

Rawlins December Meeting about 2016 seasons

1. Antelope

a. 108 Antelope

i. ~140 antelope in this pasture

Department personnel counted as many as 200 in January, though the antelope were dispersed amongst both privately owned and BLM managed sections of land

ii. Consider more doe/fawn tags

The proposed 2016 pronghorn season for area 108 would add 50 more type 7 licenses and run through the end of November (9/20-11/30) for the type 7s. It is our hope the license increase and extended season in that portion of 108 will allow increased harvest before the herd begins to migrate to winter range in 56 and eastern portions of 108.

b. No public access on private land so need to balance opportunity, access, and animal numbers.

This can be difficult at times and regional personnel attempt to do this each year and appreciate the feedback we receive through harvest surveys or in person.

c. Why allow sheep grazing on antelope winter range on chain lakes? All antelope move east. (from landowner to the east)

d. Consider a depredation hunt in 108

A depredations season is not warranted given the circumstances of the situation and compliance with Wyoming Game and Fish Commission Regulation Chapter 34. As mentioned above, we have proposed season recommendations for 2016 that we believe will help address the issue.

2. Deer

a. Whole state should go LQ (Dale Critchfield)

b. Need to maintain hunter opportunity

c. Need to consider hunter crowding in 82

This is being discussed by WGFD and Baggs Mule Deer working group.

d. Think LQ is headed in the right direction

e. Consider split season in 82

This is being discussed by WGFD and Baggs Mule Deer working group.

f. Need to manage deer in town

The City of Rawlins is currently evaluating whether an urban deer reduction program facilitated by a WGFD Chapter 56 Permit is the best approach to managing deer in town. We will continue to work with the City of Rawlins to work on a strategy that meets public need.

3. Elk

a. Likes landowner/hunter satisfaction objective concept

As explained at the December meeting we are currently reviewing and making herd objective recommendations for the Shamrock Hills Elk Herd (HA 118). A Landowner and Hunter Satisfaction objective was originally proposed for this herd in 2015, but rejected following public review. In December we intended to try and get this recommendation through public review. But we have now decided to recommend an objective of maintaining spring trend counts of 75 elk in the herd unit. It is anticipated these counts will be flown every two to three years, depending upon budget and manpower availability.

b. Youth opportunity is great

c. Consider a split season in 21

d. Would like to see license types split out in time in 108

e. Consider a HMA south of town (ask Gene Carrico)

f. Consider 108 & 21 cow tags that are reciprocated

Thus is not being considered this year. Harvest in 21 was successful particularly on cows, and even the 108-7 had about a 50% success in 2015.

g.

4. Lander/Green Mtn. Mule Deer Working Group Proposal > Majority opposed idea

a. Concern about domino effect on general areas

b. If 82 goes LQ and these may as well go LQ statewide

c. Again will bring deer back was a prevalent belief

d. Quality of hunt increase for those that draw and alienate those that don't

e. If go LQ money will go out of state

f. Likes general license youth hunt.

g. Hunter recruitment is a concern (including revenue)

h. LQ will address nonresident numbers and distribution

i. Will increase pressure in area 82 (and 130)

j. Some opposition to the type 9 → "choose your weapon"

k. Type 9 will generate revenue

Game and Fish responses to Mule Deer Working Group Discussions

A principal basis for creation of the Lander/Green Mountain Mule Deer Initiative was to collaboratively develop strategies to improve mule deer populations and mule deer hunting opportunity in the South Wind River and Sweetwater herd units. As the Working Group met, they gathered information about mule deer ecology, mule deer populations, habitats, past hunting seasons, and many other issues impacting mule deer in these herd units. In August 2015, the working group presented WGFD with mule deer management recommendations, including several recommended changes to the existing hunting season structure. The hunting season structure recommendations were presented to the public in December 2015, following extensive outreach during fall 2015.

The Working Group's primary goal for recommended changes to hunting season structure was to "Balance Hunting Opportunity with Reduced Hunter Crowding." Input received at a workshop held in April 2014, as well as responses to an initial hunter survey regarding these herd units indicated hunters were concerned about increasing hunter densities and decreasing quality of their hunting experience.

To address this goal the Working Group recommended a split limited-quota season structure for both herd units, a Type 9 archery only license valid for all five deer hunt areas, and continued General Deer Youth license any deer seasons. In fall 2015, the Working Group and WGFD embarked on an extensive outreach effort to engage the public and gauge their responsiveness on these recommended changes. A survey was developed and mailed to hunters in the Lander, Riverton, Jeffrey City, and Casper areas known to hunt mule deer in the South Wind River and/or the Sweetwater herd unit. The survey was also distributed during WGFD field contacts/game check stations and by email.

Approximately 1,900 contacts were made to solicit survey responses from those who hunt in these areas. Of the 217 responses received, 92 (42%) supported the recommendations, 82 (38%) did not support the recommendations and 43 (20%) partially supported the recommendations (Figure 1).

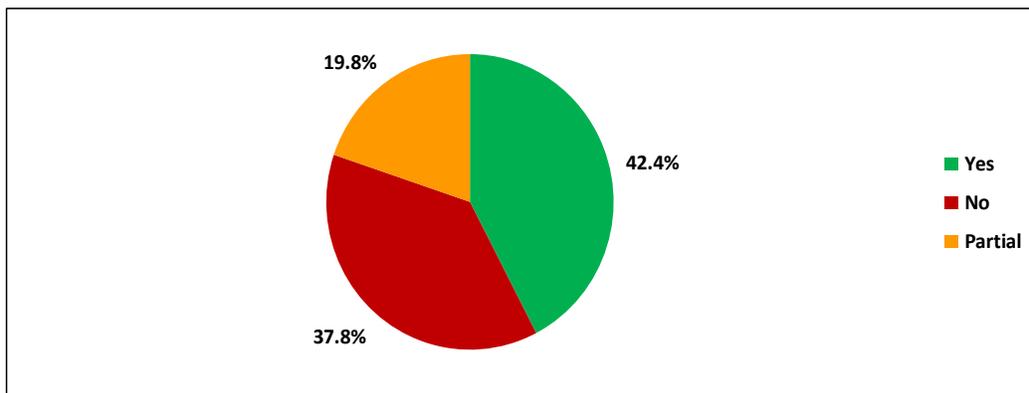


Figure 1. Survey results for the Lander/Green Mountain Mule Deer Working Group's recommendations to implement split limited-quota seasons, a type 9 archery license, and maintain General Deer Youth License any deer seasons.

“Partial support” was selected by 43 individuals when they only supported portions of the recommendations. Of those 43 responses, 24 supported limited-quota license seasons and 17 did not (for two responses, it was unclear whether or not they supported limited-quota license seasons and are not included in any further analyses). When assimilating these responses back into the survey as a whole, overall support for the limited-quota license season structure recommendation was almost evenly split with 116 (54%) in support and 99 (46%) in opposition (Figure 2).

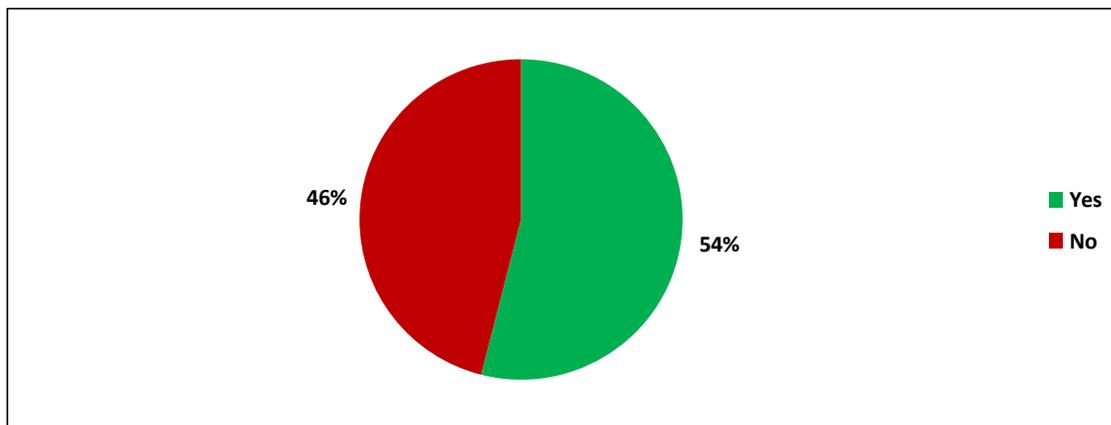


Figure 2. Survey results for the Lander/Green Mountain Mule Deer Working Group's recommendation to implement split limited-quota license seasons.

The Working Group also presented their recommendations at WGFDD post-season public meetings in Lander and Riverton in late-November and early-December, 2015. WGFDD personnel presented the Working Group's recommendations in Rawlins and Casper. Overall, public input received at these meetings mirror that from the survey. Some supported the limited-quota license season recommendation and some didn't. There was general support in Lander and Riverton and, in contrast, opposition in Rawlins and Casper.

Based on survey data, along with input received at the public meetings and WGFDD field contacts it is clear there is not over-whelming support to implement limited-quota license seasons in these herd units. Perhaps most importantly, a good number of people who were either contacted or filled out the survey continue to misunderstand the reason limited-quota license seasons were recommended. Many incorrectly assume limited-quota license seasons will increase mule deer numbers and thus tended to support the idea. Regardless, there remains a lot of confusion among the public what limited-quota license seasons will do, what they won't do, and how they will or will not affect hunting opportunity.

A. Balance Hunting Opportunity with Reduced Hunter Crowding

- *WGFDD is not recommending implementation of limited-quota license mule deer seasons in the South Wind River or the Sweetwater herd units at this time for these reasons:*
 1. There simply is not enough support to shift to a limited-quota license season structure to address hunter crowding. It is clear hunter crowding, while a continued concern for some, is no longer a major concern for many.
 2. There remains a significant amount of confusion and misunderstanding the effect limited-quota license seasons will have on mule deer populations and hunting opportunity. It is WGFDD's perspective based on the survey and public input that many who support limited-quota license seasons simply do so because they believe it will result in increased numbers of mule deer in these herd units. Limited-quota license seasons will **not** bring mule deer back. As such, it would be a disservice to the public and to the resource for WGFDD to unnecessarily restrict hunting opportunity. WGFDD will continue to evaluate the need for implementing a limited-quota license structure in these herd units if and when the circumstances described in the "Hunting Season Structure" section change.
 3. The mule deer populations have increased the past two years in both herd units and, correspondingly, there are increased numbers of bucks available for harvest. This is likely alleviating complaints.
 4. Because limited-quota license seasons in these herd units would have far reaching statewide implications, WGFDD needs to consider those implications and other options (i.e., "resident regions").
- The Working Group favored the statewide "resident region" concept to any other season structure including the split limited-quota license season recommendation. But, because the resident region concept would require change statewide, the Working Group focused on management in the South Wind River and Sweetwater herd units. The Lander Region will request Wildlife

Division and Department administration re-examine the “resident region” concept for statewide implementation.

- WGFD will carry forward the working group’s recommendation regarding opening dates for white-tailed deer seasons under the existing Type 3 (Any White-tailed Deer) and Type 8 (Doe or fawn White-tailed Deer) license structure. The proposed opening dates of October 1 for these license types in Deer Hunt Areas 92, 94, 160 and October 15 in Deer Hunt Area 97, will be presented via the standard 2016 season setting process, and if supported by the public, will be implemented in the 2016 seasons.
- WGFD will continue to propose General License seasons for youth hunters in each herd unit during the 2016 season setting process.
- *The Type 9 archery-only license recommendation is a component of the limited-quota license recommendation and is unnecessary in the absence of limited-quota license seasons.*
- WGFD will continue to consider how timing of deer hunting seasons may impact hunting for other species (and vice versa), with regard to hunter crowding and influence on harvest. This is particularly important in the South Wind River and Sweetwater herd units with respect to deer and elk hunting overlap, and which current seasons are designed to minimize conflicts.