

Game Management Plan

Anis Aoude, Game Division Manager
Wildlife Program



Purpose of Game Management Plans

- Guide the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's management of hunted wildlife.
- Provide the public an opportunity to weigh-in through a formal process on high level game management issues.
- Identify data gaps and future research and monitoring needs.
- Provide direction on sustainable hunting management.
- Identify existing and potential limiting factors affecting game populations.
- Give broad direction for addressing known limiting factors.
- Provide a basis for work planning.
- Identify funding needs.



High level Summary of Steps

- Overarching plan and individual species and guild plans that will be produced over a specific time period
- All plans will go through SEPA using a phased review approach (4 phases)
- Commission will contemplate policy considerations that may inform individual plans
- Wildlife Committee/Commission will provide case appropriate review during the internal review process prior to public SEPA review



Currently in Phase 1

Plan	Phase	Planned completion	Lead Authors	Process Owner
Vision, Dept. Authority, and General Game Mgmt. Plan	1	June 2023	Anis A	Anis A
Waterfowl & Migratory Game Birds Mgmt. Plan	1	June 2023	Waterfowl Specialists	Kyle S



Overarching Plan Touchpoints

- Commission and Department Authority
- General Game Management Issue Statements



History of Commission and Department Authority

- Preceded the first GMP
- Voted on by the Commission
- Modified by the Commission during 2014 plan revision process
- Identifies 19 guiding principles and 7 process steps for developing hunting season recommendations
- Looking for Commission consensus around these principles and steps



Guiding Principles

Hunting seasons and regulation recommendations should be based on good science. When biological information is lacking or insufficient, management decisions should be sufficiently conservative to ensure protection of wildlife resources. At no time should decisions favor income to the agency or recreational opportunity to the detriment of conservation of wildlife populations.

1. In general, hunting seasons and boundaries of game management units should be easy to understand while maintaining hunting opportunity and management options.
2. Continuity in hunting seasons over time is highly valued by the public; therefore, Department recommendations for significant changes to seasons should be adequately explained to the public and should address a resource management need.
3. Establishing hunting seasons shall be consistent with the Commission Policy C-3607 regarding cooperatively managing wildlife resources with the tribes.
4. In general, hunting seasons shall be consistent with species planning objectives and provide maximum recreation days while achieving population goals.



Guiding Principles cont.

5. A three-year season setting process which provides consistent general seasons from year to year with annual changes in permit levels to address emergent resource issues; natural disasters; and to meet requirements of federal guideline changes; etc.
6. The public shall be offered substantial and timely opportunity to make comments on and recommendations for the three-year hunting rules decision-making process. These opportunities must comply with the state's Regulatory Reform Act.
7. Public involvement for annual permit season setting shall include at a minimum, a standard written comment period and one public meeting where comments will be considered.
8. Hunting rules shall provide separate deer and elk general season recreational opportunities for archers, muzzleloaders, and modern firearm hunters.
9. Special deer and elk permit hunt opportunities shall be allocated among three principal user groups (archery, muzzleloader, and modern firearm) using the approved formula of success/participation rate.



Guiding Principles cont.

10. Weapon and hunting equipment restrictions should maintain public safety; protect the resource; allow wide latitude for individuals to make equipment choices; be easy to understand and allow effective enforcement.
11. Disabled hunter opportunities shall emphasize equal access consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
12. For disabled hunters, graduates of Master Hunter programs, youth hunters, and hunters over 65, strategies for enhanced opportunity shall include special consideration during general seasons, opportunities for special access, and other incentives rather than special permit hunts. Master Hunter incentives should return to the program's original intent, which was to address wildlife problems, issues associated with hunter ethics, and the challenging hunting circumstances on private lands.
13. Private landowner hunting issues such as season length, damage control, and trespass should be given consideration when developing hunting season recommendations.
14. The rules shall standardize furbearer seasons to provide trapping opportunity and address damage control.



Guiding Principles cont.

15. The migratory bird and small game regulations shall provide maximum hunting opportunity considering federal guidelines, flyway management plan elements, and Department management objectives.
16. The hunting season closures and firearm restrictions shall be sufficient to assure resource conservation and public safety.
17. The goat, sheep, and moose permit hunting rules shall maintain high quality opportunities consistent with resource availability.
18. The Department shall maintain programs that offer the public high quality hunter education and firearm safety training.
19. The Department shall promote high standards of hunter ethics and adoption of principles of fair chase.



Process Steps

1. Staff determine the status of game populations and impacts of previous harvest strategies;
2. Staff engage in preliminary discussion of ideas with the tribes, the public, state and federal agencies, and WDFW biologists and managers;
3. Staff develop a set of season and regulation alternatives;
4. Staff prepare formal submissions pursuant to the Administrative Procedures Act of the draft regulations and identify the period for public comment;
5. Staff receive, consider, and summarize public comments;
6. Staff develop final recommendations for hunting season rules;
7. The Fish and Wildlife Commission considers staff recommendations, public comments, and related information and adopts regulations governing hunting seasons.



General Game Management Issues

Scientific/Professional Management of Hunted Wildlife Issue Statement:

WDFW wildlife managers and biologists have developed goals, objectives, and strategies in these plans to ensure long-term sustainability of all wildlife. The best available science will be the basis for the maintenance of all endemic wildlife populations. Strategies for hunted wildlife will not have significant negative impacts on the sustainability of other wildlife or their habitats. None of the strategies, subsequent hunting season recommendations, or implementation of activities will deviate from these fundamental principles. Science is the core of wildlife management, the basis for achieving the agency's mandate, and the foundation of this plan.



General Game Management Issues

Scientific/Professional Management of Hunted Wildlife

Issue Statement:

While science and professional opinion form the foundation of wildlife management, social and economic issues often strongly affect public opinion, and influence management strategies and regulations. An easily accessible public involvement process is necessary to facilitate broad public involvement in developing and implementing management alternatives. The key is to develop programs that both achieve key biological objectives and are supported by the public.



General Game Management Issues

Hunter Ethics and Fair Chase

Issue Statement:

Many hunters think that the latitude to determine what constitutes fair chase belongs to the individual. They feel that others should not determine what fair chase is for someone else. Other hunters are concerned that the image and standard of ethics for hunting may be compromised, particularly with the expanding use of technology for hunting. This is especially evident with equipment technology.



General Game Management Issues

Hunter Behavior/Ethics

Issue Statement:

A majority of the general public believes that many hunters violate hunting laws (Duda 2002a). They feel that hunting without a license and poaching are the major violations, and shooting game out of season and hunting over the bag limit are also common violations. Hunters cite these same concerns with the addition of shooting from a vehicle. The public also indicated, they developed their opinions from direct observation, physical evidence, and from talking with others. In addition, they support hunter refresher courses and feel that an additional training requirement will improve their opinion of hunters.



General Game Management Issues

Non-toxic Ammunition

Issue Statement:

A wide variety of birds may consume spent lead shot, resulting in increased mortalities and sublethal effects. Birds of prey may ingest lead as they scavenge animals (e.g., deer) taken during hunting seasons. In Washington, there is increasing evidence of lead consumption by golden eagles, a species of concern with low population levels. However, some sportsmen are concerned that the added expense of purchasing non-toxic ammunition is not justified with population-level impacts and may further reduce hunter recruitment and retention.



General Game Management Issues

Hunting Season Regulations

Issue Statement:

The Department must manage game populations for a variety of hunters, each utilizing different methods and weapon types. This is accomplished with designated seasons for each to ensure all have opportunity. The hunting public informs decisions so that seasons and restrictions are equitable among all user groups. Continuing to solicit input from all users is a primary objective of the Department so hunting opportunity is fair and balanced.



Questions?

