

Tag Portability as it Relates to Archery Hunting in Oregon

2013-14 ARPAC

Background:

When archery season first became a statewide sport, participation was low and archers enjoyed a statewide season with very little biological impact. As the sport grew in popularity, some controlled hunts developed in archery for both elk and deer. Some were designed to provide a specific opportunity to archers while others were implemented to accommodate management issues in a unit or subunit area. In most cases, the controlled hunt tags were considered an enhancement of the hunter's general season opportunity in that if they possessed a controlled hunt tag for a specific area, the tag was valid in the controlled hunt season as well as everywhere a general season tag was valid. By contrast, hunters with general season tags were not able to hunt in the controlled hunt archery area. The controlled hunt tags had the "portability" to be used in general season areas.

As controlled hunts have increased in number over the years, the concept of portability has remained imbedded in the hunt strategy, especially for elk. **In the 2013 elk season there were 20 elk controlled hunts total with 14 hunts retaining portability for their tag holders.** Deer hunts were somewhat more restrictive in granting portability for controlled hunt tags with a 2013 total of 16 controlled deer hunts with 7 hunts retaining portability to the general season for the deer controlled archery hunt tag holders.

Portability as an Issue:

Allowing or restricting portability is a controlled hunt strategy that affects the archery hunting opportunity of archery controlled hunt tag holders. **A desire to discuss whether to retain tag portability in controlled archery seasons increases when the number of controlled hunt tag holders is significant (approx. 5,400 for elk and 750 or more for deer) and there is a desire to limit animal displacement or crowding in general archery seasons.**

Animal Displacement:

Animal displacement is a phenomenon that occurs when a significant number of animals move from one area to another. In wildlife management this phenomenon occurs most often with elk and revolves around displacement from highly accessible lands (public or open private/timber lands) to more secure private lands or more remote areas with less access. This type of shift of animals has been increasing in recent years. Causes, such as poor habitat conditions in western Oregon federal forests or **animal disturbance which is increasingly happening in eastern Oregon**, move animals off higher elevation public or accessible land in favor of lower elevation private land. These animals stay on private land through the fall and are not available to the public land hunter for harvest. Some of these animals stay on private land year-round and are never accessible for harvest. Where the movement of animals is still seasonal, the shift has been commonly observed to occur in late August and early September. Since **archery season is the primary disturbance** in some areas during this time and is the first major human

disturbance to occur in the fall, it can be the cause of the shift. Once the animals shift for the year, no significant shift of animals back to highly accessible land usually occurs. This lack of movement back to accessible lands affects archery hunters and all the user groups to follow in the fall months. The increased number of animals on private land cause damage and also put pressure on areas intended for winter range. The land mass has little ability to withstand grazing for 3-4 extra months or in some cases, year-round. Antlerless rifle seasons are put in place for damage to satisfy our statutory responsibility to alleviate damage, but rarely result in a reversal of the movement due to lack of sufficient pressure on those private lands. Private land elk remain to over utilize winter range, often causing significant agricultural damage, and exist as part of a unit's MO without providing much recreation to the hunter who is not affiliated with private land interests. Some private landowners suffer severe damage and allow antlerless rifle hunters in to try and reduce the elk numbers on their lands. Increasingly, these landowners are bordered by neighbors who purchase land for recreational reasons and have no desire to see the elk move back to accessible land. The private landowner who is suffering damage and the accessible land hunter (overwhelming majority of hunters) continue to experience negative effects from this dynamic.

When large numbers of animals shift to inaccessible private lands, they become less available for harvest by archers or any other group of hunters. However, they are still part of the Unit's MO number. A situation is created where an animal distribution shifts from perhaps 90% of the animals being on public land and 10% on private to 50% or less on public land. In such a case, the easily accessed population of animals on public land where most recreation occurs has been cut almost in half. The ability to successfully harvest an animal is seriously reduced and increased pressure is exerted on the remaining elk which have to contend with the same number of hunters trying to recreate on substantially fewer elk. As a result, more elk move off the accessible land and the situation exacerbates.

Crowding:

Crowding is a value judgment made by hunters about whether the number of hunters is appropriate or excessive in a particular area. Many factors enter into each hunter's experience and form a general impression of whether a place is crowded or not. The Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW) views such value judgments to be better discussed amongst the members of the user group and recommendations from hunters are considered when developing recommendations for Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission consideration. Issue positions not containing a biological or management component will not be advocated by ODFW.

If the ARPAC determines a desire to try to alleviate crowding in an area or group of areas, portability of tags would be a possible strategy to accomplish some relief. Crowding will be discussed in the ARPAC, particularly as it may relate to displacement of animals. Pursuing the issue of crowding in situations where there is not a biological or management component to development of any recommendation(s) would rest primarily in the initiative of the group.

Possible Solutions:

ODFW does not have any specifically recommended solution for consideration in the ARPAC. However, there are some considerations that should be followed if portability were altered for a particular outcome. They are as follows:

1. **The issue being resolved:** Animal displacement and crowding are related issues, but they are not the same. There may be areas where animal displacement is occurring and also is where hunters perceive crowding to be an issue. In other areas, animal displacement may be occurring with no feeling of a crowding effect in place by the hunting public. As a result management treatments may be crafted to alleviate animal displacement and not address crowding in a number of areas or visa versa.
2. **The number of hunters to be affected:** Simply put, if portability were constricted to relieve hunter crowding, the larger the number of controlled hunt tags constricted from portability the more it will reduce the number of archers expected to hunt in other places. If portability is constricted on only a few tags there would be a less significant effect on other areas.
3. **The type of controlled hunt:** There are a wide variety of controlled hunts currently in the Oregon Big Game Regulations and there are also differing opinions regarding the types of hunts that should or should not have tags also valid during the general season. Archery controlled hunts which provide a quality hunting experience are those most commonly restricted to being the hunters only archery opportunity for the species. The ARPAC is an appropriate place to discuss how portability applies to various types of controlled hunts.
4. **Enforcement:** Portability does have an enforcement aspect as the group discussed during development of ideas to address the illegal take of branch bulls in the MT Emily, Walla Walla, and Wenaha Units. For example, if antlerless tags for a unit are also valid for bulls in the general season, once the cow is in the truck, or even hung in camp, it is difficult to prove where it was taken.