

Archery Review Public Advisory Committee (ARPAC)
2014
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW, Department)

Issues Backgrounder and Description

Issues:

1. Antlerless harvest as applied to archery hunting.
2. Ties between tags of different species in the same archery season and area.

Issue 1.

History: In the 1970s and 1980s Antlerless harvest during archery seasons was considered small to the point of insignificance. Animal numbers were high and both archery and rifle seasons were mostly general in nature. However, rifle harvest on antlerless animals was controlled in order to limit the effect on animal populations to a biologically acceptable level.

In the 1980s-1990s, the popularity of archery hunting grew and antlerless harvest increased as well. It wasn't until the 2000s that antlerless harvest during archery season came to be less of an insignificant issue. Antlerless archery harvest rose with the popularity of archery season. Its effect on animal populations was less significant than rifle harvest. However, archery harvest was now at a level where it would need to be curbed in situations where animal populations needed greater protection from antlerless harvest.

Forested mule deer populations had long been protected from rifle antlerless harvest to maximize deer production in largely publicly owned forested lands. Antlerless hunts were kept in lower elevation private areas to provide relief from agricultural damage by deer. In contrast, elk had been subjected to unit wide antlerless rifle harvest to exert population control to achieve management objective levels. While elk were managed this way, there was little need to restrict antlerless archery harvest in the general season. Elk were being taken in large numbers for population control with rifles and antlerless harvest during the archery season helped with population control as well.

During the 2000s elk calf recruitment began to decline in several units. With the loss of recruitment came the reduced need for population control and eventually the urgent need to preserve elk populations at management objective levels instead of allowing them to decline further. Unit wide antlerless rifle seasons were decreased and finally eliminated in many areas. Lower elevation, private land antlerless elk hunts were maintained in order to address elk damage, but all other antlerless elk harvest, especially on public land, was restricted or eliminated in many Wildlife Management Units (WMUs).

Since rifle antlerless harvest was controlled, tag numbers were easily reduced and hunt areas modified to reflect the elk recruitment realities in troubled units. However, antlerless archery harvest was not controlled and was less easily metered in response to changes in biological herd realities. In a general hunt format only bag limit could be manipulated from either sex to bull only. In an effort to maintain the general nature of archery hunting in most units, a formula was devised to regulate bag limit during general archery seasons where elk recruitment was declining. **If most antlerless rifle hunting on a unit wide basis was eliminated to conserve population, especially on public land, the bag limit for general archery season would be restricted to any bull instead of any elk** in order to reduce antlerless harvest from that weapon type as well.

This same process had previously been used to determine when to allow Persons with Disability Permit **(PDP) holders** an antlerless deer or elk in their bag limit in addition to the bag limit found on a tag they possessed. As a result, the bag limit thresholds were the same for archery seasons and hunters with disabilities permits, creating a circumstance in which once the threshold was achieved, a large amount of antlerless harvest was going to occur on the affected animal population.

In many cases this joint threshold would create more antlerless harvest than the affected animal population could withstand. Since both deer and elk populations change size a relatively small amount each year, it would take several years of population buildup before that population could withstand such a large increase in antlerless harvest. On the other hand, because antlerless rifle tags are controlled they can be adjusted in small increments to cope with increasing animal populations and not trigger the immediate large increase in antlerless harvest associated with allowing antlerless animals in the bag limit for all archers and hunters with disabilities permits. As a result, antlerless archery opportunity would only be granted after a large increase in population in some cases. Archers would have to wait a much longer time in this case to be granted the opportunity to harvest antlerless animals.

The Issue: It is uncommon for deer units to move back and forth between “buck only” and “one deer” for archers. Units with elk are more common to switch archery bag limits. In the recent past, it has been more common for units to move from “any elk” to “any bull” eliminating the option to take an antlerless animal. These units are typically moving from one bag limit to the other due to reductions in calf recruitment to the adult age classes each year. Many of these units have 1,000 or more general season archers hunting each year. It is difficult to move to an “any elk” bag limit in such cases when the ability to take an antlerless animal moves from 0 to 1,000 tags or more. **The issue is exacerbated due to PDP hunter antlerless criteria being the same.** As a result, a manager has to plan on a huge increase in antlerless archery harvest along with a large increase in PDP harvest at the same time. For the animal population to withstand such a change in harvest, it has to be substantially above Management Objective which is not common at this time. **The system currently in place** keeps managers from allocating antlerless harvest to archers because they do not have the ability to meter the level of opportunity, and therefore harvest.

ODFW approach to issue in Ukiah and Heppner Units: In the late 2000s Cougar target areas were initiated to address low calf elk recruitment to the adult age classes in some units. Three of these were Heppner, Ukiah, and Wenaha. In two of these units, Heppner and Ukiah, elk calf recovery has been

sufficient to accommodate some increases in antlerless elk harvest. Neither unit has recovered to the point where triggering an either sex bag limit for general archery and PDP harvest would be biologically responsible. To find a way to offer antlerless harvest to archers in a metered way, a unit wide “any elk” bag limit controlled archery hunt was established in each unit to occur for the first time in the fall of 2014. The bag limit would retain all the bull elk harvest flexibility enjoyed by general tag holders while also offering antlerless harvest in a limited way. The controlled hunt would run concurrent to the general archery season. The tag levels of the controlled hunt would increase or decline according to the biological realities of the elk herd in each unit.

Other possible approaches: Solutions become difficult as one considers the requirements a solution must meet to be viable. Some requirements are:

1. Provide additional archery antlerless opportunity without exceeding the desired mortality level for the herd.
2. Solution must be adjustable to future biological constraints. If the biological surplus changes for the affected herd, opportunity needs to be adjustable to address either increasing or declining surplus antlerless animals available for harvest.
3. Solution does not substantially increase crowding in units where crowding is causing animal displacement at current levels.
4. Solution is timed to place hunters and animals in same location at same time to create a viable hunt.
5. Solution does not reduce opportunity for hunters using other weapons.

The approach above meets these criteria. Some other approaches may accomplish the desired outcome, but accurate predictions of hunter effort and harvest effects are difficult to make in some cases.

Issue 2

General deer opportunity being granted only when the hunter has an unfilled, valid elk tag for the same unit, was originally conceived in the Sled Springs and Chesnimnus WMUs in 1992. Since that time, the Ochoco Unit adopted a similar regulation in 2006. The extension of this regulation which has most recently caused considerable concern occurred in the Walla Walla, Wenaha, and Mt. Emily Units. In each case, enforcement was the driving force behind creating the restriction, however there is also a desire to limit archery hunter disturbance to animals where it is moving them to private lands and/or winter range..

Walla Walla, Wenaha, and Mt. Emily: The elk tags went to full controlled in Walla Walla, Wenaha, and Mt. Emily due to the need to control the number of spikes killed in the unit to **create more escapement** to the branch bull classes so branch bull tags could be offered in greater numbers (trying to address the growing chorus of complaints about how long it takes to get the branch bull tag for either archery or rifle). The Oregon State Police (OSP) were supportive of the change since they had been struggling to

enforce **poaching issues** in the units over the years. A common enforcement issue for them came in the form of a general tag holder (legal with a reduced bag limit of spike only before 2013) would be hunting in the unit and kill a branch bull. The tag would not be valid for that bull there, but would be valid for a bull just like it outside the unit. They would only have to get the bull to the vehicle and tag it with the general tag and drive away from the location (not necessarily out of the unit) and OSP's ability to pursue the case was all but destroyed. By making all the elk tags controlled, OSP would know while the person was hunting whether they had a tag valid for the area simply by looking them up on the hunt lists.

Now, the general deer tag, still valid in those three units, needed consideration. A person could still be in one of these WMUs with a general deer tag and use it as an excuse to be in the field with a bow and a general season elk tag to take an illegal bull elk. What mechanism could be used to hamper the illegal use of general archery tags? The result was the tie to the elk tag. The Department recognizes the solution had negative consequences for archery deer hunters. To be clear, the deer pressure in the Walla Walla, Wenaha, and Mt. Emily units did not constitute an issue for the deer population. The ARPAC needs to **find a way forward that continues to minimize the crossover elk poaching issue while recapturing the same deer opportunity lost in those units.**

Possible Solutions:

Following are suggestions the Department has received to replace the loss of opportunity from establishing the tie between archery elk and archery deer tags in the Walla Walla, Wenaha, and Mt. Emily Units.

No Action: leave the tie between the elk and deer tag in place and establish no hunts as replacements for the lost opportunity from establishing the tie. The result would likely be the permanent loss of some archery buck deer hunting opportunity in the three unit area with no biological need for the reduction.

Return to previous condition (Sever the tie between elk and deer tags): Doing so would restore the ability for general archers to be in the unit during the elk season. Restoration of the lost archery opportunity would accompany such a change. As a result, archers wishing to use the ability to have a valid general archery deer tag to illegally take a branch bull in one of the three units would be empowered to do so again. It is likely illegal harvest of the branch bull component in one or all of these units would increase.

Create a controlled season during standard archery timeframe: Establish a controlled archery deer tag to be valid during the standard archery season timeframe (late August to late September). This option would provide "in kind" opportunity back to archers as was lost. Since the archery deer effort was not out of balance with biological realities in the unit before the tie between tags was established, tag numbers could be similar to the level of effort as existed before the tie between tags occurred.

Establish a late controlled archery deer hunt for buck deer: This option would establish a controlled deer hunt later in the fall to backfill lost opportunity from the standard archery deer season timeframe as a result of tying archery deer opportunity to having a controlled elk tag for the unit in question (Walla Walla, Wenaha, or Mt. Emily). As has previously been discussed, the timing of the hunt would need to

consider difficulties in those three units associated with heavy snow fall that typically occurs in mid to late November. However, if a suitable timeframe could be established, the tag numbers would need to reflect the vulnerability of buck deer during that timeframe. If hunt dates were to move into the rut timeframe, buck deer would be more vulnerable than the same animals during the standard archery season timeframe.

Since a finite biological surplus of buck deer would be available, tag numbers would need to be established to take the biological surplus of bucks and nothing more. This would necessitate lower tag numbers than what would be available if the season were to occur during the standard archery deer season timeframe due to the increased vulnerability of bucks during the rut. The general archery tags in those units had about 22% success. Late archery buck deer hunts for mule deer in the state have a weighted average of 45% success. These data suggest the tags would have to be no more than half of the original tag number to keep from exceeding the harvests originally taken by archers before the tie between archery elk and archery deer tags occurred. This option also would not address concerns of local hunters and landowners who simply want to go hunting on their property or near where they live each year during the standard archery season timeframe.

Since a late archery deer hunt is not “in-kind replacement” and is a rut hunt, the Department would need to provide this same type of opportunity for rifle hunters as well. Additionally, a conversion to this type of opportunity would not recapture the “in-kind” opportunity that was lost when the tie to the deer tag was created.