

## Explanation on NDOW's 2016 Big Game Quota Recommendations

### Antelope -

- Statewide, a minor 3% decline in buck tags still influenced from low to moderate fawn recruitment from 3 and 4 years ago which will be the mature bucks in 2016. Good recruitment from fawns born in 2014 and 2015 provides optimism for buck tags the next few years.
- Overall increase in horns shorter-than-ears (doe) hunt quotas from continued desires to maintain pronghorn herd estimates within their habitat carrying capacities and help alleviate depredation on agricultural fields. As an example, one of our largest pronghorn herds, Unit Group 141, 143, 151- 156 provided 52 pronghorn for out-of-state translocation to the Colville Tribe in Washington state and had 175 animals harvested in the horns shorter than ears hunt but still had a population increase with continued strong fawn recruitment.

### Desert Bighorn Sheep -

- Statewide resident and nonresident ram quotas are recommended to be the same level as in 2015 with individual units having minor adjustments up or down based on past years lamb recruitment or recently added adult mortality from disease events. The number of harvested 170+ BC rams increased from 11 in 2014 to 16 in 2015. The 2015 average age of 6.4 for all rams harvested continues to be at the long-term average of 6.3. Rams born 5, 6, 8 and 9 years ago are from strong lamb recruitment classes and should allow for long-term average age to be met in 2016. But below average lamb ratios during the last 4 years will undoubtedly cause future ram quotas to decline. Recommended tag increase in Unit 253 tag quota because special tag holders will not be allowed to hunt in that unit in 2016
- Recommended ewe quotas for 2016 are increasing slightly from 140 to 148 for the same herds with ewe hunts in 2015: Units 212, 213, 253, and 268. In addition to ewe hunts, plans are for capturing up to 50 bighorn from the Muddy Mountains in the fall 2016 for translocation to Utah. With these reductions in ewe numbers, herd estimates will be brought closer to their sustainable management levels and may be attained with continued ewe removal in the next few years if vegetative conditions and water resources continue to improve. Ten percent of the total tags for each of the 4 units are recommended for the new nonresident ewe hunts.

### California Bighorn Sheep -

- A 2-tag reduction in Unit 012 rams is recommended as a continued quota step down since 2011 in response to severe drought conditions and uncertainty of ram availability. This is the fourth year that lamb recruitment is below population maintenance levels. With water availability much improved, we may see better accessibility to rams during the hunting season, and potentially some ingress back to historic use areas in Unit 012. With the die-off and depopulation of the Montana Mountains herd, the Unit 031 tags were dropped to 2 resident and 1 nonresident with the potential for the PIW and Dream tag to harvest in the Double H Mountains.
- Continued 10-tag ewe quota for Unit 068 to reduce herd to approximately 100 animals and its current sustainable management level. While habitat conditions have improved from good moisture in 2015 and 2016, livestock overgrazing continues to compromise rangeland health and forage for bighorn and other wildlife species.

## Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep -

- Unit 114 is recommended to have 2-tag increase. Adequate mature rams are available but accessing the mountain is very challenging and ram behavior during the hunt involves use of tree covered slopes. Only 1 ram has been harvested over the last 2 years.

## Elk -

- Recommended statewide 11% increase in bull tags and 1% increase in cow elk tags from 2015. Specifics on key hunts include:
  - Increased cow elk depredation tags for Unit 081 during select seasons with good hunter success to alleviate elk use on agricultural fields in the Goose Creek area.
  - Bull rifle tag increases in 072 and 076 unit groups where aggressive cow harvest the last few years has generated an excessive bull ratio that is nearly 1:1 to the lowered cow elk segment of the herd; strong bull harvest metrics in eastern Nevada unit groups with great average bull age and 70% of the bulls harvested having 44"+ main beam lengths affording tag increases; Early Area 16/17 rifle season back to 50 tags from 10 in 2015 rotating from the September rut hunt to standard late October hunt.
  - Increase in bull archery tags due to lower 3-year average hunter success.
  - Lower bull muzzleloader tag quota due to higher 3-year average hunter success, slight decline in applicants, and Area 16/17 season rotating into rut for 2016 with a reduced quota.
  - Slight increase in spike bull tags to reduce hunting pressure on mature bulls.
  - Resident cow elk rifle tag quota decline in some unit groups recognizing the first decline in the statewide elk population estimate since the 1980s; a major shift in tags to the cow elk management hunt in Area 6; GPS collar data documenting significant number of cow elk groups thought to be Nevada elk with 90% of their home range in Idaho and/or on tribal lands; and increased quotas for muzzleloader and archery seasons to reduce hunter congestion during deer rifle hunts. Nonresident cow elk rifle quota increased from 6% to 8% of the total statewide cow elk rifle tags.

## Mule Deer -

- Overall the Department is recommending a 17% decrease in mule deer quotas for the 2016 hunting season.
- This is primarily due to several large deer herds in Elko County experiencing reduced over-winter fawn survival and possibly lower adult survival.
- The 2016 antlerless (doe) quota recommendations are nearly 60% lower for 2016. Antlerless quota recommendations were lowered to reflect past success of density reductions and poor fawn recruitment during 2016.
- The statewide observed buck ratio was 33 bucks:100 does with nearly 15,000 total deer observed during fall surveys.
- Maintaining or increasing trophy harvest opportunities was used as justification for reducing quotas in several hunt units throughout the state.