



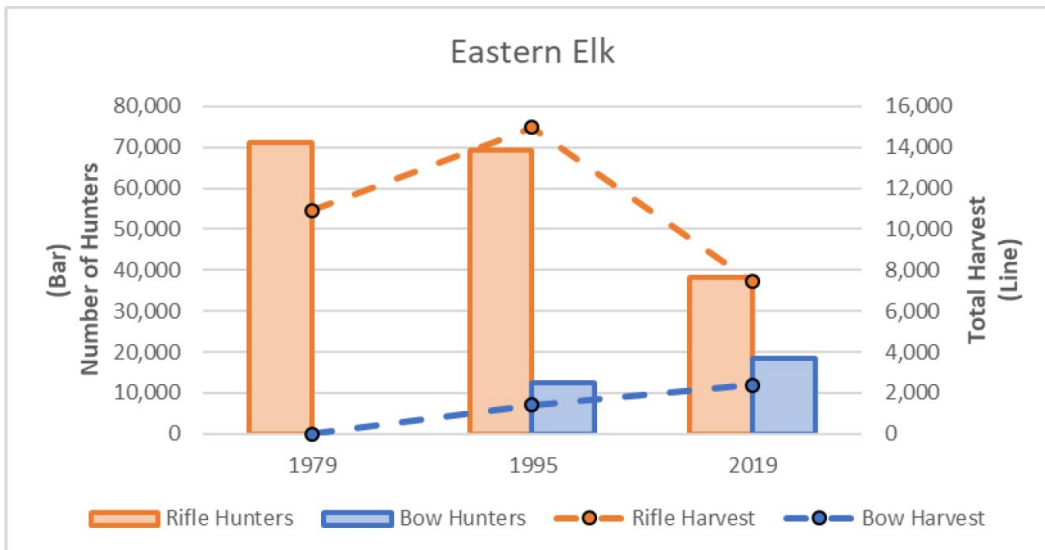
AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The Big Game Regulation Review Team (Team) is in year five of an endeavor to streamline and improve hunting regulations and opportunities the agency offers to our constituents. This process began with an editorial and stylistic review of the regulation document in year one followed by an evaluation of existing regulations for need and relevancy in the existing hunting portfolio in year two. Year three of the review focused on consolidating controlled hunts and creating consistent and expanded hunt dates where needed. Last year, the team evaluated changes to hunt period structures, with Cascade elk season and eastern Oregon archery deer season changes ultimately being adopted by the Commission. Eastern Oregon archery elk seasons were also considered for change in last year’s review, with a draft staff recommendation to move all units east of the Cascades to controlled hunts. After receiving public and Commission feedback, the archery elk concept was tabled by the agency in order ensure the final proposal is focused on current issues and concerns, and to allow further opportunity for public input.

The current statewide, 30-day general archery elk season was first established in 1979. Since that time, changes in hunter demographics have occurred as the agency reduced rifle elk hunting opportunities with the adoption of the 1992 elk management plan and the subsequent management objectives (MO) adopted in 1994. Achieving the Commission adopted elk MOs required a finer scale management of hunter numbers resulting in changing nearly all any-bull rifle hunting opportunities into controlled hunts in eastern Oregon. With this shift to controlled hunts came a reduction in rifle elk hunting opportunity, with a nearly 60% decline in total rifle tags offered in the past 25 years (Figure 1). In the same time period there has been a 60% increase in archery hunting participation, which has remained a 30-day period general season in nearly all of the state (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Trends in total hunters and harvest. 1979 to present.



Discussions regarding the need for changes in archery elk opportunity allocation started in 2003, when the agency initiated an Archery Review Committee. This committee was formed to address growing concerns expressed by hunters and biologists regarding the continued loss of opportunity for rifle hunters, as well as the growing number and harvest by general season archery hunters throughout eastern Oregon. In 2014, an Archery Review Public Advisory Committee was formed to again assist the agency in addressing archery related regulations. From these two efforts, the only substantial change that occurred to archery elk seasons was a refinement on how bag limits would be developed for archery hunts.

In order to inform the process and direction of the Team, a series of statistically valid human dimensions surveys were conducted to help determine hunter's attitudes towards archery changes that were projected to be considered. Responsive Management, a nationally recognized survey research firm specializing in natural resource and outdoor recreation issues, was contracted to conduct human dimensions work to gather data for the agency. The initial effort involved a hunter opinion survey in 2019, where a total of 1,000 deer and 1,000 elk hunters, sampled equally from western and eastern Oregon, were queried to determine hunting preferences and motivations (Attachment 2). The outcome of this survey was a statistically valid look at what weapons Oregon hunters prefer to use, where they prefer to hunt, and what motivates them to hunt.

The second survey effort by Responsive Management included an online forum, with specific topics introduced, and hunters encouraged to initiate conversation through comment posts with each other (Attachment 3). The public opinions shared in the online forum were used to inform a second statistically valid survey, this time looking more in depth at hunter weapon preference, how hunters distribute themselves in general archery seasons, and asking hunter preferences and opinion on potential archery regulations (Attachment 4). This survey ultimately sampled over 4,000 hunters in the state.

The data from these hunter opinion surveys were considered by the Team to develop the archery elk concept last year, which would have proposed controlled hunts for all archery elk hunts east of the Cascades. That concept was tabled by the agency to allow more time for evaluation and to address input received during public outreach.

The Team reconvened in December 2020 to consider previous public input received in 2020 along with elk population and harvest data to develop a modified proposal that addressed the wildlife management units (WMU) of highest concern based on elk population performance related to bull ratio MO and current proportion of bull harvest occurring during the archery season. This modification would result in controlled hunts only in the WMUs of greatest need, allowing for a general season archery opportunity to remain in portions of eastern Oregon. The development of draft proposal for 2022 archery elk seasons in eastern Oregon included wildlife district review and multiple public outreach efforts in 2021.

Significant effort has been put into communicating with all interested parties regarding the changes incorporated into the agencies initial draft proposal for 2022, as well as working with constituents to evaluate potential modifications to the proposal based on input received through either email, virtual meetings, or direct contact with the Team.

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, and April 12, 2021- Virtual meetings with designated representatives from 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

ISSUE 1

Develop a controlled hunting strategy for archery elk season in select eastern Oregon WMUs to provide elk tag allocation and harvest management that is equitable for all hunters in addressing biological MOs.

ANALYSIS

The primary issues behind the proposed shift to limited entry, controlled hunting for eastern Oregon archery include:

- Need for bull harvest reductions in some units to increase bull ratios to their Commission adopted 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 Team looked at existing harvest data and population status for all elk populations throughout eastern Oregon as a first step in refining last year's controlled archery elk concept. Three primary data were used to identify WMUs in need of management change: current MO status, proportion of branch bull harvest occurring during the archery season, and loss of opportunity during the rifle season.

To determine which WMUs had ongoing MO issues, the Team looked at herd composition data for the period of 2015-2019. Units were noted as having MO concerns if they were below the designated bull ratio in three of the last five years, or if the five-year average bull ratio was less than 75% of the MO. Using these criteria, the Team could look at trends in the composition data for each unit to highlight areas of management need.

The second data set utilized by the Team was the proportion of branch bull harvest occurring in the archery season. The goal in looking at harvest proportion was to find a consistent measure of how to allocate opportunity between the two primary weapon types preferred by hunters. Through the work contracted with Responsive Management it was shown that 70% of Oregon's hunters prefer to hunt with a rifle for elk, while 21% prefer a bow. In addition, when asked about interest in using a weapon, 85% of hunters reported interest in using a rifle, while 34% reported interest in using archery equipment. Additionally, when both measures were broken down by age of hunters, younger hunters (18-34) show a higher affinity for archery equipment. From this survey data, the Team set an initial mark of no more than 35% of branch bull harvest for archery season in order to provide opportunity proportional to the interest in each weapon type rather than preference, and to set tags in a manner that takes into account the interest of the younger cohort of hunters to assist with recruitment and retention.

The third primary data set utilized by the Team was the decrease in rifle opportunity over time. The goal of this analysis was to quantify which units had seen the greatest reductions in rifle tags in recent years. The Team was challenged in this analysis to best define the time period to gauge which units had seen a reduction that would warrant reducing archery opportunity. Ultimately the Team used the overall decrease in the average number of rifle tags allocated from 1995-1999 compared to 2014-2019 (excludes incomplete harvest data for 2018) in each WMU.

From this analysis, the Team developed a two-tiered recommendation to carry forward for internal review. The first tier consisted of seven WMU's that were significantly below bull ratio MO. These WMUs include the Desolation, Starkey, Snake River, Minam, Imnaha, Pine Creek and the Keating. Collectively during the period of 2015-2019 these seven units averaged 64% of the target bull ratio designated by the elk management plan. Additionally, five of the seven units were below MO during each of the five years of data, with the other two successfully meeting MO in only a single year.

The second tier consisted of WMUs that met one of the three Team data set criteria, and shared two or more common boundaries with either first tier or current controlled hunt units. These second tier WMUs have the highest potential for controlled hunting in the near future due to increased archery hunter density from hunters moving to adjacent general season units as their current preferred unit shifts to a controlled hunt. The Team also looked at current archery hunter density, as well as direct input from the wildlife district responsible for the WMU regarding participation levels and comments received during field checks regarding hunter concerns. Included in the second tier discussion were subunit hunts where total archery participation and harvest could not be determined based on mandatory reporting occurring at the WMU level. These subunits (West Beulah, North Malheur, and the North Sumpter) are where field staff encounter concentrated archery hunter density in the WMU, and where the majority of reported harvest for the WMU is assumed to occur. These subunits are also managed separately for controlled rifle hunts. In total, six WMUs and three subunits were requested for inclusion into the draft Team proposal as a part of the second tier consideration for controlled archery elk hunting.

Table 1 denotes the WMUs proposed for a change in harvest management to controlled archery hunting with the three data set decision criteria.

Table 1. Proposed WMUs for limited entry, controlled hunting

WMU	Tier	Bull Ratio Below MO based on 2015-2019 data	Proportion of Branch Bull Harvest by Archers \geq 35 %	Decrease in Rifle Opportunity
DESOLATION	1	Yes	Yes	Yes
IMNAHA	1	Yes	Yes	No
KEATING	1	Yes	Yes	No
MINAM	1	Yes	No	No
PINE CREEK	1	Yes	Yes	No
SNAKE RIVER	1	Yes	No	No
STARKEY	1	Yes	Yes	No
CATHERINE CR	2	No	Yes	No
HEPPNER	2	No	Yes	No
MURDERERS CR	2	No	Yes	Yes
NORTHSIDE	2	No	Yes	Yes
SILVIES	2	No	Yes	Yes
UKIAH	2	No	Yes	No
N MALHEUR	2	DATA MANAGED AT UNIT SCALE		
N. SUMPTER	2	DATA MANAGED AT UNIT SCALE		
W. BEULAH	2	DATA MANAGED AT UNIT SCALE		

The Team next evaluated various strategies to regulate archery harvest in the units identified in Table 1 based on public input received both through the current regulation development and previous archery reviews. The strategies considered included splitting the statewide general

season into general zones, choose your weapon, controlled zones, and single unit controlled hunts. The team identified single unit controlled hunting as the preferred alternative based on the ability to control harvest and maximize biologically appropriate tag allocations in each WMU.

The proportion of bull harvest occurring by each weapon type during the various seasons will be compared with results from recent hunter preference surveys when developing tag allocation recommendations for WMUs needing a reduction in bull harvest to achieve bull ratio MO. In 2020, Responsive Management found that 70% of Oregon elk hunters prefer hunting an elk with a rifle while 21% prefer hunting elk with a bow. Additionally, they found 85% expressed interest in hunting elk with a rifle and 34% interested in using a bow. Controlled archery hunts may receive a greater proportion of necessary tag reductions when more than 35% of branch bull harvest in a WMU is occurring during archery season. For those WMUs identified in the draft proposal for controlled hunts that are currently above MO but meet the other data set criteria in Table 1, participation would be capped based on current general season archery hunter densities derived from hunter reporting data.

Under the Team’s draft proposal, a controlled archery tag holder would only be allowed to hunt within that controlled hunt boundary, consistent with controlled rifle elk hunts. Data suggests this structure will increase the potential for archers to draw the controlled hunt tag for their preferred WMU more often. Current controlled hunts with portable opportunity result in hunters spending as much time in a general season unit as they do in the controlled hunt area. Hunter participation data from the current controlled archery hunts show that 55% of archers report hunting in the controlled opportunity and 45% report hunting in the general season.

ISSUE 2

Determine how to allocate hunter opportunity in WMUs not proposed for controlled hunts.

ANALYSIS

Within the draft proposal developed by the Team, those WMUs not proposed for controlled hunts were split into two separate general seasons, with the split generally occurring at the crest of the Cascades (Figure 2). Under this draft proposal there would be a choice for east or west general season tag.

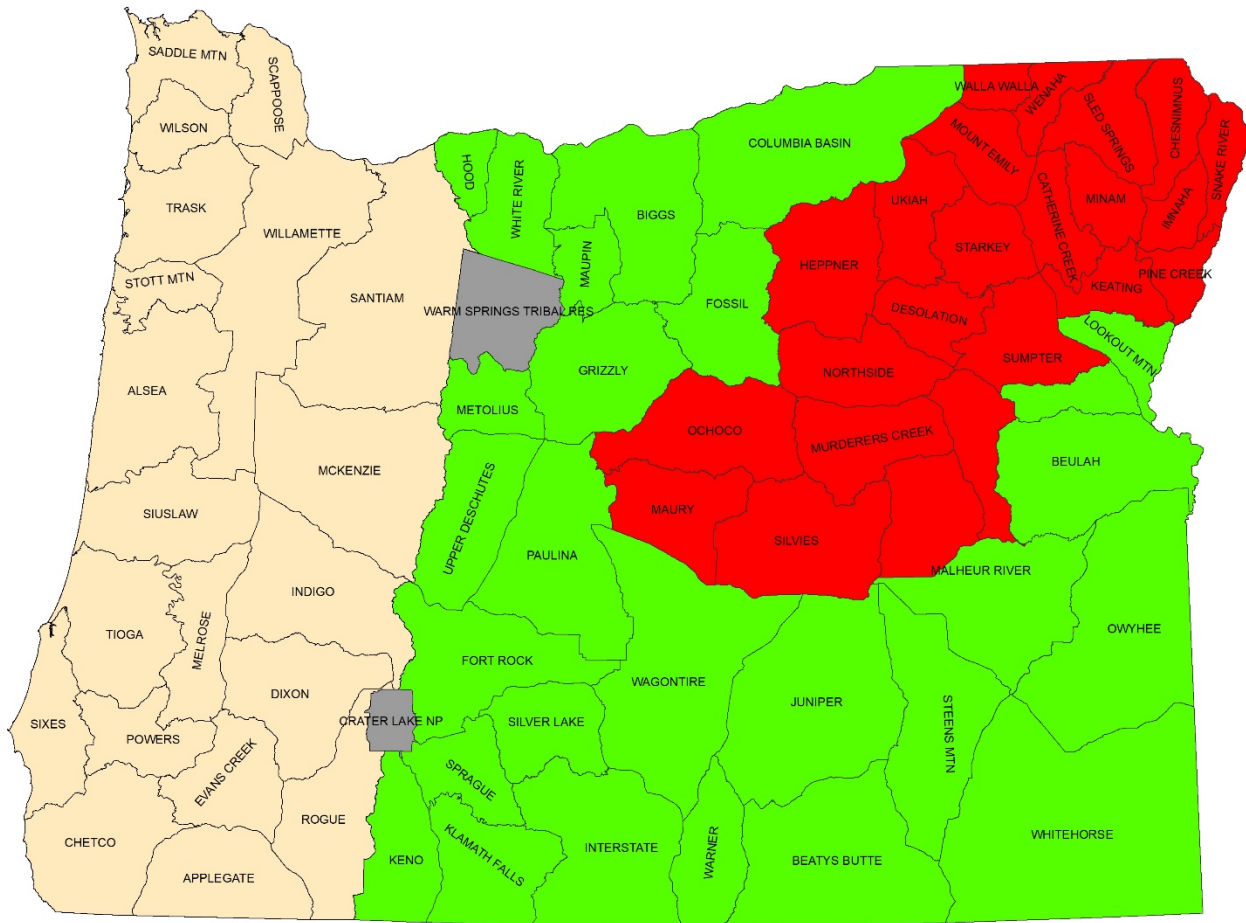
The rationale for the Team’s draft proposal to split the general archery seasons along the unit boundaries near the crest of the Cascades was to reduce the potential for the remaining general season WMUs in eastern Oregon to see increases in participation and harvest that could create elk population concerns leading to more regulation changes in the near future. Under this scenario, based on current general season data, it is believed the general season archery participation would be divided with approximately 18% in the eastern Oregon general season and 82% in the western Oregon general season.

Through this year's public review process, the department has received input on two alternate approaches to potential general seasons. The first suggestion was to have two separate general seasons, but to include the WMUs on the west slope Cascade with the eastern Oregon WMUs for one general season with the second general season consisting of all the Coast Range WMUs (Figure 3). This concept would allow for hunters in Cascade WMUs to hunt in units on both sides of the crest of the Cascades, as well as the general season units throughout eastern Oregon. The primary desire for this suggestion is to maintain Cascade mountain wilderness areas within a single hunt opportunity, allowing archers to hunt throughout the various wildernesses along the crest of the Cascades regardless of WMU boundaries. Under this potential scenario, it is expected that general season hunter allocation would be 44% of hunters in the Cascades/eastern Oregon units with 56% hunting in the Coast Range units.

The second suggested alternative received through the public process was to maintain a single general season that would include all WMUs that are not shifted to controlled hunts (Figure 4). This option would maximize the opportunity for archers to hunt multiple units during the general archery season. Under this scenario, all units not within a current or proposed controlled hunt would be available to hunters under a single tag. The primary public request for this scenario was to simplify tag options and maximize the ability for archers to shift their hunt participation to open areas or units in the event of fire closures.

Figure 2. Draft general season archery proposal: E-W split at Cascades

2022 Draft Archery Proposal General Seasons East and West Split at Cascades

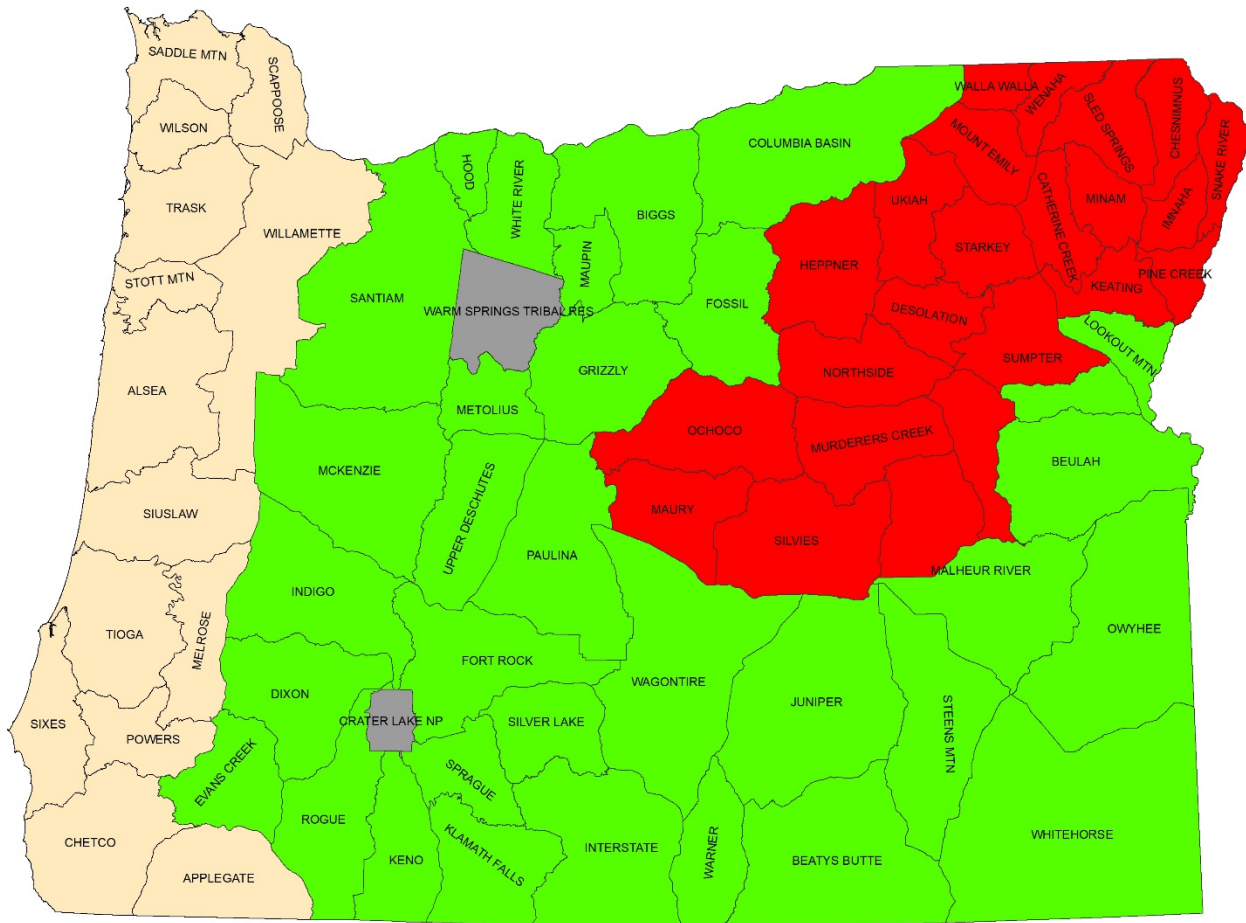


- Controlled Hunts
- West General Season
- East General Season



Figure 3. Draft general archery season: Coast – Cascades/East split

2022 Draft Archery Proposal Coast and Cascade/East General



- Controlled Hunts
- Coast General Season
- Cascade/East General Season



ISSUE 3

Incorporate youth bow hunting opportunity.

ANALYSIS

From the initial release of the Team's draft archery elk proposal, public input has consistently pointed to the need for maintaining maximum opportunity for youth archers in areas that are under consideration for controlled hunts. The primary request has been for a general season youth archery tag that would be valid in most WMUs statewide, including those that are proposed to move to controlled hunting in 2022. The reasoning provided by constituents in favor of this concept is to provide the ability for youth archers to participate in hunts with friends and family throughout the state, regardless of the tag a potential mentor may possess.

Comments received from the public not in support of a general season youth archery tag point to the lack of equity for a similar opportunity for youth rifle hunters. There are no current any legal weapon (ALW) general season youth tags in comparison and the controlled youth ALW tags are for antlerless elk. Additionally, if a youth archery tag were to overlap any proposed controlled hunts, bull harvest from the youth hunt would decrease tag allocations to other controlled archery tags.

There were approximately 1,000 general season archery tags sold to youth hunters in 2020, with an overall reported success rate of 8% (total harvest of approximately 80 elk during the statewide general archery by youth hunters). Approximately 75% of the reported harvest for youth archers were bull elk. Comparatively, the department offers approximately 1,300 ALW controlled tags for youth hunters with approximately 1,200 actually hunting. These tags are valid for several months in single or multiple units throughout the state. Essentially all youth ALW opportunities are for antlerless elk, and the overall harvest averages approximately 600 elk (52% success rate).

Based on public input and potential direction from Commission, the Team's final proposal could incorporate a youth only general season archery tag that would be valid in units that are general season currently. This season would overlap controlled archery seasons in some units however youth participation and subsequent harvest is expected to remain similar to the relatively low levels currently occurring by youth in the general archery season. Staff would monitor harvest and reductions would occur for controlled archery hunts to offset any youth harvest received from this opportunity.

ISSUE 4

Assess viability of including a potential controlled archery zone.

ANALYSIS

During the development of the draft proposal, the Team considered a concept of controlled tags valid in zones consisting of two or more WMUs. This concept would allow biologists to regulate tag allocations and harvest, but also allows an archer the flexibility to move between units in the event of an area closure or potential crowding. The Team's draft proposal did not include controlled zones because it was recognized zones would result in a greater reduction in tags when compared to individual WMU controlled hunts if any unit within the zone needs a harvest reduction to achieve bull ratio MO.

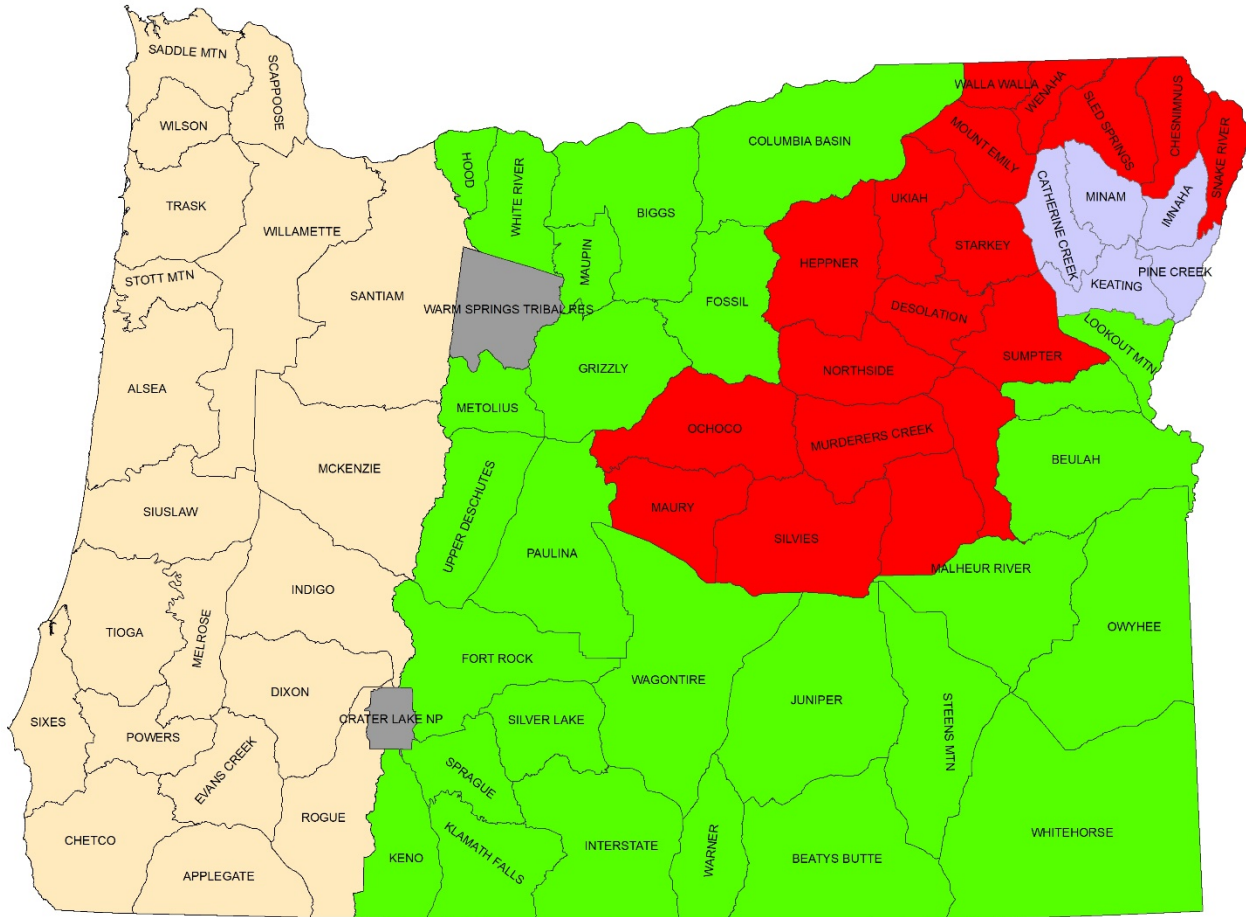
Through public input, multiple interested parties communicated interest in the department establishing at least one zone in order to gauge the potential loss in tag numbers while still providing an opportunity for hunters to move across a larger hunt area if they chose to do so. The area most commonly requested as a zone were the five WMUs associated with the Eagle Cap Wilderness; Catherine Creek, Minam, Imnaha, Pine Creek, and Keating (Figure 5). Grouping these units within a single controlled archery elk hunt would allow a tagholder the ability to hunt the entirety of the wilderness regardless of unit boundaries.

In developing a tag scenario to evaluate this potential zone, biologists used existing hunter reporting data from general archery season to determine hunter effort and success rate for each unit (Table 2). This table highlights current hunter participation levels by WMU based on mandatory hunter reporter data, as well as a draft tag allocation by WMU for 2022. For three of the five units, a reduction from current harvest levels is warranted based on performance related to bull ratio MO. Of these units, the Keating needs the greatest reduction (18%). For single WMU controlled hunts, total tag allocation for these five units would be an estimated 6% lower than current participation rates. When calculating proposed tags for an Eagle Cap zone the allocation would be based on cutting current participation across all WMUs by the 18% needed reduction in the Keating.

If a zone concept is undertaken, the Team feels enhanced monitoring protocols need to be established to evaluate hunter distribution within the zone, assess unit level harvest, and ultimately provide an evaluation of tag allocation differential due to the zone management. If overall tag allotments for the zone continue to decline due to low elk population performance in some units, the recommendation would be to convert the zone into single unit hunts consistent with how the agency manages other controlled hunt scenarios. Additionally, continuing to have unit level harvest and participation data within the zone will be essential for district biologists managing elk populations and hunter distribution.

Figure 5. Draft Eagle Cap Zone Concept

2022 Draft Archery Proposal Eagle Cap Zone Concept



- Eagle Cap Zone
- Single Unit Controlled Hunts
- West General Season
- East General Season



Table 2. Draft Eagle Cap zone tag allocations and impacts to total tags issuance

WMU	Archery Current Participation by WMU based on 3-Yr Average General Season Data	2022 Tag Allocation by Single WMU Controlled Hunt	% Change by WMU Compared to Current Participation	Tag Allowance for Eagle Cap Zone based on Keating Unit Harvest Cuts
Keating	324	265	-18%	
Pine Creek	511	450	-12%	
Imnaha	590	545	-8%	
Catherine Creek	602	600	0%	
Minam	289	315	9%	
2022 Proposed Tag Allocation	2316	2175		1894
% Reduction from Current Participation		-6%		-18%

OPTIONS

1. N/A

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

1. N/A

DRAFT MOTION: N/A

Effective Date: N/A