

Preliminary Information for May 2014, District Meetings Focused on Tag Numbers and Concepts for Season Changes

Upland Game Bird/Waterfowl/Furbearer Regulations

Upland Game Bird Season Frameworks are set for five year period, frameworks and potential changes for 2015-16 through 2019-20 seasons are under review at this time. Final proposals will be presented to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission August 1, 2014 when 2014-2015 Game Bird Regulations will be adopted. Concepts being considered include:

- **Extend quail and partridge (chukar and Hungarian) seasons in Umatilla and Morrow Counties through Jan. 31.** This would simplify eastern Oregon regulations by removing the early closure in these two counties. Quail and partridge season are currently open through Jan. 31 in the remainder of Eastern Oregon. The exception for Morrow and Umatilla counties was in place over concern about maintaining public access to private lands.
- **Extend eastern Oregon forest grouse seasons through January 31.** This change would simplify the regulations by creating a single statewide season for forest grouse. The eastern Oregon season currently closes Dec. 31. Extending the season for “blue grouse” likely won’t noticeably increase opportunity or harvest in most areas, because the grouse are generally not very accessible to hunters in January. There could be some additional opportunity and harvest for ruffed grouse, but the majority of ruffed grouse harvest (>85%) occurs during the first 6 weeks of the season (Sept 1 through Oct 15).
- **Increase spring turkey season limit to three statewide.** This would simplify the regulations and provide some additional hunting opportunity. Currently two legal turkeys are allowed statewide, except an additional (3rd) legal turkey may be taken with a bonus tag in 17 western Oregon WMUs. During the spring 2013 season, there were an estimated 146 tag holders who hunted on a third turkey tag and those hunters average 2.2 birds for the season. Increasing the statewide season limit to three legal turkeys would simplify the regulations but would not result in a biologically significant increase in harvest. A prior purchase of a tag for each turkey would still be required.
- **Replace eastern Oregon controlled fall turkey hunts with a general fall season and limited number of tags.** Currently there are 5 controlled fall turkey hunts in eastern Oregon. A proposal is being considered to combine some, or all, controlled hunt areas into a general fall season with over-the-counter tags. There would be a limit on the number of tags available. This would be the same season structure as for the general fall turkey season in western Oregon.
- **Increase the daily bag limit for turkey.** In an attempt to spread hunting opportunity, currently hunters are limited to a daily bag limit of one turkey during both spring and fall seasons, regardless of how many valid tags in their possession. Removing the one bird daily bag limit would allow a hunter to harvest the same number of turkeys as valid tags in possession (e.g. one, two, or three in some cases).

In addition to Department concepts, a hunter has asked about allowing handguns that fire 410 shotgun shells to take forest grouse.

Waterfowl Season proposals for 2014-15 Migratory Game Bird (Duck, Goose, etc.) Seasons will not be available until after the federal season frameworks are established in July 2014.

- Now have option for a 60 consecutive day dove season with a 15 bird bag limit. Potential to ask for the capability to split into two 30 day segments may be available in the future.
- Sauvie Island: The Department is considering changing the reservation hunter check-in system for the Eastside Hunt Area to a system that would randomly assign the blind selection order for “Blind Units” and check-in order for “Roam Units”. Similar to other managed reservation waterfowl hunts like Fern Ridge Wildlife Area or Umatilla NWR, all hunters who apply for a Sauvie Island Eastside reservation hunt would have an equal chance of drawing “first pick” of blind or location within their reserved unit.
- As early as 1901 the Oregon Legislature passed laws protecting geese on the Columbia River in eastern Oregon. The text used in for the 1911 law reads, *“it shall be unlawful at any time to shoot at, or take, or kill, or attempt to take, kill, injure, or destroy by any means, any wild goose on any island or sandbar in or along the Columbia River and within the State east of the Cascade Mountains on which wild geese habitually rest or roost.”*

The Commission has the authority to open State Refuges to hunting under certain conditions and portions of this refuge have been opened to hunting. Most recently, in 1983, the Commission opened the portion of the Columbia River Refuge from Arlington to Boardman to hunting for game birds and rabbits. The Department has received a request to open the remainder of the Columbia River Refuge, the reach from the railroad bridge at Celilo east to Arlington.

While comments are welcome on all proposals be sure to mention and collect comments related to the Sauvie Island Eastside reservations system and opening the remainder of the Columbia River Refuge.

Furbearer Trapping and Hunting Regulations are set for two year periods. At the June 5, 2014 Commission Meeting Furbearer Trapping and Hunting Regulations for July 1, 2014-June 30, 2016 will be adopted. Topics for consideration include:

- Oregon United Sporting Dogs Assoc. (OUSDA) request
 - All Pursuit Seasons Statewide be expanded to begin on August 1 and run through March 31. This would include Bobcat, Fox, and Raccoon. (Currently pursuit seasons end the same date the harvest season ends; February 28 for bobcat and fox, March 15 for raccoon.)
- Recommendations from trappers
 - 1 bobcat limit for non-resident (currently limit is 5 in eastern Oregon, no limit in Western Oregon)
 - 2 bobcat limit in eastern Oregon (currently the limit is 5)
 - 1 card (15 bobcat) limit for residents (currently no limit)
 - Harvesters must choose 1 method to take bobcat, traps or dogs
- Department concepts include
 - Wording to clarify that the person who kills a bobcat or otter must record it immediately on their own record card, the same as a hunter who takes a big game animal is required to tag the animal.

- Clarify bobcat and otter jaws need to be separated from the skull (some are submitted on frozen skulls or carcasses) and both sides of the jaw need to be submitted.
- Department will be proposing to reduce the bobcat bag limit in eastern Oregon. to three and is continuing to consider restricting furtakers in western Oregon to one record card (15 bobcat).
- Criteria to monitor bobcat harvest include:
 - 1) A target number for total bobcat catch/year in any two year period. Adjust the season length up or down biannually if + or - 20% of the average is harvested.
 - 2) As a secondary consideration the Male/Female ratio.
 - The harvest objective for eastern Oregon bobcat is 1,250. The intent of the bag limit reduction is to achieve an annual harvest of no more than 1,500 in eastern Oregon which is the objective proposed by furtakers and is also the upper threshold of the Department's criteria of $1,250 \pm 20\%$. To lower harvest to 1,500 from the recent average of approximately ~2,100 would require a harvest reduction of 600 bobcats in eastern Oregon.
 - The threshold level for the proportion of females in the harvest is 45%. The bobcat harvest for the 2012-13 season contained 44% females in eastern Oregon and 46% In western Oregon.
 - No harvest objective has been established for western Oregon. However, there are indications, such as a high level of females in the harvest and declining average age of the harvest, that harvest of bobcat in western Oregon may also be approaching the level where reductions are appropriate. Limiting furtaker to one western Oregon bobcat record card (15 bobcats) is being considered.

The Department will continue to monitor bobcat harvest and population parameters closely. If sales of bobcat record cards and harvest remain high in response to high pelt prices further reductions may be necessary.

Big Game Regulation Overview and species by Species Highlights

Bag Limit During Archery Seasons and Disability Permits

Each year the Department makes projections regarding which units will have an antlerless animal in the bag limit for archers and hunters with disabilities permits for the following year. If the Commission adopts this proposal in October 2014 the Department would list the units with an expanded bag limit in the 2015 Big Game Regulations.

At this time (May 1, 2014) the Department is not proposing any changes to the Wildlife Management Units to have an antlerless animal the bag limit for archers and hunters with disabilities permits for fall of 2015.

The units with an antlerless elk in the bag limit for 2015 will not be final until adopted by the Commission in October, 2014; units proposed to include antlerless animals in the bag

limit could change between now and October. Hunters need to check the Big Game Regulations each year for the final list of units with an antlerless animal in the bag limit. There is some risk which the Department believes is manageable in setting antlerless areas a year ahead of seasons. If an extreme winter was to occur causing a major reduction in deer and/or elk herds in areas with antlerless animals in the bag limit, the Department would propose an emergency rule change by April 15th (same reporting deadline as for canceled hunts) to protect antlerless animals in the impacted areas.

Archery Review Public Advisory Committee Recommendations

Winter 2014 the Department, at the request of archers, convened an Archery Review Public Advisory Committee to discuss some issues related to archery seasons. The Committee included a Department Wildlife Biologist, an Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Division Officer, and 20 members of the public who represented Oregon Bow Hunters Association, Traditional Archers of Oregon, Professional Bowhunters Society, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Mule Deer Foundation, Oregon Hunters Association, and eight hunters-at-large. Following are recommendations from the Committee.

- In the Mt Emily, Walla Walla, and Wenaha Wildlife Management Units it is currently required to have a controlled archery elk tag for the unit to hunt deer during the archery season. **Proposal:** Implement a controlled archery deer hunt for the first 9 days of standard archery season, the tag also good during the general archery season.
- Currently, factors considered to determine which units are recommended to include an antlerless deer or elk in the bag limit for archery season and hunters with disabilities permits include:
 - The deer or elk population characteristics in the unit particularly
 - Population level relative to the population Management Objective
 - Recruitment as measured by fawn or calf ratios
 - The number of antlerless firearms tags authorized in the unit
 - The distribution of firearms tags in the unit

Proposal: Use population compared to Population Management Objectives and recruitment levels to determine which units have antlerless animals in the bag limit during general archery season.

- **Elk:**
 - Population: 105% of MO and rising for units with a MO of 2,000 or more animals.
 - 110% of MO and rising for units with a MO under 2,000 animals.
 - Recruitment: Equal to or greater than 31 calves/100 cows in end of winter composition surveys for previous 3 years. No less than 2 surveys would be needed in last 3 years to make a determination.
- **Mule Deer:**
 - Population: 110% of MO and rising.
 - Recruitment: Equal to or greater than 45 fawns/100 does in end of winter composition surveys for previous 3 years. No less than 2 surveys would be needed in last 3 years to make a determination.

Committee members also identified the following recommendations for the Department to consider.

- Providing controlled late white-tailed deer hunting opportunity in the Wenaha Unit (and potentially other areas).
- Eliminating the tied tag status for Sled Springs, Chesnimnus and Ochoco and return these units to a general deer season. (Currently archery deer hunting is restricted to hunters with controlled archery elk tags for these units.)
- Remove the controlled hunt status in the Mule Deer Initiative units and return to general season for deer and elk, unless there is biological reason to continue controlled hunts.

While comments are welcome on all concepts and proposals please highlight the Archery Review Public Advisory Committee recommendations.

Department Archery Season Proposals and Concepts Under Consideration

For convenience of readers a summary of many of the Department's archery season concepts and proposals is included at this point because some ideas are related to the Archery review Committee recommendations. Additional information may be found in appropriate sections of this document including in the controlled hunt tables.

- Department Archery season and controlled hunt concepts under consideration include:
 - MDI, Warner Unit
 - Deer, maintain controlled hunt, break link with elk tag,
 - Elk, controlled hunt for the entire unit, also good during general season
 - MDI Maury, same as Warner
 - Deer, maintain controlled hunt, break link with elk tag,
 - Elk, controlled hunt for the entire unit, also good during general season
 - MDI Steens Mtn.
 - Break link between deer and elk tags
 - Eliminate controlled deer hunt
 - Sled Springs and Chesnimnus
 - Break link between deer and elk tags
 - Make "One Elk" hunt the archers only archery elk opportunity
 - Options for a late white-tailed deer hunt
- Department is proposing to make the Heppner, Ukiah, and Snake River controlled "One Elk" bow hunts the hunters only archery elk opportunity

Updates

General Winter Conditions

Western Oregon: Winter 2013–2014 was generally warmer, drier, and milder than normal except for two short cold periods with snow events. Late snows in the northern Oregon Cascades were sufficient to bring snowpack to near normal conditions. Southwest Oregon received little winter moisture and snow pack conditions are such that extreme drought could occur. Very little snow accumulation left a lot of area exposed, making elk detection difficult.

Eastern Oregon: Much of southeast Oregon also experienced less than normal winter precipitation. Winter temperatures and snowfall were mild to moderate. Generally spring green-up conditions are good, but expectations are that without significant spring moisture, forage will dry early. Northeast Oregon and in particular the Wallowa Mountains is the only area that experienced near normal winter snow conditions.

Statewide: Given the overall winter conditions, lack of snow allowed animals to spread out making counts difficult in some areas. In general, 2014 spring surveys found good winter survival in many deer and elk herds.

Elk Damage Tag Implementation

During the 2013 Regular Legislative Session, the Oregon Legislature passed House Bill 2027 which directs the Department to create and implement a statewide Oregon Landowner Damage Program to address damage caused by elk. Patterned after the successful SW Damage Pilot program, the new elk damage program will provide elk damage tags to landowners in areas where elk are currently causing damage, in areas where there has been a history of elk damage, and in areas currently designated as an elk de-emphasis area. 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.

Mandatory Reporting of Hunter Harvest and Effort

History and Status of the Mandatory Reporting System in Oregon: The Mandatory Reporting system has been operational for six full years. Overall for the first full year of reporting (2008-09 seasons) hunters reported on 15% of the tags issued (Table 1). The reporting rate more than doubled to 37% for 2009 seasons. However, by the end of March 2011 there was no apparent increase in reporting by hunters for the 2010 seasons. The Department subsequently mailed a reminder postcard to 147,000 hunters with outstanding reportable tags (at a cost of \$38,000 for postcards, postage, and staff time) and an additional 78,000 reports were received which increased the reporting rate to 58%. Reporting rates for 2011 seasons dropped to 50% (41% at the deadline dates) without a postcard mailing. Hunter compliance continued to be too low to provide reliable information.

Table 1. Mandatory harvest reporting rates, 2007 – 2013.

Hunt Type	% of Tags Reported						
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Controlled Antlerless Deer	5%	22%	49%	69%	64%	91%	90%
Controlled Buck Deer	4%	21%	47%	69%	61%	91%	89%
General Bow Deer	3%	14%	33%	53%	47%	82%	79%
General Rifle Deer	1%	10%	25%	45%	37%	79%	76%
Total Deer	3%	15%	35%	55%	48%	84%	82%
Controlled Elk	4%	20%	46%	69%	62%	91%	89%
General Bow Elk	3%	15%	35%	57%	49%	83%	80%
General Cascades Elk	2%	12%	29%	50%	42%	81%	80%
General Coast Elk	2%	12%	29%	50%	42%	81%	79%
General Rocky Mtn. Elk	4%	16%	35%	59%	50%	87%	84%
Total Elk	3%	16%	37%	60%	52%	86%	84%
Controlled Spring Bear	6%	8%	61%	79%	79%	92%	92%
SW Limited Spring Bear			47%	69%	66%	86%	86%
General Fall Bear	4%	16%	35%	55%	49%	77%	76%
Total Bear	4%	15%	37%	58%	52%	78%	78%
Cougar	5%	17%	36%	56%	49%	73%	73%
Pronghorn	9%	30%	61%	82%	76%	93%	92%
General Spring Turkey	5%	3%	42%	61%	54%	79%	79%
Controlled Fall Turkey	15%	40%	67%	84%	84%	93%	91%
General Fall Turkey	5%	20%	37%	53%	52%	70%	71%
Total Turkey	5%	5%	42%	61%	54%	79%	79%
All Tags	3%	15%	37%	58%	50%	82%	80%

After two mailings for the 2012 seasons (101,862 postcards for the January 31 deadline, 3,430 for the April 15 deadline, at an estimated cost of \$27,000 based on 2011 mailing costs), an overall reporting rate of 82% was achieved. For the 2013 seasons a 81,292 postcards were mailed for the January deadline and 3,503 postcards were mailed for the late hunts with an April 15 reporting deadline; the overall reporting rate declined slightly to 80%. Although not ideal, data for most hunts can be used in the management decision making process. While it varies from hunt to hunt, overall there continues to be a slight positive bias to the data. The bias likely occurs because even with reporting rates of ~80%, hunters who did not hunt or were unsuccessful are those most unlikely to report.

Implementation of the Mandatory Reporting penalty: Although Mandatory reporting has been a requirement since 2007; the penalty was not established until after the passage of HB 2125 during the 2011 Oregon legislative session. The Legislature authorized a way to allow hunters who either refuse to report or missed the deadline to “buy” back in and hunt. In October, 2012, at the urging of hunters, the Commission established the \$25 penalty, because in spite of outreach efforts by the Department only 41% of 2011 tags were reported on by the deadlines.

The Department has heavily promoted the Mandatory Reporting requirement:

- It is on the cover of the annual Big Game Regulations
- There is a page dedicated to Mandatory Reporting in the regulations

- It has been on the back of all licenses and tags for several years
- Postcard reminders were sent to hunters who had not reported on 2011, 2012, or 2013 deer and/or elk tags
- Emails to hunters the Department has email addresses for
- The reporting requirement is mentioned in ODFW’s weekly recreation report
- News releases each year, and in social media
- Advertising in sportsman magazines
- As an incentive to report on time, ODFW has offered the chance to win a special big game tag to three randomly drawn hunters who report on time each year

Reporting deadlines for tags issued for 2013 hunting seasons were:

- January 31, 2014 for hunts that ended on or before December 31, 2013
- April 15, 2014 for hunts that ended from January 1- March 31, 2014

Hunters who did not report by the specified deadlines for deer and elk tags offered in the 2012 Big Game Regulations were not able to purchase a 2014 hunting license without paying the \$25.00 penalty. The fee was assessed beginning December 1, 2013, with purchase of a 2014 license. A total of 29,000 deer and 17,000 elk tags went unreported by the 2012 deadlines, out of 298,000 deer and elk tags sold. Some hunters purchase both tags, so the estimated number of hunters who need to pay the penalty to purchase a 2014 license is 33,600. The penalty is charged on a hunting license and hunters only need to pay it once, regardless of how many 2012 deer and elk tags they failed to report on. As of April 23, 2014, 9,058 hunters had paid the fee for the 2012–2013 seasons. The same is true for hunters who failed to report on 2013 deer and elk tags, they will be assessed a \$25 fee when the purchase a 2015 hunting license.

Black-tailed Deer Information

Fecal Sampling: For the last 2 years, the Department has been evaluating a black-tailed deer population estimation technique. Fecal samples are collected from a ½ square mile area and then the DNA from those samples is analyzed by a lab to determine the number of individual deer in the sample area. During 2013, we completed 31 sample areas in the Trask (n=9), Alsea (n=8), Dixon (6) and Indigo (8) WMUs and in all land-ownership categories. A total of 3,620 deer fecal samples were collected. All samples have been submitted to a lab for DNA extraction. The results of the DNA extraction will allow the Department to make population estimates for each sample area and by extrapolation, for each WMU.

Deer Capture: To document additional biological information on black-tailed deer in the same areas that fecal sampling is occurring; the Department has been marking deer with radio collars (GPS on does, VHF on bucks). As of August 2013, 110 black-tailed deer were captured in 4 WMUs (Trask, Alsea, Indigo, and Dixon) (Table 2). Radio-marked deer have been marked throughout each WMU on all land-ownership types. The GPS collars are placed on does for 17 months and then break-off, during that monitoring period we typically obtain more than 3,000 locations for each doe.

Table 2. Number of black-tailed deer capture through August 2013.

WMU	Gender		Total Captures
	Male	Female	
Dixon	9	11	20
Indigo	8	12	20
Alsea	19	11	30
Trask	12	28	40
Total	48	62	110

Example of deer data from Trask WMU: Biological data is still being collected for most radio-marked deer. However, data has been retrieved on the first few deer marked during the study in the Trask WMU. The average home range size for 14 deer in the Trask WMU was 1.4 square miles (~900 acres). Most marked deer exclusively used land within the ownership category in which they were captured. Radio-marked deer in the Trask did not make large seasonal movements, however summer locations tended to be at higher elevation than winter locations.

2014 & 2015 Big Game Hunting Regulations Proposal Information

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 2015 most hunts are proposed to be adjusted one day earlier than in 2014. For example, archery season which opens on August 30 in 2014 is proposed to open on August 29 in 2015.

The 2015 general bear season is proposed to remain standardized and open August 1 and close November 30 in eastern Oregon or December 31 in western Oregon. The general cougar season is proposed to continue to be year-round, opening January 1 and closing on December 31.

Western Oregon deer bag limit change

No changes are proposed at this time for most deer and elk general seasons. However, while specific areas have not been decided at this time, the Department is planning changes to the Western Oregon General Rifle Deer Season. The proposal is designed to evaluate effects of increasing opportunity by removing antler point restrictions or extending the season length. A combination of changes are being considered including:

- Changing the bag limit to “One buck with a visible antler” for at least some units in northwest Oregon
- Adding days at the end of the season in at least some units in southwest Oregon
- Changing the bag limit of the 600 series hunts from “Antlerless or Spike” to “Antlerless”. The area of this change would take into consideration areas where the bag limit for bucks is changed from “Not less than a forked antler” to “Visible antler”.

Bag limit and season length changes would be in place for five years beginning with the 2015 hunting season. Population monitoring methods would be standardized to enhance evaluation of the effects on the deer population. Final proposals will be presented as part of the public process for the October 2014 Commission Meeting.

“Standard” General Season dates for 2015 hunts: (1 day earlier than in 2014).

Archery.....	Aug. 29–Sept. 27
Cascade Buck Deer.....	Oct.3–Oct. 16 & Oct. 24–Nov. 6
Coast Buck Deer.....	Oct 3–Nov. 6
Western OR Antlerless Deer.....	Oct. 24–Nov. 6
Controlled Buck Deer.....	Oct. 3–Oct. 14
Eastern OR Antlerless Deer.....	Oct. 17–25
Cascade Bull.....	Oct. 17–23
General Coast 1 st Season.....	Nov. 14-17
General Coast 2 nd Season.....	Nov. 21-27
Rocky Mt. Bull Elk 1 st Season.....	Oct. 28–Nov. 1
Rocky Mt. Bull Elk Season 2 nd Season.....	Nov. 7–15
Rocky Mt. Std. Antlerless Elk.....	Nov. 21–29
Pronghorn (1 st Centerfire Season).....	Aug. 15–23

Some relevant 2015 holidays that may impact season dates are:

Labor Day.....	September 7
Thanksgiving.....	November 26

Controlled Hunt Tag Numbers Summary

Total proposed controlled tags for the 2013–2014 seasons are increasing slightly (+2%, Table 3). Proposed controlled deer tags are up 1%, and controlled elk tags are proposed to increase 3%. Proposed pronghorn tags are down 3%. Proposed bighorn tags are down 1 tag (-1%) whereas Rocky Mountain goat tags are up 6 tags to 20 (+43%). The minor changes in 2014 controlled spring bear tags are the result of minor changes to tag sales patterns. See controlled hunt tag tables for details.

Table 3. Summary of corrected controlled hunt tag numbers, 2011 – 2014.

Species/Hunt Type	2011 tags	2012 tags	2013 tags	Proposed 2014 tags	*Percent Change
TOTAL DEER	72,054	71,441	71,304	72,140	+1%
Buck	57,880	57,795	57,602	58,361	+1%
Bow/Muzzleloader	3,446	3,496	3,558	3,618	+2%
Antlerless (600 Series)	9,453	8,917	8,870	8,893	<1%
Youth	1,275	1,233	1,274	1,268	<-1%
TOTAL ELK	56,946	57,086	57,963	59,573	+3%
Bull/Either Sex	36,786	36,792	36,890	37,049	0%
Bow/Muzzleloader	7,540	7,527	8,104	8,587	+6%
Rifle Antlerless	11,543	11,715	11,851	12,741	+8%
Youth	1,077	1,052	1,118	1,196	+7%
BIGHORN	93	97	96	95	-1%
MT. GOAT	11	11	14	20	+43%
TOTAL PRONGHORN	2,642	2,679	2,577	2,499	-3%
Rifle Buck/Either Sex	1,521	1,538	1,510	1,492	-1%
Bow/Muzzleloader	904	923	843	822	-3%
Doe	187	187	187	148	-21%
Youth	30	32	37	37	0%
Spring Bear				Proposed 2015 Tags	*Percent Change
TOTAL SPRING BEAR	8,403	8,795	8,853	8,871	<1%
Controlled Spring Bear	4,205	4,197	4,256	4,275	<1%
Youth Spring Bear	198	198	197	196	<-1%
SW Limited	4,000	4,400	4,400	4,400	0%
Grand total tags	140,149	140,109	140,807	143,198	+2%

*Percent change calculated for the difference between 2013 and 2014 tags for all species except bear which is calculated for the difference between 2014 and 2015.

Species by Species Highlights

Black Bear

“Limited” First-come First-served Spring Bear Season in Southwest Oregon. Hunters purchased the 4,400 available SW Oregon Spring Bear “Limited”, first-come first-served tags in 2014. The Department is proposing to maintain tags at 4,400 for the 2015 season. For Spring and Fall Bear Seasons no season date changes are proposed at this time for 2015. The Department is proposing to add a controlled spring hunt that would cover several units in SW Oregon to provide additional bear hunting opportunity.

Cougar

Target Areas

Currently, four Cougar Target Areas, as described in the 2006 Cougar Management Plan (Chapter VI, Adaptive Management Process) have been implemented to address declining ungulate populations. Beginning in December 2009, through December 31, 2013 a total of 238 cougars were administratively removed from the Steens Mtn., Ukiah, Warner, and Wenaha target areas (Table 4).

Table 4. Cougar target area objectives and removals, Dec 2009–Dec 2013 (4 years).

Target Area	Annual Objective	# Removed
Steens	20	60
Ukiah	35	94
Warner	14	28
Wenaha	20	56
Total	89	238

Data current as of April 7, 2014.

The Target Areas described above have been completed. Districts will be completing evaluations of these areas this summer and identifying potential areas for new Target Areas.

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 2012 was estimated to be 5,948. The population has been relatively stable since 2006 with an average annual increase of about 1%.

Cougar Zone A, the Coast and North Cascades, has met the Quota of 120 cougars for the past three years. The Department will be evaluating cougar quotas for all Zones, proposed changes would be presented to the Commission in October, 2014.

Bighorn Sheep

The Department is proposing 95 Bighorn Sheep tags (88 California, 7 Rocky Mountain) in 39 hunts (34 California, 5 Rocky Mountain) for 2014. This is a decrease of one tag from 2013. Seven tags (one Rocky Mountain, six California) are proposed for non-resident hunters (7% percent). One new California bighorn hunt period (Owyhee #3) will be added in 2015 to take advantage of populations in that area.

Rocky Mountain Goat

The Department is proposing 20 Rocky Mountain goat tags in 11 hunts for 2014, up 6 tags from 2013. One tag will be issued to a non-resident hunter. No changes are proposed to Rocky Mountain goat hunts for 2015.

Pronghorn Antelope

The Department is proposing 2,499 tags in 57 hunts for 2014, representing a decrease of about 3 percent from 2012 tag numbers. One hunt would be deleted (E. Interstate #2, Doe/Fawn) and one new youth hunt (Hart Mtn.) would be added for 2015.

Deer

Overall, the Department is proposing a net 1% increase in controlled deer tag numbers for 2014. Increases in controlled buck rifle deer tags (58,361) and controlled muzzleloader deer tags (3,618) are due to increases in tag numbers for several hunts. The slight declines in controlled antlerless deer tags and controlled youth deer tags is largely due to changes in correction factors for individual hunts.

General deer seasons will remain unchanged in 2015 except for a 1 day calendar shift. For 2015, Department proposals would delete one hunt and add two new hunts. Proposed changes include:

- Remove the Hood and White River Units from the 100M N Muzzleloader hunt area and add a new separate muzzleloader either sex hunt for the Hood and White River Units.
- Add a new muzzleloader buck hunt for the Chetco unit.
- Delete the Lostine-Allen Canyon antlerless hunt (660B).

Beulah Hunt Overlap

Big game season dates general 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. This jump occurred in 2014 for most hunts. One hunt, 165R W Beulah Archery deer did not jump in an effort to improve hunt quality. However, this has created a significant amount of overlap with a rifle elk hunt. Staff will ask the Commission to extend the **2014** season for 165R from November 8 – 19 through November 30, 2014. This extension will provide deer bow hunters the option of hunting early when deer densities are highest or hunting later when fewer hunters are likely to be in the field.

Saddle Mountain Unit, Removal of Burlington RR Deer Hunting Closure

The Department is considering lifting the long standing closure to deer hunting in the Saddle Mountain unit north of the Burlington Northern Railroad tracks. This closure was established in an effort to protect endangered Columbian White-tailed deer (CWTD). However, recent translocations have expanded the population, and the dike that was in danger of breaching, threatening persistence of critical subpopulations on Julia Butler-Hansen National Wildlife Refuge, has been stabilized. If the closure is lifted it would occur for the 2015 deer season.

Elk

Proposed 2014 Controlled Elk Tags

Overall, the Department is proposing a net 3% increase in controlled elk tag numbers for 2014. Proposed controlled elk rifle tags for 2014 are up 1,049 tags to 49,790 tags. For the 24 controlled elk bow hunts, the Department is proposing 5,853 tags for 2014, up 4% from 2013. Proposed controlled muzzleloader elk tags are up 4% (91 tags) to 2,574 for 2013. Proposed youth elk tags are up 7% to 1,196 for 2014.

Proposed 2015 Elk Seasons

At this time the Department is proposing to maintain existing general season structure with standard calendar adjustment of one day earlier for most season dates for 2014.

For 2015, the following changes are proposed to controlled elk hunts. Overall, Department proposes deleting 6 controlled antlerless elk hunts, adding 5 new rifle antlerless hunts, and adding one new controlled muzzleloader bull elk hunt. The two deleted hunts in western Oregon are in response to declining populations and three deleted hunts in eastern Oregon are in response to declining conflicts with elk in the area. Proposed changes include:

- Delete the SW Santiam and NW McKenzie cow hunts
- Delete the three Schleur Park cow hunts in Snake River
- Delete Hayes Butte-Murdoch Creek and add the hunt to an expanded Connley Hills hunt
- Add two new hunt periods to the Central Trask
- Add two new antlerless elk hunts in NE Oregon (S Catherine Cr Private, Lookout Mtn #2).
- Add a new muzzleloader hunt in the Minam
- Propose that three controlled archery either-sex hunts (Heppner, Ukiah, and Snake River) will become the archer's only archery elk hunting opportunity beginning in 2015.

Willamette Elk Hunts in the vicinity of the Finley National Wildlife Refuge

Finley National Wildlife Refuge has an EA out for review that will allow limited antlerless elk hunting on the refuge. The EA also sets objectives for bulls per 100 cows for viewing purposes. Finley NWR is located within an elk de-emphasis area. Staff is proposing to modify the boundary for the Willamette Plus Elk Hunts (215A1, 215A2) around Finley NWR to increase antlerless elk hunting opportunity and increase the bull ratio. Specifically, 47 square miles of the Alsea unit would be added to the hunt area and a 58 square mile portion of the hunt area would be antlerless only hunting from August 1 to October 31. Comments are also being solicited regarding the general archery season bag limit in the area.

Central Trask Elk Hunts

In February 2014, the season for hunt 214A W Trask was extended to March 31, and the hunt areas for hunts 214A, 214 E1, and 214E2 were expanded to include the central area of the Trask Unit. These changes were put in place to help address ongoing damage caused by elk in the Trask Unit. Staff is proposing to maintain the area expansion for hunt 214A during the 2014–2015 season which means that for the 2014-2015 season hunters who draw a West Trask (214A) tag would also be able to hunt the Central Trask area. However, this change is not shown in the 2014 Big Game Regulations. Successful applicants for 214A will be notified and supplied with a map of the entire hunt area. This change to the West Trask hunt is only for the 2014-15 season. Next year, for the 2015-16 season the area of the Central Trask encompassed by this expansion will be included in two new antlerless hunts.