

State of California
Fish and Game Commission
Amended Informative Digest/Policy Statement Overview

Amend Sections 360, 362, 363, 364, 364.1, and 708.5
Title 14, California Code of Regulations

Re: Deer Hunting, Bighorn Sheep Hunting, Pronghorn Antelope Hunting, Elk Hunting, SHARE
Elk Hunting, and Deer Tagging, Reporting, and Testing Requirements

Unless otherwise specified, all section references in this document are to Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR). Changes made to the Informative Digest since the publication on January 17, 2025 are designated by underline and strikeout.

Background

Big Game Hunting Tags

The Fish and Game Commission (Commission) periodically considers the recommendations of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) in amending big game hunting regulations. Considerations include recommendations for adjusting tag quotas, setting hunt periods, modifying area boundaries, authorizing methods of take, among others, to help achieve management goals and objectives for big game species management. To maintain appropriate harvest levels and hunting quality, tags and seasons must be adjusted periodically in response to dynamic environmental, biological, and social conditions.

Current regulations in section 360, 362, 363, and 364 provide definitions, hunting zone descriptions, season opening and closing dates, tag quotas (total number of hunting tags to be made available), and bag and possession limits for deer, bighorn sheep, pronghorn antelope, and elk hunting, respectively. Harvest of a deer, bighorn sheep, pronghorn antelope, or elk is authorized for an individual with a tag for a respective hunt zone or area and season or specific property.

Individuals are awarded general hunting tags for deer, bighorn sheep, pronghorn antelope, and elk through the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department's) Big Game Drawing. Deer and elk tags are also distributed through: (1) Cooperative Hunting Area "Landowner" tags, and (2) Private Lands Wildlife Habitat Enhancement and Management Area (PLM) tags. Lastly, the Shared Habitat Alliance for Recreational Enhancement (SHARE) Program, also distributes elk tags through a lottery following the Department's Big Game Drawing.

For all big game species, a limited number of fundraising tags are also available for purchase, usually by auction, via non-governmental organizations that assist the Department with fundraising.

Chronic Wasting Disease

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a fatal neurological disease caused by prions, posing significant risks to cervid populations in North America. It leads to herd declines, altered age structures, and threatens hunting opportunities due to concerns over disease transmission. With CWD now present in California, focused efforts are needed to manage and mitigate its spread.

The primary purpose of a late-season deer buck hunt is to increase sampling of individuals at highest risk of CWD infection—mature bucks. These animals are more likely to contract and spread CWD due to their behavior, particularly during the rut when they engage in increased social interactions. By targeting these high-risk individuals, the hunt enhances the likelihood of detecting positive cases, which is crucial for effective surveillance and management. The state's goal is to detect CWD at a 1% prevalence with 95% confidence across five sampling units, and this hunt would significantly contribute to that effort.

Additionally, removing infected bucks reduces environmental prion contamination, slowing transmission and helping maintain healthier deer populations. This targeted hunt complements ongoing surveillance, providing a proactive strategy to detect and manage CWD while supporting conservation and hunting opportunities in California.

Periodic adjustments of tag quotas in response to dynamic environmental and biological conditions are necessary to maintain sustainable populations of elk, provide public hunt opportunities, alleviate conflict, and keep with mandates and management recommendations. Unfortunately, administrative procedures and the Fish and Game Code require the Fish and Game Commission to receive proposed changes to existing regulations prior to the completion of surveys and analyses, thus necessitating a range of numbers. Analyses for all big game species are scheduled for completion by March 2025.

Proposed Changes

The proposed changes are as follows:

Section 360 Deer

No changes to subsections (a) through (b).

Add subsection (c)(16) to establish a late season buck hunt in the portion of hunt zone D-7 that is in Madera County and to set a tag quota range of 0-50 tags.

Establishing a late season buck hunt in deer hunt zone D-7, where CWD was recently detected, will serve as a strategic tool to increase sampling of mature bucks, the demographic most likely to be CWD-positive. These animals engage in high levels of social interaction during the breeding season, increasing transmission risk. By targeting this segment of the population, we can better detect CWD cases, aiding early detection and response efforts. This action aligns with objectives identified in [California's Chronic Wasting Disease Management Plan \(Munk et al. 2024\)](#) and public requests for expanded hunting opportunity submitted in [Petition 2021-017](#) and at Commission meetings.

Renumber subsections (16) through (44).

Section 362 Nelson Bighorn Sheep

Amend section 362(a) to redefine the north and western boundaries for Zone 6 (Sheep Hole Mountains)(Figure 1). The proposed adjusted zone boundaries more accurately reflect the home range of bighorn sheep in this unit, based on recent GPS collar data. It is anticipated that the new boundary will increase hunter opportunity.

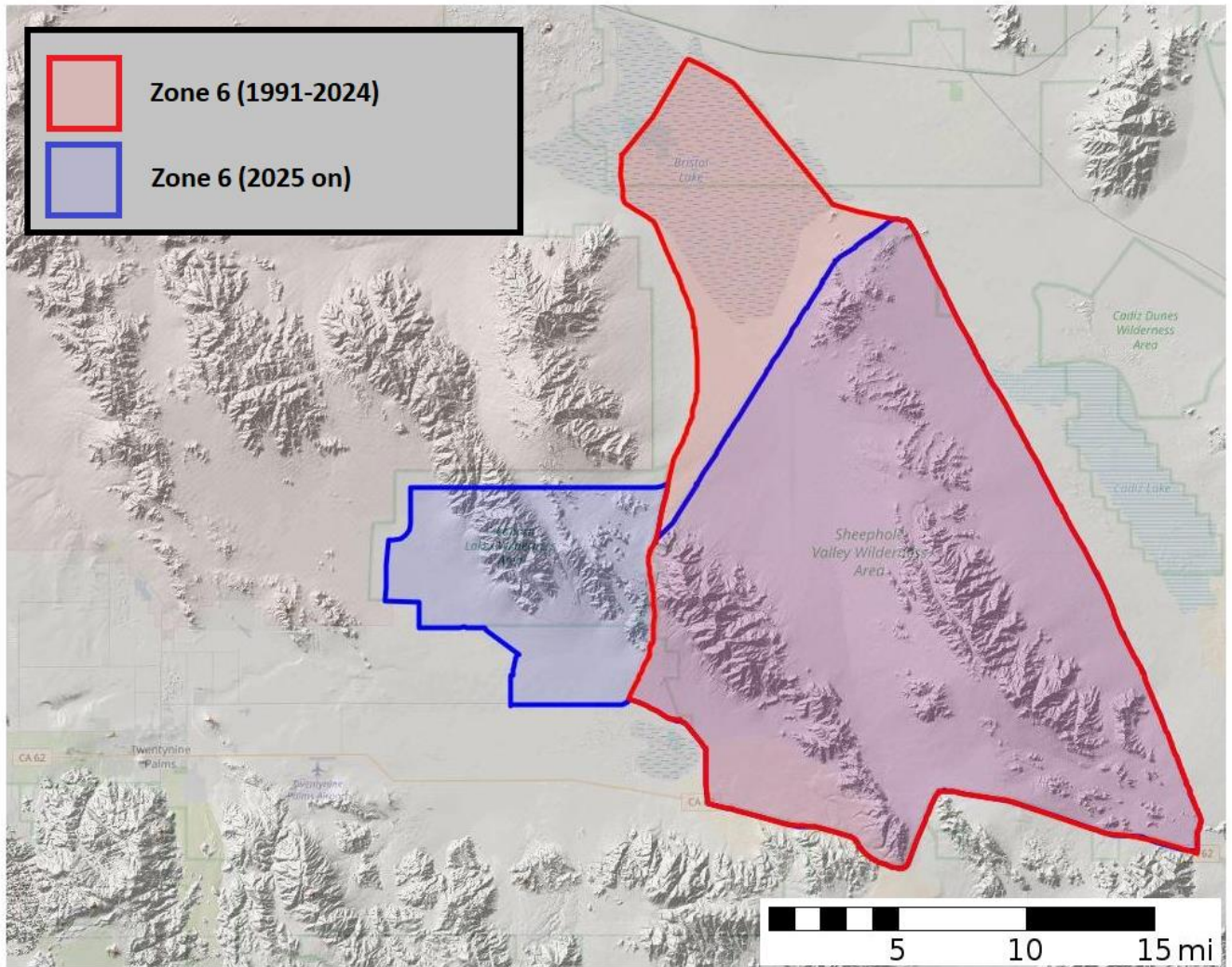


Figure 1. Map of current and proposed Zone 6 boundaries.

Amend subsection 362(b)(1) to specify that the Open Zone Fundraising Tag can only be used to hunt in zones that are allocated at least one general public tag. This will ensure that if a Zone is not issued general tags due to biological or environmental concerns, the Open Zone Fundraising Tag may not be used to harvest in a zone with zero tags allocated.

Amend subsection 362(b)(1)(A) to include Zone 10 in the Open Fundraising Tag. Zone 10 was created in 2019 but was never incorporated into the Open Zone Fundraising Tag language.

Amend subsection 362(b)(2)(A) and add subsections 362(b)(2)(B) and (C) to rename the Marble/Clipper/South Bristol Mountains Fundraising Tag to Single Zone Fundraising Tag 1 and following season information;

Amend subsection 362(b)(3)(A) and add subsections 362(b)(3)(B) and (C) to rename the Cady Mountains Fundraising Tag to Single Zone Fundraising Tag 2 and following season information;

During the regulatory change process for the 2022-2023 license year, the Department proposed a quota of zero for the Marble/Clipper/South Bristol Mountains Fundraising Tag. The Wild Sheep Foundation expressed concern at this loss of Department revenue and hunter opportunity. Increasing flexibility in the Fundraising Tags by renaming them to decouple them from specific hunt zones is intended to mitigate that issue in the future. Decoupling from a specific zone also allows managers the ability to assign the fundraising hunting opportunity to hunt zones that hold hunter interest and fundraising value.

Amend subsection 362(b)(4)(A) to remove Zone 10 and add subsection 362(b)(4)(D) to add Zone 10.

Amend subsection 362(b)(4)(C) Zone 7.

Amend subsection 362(b)(4)(C) 1. to create a Period 1 hunt season with the existing summer season dates and **add subsection 362(b)(4)(C)2.** to be the new Period 2 hunt season with new winter season dates. Zone 7 is an extremely difficult area to hunt and has the lowest hunter success rates for any of the Nelson bighorn sheep hunt zones; adding a winter season to this zone is intended to increase hunter opportunity and potentially hunter success. Period 1 and Period 2 are two separate hunts with two separate tag allocations. As such, hunters will have to choose a season (i.e. Period 1 or Period 2) when they apply during the Big Game Drawing.

Add subsection 362(b)(4)(D) Zone 10.

Add subsection 362(b)(4)(D) 1. to create a Period 1 hunt season with the existing season dates and **add subsection 362(b)(4)(D)2.** to be the new Period 2 hunt season as a late winter season. Zone 10 hosts one of the largest populations of Nelson bighorn sheep in California and by splitting the season in half we can maximize hunter opportunity and experience while reducing crowding. Period 1 and Period 2 are two separate hunts with two separate tag allocations. As such, hunters will have to choose a season (i.e. Period 1 or Period 2) when they apply during the Big Game Drawing.

Amend Subsection 362(d) to modify hunt tag quotas to ranges for each hunt zone.

Table 1. Section 362(d)

<i>Nelson Bighorn Sheep Hunt Zones</i>	<i>Tag Allocation 2024</i>	<i>Proposed Tag Allocation 2025</i>
Zone 1 -- Marble/Clipper Mountains	1	[0-5]
Zone 2 -- Kelso Peak/Old Dad Mountains	2	[0-4]
Zone 3 -- Clark/Kingston Mountain Ranges	3	[0-4]
Zone 4 -- Orocopia Mountains	1	[0-2]
Zone 5 -- San Gorgonio Wilderness	0	[0-3]
Zone 6 -- Sheep Hole Mountains	1	[0-2]
Zone 7 (Period 1) -- White Mountains	4	[0-4]

Nelson Bighorn Sheep Hunt Zones	Tag Allocation 2024	Proposed Tag Allocation 2025
Zone 7 (Period 2) – White Mountains	-	[0-4]
Zone 8 -- South Bristol Mountains	1	[0-3]
Zone 9 -- Cady Mountains	2	[0-4]
Zone 10 (Period 1) -- Newberry, Rodman, Ord Mountains	6	[0-7]
Zone 10 (Period 2) – Newberry, Rodman, Ord Mountains	-	[0-7]
Open Zone Fundraising Tag	1	1
Single Zone Fundraising Tag 1: Zone [1-10] (formerly Marble/Clipper/South Bristol Mountains Fundraising Tag)	0	[0-1]
Single Zone Fundraising Tag 2: Zone [1-10] (formerly Cady Mountains Fundraising Tag)	1	[0-1]
Total:	23	[0-52]

Amend Subsection 362(e)(4) to remove a nonfunctioning phone number.

Section 363 Pronghorn Antelope

Amend subsection 363(m) to modify tag quotas for archery-only season and general season pronghorn antelope Period 1 and Period 2 for buck hunts. Tag allocations may need to be adjusted to manage harvest following the completion of population surveys.

Table 2. Section 363(m)

Hunt Area	Archery-Only Season Buck	Archery-Only Season Doe	General Season Period 1 Buck	General Season Period 1 Doe	General Season Period 1 Apprentice Either-Sex	General Season Period 2 Buck	General Season Period 2 Doe	Fundraising
Zone 1 -- Mount Dome	0	0	2 [0-2]	0	N/A	0	0	0
Zone 2 -- Clear Lake	4 [0-1]	0	12 [0-12]	0	N/A	0	0	0
Zone 3 -- Likely Tables	5 [0-5]	0	5 [0-5]	0	5 [0-5]	5 [0-5]	0	0

<i>Hunt Area</i>	<i>Archery-Only Season Buck</i>	<i>Archery-Only Season Doe</i>	<i>General Season Period 1 Buck</i>	<i>General Season Period 1 Doe</i>	<i>General Season Period 1 Apprentice Either-Sex</i>	<i>General Season Period 2 Buck</i>	<i>General Season Period 2 Doe</i>	<i>Fundraising</i>
Zone 4 -- Lassen	5 [0-5]	0	35 [0-35]	0	5 [0-5]	35 [0-35]	0	0
Zone 5 – Big Valley	4 [0-1]	0	5 [0-5]	0	4 [0-1]	0	0	0
Zone 6 -- Surprise Valley	4 [0-1]	0	10 [0-10]	0	4 [0-4]	0	0	0
Zones 1-6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2

Section 364 Elk Hunts, Seasons, and Number of Tags

Add 364(f)(7), 364(f)(8), and 364(f)(9) to add archery only elk hunts in the Central Coast (364(d)(3)(A)), La Panza (364(d)(2)(A)), and Siskiyou (364(a)(1)(A)) hunt areas to manage increasing populations and provide hunter opportunity. The proposal is also responsive to hunter requests for new hunting opportunities.

Amend 364(s)(2)(A) to increase bull tags in the General Methods Tehachapi Hunt (CDFW Region 4). The current tag allocation is 5 bull tags and 10 antlerless tags. The Tehachapi Hunt was established in the 2023 hunting season to mitigate increased abundance of non-native Rocky Mountain elk. These non-native elk were introduced as part of a fenced game farming operation in 1967; elk subsequently escaped the enclosure and have since increased in abundance and expanded their range beyond Tejon Ranch into surrounding communities in Kern County and the Southern Sierras.

Human-elk conflict has exceeded tolerable levels in some areas. Current abundance levels are above objectives outlined in the 2018 Elk Conservation and Management Plan. Observed bull:cow ratios (47mm:100ff) are also above the Elk Conservation and Management Plan objective (25mm:100ff). Continued range expansion may result in non-native Rocky Mountain elk overlapping with endemic tule elk in the Owens Valley, resulting in hybridization between the two subspecies. This presents a threat to genetic integrity of the endemic tule elk population, and it is desirable to prevent hybridization between these subspecies from occurring as described in the 2018 Elk Conservation and Management Plan.

To help address these concerns for the Tejon Elk Management Unit, the Department recommends increasing bull tags and reduce the likelihood of dispersing bulls in the Tehachapi Rocky Mountain General Methods Hunt to help achieve goals and objectives outlined in the 2018 Elk Conservation and Management Plan.

Table 3. Section 364(s)(2)(A)

Section	Hunt	1. Bull Tags	2. Antlerless Tags	3. Either-Sex Tags	4. Spike Tags	5. Season
(2)(A)	Tehachapi	5 [5-10]	10	0	0	Shall open on the first Saturday in September and continue for 30 consecutive days.

Amend 364(u)(4)(A) to increase the bull tags in the General Methods Gabilan Hunt. The current tag allocation is 4, the proposal would increase the allocation to up to 10 bull tags to manage the increasing population and reduce elk conflict.

Table 4. Section 364(u)(4)(A)

Section	Hunt	1. Bull Tags	2. Antlerless Tags	3. Either-Sex Tags	4. Spike Tags	5. Season
(4)(A)	Gabilan	4 [4-10]	6	0	0	Shall open on the second Saturday in November and continue for 23 consecutive days.

Amend 364(u)(18) to add new periods and increase the Lake Pillsbury bull and antlerless tag quotas. the first period (u)(18)(A) with 4 antlerless tags, and the second period (u)(18)(B) with 2 bull tags. The proposal would adjust the 2 bull tags to 0-4 antlerless tags, and adjust the season accordingly to fit in the hunts without overlap, and add 3 hunt periods (u)(18)(C), (u)(18)(D), and (u)(18)(E) for Lake Pillsbury. Scott Dam, which creates Lake Pillsbury, will be decommissioned and reduce carrying capacity in the EMU. The proposal is necessary to reduce elk population size as dam removal approaches. The proposal is also responsive to hunter requests for new hunting opportunities.

Table 5. Section 364(u)(18)(A)

Section	Hunt	1. Bull Tags	2. Antlerless Tags	3. Either-Sex Tags	4. Spike Tags	5. Season
(18)(A)	Lake Pillsbury Period 1	0	4 [0-4]	0	0	<u>Shall open on the last Saturday in August and continue for seven consecutive days.</u>
(18)(B)	Lake Pillsbury Period 2	2 0	0 [0-4]	0	0	<u>Shall open on the first Saturday in September and continue for seven consecutive days.</u>

Section	Hunt	1. Bull Tags	2. Antlerless Tags	3. Either-Sex Tags	4. Spike Tags	5. Season
(18)(C)	<u>Lake Pillsbury Period 3</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>[0-4]</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>Shall open on the second Saturday in September and continue for seven consecutive days.</u>
(18)(D)	<u>Lake Pillsbury Period 4</u>	<u>[0-2]</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>Shall open on the fourth Saturday in September and continue for seven consecutive days.</u>
(18)(E)	<u>Lake Pillsbury Period 5</u>	<u>[0-2]</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>Shall open on the first Saturday in October and continue for seven consecutive days.</u>

Add 364(w)(7), 364(w)(8), 364(w)(9) to identify novel archery only elk hunts, tag allocations, and seasons. The proposal is necessary to identify tag allocations and seasons for the proposed archery hunts.

Table 6. Section 364(w)(7)-(9)

Section	Hunt	1. Bull Tags	2. Antlerless Tags	3. Either-Sex Tags	4. Spike Tags	5. Season
(7)	<u>Central Coast Archery Only Tule Elk Hunt</u>	<u>[0-5]</u>	<u>[0-5]</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>Shall open on September 1 and continue until September 30.</u>
(8)	<u>La Panza Archery Only Tule Elk Hunt</u>	<u>[0-5]</u>	<u>[0-5]</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>Shall open on September 1 and continue until September 30.</u>
(9)	<u>Siskiyou Archery Only Roosevelt Elk Hunt</u>	<u>[0-10]</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>Shall open on the fourth Wednesday in August and continue until the second Tuesday in September.</u>

Section 364.1 Department Administered Shared Habitat Alliance for Recreational Enhancement (SHARE) Elk Hunts

Amend 364.1(a) to extend the SHARE elk hunt season in two conflict zones (364(a)(2)(A) Northwestern Hunt Zone and 364(c)(1)(A) Mendocino Hunt Zone), as described in Section 555.1. The existing season opens August 15 and continues through January 31. The proposal would extend this season from July 1 to June 30. The proposal is necessary to

address intolerable levels of elk conflict in conflict zones. The proposal is also responsive to hunter requests for new hunting opportunities.

Amend 364.1(l)(17) to increase the antlerless tags SHARE tag allotment for the Bear Valley Hunt. There is currently 1 SHARE antlerless tag for Bear Valley. The proposal would add up to 5 antlerless tags (total of 6 tags). The proposal is necessary to add veritable hunt opportunities to the Bear Vally EMU, where the elk population heavily occupies private land versus public land. The proposal is also responsive to hunter requests for new hunting opportunities.

FGC Section 325 is proposed to be added to the authority section cited for Section 364 and as a reference for Section 364.1 to support the need to reduce elk numbers in certain areas.

Table 7. Section 364(l)(17).

Section	(A) Hunts	1. Bull Tags	2. Antlerless Tags	3. Either-Sex Tags	4. Spike Tags	(B) Area
(17)	Bear Valley	2	[0-6]	0	0	The tag shall be valid in the area described in subsection 364(d)(17)(A).

Section 708.5 Deer Tagging, Reporting, and Testing Requirements

Add subsection (e) to define Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Management Zones (CMZs). Based on the history and current understanding of CWD, it is likely, if not certain, that CWD will be detected in areas outside of the four hunt zones identified in the emergency regulations (D7, X9a, X9b, and X9c). In this proposal, what defines a CMZ is reframed to allow for new CMZs if CWD is detected outside of the currently affected zones to prevent delays in management actions. Adding a definition of a CMZ is necessary to adaptively manage the CWD outbreak in California over time, as target zones for mandatory testing will be variable based on current detections. Adaptive management is a cornerstone of the definition of “credible science” as defined in FGC Section 33.

The defining criteria for inclusion as a CMZ are:

- (1) any deer hunt ~~zones~~zone, excluding Zone A, in which a CWD-positive animal has been ~~taken~~detected,
- (2) any deer hunt ~~zones~~zone, excluding Zone A, within five miles of the location from where a CWD-positive animal ~~was taken~~has been detected, and
- (3) any county within Zone A where a CWD-positive animal ~~was taken~~has been detected, or is within five miles of where a CWD-positive animal ~~was taken~~has been detected. The specified distance of five miles is necessary to create a biologically reasonable boundary for detections that fall on or near county or hunt zone boundaries. Zone A is too large and must be broken up into counties to create manageable CMZ boundaries.

Amend subsection (e):

- (e)(1) - Change “zones” to “zone” for consistency and clarity with the rest of the subsection.
- (e)(1) through (3) - Change “taken” to “detected” to allow for CWD detections from carcasses that do not fall under the definition of “take.” “Take” is defined in FGC Section 86 as: hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill, or attempt to hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill.

Add subsection (f) to establish a mandatory sampling requirement, which allows the director to designate what, if any, requirements there may be for CWD testing and carcass handling within a CMZ, resulting in two types of CMZs: “testing CMZ” and “testing and handling CMZ.” Rather than having the default of every CMZ, as defined by 708.5(e)(1) through (3) have mandatory sampling or handling requirements, it is to the benefit of both the Department and to hunters to initiate or halt mandatory sampling or handling of hunter-harvested deer within CMZs prior to the start of all hunt seasons annually (July 1).

Handling restrictions are necessary to mitigate the spread of CWD. Mandatory testing is needed to enhance CWD surveillance within CMZs to determine prevalence and the geographic extent in affected areas, to clearly define the initial outbreak, and is one of the main objectives when responding to initial CWD detections as outlined in California’s Chronic Wasting Disease Management Plan (Munk et al. 2024). Knowing the prevalence and geographic distribution of a CWD outbreak informs decision makers and directs management actions. Tests are done on postmortem samples and the majority of those come from hunter-harvested deer and elk. Hunter-harvested deer from the affected hunt zones is by far the most scalable and accessible source of samples for CWD testing. The Department will also increase its response to and sampling of other mortality sources or take. Enhanced surveillance in the affected populations is the necessary first step to providing better information to hunters, partners, and decision makers following these first, and any future detections, of CWD in California. Knowing the prevalence and geographic extent will allow the Department to make informed decisions on CWD and deer management where CWD is detected.

Add subsection (f)(1) through (f)(1)(B) to define the criteria for designating a testing CMZ, the mandatory testing requirements, permissible sampling methods to be used, as well as the information that must be submitted with the sample, all within 10 days of harvest.

Add subsection (f)(2) through (f)(2)(B)(2). to define the criteria for designating a testing and handling CMZ, the mandatory testing requirements, permissible sampling methods, and the handling requirements within the CMZ.

Add subsection (g) to describe the minimum information that hunters must provide with their sample.

This is necessary so that the Department obtains essential information for monitoring the spread of CWD, such as the geographic location of the take, and to ensure the Department can contact hunters if CWD is detected in their harvest.

Add subsection (hg) to indicate how and where the Department will provide current information on CWD detections in California. This is necessary to ensure hunters have a place to find appropriate and up-to-date information on CWD and the status of their hunt zone to comply with mandatory testing.

Benefit of the Regulations

The goals and benefits of the proposed regulations are to help maintain sustainable populations of deer, bighorn sheep, and elk, provide hunting opportunities where feasible, alleviate human-wildlife conflict, allow for surveillance for CWD with mandatory testing and regulate transmission with carcass handling restrictions, and achieve management recommendations in existing unit plans.

Consistency and Compatibility with Existing Regulations

The proposed regulations are neither inconsistent nor incompatible with existing state regulations. Section 20, Article IV, of the state Constitution specifies that the Legislature may delegate to the Commission such powers relating to the protection and propagation of fish and game as the Legislature sees fit. The Legislature has delegated to the Commission the power to adopt regulations governing deer hunting, bighorn sheep hunting, pronghorn antelope hunting, elk hunting, SHARE elk hunting, and deer tagging, reporting, and testing requirements (California Fish and Game Code Section 200). No other state agency has the authority to adopt regulations governing deer hunting, bighorn sheep hunting, pronghorn antelope hunting, elk hunting, SHARE elk hunting, and deer tagging, reporting, and testing requirements. The Commission has reviewed its own regulations and finds that the proposed regulations are neither inconsistent nor incompatible with existing state regulations. The Commission has searched the CCR for any regulations regarding the adoption of deer hunting, bighorn sheep hunting, pronghorn antelope hunting, elk hunting, SHARE elk hunting, and deer tagging, reporting, and testing regulations; therefore, the Commission has concluded that the proposed regulations are neither inconsistent nor incompatible with existing state regulations.

Update

At January's Wildlife Resources Committee meeting of the Commission, the committee members specifically requested that hunter-harvest carcass handling regulations be included in this proposed regulatory package. Department staff added additional language to the proposed regulations in Section 708.5 that would require hunters in defined deer hunt zones to leave high-CWD-risk materials at the site of the harvest, and provided appropriate exceptions to facilitate CWD sampling and testing. The existing package that was published in the California Regulatory Notice Register on January 17, 2025. These amendments were approved at the February 12, 2025 Commission meeting to allow for public input and consideration of a 15-day continuation period for sufficiently related changes to the originally proposed regulatory action.