

ST. MARIES Gazette Record

NEWS

State considers shorter seasons

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Heavy snow in the Panhandle has prompted Idaho Fish and Game to call for curtailed hunting seasons next fall.

Because of record snowfall this winter the department wants to shorten the 2008 cow elk season to three days and revert back to the old whitetail doe season which opens Nov. 1.

Last year the antlerless whitetail season started Oct. 1 and ended Dec. 1

The department is having public meetings throughout the Panhandle to let sportsmen weigh in on the measures.

Meetings are set Feb. 23 at 8 a.m.

at the St. Maries Elks and Feb. 28 at 7 p.m. at the Fish and Game office in Coeur d'Alene. Another meeting will be Feb. 27 in Sandpoint or Bonners Ferry. Call the department (208-769-1414) for details.

Biologist Dave Spicer said the deep snow in the Coeur d'Alene and St. Joe River drainages is preventing elk and deer to follow daily movements from feeding to bedding areas causing stress and malnourishment primarily in whitetail deer.

The snow, as much as four feet at lower elevations, piled up in the mountains where game managers recently made periodical trips by snowmobile to check on herds. Beginning last week biologists noticed winter kill among whitetails.

"We saw 10 or 11 mortality among whitetails and the (living) deer we saw did not look good at all," he said.

Elk in the Coeur d'Alene River drainage had migrated down to the river huddling close to trees where the snow wasn't as deep, he said.

"Elk were doing OK," he said. "But, there's a likelihood of high winter mortality, particularly among calves."

On a trip up the St. Joe River from Avery to Gold Creek, the deer were huddled near the river and the elk had migrated back up the south-facing slopes, he said.

Biologists said bone marrow samples taken from the dead deer showed depleted fat reserves.

Biologists found one dead elk calf and a dead moose calf.

"A lot of people have concerns about this winter's conditions," he said. "Most of the sportsmen we talked to



Archive photo - The Idaho Fish & Game Department may propose shorter elk and deer hunting seasons this year to compensate for winter kill.

supported the proposals to back off the hunting seasons.”

In addition to floundering in the deep snow, game herds must contend with predators that can walk on the snow’s crust.

Predators from cats to wolves have an easier time killing their prey when the snow piles up, Mr. Spicer said.

“It’s like a kid in a candy shop,” he said. “they are out there doing their thing.”

The health of game herds, though, is driven by weather not predators, he said.

Regional wildlife manager Jim Hayden said even if conditions let up the department would rather err on the side of caution by adopting a conservative season in the Panhandle this fall.

“We’d rather make a mistake that favors more elk, than hit them hard in the fall,” he said.

In southern Idaho, the severe snow depths prompted the Idaho Fish and Game to resort to a feeding program for mule deer. Snow depths in the South Fork of the Payette, typically at 21 inches in a hard winter, measured 48 inches recently.

“At certain depths elk can’t move regardless, and deer have a heck of a time, period,” Spicer said.

Fish and Game has also proposed adding a controlled hunt for mule deer and whitetail bucks, August 30 to Dec. 1 in Unit 6. No extra doe tags would be issued. The whitetail doe season in Units 1, 2, 3, 4A, 5 and 6 would begin Nov. 1. No change is being proposed to buck season. All short-range weapon hunts would be muzzleloader hunts. The controlled hunt for bear in Unit 1 would end. No change is being proposed for lion seasons.

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