



COLORADO

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TO: Members of the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission
FROM: Jonathan Boydston, Public Involvement Planning Specialist
RE: Big Game License Distribution Public Focus Groups Update
DATE: May 20, 2022

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) staff recently held public focus groups to analyze current big game license distribution systems and potential changes. Staff will present a brief summary of the top ideas for changes proposed by focus group participants at the Commission's June 1-2, 2022 meeting and will provide the Commission with a more detailed written summary of the focus groups at a later date.

Ten public focus groups were held across the state and virtually. In order to discuss license distribution challenges and solutions in depth, half of the focus groups were dedicated to the topic of preference points and half were dedicated to the topic of license allocation. Staff conducted one focus group on preference points and one focus group on license allocation in each CPW region. Additionally, staff conducted one virtual focus group on preference points and one virtual focus group on license allocation with nonresidents.

Members of the public volunteered to participate in a focus group through an online comment form. Individuals were selected by staff to reflect diverse interests and backgrounds, including varying levels of hunting experience. Outfitters and guides were also selected for participation based on their unique viewpoint on nonresident license allocation. Each focus group had 5-10 participants.

Focus group participants were asked to discuss their experiences with license distribution, challenges with current systems, and potential changes. Participants had the opportunity to suggest and discuss potential changes. CPW facilitators did not ask participants to reach a consensus about potential changes, though we did identify ideas with the most support for further exploration. The effectiveness and tradeoffs of each of the group's top ideas were then discussed in more depth.

Considerations and Challenges Discussed

Discussion questions were posed to focus group participants to gauge what they consider when navigating the license distribution system. A common theme discussed was opportunity. Opportunity was often described as the chance to draw licenses that have become increasingly difficult to obtain. Additionally, hunters indicated that opportunity for new hunters, including youth, to draw sought-after licenses is also something to consider further.

CPW facilitators also asked participants to describe what they are experiencing while hunting. A majority of participants pointed to overcrowding as a concern that greatly affects their hunting experience. Although many participants discussed crowding from other hunters there was also discussion about overcrowding associated with other recreation user groups. In addition to discussing



the effect of overcrowding on hunter success there was also concern regarding the impact that increasing hunting and outdoor recreation pressure has on herd health.

Top Ideas from Focus Groups

Participants in both the preference point and license allocation focus groups were asked to share their ideas about potential changes to the license distribution system that were then discussed by the group. After all of the ideas were shared, CPW facilitators then polled the group, asking them to indicate the top 3 ideas they wanted to discuss in greater detail. The ideas described below were selected by multiple focus groups as one of their top ideas for potential changes.

Limiting OTC Licenses

Limiting over-the-counter (OTC) licenses was discussed as a potential change in both the license allocation and preference point focus groups. There was significant debate about the benefits and drawbacks of eliminating or capping OTC licenses for both residents and nonresidents versus eliminating or capping OTC licenses for just nonresidents. Although several resident participants voiced support for eliminating or capping only nonresident OTC licenses, some residents also felt that resident OTC licenses should be eliminated or capped. Meanwhile, nonresident participants largely felt that OTC licenses should continue to be offered in the manner they are currently.

Potential benefits of limiting OTC licenses discussed included decreasing crowding in OTC units, reduction in point creep as more people use preference points to obtain licenses, increased opportunity for residents, and improved data on hunting pressure. A drawback of this strategy that was expressed would be less opportunity for those hunters who do not draw a limited license.

Preference Points

Participants suggested several potential changes to the preference point system. One of the top ideas suggested at multiple focus groups was requiring preference points to be used for more licenses such as secondary draw and reissued licenses, landowner vouchers, and for second, third and fourth choices in the primary draw. This change was suggested as a way to improve point creep by requiring hunters to use more points more frequently. However, there was debate about how effective this change would be at improving point creep and it may only lead to an incremental improvement.

Additionally, multiple focus groups raised the idea of expanding CPW's existing hybrid draw or creating a split draw system like other states. Several participants suggested expanding CPW's existing hybrid draw to include more hunt codes and/or increase the percentage of licenses allocated to the hybrid draw. Other participants voiced support for creating a separate split draw model like other states that would split the quota pool and allow different allocation strategies for each pool such as a random lottery pool and preference point pool. The main benefit of expanding CPW's hybrid draw or creating a split draw would be to improve hunter opportunity, particularly for lower point holders and new hunters. Although such a change would also allow high point holders to continue to benefit from their points, there was some concern that high point holders may draw fewer tags under this approach.

Point banking, which would allow hunters to use only the number of points needed to draw the license instead of all their points, was also discussed at several focus groups. Although point banking could help to address point creep by allowing high point holders to use some of their points each year it may also have an unintended consequence of causing more point creep for typically low to medium point

hunt codes as more hunters apply for those hunt codes. Point banking was implemented in Colorado in 2006 for one year. Although many participants doubted the effectiveness of point banking to address point creep many others felt that CPW should reinstate point banking for a longer period of time to fully assess the impact.

Lastly, multiple focus groups suggested that averaging group points would be another way to address preference point creep. This potential change would allow groups of family or friends with varying point levels to hunt together more easily and would provide a mechanism for high point holders to increase the draw odds for those in their group with fewer points. This would be another way to incentivize individuals to use their points. However, there were concerns voiced that this could create a market for buying people's points or increase the number of overall applications as more non-hunting family members would start applying to gain points to increase a group's average.

License Allocation

While there were similar suggestions made by nonresidents and residents in the preference point focus groups, there was greater disagreement between the two groups regarding changes to license allocation. Nonresidents strongly favored the status quo for license allocation split percentages between nonresidents and residents and for OTC license availability. Residents were more in favor of changing the allocation splits so that there is a greater portion of licenses guaranteed to residents, though there was some pushback from residents, particularly from outfitters and guides. Residents also expressed support for updating the years in the three-year average used to determine allocation.

While several participants supported changing the license allocation system to benefit residents, there was also a recognition of unintended consequences related to decreasing nonresident allocation. For example, participants noted the potential for economic impacts in communities that cater to nonresident hunters and decreased revenue for CPW from fewer purchases of nonresident licenses.

Key Takeaways

Most focus groups identified top ideas that were supported by a majority of participants but there was an understanding by participants that each idea had unintended consequences. There was also a recognition that there is no single change that will address all concerns. Rather, participants often proposed a suite of changes that would need to be implemented in tandem. Often, the suggestion to implement multiple changes at one time was to improve the effectiveness of the change. For example, point banking may need to be implemented at the same time as requiring points to be used for the second through fourth choices in the primary draw or in the secondary draw. Or a change might need to be implemented to offset the unintended impact on certain groups, such as creating an outfitter preference system if nonresident allocation decreases.