

Summary Sheet

Meeting dates: March 18-19, 2016

Agenda Item: Baiting of Deer and Elk - Rule Briefing and Public Hearing

Presenter: Mick Cope, Game Division Manager, Wildlife Program

Background summary:

Department staff will brief the Commission on options for proposed rule changes related to using bait to hunt deer and elk in Washington. At the March and April 2015 Commission meetings, this issue was discussed at length and the Commission decided to not change the existing rule. However, the Commission requested that the Department continue to work on the issue, create a small focus group of hunters to investigate the issue more closely, and prepare potential recommended changes for their consideration in 2016.

The Department had been approached by hunters and landowners that do not approve of the practice of baiting for the purposes of hunting deer or elk. Additional input was received as part of the 3-year hunting season package, public process in 2015.

The non-random input the Department received via the website during the 3-year package process indicated that 23% of hunters wanted a ban on baiting with an exception for food plots and agricultural operations. Fourteen percent (14%) of hunters wanted to disallow the use of bait by hunting guides and restrict the manner and volume of baiting by hunters not using guides. A 63% majority of the hunters commenting wanted no change to the rules pertaining to baiting deer and elk.

In a random telephone survey of deer hunters conducted as part of the 2015-17 3-year package, 59% either opposed or strongly opposed baiting for deer. Deer hunters that supported or strongly supported baiting for deer made up 21% of the respondents. Eleven percent (11%) of those surveyed were neutral and 9% didn't know.

In the same random telephone survey, 68% of elk hunters either opposed or strongly opposed baiting for elk. Elk hunters that supported or strongly supported using bait to hunt elk were 14%. Eleven percent (11%) of those surveyed were neutral and 8% didn't know.

Since that time, the Department has facilitated further discussion with a group of hunters interested in the issue. That group met several times over the past year. Through that process, and input received from the Game Management Advisory Council in 2015, it is clear that there is no consensus on this issue other than scents and natural agricultural practices should not be considered baiting. Members of the focus group expressed several points of view ranging from banning all baiting for deer and elk hunting to retaining the ability to bait using any quantity. The committee discussed alternatives to the "all or none" scenario, which resulted in several alternatives that will be presented to the Commission for discussion and possible decision.

The Department will provide four(4) options for the Commission to consider:

- 1) No change, status quo.
 - 2) A limit on the amount of bait that can be used to hunt deer and elk: new WAC 232-12-246.
 - 3) A restriction on the amount of bait that can be used and a restriction on how close the bait can be placed in relation to another bait pile: new WAC 232-12-245.
 - 4) A complete ban on baiting for hunting deer and elk not including agricultural operations: new WAC 232-12-239.
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Policy issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

- Regulating the use of bait to hunt deer and elk in Washington.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

A variety of public surveys, meetings, and public hearings have been conducted over the past two years. The results of these efforts demonstrate that this issue is polarizing and has avid proponents on both sides. A consensus did not develop, but some middle ground options were developed.

Requests for comments were sent to over 28,000 individuals and organizations through the rulemaking process. Additionally, these individuals and organizations were informed of the opportunity to provide verbal testimony at the March 18-19, 2016 Commission Meeting in Moses Lake.

Action requested:

Take public comment. Adoption is planned for the April 8-9, 2016 Commission Meeting.

Draft motion language:

NA – Briefing and public hearing only.

Justification for Commission action:

N/A – Briefing and public hearing only.

Communications Plan:

WDFW Website
News Releases
Hunting Pamphlet