



AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

In 2005, the Oregon Legislative Assembly passed Senate Bill 694 establishing a program for offering hunting tags to nonprofit organizations that provide hunting opportunities to terminally ill children and limited the total number of tags that may be issued annually through this program to no more than 35 tags. In 2017, the legislature amended the statute reducing the tags available to terminally children to 15 tags as part of a bill that established a similar program offering deer, elk, pronghorn, and black bear hunting opportunities for qualified disabled veterans, with a combined limit of 35 tags for both programs. Combined tags issued annually through the two programs are also limited by type of big game with no more than 10 tags each for black bear, deer, and elk; and no more than five tags for pronghorn. Administrative rule further limits the total number of tags available annually for any one nonprofit organization to no more than five tags.

Nonprofit organizations serving terminally ill children apply for tags each year between January 1 and June 30. Applications must include supporting documentation demonstrating the sponsored child meets the prerequisites of this program. Successful applicants receive a tag through the organization. Sponsoring organizations manage the logistics of the hunt including arranging a hunt location.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Department staff consulted with nonprofit organizations that provide hunting opportunities for terminally ill youth, local sports group leadership, and a private landowner. Interested parties may also provide comments at the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission Meeting.

ISSUE 1

Should a bighorn sheep hunting opportunity be added to the program offering hunting tags to terminally ill youth?

ANALYSIS

The program providing hunting tags to terminally ill children has successfully provided a quality hunting opportunity with the flexibility to accommodate the mobility and medical treatment challenges of numerous terminally ill children desiring to experience all of the associated

memories from an Oregon big game hunt. Organizations serving these children are often able to obtain necessary hunting equipment through donations and often partner with generous landowners willing to provide access to private lands.

Bighorn sheep populations in Oregon offer a highly desired hunting opportunity. Tags are allocated through the controlled hunt drawing with a once in a lifetime limit on drawing a tag allowing the harvest of a bighorn ram. Additionally, one tag is allocated each year through a public auction and one tag is allocated through a raffle with the auction and raffle proceeds dedicated to bighorn sheep management.

Historically, the department has managed the ram component of bighorn sheep herds through hunting; management of overall bighorn sheep populations and distribution is accomplished through trap and relocation efforts. These efforts have been successful in reestablishing bighorn sheep populations in much of the remaining suitable habitat in Oregon. Disease, often contracted by interactions with domestic sheep, is a primary threat to maintaining healthy bighorn sheep populations. Currently, opportunities to trap and transplant sheep to manage growing herds and to supplement declining herds has been limited due to disease concerns. As a result, in 2021 the department initiated the first controlled ewe hunts offered in Oregon for two herd ranges with strong and growing populations.

There are select locations in Oregon with bighorn sheep herds where traditional hunting opportunities have not been authorized due to issues of access or other challenges. The ram component of these herds becomes difficult to manage because attempts to relocate rams results in an unpredictable amount of wandering and dispersal which increases disease risks to the individual rams and other herds. Although trap and transplant continues to be a priority for these herds, there may be opportunities to provide a highly structured hunting opportunity through the program providing hunting tags to terminally ill children.

The proposal developed by staff would allow up to one bighorn sheep tag annually to be made available only to a qualified terminally ill child. This tag would be one of the 15 hunting tags authorized by statute to be issued to terminally ill children. The hunt area would be limited to a specific geographic area that must be outside any other authorized bighorn sheep hunt area and is not compatible with normal bighorn sheep seasons due to access or other location issues. The tag would be valid from August 1 through November 30 with a bag limit of one bighorn sheep. In years when a bighorn sheep tag is available to terminally ill children but not issued by June 30, the tag could not be made available to disabled veterans as statute limits the program allowing tags to disabled veterans to only black bear, deer, elk, and pronghorn tags.

If approved, staff does not anticipate that offering a bighorn sheep to terminally ill children will impact bighorn sheep tags available through the controlled hunt drawing or revenue generated from auction and raffle tags due to the requirement that the hunt area be outside any existing bighorn sheep hunt areas and in a location that is not compatible with normal bighorn sheep hunts.

OPTIONS

1. Adopt staff recommendations.
2. Amend staff recommendations.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

1. Option 1.

DRAFT MOTION:

I move to adopt OAR Chapter 635, Division 043, as proposed by staff in Attachment 3.

Effective Date: Upon Filing