



July 16, 2021

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission
Chair Mary Wahl
4034 Fairview Industrial Drive SE
Salem, OR 97302
odfw.commission@odfw.oregon.gov

Re: Official Testimony Regarding the Eastern Oregon Archery Elk Proposal

Dear Chair Wahl and members of the Commission,

The undersigned sporting and conservation groups were invited by the ODFW project team to participate in discussions pertaining to the proposed archery elk changes for the 2022 hunting regulation cycle. Our organizations have been diligently collaborating for the past five months, soliciting membership input, reviewing issues identified in the 2021 hunt development process, gathering additional information, and developing concept alternatives that are consistent with ODFW goals. Our collaboration was informed by the following goals: maintaining opportunity, developing creative solution options based in sound biological and social data, and addressing R3 initiatives (recruitment, retention and reactivation).

As a group, we would like to thank the ODFW lead Jeremy Thompson for his open, informative, and unbiased participation through this process. We also want to thank Commissioner Labhart for his facilitation efforts during our final meeting and for always being available to talk over specific proposal concerns. Much has been learned over these months, and our organizations hope to see this level of public outreach, and the model that was developed for this process, continue into future ODFW proposals.

At the onset on this big game review process, ODFW identified a list of benchmarks they needed to reach with any change to archery elk hunting in Eastern Oregon. With the exception of addressing point creep due to the uncertainty of how these changes will ultimately affect it, we feel that the following ODFW benchmarks will be met.

1. Allow for district biologists to adjust tags across all user groups in order to meet elk plan objectives.
2. Provide ability to address hunter crowding in units with high hunter densities and hunter complaints.
3. Provide a vehicle for biologist to address elk disturbance in areas with documented elk movement in response to start of elk season.
4. Allow for equitable utilization of biological resources.
5. Create consistent regulations that are easy to understand and explain to public.

Hunters in this state, and the organizations that represent them, are a diverse group. But there are common threads that bind us together: an abiding sense of stewardship for our natural resources, and a desire that healthy wildlife populations, the wild places in which they live, and the opportunity to pursue them persists and improves in Oregon. With these principles guiding us, and after careful evaluation and vetting by staff to ensure both the biological and social requirements would be met while providing for maximum hunting opportunity, we encourage the Commission to adopt staff's current proposal of maintaining a statewide general season and the creation of the eagle Cap Zone. Most importantly, we encourage the adoption of the youth controlled archery concept amendment.

1. **Maintain a statewide general season opportunity for all units not moving to controlled**

This concept:

- i. Maintains maximum hunter participation without jeopardizing elk populations or causing a reduction of tags for other user groups.
- ii. Allows maximum portability in the event of wildfires and other natural factors.
- iii. Simplifies the regulations for the hunter, ODFW and OSP by maintaining a general season where biological and management factors allow.
- iv. Allows all hunters, including rifle hunters, to fall back on a general hunt opportunity if their controlled hunt choices are not selected.
- v. Directly aligns with and supports ODFW's recruitment and retention goals by allowing opportunities for youth and families to hunt on an annual basis.
- vi. Did not raise any objections by ODFW staff at the final sporting and conservation group meeting while consensus amongst the group was achieved.

2. **Creation of the Eagle Cap Zone with Added Traditional Archery Opportunity**

This concept:

- i. The zone model meets the objectives of the archery review process as outlined by ODFW in that it allows for sound biological management and equity in harvest distribution.
- ii. Recognizes the unique characteristics of the proposed units to include Oregon's largest wilderness and roadless area.
- iii. Incorporates and recognizes traditional archery as a management tool while maximizing opportunity.
 1. Given the low success rate of traditional archery, elk populations would not be jeopardized or cause a reduction of tags from other user groups.
 2. Over 200 hunter tags can be salvaged from the original zone concept.
 3. Hunter opportunity would be maximized to the extent biological factors and management practices allow.
- iv. Maximizes tag portability in the event of an area closure due to fire or other natural factors.
- v. Allows an archer the flexibility to move between units in the event of potential hunter crowding.
- vi. When compared to original staff proposal, would provide the quickest route to achieve tag increases for rifle hunts in the 5 WMU by reducing archery harvest and expediting bull MO increases.
- vii. Provides a new data set for staff by establishing enhanced monitoring protocols to evaluate hunter distribution within the zone, assess unit level harvest, and ultimately provide an evaluation of tag allocation differential due to the zone

management. Such data would prove useful while evaluating other zone opportunities.

- viii. Did not raise any objections by ODFW staff at the final sporting and conservation group meeting while consensus amongst the group was achieved.

3. **Establish a statewide controlled archery youth hunt consistent with existing archery season structure. Note: This will allow youths to hunt in the newly proposed controlled unit(s) as well as general units during the existing archery season.**

This concept:

- i. Recognizes the value and nuances associated with youth archery. No other youth archery only elk hunts exist.
- ii. Given that youth have limited time to hunt due to school and other activities, this will allow an opportunity for youths to participate in an eastern Oregon experience while still being able to hunt near home when time allows.
- iii. Archery requires many years in the field to successfully harvest an animal. This concept allows for continual participation and repetitive experiences that are necessary to gain the experience, confidence, and ethical behavior that are integral components of archery hunting.
- iv. While the youth mentor program will be expressed as an option by ODFW, most youths between the ages of 12 and 15, especially young women, do not have the strength to pull back the required 40-pound bow draw weight, thus significantly limiting participation. In addition, the mentor program does not allow for hunting in both a controlled unit and general unit and only goes to age 15.
- v. While controlled youth elk hunts exist, these hunts focus on rifle and it may take at least one to three years to get drawn. Worth noting is that youths as early as 12 and younger can harvest an elk first time out while shooting at long distances with a rifle. Archery on the other hand can take many years and hunter days to be successful as expressed in item ii.
- vi. Enables youth to hunt every year with a tag allocation as determined by ODFW.
- vii. Enables ODFW to manage hunters/resources through the controlled hunt structure.
- viii. Directly aligns with and supports ODFW's recruitment and retention goals.
- ix. With low success rates for youth archery, elk populations would not be jeopardized or cause a reduction of tags from other user groups. If necessary, ODFW can restrict harvest to spike only or spike/calf in order to meet management objectives. Controlled hunt areas could also be established on a unit-by-unit basis as another management tool.

While implementing a controlled model does create an additional management tool, controlled archery hunts and the hundreds of tag opportunities lost through this process alone will not resolve our elk management issues. Throughout this review process concerns were expressed by this group and many others for the need to address additional factors such as predation, road closures, spike hunting, antler restrictions and more accurate data collection.

The responsibility lies with the Commission to ensure that ODFW actively pursues management strategies that prevent the reduction of hunter tags of any type to address bull elk ratio decline. Such efforts should be proactive, science based and forward thinking beyond the conventional reactionary focus on units below management objectives. The Commission must act now to challenge ODFW to more actively engage in using all the creative management tools at their disposal.

Once a final decision has been made by the commission, our organizations look forward to working with ODFW staff, commissioners, public land management agencies, and the other sport groups in this state to address the host of other challenges facing our game populations today. Thank you for the consideration of our collective views on this important issue. We welcome the opportunity to continue to work together moving forward.

Sincerely,

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Oregon Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

Tristan Henry
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