

**Meeting Date:** January 26, 2023

**Agenda Item No. 7**

**Agenda Item:** Big Game Movements & Migration    **Bureau Chief Approval:** FE  
Action Plan to Release for Public Input

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**Background:**

The Department coordinates with a diversity of partners, including private landowners, state and federal agencies, and non-governmental organizations, to implement voluntary management to conserve big game habitats across the State including migration routes and seasonal ranges. For decades, the Department has invested significant research and monitoring resources to obtain data necessary to inform big game management and assist these partners with conserving big game habitat.

Since 2018, the Department's management and studies of big game migration routes and seasonal habitats have been augmented through the Department of Interior's (DOI) Secretarial Order No. 3362 (SO3362). SO3362 directs DOI agencies to assist western tribes, private landowners, state fish and wildlife agencies, and state highway departments with conserving and managing priority big game winter ranges and migration routes.

SO3362 assistance includes grant funding opportunities for voluntary habitat conservation and data collection and analysis based on state-specified conservation priorities as documented in state-prepared action plans. To access SO3362 funding, the Department prepared Version 1 (2018) of the "Idaho Action Plan for Implementing the Department of the Interior Secretarial Order 3362: Improving Habitat Quality in Western Big Game Winter Range and Migration Corridors" (Action Plan). Idaho's Action Plan established a framework for conserving priority big game migration routes and winter ranges within five Priority Areas as informed by Commission approved species management plans.

The Department established the Big Game Movements & Migration (M&M) Program to implement the Action Plan. Updated in 2019 (Version 2), 2020 (Version 3), and 2022 (Version 4), Action Plan revisions occur as needed based on annual reviews to address new priorities, provide new information, and document completed projects. To date, Idaho has received approximately \$2.6 million in SO3362 related funding to address big game conservation priorities within Priority Areas as guided by the Action Plan. Conservation priorities include habitat management, population monitoring, and technical assistance. Priority Areas consider the presence of key big game populations, corresponding migration routes, and winter ranges, potential habitat and population risks, and opportunities for voluntary conservation efforts.

Idaho's Action Plan also facilitated the analysis of 20 years of high-resolution radiotelemetry data, which resulted in mapping 22 mule deer, 23 elk, and 6 pronghorn migration routes. Idaho's big game migration maps are digitally available through the Department's Idaho Fish and Wildlife Information System (IFWIS). These maps are used by the Department and partners to inform big game management and conservation efforts including the following examples:

- Habitat improvement projects including retrofitting livestock fences along migration routes to wildlife-friendly specifications.
- Habitat management and conservation during land use planning processes.
- Assessment options to offset negative effects on big game from development projects.
- Siting and design of transportation infrastructure to reduce wildlife-vehicle conflicts.

The Department is initiating the 2023 review and updating process for Version 5 of the Action Plan. Although originally focused on leveraging SO3362-related grant funding, the Action Plan has enhanced the Department's focus on documenting and managing big game movement and migration routes. Consequently, the Action Plan and migration maps routinely inform the Department's big game management and partners' conservation efforts. The Department will therefore seek formal Commission adoption of future Action Plan versions, including providing opportunities for public input.

#### **Statutory Authority and/or Policy issues:**

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission administers the State's policy to preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage fish and wildlife resources to be available to Idaho citizens for continued supplies for hunting, fishing and trapping (Idaho Code § 36-103). SO3362 directs DOI agencies to assist western tribes, private landowners, state fish and wildlife agencies, and state highway departments with conserving priority big game winter ranges and migration routes.

#### **Public Involvement Process:**

With Commission concurrence, draft Version 5 (January 2023) of the Idaho Action Plan will be posted on the Department website for a three-week period to provide the public with an opportunity to review and comment. Public input will be considered during the Department's 2023 Action Plan revision process. The revised Action Plan will be presented for formal adoption at a future Commission meeting.

#### **Justification:**

The Commission sets policy and provides direction, considers public input, and has the authority to adopt, amend, or reject Department-recommended plans. Although originally focusing on leveraging SO3362-related grant funding, the Action Plan has enhanced the Department's focus on documenting and managing big game migration routes and seasonal ranges. Because the Action Plan routinely informs big game management, the Department is seeking Commission adoption and formalization of the Action Plan and M&M Program.

#### **Staff Recommendation:**

Staff recommends the Commission concur with the Department releasing the Action Plan for public review and comment.