

C O L O R A D O P A R K S & W I L D L I F E

2025-2029 Big Game Season Structure

SUMMARY REPORT OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT • AUGUST 2023



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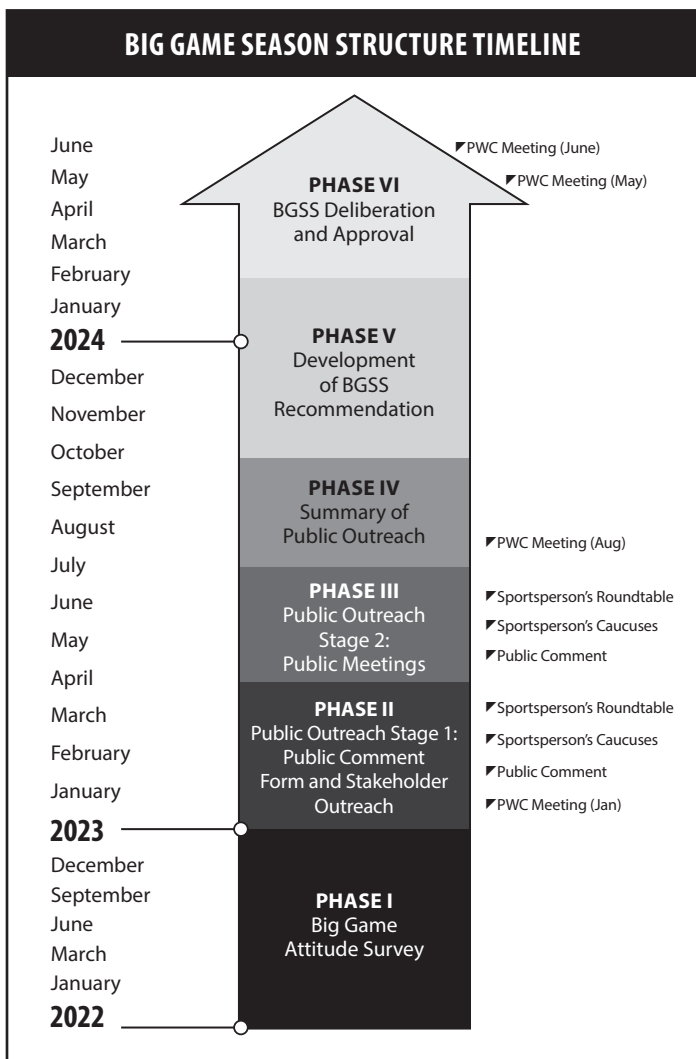


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I. Executive Summary

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) currently uses a five-year Big Game Season Structure (BGSS) as a framework to guide annual big game hunting regulations, primarily through setting the timing, length, and number of seasons for hunting big game in the state. The current BGSS planning horizon will expire at the end of 2024, and the agency has prioritized a publicly-driven process to generate an updated BGSS framework for the time period of 2025-2029. This document describes the public involvement activities that have taken place to date to ensure that interested members of the public, stakeholders, CPW staff, and decision-makers are informed about the BGSS process and have had adequate opportunities to provide their input.

The public outreach process for the 2025-2029 BGSS was divided into two stages. Stage One focused on gathering public input on the BGSS via an online comment form on the [Big Game Season Structure Engage CPW webpage](#) and targeted stakeholder briefings. Stage Two focused on hosting in-person meetings in each region of the state as well as two virtual meetings. During these meetings, CPW staff engaged with sportspersons about the list of BGSS topics presented to the Parks and Wildlife Commission (the Commission) and approved in January 2023. Through these avenues, staff received input from over 640 respondents and interacted with just over 300 public meeting attendees.



Major findings from Stage One and Stage Two include the following:

- **Potential Limitation for Over-the-Counter (OTC) Rifle and Archery Elk Licenses**
Many resident hunters feel that the opportunity to purchase an OTC elk rifle or archery license should only be made available to residents. Most nonresident hunters prefer the status quo, which gives nonresident hunters the same OTC opportunity as residents. Many hunters, both residents and nonresidents, expressed concern over crowding and lack of opportunity as rationales for limiting OTC in some form.
- **Potential Adjustment of Season Structure for Regular Rifle Seasons**
The majority of the public generally seem satisfied with the current regular rifle seasons. Those who want changes to the current seasons cited hunting too late in the year (potentially leaving animals too vulnerable) and the overlap with the Thanksgiving holiday as the primary reasons to adjust the seasons.
- **Potential Adjustment of Season Structure for Early Seasons (Archery and Muzzleloader)**
The public is generally content with the current structure for early seasons and feel that no changes are needed. For those who believe that changes are necessary, several commenters suggested removing the overlap between the archery and muzzleloader seasons entirely to decrease crowding from too many hunters in the field at the same time. While some members of the public expressed concern about safety issues, most were focused on generally reducing overcrowding in an effort to increase hunting opportunity in these seasons.
- **Potential Addition of First Rifle Deer Season**
There is general opposition across all regions to the addition of a first rifle deer season. Members of the public cited biological concerns and the overlap with elk rifle seasons as the primary rationales for not supporting this additional season.
- **Potential Addition of Second Pronghorn Season**
Most members of the public generally supported the addition of a second pronghorn season or were ambivalent due to the lack of local impacts in certain regions. Those who supported this additional season believe it would help reduce crowding/hunting pressure on the opening day/first weekend of the pronghorn season and increase opportunity. Those who opposed this additional season cited concerns over the belief that hunters are hunting too late in the year already or that opening day already pushes pronghorn onto private land.
- **Potential Change from a 5-year Season Structure to a Longer Season Structure**
Members of the public generally advocated for maintaining the 5-year season structure due to the increased flexibility and adaptability associated with a 5-year season structure.

An internal BGSS Working Group will analyze and use the public feedback received to help develop alternatives and recommendations for the 2025-2029 BGSS. These alternatives will be presented to the Commission in the spring of 2024 for final consideration and approval.

II. Background

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 ungulate herds. BGSS defines a framework for achieving those objectives through hunting seasons for different species and methods. These two processes inform the allocation of licenses 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 a broad range of hunting experiences to fit the varied preferences of different hunters. CPW aims to continue to improve upon the existing structure, and public input is an essential part of that goal.

Prior to initiation of the 2025-2029 BGSS process, CPW conducted a Big Game Attitude Survey (BGAS) in 2021 to assess hunters' views on big game hunting in Colorado. The BGAS was completed by 2,183 hunters total (evenly split between residents and nonresidents). CPW considers the BGAS (which is a random sample survey) one of our strongest datasets to rely on regarding big game hunting season structures. The BGAS helped to inform the BGSS Working Group's selection of topics for the 2025-2029 BGSS. Some notable results from the BGAS that fed into BGSS topics include the following:

- ▶ The majority of survey respondents would prefer to keep the big game hunting seasons as they are currently (61% resident v. 72% nonresident).
- ▶ There was no clear consensus regarding limiting OTC elk licenses between resident and nonresident hunters.
- ▶ About 71% of all respondents are not at all or only somewhat concerned about hunter safety during the overlapping archery and muzzleloader seasons.



¹ It is important to note that several other topics important to Colorado hunters, including license allocation and preference points, were not included in this BGSS process, as these topics were addressed separately per Commission direction.

The 2025-2029 BGSS process was officially initiated in the fall of 2022. CPW staff established an internal BGSS Working Group that included representatives from every region of the state and relevant sections within CPW (Policy and Planning, Terrestrial, etc.) to help guide this process. During the fall of 2022, the BGSS Working Group undertook an internal scoping effort to finalize the primary BGSS issues and discussion topics that would help frame the public outreach process for the 2025-2029 BGSS (building on the big game hunting topics analyzed in the BGAS). At its January 2023 meeting, the Commission agreed to include all staff-recommended [discussion topics and the corresponding public outreach strategy](#) in the 2025-2029 BGSS process. The primary discussion topics that were approved by the Commission included¹:

- ▶ **A Strong Focus on OTC**
Exploring options to limit either or both resident and nonresident OTC elk rifle and/or archery licenses to address crowding and resident opportunity concerns.
- ▶ **Early Season Dates and Length for Archery and Muzzleloader**
Focusing on hunter preference of the dates and length of early seasons for deer and elk between the current BGSS (2020-2024) and previous BGSS (2015-2019).
- ▶ **Rifle Season Dates and Length for Deer and Elk**
Focusing on hunter preference of the dates and length of deer and elk regular and late rifle seasons between the current BGSS (2020-2024) and other possible structures, and the possibility of adding deer licenses for the first rifle season.
- ▶ **Pronghorn**
Potentially increasing hunting opportunity through mechanisms such as adding a second regular rifle buck and doe pronghorn season.
- ▶ **Weighted-point Draw System**
Considering options for modification to the weighted-point draw system in a way that would increase the likelihood that hunters with high numbers of weighted-points are able to draw a bighorn sheep, mountain goat, or moose license. **Note: This topic will be handled via a separate process in order to allow for adequate consideration.*
- ▶ **Administrative Topics**
Aiming to gain approval during BGSS to visit certain administrative topics as-needed through issue papers or BGSS language revisions (e.g., private-land-only (PLO) black bear season, fall mountain lion season, and regional issues). **Note: This topic was not discussed during the public outreach process, as these issues will be handled internally by CPW staff.*

As a result of this guidance from the Commission, CPW officially launched public outreach efforts in the spring of 2023 to inform the public and interested stakeholders about the upcoming BGSS and to collect input from the public on the discussion topics listed above and how the current hunting season structure could be improved.

Following the review of outcomes from the public outreach process, the BGSS Working Group will develop alternatives and recommendations for the 2025-2029 BGSS. These alternatives and recommendations will be presented to the Commission in the spring of 2024. In order to inform regulation setting for the 2024 seasons, the Commission will need to approve the 2025-2029 BGSS by the fall of 2024 at the latest.

² E.g., cow moose season choice in Northwest and Northeast Regions, allow for opting out of the fourth rifle season for elk.

III. Process Summary

To inform the alternatives and recommendations for the 2025-2029 BGSS, CPW divided the public outreach process into two stages. Stage One focused on 1) gathering public input on the BGSS via an online comment form on the [Big Game Season Structure Engage CPW webpage](#) and 2) conducting targeted stakeholder briefings.

Stage Two focused on hosting in-person public meetings in each region the state as well as multiple virtual meetings to collect input from members of the public on the list of BGSS topics. These meetings occurred in the summer of 2023 from mid-May through the end of June. CPW staff (BGSS Working Group members with extensive support from regional staff) hosted 17 in-person meetings and 2 virtual meetings.

Public Outreach Stage One

CPW used multiple tools to share information on the BGSS process with the public and to collect public input during Stage One of the public outreach process. CPW staff discussed the upcoming BGSS, including possible changes, at several stakeholder meetings in early 2023, including at the Colorado Sportsperson’s Roundtable and Regional Sportsperson’s Caucuses. Area Wildlife Managers shared information about the BGSS process through their regional offices as well.

The largest component of staff’s public outreach effort during Stage One was an online public comment form posted on the [Big Game Season Structure Engage CPW webpage](#).³ Based on the list of BGSS discussion topics developed during the internal scoping process, CPW staff posted an online comment form (see Appendix A) to collect preliminary public feedback on these topics. This comment form was available for four weeks, from February 15 through March 15, 2023. Staff promoted this comment form at Regional Sportsperson’s Caucuses, as well as on our website, through social media postings, and via a statewide press release. At the close of the comment period, CPW received 1,035 completed comment forms from members of the public. A summary of the findings from this comment form is located in Section IV.

Public Outreach Stage Two

Public Meetings

Stage Two of the 2025-2029 BGSS public outreach process focused on in-person meetings held throughout the state as well as several virtual meetings. These meetings were designed to give members of the public an opportunity to learn about the issues addressed by the BGSS process, to speak with experienced staff, and to have their questions asked and opinions considered on the specific BGSS topics. In addition, these public meetings offered staff an opportunity to share updates on the BGSS process and to better understand hunters’ perspectives on the current BGSS, opinions on possible changes for the 2025-2029 BGSS, and ideas for season dates and timing.

CPW organized and hosted 17 in-person and 2 virtual BGSS public meetings that covered every region across the state. Members of the public had 3-4 opportunities per region to attend an in-person meeting; see Table 1 for a full list of public meeting locations.

³ Engage CPW is Colorado Parks and Wildlife’s public engagement website, where you can share your thoughts, ideas, and feedback with CPW on a range of important topics. Engage CPW was first developed and utilized by CPW in 2022.

Table 1: 2025-2029 BGSS Public Meeting Locations and Participant Counts

TABLE 1	
Public Meeting Location	# Of Participants
Northwest Region	Total: 72
Steamboat Springs	4
Kremmling	16
Grand Junction	18
Glenwood Springs	9
Eagle	8
Meeker	17
Southwest Region	Total: 56
Durango	15
Montrose	14
Monte Vista	15
Gunnison	12
Southeast Region	Total: 45
Colorado Springs	11
Walsenburg	10
Las Animas	5
Salida	19
Northeast Region	Total: 45
Denver	14
Loveland	30
Sterling	1
Virtual	Total: 85
Virtual Meeting 1	26
Virtual Meeting 2	59
TOTAL	Total: 303

In total, 218 people attended the in-person public meetings, and 85 people attended the virtual meetings, for a total of 303 public meeting attendees. Polling data on several of the BGSS topics was captured at these meetings through interactive posters, worksheets, and digital polling (this polling data was collected and stored in an online database and carefully reviewed by the BGSS Working Group; see Section IV and Appendix B for results and findings on these polling questions).

The public meetings were a mix of open house and town hall formats. Open house meetings consisted of several “stations” where members of the public could learn more about specific BGSS topics, ask questions, and give verbal feedback directly to staff. Each station had a different interactive activity (polling questions or worksheets) that provided an opportunity for attendees to provide input on the BGSS topics (for example, members of the public could fill out worksheets with their preferred season structure dates for regular rifle seasons).

Town hall meetings consisted of a PowerPoint presentation that incorporated live interactive digital polling via smartphones and devices to collect input from attendees on each of the BGSS topics. For those unable to access digital polling during meetings, participants completed hard copies of the same polling questions. Attendees also had an opportunity to ask questions and provide verbal feedback to staff during moderated open discussions at the town hall meetings.

Further, members of the public could submit open-ended comments on the 2025-2029 BGSS topics through hard copy comment forms at in-person meetings or via a digital guestbook tool on CPW's [Big Game Season Structure Engage CPW webpage](#). During the Stage Two public comment period (from May 11 – June 30, 2023), CPW received 216 guestbook tool entries on the [Big Game Season Structure Engage CPW webpage](#). Additionally, the same public meeting polling questions were posted on the [Big Game Season Structure Engage CPW webpage](#) as a survey for members of the public who were unable to attend any of the meetings. In total, staff received input from over 640 members of the public through these various methods during Stage 2 of the public outreach period.

Public Outreach Materials

To help inform the public on opportunities to provide their input and how to get involved during various phases of the BGSS process, staff developed a variety of informational materials, including online press releases and social media blurbs, to extensively advertise the meetings across multiple online platforms. Additionally, staff posted hard-copy materials around various CPW offices to advertise public meeting dates/times and opportunities for public involvement. Staff advertised the meetings several weeks in advance of the first meeting, and again halfway through the public meetings in an effort to bolster attendance at the meetings.

Websites

Throughout the BGSS public outreach process, the [CPW website](#) included important information and dates on the 2025-2029 BGSS public outreach process, and also featured a prominent link to the [Big Game Season Structure Engage CPW webpage](#), where members of the public could learn about how to get involved in the process as well as access FAQs and in-depth BGSS resource materials.



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IV. Public Input Summary and Findings

The following sections break down the findings and results from the public input collected during Stage One and Two of the public outreach process for the 2025-2029 BGSS. In addition to the main BGSS topics listed below, members of the public also provided limited input on various other hunting-related topics that fell outside the scope of this BGSS process. These topics are listed in **Appendix C**.

Potential Limitation for Over-the-Counter Rifle and Archery Elk Licenses

The following table summarizes the results from the quantitative data collected from the Stage One BGSS comment form and Stage Two BGSS public meeting polling questions.

RESULTS	
Stage One BGSS Comment Form	
<p>1035 TOTAL RESPONDENTS ~80% Resident ~20% Non Resident</p>	<p>Regarding the potential limitation of OTC archery elk and OTC rifle elk, the majority of residents prefer maximizing hunting opportunities for residents, while the majority of nonresidents prefer the option(s) that maximize hunting opportunities for nonresidents the most.</p>
Stage Two BGSS Public Meeting Polling Questions ⁴	
<p>642 TOTAL RESPONDENTS ~88% Resident ~12% Non Resident</p>	<p>Based on the BGSS public meeting polling questions, when asked if OTC elk licenses (rifle and archery) should be limited, a majority of respondents (57%) would support limiting both OTC rifle and archery licenses. 19% of respondents prefer keeping OTC opportunities available, 14% would limit just rifle OTC licenses, and 10% would limit just archery OTC licenses.</p>
<p>68% OF RESPONDENTS</p>	<p>When asked if OTC licenses that are limited should go through the draw (with applicable residency allocation) or remain available as OTC but with a cap on the number of OTC licenses sold, a strong majority of respondents (68%) prefer making limited OTC licenses available through the draw only.</p>
<p>55% OF RESPONDENTS</p>	<p>When asked to choose between alternatives for OTC archery elk licenses, a slight majority (55%) support limiting OTC elk archery licenses statewide only for nonresidents, while 26% support statewide limitation for nonresidents and residents. Fewer respondents supported the status quo alternative (15%) and very few people (4%) supported making OTC archery elk licenses available for private land only.</p>
<p>50% OF RESPONDENTS</p>	<p>Similarly, when asked to choose between alternatives for OTC rifle elk licenses, about half of respondents (50%) support limiting OTC rifle elk licenses statewide only for nonresidents, while 30% support statewide limitation for nonresidents and residents. 16% of respondents supported the status quo alternative and only 4% supported making OTC rifle elk licenses available for private land only.</p>

The following section outlines the key takeaways based on comment form and polling question results, as well as open-ended discussions held at the in-person BGSS meetings and input collected from the Engage CPW open-ended guestbook tool.

DISCUSSION AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

Based on the survey and polling results across Stage One and Two of the BGSS public engagement, many resident hunters feel that the opportunity to purchase an OTC elk rifle or archery license should only be made available to residents. In the opinion of many resident hunters, OTC licenses should be limited for nonresidents statewide, whom they feel should instead apply through the draw process. Meanwhile, most nonresident hunters prefer the status quo, which gives nonresident hunters the same OTC opportunity as residents.

The survey and polling question results largely mirror the sentiments expressed during moderated open discussions at the public meetings and through the Engage CPW guestbook tool. Limiting OTC elk licenses for nonresidents was the most recurring topic on Engage CPW, with 61 commenters (out of 221 total) stating that OTC licenses for nonresidents should either be limited through the draw or capped. Members of the public often cited the importance of OTC licenses for residents as the primary reason to not limit OTC licenses for residents (17 comments on Engage CPW). Many commenters expressed that OTC licenses provide a critical opportunity for resident hunters to participate in hunting in Colorado and to provide a sustainable source of food for their families. Several respondents emphasized that limiting OTC licenses may adversely impact families with young children who hunt with OTC licenses.

However, there are a wide variety of opinions on this topic, which is reinforced in the quantitative and qualitative data captured on potential OTC limitation. Several respondents and public meeting participants, including residents, feel that OTC licenses should be limited for both nonresidents and residents (14 comments on Engage CPW). Resident hunters who support limiting OTC licenses for all often referenced excessive crowding during OTC season as the primary justification to limit licenses. However, these commenters also acknowledged that limiting OTC licenses will decrease hunting opportunity and may negatively impact hunter retention rates.

The status quo OTC alternative, which would leave OTC elk rifle and archery licenses available in unlimited numbers in select units for both residents and nonresidents, generally has less support than the alternatives enforcing some form of statewide limitation. Other alternatives presented, such as limiting OTC licenses to private land, and suggestions made, like offering OTC licenses to youth only, were discussed during the public meetings, but are not as widely supported by the public as either a statewide limitation for nonresidents or all hunters, or the status quo alternative.

⁴ Includes results from both the polling questions posed during the public meetings as well as polling questions via the BGSS Engage CPW webpage.

Potential Adjustment of Season Structure for Regular Rifle Seasons

The following table summarizes the results from the quantitative data collected from the Stage One BGSS comment form and Stage Two BGSS open house worksheets. To encourage more productive and creative discussions on this topic, staff decided not to ask discrete polling questions on this topic during the Stage Two BGSS public meetings. Staff instead opted to provide members of the public with worksheets to fill in their preferred regular rifle season structures at the open house meetings and facilitated open-ended discussions to collect input on this topic at the town hall meetings.

RESULTS	
Stage One BGSS Comment Form	
<p>1035 TOTAL RESPONDENTS ~80% Resident ~20% Non Resident</p>	<p>When asked about the rifle season date structure for deer and elk, over half of respondents preferred either the previous (~30%) or current BGSS (~30%). The remainder were split between the two options below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~20% preferred the current (2020-2024) BGSS Date Structure, but returning to a 9-day 3rd rifle season that includes two weekends (shortens the break between the 3rd and 4th rifle seasons from 4 days to 2 days) OR • ~20% preferred New Alternative: Starting the 1st rifle season on the 2nd Saturday in October.
Stage Two Open House Worksheet	
<p>49 TOTAL RESPONDENTS 100% Resident</p>	<p>The majority of the public who filled out the open house worksheets advocated for moving the rifle seasons up earlier (12 comments), followed by extending the rifle season dates (9 comments). A small number of commenters requested shortening the rifle season dates (2 comments) or moving the rifle season dates back further (1 comment).</p>



The following section outlines the key takeaways based on comment form results and open house worksheets, as well as open-ended discussions held at the in-person BGSS meetings and input collected from the Engage CPW open-ended guestbook tool.

DISCUSSION AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

For the potential adjustment of the season structure for regular rifle seasons, public meeting attendees generally seem satisfied with the current regular rifle seasons for the as they believe that:

- The longer breaks between seasons allow for the animals to rest/recover, resulting in better quality hunts and increased hunting opportunity.
- The longer breaks between seasons also benefit CPW staff by allowing them to better manage field staffing needs.
- Maintaining the current season structure leads to increased reliability and predictability for planning hunting trips.
- For some hunters, having a rifle season overlap with Thanksgiving can be beneficial.

However, opinions varied on this topic during the public meetings, as other members of the public advocated for a change to the current rifle season structure. These members of the public feel that the current season structure dates are too late in the year, leaving animals too vulnerable (e.g., current season dates are potentially pushing on the third season pre-rut bucks and fourth season bucks in the rut) and conflicting with the Thanksgiving holiday. Suggestions to address these issues by adjusting the rifle season dates included the following:

- Allow for two full weekends in the second season.
- Allow for local flexibility for the fourth rifle elk season.
- Begin the rifle seasons with a hard start date of October 10th, with a total of 5 5-day rifle seasons with a 5-day break between each season (this assumes most hunters are finished with their hunt by day 5, and shortening the seasons would allow CPW to retain breaks between the seasons without a detriment to hunters).

The Engage CPW comments and worksheet results generally mirror the public meeting feedback to either 1) maintain the current BGSS season dates for regular rifle seasons or 2) move the seasons earlier (to be more similar to the previous BGSS). Some people (but far fewer) advocated for extending the seasons in some way.

Members of the public on Engage CPW noted that the primary motivation for moving the rifle seasons (particularly the third and fourth rifle seasons) earlier in the season would be to remove the overlap with the Thanksgiving holiday. Other comments included the following suggestions:

- Move the season dates earlier, as overlapping elk and deer second and third seasons cause hunter congestion and crowding (separate elk and deer seasons if possible).
- Move season dates earlier, as later dates are resulting in the overharvest of mature mule deer bucks (deer hunting at the peak of the rut, versus the beginning of the rut, is added stress on the animals and may cause a decline in the quality of game). Members of the public expressed the belief that animals are also more vulnerable in their winter range later in the season.
- Move the season dates (especially for the fourth season) earlier, due to inaccessibility of some terrain due to road closures from snow.
- Move the later season dates back up (to the previous BGSS dates), as the later dates favor private landowners and outfitters who guide on private land over public land hunters, and exacerbate the difficulty in meeting cow elk harvest quotas needed to limit populations in some areas.
- Add two days back to the third rifle season to allow for increased hunting opportunity.

Potential Adjustment of Season Structure for Early Seasons (Archery and Muzzleloader)

The following section summarizes the results from the quantitative data collected from the Stage One BGSS comment form and Stage Two open house worksheets. To encourage more productive and creative discussions on this topic, staff decided not to ask discrete polling questions on this topic during the Stage Two BGSS public meetings. Staff instead opted to provide members of the public with worksheets to select their preferred season structure for archery and muzzleloader seasons at the open house meetings and facilitated open-ended discussions to collect input on this topic at the town hall meetings.

RESULTS	
Stage One BGSS Comment Form	
<p>1035 TOTAL RESPONDENTS ~80% Resident ~20% Non Resident</p>	<p>When asked their preference between the previous (2015-2019) BGSS date structure versus the current (2020-2024) BGSS date structure for early seasons (archery and muzzleloader) for deer and elk, the current BGSS date structure is the preference for 60% of respondents.</p>
Stage Two Open House Worksheet	
<p>68 TOTAL RESPONDENTS 100% Resident</p>	<p>Based on the BGSS open house worksheets, about 67% of respondents prefer the current BGSS season structure for archery/ muzzleloader, while the remaining 33% prefer the previous BGSS season structure.</p>



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DISCUSSION AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

Overall, many people are content with the current structure for early seasons and feel that no changes are needed. For those who do not prefer the current structure and believe that changes are necessary, several commenters suggested removing the overlap between the archery and muzzleloader seasons entirely to decrease crowding from too many hunters in the field at the same time.

Other common suggestions for adjusting the early seasons included:

- Transitioning back to the previous BGSS (start the archery season in August to allow for two full weekends before muzzleloader season).
- Shortening the archery season to allow for an earlier rifle season.
- Adding a December archery elk season.
- Moving all seasons back one week and replacing muzzleloader with first rifle.

Based on the Engage CPW guestbook tool results, members of the public expressed similar sentiments to those shared during the open house and town hall meetings. The majority of comments related to this topic advocated for either adjusting the seasons to increase opportunity or removing the archery/muzzleloader overlap and creating separate seasons by:

- Moving muzzleloader to its own season (either to the first week of October after archery season is over or to the last week of September) to improve hunting opportunity for archery hunters, reduce crowding, and give muzzleloader hunters ample opportunity at bugling and post-rutting bulls.
- Moving archery deer season before archery elk season (to mid to late August).
- Moving archery elk season to the last week of August to encourage youth hunter participation.

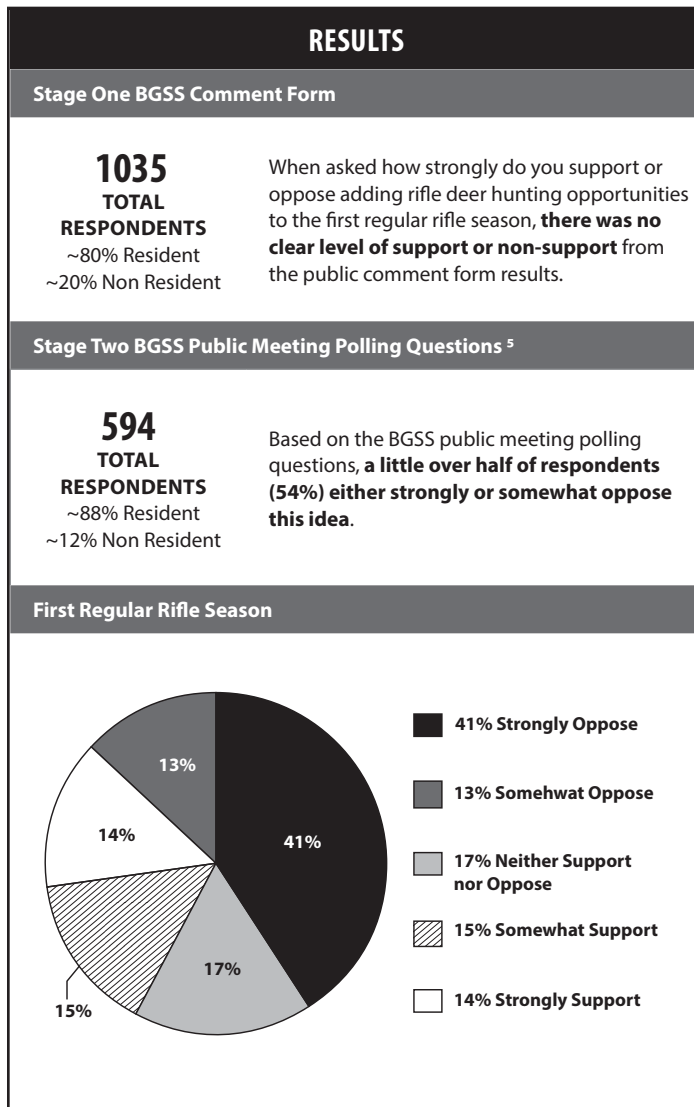
25 members of the public using the Engage CPW guestbook tool and worksheets provided at the public meetings requested that CPW transition back to the previous BGSS for archery/muzzleloader seasons, while 48 advocated for the current BGSS. While some members of the public who requested removing the overlap between the seasons cited safety concerns (from overcrowding), most members of the public were not as concerned about safety issues, and instead were focused on generally reducing overcrowding in an effort to increase hunting opportunity in these seasons. Other suggestions related to archery/muzzleloader brought up in Engage CPW comments included the following:

- Moving the muzzleloader season to the first week of archery season or adding a second week to the muzzleloader season and starting it with the first rifle season.
- Extending archery dates/allowing unfilled archery tags to be filled through the rifle season.
- Reducing the muzzleloader season to a 7-day season.
- Setting a hard start date for the muzzleloader season.



Potential Addition of First Rifle Deer Season

The following section summarizes the results from the quantitative data collected from the Stage One BGSS comment form and Stage Two BGSS public meeting polling questions.



The following section outlines the key takeaways based on comment form and polling question results, as well as open-ended discussions held at the in-person BGSS meetings and input collected from the Engage CPW open-ended guestbook tool.

DISCUSSION AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

There is general opposition across all regions in the state to the addition of a first rifle deer season, with very limited support for this idea, based on public meeting polling results and discussions.

The primary concern from the public associated with the addition of this season is that this new season would overlap with the elk rifle seasons, potentially negatively impacting the success rates for elk hunters (with more deer hunters in the field) and contributing to overcrowding in units with good deer hunting opportunities. To address this concern, some members of the public suggested that CPW allocate a fairly low number of licenses for this additional season to reduce potential overcrowding between deer rifle and elk rifle hunters.

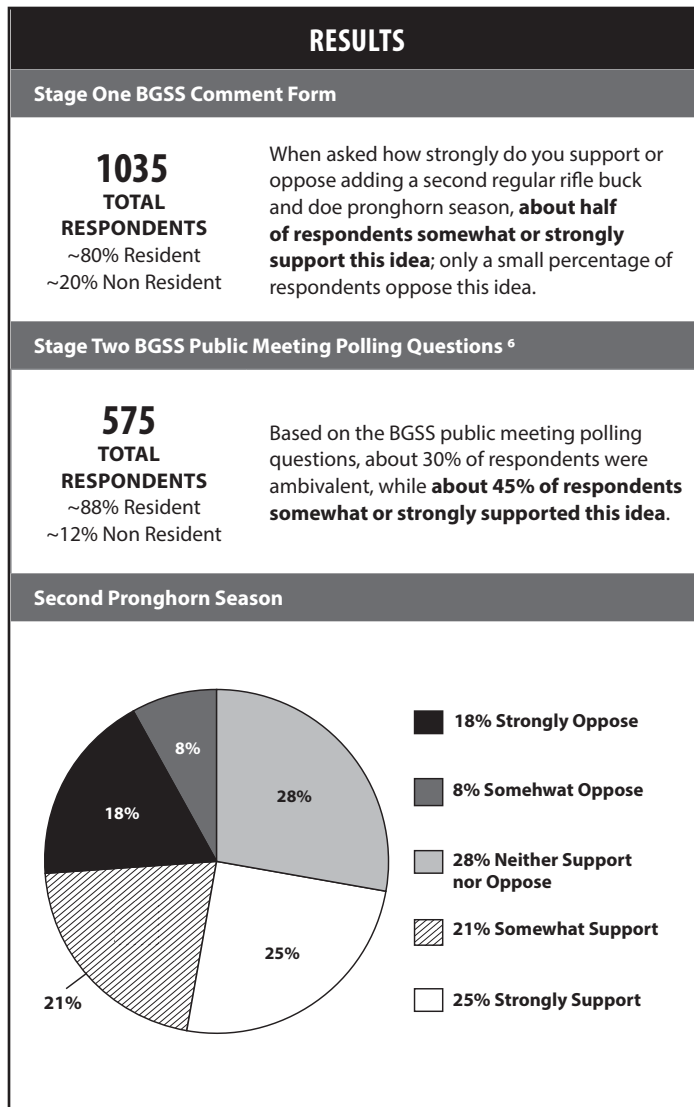
Additionally, several members of the public cited biological concerns as the rationale for not supporting this additional season (harvesting deer too early may result in putting pressure on deer in alpine areas, etc.). Those who did support this additional season generally did so only with the caveat that herd population objectives must support this additional season, especially in light of the severe winter impacts on deer herds in the Northwest Region. Lastly, some members of the public suggested that if this additional season is added, CPW should also limit the later deer season to preserve some of the buck numbers and get a better age class of bucks. Several members of the public questioned whether CPW would increase tags for this additional season; staff clarified that CPW would balance these first season tags with cuts to other seasons (i.e., CPW would not increase the total number of deer tags per DAU unless well over population objectives).



⁵ Includes results from both the polling questions posed during the public meetings as well as polling questions via the BGSS Engage CPW webpage.

Potential Addition of Second Pronghorn Season

The following section summarizes the results from the quantitative data collected from the Stage One BGSS comment form and Stage Two BGSS public meeting polling questions.



The following section outlines the key takeaways based on comment form and polling question results, as well as open-ended discussions held at the in-person BGSS meetings and input collected from the Engage CPW open-ended guestbook tool.

DISCUSSION AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

Public meeting attendees generally supported the addition of a second pronghorn season (~45%) or were ambivalent due to the lack of local impacts in certain regions (~30%).

Based on the Engage CPW guestbook tool results, members of the public expressed similar sentiments to those shared during the open house and town hall meetings. Those who supported this additional season (as long as it is region-specific and not a statewide requirement) believe that this would help reduce crowding/hunting pressure on the opening day/first weekend of the pronghorn season and increase opportunity by having calmer/larger groups of pronghorn. Some members of the public also noted that similar to the proposed first rifle deer season, they would support a second pronghorn season as long as herd population objectives are met. Similar to the proposed first rifle deer season, staff clarified that CPW would balance these second season tags with cuts to the first season (i.e., CPW would not increase the total number of pronghorn tags per DAU unless well over population objectives).

Those who opposed this additional season cited concerns over the belief that hunters are hunting too late in the year already (putting added pressure on pronghorn) or that opening day already pushes pronghorn onto private land (so a second season wouldn't provide much benefit to hunters).

Landowner-specific Outreach

In the Southeast Region, CPW staff met with several landowners in Area 11, who generally supported the addition of a second pronghorn season, and would like to have a higher percentage of licenses dedicated to landowners for all seasons. In the Northeast Region, CPW staff met with several landowners on this topic. Landowners in the northern front range in particular supported the addition of a second pronghorn season to potentially help reduce the amount of trespass occurring on private lands by spreading out hunters more and providing them with additional opportunity to hunt pronghorn.



⁶ Includes results from both the polling questions posed during the public meetings as well as polling questions via the BGSS Engage CPW webpage.

Potential Change from a 5-year Season Structure to a Longer Season Structure

When asked during the virtual and in-person town hall meetings whether they preferred maintaining the current 5-year season structure or transitioning to a longer season structure (e.g., 7 or 10-year season structure) members of the public generally advocated for maintaining the 5-year season structure for the following reasons:

- ▶ Allows for increased flexibility and adaptability for CPW staff to make quicker decisions if changes are needed and to manage new trends.
- ▶ Keeps the public more informed and engaged in the process.
- ▶ Provides a good representation of how decisions have played out/what has happened on the ground to help inform new decisions.

However, some members of the public noted that lengthening the season structure timeframe may allow for better and more robust evaluations of seasons before making new changes. If the 5-year structure were to remain in place, some members of the public advocated for CPW to update or review herd management plans more often instead of lengthening the BGSS timeframe.

SPORTSPERSON'S ROUNDTABLE AND REGIONAL SPORTSPERSON'S CAUCUS MEETINGS INPUT

During the spring/summer of 2023, CPW staff hosted two statewide Colorado Sportsperson's Roundtables in Salida (March 3) and Breckenridge (July 22). The statewide roundtable meetings are attended by hunters from around the state who are heavily engaged with their local sportsperson communities. During the March 3 Roundtable, staff provided attendees with an update on the BGSS process, discussed the BGSS topics to be considered, and accepted feedback on the BGSS process from attendees. The July 22 Roundtable provided an opportunity for roundtable members to answer the same polling questions asked at the summer 2023 public meetings, learn about key findings from the public meetings, and compare the perspectives of the Roundtable with the general hunting public.

Additionally, staff hosted Regional Sportsperson's Caucus meetings in each region prior to both statewide roundtable meetings. Regional caucus meetings are hosted in collaboration with local sportsperson delegates and focus on both region-specific issues and statewide topics. Attendees in each region had the opportunity to share feedback on the BGSS process and learn more about how to stay engaged in the process.

There were several key similarities between input from statewide Sportsperson's Roundtable members (as well as Regional Sportsperson's Caucus attendees) and that of the general hunting public. In particular, there was robust discussion at both the roundtable and caucus meetings regarding the potential limitation of OTC elk licenses that generally mirrored the input collected at the public meetings. Although multiple viewpoints were shared at each roundtable and caucus, there was a high level of support for preserving OTC license availability for residents while limiting OTC licenses for nonresidents, either through a cap or by requiring nonresidents to obtain licenses through the draw.

At the July 22 Roundtable meeting, 76% of attendees said to limit both OTC rifle and archery, with 59% preferring a statewide limitation of nonresidents only for archery and 47% preferring a statewide limitation of nonresidents only for rifle. Hunters often cited the increase in participation in OTC seasons and associated crowding as reasons to limit some OTC hunters; however, many residents feel that OTC licenses are a crucial opportunity for resident hunters, particularly for families with children, to stay engaged in hunting. However, similar to the public meetings, while the vast majority of resident hunters on the Roundtable feel that the status quo is no longer preferable, (only 6% advocated for not limiting rifle or archery OTC in some way) many feel that both nonresident and resident OTC licenses should be limited (41% said to limit both resident and nonresident OTC rifle and 18% prefer to limit both resident and nonresident OTC archery).

Other topics with similar input from the Sportsperson's Roundtable and public meetings include season dates and timing for both rifle and early seasons. Roundtable members' satisfaction with the current BGSS rifle seasons is mixed, with several members preferring the current dates and timing compared to previous cycles and others suggesting changes that would either move the seasons earlier (to avoid seasonal road closures, Thanksgiving, etc.) or extend the seasons to provide more opportunity (such as having two weekends included in third rifle season). Similarly, for early seasons, several roundtable members expressed satisfaction with the current dates for archery and muzzleloader, with some members making similar suggestions as earlier public meetings about possibly adjusting muzzleloader dates to avoid archery season or creating two separate archery seasons in the month of September.

Input received from the Sportsperson's Roundtable about the potential second pronghorn season also mirrored input from public meetings, though support from the Roundtable was significantly higher. 91% of roundtable members were either somewhat or strongly supportive of adding a second pronghorn season with no members indicating opposition.

Roundtable members from the Northeast and Southeast Regions, where pronghorn hunting opportunities are prevalent, noted that many people in their local communities are supportive of an additional second pronghorn season.

A notable difference between input received from the Sportsperson's Roundtable and the general hunting public is the possible addition of limited deer hunting opportunities during the first rifle season. Roundtable members voiced significant support for deer hunting opportunities during the first season (71% were either somewhat or strongly supportive of the change) whereas public meeting attendees were generally less supportive (54% were either somewhat or strongly opposed to the change). One roundtable member commented that learning from CPW biologists about the optional nature of the potential first deer season, which could be implemented only in those units where it may help reach herd objectives, led them to change their position and support the potential change after previously opposing the change.

V. Conclusion

Public information is critical to the formulation of the draft alternatives for the 2025-2029 BGSS topics and to demonstrate CPW's transparency and commitment to an open public process. In support of the 2025-2029 BGSS, CPW held an extensive public outreach effort to ensure that interested members of the public, stakeholders, CPW staff, and decision-makers were informed about the BGSS review process and had adequate opportunities to provide their input.

The methods used to collect input and the multiple types of information collected through this process, including in-person and virtual meetings, surveys, polling questions, and online comment forms, offered complementary techniques for better understanding the varied opinions of big game hunters in Colorado. The BGSS Working Group will utilize the information gained during this public outreach process to help develop alternatives for the 2025-2029 BGSS. These alternatives will be presented to the Commission in the spring of 2024 for final consideration and approval.



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Appendix A

Stage One Big Game Season Structure Comment Form (February 15 – March 15, 2023)

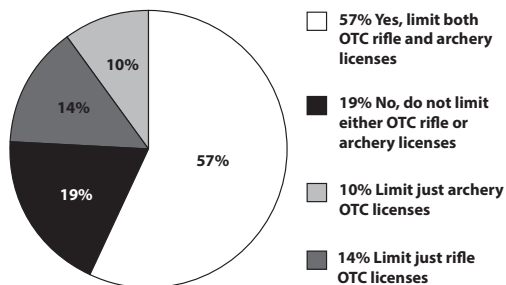
1. Are you a resident of Colorado or a nonresident?
 - a. Resident
 - b. Nonresident
2. Which method of take do you most prefer to use when hunting deer in Colorado?
 - a. Rifle
 - b. Archery
 - c. Muzzleloader
 - d. Not Applicable
3. Which method of take do you most prefer to use when hunting elk in Colorado?
 - a. Rifle
 - b. Archery
 - c. Muzzleloader
 - d. Not Applicable
4. Please rank the following alternatives regarding OTC archery elk licenses, with #1 being your most preferred.
 - a. Option A: OTC archery elk licenses remain OTC for both resident and non-resident hunters (status quo).
 - b. Option B: OTC archery elk licenses remain OTC for resident hunters but switch to Limited for non-resident hunters.
 - c. Option C: OTC archery elk licenses switch to Limited for both resident and non-resident hunters and are affected by the relevant license allocation (currently a 65/35 R/NR split).
 - d. Option D: None of the above.
5. Please rank the following alternatives regarding OTC rifle elk licenses, with #1 being your most preferred.
 - a. Option A: OTC rifle elk licenses remain OTC for both resident and non-resident hunters (status quo).
 - b. Option B: OTC rifle elk licenses remain OTC for resident hunters but switch to Limited for non-resident hunters.
 - c. Option C: OTC rifle elk licenses switch to Limited for both resident and non-resident hunters and are affected by the relevant license allocation (currently a 65/35 R/NR split).
 - d. Option D: None of the above.
6. Please rank the following alternatives for rifle season date structure for deer and elk, with #1 being your most preferred.
 - a. Option A: Previous (2015-2019) BGSS Date Structure.
 - b. Option B: Current (2020-2024) BGSS Date Structure.
 - c. Option C: Current (2020-2024) BGSS Date Structure, but returning to a 9-day 3rd rifle season that includes two weekends (shortens the break between 3rd and 4th rifle seasons from 4 days to 2 days).
 - d. Option D: New Alternative: Starting 1st rifle season on the 2nd Saturday in October.
7. How strongly do you support or oppose adding rifle deer hunting opportunities to the first regular rifle season?
 - a. Strongly Support
 - b. Somewhat Support
 - c. Neither Support nor Oppose
 - d. Somewhat Oppose
 - e. Strongly Oppose
8. How strongly do you support or oppose adding a 2nd regular rifle buck and doe pronghorn season [10/25-10/31 (the last seven days of October)]?
 - a. Strongly Support
 - b. Somewhat Support
 - c. Neither Support nor Oppose
 - d. Somewhat Oppose
 - e. Strongly Oppose
9. Which early season (archery and muzzleloader) date structure do you prefer for deer and elk, with #1 being your most preferred?
 - a. Option A: Previous (2015-2019) BGSS Date Structure
 - b. Option B: Current (2020-2024) BGSS Date Structure
10. Do you currently apply for bighorn sheep, mountain goat, or moose licenses in Colorado?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
11. If yes, how long have you been applying for bighorn sheep, mountain goat, or moose licenses in Colorado?
 - a. 1-4 years
 - b. 5-9 years
 - c. 10-14 years
 - d. 15 or more years
 - e. Not applicable
12. How strongly do you support or oppose changing the weighted-point draw system in a way that would increase the likelihood that hunters with high numbers of weighted-points are able to draw a bighorn sheep, mountain goat, or moose license? (To note: This would reduce the likelihood that hunters with low numbers of weighted-points would draw these licenses).
 - a. Strongly Support
 - b. Somewhat Support
 - c. Neither Support nor Oppose
 - d. Somewhat Oppose
 - e. Strongly Oppose

Appendix B

Stage Two Big Game Season Structure Public Meetings Polling Questions Results (May 11 – June 30, 2023)

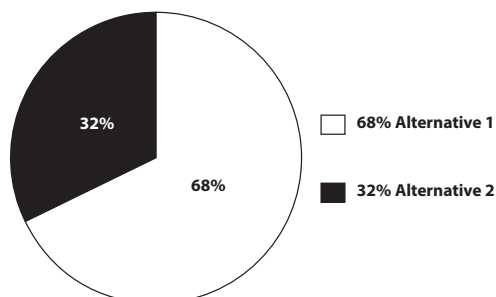
1. Do you think Over-The-Counter (OTC) Elk licenses should be limited?

- a. Yes, limit both OTC rifle and archery licenses
- b. No, do not limit either OTC rifle or archery licenses
- c. Limit just archery OTC licenses
- d. Limit just rifle OTC licenses



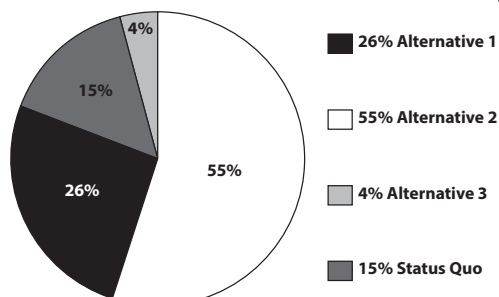
2. If OTC elk licenses are completely limited, which license distribution method do you most prefer?

- a. Alternative 1: Limited licenses issued through the draw with applicable residency allocation rules
- b. Alternative 2: Limited licenses available as OTC with caps, residency allocation rules do not apply



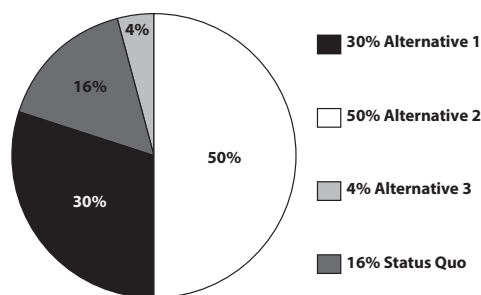
3. Keeping in mind the implications associated with the alternatives to limit OTC archery below, which alternative are you most likely to support?

- a. Alternative 1: statewide limitation; limited for both resident and non-residents; distributed according to relevant license allocation
- b. Alternative 2: statewide limitation; limited for non-residents only
- c. Alternative 3: OTC for private land only
- d. Status Quo: continue to evaluate limiting individual DAUs (CPW has limited 5 DAUs in the last 3 years)

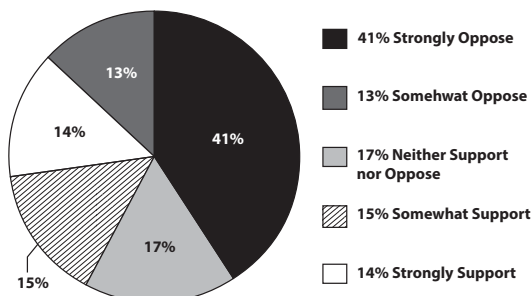


4. Keeping in mind the implications associated with the alternatives to limit OTC rifle below, which alternative are you most likely to support?

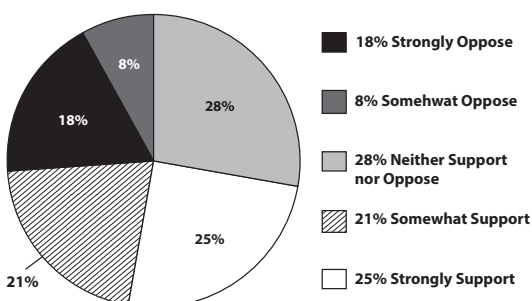
- a. Alternative 1: statewide limitation; limited for both resident and non-residents; distributed according to relevant license allocation
- b. Alternative 2: statewide limitation; limited for non-residents only
- c. Alternative 3: OTC for private land only
- d. Status Quo: continue to evaluate limiting individual DAUs



5. How strongly do you support or oppose adding rifle deer hunting opportunities to the first regular rifle season, which is currently elk only?



6. How strongly do you support or oppose adding a 2nd regular rifle buck and doe pronghorn season [10/25-10/31 (the last seven days of October)]?



Appendix C

Non-BGSS Hunting-related Topics Brought Up During the 2025-2029 BGSS Process

GENERAL COMMENTS

- Prioritize youth and/or older hunters
- Prioritize residents for leftover and reissued licenses
- Generally prioritize resident hunters
- Residents willing to pay more for licenses to compensate for potential revenue loss (from OTC limitation, etc.)
- Hunts are too crowded
- Improve public outreach process/survey questions

BIOLOGICAL FACTORS

- Consider wolf impacts on herds and hunters
- Prioritize herd health
- Consider severe winter weather impacts

LICENSE DRAW/LICENSE ALLOCATION PREFERENCE POINTS

- Reduce nonresident license allocation
- Difficulty drawing licenses
- Restructure preference point system
- More or all licenses should use up preference points



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