



AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (department) is proposing to shift 13 wildlife management units (WMUs) and three sub-units from the current general archery season to controlled hunts. This recommendation is in response to existing harvest and hunter density concerns within the identified WMUs. The analysis and proceeding public outreach were conducted as a part of the Big Game Regulation Review process undertaken by the Regulation Review Team (Team) over the past five years.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

- Ongoing- Provide project updates and associated data on project specific webpage. This page currently has approximately 6,600 constituents registered to receive updates as they occur.
- March 1, March 11, April 12, and June 23, 2021- Virtual meetings with representatives from a subset of interested sport groups.
- March 16, 2021- Virtual meeting with Sport Group Leaders group
- March 25, 2021- Virtual meeting hosted for interested public within the North Willamette Watershed and North Coast Watershed
- March 29, 2021- Virtual meeting with Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
- March 30, 2021- Virtual meeting hosted for interested public within the South Willamette Watershed
- March 31, 2021- Virtual meeting hosted for interested public within the Grande Ronde and John Day Watersheds
- April 5, 2021- Virtual meeting hosted for interested public within the Deschutes, Klamath and Malheur Watersheds
- April 6, 2021- Virtual meeting with Traditional Archers of Oregon
- April 7, 2021- Virtual meeting hosted for interested public within the Umpqua and Rogue Watersheds
- April 28, 2021- Virtual meeting with Oregon Hunters Association
- May 19, 2021- Backcountry Hunters and Anglers Virtual Event
- June 18, 2021- Commission informational briefing
- July 1, 2021- Facilitated meeting hosted by representatives from a subset of interested sports groups.

ISSUE 1

Whether to modify the current general season approach for archery and implement a controlled hunt within identified WMUs.

ANALYSIS

The primary issues behind the proposed shift to controlled archery hunting for identified eastern Oregon WMUs include:

- Need for bull harvest reductions in some WMUs to achieve Commission adopted bull ratio Management Objectives (MO)
- Continued increase in archery hunter density within specific units
- Equity in branch bull harvest allocation between all weapon types
- Landowner concerns over elk dispersal onto private lands in some areas

The current proposal represents a review and refinement of the original Team recommendation discussed with the Commission in June of 2020, and considers the input received from the June 2021 informational briefing. The Team utilized existing herd composition data as well as harvest and participation data derived from mandatory hunter reporting to identify eastern Oregon WMUs with the greatest need for change in hunt structure. Initial analysis looked at bull ratio by WMU and its relation to commission adopted bull ratio MO. In addition, WMUs with branch bull harvest exceeding 35% in the general archery season compared to other weapon types were identified to predict where hunter shifts within remaining general season WMUs could increase harvest leading to additional MO deficits.

WMUs proposed for controlled hunts, with associated tag number recommendations for 2022, are listed in Table 1. If the Commission accepts the staff recommendation, Table 1 would be incorporated into administrative rule through the 2022 Oregon Big Game Regulations.

For those WMUs not recommended for controlled hunts, the department is proposing to maintain the existing, single general season structure (Figure 1). The general season opportunity maximizes the ability for archers to hunt across many of the WMUs throughout Eastern and Western Oregon and will help to address some of the primary concerns heard by the Team throughout public review. These concerns included impacts of fire closures during the archery season and a desire for families and hunting parties to hunt together regardless of management units. The existing general archery structure also enables youth to experience multiple landscapes with their family.

In order to provide a different option within the newly created controlled hunts and monitor efficacy of an alternate hunt methodology, the Team proposes two zone hunts encompassing the Eagle Cap Wilderness. These zone hunts will replace single unit-controlled hunts within the Minam, Imnaha, Pine Creek, Keating, and Catherine Creek WMUs (Figure 1).

Tag allocations for the proposed Eagle Cap Zone hunt will be based on available harvestable surplus, as they would be within single WMU hunts and allocated based on existing hunter distribution within the current general archery season. In this scenario, overall tags for the Zone during the standard archery period will be less than if the WMUs included were set individually to meet needed harvest reductions within the Keating WMU (Table 2). To reduce impacts to overall archer opportunity lost within a zone hunt structure, the Team also proposes an additional traditional archery only hunt for the same area. A traditional archery zone tag restricts the tagholder to using a traditional bow only. Each hunt will be monitored for overall harvest and hunter participation by unit, and future modifications are possible based on overall outcomes realized once the hunt is fully established.

The initial Team proposal included splitting the general season units into two general seasons to better evaluate participation and reduce potential for additional controlled WMUs in the immediate future. The decision to maintain a single general season is in response to public input throughout the review process.

The department is also reviewing a modification to the existing wildfire policy that would increase flexibility for hunters during the archery season that experience a major loss of opportunity within a controlled hunt. The primary option being considered by staff would allow the department to respond to a loss of opportunity by temporarily allowing a controlled hunt tag to be made valid for the general season. With a single general archery season, in season modifications due to fire would be simpler and have less impact on staff workload than would be necessary if the general season were split.

To address concerns expressed by district staff regarding potential increased harvest and hunter density in WMUs not proposed for controlled hunts in the 2022 archery proposal, the Team recommends establishing specific monitoring criteria. For individual WMUs within the proposed general season hunt, overall participation and associated harvest will be assessed from mandatory harvest reporting surveys. If any additional WMUs see a trend in bull ratios that are below adopted management objectives and realize branch bull harvest within the general archery season that exceeds 35% of total branch bull harvest those units will be evaluated for a change in general season hunt structure.

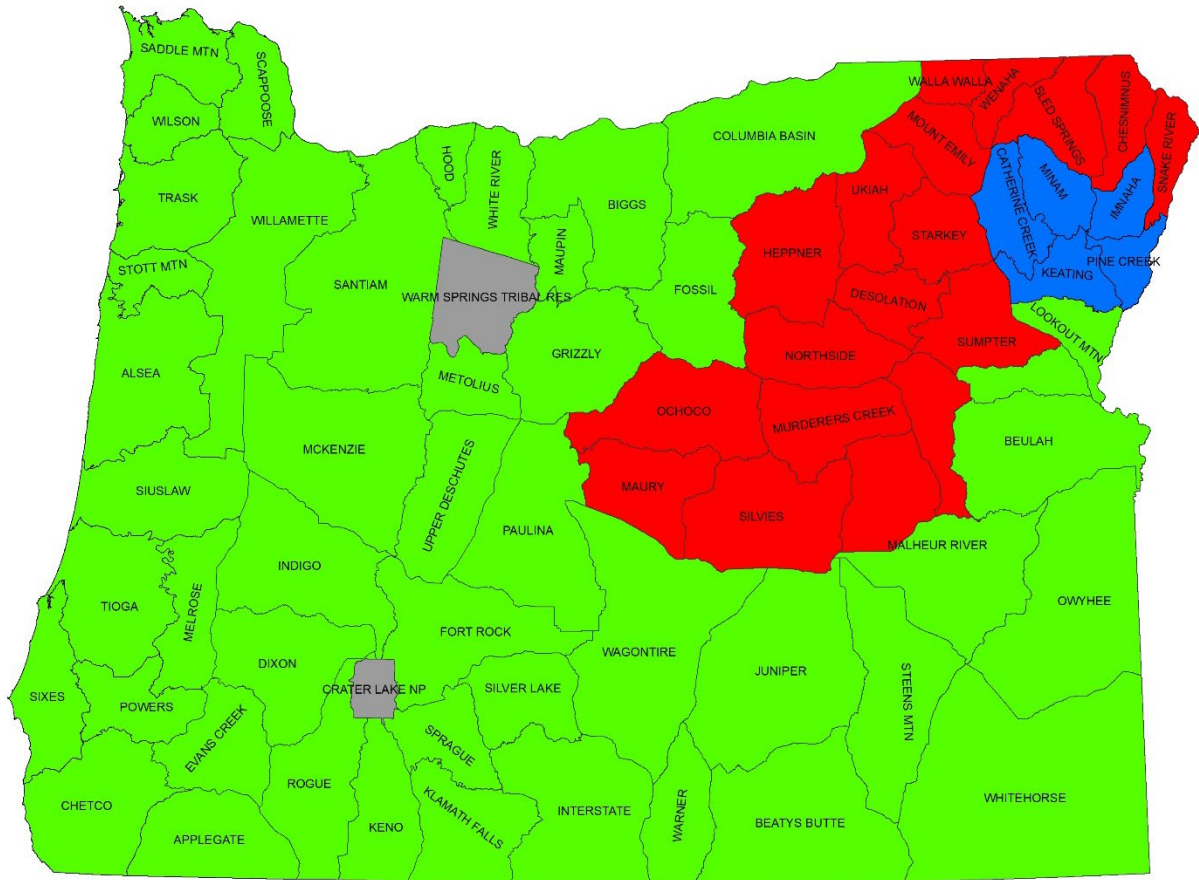
Under the staff proposal, all controlled archery tags in eastern Oregon would be valid only for the WMU or hunt area designated. A zone tag would be valid only for the units comprising the zone. Having each opportunity be a unique, stand-alone hunt is projected to increase the likelihood of hunters drawing their desired hunt and is consistent with current structure utilized during any legal weapon seasons.

Table 1. Proposed WMUs for limited entry, controlled hunting

Proposed Hunt Number	Proposed Hunt Name	2020 Hunter Participation based on Mandatory Hunter Reporting	Proposed 2022 Tags
246R	Murderers Cr Unit Bow	1,060	1,030
247R	Northside Unit Bow	1,170	1,055
248R1	Heppner Unit Bow No. 1	105	100
248R2	Heppner Unit Bow No. 2	1,690	1,600
249R1	Ukiah Unit Bow No. 1	321	200
249R2	Ukiah Unit Bow No. 2	1,350	1,300
250R1	Desolation Unit Bow	1,790	1,085
250R2	N Fork Traditional Bow	55	100
251R	N Sumpter Bow	540*	530
252R	Starkey Unit Bow	1,685	1,300
253R1	Eagle Cap Zone Bow	2375	1,795
253R2	Eagle Cap Zone Traditional Bow		200
259R	Snake River Unit Bow	225	270
265R	W Beulah Bow	550*	500
266R	N Malheur Bow	600*	450
272R	Silvies Unit Bow	900	855

*Data managed on unit scale, participation for sub-unit estimated based on district input

Figure 1. 2022 Proposed Archery Regulations



- Eagle Cap Controlled Hunt Zone
- Single Unit Controlled Hunts
- General Season



OPTIONS

1. Adopt staff recommendations
2. Amend staff recommendations

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

1. Option 1

DRAFT MOTION:

I move to amend OAR Chapter 635, Divisions 065, 071, and 073 as proposed by staff

Effective Date: Upon Filing