

9/4/2021

Hello Sublette County this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from interim work of the 66th Legislature. On September 1st, the Wyoming Wildlife Taskforce met in Casper, and I am a legislative member of that taskforce.

The purpose of the Wyoming Wildlife Taskforce is to study top-priority wildlife policy issues facing the state related to the allocation of hunting opportunity, sportsperson access, and other issues. Over an 18-month period, topics will be identified by taskforce members for study, 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 preference point system for the Big 5 (moose, bighorn sheep, mountain goat, bison and grizzly bear) was the most debated issue during this meeting. Multiple sportsmen have told me that the state needs to phase out the preference point system for the Big 5. A new hunter has little chance of drawing a bighorn license, for example, by the end of his hunting career in Wyoming.

After considerable debate, the taskforce, in a 14-2 vote, preferred replacing the existing preference point system with weighted bonus point system for the Big 5. The vote was to take this concept out to the hunting public for feedback. A weighted bonus point system could be a squared bonus point system, which means for every year you put in for license, then your draw number is put into a random draw based upon a squaring of your number of years applied. An example would be if you have applied for 2 years, then your name would be put in the random draw 4 times, and if you have applied 5 years then your draw number would be placed in the random draw 25 times. There is no guarantee of a draw, just that you would have your name in the hat for the random draw more times.

Currently, if you have the maximum number of preference points, then you are assured of drawing a license. People have invested decades into obtaining preference points for moose and bighorn licenses, with a considerable outlay of money. I do not believe it would be fair to pass a law that would trade a hunter's preference points in for bonus points. I was one of two

who voted against bringing this concept out to the public as a potential recommendation. I favor phasing out the preference point system over time, by not issuing any new preference points. After about 20-30 years, the system would be an entirely random draw. One hybrid idea was very interesting, which was to allow hunters a one-time opportunity to either shift to a weighted bonus point system or retain their preference points. This concept would have moved the 75% of licenses in the preference point draw to 50%, which would increase the number of licenses in the random draw. Somehow the taskforce needs to find the sweet spot on this issue, because our current system provides little opportunity for new and young hunters. The taskforce will take this issue up again in November, after the end of hunting season.

The taskforce began to discuss hunter opportunity issues surrounding elk, deer, and antelope. Some discussion has occurred on how to reduce hunting pressure in mule deer regions G and H. Should there be a pick-your-region system, which forces hunters to choose the region they intend to hunt? Should more limited quota areas be developed in these popular Wyoming Range hunting areas? Hunters, what are your thoughts?

We also began discussing landowner issues, such as access for sportsmen and damage caused by wildlife. More and more ranches are being purchased by rich out-of-state interests, who lock up these lands from sportsmen wanting to hunt and fish. How can the State of Wyoming incentivize landowners to allow hunting and fishing opportunities for the public?

Remember to provide comment to this taskforce at

<https://sites.google.com/wyo.gov/wyomingwildlifetaskforce>. I can be reached at albert@albertsommers.com with questions or comments.