



COLORADO

Parks and Wildlife

Department of Natural Resources

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To: Members of the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission
From: Matthew Eckert, Terrestrial Program Supervisor and Katie Lanter, Policy and Planning Supervisor, CPW
Date: January 6, 2023

Re: 2025-2029 Big Game Season Structure: Topics and Public Outreach Approach

This memo provides an overview for the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) Commission on what Big Game Season Structure (BGSS) is, provides CPW staff's recommendation of topics to address during the 2025-2029 BGSS planning process and outlines the proposed public outreach approach.

BGSS Overview

Introduction

CPW uses a five-year BGSS as a framework for annual hunting regulations. The five-year season structure is designed to provide sportspersons, hunting-related businesses, landowners and communities an opportunity to plan ahead for the upcoming seasons. This timeframe also provides consistency for CPW to assess the effectiveness of management actions and hunting seasons over time.

Big game management in Colorado is built on two main planning processes: Herd Management Plans (also called Data Analysis Unit [DAU] Plans) and BGSS. Herd Management Plans establish population objectives and sex ratios for each of the state's big game herds. BGSS defines a framework for achieving those objectives through hunting seasons for different species and methods. These two processes inform big game license recommendations through the annual rule-making process.

The BGSS planning process is a critical component of big game management and big game hunting regulation development. The central purpose of the BGSS planning process is to determine:

- What, when and where types of big game hunting opportunities are available.
- How opportunities are divided among hunters.

Through this planning process, CPW is better able to maintain healthy wildlife populations in keeping with management objectives and provide recreational benefits for the hunting and non-hunting public.



2020-2024 BGSS

The current BGSS covers 2020-2024. CPW conducted extensive public engagement for the 2020-2024 BGSS planning process, given the high level of interest in the effort. As a result of the public feedback received, CPW made various changes/adjustments to the previous season structure for the 2020-2024 BGSS. Changes from the previous cycle that were approved for the 2020-2024 BGSS included:

- The archery elk and deer season start date was pushed back from opening the last Saturday in August to opening September 2nd.
 - For archery elk, unlimited either-sex, antlered, and antlerless archery elk licenses were made available in certain units. Meanwhile, either-sex and sex-specified archery elk licenses could be limited geographically to meet biological or social management objectives.
- For the regular rifle seasons for deer and elk:
 - The break between the 1st and 2nd season was extended from 2 days to 9 days, and the break between the 3rd and 4th season was extended from 2 days to 4 days.
 - To accommodate the longer breaks, the 3rd season was shortened from 9 days to 7 days; the 1st, 2nd, and 4th season lengths stayed the same.
 - The total number of consecutive days, including all regular rifle seasons and breaks, increased from 37 days to 44 days.
- The antlerless moose rifle season was kept at a 14-day season, with fixed dates of October 1-14th, annually, but the option of moving this season to run concurrent with the regular rifle deer and elk seasons was also approved when necessary to meet management objectives for moose.
- Antlered or either-sex moose licenses were converted to “season choice” licenses, valid for all “manner of take” seasons, provided the license is unfilled and the appropriate method of take is used. Season choice licenses are those that allow hunting in any or all of the seasons (archery, muzzleloader and/or rifle and associated methods) in specified units with the correct method of take until the license is filled.
- The pronghorn rifle season was extended from 7 days to 9 days, and an optional late pronghorn rifle season was added.
- Bear hunting opportunities were expanded in units where the bear population management strategy is to reduce or suppress by offering “add-on” bear licenses for big game hunters. In addition, all Private Land Only (PLO) licenses were made over-the-counter (OTC), and the price for a bear license was reduced.
- Youth hunters with unfilled limited doe or either-sex pronghorn licenses were permitted to hunt designated late pronghorn doe seasons statewide after the original licensed season had closed.

2025-2029 BGSS Process

To assess hunters' views on big game hunting in Colorado to inform the 2025-2029 BGSS process, CPW conducted a Big Game Attitude Survey in 2021, which was completed by 2,180 hunters total. This survey informed our selection of topics for the upcoming BGSS. Results showed that resident and nonresident hunters' attitudes about big game season structure were somewhat similar to each other. The majority of survey respondents would prefer to keep the seasons as they are currently (61% resident v. 72% nonresident) but staff recommends reassessing hunter preference between the current and prior BGSS. There was no clear consensus regarding limiting over-the-counter licenses between resident and nonresident hunters.

Recommended 2025-2029 BGSS Topics

The following table shows potential topics to discuss during the 2025-2029 BGSS planning process as proposed by CPW staff based on input received about the current BGSS. CPW would like guidance from the Commission to approve moving forward with this list of topics for public and stakeholder engagement.

Category	Topics
Over-the-Counter (OTC) Licenses	OTC Archery Elk
	OTC Rifle Elk
Rifle Seasons Dates and Length	Hunter preference of the dates and length of deer and elk regular and late rifle seasons
	Possibility of adding deer licenses for first rifle season
	Flexibility requested in BGSS for the option to create a second rifle pronghorn season (Northeast Region)
Early Seasons Dates and Length	Hunter preference of the dates and length of early seasons for deer and elk
Weighted-Point Draw Process Modification	<p>Shift from a weighted-point draw system to a bonus points draw system ("names in the hat" approach)</p> <p>Consider modification of the new bonus-point draw system to improve the likelihood of high-point holders to draw a sheep, goat, or moose tag</p>

Recommended Administrative Changes (<i>gain approval during BGSS to visit these topics as-needed through issue papers or BGSS language revisions</i>)	
PLO Black Bear Season	Clarify intention of Section XI. OO. Unlimited OTC PLO bear licenses should be optional for Data Analysis Units with a Stable Bear Management Objective.
Mountain Lion	Clean-up of 2020-2024 BGSS Section X.II.
Regional Issues	Regional Issues Identified To Date: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Flexibility requested in BGSS for the option to make cow moose season choice (NW and NE Regions) · Flexibility requested in BGSS to allow for opting out of the fourth rifle seasonal for elk

The following topics will not be covered during this process because they are being addressed through a separate process:

- License allocation among residents and non-residents
- Preference point banking and group point averaging

Regarding the BGSS timeframe, CPW staff sees advantages to extending the BGSS assessment period from every 5 years to 7 years. BGSS is a resource intensive process that requires a large number of staff to implement. Extending BGSS to a 7-year cycle would better align with staff workloads, reduce overlap with other major processes like the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), and provide additional time to evaluate effects of any changes made to BGSS. We recommend this topic be considered by the Commission during this BGSS process.

Proposed Public Outreach Approach for 2025-2029 BGSS

Over the years, the Commission and CPW staff have used a variety of methods to inform the interested public about BGSS and to gather input on key issues. These activities have included media outreach, public meetings, targeted stakeholder briefings, quantitative surveys, telephone town halls, and focus groups.

The breadth of outreach efforts has generally been driven by the scope of each planning process. CPW proposes extensive public engagement for 2025-2029 BGSS with a narrowly focused list of discussion topics. The public outreach process will be divided into two phases.

Stage One:

Stage One will focus on 1) using the Engage CPW BGSS webpage to gather public input on the BGSS and 2) targeted stakeholder briefings. The Engage CPW webpage is a new method that was not available during the last BGSS planning process; this webpage will allow CPW to use various tools, such as moderated comment forums and comment forms, to collect valuable input from big game hunters.

Meeting opportunities to discuss BGSS include regularly scheduled hunting organization meetings across the state, including at the Sportsperson’s Roundtable and the regional sportsperson’s caucuses. CPW will also engage in various media outreach efforts to promote public engagement for the 2025-2029 BGSS, including news releases, social media posts, and newsletters.

Stage Two:

Stage Two will focus on hosting public meetings throughout the State to help inform the 2025-2029 BGSS. In-person and virtual meeting opportunities will be offered.

A summary of these outreach efforts will be shared with the Commission during the August 2023 Commission meeting, with a full report provided in fall 2023.

Based on the hunter input gathered and guidance from the Commission, CPW staff will develop BGSS recommendations in early 2024. Those recommendations will be brought forward to the Commission in May 2024 and final approval slated for June 2024. A graphic below shows the overall BGSS timeline and its phases.

Big Game Season Structure Timeline

