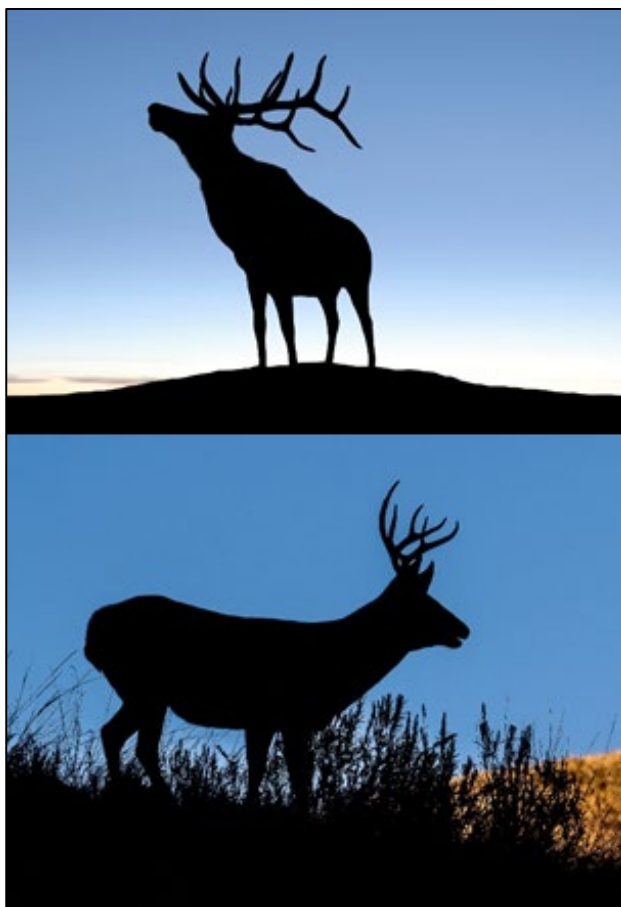


# **Oregon Deer and Elk Hunters' Attitudes Toward Big Game Management and Hunting Opportunities**

## **Online Public Forum Report**



**Conducted for the  
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife**

**By Responsive Management**

**2020**



**OREGON DEER AND ELK HUNTERS'  
ATTITUDES TOWARD BIG GAME MANAGEMENT  
AND HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES  
ONLINE PUBLIC FORUM REPORT**

**2020**

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## **Acknowledgments**

Responsive Management would like to thank Nick Myatt, Project Lead, Big Game Hunting Review, of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, for his input, support, and guidance on this project.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (hereinafter referred to as the Department) to obtain public input regarding proposed changes in deer and elk hunting seasons.

The overall project, which obtained input from Oregon resident deer and elk hunters and which furthermore gave *every Oregon deer and elk hunter* an opportunity to provide input, included the following components:

- One scientific, probability-based survey of deer and elk hunters administered by Responsive Management.
- An online public input forum facilitated by Responsive Management.
- An additional scientific, probability-based survey, with additional questions developed using findings from the first scientific survey and the online public input forum to be administered in the coming weeks.

This report focuses on the findings from the online public input forum.

To gather qualitative data and to provide a further opportunity for Oregon deer and elk hunters to contribute their opinions and provide input on deer and elk hunting, the researchers developed an online public forum featuring open-ended discussion threads. The primary purpose of the online forum was to allow the hunting public, particularly those who did not participate in the quantitative survey, to provide input.

### Forum Layout and Moderation

The forum was maintained on a dedicated website ([www.oregonbiggameforum.org](http://www.oregonbiggameforum.org)). The homepage explained that the research was being conducted by Responsive Management, explained that the Department was interested in the opinions of resident deer and elk hunters, and explained other elements of the project.

An *About the Project* page was included that explained that the Department wanted input regarding deer and elk hunting seasons that would later be used to inform potential changes to the 2021 big game hunting seasons. This page listed the information being sought from this study and gave background information about Responsive Management and the Department.

The overall website included three top-level forums: an elk hunting forum, a deer hunting forum, and an *other* forum that invited commenters to offer any input not directly addressed in the first two forums. The elk and deer hunting forums included several sub-forums, which specifically asked commenters to choose a sub-forum based on certain aspects of hunting seasons, including location and weapon type. Each sub-forum then posed questions as a way to stimulate discussion and comments on the page.

Visitors to the forum could comment anonymously or include personal information. As indicated previously, within each sub-forum, specific questions about current and possible future deer and elk hunting strategies were posed to get the discussion started; however, although questions and potential topics were offered by the researchers, commenters were encouraged to discuss other topics, as long as they pertained to deer and elk hunting in the state. Forum visitors had the opportunity to engage with one another in a typical online discussion format, as well. Responsive Management maintained a moderating presence in each forum (removing comments that violated forum rules, such as those that personally attacked others) but otherwise did not engage with forum participants in any way. Only two comments were removed by the forum moderator; however, the questions deleted from the public forum were saved by Responsive Management and later included in the analysis of forum content.

A last page within the forum provided an email contact for Responsive Management. Through the dedicated email address, commenters could ask the researchers questions or send completely confidential comments. Comments from these confidential emails were considered and analyzed along with the other forum data.

### **Forum Launch and Deactivation**

Responsive Management coordinated with the Department to launch the online forum via announcements on social media, an announcement on the Department's website, and news releases. The announcements notified hunters of the forum purpose, website address, launch date, and active dates. The Department distributed releases and reminders to a variety of outlets in an effort to ensure widespread awareness of the forum opportunity among Oregon deer and elk hunters. Outreach also included radio interviews, podcast discussions, newspaper articles, and handouts at the Pacific Northwest Sportsmen's Show. Hunting groups and other partners also helped spread the word about the opportunity for input. After comments were submitted and the forum had been deactivated, Responsive Management conducted a content analysis of the results and discussion themes.

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## **INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY**

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To gather qualitative data and to provide an opportunity for Oregon deer and elk hunters to contribute their opinions and provide input on deer and elk hunting, the researchers developed an online public forum featuring open-ended discussion threads. The primary purpose of the online forum was to allow the hunting public, particularly those who did not participate in the quantitative survey, to provide input.

The forum was maintained on a dedicated website ([www.oregonbiggameforum.org](http://www.oregonbiggameforum.org)). The homepage explained that the research was being conducted by Responsive Management, explained that the Department was interested in the opinions of resident deer and elk hunters, and explained other elements of the project.

In addition to a page with information about the project and contact information about Responsive Management, the online forum comprised three thematic forums on the following topics: elk hunting, deer hunting, and other topics. The elk and deer hunting forums included three sub-forums that further narrowed topics. The elk hunting forum included sub-forums on the following topics: Western Oregon rifle elk seasons, archery elk seasons, and Eastern Oregon rifle elk seasons. The deer hunting forum sub-forums covered the following topics: Western Oregon rifle season, archery deer seasons, and Western Oregon late season hunting. The “other” topic forum presented only one question to commenters and was not divided into sub-forums.

In the introduction to each sub-forum, a set of basic questions was posed to people to consider in their comments. Each introduction was tailored to its specific sub-forum. All were simply questions to consider; it is important to note that online commenters were not limited to these questions/topics but could provide any comment that they wished.

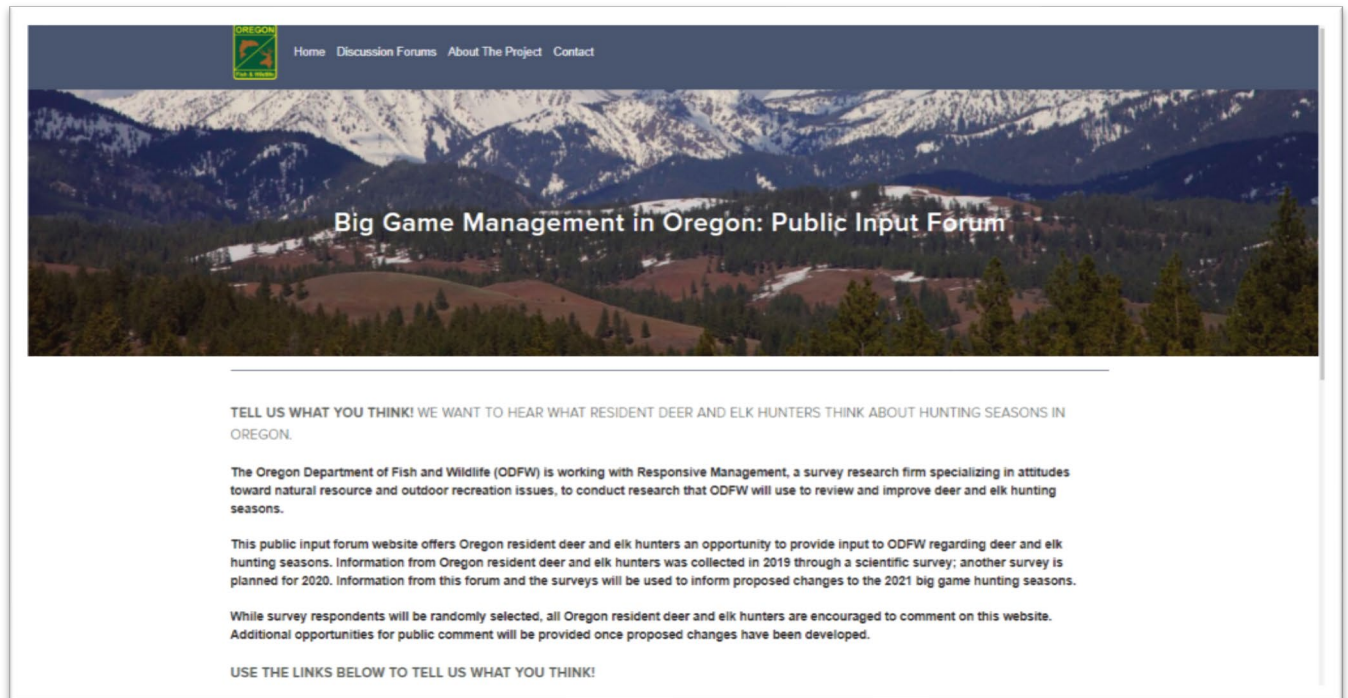
The efficacy of any suggestions is not discussed in this report; only that a suggestion was made. Likewise, any claims made in the online forums regarding how management is currently being done were not vetted to assess whether the claim is correct; again, the report simply indicates perceptions of online forum commenters, not whether they are correct or incorrect in those perceptions.

The online forum was monitored by Responsive Management. At the beginning of each forum, rules of conduct were listed. Violations of the rules resulted in removal of comments. Two comments were removed by the forum moderator; however, the questions deleted from the public forum were saved by Responsive Management and later included in the analysis of forum content.

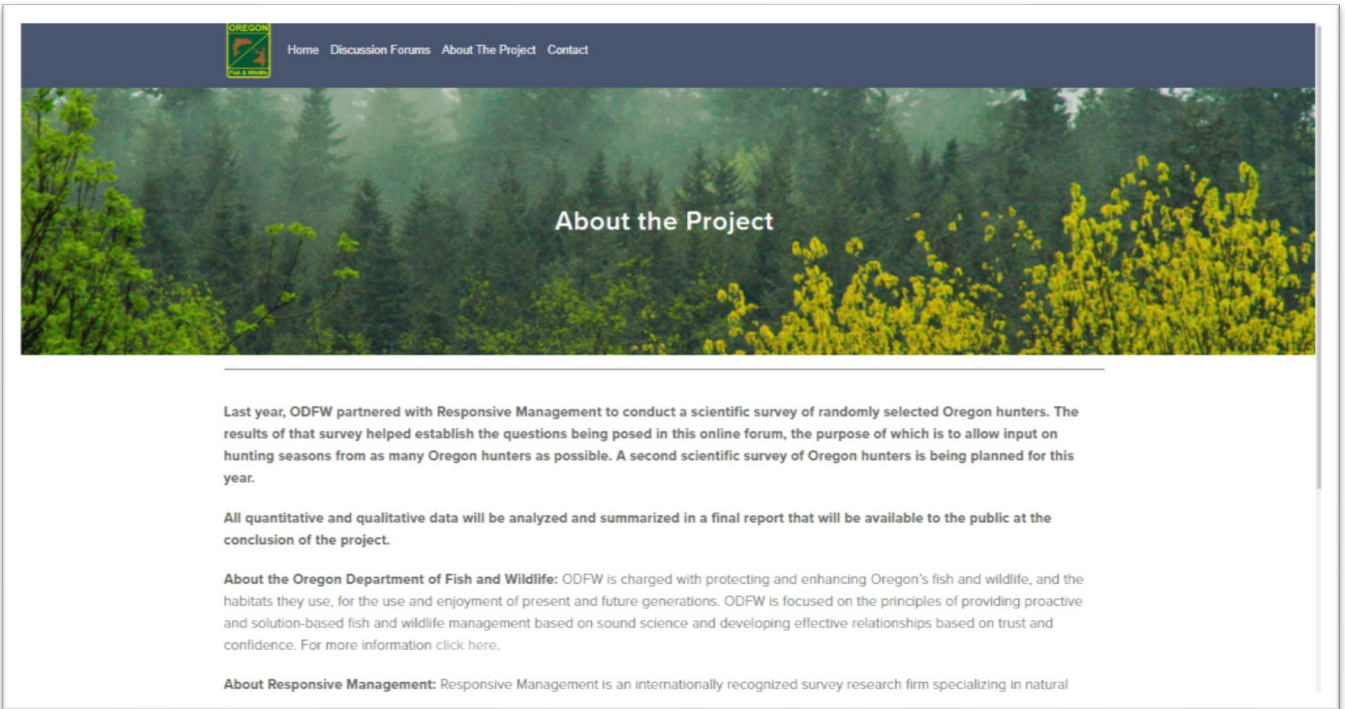
One goal of the online forum has already been achieved: the comments presented are public and, as such, have already influenced the conversation about deer and elk hunting. A secondary goal of the online forum is achieved by this report, which summarizes and condenses the numerous comments received.

In this report, an image of each page of the forum is provided. Images of top-level pages—the Home page, About the Project page, and the Contact page—are displayed first (Figures 1-3), followed by the Elk forum and each of its sub-forums (Figures 4-7) and the Deer forum and each of its sub-forums (Figures 8-11), and then finally, the Other topics forum (Figure 12).

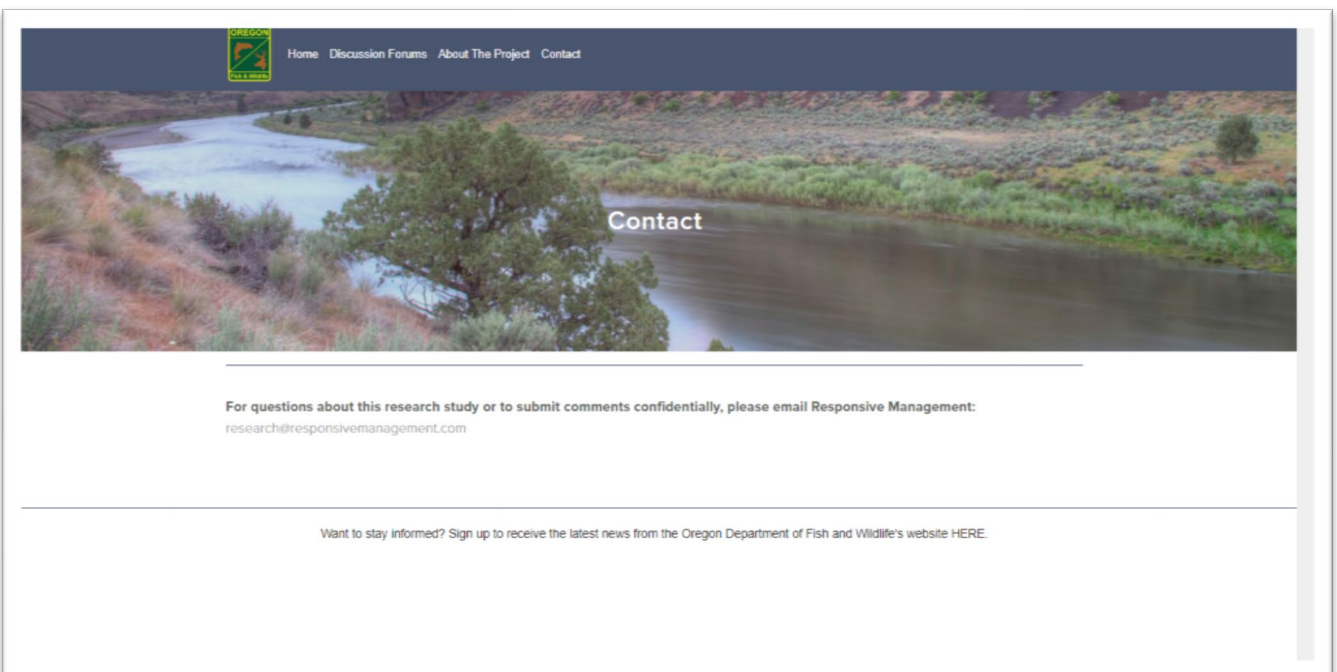
## TOP-LEVEL PAGES OF THE FORUM



**Figure 1. Home page**



**Figure 2. About the Project Page**



**Figure 3. Contact Page**

## FORUMS AND SUB-FORUMS

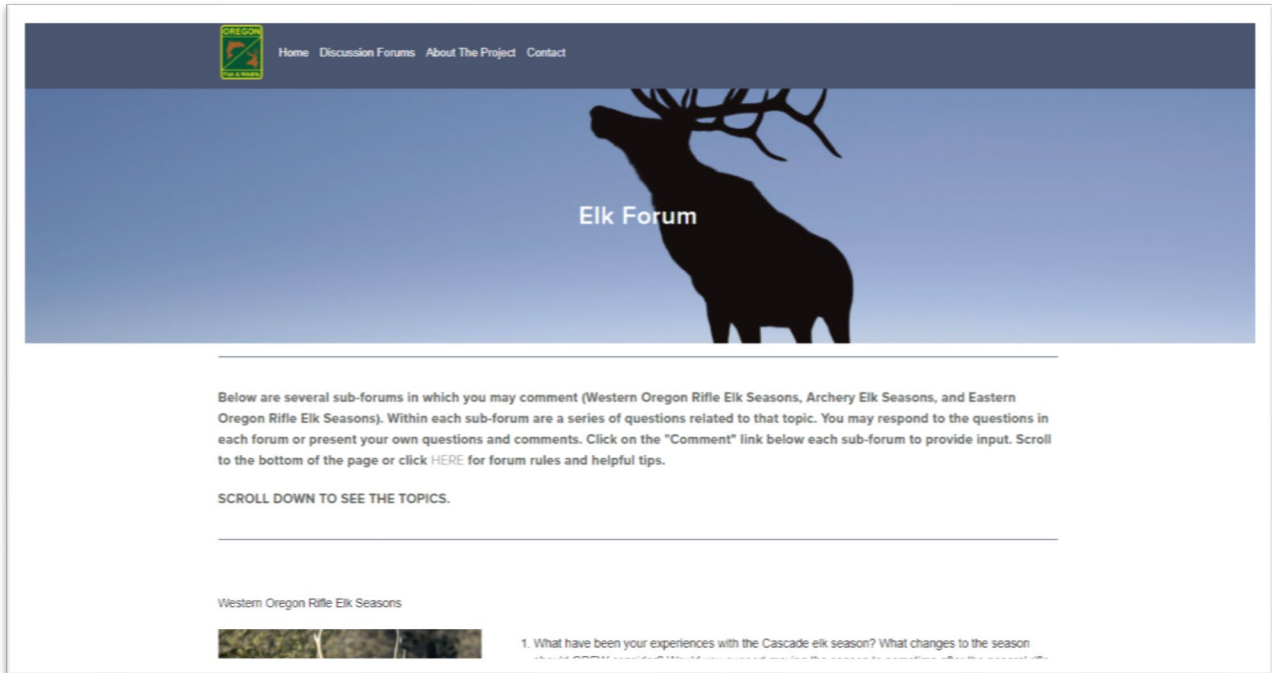


Figure 4. Elk Forum

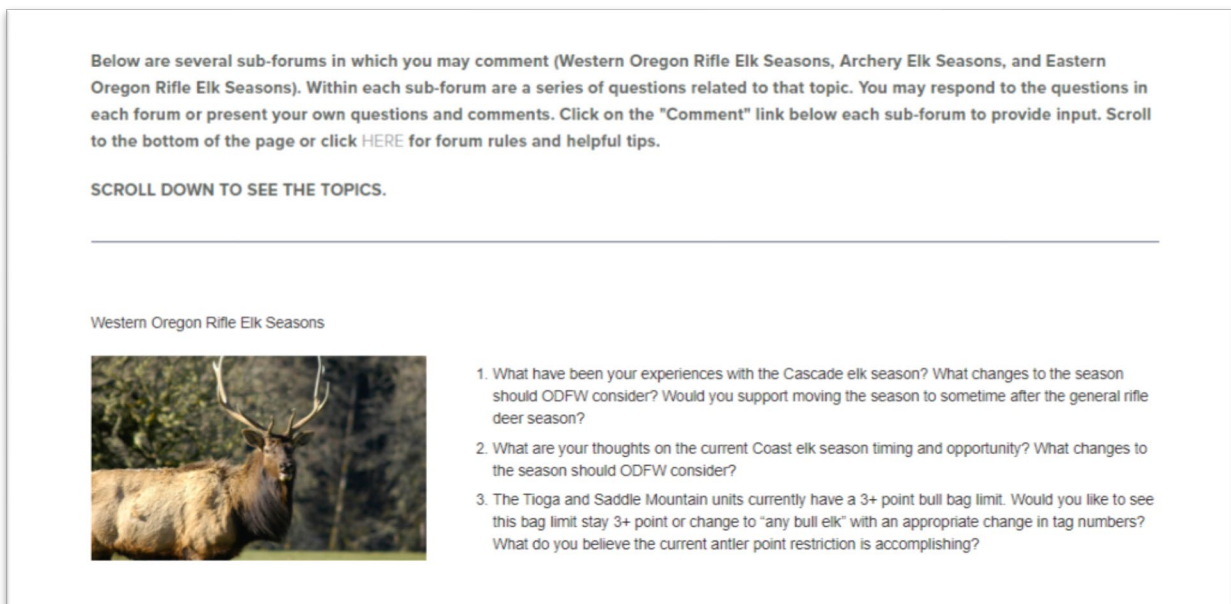


Figure 5. Western Oregon Rifle Elk Seasons Sub-forum



Below are several sub-forums in which you may comment (Western Oregon Rifle Elk Seasons, Archery Elk Seasons, and Eastern Oregon Rifle Elk Seasons). Within each sub-forum are a series of questions related to that topic. You may respond to the questions in each forum or present your own questions and comments. Click on the "Comment" link below each sub-forum to provide input. Scroll to the bottom of the page or click [HERE](#) for forum rules and helpful tips.

SCROLL DOWN TO SEE THE TOPICS.

#### Archery Elk Seasons

ODFW is reviewing its approach to the archery elk hunting season to see if any changes need to be considered. One management challenge in some areas of Eastern Oregon is high hunter densities that displace elk from public lands onto private land. Another management challenge is how to allocate hunting opportunity fairly in units where archery tags are unlimited and rifle tags are controlled. A recent survey showed that 21% of Oregon resident elk hunters prefer to hunt with a bow, 75% prefer to hunt with a rifle, and 3% prefer a muzzleloader. Over time, the number of general season archery hunters has increased, which has led to decreased controlled rifle tags in some hunts. In some units, archery harvest of branch antler bulls is now equal to or greater than rifle harvest.

1. What do you like or dislike about the current archery season structure? What changes would you propose?
2. How should hunting opportunity and harvest be allocated between weapon types? Should archery season be a controlled hunt in units with controlled rifle hunts?



**Figure 6. Archery Elk Seasons Sub-forum**

Below are several sub-forums in which you may comment (Western Oregon Rifle Elk Seasons, Archery Elk Seasons, and Eastern Oregon Rifle Elk Seasons). Within each sub-forum are a series of questions related to that topic. You may respond to the questions in each forum or present your own questions and comments. Click on the "Comment" link below each sub-forum to provide input. Scroll to the bottom of the page or click [HERE](#) for forum rules and helpful tips.

SCROLL DOWN TO SEE THE TOPICS.

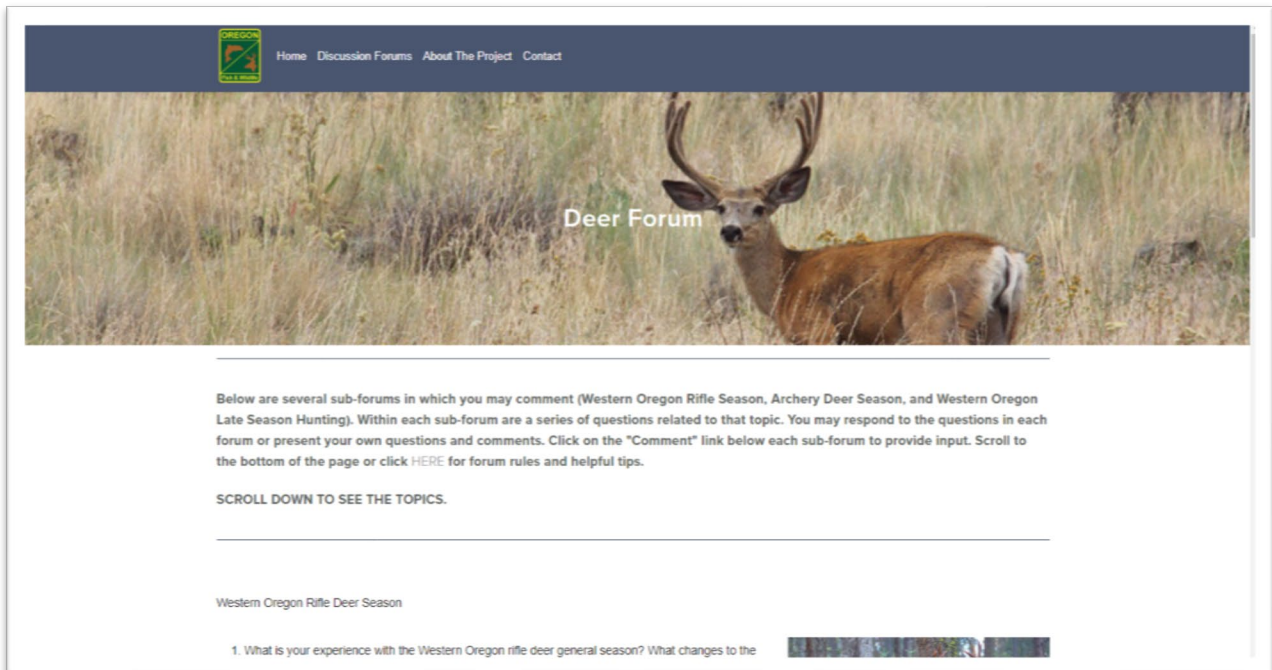
#### Eastern Oregon Rifle Elk Seasons

In Northeast Oregon Wildlife Management Units there are currently nine different approaches to bag limits and the season structure of Rocky Mountain first and second seasons. In most units, there are more hunters that want bull elk tags than the population can support, so spike elk bag limits are used as a way to maintain hunting opportunity. In some units, there is a general spike only elk season, while in others there is a controlled spike elk season. Some units have spike only controlled hunts that overlap controlled "one bull" hunts. This approach allows hunters who do not draw an any bull tag the opportunity to draw a spike only tag and still go hunting. Some hunters have expressed concern about having to use preference points to draw a bull tag and then experiencing disturbances from spike tag holders.



1. What is your experience during the Rocky Mountain first and second seasons in Northeast Oregon?
2. How would you like to see the timing of "one bull" hunts and spike only hunts structured?
3. Should "one bull" hunts and spike only hunts take place during the same time period?
4. Do you prefer hunts with a spike only bag limit to be controlled or general seasons?

**Figure 7. Eastern Oregon Rifle Elk Seasons Sub-forum**



**Figure 8. Deer Forum**



**Figure 9. Western Oregon Rifle Deer Season Sub-forum**

Below are several sub-forums in which you may comment (Western Oregon Rifle Season, Archery Deer Season, and Western Oregon Late Season Hunting). Within each sub-forum are a series of questions related to that topic. You may respond to the questions in each forum or present your own questions and comments. Click on the "Comment" link below each sub-forum to provide input. Scroll to the bottom of the page or click [HERE](#) for forum rules and helpful tips.

SCROLL DOWN TO SEE THE TOPICS.

#### Archery Deer Seasons



1. What is your experience with archery deer season? What changes to the season should ODFW consider?
2. One management challenge ODFW is facing is continuing to provide a general archery deer season in Eastern Oregon with declining mule deer populations. When populations decline in Eastern Oregon units with a general archery deer season and a controlled rifle deer season, the only way for ODFW to regulate harvest is by reducing rifle tags. Would you be supportive of controlled archery deer hunts in Eastern Oregon to allocate harvest equitably and prevent overharvest of mule deer? Why or why not?

**Figure 10. Archery Deer Seasons Sub-forum**

Below are several sub-forums in which you may comment (Western Oregon Rifle Season, Archery Deer Season, and Western Oregon Late Season Hunting). Within each sub-forum are a series of questions related to that topic. You may respond to the questions in each forum or present your own questions and comments. Click on the "Comment" link below each sub-forum to provide input. Scroll to the bottom of the page or click [HERE](#) for forum rules and helpful tips.

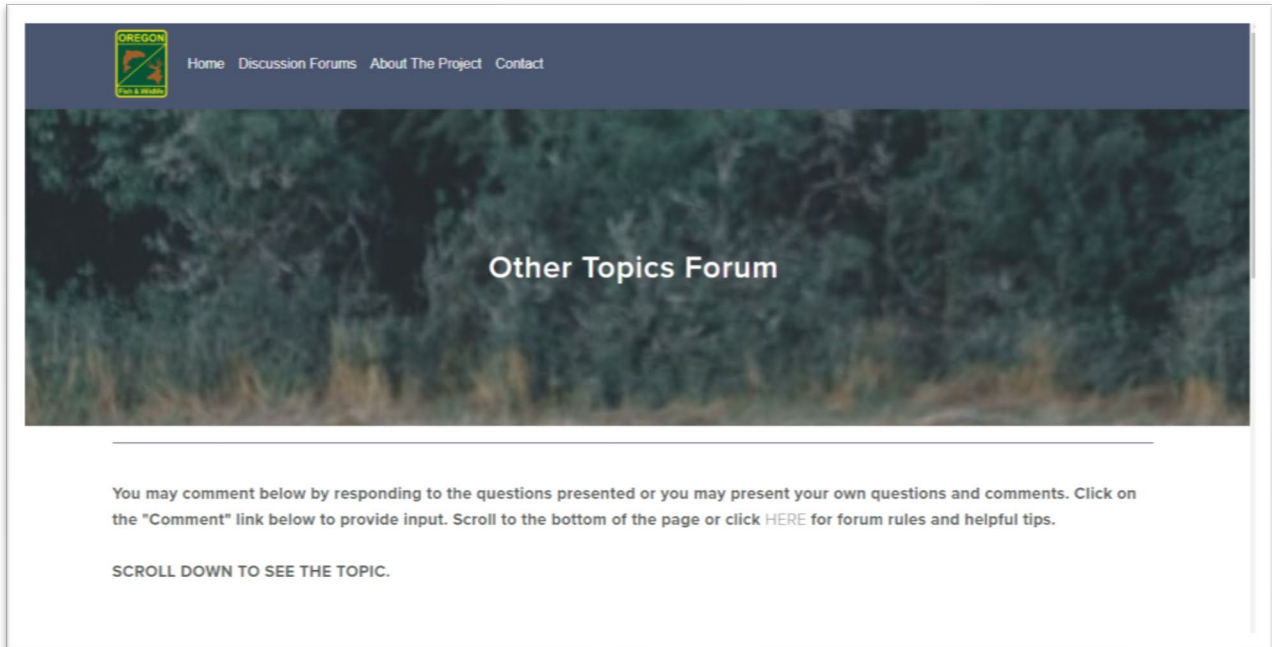
SCROLL DOWN TO SEE THE TOPICS.

#### Western Oregon Late Season Hunting (All Weapon Types)

1. What is your experience with late-season black-tailed deer hunts in western Oregon? Are there any changes ODFW should consider?
2. Should late season hunting be controlled hunts for all weapon types or remain a general season for certain weapon types?
3. There are currently a variety of approaches used for late-season black-tailed deer hunting in Western Oregon. Late-season archery hunts are general seasons, muzzleloader and youth hunts are controlled hunts, and there are no adult late-season centerfire rifle hunting opportunities. How should late-season hunting opportunity be allocated between weapon types?
4. Should a unit have one late-season opportunity for one weapon type or multiple hunts for different weapons? If multiple hunts occur in a unit, should the season dates overlap so each weapon type gets a portion of the preferred time period?



**Figure 11. Western Oregon Late Season Hunting (All Weapon Types) Sub-forum**



**Figure 12. Other Topics Forum**

The three forums had more than 1,300 comments combined, including emailed comments. The elk forum received the most comments overall (more than 600), and the archery elk seasons sub-forum received more comments than any other sub-forum (more than 300). A full list of forum comments was provided to the Department.

In the analysis of each forum, the number of comments and the number of commenters will be included in order to help better understand the level of interest in and activity on the forum. Please note that commenters could change their username or comment anonymously; therefore, it is not possible to say with certainty that each contributor is a unique commenter.

This report is not intended to archive each comment received. Additionally, direct quotations from the forum are not included in this summary. An archival copy of the online forum, which includes every comment submitted (with the exception of the two comments that were deleted from the forum), was given to the Department.



## **FINDINGS FROM THE ONLINE FORUM**

### **COMMENTS THAT APPLY TO ALL FORUMS**

Despite attempts to narrow questions and commenters by season, region, and weapon type, several topics made their way into all of the forums and sub-forums. For example, discussion regarding the perceived decline in both elk and deer herd numbers was discussed in every forum.

In addition to agreeing that the herds are declining, most commenters seemed to be largely in agreement about what they feel is causing the destruction: most commenters feel that the primary cause of declining populations is due to a combination of increased predation from wolves, coyotes, bear, and cougars; a rise in poaching throughout the state; increased pressure from rising numbers of hunters; and loss of habitat due to lack of logging on public land. In some sub-forums these topics were heavily discussed by numerous commenters and are therefore given their own category of analysis, whereas in other forums, these topics were secondary and are included in other categories that were discussed at greater length.

Finally, comments throughout the forums suggested that Oregon deer and elk hunters were appreciative of the forum overall and pleased with the opportunity to give their opinions in a format that they believe will be received and seriously considered by the Department.

## ELK FORUM

As previously mentioned, each sub-forum started with a set of basic questions that were posed to commenters. Although all questions were simply presented for consideration, and commenters could comment on any topic they liked, many comments did address these questions. As such, before the analysis of each sub-forum, the questions presented to potential commenters are listed.

The elk forum received more than 600 comments overall. Among the three sub-forums, the archery elk seasons sub-forum received the most comments (315), both in terms of among elk-specific sub-forums and when compared to all other sub-forums. The Eastern rifle elk seasons sub-forum received the fewest comments (122) in the overall elk forum.

As with all forums, certain topics were present throughout the three elk sub-forums. Although there was a small minority of commenters that feel strongly that antler point restrictions (APRs) do not work; overall there was a clear majority in favor of elk APRs across the state (specifically three-point or better). In regard to the small minority of commenters who oppose APRs, it is important to note that at first glance the comments seem to be divided on the topic, but upon analysis, a single contributor, who is adamantly opposed to APRs, made 15% of *all* comments in the elk forum.

Additional topics seen in all three sub-forums included concern for hunter overcrowding issues, interest in allowing more hunters on private land, and need for better management of predators.

## WESTERN OREGON RIFLE ELK SEASONS SUB-FORUM

The questions presented in the Western Oregon rifle elk sub-forum were:

1. What have been your experiences with the Cascade elk season? What changes to the season should ODFW consider? Would you support moving the season to sometime after general rifle deer season?
2. What are your thoughts on the current Coast elk season timing and opportunity? What changes to the season should ODFW consider?
3. The Tioga and Saddle Mountain units currently have a 3+ point bull bag limit. Would you like to see this bag limit stay 3+ point or change to “any bull elk” with an appropriate change in tag numbers? What do you believe the current antler point restriction is accomplishing?

The Western Oregon rifle elk seasons sub-forum closed with 208 comments from 153 commenters, making it one of the more popular sub-forums among forum commenters. Commenters to the sub-forum often directly answered the questions that were posed at the beginning of the sub-forum. For this reason, this sub-forum offered a wealth of opinions and comments related to specific units and regions in Western Oregon.

### **Cascade Elk Season**

Most forum commenters expressed concern for the size of the elk population in all Cascade units. Commenters listed issues with increased predation and poaching; loss of habitat, attributed to lack of logging on public land; and overhunting as major threats to the population.

Commenters offered several solutions regarding their concerns for the elk population. Most commenters agree that Cascade units need three point or more antler restrictions and should implement a moratorium on spike only hunts (three to five years was offered as a suitable time frame to allow the population to rebuild).

Solutions for reducing hunter crowding included lengthening the season to span two weekends, working with private landowners to open more private land to hunters, and offering more seasons in the units. Commenters argued that lengthening the season and possibly moving into several seasons will spread hunting out over a longer period of time and therefore reduce crowding.

One question presented in the sub-forum asked commenters if they would support moving the Cascade elk season to sometime after general rifle deer season. An overwhelming majority of comments suggested that the move would be widely supported by hunters. Among those who did not clearly state support or opposition, but mentioned the season timing, most did not feel that the timing of the season was an issue and were happy with the current season structure and timing. Some suggested leaving the current season timing, eliminating the break in Cascade deer season so that hunters could hunt deer and elk at the same time.

### **Coast Elk Season**

Regarding the Coast elk season, many comments focused on concern for the decline in elk in the units. Again, commenters mentioned overhunting and hunter crowding as major factors in the depletion of the elk herds. In contrast to discussion about other regions and units, however, commenters did not feel that spike only and cow hunting should be avoided during Coast elk season. Instead, commenters suggested that only the second Coast elk season should allow spike only hunts. Suggestions varied on the first season: some commenters feel that any bull hunts are appropriate, while other commenters feel that the first season should have an APR of three points or better. Other commenters feel there should be more cow elk hunting opportunities during the season.

The season length and structure provoked a fair amount of discussion among forum commenters. Although opinions seemed nearly unanimous that the season was too short, a solution for the issue did not see as much consensus. Some commenters wanted the seasons to be combined in order to have more hunting opportunities. Other commenters argued that combining the seasons could lead to more crowding in the units. Most commenters agreed that the first season should be lengthened.

### **Tioga and Saddle Mountain Units**

Commenters who addressed regulations in the Tioga and Saddle Mountain units are divided about the quality of hunting in the units. Some commenters feel that the Tioga and Saddle

Mountain herds have been especially vulnerable to population threats. As a result, these commenters support restrictions of three points or better for any elk harvest on the units. Some participants argued that the units are still desirable places to hunt with better elk populations than some other units, and therefore should allow any bull hunting. Among those who did not support APRs for this area, many simply do not think that APRs are an effective management tool in any capacity. Some feel, however, that especially on the Tioga unit, there should be a ban on cow harvests.

A slight majority of participants who discussed it feel that Tioga and Saddle Mountain units should move to solely controlled hunt units. Most commenters feel that archery and rifle hunts alike should be controlled. Commenters feel that moving to controlled hunts in these units could improve issues associated with overcrowding and allow elk herds time to replenish.

Among those who oppose moving to controlled hunts in the Tioga or Saddle Mountain units, many argued that controlled hunts will only make hunting more problematic in a state that they perceive to have limited hunting opportunities. Further, some commenters feel placing any barriers in the way of hunting will have a long-term impact on hunter recruitment, retention, and reactivation (R3).

Regardless of commenters' support or opposition to instituting controlled hunts in Tioga or Saddle Mountain units, most agreed that the number of tags (rifle tags were specifically mentioned) for the units should be dramatically reduced, if only temporarily.

### **Funding**

Funding was a frequent topic of discussion in the sub-forum. Many comments addressed tag sales, specifically, and their role in funding the Department. Some commenters feel that the number of tags sold needs to be increased for both residents and nonresidents in the interest of bringing in additional funding for the Department. Other commenters suggested that the decline in elk populations, and the perceived obvious need to reduce the number of tags sold in order to rebuild populations, is a clear sign that the Department needs to find alternate sources of funding. Among both sides of the tag sales argument, most agreed that the price for nonresident licenses needs to be increased (some suggested by as many three times).

### **Health of Elk Population**

A substantial number of sub-forum commenters are concerned over what they believed to be a significant drop in the number of elk in the state. Many solutions were offered by commenters, including shortening seasons, instituting controlled hunts on all units and for all weapon types, adding APRs in more locations, and reducing the number of tags and hunters.

Many commenters also discussed the work of the Department's biologists and the role they believe the Department plays in protecting elk populations. Some commenters are concerned that winter survival rates are collected too early in the season and are therefore not reliable enough to drive tag sales for the rest of the year. Commenters further requested more transparency from the Department, especially concerning scientific findings and decision-making leading to changes in regulations, tag numbers, season lengths, and season structures. Several commenters argued that more transparent decision-making could lead to less conflict among different types of hunters.

### **Controlled Hunts and Mandatory Choose Your Weapon**

Many comments in this sub-forum specifically addressed the units from the introductory questions. Some comments, however, suggested statewide changes. The two most common statewide suggestions involved employing controlled hunts on every unit for every weapon type and requiring hunters to choose either archery, rifle, or muzzleloader at the beginning of hunting seasons, and then restricting them to the use of the selected weapon for the remainder of the year.

Upon first mention, the choose-your-weapon suggestion triggered quite a bit of discussion. Many commenters feel strongly that requiring hunters to choose only one weapon will result in some current hunters terminating their hunting participation, a drop in R3, and a major reduction in funding for the Department.

Others argued, however, that continuing to allow hunters to switch weapons is responsible, at least in part, for some of the issues with depleted elk populations. Many commenters noted that they had personally experienced rifle hunters not receiving tags, then deciding to try archery hunting instead. Some claimed that this influx of inexperienced, ill equipped “archers” had resulted in dangerous overcrowding and an increase in injured but not immediately killed animals. A slight majority of commenters felt that a choose-your-weapon approach could be beneficial to the state.

Whereas the choose-your-weapon suggestion received slightly more support than opposition in the sub-forum, the topic of controlled hunts was more evenly split—for every commenter who supports moving to controlled hunts, another commenter opposes moving to controlled hunts.

Controlled hunt conflict is particularly prevalent when discussing archery. Some commenters think that archery hunts should be controlled hunts in units in which rifle is a controlled hunt, while others feel that the entire state, or in most cases, at least the eastern part of the state, should transition to controlled hunts. Some argued that the lower success rate of archers should exclude them from all controlled hunts. In response to the latter argument, many commenters argued that advances in bowhunting technology have diminished the gap in success rates between archery and rifle hunting.

Among commenters who do not support moving all the way to controlled hunts, many feel there are intermediate steps that should be taken to reduce hunter numbers. Suggestions included having smaller general season zones instead of a statewide season or having general season zones with a tag quota for each zone.

Among those who support transitioning to more controlled hunts regardless of weapon type, most argued that the elk population is far too exhausted, and the needs of the animal should be put before the desire of hunters.

A substantial amount of commenters argued that neither controlled hunts nor enforcing weapon restrictions are necessary if the Department is willing to sell fewer tags overall.

## Other Topics

Several topics, although not as prevalent in the sub-forum as those presented above, received enough discussion to warrant their mention in this report.

Some commenters used the sub-forum as an opportunity to let the Department know that they would not like any changes to seasons or regulations. This came up for a number of reasons: first, some commenters feel the seasons and regulations are perfect as they are; and second, several commenters are concerned that the Department has effective protective measures in place for elk herds and any changes prompted by hunters' input may not focus on the health of the elk population.

Several comments in the sub-forum suggested that muzzleloader hunters would like to see more opportunities for muzzleloader use, as well as more encouragement for muzzleloader hunting on behalf of the Department.

A substantial number of commenters noted that having seasons start on the same day of the week every year would allow hunters to plan for hunts and participate in more hunts.

Some commenters would like to see an alternative to damage hunts, during which they feel too many elk are being killed. Some suggested relocating elk to lands where they would cause less damage, although they noted that the financial burden of such actions would be too much for the Department to bear. Some commenters suggested the Department partner with nongovernmental organizations or nonprofit organizations in order to relocate elk throughout the state.

One final topic that was discussed in the sub-forum was preference points. Many commenters feel that nonresidents benefit from preference points more often than residents. Further, some commenters feel that the current preference point system results in abnormally long waiting periods for preferred hunts. One commenter, especially, advocates for the use of bonus points instead of preference points in the state. At least one other commenter, however, felt that the current preference point system was better than some other states' bonus point systems.

## ARCHERY ELK SEASONS SUB-FORUM

The archery elk seasons sub-forum started with information presented to participants:

ODFW is reviewing its approach to the archery elk hunting season to see if any changes need to be considered. One management challenge in some areas of Eastern Oregon is high hunter densities that displace elk from public lands onto private land. Another management challenge is how to allocate hunting opportunity fairly in units where archery tags are unlimited and rifle tags are controlled. A recent survey showed that 21% of Oregon resident elk hunters prefer to hunt with a bow, 75% prefer to hunt with a rifle, and 3% prefer a muzzleloader. Over time, the number of general season archery hunters has increased, which has led to decreased controlled rifle tags in some hunts. In some units, archery harvest of branch antler bulls is now equal to or greater than rifle harvest.

After this information was provided, the following questions were presented:

1. What do you like or dislike about the current archery season structure? What changes would you propose?
2. How should hunting opportunity and harvest be allocated between weapon types? Should archery season be a controlled hunt in units with controlled rifle hunts?

The archery elk seasons sub-forum received 315 comments from 194 commenters. Commenters in the sub-forum addressed a number of topics; chief among them: controlled hunts, Department funding, access, and inexperienced archers.

### **Season and Season Structure**

Many commenters expressed that they are extremely satisfied with archery elk season. Among those who suggested changes to the season structure, the most popular suggestion was to move archery season to September 1 through September 30, followed closely by suggestions to break elk archery season into two parts in order to disperse hunters over two periods and reduce crowding.

A number of commenters in the sub-forum feel that the state should be broken into zones that contain multiple units instead of maintaining the current singular unit structure—most suggested a northeast zone, a southeast zone, a northwest zone, and a southwest zone. Commenters argued that using zones could help reduce hunter crowding during the season in a number of ways: first, commenters feel that if the state decides to use zones instead of units, the Department should require hunters to choose only one zone in which they wish to hunt. Further, commenters agreed that if the Department moves to zones, fewer tags should be allotted to each zone. Although many commenters seemed to agree that the zone structure could work for Oregon, the suggestion to require hunters to select only one zone for hunting received a great deal of opposition.

### **Controlled Hunts**

As in other forums, the topic of imposing controlled hunts sparked a great deal of debate. Many commenters support transitioning all hunts, archery or otherwise, into controlled hunts until the elk population has been revived. Some commenters who expressed uncertainty regarding implementing more controlled hunts for archers seemed less inclined to oppose controlled hunts if they could be guaranteed that nonresidents would be excluded from the hunts. Many commenters agreed that the eastern part of the state should be all controlled hunts.

There was also a substantial number of commenters who do not support controlled hunts for archers. Most often, commenters argued that the lower success rate of archers compared to rifle hunters was the strongest reason not to transition to controlled archery hunts. Some commenters argued that the decision to move to controlled archery hunts should not be in the hands of hunters but instead should be based solely on harvest numbers by weapon type. Some commenters suggested comparing archery and rifle harvests in regions with controlled rifle hunts in order to get the best understanding of where limitations should be applied.

On a somewhat related topic, a substantial number of commenters feel that more technology-free or primitive weapon hunts should be offered and enforced. Some commenters feel that advances

in bowhunting technology are resulting in archery kill rates as high as rifle kill rates, and changes should be made in archery seasons to ease some of the pressure placed on big game populations.

### **Funding**

A number of commenters addressed funding for the Department. Most often, commenters noted that the Department should find additional forms of funding, rather than being reliant on hunters for such a large chunk of funds. Some commenters are not as concerned about the Department relying on funding from hunters and instead suggested that more tags be sold. Most commenters agreed that nonresident license and tag prices should be increased in order to bring in more funding.

### **Regulations**

Many comments in the sub-forum addressed archery season regulations. One of the most frequently discussed topics was the possibility of enforcing a choose-your-weapon regulation. The topic was debated among commenters, but many archers argued that requiring hunters to choose only one weapon would give the Department a more accurate idea of how many archers exist in the state and help reduce crowding.

In regard to APRs, many commenters feel that three-point or higher APRs should be the rule throughout the state. Although some commenters argue that APRs are ineffective, more commenters feel that APRs are an effective management tool for rebuilding populations. Many commenters also feel that spike only hunts should be eliminated in coveted units. Some commenters suggested that spike only hunts should be eliminated altogether in order to give younger elks the opportunity to reproduce.

Discussion related to cow hunts was slightly more divided than discussion regarding APRs. While some commenters feel that either sex hunts should be brought back to the units in which they were removed and over the counter (OTC) cow tags are great for subsistence hunting, others feel that cow hunts should be stopped in order to help rebuild elk populations. This was particularly true about the late season, as many commenters feel that potentially hunting pregnant cows is too much of a risk for depleted populations.

Debate about technological advancements in archery hunting was another frequent topic in the sub-forum. Some commenters feel that the Department should promote handgun, archery, muzzleloader, and shotgun (HAMS) hunts, wherein no scopes or other technology are permitted. Many commenters suggested that technological advancements in archery hunting should result in more draw units for archery hunting. In contrast, a significant number of commenters oppose archery draw hunts and feel that archery technology has not advanced to the point that archery harvest numbers approach rifle harvest numbers, and therefore archers should not be limited in the use of technology.

The remainder of the regulation-related comments centered around ways to increase and improve hunting participation. For example, commenters feel that the Department should work with private landowners to allow hunters access to more land. Further, commenters feel that, although units with excess pressure on elk should be exclusively draw hunts, fewer units overall should be draw units and a generous number of tags should be allotted in general archery regions, with



accompanying quota adjustments. Many commenters also feel that archery hunting and rifle hunting should be kept separate when possible. Although the Cascade buck hunt was specifically mentioned as a rifle hunt that should take place at a different time than archery season, many commenters agreed that overall separating archery and rifle seasons reduced risks to hunters (archery hunters must blend with their environment and put themselves at great risk from rifle hunters) and improved hunting experiences.

### **Access**

Access was discussed by many in the sub-forum. In addition to general crowding issues, which made access difficult for some, many commenters pointed out specific issues they had experienced with access. Some commenters reported having had issues with large groups of nonresident hunters, while others reported seeing vehicles in areas that posted regulations prohibiting the use of vehicles on the land. Commenters listed issues with road closures not being enforced, increased numbers of ATVs blocking access to areas, and a lack of travel management areas (TMAs) during archery season. Many hunters would like to see more TMAs on national forest lands.

### **Health of Elk Population**

As in every forum and sub-forum, concern for big game populations was a major topic of discussion. Many attributed what they perceived to be decimated elk herds to an increase in the number of poachers and predators, as well as degradation of habitat as a result of lack of logging on public land. Some commenters added that they feel that there are too many nonresident hunters contributing to crowding and damage to the elk herds in the state. Commenters also noted that information regarding the herd is being released before winter survival rates can be adequately analyzed.

### **Inexperienced Archers**

Concern over an influx in inexperienced archers was a topic of discussion in nearly every sub-forum, but none more so than the archery-specific sub-forums. Many commenters are worried that individuals who do not obtain their desired rifle draw move to hunting in archery season. Commenters were alarmed at this trend for several reasons.

First, and perhaps seen as most important by many commenters, some feel that inexperienced archers are injuring, and not harvesting, a large number of elk, which many commenters perceived to be more than an ethical hunting issue because of the added pressure on an already vulnerable elk population. Next, commenters fear that inexperienced archery hunters are putting other hunters in danger, as novices are not believed to be in as much control of their weapon as some more experienced archers. Commenters also fear that these “opportunity” hunters are skewing data and perceptions of the incidence of archers in the hunting community and that the Department could respond with additional regulations and changes to archery seasons. Finally, commenters are bothered by the crowding caused by these unexpected additional archery hunters.

## Other Topics

As in other sub-forums, several topics found their way into discussion that were not as easily categorized as some of the others. Commenters noted the importance of maintaining R3 through posting information about herds, tags, and units early and as often as possible in order to get and keep hunters engaged and interested. Further, many commenters felt that maintaining a general archery season was an integral part of R3.

In this sub-forum, again, there was discussion about transitioning to a bonus point system instead of maintaining the current preference point system. The primary proponent of transitioning to the bonus point system argued that bonus points would allow more trophy hunting opportunities in the state.

## EASTERN OREGON RIFLE ELK SEASONS SUB-FORUM

Visitors to the sub-forum were given the following information:

In Northern Oregon. Wildlife Management Units there are currently nine different approaches to bag limits and the season structure of Rocky Mountain first and second seasons. In most units, there are more hunters that want bull elk tags than the population can support, so spike elk bag limits are used as a way to maintain hunting opportunity. In some units, there is a general spike only season, while in others there is a controlled spike elk season. Some units have spike only controlled hunts that overlap controlled “one bull” hunts. This approach allows hunters who do not draw an any bull tag the opportunity to draw a spike only tag and still go hunting. Some hunters have expressed concern about having to use preference points to draw a bull tag and then experiencing disturbances from spike tag holders.

After being given this information, the following questions were asked:

1. What is your experience during the Rocky Mountain first and second seasons in Northeast Oregon?
2. How would you like to see the timing of “one bull” hunts and spike only hunts structured?
3. Should “one bull” hunts and spike only hunts take place during the same time period?
4. Do you prefer hunts with a spike only bag limit to be controlled or general seasons?

The Eastern Oregon rifle elk seasons sub-forum closed with 122 comments from 109 commenters. Whereas spike hunts were often included in the regulations category in other sub-forum analyses, because questions specifically asked about spike hunts and a great deal of comments addressed spike hunts, this topic was put into a separate category in the Eastern Oregon rifle elk season. Most commenters in the sub-forum agreed that spike and one bull hunts should not take place at the same time. Opinions on spike hunting in the sub-forum varied from eliminating spike hunts altogether to allowing more spike hunting for the purpose of subsistence.

## Rocky Mountain Seasons

A significant number of commenters feel that the Rocky Mountain seasons are too crowded for the slight elk population in the region. Some argued that overcrowding in the region can be explained by combined archery and rifle hunters, spike and trophy hunting occurring

simultaneously, and by trophy hunters bringing large groups of individuals along in order to assist with using technologies and scouting.

Some sub-forum commenters feel that it is very difficult to draw tags for the Rocky Mountain elk seasons. Commenters agreed that the timing of rifle elk season, coming after a great deal of pressure from other hunters, is causing elk to move to inaccessible private land and resulting in difficult hunts. Some commenters feel that some of these issues could be resolved by adding more time between seasons. Commenters suggested adjusting the first season rifle hunt to three-point bull or better hunts only and setting the season at a nine-day length.

### **Spike Hunts**

Spike hunts were a common topic of discussion in the sub-forum. The vast majority of commenters feel that spike hunts should not overlap with bull hunts. Some commenters feel that all spike hunts should be exclusively controlled hunts. Commenters who did not feel that spike hunts should be controlled hunts, feel that spike only hunts being general hunts allows too many people to be hunting at once. As such, commenters suggested spike hunts only taking place in the second season (a small number of commenters feel that spike should precede one bull hunts) and separately from other hunts. Several commenters suggested spike hunts become draw-only hunts.

Some commenters feel that spike hunts should be eliminated. Several commenters are in favor of any bull hunts, and others feel that spike hunts should be eliminated in order to let the population grow.

Most commenters feel that changes should be made in order to reduce spike hunts, but not all commenters agree. Some commenters feel that spike hunts should not require controlled hunt tags but should instead just maintain strict general season quotas. Other commenters feel that spike hunts should be OTC hunts (although a small number of commenters disagree) in order to provide more opportunities for subsistence hunters. A very small number of commenters feel that there should not be any changes regarding spike and one bull hunts.

### **Regulations**

Many commenters again argued that hunters should be required to choose their weapon prior to the controlled hunt draw in order to reduce crowding during archery season and the presence of inexperienced archers in the field. Other commenters feel that moving all hunts everywhere in the state to draw hunts could serve the same purpose. With the same interests in mind, some commenters also suggested that all hunts should be controlled hunts.

Many commenters also feel that the elk population could be best protected by maintaining APRs of three points or more in every unit in the state. Many commenters feel strongly that maintaining APRs helps protect the elk population by giving younger bulls the opportunity to grow and breed. Commenters who strongly support APRs also frequently oppose cow hunts of any kind.

With regard to cow hunts, however, some commenters feel that expanding the space of general cow damage hunts and starting the hunts a greater distance from private land borders could allow for more successful cow damage hunts. Many commenters feel that changes in regulations that

would allow more private land hunts could be hugely beneficial to hunters and private landowners.

### **Health of Elk Population**

Commenters in the sub-forum are concerned about the health of the elk population. Many commenters feel that elk populations are particularly depleted in the eastern part of the state. Many attribute population issues to poaching, overcrowding and overhunting, and poor predator management.

Several commenters feel that the Department's decisions regarding rebuilding elk populations are not always based on science but on financial interests. Some commenters are concerned about the Department's credibility and transparency.

### **Other Topics**

A very small number of comments presented topics that did not fit into the categories previously established. Some of these topics included concern that shorter season lengths prevent youth hunters' opportunities to learn and practice hunting, a desire for more muzzleloader hunting, desire for less technology use in archery hunting, and concern for rising tag and license prices. Finally, some commenters were pleased with the opportunity to comment on the online forum, and several recommended reviving the Oregon Wildlife Magazine or creating additional ways for the Department to communicate with hunters and the public.

## **DEER FORUM**

Each sub-forum within the larger deer forum started with a set of basic questions that were posed to commenters. Although all questions were simply presented for consideration, and commenters could address any topic they liked, many comments did address these questions. As such, before the analysis of each sub-forum, the questions presented to potential commenters are listed.

The deer forum received more than 440 comments overall. Among the three sub-forums, the archery deer season sub-forum received the most comments (204). The Western Oregon late season hunting sub-forum received the fewest comments (62) among all of the sub-forums.

Some themes were present in each the three deer sub-forums. Throughout all three sub-forums, there was a great deal of concern for deer populations, especially mule deer populations. Many commenters also supported APRs and reducing doe and spike hunts.

Additional topics seen in all three sub-forums included concern for hunter overcrowding issues, interest in allowing more hunters on private land, and need for better management of predators and poaching.

### **WESTERN OREGON RIFLE DEER SEASON SUB-FORUM**

The questions presented in the Western Oregon rifle deer season sub-forum were:

1. What is your experience with the Western Oregon rifle deer general season? What changes to the season should ODFW consider?
2. ODFW is considering proposing to remove the seven-day, mid-season closure of the Cascade buck season during the West Cascade elk season. If proposed, West Cascade elk season would also be moved to after deer season. This would then allow all units in Western Oregon to have the same buck deer season. Would you support this change to deer season? Why or why not?

The Western Oregon rifle deer season sub-forum had 181 comments from 115 commenters. As is the case in other sub-forums, many commenters are concerned about big game populations and feel that changes in regulations and seasons should all be made with the interest of reviving the deer populations in mind. There is relatively strong support for the Department's proposed changes to the Western Oregon rifle deer seasons.

### **Support and Opposition for Changes in Cascade Elk Season**

More commenters support the proposed changes to the Cascade buck and elk seasons, especially removing the mid-season closure, although the number of proponents and opponents in the sub-forum were close to evenly divided. Some of the commenters who oppose the changes feel that the break in Cascade buck season should be removed altogether in favor of one single Cascade deer season. Some commenters oppose the proposal because they want the elk hunt to be moved even later in the season than the Department is currently proposing.

### Season and Season Structure

While some commenters specifically noted support for or opposition to the Department's proposed changes, other commenters did not assert an opinion, but instead offered suggestions for changes to the season or season structure. Because so many season and season structure changes were recommended in this sub-forum, and because many suggestions contradict one another, but were commented on nearly equally, they are presented here in a list. Timing and structural changes suggested by commenters include:

- Add another week so that hunters have five full weekends.
- November Cascade season should be only five days.
- Late season should run from early October through November.
- There should be a longer deer hunt/rifle season in Cascade units.
- Rifle season should be three weeks long.
- Archery season should be three months long.
- The late season should be moved to an even later time in the year.
- The season should be during or closer to the rut.
- The elk and deer seasons should be concurrent and longer.
- Elk hunting should not take place during archery deer.
- Elk season starts too early.
- Shorten entire season or move to controlled hunt.
- The season start date should remain the same each year.
- The late season should only be during the month of October.
- The season should be later for buck hunting.
- The season should start at the beginning of September.

### Health of Deer Population

Many commenters feel that there has been a serious decline in the population of deer in Western Oregon. Some noted that this was particularly the case in national forest land. Theories related to causes of the decline were familiar: poaching has become an issue, there are more predators in the state than there have been in the past, overhunting and overcrowding (most agreed especially on the part of nonresident hunters) is hurting populations, and habitat loss is an issue as a result of a lack of logging on public land.

Some commenters specifically mentioned black-tailed deer as being particularly affected by overhunting. Commenters noted that hunters were applying a great deal of pressure to black-tailed deer populations, and, as such, many hunters had noticed fewer and fewer black-tailed deer in the field. Commenters suggested revising the black-tailed deer management plan in order to find a more accurate population estimation.

### Regulations

Many regulations were discussed in this sub-forum, but none were discussed more than adopting antler point restrictions (APRs of three or more) throughout the state and removing spike deer from the buck bag limit. Some commenters were not as adamant about doing away with allowing

spike harvests entirely, but instead feel that only youth should be permitted to hunt for spikes and not during rifle season.

Many commenters also expressed concerns with the recent change in western Oregon deer bag limits that now allow hunters to harvest spike deer during buck seasons.

As with many topics in the forums, doe hunting received very mixed comments. Some commenters feel more doe tags should be issued, while other commenters feel hunting doe should be stopped altogether. Some commenters feel that a compromise could be reached by offering lottery tags for doe hunts.

Another aspect of the regulations that was thoroughly discussed pertained to tags. Opinions vary broadly with regard to tags and how they should be allocated. Some commenters oppose lottery tags, oppose having to pay for a chance to draw a tag, oppose high numbers of tags being issued, and oppose nonresidents receiving tags before residents. Not all comments about tags were in opposition to current regulations, however. Some commenters feel that the tag system is effective, but that any issues with the system could be resolved by simply increasing the price of tags for deer and elk, reducing the number of total tags for deer and elk, and decreasing the price of predator tags.

Some commenters feel that hunters should be required to choose their weapon and use only that weapon type for the remainder of the hunting season. If choose-your-weapon regulations are embraced, some commenters feel that bag limits should be the same for all weapons.

Finally, a sizable number of commenters in this sub-forum discussed archery hunting seasons. Comments suggest that there may be some tension between rifle hunters and archery hunters. Some commenters even urged the Department to end archery seasons entirely. Some commenters feel that all archery hunts should be draw hunts.

### **Controlled Hunts**

Again, commenters were torn on the topic of controlled hunts. Some commenters feel that all controlled hunts should cease. Others encouraged the Department to transition all of the state's hunts to controlled hunts. Several commenters support controlled hunts for rifle hunters, but not for archery hunters. The success rate of archers when compared to rifle hunters, some argued, is low enough to allow archery hunting to continue as is.

### **Predators and Poachers**

Many commenters took this sub-forum as an opportunity to discuss concerns related to predator species in the state. Some commenters focused on the danger rising predator numbers could have on the deer population. Some commenters focused on what they see as missed opportunities for predator hunting. Specifically addressing predator hunting, commenters feel that there should be more cougar hunting in areas with substantial black-tailed deer populations, hunters should be able to use hounds when hunting predators, and baiting should be allowed when hunting predators.

Many commenters are concerned about the number of poachers in the state. Some commenters feel that poachers are playing a major role in harming deer populations and that punishments should be made more severe in the interest of providing protection for deer and other big game species.

### **Funding**

Funding was mentioned on several occasions in the sub-forum. Some commenters are concerned that the Department is making decisions based on the possible financial benefit. Some commenters are concerned that financial interests, instead of science, are driving big game management.

Several commenters feel that the Department needs to focus on finding alternate sources of funding in order to prevent becoming too reliant on funding supplied by hunters. Commenters fear that relying solely on funding from hunters could lead to the Department making changes based on the interest of hunters instead of wildlife management and conservation.

### **Other Topics**

Some commenters added topics to the discussion that were not necessarily discussed at length or worthy of their own category but still were mentioned enough to be included in this analysis. Most of these comments referred to specific groups of hunters, both in positive and negative ways. In terms of positive comments about hunters, several commenters feel that there should be more youth hunting opportunities of all kinds, as youth are an important aspect of R3 efforts. Commenters also feel that hunters should have a more present and consistent voice in shaping regulations.

In regard to negative comments about groups of hunters, some commenters feel that the Department allows the archery lobby too many liberties and should shorten the archery season in order to allow more rifle and muzzleloader opportunities. Some commenters also noted that so-called road hunters have become a major issue in the state. Some urged the Department to do more to enforce laws that prohibit such behaviors.

## **ARCHERY DEER SEASONS SUB-FORUM**

The questions presented in the archery deer seasons sub-forum were:

1. What is your experience with archery deer season? What changes to the season should ODFW consider?
2. One management challenge ODFW is facing is continuing to provide a general archery deer season in Eastern Oregon with declining mule deer populations. When populations decline in Eastern Oregon units with a general archery deer season and a controlled rifle deer season, the only way for ODFW to regulate harvest is by reducing rifle tags. Would you be supportive of controlled archery deer hunts in Eastern Oregon to allocate harvest equitably and prevent overharvest of mule deer? Why or why not?

The archery deer seasons sub-forum had 204 comments from 130 commenters. The archery deer seasons sub-forum was one of the more popular sub-forums among commenters. Many



commenters were concerned about inexperienced archers and took the opportunity to comment on the topic. A large majority of commenters in the sub-forum feel that the season should be moved from its current dates to September 1 through September 30.

### **Season and Season Structure**

Commenters mostly approved of the season length, save a small number of commenters who feel the season is too long and should be shortened. Some suggested making the season slightly earlier in the year, while another smaller group would like to see the season later in the year, but no specific time frame was offered. As was the case in the archery elk sub-forum, several commenters feel the season should be from September 1 to September 30 instead of its current dates. Commenters also suggested adding a mid-season break to the archery deer seasons. Some commenters suggested adding a controlled hunt that precedes the late August start of archery season. Other commenters feel that more late season archery hunts should be made available to archery hunters.

Several commenters encouraged the Department to keep deer and elk archery seasons separate and to split tag allocations for both species between public and private land. Most commenters agreed that archery hunting should move to more draw hunts, and a fair number of commenters feel that general archery season should be halted until deer populations can rebound.

### **Controlled Hunts**

Many commenters were very flexible about keeping a general archery season, and a number of commenters specifically mentioned that they would support transitioning to more controlled archery hunts. In most cases, commenters supported controlled hunts in the interest of rebuilding deer populations. It is important to note that some supporters of controlled hunts added a caveat: several commenters specified that they only support controlled hunts if they are contained to deer season and do not extend to elk hunting. Commenters also noted that they favored moving to controlled hunts only if rifle hunting is also moved to controlled hunts.

Although many commenters supported the introduction of controlled hunts, a fair number of commenters oppose moving to controlled hunts. In most cases, these commenters argued that archery has a far lower harvest success rate and should not be held to the same standard as rifle hunters.

### **Health of Deer Population**

Commenters nearly unanimously agreed that the deer population has seen a noticeable decline. Among the reasons listed as contributing to population changes are predators, poaching, habitat loss, and overhunting. Some commenters feel that the decline is so severe that mule deer should be added to the endangered species list and that the Department should start working toward creating breeding programs in order to rebuild the population. Other commenters feel that mule deer hunting should be closed for at least a few years.

Predators and poaching, as mentioned above, appear to be major concerns in the state, especially with regard to the health of the deer population. Some commenters offered solutions to these issues, which included possibly giving out a free predator tag with every deer or elk tag, allowing

dogs when hunting for predators, and enforcing stricter penalties for individuals caught poaching.

One final topic regarding the deer population was discussed by commenters to the sub-forum. Several commenters noted that they had seen an increase in the number of deer-vehicle collisions. As many commenters are gravely concerned about the deer population, some commenters suggested creating more game overpasses and adding more wildlife fences along problem areas.

### **Access**

In both the elk and deer archery sub-forums, access was discussed at great length. Although nearly all forums addressed issues with big game moving from public land to private land, and thereby becoming inaccessible for the majority of hunters, rifle-oriented sub-forums were less likely to address access issues outside of private land. Commenters in this archery sub-forum addressed issues with private land and also noted that many archers feel that there are not enough TMAs. Further, archers feel that TMA periods need to include archery season, and road closures should be more closely monitored during archery season. Some feel that access is not taken as seriously during archery season as it is during rifle season. Many hunters would like to see more TMAs on national forest lands.

### **Regulations**

A number of regulation-related comments were made throughout the sub-forum. Many commenters addressed changes they would like to see in the allocation of tags. Numerous commenters feel that the number of tags for every season and weapon type should be reduced, a substantial number of commenters feel that only the number of rifle tags should be reduced, and a very small number of commenters think archery tags should be reduced. Several commenters also feel that the number of tags for nonresidents should be reduced.

Commenters also suggested that fewer buck tags be issued, more doe tags be issued, as well as fewer doe tags, and that a predator tag be issued with every deer tag in order to reduce predator populations. Further tag recommendations from commenters included eliminating OTC tags and not restricting tags to one unit.

In general, most commenters agree that APRs of three or more points should be implemented in order to protect the deer population. Many commenters also feel that the harvest of spike deer should be discontinued. Some commenters feel that some units with pressure on bucks should be temporarily closed.

Sub-forum commenters also mentioned a need to reduce deer tag numbers and change bag limits to discontinue the harvest of does all over the state and set regulations that prevent road hunting.

### **Choose Your Weapon**

Many commenters support requiring hunters to choose their weapon. Commenters argue that implementing a choose-your-weapon system will help reveal how many archery hunters actually exist in Oregon. In addition, most commenters support this idea, because they believe requiring

people to choose between bow, rifle, and muzzleloader will greatly reduce the number of hunters in the field, which will lead to less crowding and less pressure on the deer population. Further, many commenters believe that requiring hunters to choose their weapon before hunting will leave the state with only the most experienced and responsible archery hunters.

### **Other Topics**

As with all other forums, there are a small number of topics that are important to commenters but do not fit into some of the larger categories in the forum. Most of the topics listed in this category in this sub-forum relate to the Department's management other than hunting. For example, a small number of commenters feel that the Department has made a series of bad decisions based on funding, which have led to declining deer populations all over the state. Some comments suggest that there is support for finding alternate sources of funding, as well as partnering with nonprofits and nongovernmental organizations in order to implement better big game management solutions.

Commenters feel that license and tag fees are expensive and are excluding many low-income individuals from participating in hunting. Continuing with concerns about hunters being excluded, several commenters would like to see the Department offering more youth hunting opportunities.

### **WESTERN OREGON LATE SEASON HUNTING (ALL WEAPON TYPES) SUB-FORUM**

The questions presented in the Western Oregon late season hunting sub-forum were:

1. What is your experience with late season black-tailed deer hunts in Western Oregon? Are there any changes ODFW should consider?
2. Should late season hunting be controlled hunts for all weapon types or remain a general season for certain weapon types?
3. There are currently a variety of approaches used for late-season black-tailed deer hunting in Western Oregon. Late-season archery hunts are general seasons, muzzleloader and youth hunts are controlled hunts, and there are no adult late-season centerfire rifle hunting opportunities. How should late-season hunting opportunity be allocated between weapon types?
4. Should a unit have one late-season opportunity for one weapon type or multiple hunts for different weapons? If multiple hunts occur in a unit, should the season dates overlap so each weapon type gets a portion of the preferred time period?

The Western Oregon late season hunting sub-forum closed with 62 comments from 42 commenters. The Western Oregon late season hunting (all weapon types) sub-forum received fewer comments than any other sub-forum, both among the deer hunting sub-forums and overall. Again, many commenters discussed the declining deer population, and many proposed increasing the number of controlled hunts and decreasing the number of tags allotted. A majority of commenters are pleased with the current late season structure.

## **Season Structure**

A small majority of commenters feel that the current season structure is effective and not in need of any changes. Among those who are not satisfied with the current Western Oregon late season, opinions vary on how the season can be improved. Several commenters feel that more late season hunts should be available and that the late season should be extended (some feel only the archery late season should be extended and others feel only the late rifle season should be extended), while others feel that shortening the late season archery hunting to only ten-fourteen days and adding additional early season hunts would take pressure off of deer hunted in the late season.

Several commenters offered specific dates or date ranges they would prefer instead of the current late season structure. Often these suggestions were region-specific. Some commenters suggested that southern dates for late archery season should be matched to northern late archery dates. Some commenters suggested that the Western late season should run from mid-October through the end of the first day of November. Remaining commenters who did not offer a suggestion for a specific region feel that late season rifle and archery hunts should be separated, but that both rifle and archery hunters should have opportunities in the late season. Other commenters suggested that late archery season should start the day after general rifle closes.

## **Health of Deer Population**

Again, the health of the deer population was a major topic of discussion. Some commenters simply asserted that they had seen major declines in the population and expressed concern for the population.

Among the issues listed for the decline in the deer population, in addition to overhunting, commenters mentioned issues with increased poaching and predation. Several commenters suggested that hunting should be temporarily terminated in certain units and regions with more noticeable population issues. A year-long rest in these areas was suggested by commenters.

## **Black-Tailed Deer**

Most comments in this sub-forum addressed deer populations in general, but several did specifically refer to black-tailed deer. Some commenters feel that hunting in the late-season black-tailed deer season is very enjoyable and that populations seem very healthy. In contrast, some commenters fear that the Northern half of the black-tailed deer population cannot support continued harvesting, particularly in the late season.

## **Regulations**

Most of the regulation-related comments in this sub-forum addressed APRs and creating regulations that focused on protecting the health of deer populations. For example, some commenters feel that restrictions should be established that would prevent the killing of immature bucks and maintain a minimum APR of three points. Some commenters feel that protecting deer during the rut should be a priority, noting that all hunts should end before the rut begins.

Finally, some commenters who addressed regulations in this sub-forum focused on what they perceived to be a greater need for more controlled hunts. Often reacting to comments about the perceived ill health of the deer population, some commenters feel that the entire state should move to controlled hunts during all seasons, in all regions, and with all weapon types.

### **Other Topics**

Commenters addressed several additional issues that did not necessarily fit into the more discussed categories listed above. A need for increased law enforcement and more strict punishment for poachers was addressed by several commenters, as was the need for increased access to some public and private lands. Some commenters focused on the need for more muzzleloader hunting opportunities.

## **OTHER FORUM**

The question presented in the Other forum was:

1. Are there any additional issues you feel ODFW should be made aware of regarding big game populations or big game management in the state?

The Other forum had 300 comments from 186 commenters. Because only one question was presented and the topic was not narrowed in the way other sub-forums' topics were, comments in the final forum covered a wide range of topics. Below is a list of topics that were presented numerous times, followed by a list of topics that were only mentioned once in the forum.

### **Bear and Predator Hunting**

More comments focused on bear hunting and predator hunting in this forum than any other topic.

Many comments in the forum centered around suggestions for changes to bear hunting seasons, season structures, and regulations in the state. Many commenters focused on the spring bear season, specifically. For example, a number of commenters feel that the spring bear season should be much longer and structured more like the fall/general bear season. Some commenters suggested that the two seasons be combined to make one nine-month long season. Other comments regarding bear hunting included recommendations for a general spring bear season, more spring bear youth tags, and adding a premium spring bear tag.

Many comments in the final forum addressed concerns about increased predator populations, including wolves, coyotes, bears, and cougars. Two comments regarding predators were made most often: first, commenters noted that they would like to be able to use dogs when hunting predators. Second, many commenters feel that the quotas for predators should be increased and that tags should not be required for predator hunting. Some commenters proposed offering incentives for predator hunting until the predator populations are manageable and the deer and elk populations have been able to rebuild.

### **Health of Deer and Elk Populations**

Throughout the forums and sub-forums, concern for big game populations was a major theme. Commenters offered suggestions for rebuilding deer and elk populations and submitted

numerous theories about how the population had become what they perceive to be diminished. The final forum continued with this trend. Some of the suggestions in this forum may have been mentioned in one or more of the deer or elk sub-forums, but because of their frequency in this forum, they will be repeated here.

Several commenters suggested closing units for periods of time (the time frame, they noted, could be determined through an analysis by the Department's biologists) in order to allow the recovery of certain species. Other commenters felt that the Department needed to focus on reducing vehicle-deer collisions that were further damaging populations. Some commenters suggested the Department consult and partner with outside organizations, (e.g., conservation-based nonprofits and nongovernmental organizations) in order to work on rebuilding big game populations.

Some commenters feel that mandatory in-depth hunter surveys that gather more than simple harvest data could help the Department get thorough information about the population of big game species. These survey data, some commenters argued, could help drive big game management and eventually lead to decision-making that helps rebuild elk and deer populations.

### **Hunter Needs/Requests**

Many commenters feel that the hunting experience could be improved if a few changes are implemented. Comments suggest that there is a desire for better discounts for military veterans, elderly hunters, disabled hunters, and youth hunters. Some commenters feel that hunters' needs, including the needs of specific subsets of hunters, would be better met if there were more hunter representatives involved in the Department's decision-making.

Several other suggestions were given in regard to making hunting more available to more hunters. Commenters noted that their planning would be easier and that they would likely hunt more often if tags were drawn earlier in the year and they were given detailed range-wide maps of deer habitats.

There was a fair amount of discussion about license fees in this forum, as well as suggestions regarding changes in licensing that would increase hunting in the state. Most commenters feel that any preference in hunts should be given to residents. Some commenters specifically requested that the Department show its appreciation for resident hunters by decreasing the price of resident licenses and increasing the price of nonresident licenses.

Many commenters also emphasized the importance of the Department and hunters working with private landowners in order to open more land to hunters and increase hunting opportunities.

### **Regulations**

A number of regulations were addressed in this forum. The appropriate use of APRs was discussed more than any other regulation. Some commenters feel very strongly that APRs of at least three points are an essential aspect of protecting the long-term health of elk herds and should therefore be applied to all Oregon hunting units. In contrast, however, nearly as many commenters feel that APRs are not an effective management tool. Many of the latter group feel that the focus should be on maintaining accurate population data and making calls for each season and each unit based on the scientific gathering of such population-related data.

In addition to debate regarding the efficacy of APRs, many commenters feel that regulations should be made in the interest of protecting the health of herds. For example, many commenters feel that the state should require hunters to choose their weapon to reduce crowding and overhunting, shorten all seasons, and increase penalties for individuals caught poaching deer and elk. In addition to feeling that the number of tags should be reduced overall, several commenters also think that all archery hunts should move to draw hunts.

Finally, many commenters urged the Department to base all regulations on science instead of emotion and maintain clear communication with the public regarding decision-making behind regulation changes.

### **Other Topics**

Several topics prompted discussion in the forum but did not necessarily fit into any specific established category.

By far the most frequent topic addressed that does not fit into other categories is gratitude for the opportunity to comment and offer input on hunting in the state through the use of the online forum. In addition, commenters discussed the need for more public education on the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.

### **Topics Mentioned Once**

The final forum encouraged commenters to address any topic related to big game hunting in Oregon that they feel is important; as a result, many topics were only addressed once in this forum. Because these comments were not discussed at length or even replied to after their first appearance, they are simply listed below as an addendum to the issues that received more attention. Note that comments that were mentioned only once in the final forum but were explored more thoroughly in the deer or elk forums will not be included in this list.

- One commenter is concerned about management of feral horse populations.
- One commenter would like to see a seal or sea lion tag issued.
- One commenter feels that a tag should be donated to a child with a life-threatening illness every year.
- One commenter urged the Department to return to using paper tags only.
- One commenter would like to see an open bag limit for snow geese.
- One commenter supports a ban on hunting deer and elk over bait.
- One commenter feels there should be a bounty on coyotes in Eastern Oregon.
- One commenter is concerned that the prices of tags and licenses in the state is excluding low-income hunters.

## ABOUT RESPONSIVE MANAGEMENT

Responsive Management is an internationally recognized survey research firm specializing in natural resource and outdoor recreation issues. Our mission is to help natural resource and outdoor recreation agencies, businesses, and organizations better understand and work with their constituents, customers, and the public. Focusing only on natural resource and outdoor recreation issues, Responsive Management has conducted telephone, mail, and online surveys, as well as multi-modal surveys, on-site intercepts, focus groups, public meetings, personal interviews, needs assessments, program evaluations, marketing and communication plans, and other forms of human dimensions research measuring how people relate to the natural world for more than 30 years. Utilizing our in-house, full-service survey facilities with 75 professional interviewers, we have conducted studies in all 50 states and 15 countries worldwide, totaling more than 1,000 human dimensions projects *only* on natural resource and outdoor recreation issues.

Responsive Management has conducted research for every state fish and wildlife agency and every federal natural resource agency, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Coast Guard, and the National Marine Fisheries Service. Additionally, we have also provided research for all the major conservation NGOs including the Archery Trade Association, the American Sportfishing Association, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Dallas Safari Club, Ducks Unlimited, Environmental Defense Fund, the Izaak Walton League of America, the National Rifle Association, the National Shooting Sports Foundation, the National Wildlife Federation, the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Safari Club International, the Sierra Club, Trout Unlimited, and the Wildlife Management Institute.

Other nonprofit and NGO clients include the American Museum of Natural History, the BoatUS Foundation, the National Association of Conservation Law Enforcement Chiefs, the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators, and the Ocean Conservancy. As well, Responsive Management conducts market research and product testing for numerous outdoor recreation manufacturers and industry leaders, such as Winchester Ammunition, Vista Outdoor (whose brands include Federal Premium, CamelBak, Bushnell, Primos, and more), Trijicon, Yamaha, and others. Responsive Management also provides data collection for the nation's top universities, including Auburn University, Clemson University, Colorado State University, Duke University, George Mason University, Michigan State University, Mississippi State University, North Carolina State University, Oregon State University, Penn State University, Rutgers University, Stanford University, Texas Tech, University of California-Davis, University of Florida, University of Montana, University of New Hampshire, University of Southern California, Virginia Tech, West Virginia University, Yale University, and many more.

Our research has been upheld in U.S. Courts, used in peer-reviewed journals, and presented at major wildlife and natural resource conferences around the world. Responsive Management's research has also been featured in many of the nation's top media, including *Newsweek*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, CNN, National Public Radio, and on the front pages of *The Washington Post* and *USA Today*.

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