

Explanation on NDOW's 2014 Big Game Quota Recommendations

Antelope -

- Approximately half the rifle and archery buck unit groups have lower recommend quotas than in 2013 because of moderate buck ratios observed that were achieved the last few years from the tag increases coupled with low to moderate fawn recruitment. A few unit groups with substantial increases are due to high observed bucks ratios during 2013 post-season surveys
- A few muzzleloader buck hunts increased due to greater demand for this weapon class
- A few horns shorter-than-ears hunts have substantial increases based on population estimates still above short-term sustainable management levels. One herd in particular that we are very concerned about is Units 041, 042 that has become a top unit for trophy quality. It was growing at a very high rate even during drought years but last year had a substantial drop in the fawn ratio. This data and other metrics strongly suggest this population (almost 1,900 in 2013) overshot its carrying capacity. The absolute worse predicted drought index this summer centers over these units with summer water availability being the most limiting factor to this herd. Until we see a fawn recruitment recovery which will tell us the population is back under its carrying capacity, we need to lower the population to avoid longer term impacts to this herd.

Desert Bighorn Sheep -

- Statewide only a 2% increase in ram tags based on continued strong middle to older age ram cohorts from good lamb recruitment 5 - 8 years ago.
- Unit 212 Ewe hunt quota is based on the population being higher than ever recorded and animal densities are alarming. It was just confirmed this spring that potentially deadly pathogens have been detected in the Lone Mountain bighorn, eliminating it as an option for transplant stock. Unit 213, Monte Cristo Range population is still high relative to its sustainable management level. The herd is too close to release site opportunities to use as source stock and known movement with Lone Mountain may have already spread pathogens to the Monte Cristos. Unit 068, the Muddy Mountains will be used as source stock for the state of Utah in 2014. We don't have reasonable, low risk release sites in Nevada to use this herd as source stock at this time. We have removed over 200 bighorn from the Muddys over the last 7 years and the population is still increasing. It currently is 200 animals above its sustainable management level and with continued drought conditions, we must start reducing this herd through harvest until viable release sites or alternate capture timing are accommodated.

California Bighorn Sheep -

- We are recommending a small reduction in ram tags statewide for 2014 commensurate with concerns of adequate mature rams in Units 012 and 033
- Recommended ewe quota for Unit 068 uses a combination of harvest and removal for transplant stock to reduce the Sheep Creek Range herd due to deplorable range conditions that have placed this herd in peril of experiencing high mortality in the short term.

Mountain Goat -

- Recent aerial and ground surveys confirmed good numbers of billies to support the moderate tag increases recommended.

Elk -

- With no surprise to most hunters, continued bull and cow elk tag increases are recommended for 2014 to continue to reduce herds to their population objective levels. Over 2,000 cow management tags for all weapon classes combined with both mule deer and bull elk tags account for the large percentage of the 51% increase in cow elk tags compared to 2013.

Mule Deer -

- Many unit groups in 2013 saw increases in tag quotas to take advantage of record high buck ratios (32 bucks:100 does statewide average). The 2013 statewide hunter success for all deer hunters was nearly 44% which resulted in a harvest of 8,230 bucks. The 2013 harvest level resulted in an observed post-season buck ratio of 30 bucks:100 does statewide, which meets NDOW's management objectives. Statewide 2014 buck quota recommendations are down approximately 4% not including Junior Hunts. The harvest level expected from this tag quota is aimed at maintaining the statewide management objective of 30 bucks:100 does.
- The 2014 antlerless deer quotas in Unit Groups 043-046 and 051 are similar to those in 2013. These quotas are based on populations reaching carrying capacity around 2012 and 3 years of persistent drought conditions, which have hampered over-winter fawn survival and recruitment for the past several years.
- Hunt units in Area 6, Area 10, and Area 15 will see significant increases in antlerless deer quota recommendations for the fall 2014 hunting season. These populations have continued to exhibit density dependent responses to poor habitat conditions. Persistent drought conditions, degraded range conditions, and large-scale wildfires on winter ranges have all contributed to the reduced carrying capacity in these mule deer herds. The very poor range conditions in Area 6 and Area 15 are comparable to the conditions witnessed prior to the massive winter die-off experienced in 1992-93.