals were generated by staff following in-house data analyses and discussions among biologists and law enforcement personnel. Proposed changes were scoped with the public statewide through the Department's website and at in-person regional meetings. The Department also collected public input from calls to regional offices. Public outreach efforts were advertised through news releases in all media outlets, email, social media, and the Department website. Proposals were posted on the Department website on December 13, 2022 for public review. Public comment ran December 13-29, 2022.

Public input will be evaluated and a summary will be provided during presentation of the agenda item.

Justification:

Action is required to establish hunting seasons for moose, bighorn sheep, and mountain goat for the upcoming 2023 and 2024 seasons.

Staff Recommendation:

Preliminary recommendations were reviewed with the Commission in November and final proposals were scoped with the public in December 2022. After an assessment of public comments and regional input, the Bureau of Wildlife and the Director's Office will provide final recommendations during the presentation of this agenda item.

Action Requested:

Approve 2023 – 2024 moose, bighorn sheep, and mountain goat seasons and tag levels.

Suggested Motion: Commission adopt staff recommendations for moose, bighorn sheep, and mountain goat seasons and tag levels for the 2023 and 2024 seasons.