

TAG ALLOCATION AND APPLICATION HUNT COMMITTEE
Minutes of the March 21, 2014 Meeting

The Tag Allocation and Application Hunt Committee (TAAHC) met at 8:30 a.m. on Friday, March 21, 2014 at the Truckee Meadows Community College, 7000 Dandini Blvd, Sierra Building Room 108, Reno, Nevada

PRESENT: Chairman Jack Robb
Rex Flowers
Joe Crim
Brad Johnston

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT: Michael McBeath

STAFF: Bob Haughian

OTHERS PRESENT: Don Sefton – Systems Consultants (SCI)
Sean Shea
Cody Schroeder – NDOW
John Reed
Keith Ingram

NOTE: A tape recording of these proceedings is retained by the Department of Wildlife and is available for review upon request.

1. Call to Order and Roll Call of Committee Members, Determination of Quorum

Chairman Robb called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m.

2. Approval of Agenda – Chairman Robb

Joe Crim motioned to approve the agenda.

Rex Flowers seconded the motion.

Motion carried unanimously.

3. Approval of Minutes – Chairman Robb – For Possible Action

The Committee will review the minutes from the December 6, 2013 meeting of the TAAHC and may take action to approve the minutes.

Rex Flowers motioned to approve the minutes.

Brad Johnston seconded the motion.

Motion carried unanimously.

4. Member Items/Announcements and Correspondence – Chairman Robb - Informational

Committee members may present emergent items. No action may be taken by the Committee. Any item requiring Committee action may be scheduled on a future Committee agenda. The Committee will review and may discuss correspondence sent or received by the Committee since the last regular meeting and may provide copies for the exhibit file (Committee members may provide hard copies of their correspondence for the written record). Correspondence sent or received by the department will also be discussed.

Chairman Robb asked the committee if they had any member items, announcements or any correspondence they would like to discuss. There were none.

5. Review Current Status of the Survey, Titled “Mule Deer Hunting and Management: Experiences, Attitudes and Preferences of Nevada’s Mule Deer Tag Applicants” - Operations Chief Bob Haughian – Informational

The committee will hear a progress report regarding the survey of Mule Deer tag applicants. This survey is being conducted by the University of Idaho on behalf of the Department.

Bob Haughian informed the committee that this is a preliminary report and the final will be available in late April. This report is the first of two deliverables from our interlocal agreement with the University of Idaho. The survey responses as presented in the preliminary report were collected from January 10th to March 1st. During that period there were 543 respondents out of the pool of 1,200 selected. Of the 1200 surveys that were mail out, approximately 20 were return due to bad mailing addresses. The 1,200 selected for the survey were hunters who applied for mule deer tags in 2012 and 2013. Anyone who was 18 years of age or younger was excluded from the survey. Ten percent (10%) of the surveys were sent to nonresidents and 4% were sent to those who applied on paper applications only during the last two years.

On the January 8th the department sent out introduction emails to those selected to let them know a survey was going to be mailed to them. Two weeks after the email, letters were sent out from the University of Idaho with instructions on how to fill out the survey; two weeks after the letter, a postcard was sent out as a reminder, and two weeks after that those who still did not respond in taking the survey were sent a final letter.

Bob Haughian informed the committee that by April 11th when the survey ends, he anticipated there might be a 50% participation rate for the survey. So far 75% of those who have responded took the survey online and 25% have done the survey on paper. Bob Haughian continues to summarize all of the data that was captured in the preliminary report from the survey for the TAAH committee members. Bob Haughian explained that the responses to question 23 which asks question "How do you define a trophy mule deer" were not included in the preliminary report. He stated the responses to this question were all over the board and the University of Idaho professors asked if they could get some assistance from the Department in analyzing the responses. Bob Haughian informed the committee that the results to this question will be in the final report. Bob Haughian asked Cody Schroeder, NDOW Staff biologist, to explain to the committee his analysis of the responses to this question.

Cody Schroeder indicated there were several different categories for this question, a, b, c or d, and it was pretty clear there was confusion on the part of the hunters regarding the survey question, specifically on how to measure a quality animal in terms of beam length or Boone and Crocket score. By and large the confusion came from the respondents who did not know if they should report an actual measurement in inches like the Boone and Crocket score or an antlered beam length. The first one was in regards to point class and it pretty much made sense; the majority defined a trophy mule deer as 4 points or better. The length question did have problems; it was geared towards the antler length or the main beam length. These answers varied from 1" to 2", to over 200" and this was hard to make a conclusion on. Cody stated he did look in the Nevada Record Book for some reference and the majority of scores out of the 1,400 records in the 2010 book, they recorded the right and left main beam length which is between 20 and 30 inches for a main beam length. Less than a dozen were recorded over 30 inches in the entire record book. We did not make this clear in the survey question whether we were addressing inside spread, greatest spread or the outside spread. They had ranged on their answers from less than 5 inches in width to over 44 inches, but the majority were using 30 inches as a benchmark for a trophy deer. The subcategory "E" was the most problematic question in regards to weight, with answers ranging from 3 pounds to over 350 pounds. The question did not distinguish between live weight or field dress weight, which makes it more problematic and probably should not consider this question. The majority of the respondents indicated a buck over 250 pounds as a trophy. To put this in perspective, Cody stated that NDOW has captured over 75 mature mule deer bucks in the past 3 years and the average live weight of a Nevada mule deer buck is about 160 pounds. These samples were taken from the Carson range, Area 15, central Nevada and the Ruby Mountains. There was only one deer that was over 200 pounds. He believes over 25% of the respondents consider a trophy deer to be at least 250 pounds. Average hunters do not have a realistically idea of what live weight is or they just have unrealistic expectations.

The last question regarded the score, the Boone and Crocket score. Again, the majority of the respondents made sense; many respondents used 160 as a score, which made sense and is the minimum to make the Nevada Record Book. Additionally, e did not distinguish between typical and non-typical in the question which makes a big difference when scoring. We also used Boone and Crocket or Pope and Young for scoring and some people may have been confused. These are the same measurements, just different name criteria. The respondents did range in scores from 10 to over 250. There were a fairly high number of respondents that had 200 inch as a trophy. Just as reference, out of 1,400 records, there were only 9 entries in the 2010 Nevada Record book with a score of 200 inches or more. Cody stated there may be an overoptimistic view of hunters as to what a trophy is.

Joe Crim said he felt that this whole survey was about people who are not as up on their terminology or their critters as much as they think they are.

Bob Haughian stated that this spring NDOW would be posting the final results of the survey on its website. Bob reiterated again, this is only the preliminary report and will not be posted to the website, but is considered to be a public document and will be noted in the March 21 minutes. He recommended to the committee that once the final survey report is received by NDOW, he would like to the committee to hold another TAAHC meeting prior to the May Commission meeting to present the final report and then make it public at that time to the website. He said he would also like to have a member from the University of Idaho present the final report to the Commission in May.

Chairman Robb asked the committee if they could skip agenda item 6 and go forward with agenda item 7 then go back to agenda item 6.

All members were in agreement.

6. Impact of Bighorn Sheep Harvest by Statewide tag holders--Heritage, PIW, Silver State and Dream Tag – Chairman Robb – For Possible Action

The committee will hear a proposal addressing the increased harvest of mature rams in those units as a result of these premium tags.

Chairman Robb recalled a few years ago it was recognized by a prior commission that the system we had and the number of specialty tags we had, had an impact on some of our smaller sheep units. This impact has been felt, specifically in unit 041. We have had multiple heritage tags and multiple PIW tags holder's taking rams out of an area that can't support that level of harvest. There were 1 or 2 general tags in that same area, then we threw in multiple other tags which had an undesirable effect. After looking at this issue in this specific unit, the prior commission applied this to other areas and decided to go to a scenario of if a heritage tag holder harvested in an area the year prior, the area will be closed the following year. This did lighten the load, but now you have the Silver State Tag, Heritage Tag, the Dream Tag and the PIW tag which is 5 tags. This can have a negative effect on our smaller populated units. This could also have an effect on the price you receive for an auction tag if you eliminate one of those popular areas. We need to think of ways that we could better manage this situation in a different manner to recognize the impact on these specialty tags, but also maintain the value and uniqueness of these specialty tags. Chairman Robb indicated he had some ideas and would like to have comments from the committee.

The first idea is to do like we do on the mountain lion harvest and on the bear harvest, which would be a call-in before you can hunt in an area. Have the whole state open to hunt for the Silver State and Heritage tag holders, but if someone was to harvest in a unit, they would have 24 hours to report the harvest to a hotline which would then shut that unit down for everyone else to hunt for the rest of the year. The other PIW, Dream tag or Heritage Tag holders would then not be allowed to hunt that unit. There is the potential for 3 animals being harvested on July 1 when the season opens for those tags in the same area.

The second idea is to number the tags as Heritage 1, Heritage 2 and Heritage 3. Let's say the Silver State tag is Heritage 3, and if Heritage 3 harvested in the Muddy's, Heritage 2 harvested in the Bares and Heritage 1 harvested on Stonewall, then the following year Silver State tag holder for Heritage 3 would be precluded from hunting in the Muddy's. Chairman Robb stated he would like the committee and the CAB's to open up with discussion on finding ideas for not over harvesting in an area like what had happen in the Sahwave Mountains. He suggested on putting this agenda item on a future TAAHC meeting and would like the CABs to have a discussion about ideas for this agenda item at their next meeting, then come back to the TAAHC with their comments or ideas.

Sean Shea informed the committee that last year at one of the Washoe County Advisory meetings this topic was brought up, and one of the ideas was to split the tags up in north unit and south unit for sheep. One year a PIW tag holder could hunt the north unit only and then the following year hunt the south unit only. As for deer, make it east and west units.

Chairman Robb felt by splitting the tags by north or south units especially for the Heritage tag could have an effect on the price of the tag at auction by limiting where they could hunt.

Sean Shea suggested then just doing it with the PIW and the Silver State tags only.

Chairman Robb made a suggestion on reducing the numbers of PIW tags from 20 tags to maybe 7 tags. He also felt that this would not reduce the number of participants applying for the PIW tags and this would not have the impact on the resource as we do now. Even if this had a 20% impact financially, is a 20% worth it in maintaining a particular area?

Rex Flowers recalled several years ago when the Silver State Tag was first introduced, the commission reduced the number of sheep tags for heritage from 2 to 1, after a year they went back and increased the sheep tag for Heritage to 2 tags. He asked if it is about money or is it about sheep and an opportunity for everyone to hunt sheep.

Chairman Robb explained that he is on the Heritage committee and the money a Heritage tag can bring in from just one animal has a big impact on helping fund projects. The Heritage fund money is seed money, every applicant who request heritage fund money is required to go out and get matching funds or federal dollars to associate with it. Routinely, you will see if we have \$500,000 of Heritage money to allocate that year, we would usually get \$1.5 million worth of projects on the ground. If we get \$100,000 for a sheep tag, we would get \$75,000 of it that we could spend or 75% of what was received in the Heritage fund for that year and the other 25% goes into the long term interest bearing account. So \$75,000 then in turn can be made into \$225,000, which would be a lot of seed money for projects on the ground that we are able to accomplish by the harvest of one animal. It is about the money and he believes in it because of the positive effect it has had. Chairman Robb stated he would like this agenda item to be sent out to the CABs for their input and returned back to the committee so it could be presented at the next commission meeting in May.

Chairman Robb asked if there were any public comments regarding agenda item 6. There were none.

7. Tag Refund and Reinstatement of Bonus Points for Mule Deer Tag Holders in Unit 033E affected by the Federal Government Shut Down – Chairman Robb – For Possible Action

The committee will evaluate requests for refunds and reinstatement of bonus points made by hunters with Any Legal Weapon Mule Deer tags for the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge (Unit 033E; season date: October 5 – 20) whose hunt was affected by the Federal Government shutdown of October 1 – 16).

Chairman Robb informed the committee that NDOW has been contacted by a number of people who stated that they drew a deer tag in the Sheldons but were unable to hunt due to the Federal closure and would like to have those bonus points reinstated. Chairman Robb informed them he would put this item on the TAAHC agenda and would have an open discussion on this matter during a public meeting. He stated he also looked at the numbers of hunters who hunted, harvested or returned their tags and by trying to help out one group, he felt there was a chance this may further damage additional individuals. Chairman Robb opened up the discussion to the committee members for comments.

Rex Flowers said it was unfortunate that this had happened, but as stated in the support material, this has happened in the past. A few years ago BLM closed the roads in 015 because of a fire. There were people who turned in their tags, there were people who chose to hang on to their tags and try to hunt. Rex felt there was nothing the committee could do for these hunters other than to be sympathetic. If you help these individuals, how many others will come forward afterwards and say they did not hunt because this or that happened. You would get a steam roll affect out of this and just by statutes alone, we can't do anything for them. He suggested in the future, if anything like this happens again, and if time permits, to post something to the NDOW website as to give direction to the hunters.

Brad Johnston asked if there have been prior instances where bonus points have been restored?

Bob Haughian indicated from his recollection that generally under no circumstance have bonus points been reinstated.

Brad Johnston stated he was torn, because what happened was an unfortunate set of circumstances but after looking at the records for those units, the vast majority of people were able to hunt on their tags and 24 of those hunters were successful in harvesting which was over half of the tags that was issued. Brad asked how many days they were allowed to hunt.

Bob Haughian explained the unit was closed from October 1 – 16, and the season went until October 20 so they had four days to hunt on their tag.

Rex Flowers replied that the first official day to hunt was October 5, so they had 4 days of notice stating the unit may or may not be closed on opening day.

Joe Crim asked Bob Haughian if there was a disclaimer on the website when someone opts for a tag on the Sheldon's that is on Federal land.

Bob Haughian replied there may be a disclaimer that states the unit is on Federal land but there is no disclaimer that addresses anything about potential closures.

Joe Crim asked if this could be added to the application site like the other disclaimers that display for other areas. This would put the responsibility back on the applicant when applying for a tag in this area. Brad stated he personally knows of someone who had a tag in the Sheldon's, they did get kicked out; they did go back later and was able to harvest an animal. He felt this was a unfortunate situation but it is the chance you take when you apply in areas that are controlled by other agencies other than the state of Nevada.

Chairman Robb said the individuals who contacted him had stated they were getting up on years and their opportunity to hunt going forward is limited. He said he is sympathetic with their situation and if there was anything he could do to make it right for those individuals and not step on the toes of others, he felt that the committee would all be in agreement. But he did look at the other individuals who did manage to hunt and harvest in those areas and they too had a shortened hunting experience. They took the chance of not returning their tag and hoping it would open back up and did go back out to hunt. The 11.4% of hunter's who did return their tags, probably played it the safest and maintained their bonus points. Those 24 who did go out to hunt and harvest in that area may have not been able to spend as much time as they would have liked but still were able to go out and harvest a mule deer. Suggesting doing something for a small group of people, how is this right to those hunters who chose to take a chance and only had only 4 days to hunt and may have not harvest. He explained he did not see any equitable way to help out one small group without further damaging others who experienced the same situation.

Sean Shea felt if the committee opted to reinstate these bonus points they would have to go back and look at the other individuals who could not hunt when the Sheldon closed down due to fires a couple of years ago.

Chairman Robb explained that NDOW has made it easy and has given hunter's every opportunity to return a tag before the start of the season opening, but we have to recognize there are some unforeseen situations that are out of our control, whether it is fire, government interference or weather.

Brad Johnston recalled the letters that were sent into NDOW all had stated they did not think the Government shut down in the Sheldon's would last very long, and this is why they did not return their tags. He asked if there was anything in regulations regarding reinstating bonus points and has it ever been done before.

Chairman Robb recalled that in the past, we had made some rule changes and when these rules were changed, they were not retroactive to the people who were affected by it. There was a return card issue a few years ago when we shorten up the length of the return card due date. After discussion with the Deputy Attorney General, you can make some rules that can apply backwards and there is a possibility to do it. We have never done it, and believe this would be a slippery slope. Chairman Robb informed the committee that whatever the result the committee agrees to on this issue, he would like these people to see the documents that were considered by this committee and give them an answer back so they know that the committee did have an open meeting about it and addressed their concerns.

Chairman Robb asked if the committee would make a motion to take action on this item.

Rex Flowers motioned to deny the requests for refunds and reinstatement of bonus points made by hunters with the any legal weapon mule deer tags in the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge in unit 033 early, with the season date of October 5 through October 20, whose hunt was affected by the Federal Government shut down from October 1 through October 16, and would request that the department would work with System Consultants to create a drop down identifying that federal lands could be shut down due to government regulations.

Joe Crim seconded the motion.

Brad Johnston said he is willing to support the motion but if the government shut down had occurred on October 5 or October 6 when it was too late to return the tag, he would may have reached a different conclusion because that person would have had no opportunity to address the situation but given the time line of the events and after reviewing the correspondence from the applicants there were decisions to make and there were decisions that were made by various groups. What was compelling to him was the data that came in from the other tag holders both residents and nonresidents who hunted or returned their tags. He said his biggest concern is opening up a whole host of additional issues potentially.

Motion carried unanimously.

Keith Ingram stated his family has been in Nevada for over 60 years and they are hunters and fishermen. He asked when the federal government started to play politics or whatever it was and shut down the national parks, was there some way

Nevada Department of Wildlife could have filled the void when they shut down the Sheldon for whatever reason and couldn't the state of Nevada keep it open with their own game wardens.

Chairman Robb explained that Law Enforcement was not shut down and part of the issue was that some of these individuals did recognize that Law Enforcement on federal wildlife management areas were still in effect and they did not want to break any federal laws by going there. He believes some people did chose to go there and break the law. There was no way to keep it open, it is federally controlled and we didn't have any way to step in at that point.

8. Extending Bonus Point Retention Beyond the Current Two Year Limit for Active Duty Military – Operations Chief Bob Haughian – For Possible Action

The committee will hear a report regarding a proposal to allow Nevada residents who are on active military duty to keep their bonus points beyond two years.

Bob Haughian explained to the committee he had not yet addressed this agenda item due to scheduling issues and has attentively scheduled a meeting with John Reed, to proponent of this issue, on April 17. He would have more information for the committee at the next TAAHC meeting.

Chairman Robb asked if there were any more comments on this agenda item. There were none.

9. Public Comment Period - Persons wishing to speak may do so at this time. Public comment will be limited to three minutes. No action can be taken by the Committee at this time; any item requiring Committee action may be scheduled on a future Committee agenda.

Keith Ingram asked if he could talk about the steel shot requirements for doves on the wildlife areas.

Chairman Robb informed him this was public comment period opened to the public and there is no restriction on public comments.

Keith Ingram said he doesn't know how the steel shot requirement for dove and quails got started in the wildlife areas. It is not federal law and he would like to see it deleted off of Nevada's regulation NAC 503.183, non toxic shot must be used for all species when hunting on wildlife management areas.

Chairman Robb said he would talk with NDOW Law Enforcement Chief Rob Buonamici on this and find the reason why this was put into place. Chairman Robb stated if this is something he felt strongly about, he could bring it as a petition to the commission. NDOW staff could explain the petition process to him and he could file the petition which would come before the commission board, which then would accept or deny the petition. If they accept the petition, then would look into changing the regulation as requested.

John Reed said he wanted to thank the committee for considering agenda item 8, extending bonus point retention for active duty military. He said he had discussed this with several veterans and active duty guys who all were very receptive to the idea.

Sean Shea asked out of curiosity why the two year limit was put on the bonus points anyway.

Chairman Robb explained it was to keep people to actively buy hunting license and apply.

10. Future Committee Meetings – Chairman Robb – Informational

The Committee will reconfirm the date and location of the next TAAHC meeting.

Bob Haughian asked to recommend that the next TAAHC meeting be held soon after April 21 when the University of Idaho is to furnish NDOW with the final report of the survey. This way, the committee could review and take the findings from the survey to the CABs to also review.

Next TAAHC will be scheduled on April 28, 2014 in Reno, at 4:00 pm. Location to be determined.

Meeting adjourned at 9:32 a.m.

FINAL