



Recommendations from the **WYOMING WILDLIFE TASKFORCE**

THE WYOMING WILDLIFE TASKFORCE'S charge is to study top-priority wildlife policy issues facing the state related to the allocation of hunting opportunity, sportsperson access and other issues. The topics will be identified by the taskforce members for study over an 18-month period with the goal of presenting conclusions and recommendations to the Wyoming Legislature, Game and Fish Commission and governor to support decision-making on Wyoming's wildlife resources.

The Wyoming Wildlife Taskforce's (Taskforce) charge is to study top-priority wildlife policy issues facing the state related to the allocation of hunting opportunity, sportsperson access and other issues, and to make recommendations to the proper decision-making body regarding solutions to these issues.

ONCE IN A LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY FOR BIG 5 SPECIES:

The Taskforce recommends that the Wyoming legislature pass legislation stating that the draw of a hunting license for allowing for the take of a bighorn sheep ram, any moose/bull moose, bull bison, mountain goat, and grizzly bear (once delisted) will be a once in a lifetime draw opportunity. Anyone currently in the 5-year waiting period is included and has already drawn their in a lifetime opportunity.

This recommendation came from the Taskforce discussion that opportunity for residents to hunt bighorn sheep, moose, bison, mountain goat, and grizzly bear (once delisted) needs to be increased. The Taskforce made this decision after being presented with information from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department regarding license allocation and the draw process, and receiving public comment on this topic.

90/10 LICENSE ALLOCATION FOR BIG 5 SPECIES:

The Taskforce recommends that the Wyoming legislature pass legislation providing that 90% of all bighorn sheep, moose, mountain goat, wild bison and grizzly bear tags are allocated to Wyoming residents, and the remaining 10% to nonresidents.

This recommendation came from the Taskforce discussion that opportunity for residents to hunt bighorn sheep, moose, bison, mountain goat, and grizzly bear (once delisted) needs to be increased. The Taskforce made this decision after being presented with information from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department regarding license allocation and the draw process, and receiving public comment on this topic.

FULLY FUND THE WYOMING WILDLIFE LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCE TRUST:

Based on a unanimous vote of the Wyoming Wildlife Taskforce, we ask that you include additional funding for the corpus of the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust Fund (WWNRT) in your upcoming budget in the amount of no less than \$85 million. As you are aware, this amount would bring the corpus of the fund to being fully funded at the \$200 million minimum objective as defined when the fund was initially passed into law, and allow the program to operate at its intended capacity without annual funding from the General Fund.

During our first three task force meetings, many of our discussions and associated public comment have revolved around our desires to increase hunting and fishing opportunity around the state. One of the best ways to increase wildlife populations is through the maintenance, enhancement and new development of new wildlife habitats. The WWNRT has had an exceptional record for over a decade of putting resources on the ground to improve and conserve Wyoming's treasured landscapes, including hundreds of miles of streams restored, thousands of acres of wetlands built, millions of acres of rangeland and forests conserved, and nearly 1,000 individual projects in all 23 Wyoming counties.

Additionally, the work of the WWNRT and its partners has been, and will be, a major factor in Wyoming's efforts to address species of greatest ecological concern and keep species off the Endangered Species List. While all members recognize the challenging times we face related to our states' fiscal situation, we believe fully funding the WWNRT demonstrates leadership and renewed focus on the importance of investing in Wyoming's future.

GRIZZLY BEAR MANAGEMENT:

The Wyoming Wildlife Taskforce's (Taskforce) charge is to study top-priority wildlife policy issues facing the state related to the allocation of hunting opportunity, sportsperson access and other issues and to make recommendations to the proper decision-making body regarding solutions to these issues.

Due to the fact the Taskforce is making recommendations pertaining to the license allocation for hunting grizzly bears, and to address a number of public comments on the topic, the members agreed it was important to state our position on grizzly bear management. The Taskforce is united in our belief that:

- The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem's population of grizzly bears has achieved, and exceeded, federal recovery criteria.
- Grizzly bears should be delisted from the federal Endangered Species Act and management should be returned to the State of Wyoming.
- The endless legal challenges to returning grizzly bears to state management are only related to promulgating rules for delisting and ignore scientific evidence of recovery.
- The state wildlife authority, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, is best-suited for the management of grizzly bears in Wyoming.
- Wyoming has a sound management plan in place for the seamless return of grizzlies to the state.
- Sportspeople have paid over \$50 million for the recovery and management of grizzly bears and are an essential part of the management of the species.
- Hunting is a time-tested model for managing many wildlife species in North America, including large carnivores. Like other wildlife, large carnivores must be managed, and that includes objectives set by science and public input. Hunting is one method to move populations toward those objectives. It also offers those who provide the financial resources to manage grizzly bears an opportunity to take an active role in their management.

The Wyoming Wildlife Taskforce is hopeful that future Wyoming hunters will enjoy the chance to participate in grizzly bear management.

PREFERENCE POINTS TRANSITION TO BONUS POINTS:

Following multiple discussions over several meetings, the Taskforce voted to recommend a substantial change to the manner in which bighorn sheep and moose licenses are issued for both residents and nonresidents specific to the use of preference points. There are three primary components of the changes recommended: 1) Transition from a prescriptive draw where 75% of licenses are drawn from the top point holders to a system that is completely random. 2) Transition to a weighted bonus point system where an applicant's advantage in the draw increases exponentially with each subsequent year they continue to apply. The Taskforce recommends this be implemented by squaring an applicant's total number of bonus points. 3) Delay implementation by up to four years from the date the law is effective to provide long term applicants with the highest numbers of preference points a transition period. This was approved by the Task Force on December 3rd, 2021:

The task force solicited and received public feedback and comments in a variety of ways.

SPLITTING DEER SPECIES:

Following multiple discussions over several meetings, the Taskforce voted to recommend a change to state statute to differentiate "deer" as two species with one being Mule Deer and one being White-tailed Deer. This change would clarify in statute the biological fact that these are distinctly separate species. Currently, Mule Deer and Whitetail Deer are referred to as "deer" in State Statute.

We are asking that your Travel, Recreation, Wildlife and Cultural Resources Committee consider drafting legislation to address this definition change wherever it may appear in Wyoming Statutes.

This was approved by the Taskforce at our meeting on April 28, 2022. The Taskforce solicited and received public feedback and comments in a variety of ways.

7,250 ELK CAP AND REGIONALIZATION OF NON-RESIDENT GENERAL ELK LICENSES:

The Wyoming Wildlife Taskforce recommends the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission remove the 7,250 cap on nonresident elk licenses, establishes and adopts regions for non-resident general elk licenses, and strongly requests the Commission implement a process for determining the non-resident general elk license quotas for each region that takes into consideration: (1) herd objectives, (2) access to hunting opportunity, and (3) resident hunting experience/hunter pressure.

In our discussions, the Taskforce recognized the 7,250 cap for non-resident general license allocation instituted in the 1980s was based on the average of non-resident license sales at that time. There was no biological purpose for this number. The state elk population has increased significantly since the 1980s and new methods are required to manage these herds in Wyoming. With the cap removed, game managers will have greater flexibility to control harvest.

We also studied the idea of regionalization of non-resident general elk licenses. Recent Wyoming Game and Fish Department analysis concluded that regionalizing non-resident elk licenses would provide game managers more precise abilities to manage the elk populations across the state. If implemented this measure could result in allocation of licenses in areas where additional elk harvest is needed and also provide additional options to manage hunter crowding.

ANTELOPE LICENSE REDUCTION:

The Taskforce recommends that the Commission modify existing regulations to change the number of type 1 antelope licenses a hunter may possess in each calendar year from two (2) to one (1). The Taskforce collected public comment and considered several factors in their deliberations prior to making this recommendation. Primary considerations revolved around providing more hunters with the opportunity to have at least one license.

The Taskforce recognized that the total number of licenses available has declined for biological reasons over the past several years. The Taskforce also acknowledged that nearly all Type 1 Antelope licenses are purchased and that there are no leftover licenses at the end of each season, even those areas with large amounts of private land.

Recommendations from the Taskforce to appropriate decision-making bodies, including the Wyoming state legislature, the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission, and the Governor as they become available on the Wyoming Wildlife Task Force website: <https://sites.google.com/wyo.gov/wyomingwildlifetaskforce/home/recommendations-from-the-taskforce>