

To: Colorado Wildlife Commission

Subject: Early Season, Big Game Season Structure Review-- A Comprehensive Survey/Study.

From: Colorado Bowhunters Association, CBA, and supported by the Colorado State Muzzleloading Assoc.

Date: April 28, 2008

Colorado Wildlife Commissioners,

1. RECOMMENDATION: The CBA recommends a “stand-alone” comprehensive survey/study of the Early Season. The Early Season is defined as: the first day of archery pronghorn, (mid. August), to the day before the first rifle elk season, (early October), approx. 7 weeks.

2. RATIONAL FOR THE STAND-ALONE EARLY SEASON SURVEY/STUDY:

- a. A comprehensive survey/study of the Early Season has not been accomplished for the past 10-15 years.
- b. The increase in participation during the past 15-20 years has grown beyond 100% in some cases for a total of, est. 65,000 Early Season hunters.
 1. Bow hunter numbers have increased from 23,000 in 1993 to nearly 44,000 in 2007, of which 19,000 were nonresidents.
 2. Muzzleloader Rifle Hunters: Increased to 20,000 deer and elk.
 3. Early Sept. Bear rifle hunters: 1,200
 4. High Country, Early Rifle deer: 230
 5. North Park, Rifle Early deer: est. 450
 6. CDOW cow elk management: est. 400
- c. Various CBA membership polls have indicated that there is a growing concern about the amount of rifle seasons that coincide with the archery seasons that can reduce the archery hunt quality and potentially create a safety issue.
- d. The Early Season structure as it currently exists remains unchanged and has inadequately adapted and evolved to hunting’s popularity and changing hunter demographics.

e. The level of participation matches or exceeds that of the individual rifle seasons in October and November.

f. Further support for a stand-alone survey/study exists in a 1993 CDOW/CSU research study of George/Kahn. This study recommended conducting further studies (surveys) “if bow hunter numbers increase or became more concentrated and /or if firearms seasons were expanded”. All of these “triggering” factors for additional research have in fact occurred since that study was completed. Further studies were also recommended to increase the knowledge base per satisfaction levels and hunting quality.

3. HISTORY: Based on the above rationale, and being the major stakeholder in the Early Season, the CBA developed a BGSS Review Committee to begin a proactive process to provide input towards the next 2010-2015 Big Game Season structure. Retired CDOW employee, John Smeltzer and current CDOW researcher, Peter Bull, were asked to attend and to provide general directions and parameters for the survey/study. The CBA greatly valued their expertise and input. The Committee concluded that a survey/study would be timely and important. Also it would be a proactive professional approach to gather important facts related to the Early Season. The Committee believes that such a survey/study should be a collaborative effort involving all of the participating stakeholders. The CBA attended the State Muzzleloading Association board of directors meeting and presented the concept of a comprehensive survey/study, which they supported.

Other representatives of the CDOW that have been contacted and/or with whom meetings were held have been the four CDOW Regional Managers, and recently, meetings with Jeff Ver Steeg-Wildlife Programs Manager and CDOW Director Tom Remington.

4. STRUCTURE AND GOAL OF SURVEY/STUDY: To develop a comprehensive stand-alone survey/study that evaluates and measures important factors that control and impact the Early Season and its various hunter stakeholders. Factors that effect hunting quality and opportunity and management decisions. This accurate, unbiased, information can aid the CDOW/CWC, the CBA, ML Assoc., and the other stakeholders in modifying and restructuring (as may be necessary) the next 5-yr BGSS, to meet these changing hunter demographics and the variety of big game seasons.

CONCLUSION: Significant changes in hunter demographics including a significant increase in participation in hunting in the traditional early seasons justifies the need for a comprehensive early season study to help develop guidelines for the upcoming 2010-2015 BGSS. This survey/study will help ensure that any new early season structure better meets the needs and desires of hunters, while simultaneously factoring in appropriate management strategies for Colorado's big game wildlife resources.

Paul Navarre, CBA/CDOW Liaison,

Approved by the CBA Board of Directors.

Cc. Colorado Wildlife Commission, Director Tom Remington, Jeff Versteeg, CDOW researcher, Peter Bull, CDOW Regional Managers, Colorado State Muzzleloading Association, CBA board of directors, Bob Radocy.