

PROTECTING TROPHY ELK with TIED ELK & DEER TAGS

At the March 8, 2014, the ARPAC examined the issue of “Tied Tags”, a management tool which requires an archery hunter to hold an elk tag to legally hunt deer in certain hunts. The opposite is required in certain units (hold a deer tag) in order to hunt elk.

Discussion was rendered down to Oregon’s premier trophy elk units: Wenaha, Walla Walla and Mt. Emily because of poaching issues during archery seasons as highlighted by OSP committee members. ARPAC members realized that ODFW has been working diligently so that more opportunity for a trophy elk might be offered in these units for all of Oregon’s elk hunters regardless of weapon choice. Additionally, ARPAC Members were fully supportive of OSP’s enforcement limitations in a general archery season framework and decided that continued support for the recently enacted controlled hunt scenario offered them the best chance for success. In the first year (2013), OSP reported no illegal kills!

A list of options were discussed from “No Change” to “Severe the Tie” with numerous options at offering archers some recompense for loosing general season opportunity in these three units. After a long discussion, the group finally agreed to an option which would allow a controlled hunt for the first 9 days of the season in the three premier elk units. It should be noted that this option was only for Wenaha, Walla Walla and Mt. Emily.

ARPAC members felt was worth “taking one for the team” in order to provide ODFW and OSP this critical tool to curb poaching and potentially increase the number of tags offered in these units so more opportunity is available to all elk hunters regardless of hunting method.

As mentioned above, this at the expense of adding 3 more Big Game Management Units to the growing list of hunt opportunity now off limits to archery hunters. This in an area which already has closed units due to tied tag scenario and offers archers their best opportunity to hunt whitetail deer, which are in a growing and stable population mode. Committee representatives for TAO & PBS realize the lost opportunity and therefore submit the following ideas for consideration to the ARPAC and ultimately to the ODFW Commission:

- As another offset to opportunity in the premier trophy elk units, ODFW should allow a controlled late whitetail deer opportunity in the Wenaha Unit. N.E. Oregon Wildlife Managers are in agreement that there is a surplus of whitetail deer in this unit, it has calendar openings available in the October-November time period and access to the unit would all support a quality whitetail deer hunt for archers. (Ref pg 2)
- ODFW should severe the tied tag status for Sled Springs, Chesnimnus and Ochoco and return these units to a general season to allowing local hunters in N.E. Oregon and Central Oregon the opportunity to hunt evenings or weekends when they cannot get away for longer periods.
- The Mule Deer Initiative, originally slated as a 3 year study, affecting bowhunting in five additional units, is now going into year four. ODFW should remove the controlled hunt status and return all units to general season for deer and elk, unless there is biological data which indicates this would not be prudent. (Ref pg 3)

General archery season opportunities continue to be reduced and the above recommendations offer the best choice of “In Kind” replacement with a mix of very “do-able” scenarios offering a variety of archery hunting situations, yet will help game managers and enforcement officials achieve goals leading to enhanced hunting opportunities for all hunters.

**OPTIONS FOR
N.E. OREGON LATE WHITETAIL DEER
ARCHERY HUNT OPPORTUNITIES**

Late Archery Hunting opportunities were discussed with ODFW District Biologists: Pat Mathews & Mike Hanson – Wallowa, Leonard Erickson – Union, Mark Kirsch – Umatilla. These discussions deal strictly with lost general season opportunities in Wenaha, Mt. Emily, and the Walla Walla units related to elk-deer tied tags.

It is generally accepted that the Wenaha whitetail populations were biologically stable & growing, there were open calendar dates and reasonable hunter access (given weather). Those opportunities include the following:

- Wenaha Unit: (Wallowa District)
Oct. 18-26, (9 days) +/- 100 tags
OR...
Nov. 22-30 (9 days) +/- 50 tags
- Mt. Emily Unit: (Umatilla District),
Nov. 15-26 (12 days) +/- 20 tags
- Sled Springs: (part in Union County), November window, undetermined.

Additional Discussions and Considerations:

1. As these hunts are replacement for lost general archery season opportunity, tags are to be issued without “portability” restrictions.
2. As the Mule Deer Initiative efforts begin to show success (meeting: M.O.’s, Buck/Doe ratios, and fawn recruitment), Mule Deer should be considered in the bag limit.
3. If bowhunters are willing to overlap with other hunter types – such as trophy rifle in Mt. Emily (any deer), tag numbers/dates could be shifted upward.
4. Early opening date for general mule deer season.

Compiled March 10-17, 2014 by Jim Akenson

OREGON MULE DEER INITIATIVE

The MDI was initiated in July of 2008 during a meeting with all Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) wildlife biologists. Since that time Department biologists with the help of local Action Plan Committees from each WMU developed draft Action Plans for each WMU.

The Director's Message in the 2009 Big Game Regulations stated that five wildlife management units will be the focus of efforts and that "over the next three years we will work with willing partners and landowners to identify and implement on-the-ground projects to start bringing these (mule) deer herds back to prominence". The Directors Message goes on to state that work done in a broad range of habitats found in the five MDI units over the next three years will allow them to figure out what works then expand efforts.

Activities such as predator control, changing tag numbers, and reducing road-kill are considered short term and should show results within 1-3 years, as was demonstrated by cougar removals in the Heppner Unit to benefit elk. Many habitat improvements, such as juniper removal are considered long term, full benefit may require 10+ years to achieve.

The 2010 Big Game Regulations reflect changes to archery seasons in Steens Mt, Heppner, Warner, Maury units using the "Tied Tag" method of controlled hunting to ensure the success of the project. In addition to the "Tied Tag" regulation, initial staff proposals for these hunts were listed as "ONLY DEER OPPORTUNITY" limiting portability of hunting opportunity (this additional restriction was dropped when brought to the attention of ODFW Staff).

ODFW has had the three years to "try some innovative projects" as mentioned in the 2009 Director's Message, yet the 2014 Big Game Regulations still reflect the same loss of hunting opportunity to Oregon's hunting Archers.