

STATEMENT OF REASONS

CHAPTER 7

ELK HUNTING SEASONS

W. S. § 23-1-302 directs and empowers the Commission to fix seasons and bag limits, open, shorten or close seasons on any species or sex of wildlife except predatory animals, predacious birds, protected animals and protected birds.

The Department proposes to amend Wyoming Game and Fish Commission Regulation Chapter 7, Elk Hunting Seasons to establish annual hunting seasons, limitations and bag limits for the 2025 elk hunting season. The Department sets elk hunting seasons annually based on public input, annual harvest data, population monitoring data, individual herd unit objectives and ongoing habitat evaluations. The entire Chapter 7, Elk Hunting Seasons regulation is open for public comment and may be modified through this rule making process.

At the time of this filing, the 2024 elk harvest information is not yet available to the Department. Individual hunt area regular hunting season dates, special archery hunting season dates, hunt area limitations and license quotas may be adjusted after harvest data has been evaluated. Individual license types may be added, removed or modified for existing hunt areas.

The Department begins this rule making process by posting the final 2024 Chapter 7, Elk Hunting Seasons regulation for public comment. Any additional proposed changes to regular hunting season dates, special archery hunting season dates, hunt area limitations, license types, numbers of limited quota licenses, hunt area boundaries or modifications to other hunting provisions shall be made available for public comment on the Department website. An updated draft of 2025 Chapter 7, Elk Hunting Seasons regulation proposal will be available at all in-person public meetings and through online Department presentations. All proposed changes to this regulation will be posted on the Department website in March for additional public comment.

Wildlife managers are intending to modify the opening date for the regular hunting season in elk Hunt Area 7, Laramie Peak, from October 15 to begin October 1. This is in response to sportsperson and landowner comments and is intended to provide more “any-elk” hunting opportunity in an over objective herd unit without increasing hunting pressure in the field. A new hunting season date structure should allow for continuous hunting pressure on elk that routinely cross into Hunt Area 7 from adjoining hunt areas that have regular hunting season dates beginning October 1 each year. Moving the regular hunting season dates earlier will also increase elk availability and access to higher elevation hunting grounds prior to the onset of winter weather.

Sheridan area wildlife managers are also intending to modify the hunting season structure in elk Hunt Area 123, Black Thunder, to allow for general license hunting for the entire hunt area and retain cow/calf hunting opportunity beginning with the 2025 elk hunting season. This is predominantly a private land hunt area with limited public access where the elk population continues to grow. Access to private land will continue to limit hunting opportunity in this area.

Utilizing a general license hunting structure area wide will allow landowners to address increasing elk damage concerns, allows for reduced complexity of hunting regulations and is intended to meet the elk management objectives for this area.