

## Information for July 2025 Wildlife District Outreach

### Migratory and Upland Game Bird Updates

2025-2026 Migratory and Upland Game Bird seasons were adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission on April 18, 2025. Setting game bird seasons in April allows the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (department) to publish the Game Bird Regulations by early July. The 2025-2026 seasons will again open a bit later this year, primarily to avoid conflict with the controlled buck deer opener. Specifically, eastside chukar, quail and partridge will open on October 11, 2025. This delay also results in concurrent openers for Zone 1 and Zone 2 duck seasons on October 11<sup>th</sup> to maximize total hunt days allowed within the federal framework.

Following is a list of major Commission adopted changes for 2025-2026 game bird seasons:

#### Upland Game Birds

- For most upland game birds, all aspects of the seasons (e.g., season dates, daily bag limits, possession limits) are covered by the Upland Game Bird Hunting Season Framework (framework), which is reviewed every five years. The framework was reviewed this past April, resulting in the 2025-2030 framework that will guide decision-making over the next five seasons. A summary of 2025-2026 seasons covered by the framework is provided in the table below.

<b>Upland Game Birds</b>	<b>Open Area</b>	<b>Open Season</b>	<b>Daily Bag Limit</b>	<b>Possession Limit</b>
Ruffed and Blue Grouse	Statewide	Sept. 1 – Jan 31, 2026	3 each species	9 each species
Chukar and Hungarian (Gray) Partridge	Statewide	Oct. 11 – Jan. 31, 2026	8	24
Rooster Pheasant	Statewide	Oct. 11 – Dec. 31, 2025	2	8
	Western Oregon	Sept. 1 – Jan 31, 2026	10	30
Quail (California and Mountain)	Eastern Oregon	Oct. 11 – Jan 31, 2026	10 (may not include more than 2 Mtn Quail)	30 (may not include more than 6 Mtn Quail)

- Changes for Fall and Beardless Turkey Seasons
  - The East and West Fall Turkey tags have been combined into a single Fall Turkey tag. Hunters may still purchase up to two Fall Turkey tags, though only one can be filled in Eastern Oregon.
  - Additional WMUs surrounding Burns, OR have been added to the Fall turkey season.
  - Portions of SW and Eastern Oregon added to Beardless Turkey Permit Season.
- Final Greater Sage-Grouse permit numbers will be adopted in the August Commission Meeting, but the J72 Silvies Unit hunt has been closed for 2025 due to ongoing impacts from 2024 wildfires.

### **Migratory Game Birds**

- No changes to dove and pigeon seasons.
- Normal season date shifts with the calendar (one day earlier) for most waterfowl seasons and concurrent openers for Zone 1 and Zone 2 duck seasons on October 11.
- The daily bag limit of ducks continues to be seven but within the daily bag limit, hunters may now bag three pintails per day.
- Reductions in Canada/cackling goose bag limit and season length in the Northwest Permit Goose Zone. The daily bag limit is now two Canada/cackling geese per day and the third season period closes on February 15 instead of March 10.

### **Wildlife Area Hunt Program Regulations**

- The John Day River Refuge (JDRR) includes all lands and waters (public and privately owned) within ¼ mile from the high-water line along the John Day River from its mouth at the Columbia River, upstream to its junction with Thirty Mile Creek. Previously, the hunting of game birds during authorized season was allowed in that portion of the refuge from Rock Creek to Thirty Mile Creek. Below Rock Creek, only upland game bird hunting was allowed and only during September and October. The area where hunting of any game bird is permitted has been expanded and now occurs from Tumwater Falls up to Thirty Mile Creek. This will allow the public to pursue game birds, especially chukar and California quail, at all times of the season without impacting neighboring private landowners.

## **Big Game Regulation Overview and Species by Species Highlights**

### **Big Game Regulations Development Process**

2026 Big Game Hunting Regulations, will be adopted at the September 12, 2025 Commission meeting in Ontario, Oregon. The meeting format will include both an in-person and virtual attendance option with the latter requiring 48-hour advanced sign-up.

Like previous years, the deadline for hunters to apply for deer, elk, pronghorn, bighorn sheep, and Rocky Mountain goat controlled hunts was May 15<sup>th</sup> with revisions or corrections to applications allowed through May 25<sup>th</sup>. Draw results were released on June 12, giving most hunters many months of time for hunt preparation and decision-making.

**General Regulation Proposals for 2026**

As a reminder, the hunting season framework was modified in 2020 so that the season dates are built off of the buck deer any legal weapon season opening on the first Saturday in October. To keep openers on the correct day of the week, the 2026 dates below are one calendar day earlier than 2025. “Standard” season dates for 2026 hunts are as follows:

Pronghorn (1 <sup>st</sup> Centerfire Season).....	Aug. 15–23
Archery Deer and Elk.....	Aug. 29–Sept. 27
Western Buck Deer and Antlerless Deer.....	Oct. 3–Nov. 6
Controlled Buck Deer.....	Oct. 3–Oct. 14
Eastern OR Antlerless Deer.....	Oct. 17–25
Cascade Bull.....	Nov. 7–13
General Coast 1 <sup>st</sup> Season.....	Nov. 14–17
General Coast 2 <sup>nd</sup> Season.....	Nov. 21–Nov. 27
Rocky Mtn. Bull Elk 1 <sup>st</sup> Season.....	Oct. 28–Nov. 1
Rocky Mtn. Bull Elk 2 <sup>nd</sup> Season.....	Nov. 7–15
Rocky Mtn. Antlerless Elk.....	Nov. 21–29

Some relevant 2026 holidays that may influence season dates are:

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

**Big Game Hunting Regulation Proposals**

Two proposed changes regarding general regulations pertains to increasing clarity regarding prohibited devices and equipment. The intent is to ensure regulations can maintain expectations of fair chase amidst advancing technology. First, additional language is being proposed to clarify that the prohibited use of any electronic device attached to, or incorporated in, the firearm or scope while hunting applies even if the electronic capability is turned off. Cameras and scopes with lighted reticles are exempt but scopes capable of receiving information from an electronic device are also prohibited. The second is the inclusion of “thermal” when describing prohibitions on the use of infrared devices. This expanded regulation would read it is unlawful “to hunt, locate, or scout, for the purpose of hunting any wildlife with infrared, including thermal, or any other “night vision” sight or equipment except trail cameras”.

In addition, the Department has received requests for regulations prohibiting the hunting of wildlife within a certain distance of designated wildlife crossings.

Public input on these proposals are welcome.

**Controlled Hunt Tag Numbers Summary**

Total proposed controlled hunt tag numbers for 2026 seasons (142,791) (Table 1) are a decrease of 4% from 148,795 in 2025. See Table 1 below and the draft tag tables for controlled hunt tag numbers and details for each species/hunt series.

Table 1. Summary of proposed controlled hunt tag numbers for 2026.

Species	Series	Weapon/Type	2025 tags <sup>2</sup>	Proposed 2026 tags	% Change 2025-2026
DEER	100	ALW <sup>1</sup>	42,421	38,585	-9%
		Archery	15,230	13,286	-13%
		Muzzleloader	3,067	3,180	4%
		Youth	292	344	18%
	600	ALW <sup>1</sup>	8,687	8,478	-2%
		Youth	1,432	1,433	<1%
	L Premium	ALW	67	63	-6%
<b>Total</b>			<b>71,196</b>	<b>65,369</b>	<b>-8%</b>
ELK	200	ALW <sup>1</sup>	44,869	44,655	-1%
		Archery	15,477	15,212	-2%
		Muzzleloader	2,294	2,404	5%
		Youth	1,670	1,749	5%
	M Premium	ALW <sup>1</sup>	64	64	0%
<b>Total</b>			<b>64,374</b>	<b>64,084</b>	<b>-1%</b>
PRONGHORN	400	ALW <sup>1</sup>	1,380	1,400	1%
		Archery	492	490	<-1%
		Muzzleloader	138	133	-4%
		Youth	37	37	0%
	N Premium	ALW <sup>1</sup>	26	26	0%
<b>Total</b>			<b>2,073</b>	<b>2,086</b>	<b>1%</b>
BIGHORN	500	CA Ram	80	80	0%
		CA Ewe	50	50	0%
		RM Ram	6	5	-17%
<b>Total</b>			<b>136</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>-1%</b>
MTN GOAT	900	ALW <sup>1</sup>	23	21	-10%
		<b>Total</b>			<b>23</b>
BEAR	700	ALW <sup>1</sup>	10,720	10,823	1%
		Youth	273	273	0%
	<b>Total</b>			<b>10,993</b>	<b>11,096</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>148,795</b>	<b>142,791</b>	<b>-4%</b>

<sup>1</sup> Any Legal Weapon Season (ALW)<sup>2</sup> Includes 2025 Hunt Cancellations/Tag Reductions

## **Mule Deer Hunt Changes**

### **Introduction**

Based on the movements from over 1,400 mule deer collared in recent years, ODFW has identified 22 distinct mule deer herd ranges in eastern Oregon. A mule deer "herd range" includes the entire area a herd uses in a year, including summer ranges, winter ranges, and the migration corridors between them. As directed by the newly updated Oregon Mule Deer Management Plan, these ranges now form the basis for ODFW's mule deer monitoring and management, including harvest management.

ODFW's improved, stronger population models now integrate multiple data streams, including herd composition (buck and doe ratios) and abundance data. To function properly, these models also require accurate harvest data to be collected within a herd range, which is difficult with the current WMU hunt structure.

To address this misalignment, ODFW is proposing to transition mule deer hunting from WMUs to new Deer Hunt Areas within herd ranges in 2026. This change will better align hunting effort and associated harvest with Oregon's mule deer populations and management goals, improve monitoring of population trends, and allow for quicker management responses/accurate evaluation of management actions.

### **Hunt Area Process**

The 22 distinct mule deer herd ranges were first evaluated to see if and where they needed split out into smaller hunt areas and then those hunt areas were crafted considering a variety of factors. Some proposed hunt areas will encompass an entire herd range. However, because of differences in size, deer distributions, habitats, and access between herd ranges, many will have multiple hunt areas. To determine hunt area boundaries, Wildlife Biologists looked at many factors including but not limited to biological information such as mule deer movements from collar data, habitat and land use, roads and access, and closure risks and impacts.

Across all new hunt areas, a concerted effort was made to utilize more easily identifiable boundaries to help hunters and law enforcement.

### **Tag Proposal Process**

ODFW used 2025 tag allocations, and recent data on mule deer movements, hunting, and landscape conditions to direct the process for developing the 2026 tag proposals for eastern Oregon deer hunts. First, spatial analysis was used to look at how herd ranges, hunt areas, and WMUs overlapped. New hunts were created for the new Deer Hunt Areas for 2026 that corresponded to the old WMU hunts by series (buck and antlerless) and weapon type (ALW, bow, muzzleloader). The total number of 2025 tags were then re-allocated to the proposed 2026 hunts based on results of the spatial analysis. This spatial redistribution also incorporated information on mule deer home ranges from collar data.

Following the initial allocation, local wildlife biologists made further adjustments to tag proposals after considering a long-list of biological and social factors. These include but are not limited to: local knowledge of habitat, hunter access, hunter distribution and crowding concerns, harvest success rates, management objectives, recent population and composition estimates from surveys, and population model estimates.

Throughout the process, attempts were made to maintain the same relative proportion of tags across those hunts/weapon types. Premium Hunts were modified to maintain one tag per new hunt area.

In Northeast Oregon, ODFW is proposing separating mule deer hunts and white-tailed deer hunts. Tag allocations for each species was based on the observed proportion of mule deer and white-tailed deer harvest in the current WMUs using mandatory harvest reporting data.

Importantly, the final proposals from this process also incorporate information on present population trends. Reductions in tag allocations were needed in some herds to address ongoing population declines and help improve populations currently below management objectives. The net result is a 9% overall reduction in eastern Oregon deer tags across the 100 Series Buck Deer and 600 Series Antlerless Deer (8% reduction in deer tags statewide).

The final outcome is resulting in a new and different mule deer hunting landscape in Oregon. In some herd ranges, deer hunt area tag proposals for 2026 are very similar to the 2025 totals from the WMUs or portions of WMUs contained by the deer hunt area. For example, proposed tags for the Keno and Trout Creek hunt areas are both similar to 2025 tags for the Keno WMU and Trout Creek Mountains controlled hunts. Where new deer hunt areas encompass multiple WMUs, 2026 tag allocations are also very similar to 2025. For example, the SW-02 hunt area primarily comprises the Pine Creek, Keating, and about half of the Catherine Creek Unit. The 2026 tag proposal for SW102 is 704, which is very similar to the sum of 2025 tags for those units: 220 Pine Creek tags + 329 Keating tags + ½ of 330 Catherine Creek tags = 714.

In other areas and herds, however, the 2026 tag numbers may appear very different from those for 2025 because a WMU may be split into multiple herds and deer hunt areas. In these areas, it is extremely important for hunters to review deer hunt area numbers, names, descriptions, and maps to determine what hunt to apply for and just where to go. Conversations with local biologists and reviewing available ODFW resources will be very useful in this endeavor.

### **Species by Species Highlights**

For species with controlled hunts (**Deer, Elk, Pronghorn Antelope, Bighorn Sheep, Rocky Mountain Goat, and Black Bear**) the details of changes to tag numbers, deleted hunts, new hunts, etc., can be found in the attached controlled hunt tag tables for each species which are also available online. Controlled hunt tag numbers are summarized in Table 1(above).

#### **Buck Deer – 100 Series**

Notable proposed changes include:

- No changes for western Oregon
- Eastern Oregon mule deer hunts replaced with hunts aligning with herd range structure
- Tag reductions common due to shift in hunts, boundaries, and biological need
- Additional white-tailed deer hunts in NE due to separating mule deer and white-tailed deer bag limits

#### **Antlerless Deer – 600 Series**

Notable proposed changes include:

- Decreased tags in three W/NW hunts (Wilson, W McKenzie, Camas Swale)
- Increased tags in Applegate
- Additional white-tailed deer tags in NE due to separating mule deer and white-tailed deer bag limits

**Elk – 200 Series**

Notable proposed changes include:

- Decreased tags in Santiam, Siuslaw, Tumalo, and Minam
- Delete five West Cascades hunts (ALW- Mosby, Pengra; Archery- McKenzie late bow, Santiam Late Bow, N Indigo) and North Wagonfire ALW
- Increased archery tags in Metolius and Upper Deschutes
- Three hunts each split into separate hunts (Applegate-Evans Creek ALW and Youth; Umatilla Youth)

**Pronghorn – 400 Series**

Notable proposed changes include:

- Increased tags in Beulah and Malheur River Units

**Bighorn Sheep – 500 Series**

Notable proposed changes include:

- No Wenaha hunt for 2026: three-year tag rotation with CTUIR and WDFW

**Rocky Mountain Goat – 900 Series**

Notable proposed changes include:

- No Central Cascades hunt for 2026; two-year tag rotation with CTWS
- Strawberry Mtn tag reduction for 2026; two-year tag rotation with CTWS

**Bear – 700 Series**

Notable proposed changes include:

- Increased tags in South Central and Mt. Emily-Walla Walla hunts

**Premium Hunts**

Notable proposed changes include:

- With the transition from WMUs to deer hunt areas in Eastern Oregon, L Premium series hunts have been reduced from 67 to 63 statewide.
- No changes are proposed for other Premium Hunt Series for 2026.

**Western Gray Squirrel**

Notable proposed changes include:

- Regulations for western gray squirrel seasons can be found in both the Big Game Regulations and Game Bird Regulations. No changes are proposed for 2026.