

Big Game Regulation Proposal Overview
October 9, 2015

This overview is primarily an abbreviated version of proposals presented to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission on June 5, 2015.

This document focuses on:

- changes from 2015 regulations
- edits and changes to proposals made in June 2015 for 2016 regulations
- proposals which were not included in the June 2015 Commission packet

Many of the topics covered in this overview were covered in more detail in previous Commission packets. To reduce repetition this summary contains condensed discussions of those topics.

Proposed 2016 General Seasons

Annually most big game season dates follow a cycle in which they progress one day earlier each year then “jump” a week later, starting the cycle over again. A key date is the opening of buck deer rifle season which is the Saturday nearest October 1. This “jump” occurred for the 2015 seasons, which are the latest in the cycle. For 2016, most hunts are proposed to be shifted 2 days earlier. Most years the shift is one day but 2016 is a leap year resulting in the two day shift. For example, archery season, which opened on August 29 in 2015, is proposed to open on August 27 in 2016 (Table 1).

Seasons and controlled hunts with “fixed” dates, including General Bear and General Cougar seasons, remain unchanged for 2016.

Proposed 2016 Application and Tag Sale Deadlines

Controlled hunt application deadlines are set to occur the same date each year (Table 2). Tag sale deadlines (Table 3) are set at 11:59 pm the day before each respective season opens, except general bear and general cougar tags which have the same tag sale deadline as for buck deer. For bighorn sheep and Rocky Mtn. goats the tag sale deadline is the last day of the hunt.

- Will allow hunters to hunt deer and elk at the same time
- Allows an opportunity to harvest a buck spotted during elk season or a bull during deer season, or put an antlerless animal in the freezer any time during a long season
- Structure fits well with current controlled hunt structure, requires less extensive computer programming (no new fees, no new preference point types, no need for statutory changes, etc.).
- Does not compete directly with A&H tags; hunters willing to invest more can purchase raffle tickets or bid on auction tags
- Will increase, although possibly not maximize, Department revenue

Limiting Landowner Preference Mule Deer Tags

The 2013 Legislature, House Bill 2027A, made changes to Section 2 of the LOP Program and extended the Sunset to January 2, 2020. One of the significant changes was authorizing the Commission to limit LOP mule deer buck tags in WMUs where the mule deer population is below MO.

496.146.

Sec. 2. Landowner preference tags.

(7)(c) The commission may specify by rule a formula for determining the number of landowner preference tags that are available for controlled hunts for mule deer in a wildlife management unit in which the population of mule deer is less than the goal specified for that wildlife management unit in the wildlife management plan for mule deer.

For 2015 mule deer hunts, the Department implemented the same formula for mule deer used for other deer and elk hunts that have limited LOP tags. In those LOP limited hunts, landowner hunting preference tags are limited to five tags or 10 percent of the total controlled hunt tags for each hunt, whichever is greater.

For 2016 the Department is recommending to continue limiting LOP tags for some buck hunts (100 Series). Proposals for 2016 tag numbers, including hunts to have LOP limitations, will be developed spring 2016 using the most current information available and provided to the Commission June 2016.

Cougar Target Areas

There were no active Cougar Target Areas, as described in the 2006 Cougar Management Plan (Chapter VI, Adaptive Management Process) during 2014 and 2015. Four Target areas are planned for implementation beginning January 1, 2016 (Table 4). One new target area is being implemented to reduce human/pet safety or livestock conflicts, one is being implemented for mule deer population improvement, and two are being implemented to continue gains from previous actions in Mule Deer Initiative units.

Table 4. General information on Cougar Target Areas being implemented beginning January 1, 2016.

Target Area	Cougar Zone	Purpose	Size (mi ²)	Annual Removal Objective	Estimated Annual Cost	Removal By
E Umpqua	B	Reduce livestock/safety conflicts	1,508	30	\$22,425	ODFW, Vol. Agents, & Wildlife Services
Interstate	C	Improve Mule Deer Populations	2,196	50	\$32,250	Vol. Agents, & Wildlife Services
Steens Mtn.	F	Improve Mule Deer & Bighorn Populations	1,572	10	\$12,500	Wildlife Services
Warner	F	Improve Mule Deer Populations	960	5	\$1,750	Volunteer Agents

Criteria for triggering target areas are established by the 2006 Cougar Management plan. For Cougar Management Zone B, the number of recorded livestock related complaints has been above the trigger value of 69 since 2009. For human and pet safety, the number of recorded complaints was above the trigger value of 84 from 2008 – 2012, dropping below 84 since 2013. The strongest indicator of need for more aggressive management of conflict in the area is number of cougars killed as a result of conflict. For Zone B, number of cougar mortalities due to conflict with humans, pets, and livestock has been above the criteria triggering target area management since adoption of the Cougar Management Plan in 2006 (Table 5). For 2012 – 2014, non-hunting mortality related to human/pet safety or livestock safety has been from 5.5 to 6.4 times the criteria value.

Table 5. Number of cougar complaints and mortalities related to the Target Area trigger for criteria human and pet safety conflicts or livestock conflicts in Cougar Management Zone B, 2006 – 2015.

Year	Livestock Conflict		Human/Pet Safety		Human/Pet Safety or Livestock Conflict	
	Criteria	Complaints	Criteria	Complaints	Criteria	Mortalities
2006	69	63	84	58	11	32
2007	69	65	84	77	11	35
2008	69	65	84	114	11	35
2009	69	71	84	96	11	40
2010	69	76	84	109	11	43
2011	69	119	84	108	11	59
2012	69	109	84	94	11	61
2013	69	99	84	56	11	70
2014	69	88	84	70	11	64
2015 ^a	69	89	84	68	11	25

^a Data for 2015 current through 1 September 2015.

Target areas also may be established to address issues occurring with other big game species. Beginning in 2010, two cougar target areas (Steens Mtn, Warner) were implemented as part of the Mule Deer initiative (MDI). These units have historically averaged below 50% of population management objective (Table 6), which is below the criteria of 60% as established in the 2006

Cougar Management Plan. Department monitoring indicated that target area cougar removals between 2010 and 2013 positively affected mule deer populations in these units. As a result, administrative cougar removal will continue in both the Warner and Steens Mountain WMUs in an effort to improve upon the benefits realized from initial target area actions. In addition, as per criteria established by the Cougar plan for Zone C, the mule deer population in the Interstate WMU is consistently one of the farthest below population MO compared to all other eastern Oregon WMUs. As a result, a target area implementing more aggressive cougar management to benefit mule deer populations will begin in 2016.

Table 6. Percent of mule deer population management objective for WMUs selected for cougar target area implementation in 2016.

Year	Steens Mountain	Warner	Interstate
2006	45%	30%	45%
2007	36%	41%	45%
2008	39%	19%	39%
2009	35%	54%	74%
2010	34%	43%	70%
2011	35%	57%	38%
2012	40%	45%	27%
2013	44%	69%	37%
2014	48%	36%	26%
2015	47%	50%	30%

Changes Developed Since the June 2015 Commission Meeting

Following are proposals developed for presentation at the October 9, 2015, Commission meeting for potential inclusion in the 2016 Big Game Regulations.

Allow the Use of Lighted Arrow Nocks

At the June 2015 Commission Meeting the Commission Directed Department staff to develop a proposal for consideration that would allow the use of lighted arrow nocks. The Commission has discussed lighted nock several times during the past five years. Two concerns are commonly expressed by hunters who do not support the use of lighted nocks.

- Concern that any technology that increases hunting effectiveness could result in reduced archery hunting opportunity
- Concern that allowing any electronic device on bow or arrow could lead to additional items being allowed in the future

The current restriction reads, "No electronic devices may be attached to bow or arrow." If the Commission decision is to allow lighted nocks the Department proposes to simply add the exception so the regulation would read, "No electronic devices may be attached to bow or arrow except lighted arrow nocks that have no function other than to increase visibility of the arrow are allowed."