Big Game Hunting Review

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June 2020 Commission Update
Big Game Hunting Review

- Review project goals
- Online public forum
- Deer and elk hunter survey
- Proposals being considered for 2021 hunting season
- Public outreach and opportunity for input
Big Game Review Goals

• Improve customer service through simpler big game hunting seasons and associated regulations

• Allocate hunting opportunity fairly and consistent with hunter preferences

• Review hunting season structure and allocation of hunting opportunity to promote hunter recruitment, retention and reactivation (R3)

• Ensure hunting seasons meet biological objectives and maintain or improve hunter opportunity
Project Adjustments

• Focus on priority issues
  ▪ Timing of West Cascade deer and elk season
  ▪ Eastern Oregon archery deer and elk season

• Selection of issues based on public forum comments and Department management challenges

• Outreach effort prioritized to online resources
Online Public Forum

• Opportunity for input prior to proposal development
• Forum live for 30 days in February
• 1,393 comments from 9,820 unique visitors
• Beneficial tool and positive experience
• Public report of results available late-June
Deer and Elk Hunter Survey

- Prioritized collection of unbiased information on opinions and preferences of hunters
- Survey of resident deer and elk hunters completed this week
- Expected sample size of 2,000 but completed >4,000 surveys
- Survey focused on informing specific changes the Department is considering proposing
- Public report of results available late-June
- Looking at possibility of presenting results to Commission later this summer
West Cascade Deer and Elk

• Decades ago there were multiple, later and longer Cascade elk seasons

• Seasons moved from Nov to Oct due to challenges with maintaining bull ratios

• Less desirable time of year and shorter season

• Causes a 7-day break in Cascade buck deer season

• Declining participation and very low hunter success

• Opportunity to provide a better experience for customers and simpler regulations
West Cascade Deer and Elk

• Two options being considered
  ▪ Move W. Cascade Elk Season to early-Nov
    o 7-day season, starting Saturday after deer season
    o Overlap youth 2-day deer season
  ▪ Alternative - Current W. Cascade Elk dates, but eliminate break in Cascade Buck Deer
  ▪ Both options would create consistent date for Western Oregon General Deer Season
Eastern Oregon Archery Elk

• Statewide general archery season established in 1979

• 30-day season starting in late-Aug since 1983

• Created as a liberal season due to low hunter interest, limited technology and low harvest success

• Archery hunt originally designed to draw hunters away from crowded rifle seasons
Eastern Oregon Archery Elk

• Over the last 40 years archery hunting has become very popular
• Objective of drawing hunters away from rifle season was met >20 years ago
• Social and political pressures have led to little opportunity for adaptive management
Eastern Oregon Archery Elk

- Many benefits and challenges with current season
- Benefits of current general season
  - Quality experience for public land bull elk hunting
  - Significant amount of hunting opportunity
  - Unlimited tags so hunters are guaranteed a tag every year
  - Hunters can hunt their preferred unit while also accumulating preference points
  - Can hunt general season, if unsuccessful in controlled draw
  - Hunt east and west in same year
  - No limit on non-resident hunters
Eastern Oregon Archery Elk

- Challenges with current general season
  - High hunter density in most popular units
    - Elk distribution concerns – public vs. private land
    - Frequent hunter complaints on crowding
  - Growing inequity in opportunity and harvest in some units
  - When harvest changes are necessary, we can only change controlled rifle harvest
  - No limit on non-resident hunters
- Challenges caused by managing rifle elk hunting different than archery elk hunting
Eastern Oregon Archery Elk

• 2019 elk hunter survey on weapon preference
  ▪ 75% prefer rifle
  ▪ 21% prefer archery

• 3-year average Starkey, Ukiah, Heppner Units
  ▪ 73% branch bull hunters during archery season
  ▪ 55% branch bull harvest during archery season

• Differences in frequency of hunting opportunity
  ▪ Archery – guaranteed ability to hunt bull elk every year
  ▪ Rifle – accumulate preference points for 5 to 7 years until guaranteed
Eastern Oregon Archery Elk

- Objectives of proposals
  - Reduced archery hunter density where archery hunter density is believed to be impacting elk distribution.
  - Allow for tag changes for all weapon types when changes are appropriate to manage populations, bull ratio, and/or allocation of harvest.
- Achieve objectives by using same management strategy for archery hunting as rifle hunting.
Eastern Oregon Archery Elk

- Controlled archery elk in all eastern Oregon
- Manage archery elk controlled hunts similar to controlled rifle hunts
- Blue and Wallowa Mtns - unit scale hunts
- High Desert, E. Cascades, Columbia - multi-unit hunts
Eastern Oregon Archery Elk

- Considerations for controlled archery hunts
  - Maintain or increase opportunity where feasible
  - Reduce hunter density in problem areas
  - Make shifts in bull harvest allocation in areas with high archery harvest

- Reduction of hunters in some units, increase in others

2019 – 16,300 general season archery hunters
2021 – 15,600 tags proposed

- Controlled archery tags valid within the dates and area of the controlled hunt
- Eastern Oregon controlled hunt tags would not be valid during western Oregon general season
Eastern Oregon Archery Deer

- Currently general archery season with unlimited tags
- Mule deer declining in Oregon and throughout their range in U.S.
- Multiple factors influencing populations
- Recent research that nutrition is a limiting factor
Eastern Oregon Archery Deer

Oregon Mule Deer Population


150,000 175,000 200,000 225,000 250,000 275,000 300,000
Eastern Oregon Archery Deer

- Unlimited tags is no longer an appropriate management tool for declining populations

- Proposal being considered
  - Manage archery deer hunting the same as rifle deer hunting
  - Controlled archery in all eastern Oregon units
  - Would allow biologist to make harvest adjustments to all hunts
  - Proposed tag numbers similar to previous general season archery hunters or decrease in units with significant population declines and corresponding decreases in controlled hunt tags
Public Outreach

- 2019 deer and elk hunter survey
- January 2020 Commission update
- 2020 online forum and survey
- Sport Group Leader meeting and detailed updates
- State and local outreach on proposals by July 1
- Launch dedicated information page on website
- July/August OHA magazine article
Website Information

- All outreach and information directing public to website
- Ability to sign-up for email updates and submit input online
- Hunter opinions and preferences – survey reports
- Details on changes being considered for 2021
- Final Department proposals available in late-August
- Commission process, comment, and testimony opportunity
Questions?