

Thoughts behind 2009 and 2010 Big Game Season Recommendations

Fixed date openers were again used for all big game season recommendations for 2009 and 2010. The long-term goal is to pursue standard date seasons that prevent calendar shift from disrupting the timing and flow of hunts. The diverse work force of Nevadans with nontraditional work weeks, reduced hunter congestion on the opening days of the season (even ranchers have said the dispersed hunting pressure causes less headaches for them), and maximum use of days each month to provide for more separate hunts and higher quality hunting experiences were recognized in using fixed date openers. Other benefits or reasons for standardized seasons include: less time spent by NDOW biologists and employees and Wildlife Administrative Services Office preparing for the big game application process, resulting in cost savings to NDOW and/or more time for biologists for on-the-ground projects that benefit herds; and hunters who must identify vacation dates months in advance will know when hunts will occur without waiting for seasons to be set.

Many seasons have been added over time as herds expand without fully accounting for interplay and overlap with concurrent and adjacent seasons, big game herd surveys and harvest data collection, big game captures and transplants, herd ecology, and rut timing. With the large number of seasons today involving different species and weapon classes compared to the once simple season structure, trying to find a window for each hunt without season overlaps becomes a challenge. To use weekends as the basis for seasons, you end up having 5 days in between the closing and opening dates which severely restricts your ability to fit all the various hunts on the calendar.

Even with knowing what date every Saturday is for the next 30 years, you must account for calendar creep. There are 3 years of 5 Saturday months and 3 years of 4 Saturday months. For example, depending on how you identify the opening weekend, you either force deer rifle hunts to occasionally start in September or extend them into November when bucks are vulnerable. You can make exceptions to prevent this from happening but with so many other hunts tied together, you eventually create unwanted calendar shifts into other hunts.

Below is a list of the changes from the 2008 big game seasons (changes are bolded in the 2009 and 2010 recommendation table):

- Split pronghorn buck rifle seasons in some units to distribute hunting pressure and recognize specific unit limitations such as camping sites.
- Though pronghorn buck muzzleloader hunts are not identified, if desired for a particular unit group, we recommend season dates of Sept 25 – Oct 4.
- Additional nonresident pronghorn hunts to comply with 10% of total quotas to nonresidents.
- Additional pronghorn doe (horns shorter than ears) hunts in unit groups that have met population objectives, have depredation concerns, or have habitat losses reducing pronghorn herd carrying capacity.
- Elk herd established in Unit 073 to allow for new bull hunt.
- No unit groups for bull elk rifle rut hunts were identified; allow public process to identify rut hunts if desired; if certain unit groups are identified for rut hunts, quotas need to be very limited and decision must be made on allowance of incentive elk tag holders where inequality may occur among landowners who receive elk incentive tags where a rut hunt doesn't exist.
- Reassessment of nonresident bull elk hunts to comply with 10% of total quotas to nonresidents.
- Additional cow elk hunts with expanding elk herds and need to manage for specific elk population objectives; cow elk rifle season extended to ensure harvest is attained.

- Nonresident cow elk hunts not identified; though tag fee has been reduced, demand is likely very low and without a seamless second draw and leftover tags available for residents, past nonresident cow elk hunts have created resentment in unsuccessful first draw cow elk applicants.
- Mature bighorn rams available for new 3151 hunt in Unit 045; start primary season 10 days later - more in line with past season dates; also provides for a cooler and safer time frame for capture events necessary for population management and herd restoration; earlier season for high elevation and more northerly (severe winter weather) hunts and for units as part of split season to distribute hunting pressure; early season to end before Nov. 5 to accommodate bighorn captures; no PIW hunters in early season; new special regulation language for DOD hunts.
- Split rifle seasons for junior deer (1107) hunts with 1331 split seasons but early season to start on October 1 to provide for additional weekend to junior hunters (concern for added hunting pressure and mature buck harvest during late 1331 season with single long 1107 hunt).
- For consistency, split seasons for all 1235 hunts in unit groups with 1331 split seasons if more than 1 tag is available for 1235 hunt in a given unit group.
- Unit 031 has large enough deer herd to justify split 1331 seasons
- For Unit 081, provide season dates for all weapon classes to accommodate late fall interstate deer movement into Nevada.
- Hold Unit 114, 115 muzzleloader hunt to run through end of November to better accommodate deer movement out of Great Basin National Park.

Heritage Tag Seasons for big game are recommended to be extended year long to make the tag more attractive to potential bidders.