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Information for July 2017, District Meetings

Upland Game Bird and Waterfowl Updates

2017-2018 Upland Game Bird and Waterfowl seasons were adopted at the April 21st, 2017, Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) Meeting. A change in the federal regulation setting process allows the Department to set game bird seasons earlier in the year. The 2017-18 seasons are very similar to last year's seasons (changes listed below). Most season opening dates are one day earlier than last year because of the calendar shift. For example, last year the chukar season opened October 8, 2016, this year chukar season will open October 7, 2017. Setting game bird seasons in April will allow the Department to publish the 2017-2018 Game Bird Regulations by early July.

Following is a list of Commission adopted changes for the 2017-18 game bird seasons:

- The general season Blue Mountain fall turkey hunt area will be increased to include Grizzly, Ochoco, and Maury units. Correspondingly, the number of tags available for the Blue Mountain fall turkey hunt will be increased to 600 and available over-the-counter starting Sept. 20. Also new this year, the Northeast and Blue Mountain fall general season turkey tags can now be used in the Mt Emily unit. Hunters can apply for the White River controlled fall turkey hunt beginning July 1.
- The Miller Island Unit of the Klamath Wildlife Area will be open to youth hunters only for waterfowl and upland game birds on first-come, first served basis on October 21. Upland hunting hours will begin at 10 a.m. Pheasants will be released for this opportunity.
- Hunters can apply for controlled sage-grouse hunts beginning July 1. No permits will be offered for Lookout Mt., Sumpter, and South Wagontire units in 2017. Tag numbers for the remaining units will not be finalized until August, after brood routes are completed.
- The definition of edible parts of game birds has been changed to: "Edible portions of game birds means, at a minimum, the meat of the breast associated with the sternum." However, the Department encourages hunters to consume meat from the leg (drumstick), thigh, and wing when practicable. Many hunters do not realize how much meat is lost when just the breast is saved. On most game birds, 25% to 35% of the meat is found on just the legs and thighs, with only 55% to 60% found on the breast.
- Changes to Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area will allow game bird hunting during September, providing a mourning dove hunting opportunity on the Wildlife Area. Previously, the Wildlife Area was only open to game bird hunting during pheasant, quail, and waterfowl seasons.
- Shooting hours for geese in the Northwest Permit Goose Zone have been expanded to sunrise to sunset. Previously, the open hours were 15 minutes after sunrise until 15 minutes before sunset. A separate shooting hours table for goose hunters in this zone is printed in the regulations.

The Department welcomes any comments, or proposed changes for the 2018-19 game birds seasons.

Updated DRAFT Oregon Wild Turkey Management Plan available for public comment.

Background: Oregon is one of nine lower 48 states without a native population of wild turkey. Through trapping of wild birds in other states and relocation to Oregon, the Merriam's subspecies was first successfully introduced to Oregon in 1961 and the Rio Grande subspecies was established in 1975. The

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Rio Grande subspecies proved to be very adaptable and are now found in suitable habitat in eastern and western Oregon. With the expansion of turkey populations, turkeys have become a popular game bird offering opportunities in spring and fall. Many Oregonians also enjoy viewing these large fascinating birds. With the increase of the turkey populations, it became necessary to develop guidelines for their management through the adoption of Oregon's first Wild Turkey Management Plan in 2004. Though the Plan has served well, it is time for the Plan to be updated.

Department staff has drafted an update to the 2004 Plan and is now seeking comment from the public and stakeholders on the proposed Plan. Some examples of the changes in the updated Draft Oregon Wild Turkey Management Plan include:

- More attention on turkeys causing nuisance and damage issues, particularly in western Oregon
- Removed separate treatment of the Merriam's subspecies of turkeys since there are few, if any, pure Merriam's turkeys remaining in Oregon.
- Revised trap and transplant guidelines for logistic efficiency
- Aligned disease testing protocols with draft Avian Translocation Guidelines
- References to more than 40 additional papers about wild turkeys; most were published since the first Plan was adopted 2004

Draft schedule for updating Oregon's Wild Turkey Management Plan:

- Seek stakeholder and public comment (Summer 2017)
- Consider stakeholder and public comment
- Present to Commission for proposed adoption (Fall 2017)

For more information about Oregon's Draft Wild Turkey Management Plan and how to submit comments go to: <http://odfw.com/wildlife/turkey/>

Furbearer Trapping and Hunting Updates

Furbearer Trapping and Hunting Regulations are set for two year periods and were last adopted at the June 9, 2016 Commission Meeting. Therefore, excluding a temporary rule adoption to account for the new online reporting system, Furbearer Regulations will not be opened in 2017.

ODFW Furtaker Online Reporting System:

- As of January 2017, licensed furtakers can report their activities online using a computer or mobile device. Paper reports will still be accepted, however online reporting is preferred. The online system provides furtakers instant notification that their reports were received, thereby reducing uncertainty regarding meeting reporting deadlines.
- Furtakers can submit new and view old reports on the online site: <https://fwpubapps.dfw.state.or.us/furtakerharvest/>

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Big Game Regulation Overview and Species by Species Highlights

Regulation Simplification Project

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has initiated a project to simplify the hunting regulations, beginning with the 2018 Big Game Regulations. The project will occur in three (sometimes-overlapping) phases.

- Phase 1 – Simplify delivery of the information
- Phase 2 – Simplify the actual regulations
- Phase 3 – Simplify the hunts

Phase 1 is focused primarily on improving the layout and content of the Regulations booklet. While simplification is the goal, there are other considerations. It is necessary to balance enforceability with simplification, and there are circumstances where complexity may result in increased hunting opportunity. For example, if controlled hunts were combined it could be necessary to reduce total tag numbers to manage the harvest of the area with the “best” hunting.

The type of changes you may notice in the 2018 Big Game Regulations include:

- New regulations **highlighted in yellow** (consistent with the recently revised Fishing Regulations)
- Table of contents on 1st page after advertisements, and contents follows organization of booklet
- New pages of consolidated information for Youth, Landowner, Uniformed Services and Veterans
- New page dedicated to hunting small game, including western gray squirrels
- Improved Wildlife Management Unit (WMU) map, and better map resources information

As noted, there will be some overlap of the phases, for example, since 2017 is a legislative year, the Department, with the assistance of the Oregon Hunters Association (OHA) worked with the Oregon legislature to eliminate the 3% nonresident limitation for the General Fall Bear Season. Note, the nonresident limitation is still in effect for all spring bear hunts. In general, there are few significant changes to hunting season structure proposed for 2018. In conjunction with the Regulation Simplification Project, hunters are likely to see more changes proposed for 2019, 2020, and beyond.

Phase 2 will be looking at changing or eliminating regulations. Criteria will include “Is it still needed?”. For example, the 3% nonresident limitation for the General Fall Bear Season was put in place more than 20 years ago when dogs could be used to hunt bear in Oregon. With the ban on the use of dogs, the demand for bear hunting by nonresidents and need for the regulation no longer exist. Other considerations include:

- Is the regulation redundant?
- Is the regulation enforceable?
- Does the regulation effect opportunity, hunter satisfaction, and/or hunter recruitment?
- Can the regulation be simplified so it is easier to understand?

The regulation on page 28 of the 2017 Big Game Regulations that begins: “**No Person Shall:** • Hunt with a centerfire or muzzleloading rifle without a valid used or unused deer or elk tag for that time period and area on your person (see exceptions) during: standard Eastern Oregon controlled buck deer centerfire firearm season (Sept. 30 – Oct. 11), Cascade bull elk centerfire firearm season (Oct. 14 –Oct. 20)”....., is one the Department recognizes is complicated and restricts opportunity. The regulation dates back at least

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to 1980, at which time the restriction was specific to General Elk Seasons; by 1990, it had expanded to include controlled elk, pronghorn, and bighorn sheep seasons. Since 1994, the basic regulation has not changed much, significant changes have been the addition of exceptions to increase hunting opportunity for species other than deer or elk in some areas and circumstances. The exceptions do increase the complexity of the regulation.

The restriction is intended to reduce party hunting (more than one hunter attempting to fill a tag). As part of the Regulation Simplification process, the Department will be considering options including modifying, eliminating, or potentially replacing the regulation with a simpler rule that addresses the intent of reducing party hunting. The Department is very interested in ideas from hunters for modifying or replacing this regulation.

While there is not an absolute timeline, the Department expects to begin digging into Phase 2 fall 2017, after Phase 1 is pretty well wrapped up and the 2018 Big Game Regulations have been printed.

Phase 3 will be looking for opportunities to simplify hunts. Biologists will be asked to consider aspects of general seasons and controlled hunts including:

- Is the hunt still needed?
- Can the hunt dates be matched up with other hunts?
- Can the hunt boundary be simplified, or adjusted to match the boundary of a similar hunt for a different species?
- Can the hunt be combined with another hunt?

No doubt, Phase 2 and Phase 3 will overlap. The Department anticipates that each year, as the Regulations evolve, there will be changes that could be classified as Phase 1, Phase 2, and Phase 3. It is expected that by 2019 or 2020 the emphasis will be on Phase 3. At this time, the major effort is on the Big Game Regulations. However, some of the changes will be applied to the Game Bird and Furbearer Regulations to move towards standardization.

Updates

Legislative changes

- **House Bill 2030**, removes the 3% limitation on nonresident bear tags for the General Fall Bear Season. The 3% nonresident limitation for bear tags was put in place decades ago when dogs could be used to hunt bear in Oregon. With the ban on the use of dogs, the demand for bear hunting by nonresidents, and need for the regulation, no longer exist. The Department, with the assistance of the Oregon Hunters Association (OHA) worked with the Oregon legislature to eliminate the 3% nonresident limitation for the General Fall Bear Season. Note, the nonresident limitation is still in effect for all spring bear hunts. This change will be in place for fall, 2017 seasons.
- **House Bill 2566** extends the Mentored Youth Program to include youth 14 and 15 years of age. The change will take effect January, 2018.
- **House Bill 3158** requires the Commission to implement a program to encourage persons to report violations of the wildlife laws. The program will include offering a person either preference points in a scaled system determined by the Fish and Wildlife Commission, or a cash reward, for

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information leading to citations or arrest for unlawful take, possession or waste of antelope, bear, cougar, deer, elk, moose, mountain goat, mountain sheep or wolf. The reward for reporting violations will vary depending upon species. For example, violations related to bighorn sheep will provide more incentive (preference points or dollars) than violations involving deer. Administrative rules for the program will be developed with input from the public and OSP and presented to the Commission, to be put in place during 2018.

- **Senate Bill 327** modifies the “recreational immunity” statutes. Oregon has a long-standing statute that, in general, states that a landowner is not liable, if, for example, a hunter has an accident on their property and injures themselves, provided the hunter was not charged for access. A recent Oregon Supreme Court decision determined the current statute only protected the landowner. With this interpretation, the Department had immunity from a hunter on a wildlife area, but employees did not. This also had a direct effect on hunter access to A&H properties where the rancher was protected but not their family or employees. Previously it was believed the coverage extended to family and employees.

Changes to the statute by SB 327 clearly extended recreational immunity to include not only landowners, lessees, occupants, etc., but also their employee, volunteer, or agent while acting within the scope of assigned duties; and also business partners, shareholders, etc..

This change took place immediately when signed by the Governor.

- **Senate Bill 372** (roadkill bill) requires the Commission to adopt rules to implement a program to issue wildlife salvage permits for deer or elk, for human consumption, accidentally killed as result of vehicle collision. If the animal is a buck or bull, the antlers must be surrendered to the Department. The State of Oregon will not be liable for any loss or damage arising from the recovery or consumption of a deer or elk collected pursuant to a salvage permit.

Details of the program, including the form and method for applying for and receiving a wildlife salvage permit; and the terms and conditions for the recovery, possession, use and transport of deer or elk pursuant to a wildlife salvage permit have not been established. The Department has more than a year to develop rules for the program designed to minimize poaching being reported as “salvage”.

The roadkill salvage program will go into effect by January, 2019.

- **Senate Bill 373** directs the Commission to develop a pilot program for urban deer population control. After passage of a city ordinance declaring that deer populations have risen to levels that constitute a public nuisance, the city may petition the Department for assistance in reducing deer population levels within city limits. If the Department determines/agrees the deer population is a public nuisance, the local government body or an appropriate agent may be allowed to take deer to reduce the population. To implement the pilot program The Department will consult with cities where high urban deer populations are a concern; and food banks or other charitable organizations that serve the area.

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Before deer are removed under this program, the governing body of the city must “adopt by ordinance restrictions on placing, depositing, distributing, storing or scattering food, garbage or any other attractant so as to knowingly constitute a lure, attractant or enticement for deer.”

Rules for the pilot program must include, but need not be limited to:

- (a) Provisions for the methods by which deer may be taken under the pilot program, which cannot include by dart or lethal injection
- (b) Provisions for ensuring the edible portions of deer taken are distributed, at the expense of the local government, to a local food bank or other charitable organization
- (c) A requirement that, if the hides and antlers of a deer taken are not sold by the local government to a licensed Hide and Antler Deader, the antlers must be surrendered to the Department
- (d) Provisions for ensuring that the number of deer taken does not exceed the number necessary to reduce the population to a level that is no longer a public nuisance

Details of the urban deer population control program will go into effect by January, 2019.

Landowners and Hunters Elk Damage Management Meetings

After hearing frequent complaints from landowners and hunters about elk damage, management of elk damage, and lack of hunter opportunity on private lands experiencing elk damage, the decision was made to meet with stakeholders (landowner and hunter representatives) to discuss the issue and identify ideas that could help reduce concerns. In addition to the Department, stakeholders invited included the Oregon Bow Hunters, Traditional Archers of Oregon, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Oregon Hunters Association, Oregon Cattlemen’s Association, Oregon Dairy Farmers Association, Oregon Farm Bureau, Oregon Forest Industries Council, Oregon Small Woodlands Association, and landowners from Morrow, Umatilla, Grant, Harney, Baker, Tillamook, and Coos counties.

Since January, 2016, eight meetings were held, five with eastern Oregon stakeholders, followed by three meetings with western Oregon stakeholders. Meeting attendance varied, some organizations were represented at both eastern and western Oregon meetings, and not all entities were represented at every meeting. Concerns were expressed by all stakeholders. There was much discussion regarding current elk populations, specific examples of elk damage problems, and the Department’s Damage Policy, including a review of current options to address elk damage (advice, hazing permits, kill permits, Elk Damage Program Tags, emergency hunts, etc.) and the limitations associated with each of these damage tools. For example, hunting can only occur August-March.

A major theme, and a common concern for landowners and hunters, is the increased use of private lands by elk. This change has occurred in many areas, including locations where the elk population has been stable or declined, but more of the elk are increasing the time they spend on private land. Reasons for the shift in elk use vary but include reduced forage/habitat quality on federal lands, increased disturbance on federal lands. Conversely, private lands may provide better forage, less disturbance, or even “refuge” areas.

Several ideas were generated at these meetings. NOTE, there was not necessarily a consensus on the following concepts. However, at least some stakeholders supported each concept and there was enough discussion that the group felt these ideas should be presented for public review and comment.

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- **Action Plans** will be developed for areas with extreme and/or complicated damage issues. Key to the success of an Action Plan will be the Department and the landowner(s) involved meeting to more formally document the history of damage, actions already taken, and to discuss options and next steps in the effort to reduce the problem.
- **Kill Permit** parameters were discussed. Ideas included allowing landowners or their agents to keep some or all of the meat. There was also interest in having the Department or a third party act as the agent to shoot, dress, and deliver the carcass to the charitable organization.
- **Federal Land Management.** Everyone agreed, they would like to increase elk numbers and use on federal lands. Increasing elk use of public land would reduce damage to private land and create more hunting opportunity. Increasing forage enhancement on federal lands, and increasing the area and closure period of Travel Management Areas were identified as methods to keep more elk on public land. Action would require cooperation from federal land managers and enforcement.
- **Monetary incentive** to landowners to allow public access for hunting. Ideas discussed were to create a surcharge on tag fees that would be used to compensate landowners for allowing public access, or to use the money raised to compensate landowners suffering damage from elk/wildlife.
- **Landowner Preference Program (LOP)** change to allow individuals with LOP tags to hunt the entire Wildlife Management Unit (WMU) not just their land. Not all the participants agreed to overall concept without some limitations, such as only allowing hunting off their property when the landowner allows public access on their land for hunting. This concept would require changes by the Legislature to the LOP statutes.
- **Modify the Elk Damage Tag Program.** Two ideas received the most discussion, allowing tag holders to hunt in an identified adjacent area outside the property where damage is occurring (and where tag is valid); and allow more than five tags to be issued for a landowners property at one time. This concept would require changes by the Legislature to the LOP statutes which also direct the Elk Damage Tag Program.
- **Master Hunter Program.** There was some discussion about phasing out the current Master Hunter Program. Potentially it could be replaced with a new/revised program focused on improving the relationship and acceptance of hunters by private landowners. Stakeholders from the meetings including the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Oregon Hunters Association, and Oregon Cattlemen's Association agreed to meet in the next few months to discuss what a new Master Hunter type program may look like.

For many of these concepts to be implemented, final recommendations would need to be adopted by the Commission and some would also require legislation to change statutes.

Big Game Regulations Development Process

2018 Big Game Hunting Regulations, including seasons and controlled hunt tag numbers will be adopted September 15, 2017.

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2019 Big Game Hunting Regulations: Following is the tentative Big Game Regulation development timeline for 2019 seasons. Dates cannot be finalized until after Commission Meeting dates for 2018 have been set.

NOTE: Dates may shift a week or two depending on the final dates of 2018 Commission Meetings.

- November, 2017 – March, 2018: Districts conduct field surveys
- April 1, 2018: Deadline for canceling 2018 hunts or making emergency tag reductions
- May 15, 2018: District proposal deadline
- June 11-15, 2018: Division meets with Biologists
 - Discuss 2019 seasons, tag numbers, and regulations
- June 30, 2018: Information for public outreach/meetings distributed to Districts
- July 9-20, 2018: Districts conduct public outreach/meetings
- July 2018: Commission packet due to Division Administrators
- September 2018: Commission Adoption of 2019 seasons and tag numbers
- November, 2018: 2019 Big Game Regulations printed and delivered to vendors

General Winter Conditions

Western Oregon: Winter 2016–2017 was generally colder and wetter than normal. Several areas set record monthly moisture amounts. Winter conditions also persisted much later than have been seen in recent years for many areas.

Eastern Oregon: The winter of 2016–2017 was characterized by long lasting, severe, snowy conditions. According to NOAA weather evaluations at the end of February, the Blue Mountains were at 135% snow pack, and the 4th most severe winter on record, if considering days of snow and daily temperatures. These conditions lasted from approximately mid-December to the end of February. However, in many areas deer and elk survival were at or slightly below the 5 year average, primarily due to our reoccurring low elevation and south facing melt offs of snow. In addition, there were short duration intermittent temperature rises during January and February. Most Districts did not request emergency tag reductions for the 2017 fall season. The harshest conditions, resulting in emergency mule deer and pronghorn tag reductions for fall 2017 hunts, occurred in Baker, Union, and northern Malheur Counties.

Statewide: The winter of 2016–2017 will be remembered for the extended period of snowy, cold weather across Oregon. It appears the state will be in good shape, as far as water supply, heading into the summer months. Biologists are expecting a good forage year for animals that made it through the harsh winter. Upland game bird production is anticipated to be much improved, although adult bird numbers will be down in some areas because of winter mortality.

2018 Big Game Hunting Regulations Proposal Information

Hunting Technology and Methods: The Department has heard comments from hunters and biologists regarding changes in technology and hunting methods.

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- The **TrackingPoint** shooting system is a rifle that incorporates a computer, weather station, and a laser range finder. The user marks the location on the target they want to hit; the system tracks the target, calculates range, wind speed, target speed, target direction, and sets the scope to proper holdover and lead. The user pulls and releases the trigger, the weapon is triggered to fire by the computer, but not until the calculated point of impact matches the marked hit location on the target. Some models are good to 1400 yards and target speeds to 20 mph. This type of “smart gun” is illegal in Oregon because the rangefinder emits a beam to the target.
- **Slash INsetBlade® Arrows** are considered illegal for big game in Oregon. Not only are the blades moveable, once deployed they are “barbed”. Should the wording of the regulation be changed slightly to make it clearer to hunters these arrows are not legal? One reason for the restriction on mechanical broadheads is reduced penetration; note, Alaska does not allow their use on larger animals including elk, moose, bison, muskox, and brown bear.
- **Handheld FLIR** (Forward Looking InfraRed), or other thermal or night vision optics are currently legal to use for hunting in Oregon unless it is incorporated into the sight. The current regulation is:
No Person Shall:
 - Hunt any wildlife with infrared or any other night vision sight.

Recommendations have been received from Department biologists and hunters to change the regulation to make night vision equipment illegal for hunting. The change could be as simple as one word.

No Person Shall:

- Hunt any wildlife with infrared or any other night vision **equipment**.
- **Baiting game mammals** is legal in Oregon except for black bear and on the North Bank Habitat Area near Roseburg. In 2008, the Department surveyed all 50 states. Baiting deer and elk (where present) was legal in 15 states, legal in parts of 13 states, and illegal in 22 states. “Partial” states generally allow baiting on private lands, or ban baiting on Wildlife Areas, some states ban baiting on state and federal lands. AZ and WA were considering making baiting illegal.

The Department is considering making baiting game mammals illegal. Baiting is already illegal for upland game birds, migratory game birds, and black bear. Biologically, baiting can increase the spread of disease by increasing concentrations and contact among animals. There has also been a recent request to the Commission to make baiting illegal, the conflict was with hunters that had several sites baited on federal land.

Current regulations include:

- Using bait to attract black bear and using dogs to locate and tree black bear is prohibited. Applying a scent or attractant to one’s body or clothing while worn is not baiting.
- Definition: “Bait” for hunting game mammals means any substance placed to attract an animal by its sense of smell or taste, including, but not limited to, food items or minerals (such as salt). Applying a scent or attractant to one’s body or clothing while worn is not baiting.

Typically, agricultural crops and food plots are not considered baiting.

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Access and Habitat “Access Area” Regulations

The Department, through the Access and Habitat (A&H) Program, provides hunting access to approximately 35 “Access Areas” on private land. A few A&H funded areas are listed in the Big Game Regulations; including some of the Travel Management Areas (TMAs), such as North Coast and Wendling TMAs on page 104 of the Regulations. The advantage to being listed in the Regulations is the rules are adopted as Oregon Administrative Rules (OARs), therefore OSP can write citations for violations such as driving closed roads. A&H Access Areas are not listed in the Regulations, which means landowners must go through the civil process if a violation occurs, such as hunters driving on a road closed to the public.

The Access and Habitat State Board has asked the Department to look into adoption of some type of OAR that would authorize OSP to enforce Access Area regulations. All of the Access Areas are on the Oregon Hunting Map at <http://www.oregonhuntingmap.com/>. There is a map for each Access Area that lists the rules for the area, for example, the Otley Access Area regulations are on the map at: http://www.dfw.state.or.us/maps/access_habitat/otley.pdf. Other Access Areas have similar, but not identical rules.

The Department is considering the following OAR Concept: **“Access Areas”** funded by the Access and Habitat Program, provide hunting access to private lands. Hunters are required to follow the area regulations printed on the map for each Access Area. Common Access Area Regulations include vehicle travel restricted to designated roads, no ATVs or motorcycles allowed on private land, no fires, no nighttime use.

The specific regulations for each Access Area can be found through the Oregon Hunting Map at: <http://www.oregonhuntingmap.com/>. Select the Access Area of interest, at the bottom of the area description pop-up, under “Other Resources”, select “map”. Maps are also available in map boxes at TMA entrances, local District ODFW offices, and at ODFW HQ in Salem.

Starkey Unit Travel Management Area Date Changes

Date changes are planned to be in place this fall for the Clear Cr. (52A) and Indian Cr.-Gorham Butte (52C) TMAs in the Starkey WMU. The proposed change was included in the “What’s New”, and TMA sections of the 2017 Big Game Regulations, and notifications were posted at the TMAs. The closure period will begin 3 days prior to the opening of the general deer and elk archery season and extend through the close of Rocky Mt. bull elk second season (August 23- November 12, 2017). Final regulations will be on TMA Maps and available on the ODFW website by August 15, 2017.

LOP Tag Limitations in “Special Opportunity” Hunts

The Landowner Preference (LOP) Program was first implemented in 1982, when controlled hunts were increasing, replacing general seasons. The Program provided landowners the opportunity to obtain tags to hunt on their property, and recognized the importance of wildlife habitat on private lands.

In 2000, LOP tags were limited “in certain controlled elk hunts with a bag limit of spike or better in units where the usual bag limit for bull elk is spike only”. Elk hunts that included branch bulls in the bag limit in Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) where most of the bull hunting was restricted to spike only include hunts in Catherine Creek, Pine Creek, Mt Emily, Walla Walla, Wenaha, Starkey, etc..

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In 2008, six mule deer hunts with small tag numbers (10-20 per hunt), that provide a special opportunity to hunt during the late season were added to the list of Limited LOP hunts. The formula used to limit tags for these deer and elk hunts is five tags or 10% of the tags authorized by the Commission, whichever is greater.

In 2015, the same five tags or 10% formula was used to limit LOP mule deer buck tags in WMUs where the population was below Management Objective (MO). At the March, 2017 Commission Meeting the Commission adopted a new, three tiered system for limiting LOP mule deer tags, depending primarily on how close the mule deer population is to the Population Management Objective for the WMU. The Commission was asked during public testimony to consider adding hunts that provide a very limited opportunity, particularly the Metolius Bow hunt for buck deer, to the hunts that are permanently restricted to five tags or 10% of the tags authorized by the Commission.

Following the request, the Commission directed Department Staff to review special opportunity hunts and prepare a proposal for the September 2017 Commission Meeting. After review, the Department is proposing to add six hunts to the list of special opportunity hunts restricted to five tags or 10% of tags authorized for the public. (Table 1)

Table 1. Special Opportunity Deer Hunts

**2014—For Comparison Prior to Any
LOP Limitations**

Hunt #	Hunt Name	Controlled Hunt Tags Authorized	LOP Tags Authorized	LOP Tags Sold	2016 1st Choice Applicants	Preference Points to Draw Tag in 2016
Hunts Already LOP Restricted to 5 Tags or 10% of Tags Authorized						
141C	WHITE RVR UNIT NO 2	10	5	5	1,815	18
142B	HOOD UNIT NO 2	10	5	3	288	14
154C	MT. EMILY	10	5	5	2,115	17
156R2	N WENAHA BOW, WTD	30	5	0	25	First Year, 1
165R	BEULAH UNIT BOW	20	5	0	435	11
168R2	SE WHITEHORSE BOW	20	5	0	127	7
170R3	HART MT NO. 3 BOW	6	5	0	132	14
New Hunt 2017, to be added to LOP Restricted Hunts						
157A	LOWER WALLOWA VALLEY, WTD	NA	NA	NA	New in 2017	New in 2017
Late Season Special Opportunity Hunts Proposed to be added to LOP Restricted Hunts						
132M	KLAMATH FALLS MUZ	27	No Limit	26	257	6
139M1	METOLIUS NO 1 MUZ	44	No Limit	2	289	8
139R1	METOLIUS NO.1 BOW	21	No Limit	31	2,178	17
171M	JUNIPER MUZ	10	No Limit	2	479	16
175T	INTERSTATE YOUTH	30	No Limit	21	936	10

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Hunt Dates for Auction, Raffle, Premium Hunts, and Mandatory Reporting Incentive tags

At the February Commission Meeting, the Commission was asked to extend the hunt dates for deer and elk Auction and Raffle Tags. The request was to start hunts earlier (in August), and end hunts later (December 31).

Current Dates:

- Deer and Elk, September 1 – November 30
- Pronghorn, August 1 – September 30
- Rocky Mtn Goat, September 1 – October 31
- Bighorn Sheep, August 1 – November 22

The Commission, and the Access and Habitat State Board, have had requests to extent these season dates in the past. Most requests have been focused on deer and elk tags, and extending the season later. In the past, neither the Department nor the Access and Habitat Board have supported extending hunts after November 30, which is when some winter range closures take effect.

At the July, 2017, Access and Habitat Board Meeting, the Department will be discussing this issue with the Board. While no proposal has been developed, one option to be considered would be to standardize the hunt dates for all species. A hunt period of August 1-November 30, would address the issues of deer and elk archery seasons opening before these special hunts some years, extend pronghorn season to after fire season, and be consistent with the current effort to simplify regulations.

Proposed General Season Bag Limits and Dates

Annually most big game season dates follow a cycle in which they progress one day earlier each year then “jump” a week later, starting the cycle over again. A key date is the opening of buck deer rifle season which is the Saturday nearest October 1. For 2018, most hunts are proposed to be adjusted one day earlier than in 2017. For example, archery season which opens on August 26 in 2017 is proposed to open on August 25 in 2018.

“Standard” season dates for **2018** hunts are as follows:

Archery.....	Aug. 25–Sept. 23
Cascade Buck Deer.....	Sept. 29–Oct. 12 & Oct. 20–Nov. 2
Coast Buck Deer.....	Sept. 29–Nov. 2
Western OR Antlerless Deer.....	Oct. 20–Nov. 2
Controlled Buck Deer.....	Sept. 29–Oct. 10
Eastern OR Antlerless Deer.....	Oct. 13–21
Cascade Bull.....	Oct. 13–19
General Coast 1 st Season.....	Nov. 10-13
General Coast 2 nd Season.....	Nov. 17-23
Rocky Mt. Bull Elk 1 st Season.....	Oct. 24–Oct. 28
• Columbia Basin Extended Season.....	Oct. 24–Dec. 31
○ (Any elk Oct. 24 – Nov. 30, Antlerless elk Dec. 1 – 31)	
Rocky Mt. Bull Elk Season 2 nd Season.....	Nov. 3–11
Rocky Mt. Std. Antlerless Elk.....	Nov. 17–25
Pronghorn (1 st Centerfire Season).....	Aug. 11–19

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Some relevant 2018 holidays that may affect season dates are:

Labor Day.....September 3
 Thanksgiving.....November 22

Controlled Hunt Tag Numbers Summary

Total proposed controlled tags for 2018–2019 seasons (137,591) (Table 2) are decreasing slightly (-2.5%) from 141,133 in 2017–2018. Within species, proposed controlled deer tags are dropping the most with a 4.6% reduction for 2018–2019 whereas controlled bighorn tags are down 1.0%. Elk tags, and pronghorn tags are changing less than 1%. Rocky Mountain Goat tags are proposed to increase 4.3% and Controlled Spring Bear is increasing less than 2%. The slight decline in elk is due largely to an increase in sales rate for tags that were drawn by hunters last year, which decreased the level of correction for many of the hunts. Declines in mule deer related to impacts of winter 2016-2017 and changes in tag sales rate. Bighorn tags are changing primarily in response to changes in the mature ram cohort of local populations. See controlled hunt tag tables for details.

Table 2. Summary of proposed controlled hunt tag numbers, 2017 – 2018.

Species/Hunt Type	2017 tags	Proposed 2018 tags	% Change 2018 - 2017
TOTAL DEER	68,291	65,151	-4.6%
Buck	54,087	51,472	-4.8%
Bow/Muzzleloader	4,435	4,423	-0.3%
Antlerless (600 Series)	8,456	7,993	-5.5%
Youth	1,246	1,196	-4.0%
Premium	67	67	0.0%
TOTAL ELK	61,268	60,705	-1.0%
Bull/Either Sex	36,137	35,956	-0.5%
Bow/Muzzleloader	9,466	9,145	-3.4%
Rifle Antlerless	14,289	14,276	-0.1%
Youth	1,312	1,264	-3.7%
Premium	64	64	0.0%
BIGHORN	85	84	-1.0%
Rocky Mountain	7	7	0.0%
California	78	77	-1.0%
MT. GOAT	23	24	4.3%
TOTAL PRONGHORN	2,391	2,407	0.7%
Rifle Buck/Either Sex	1,430	1,445	1.0%
Bow/Muzzleloader	729	731	0.3%
Doe	165	164	-0.6%
Youth	40	40	0.0%
Premium	27	27	0.0%
TOTAL SPRING BEAR	9,075	9,221	1.6%
Controlled Spring Bear	4,477	4,623	3.3%
Youth Spring Bear	198	198	0.0%
SW Limited	4,400	4,400	0.0%
Grand total tags	141,133	137,591	-2.5%

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Species by Species Highlights

Black Bear

The Department is proposing 9,221 Spring Bear tags for 2018. The Department is proposing to maintain tags at 4,400 for the 2017 Southwest Limited season where tags are sold First-come First-served. An additional 4,821 tags will be allocated in 19 controlled hunts for spring bear. For Spring and Fall Bear Seasons, no season date changes are proposed for 2018.

The 3% limitation on nonresident Fall Black Bear tags was removed in the 2017 Oregon Legislative Session (HB 2030A). The limitation remains in place for Spring Bear hunts.

Cougar

Target Areas

Four Cougar Target Areas were initiated January 1, 2016 and continue in 2017. These efforts are outlined in the 2006 Cougar Management Plan (Chapter VI, Adaptive Management Process) (Table 3).

Table 3. Current Target Areas and results as of June 12, 2017.

Target Area	Purpose	Annual Objective	Administrative Removals 2016	Administrative Removals 2017
East Umpqua	Reduce livestock depredation	30	30	25
Interstate	Improve mule deer populations	50	26	5
Steens	Improve mule deer & BHS populations	10	10	3
Warner	Improve mule deer populations	5	5	1

Population Overview

The Department uses a deterministic, density-dependent population model (Keister and Van Dyke 2002) to estimate annual cougar abundance in Oregon from 1987 to present at the statewide level, and 1994 to present at the zone level. Like most state-level population models for cougars, this model relies on harvest data to develop estimates. The statewide population abundance for 2016 was estimated to be 6,413 for all age classes (3,325 adults). The population has been increasing slowly since 2006 with an average annual increase of about 1%. No Cougar Zone Quotas were reached in 2016 although Zone A saw 176 mortalities and has a cap of 180. As of June 12, 2017, a total of 195 cougar mortalities had been reported for 2017 including 72 by hunters, 68 taken on damage complaints, 10 taken on human safety-pet conflict, 34 due to Target Area efforts, and 11 others.

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Cougar Management Plan

The 2006 Oregon Cougar Management Plan is currently being updated. This revision will result in the fourth Oregon Cougar Management Plan in the Department's history. The proposed schedule is to have a Draft Plan available for the August Commission Meeting, with potential adoption in October.

Bighorn Sheep

The Department is proposing 84 Bighorn Sheep tags (77 California, 7 Rocky Mountain) in 36 hunts (31 California, 5 Rocky Mountain) for 2018. This represents a one tag decline from 2017. Bighorn tags are changing primarily in response to changes in the mature ram cohort of local populations. Six tags (one Rocky Mountain, five California) are proposed for non-resident hunters (7% percent). No hunt changes are proposed for 2018 bighorn seasons except for a one-day shift in season dates for most hunts. The hunt area for one hunt, 559A1, N Snake River, will be expanded by 82 square miles to provide access to additional animals in an expanded herd range.

Rocky Mountain Goat

The Department is proposing 24 Rocky Mountain goat tags in 14 hunts for 2018, a 1 tag (+4.3%) increase from 2017. Two tags (8%) will be issued to non-resident hunters. No changes to seasons or hunt areas are proposed for 2018 Rocky Mountain goat seasons except for a one-day shift in season dates for most hunts.

Pronghorn Antelope

The Department is proposing 2,407 tags in 57 hunts for 2018, representing a 0.7% increase from 2017 tag numbers. No season or hunt area changes are proposed for 2018, except for the one day shift in season dates for most hunts.

Deer

Proposed general deer seasons are unchanged for 2018, except for a one-day calendar shift. The general archery bag limit is a legal buck except in units identified by the Commission each year. At this time, the Department not proposing any changes to the list of units that would have an expanded bag limit during the general bow season. No deer populations have changed their status in a WMU relative to criteria for inclusion in the expanded bag limit (deer population is $\geq 110\%$ of MO, rising, and recruitment is ≥ 45 fawns/100 adults in end of winter surveys for the previous 3 years) or exclusion of the expanded bag limit (deer population is $\leq 100\%$ of Population MO, declining, and recruitment is ≤ 30 :100 adults in end of winter surveys for previous three years). Similarly, no changes are proposed to the list of WMUs where hunters with disabilities would have an expanded bag limit.

Overall, the Department is proposing a net 5% decrease in controlled deer tag numbers for 2018. As noted earlier, this decline is largely due to effects of the 2016-2017 winter in some parts of eastern Oregon. No season structure changes are proposed to 2018 controlled buck seasons. For antlerless deer, six hunts will be condensed into two hunts in southeastern Oregon: hunts 665A-665D are condensing into hunt 665A SE

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Beulah Ag, and hunts 667A and 667B will become 667A NE Owyhee Ag. Two youth hunts on Ladd Marsh (652T1, 652T2) will be deleted in 2018.

Mule Deer LOP

In 2013, House Bill 2027A authorized the Commission to limit mule deer buck tags in WMUs where the mule deer population is below the Management Objective (MO). In October 2014, the Commission adopted the same formula that has been used for quite some time for selected deer and elk hunts with limited LOP tags. In these hunts LOP tags are limited to five tags or 10 percent of the total controlled hunt tags authorized for each hunt, whichever is greater. In 2014, a total of 2,804 controlled mule deer buck LOP tags were sold with allocation based on acreage owned and registered. Beginning in 2015, LOP tags were limited for mule deer buck hunts (100 Series) in WMUs where estimated populations were below 100% of the established population MO for the unit, 2,335 and 2,374 LOP buck tags were sold in 2015 and 2016, respectively.

Application of this formula resulted in a number of landowners not receiving tags for some controlled buck hunts. Following concerns from these landowners, the Department conducted a workgroup to review the tag allocation formula. Workgroup members included representatives of the Oregon Cattleman's Association, Oregon Farm Bureau, Oregon Hunters Association, Oregon Bow Hunters, Traditional Archers of Oregon, landowners, and hunters at large.

The final result of the workgroup meetings was a three-tiered approach to allocation of LOP mule deer tags which was adopted by the Commission in March 2017. Tiers are still based on the estimated wintering population for each WMU expressed as a percent of the population MO. However, the total number of LOP available in a hunt differs based on how close the population is to the MO.

Tier 1: For populations at 80% or more of MO, there is no limitation on number of LOP tags available and LOP tags are allocated according to the current acreage table.

Tier 2: For populations from 60 to 79% of MO, LOP tags available are limited to 5 tags or 15% of the total controlled buck tags authorized for the public for that hunt, whichever is greater.

Tier 3: For populations below 60% of MO, LOP tags available are limited to 5 tags or 10% of the total controlled buck tag level authorized for the public for each hunt, whichever is greater.

Five hunts were also maintained in Tier 1 even though populations in the unit are below MOs. Hunts in the Columbia Basin, E. Biggs, and the NE Owyhee hunt (167A) are directed at addressing high levels of damage and contain extremely high proportions of private land in the hunt areas. Two hunts in Mt. Emily were kept in Tier 1 due to the high proportion of white-tailed deer taken during these hunts. Additionally, four hunts (151, 152A, 165, 165A) were moved from Tier 1 to Tier 2 as a result of emergency tag reductions in response to winter severity.

For the 2017 controlled hunts, including tag reductions resulting from severe winter mortality in some areas, this tiered approach to allocating mule deer LOP tags resulted in 17 hunts in Tier 1, 30 hunts in Tier 2, and 29 hunts in Tier 3. In Tier 2, Tier 3, and Special Opportunity hunts where tags available are limited, 4,909 tags were available for drawing by landowners in the June 2017 controlled hunt drawing. One hundred percent of the Limited LOP Tags available were drawn in 13 of the 65 hunts during the main June controlled hunt drawing. For 2018, approximately 4,600 mule deer LOP tags will be available for landowners to draw in limited LOP hunts, a decline of ~6%. Limited LOP Tag numbers for 2018 mule

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deer hunts will be determined after mule deer population estimates are finalized and available before the September Commission Meeting.

Elk

Most general elk seasons are unchanged for 2018, except for the one-day calendar shift. The Department is proposing one bag limit change in one general archery season area. In the Monroe Subunit of the Willamette WMU, the bag limit will change from “One Antlerless Elk” to “One Elk” during the general archery season. This change will allow some bull harvest while still meeting objectives for the area including Finley National Wildlife Refuge. This change will also occur for the Aug. 25 – Oct. 31, 2018 portion of controlled hunt 215A1, Willamette Plus No. 1.

The general archery season bag limit is a legal bull except in units identified by the Commission each year. At this time, the Department is not proposing any changes to the list of units that would have an expanded bag limit during the general bow season. No elk populations have changed their status in a WMU relative to criteria for inclusion in the expanded bag limit (elk population is 105% of MO, rising, and recruitment is ≥ 31 calves/100 cows in end of winter surveys for the previous 3 years) or exclusion of the expanded bag limit (elk population is $\leq 100\%$ of Population MO, declining, and recruitment is $\leq 25:100$ cows in end of winter surveys for previous three years). Similarly, no changes are proposed to the list of WMUs where hunters with disabilities would have an expanded bag limit.

Overall, the Department is proposing a net 1% decrease in controlled elk tag numbers for 2018. As noted earlier, this decline is largely due to a reduced correction resulting from high tag sales rates in 2016. Four hunts are proposed for deletion in 2018. Hunt 210C Upper Nehalem will be deleted and replaced with 2 new hunts: 210C1 Upper Nehalem No. 1 and 210C2 Upper Nehalem No. 2. Similarly, hunt 214A, West Trask, will be deleted and replaced with 214A1, West Trask No. 1 and 214A2, West Trask No. 2. Hunts 212A3, Miami-Nehalem No. 3, and 221B, Cougar Mt-Taylor Butte, will be deleted for 2018. One new antlerless elk hunt is proposed for 2018 in Starkey Experimental Forest. Current elk populations are above desired levels for research in the area and this hunt is designed to reduce the population as needed for research being conducted in the area.

Elk Damage Tag Implementation

The Oregon Legislature passed House Bill 2027 in 2013 which directed the Department to create and implement a statewide Oregon Landowner Damage Program to address agricultural damage caused by elk. The elk damage tag program does not have minimum acreage requirements and does not limit the number of tags a landowner may acquire. However, no more than 5 tags may be valid at any given time. Additionally, the option for landowners to exchange unused LOP tags 1 for 2 was removed.

The first year of the new elk damage tag program resulted in an overall statewide increase in the number of elk tags issued to address damage and the associated harvest. This increase was driven primarily by increases in northeast Oregon. Since the first year of the program, elk damage tag numbers have stabilized at current levels. There was a slight increase from 2014-15 with 3,162 total tags to 2015-16 with 3,315 total tags issued. The number of tags issued on damage stabilized for the winters of 2015-16 and 2016-17 (Table 4). The severity of last winter did not increase the number of damage elk tags issued.

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Table 4. Number of elk tags and harvest issued to address conflict in Oregon during the 2014–2015 to the 2016–2017 season.

Area	2014 – 2015			2015 – 2016			2016 – 2017*		
	Exchange Tags	Damage Tags	Harvest	Exchange Tags	Damage Tags	Harvest	Exchange Tags	Damage Tags	Harvest
NW Oregon	80	245	158	36	344	199	34	383	245
SW Oregon	252	168	184	1	349	192	0	326	180
NE Oregon	797	1,405	1,103	20	2,164	1,198	7	2,169	1,055
High Desert	78	137	104	16	385	220	12	362	168
Total	1,207	1,955	1,549	73	3,242	1,809	53	3,240	1,648

*Data compiled from 2016-17 completed damage reports received in Salem by 6/19/2017

Premium Hunts

Contained within the fee increase discussions were ideas about license restructuring, new license types, and ways to increase revenue and hunter recruitment and retention. One of the ideas that emerged from these discussions was creating “Premium Hunts”.

In 2016, three new controlled hunt series were implemented. These hunts series are for deer, elk, and pronghorn. Most of the new hunts are for a single WMU, a few are for two adjacent WMUs. For 2017, one tag is proposed for each hunt area, proposals are for 67 deer hunts, 64 elk hunts, and 27 pronghorn hunts. 2017 Premium Hunt applications totaled 53,012, including 20,717 for deer hunts, 21,504 for elk, and 10,789 pronghorn hunt applications. Applications are down 23% from the 69,190 Premium Hunt applications in 2016 (28,021 for deer, 28,989 for elk, and 12,180 for pronghorn). Not all who drew Premium Hunt tags in 2016 bought them, two deer tags and one elk tag were not sold (Table 5).

Table 5, 2016 Premium Hunt Summary

Species	Tags Sold	Reports	Went Hunting		Total Days	Days per Hunter	Antlerless/ Doe	Spike/ Buck	2 Pt	3 Pt	4 Pt	5 Pt	6 Pt	Total Harvest
			No	Yes										
Deer	65	62	4	58	595	10	2		2	6	41			51
Elk	58	57	2	55	817	15	5	2	1	0	1	6	19	34
Pronghorn	27	26	1	25	170	7	2	21						23

*Buck applies to pronghorn, otherwise the column represents spike deer and elk.

4 Pt+ applies to deer, for 4 points and larger

6 PT+ applies to elk, for 6 points and larger