

Meeting Date: January 28, 2009

Agenda Item No. 6C

Agenda Item: Winter Feeding Advisory Committee
Appointments (Action)

Approved by: _____

Prepared by: Brad Compton

Background:

Regional Winter Feeding Advisory Committees (WFAC) were established following passage of Senate Bill 1406 in 1994. Committees are charged with assisting the Department in implementing the Commission's Emergency Big Game Feeding Policy (attached). Committees exist in every region where emergency winter feeding is a normal occurrence (Southwest, Magic Valley, Southeast, Upper Snake, and Salmon regions). Committee members are appointed by unanimous vote of the Commission with appointments lasting 2 years.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

Idaho Code 36-123. WINTER FEEDING ADVISORY COMMITTEES.

(1) A winter feeding advisory committee shall be established for each district where winter feeding of antelope, elk, and deer normally occurs. Each committee shall consist of five (5) members. The members shall be appointed and removed for cause by unanimous vote of the Idaho fish and game commission. It is intended that the committees reflect the cross section of the major interest groups associated with each district. Each committee shall meet at such times as appropriate, but not less frequently than annually, on or before December 1, before the winter feeding season arrives, whichever is earlier.

(2) The term of office of a member shall be two (2) years, except a portion of the initial appointments may be for a term of one (1) year to provide staggered terms. Appointments to fill vacancies shall be for the balance of the unexpired term. The committees shall serve without compensation.

(3) Each winter feeding advisory committee established pursuant to subsection (1) of this section shall appoint a chairman. The chairmen of the committees shall meet at least annually to coordinate activities and promote consensus on issues of common interest among the winter feeding advisory committees. The chairmen may elect a leader from among the chairmen to call meetings and conduct and coordinate activities of the group.

(4) The department of fish and game shall provide staff assistance and support for the committees.

(5) The committees shall have the authority to:

(a) Act as an independent resource in each district to give advice and recommendations on the administration of winter feeding programs;

(b) Act as a liaison between the commission, the department, interest groups, and the public on winter feeding issues.

Public Involvement Process:

Nominees are selected by Regional Supervisors with input from various stakeholders, including Department staff, sportsmen organizations, and local publics.

Staff Recommendation:

Appoint/reappoint WFAC members. Current committee members are provided on the next page. A final list of recommended appointments/reappointments will be provided to the Commission during presentation of this agenda item.

Justification:

Commission action required to appoint Winter Feeding Advisory Committee members.

REVISED: April 30, 1996

APPROVED:

TITLE: BIG GAME FEEDING POLICY (Deer, Elk, Antelope, Moose)

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission recognizes that the big game population should be maintained under natural conditions and by naturally available forage. Winter forage is the major limiting factor that determines the basic size of the big game populations and it must be maintained if these animals are to prosper and propagate. The Department will work with the appropriate land management agencies in an effort to maintain winter ranges in a condition suitable to meet big game management objectives, including the restoration of ranges damaged from such long-term impacts as disease, weed infestation, and/or overgrazing. These restorations could include temporary solutions for short-term impacts caused by fire and/or drought. In order to maintain these winter ranges, big game numbers must be controlled through adequate harvest. We, therefore, do not sanction any widespread supplemental winter feeding programs.

Big game animals, especially elk, when concentrated by supplemental feeding, are very susceptible to infectious disease, which can be transmitted to livestock and to other big game animals. Every effort should be made to lessen this threat.

We are aware that big game harvests and weather will vary from year to year throughout the state. In most years, snow depths, temperatures, and animal body condition do not create adverse conditions for wintering animals. However, there are times when unusual weather patterns may create critical periods of stress when winter forage becomes limited, unavailable, or animals are forced into areas involving public safety. We recognize that we cannot manage game populations for these extreme weather conditions--nor should we.

The Department is authorized to feed big game only if the following conditions exist:

1. To prevent damage to private property or for public safety when other methods of preventing damage and providing safety measures are determined to be impractical, inappropriate, or ineffective and the amount of damage or cost of protection is expected to exceed the cost of feeding.
2. To prevent the excessive mortality of big game populations in drainages that would affect the recovery of the herd. Some mortality should be expected, especially from the young and old segments of the population.

It is the responsibility of all field personnel to advise the regional supervisor of weather, animal conditions and numbers, and public input on situations that meet the feeding criteria outlined above. If the regional supervisor, in consultation with the regional winter feeding advisory committee, determines that the criteria has been met and that an emergency exists, he will inform the Bureau of Wildlife of his decision and the Bureau of Wildlife will notify the Director's Office, Bureau of Enforcement, and the Bureau of Information and Education. The regional big game operational plan will then be implemented.