

## **Southeast Region Mule Deer Advisory Committee**

### **Meeting Notes**

**4 November 2024**

**6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.**

**Committee Attendees:** Rick Berg, David Vedder, Justin Bergholm, Daniel McGregor, Bracken Anderson, Jon Meyers, Travis Hobbs, Brock Maynard, Gary Peck, Dustin Rowe. *Absent were members Chris Burger & Max Winward.*

**IDFG Staff:** Dan Garren (Regional Supervisor), Zach Lockyer (Regional Wildlife Manager), Eric Freeman (Regional Wildlife Biologist), David Dressel (Regional Wildlife Biologist), Erik Bartholomew (Regional Wildlife Biologist), Jess Jaeckel (Senior Depredation Technician)

**Meeting started at 6:00 p.m.** Notes prepared by Zach Lockyer, Eric Freeman, David Dressel, and Dan Garren.

#### **Introduction**

- Reviewed meeting minutes from October 7, committee motioned to approve with a second. Unanimous.
- Discussed outline for the meeting and a that focus will be on finalizing details of proposals. Staff reminded the group that they need to be open and forthright with their opinions and thoughts to avoid approving something they do not support.
- Reiterated the 3 goals the committee began with, or parameters that the committee is working with.
- Reviewed 3 season setting proposals, 2 rules changes, and 2 committee recommendations derived from the October 7 meeting. Staff cautioned committee that proposals adding opportunity will be difficult for the broad public to understand given current status of the deer population.

#### **Proposal 1 Discussion – converting general any-weapon season in 1 or 2 GMUs to either short-range or muzzleloader only.**

- Committee had a lengthy discussion on the pros and cons of this concept. They discussed the potential for hunter displacement as well as challenges for youth to participate with a different weapon type.
- Committee discussed where (what GMU) in detail. They unanimously supported GMU 76 because of the impact from the most recent severe winter and a desire to see an effect from the change. They discussed other GMUs, such as 71, 72, 73, and 73A. Ultimately, they approved GMU 73A as a second place to test restricted weapons.
- Committee debated the merits of short-range vs muzzleloader season. Their preference is muzzleloader if reducing success is important, but would support short-range if that was more palatable to the broader public.
- Committee unanimously supported a proposal to convert the any-weapon seasons (Oct 10 – 24) in GMUs 73A and 76 to muzzleloader only.

- To offset the lost any-weapon opportunity, the Committee also recommended adding an any-weapon controlled hunt with 25 tags for youth and 25 tags for everyone from Oct. 1 – 9. Additionally, committee would like to allow archery hunting during the Oct. 10-24 timeframe.

**Proposal 2 Discussion – Extending season length with a revised opening day of Oct. 5 instead of Oct. 10.**

- Committee discussed and agreed that the timing isn't right for this proposed change. Although it would serve to spread hunters out without increasing harvest this extension isn't warranted given the status of the deer population.
- When the deer population rebounds to a better place the committee would like the Department to consider a longer season to help with crowding and experience concerns.
- Unanimous agreement to eliminate this proposal and move to a suggestion for future consideration.

**Rules Discussion –**

- Proposed rule – create rule for additional weapon type as follows:
  - Limited any-weapon – any center fire rifle that is open sights and not equipped with any type of scope or magnifying technology
    - Fiber optic, metal, or plastic “open” or “peep” sights only
- Proposed rule - Allow lesser weapons during muzzleloader only seasons (e.g. archery equipment).
- Proposed rule – ban use of thermal technology as an aid to hunting.
- All above rules had unanimous support. Staff discussed role of the Hunting and Technology working group and how these fit into their cause/role.

**Break**

**Proposal(s) 3 Discussion – Adding opportunity to existing controlled hunts.**

- Committee views controlled hunt GMUs as places where opportunity has been lost and likely impacted adjacent general season units. Adding opportunity back in these areas could serve to disperse hunters and provide more opportunity (addresses crowding, hunter experience/satisfaction, and potentially drawing odds).
- Committee vetted many ideas on how opportunity could be added. Several voiced concern about losing existing coveted opportunity.
  - Final proposals voted on by the committee:
    - Convert GMU 70 unlimited controlled archery hunt back to a general archery season that would match GMU 73 and 78 archery opportunities.
      - Vote – 7 support, 3 had no opinion
    - Add a muzzleloader only controlled hunt to GMU 70 from Oct. 1 – 9 with 100 tags. Reduce existing any-weapon controlled hunt tags from 170 to 125 (net gain of 55 controlled hunt tags).
      - Vote – Unanimous support

- Add a muzzleloader only controlled hunt to GMU 78 from Oct. 1 – 9 with 50 tags. Reduce existing any-weapon controlled hunt tags from 200 to 175 (net gain of 25 tags).
    - Vote – 8 supported, 1 did not support
- Staff asked committee opinion on continuing with a shed antler season. In general, group does not support a shed antler season unless season dates line up with adjacent states (Wyoming/Utah). They suggested a lack of enforcement/consequence for violations and the influx of non-residents once it opens because shed hunting is closed in their state as primary reasons they didn't support the idea.
- Next meeting set for December 2<sup>nd</sup> in Soda Springs.
  - Staff and committee will discuss predation, winter feeding, GMU 71 harvest/biology, roadkill, MHR rule
  - Discuss late season controlled hunts in units that currently do not offer late opportunities.
- Meeting adjourned at 9 pm.