

Concise Explanatory Statement

Hunter Orange, Multi-season, and Reduced Rate Combo Elk License

WAC 220-55-174 Reduced rate combination elk general licenses

Written Comments Received During Official Comment Period:

WDFW Summary of Comments:

WDFW received 66 comments on this proposed rule change during the official comment period. They were varied responses with 20% who support the proposed change, 51% who did not support the proposed change and 29% who were outside the scope. When the comments that were out of scope are removed, those that support the proposed change are 28% and those opposed are 72%.

Supporting Comments:

Most supporting comments were of a general nature. Some requested that the permit levels be decreased and some asked for the levels to stay the same. One supporter noted that these damage hunts are used to help landowners, so supported a reduced fee associated with providing a service. One requested WDFW look at the age you become an “Adult” in regards to purchasing licenses.

Opposing and Other Comments:

Of those opposed, some of the comments identified that the master hunters get more opportunities than the normal hunter and should not be given any more. There were also many general statements of opposition. A couple respondents indicated that there should be fewer master hunter hunts and more general season hunts.

Of those that were not in scope, cost of licenses was brought up for all hunters several times. A few commenters identified that youth and/or the disabled should be allowed to hunt on the depredation hunts. A couple comments were based on abolishing the master hunter program as a whole.

Direction and Rationale:

Master hunters help both the landowner and the Department of Fish and Wildlife by providing hunting pressure in situations where deer or elk are damaging commercial crops. Having the second tag also provides more accurate harvest estimates, which helps the Department manage the wildlife conflict program. WAC 220-55-174 was modified in 2014 to provide a discounted

fee for second elk tags associated with Master Hunter special permit hunts. The current proposal will provide the reduced fee for second elk tags associated with general Master Hunter hunts as originally intended. This will incentivize Master Hunters to help address crop damage issues in general Master Hunter seasons that require a second tag. The proposal was also supported by the Master Hunter Advisory Group.

Public Testimony Received During March 20-21 Commission Meeting:

Public testimony was not provided.

Changes, if any, from the text of the proposed rule and reasons for difference:

Under section 1(a) change the language from "Master hunters must purchase a master hunter elk tag to participate in both special permit and general season master hunter hunts" to "Master hunters must purchase a master hunter second elk transport tag to participate in a master hunter special permit hunt. Master hunters must purchase a master hunter elk area 3911 second elk transport tag to participate in the early elk area 3911 master hunter general season hunt."

WAC 232-12-055 Hunter Orange Clothing Requirements:

Written Comments Received During Official Comment Period:

WDFW Summary of Comments:

WDFW received 75 comments on this proposed rule change during the official comment period. They were varied responses with 77% supporting the proposed change, 5% who did not support the proposed change, and 17% whose comments were outside the scope of the proposed rule. When the comments that were out of scope are removed, those that support the proposed change are 94% and those opposed are 6%.

Supporting Comments:

Respondents supporting the proposed changes recognized that all hunters hunting in a modern firearm season should wear orange. Of those opposed, one recommended that on damage hunts allow the master hunters to not wear hunter orange clothing based on the difference to the farmer/landowners normal clothing.

Opposing and Other Comments:

Of the comments that were not in scope, many called into question any requirement to wear hunter orange. There were also comments that called for clarity in the existing, non-master hunter hunter orange regulations. A couple comments were based on abolishing the master hunter program as a whole.

Direction and Rationale:

The proposed rule is to clarify that master hunters must wear fluorescent orange while hunting during any deer or elk season which allows use of modern firearms. However, the Department can authorize an exemption for special situations when warranted (e.g. during certain special permit damage hunts). In general, this proposal is consistent with requirements of other user groups and is supported by the Master Hunter Advisory Group.

Public Testimony Received During March 20-21 Commission Meeting:

Public testimony was not provided.

Changes, if any, from the text of the proposed rule and reasons for difference:

None

WAC 232-28-294 Multiple season big game permits

Written Comments Received During Official Comment Period:

Supporting Comments:

Sixty-three percent of the comments received in response to proposed multi-season big game special permit regulation (WAC 232-28-294) supported the proposed modifications. Respondents supported the opportunity provided by the increased number of permits available and/or allowing those permits that are not purchased by drawing winners to be sold on a first-come-first-served basis over the counter.

Opposing and Other Comments:

The most frequent topic of concern was the cost of the multi-season permit, which is not part of this proposal and not within the Fish and Wildlife Commission's authority. Other comments related to wanting the Agency to allow all hunters to use all weapon types, allowing multi-season permit drawing winners to apply for all special permit hunts, and concerns over crowding and safety.

Direction and Rationale:

The proposed changes are intended to provide recreational opportunity within the context of maintaining healthy game populations. Over the past three years, the Department has received comments asking for increased multiple season opportunity as well as the ability to purchase tags over the counter. Over the last nine months, the 3-year season setting process revealed more support for these concepts. The number of permits being proposed is within sound management

parameters for deer and elk populations and the recommended changes support greater recreational opportunity.

Public Testimony Received During March 20-21 Commission Meeting:

Public testimony was not provided.

Changes, if any, from the text of the proposed rule and reasons for difference:

Amend proposed language in section 3 subsection (d) to read, “Permits not purchased by successful applicants prior to August 1st may be sold at the discretion of the department on a first-come, first-served basis.”