

## Staff Summary for April 15-16, 2026

**11. Bighorn Sheep Hunting (Consent)****Today's Item**Information Action 

Consider adopting proposed amendments to regulations for bighorn sheep hunting and taking final action under the California Environmental Quality Act.

**Summary of Previous/Future Actions**

- Wildlife Resources Committee (WRC) vetting May 15, 2025; WRC
- WRC discussion and recommendation September 11, 2025; WRC
- Notice hearing December 10-11, 2025
- Discussion hearing February 11-12, 2026
- **Today's adoption hearing April 15-16, 2026**

**Background**

At its December 2025 meeting, the Commission authorized publication of a notice of its intent to amend bighorn sheep hunting regulations to add three new hunt areas, increase flexibility for single zone fundraisings, and modify hunt tag quota allocations; the Commission subsequently published notice of intent to amend its regulations. At its February 2026 meeting, the Commission received public comments on the proposed regulations. See exhibits 1 and 2 for additional background information and a description of the proposed amendments.

**Update**

Based on analyses and findings from 2025-26 bighorn sheep surveys, the Department has provided its final recommendations regarding bighorn sheep tag quota allocations and the zone for single zone fundraising tag 2 (Table 1 and exhibits 6 and 7).

**Table 1. Recommended Tag Allocations for Nelson Bighorn Sheep**

<b>Nelson Bighorn Sheep Hunt Zones</b>	<b>Tag Allocation</b>
Zone 1 -- Marble/Clipper Mountains	1
Zone 2 -- Kelso Peak/Old Dad Mountains	3
Zone 3 -- Clark/Kingston Mountain Ranges	4
Zone 4 --Orocopia Mountains	1
Zone 5 -- San Geronio Wilderness	1
Zone 6 -- Sheep Hole Mountains	1
Zone 7 (Period 1) -- White Mountains	2*
Zone 7 (Period 2) -- White Mountains	1*
Zone 8 -- South Bristol Mountains	1
Zone 9 -- Cady Mountains	2

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<b>Nelson Bighorn Sheep Hunt Zones</b>	<b>Tag Allocation</b>
Zone 10 (Period 1) -- Newberry, Rodman, Ord Mountains	4
Zone 10 (Period 2) – Newberry, Rodman, Ord Mountains	4
Zone 11 -- Granite and North Bristol Mountains*	1*
Zone 12 -- Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains*	2*
Zone 13 -- Castle Mountains and Piute Range*	2*
Open Zone Fundraising Tag	1
Single Zone Fundraising Tag 1: Zone 10: Newberry, Rodman, Ord Mountains	1
Single Zone Fundraising Tag 2: Zone 12: Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains*	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>33*</b>

\*Denotes a change from the 2025/2026 hunt year.

### **California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)**

An initial review of the proposed project was conducted in accordance with CEQA in 2019, and the Commission certified the *Final Environmental Document Regarding Bighorn Sheep Hunting* (“Bighorn Sheep Hunting ED”) (SCH No. 2018112036). The Commission determined that adopting the proposed regulations that triggered the 2019 CEQA review would not result in any new significant or substantially more severe environmental effects. The Commission adopted the proposed regulations. In the 2019 environmental document, the Commission assessed the then-proposed project’s increase of 10 tags, creation of new hunt zones, and reallocation of a fundraising tag. In total, a range of between 0 and 42 bighorn sheep tags was assessed.

The bighorn sheep tag quota ranges in the 2019 Bighorn Sheep Hunting ED are the basis for the current proposal. The 2026 proposed net increase of 3 tags, to a maximum of 33 mature Nelson bighorn rams accounts for approximately 0.73 percent of the estimated 4,500 Nelson bighorn sheep statewide. The maximum of 33 tags is less than the maximum number of tags analyzed in the 2019 Bighorn Sheep Hunting ED, which analyzed a maximum of 42 tags out of an estimated 4,000 Nelson bighorn statewide (approximately 1.05 percent) and would not have a significant negative effect. Similarly, the proposed increase in tag quota ranges within individual zones falls within the 15 percent of the mature ram population estimated for those populations. Furthermore, the 2019 Bighorn Sheep Hunting ED analyzed the addition of a new hunt zone (for up to 6 tags) and also concluded that at these low harvest numbers there will not be any significant impacts to the environment.

The Department drafted an addendum to the 2019 Bighorn Sheep Hunting ED that Commission staff has evaluated and determined to be reflective of the independent judgment of the Commission (Exhibit 10). No new significant or substantially more severe impacts under CEQA than those analyzed and disclosed in the 2019 Bighorn Sheep Hunting ED will occur

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due to this proposal; the addendum provides details of the CEQA analysis supporting this conclusion.

### Significant Public Comments (N/A)

### Recommendation

**Commission staff:** Under a motion to adopt the consent calendar, find that the Commission, having considered the addendum and associated environmental document, approves the revised project pursuant to CEQA, and adopts the proposed amendments to Section 362 related to bighorn sheep hunting as recommended by the Department.

**Department:** Adopt the addition of three new bighorn sheep hunt areas in San Bernardino County as originally proposed and adopt the Department's final recommendations regarding tag quota allocations and the zone for single zone fundraising tag 2 as outlined in the pre-adoption statement of reasons and revised proposed regulatory language (exhibits 7 and 8).

### Exhibits

1. [Staff summary for Agenda Item 10, December 2025 Commission meeting \(for background purposes only\).](#)
2. [Staff summary for Agenda Item 21, February 2026 Commission meeting \(for background purposes only\).](#)
3. [Department memo transmitting draft initial statement of reasons, received November 7, 2025](#)
4. [Initial statement of reasons, dated January 8, 2026](#)
5. [Economic and fiscal impact statement \(STD. 399\)](#)
6. [Department memo transmitting pre-adoption statement of reasons, received March 30, 2026](#)
7. [Pre-adoption statement of reasons, including Department-recommended responses to public comments, dated March 17, 2026](#)
8. [Revised proposed regulatory language](#)
9. [Department memo transmitting draft Addendum to the 2019 \*Environmental Document Regarding Bighorn Sheep Hunting\*, received April 1, 2026](#)
10. [Draft Addendum to the 2019 \*Environmental Document Regarding Bighorn Sheep Hunting\*](#)
11. [Department presentation \(for informational purposes only\)](#)

### Motion

Moved by \_\_\_\_\_ and seconded by \_\_\_\_\_ that the Commission adopts the staff recommendations for items 8 through 14 on the consent calendar.

**Staff Summary for December 10-11, 2025  
For Background Purposes Only**

## 10. Bighorn Sheep Hunting

### Today's Item

Information

Action

Consider authorizing publication of notice of intent to amend regulations regarding bighorn sheep hunting.

### Summary of Previous/Future Actions

- |  |                             |
|--|-----------------------------|
| • Wildlife Resources Committee (WRC) vetting | May 15, 2025; WRC           |
| • WRC discussion and recommendation          | September 11, 2025; WRC     |
| • <b>Today's notice hearing</b>              | <b>December 10-11, 2025</b> |
| • Discussion hearing                         | February 11-12, 2026        |
| • Adoption hearing                           | April 15-16, 2026           |

### Background

Current regulations establish Nelson bighorn sheep hunt zones, specify tag quotas for each hunt zone and specify season opening and closing dates in accordance with management goals and objectives described in the management unit plans. Current regulations specify that the two single zone bighorn sheep fundraising tags are allocated to zones 2 and 10.

The recommended regulation changes for the 2026-27 season add three new hunt areas to San Bernadino County: Granite and North Bristol Mountains (Zone 11), Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains (Zone 12), and Castle Mountains and Piute Range (Zone 13); identify new zones 11, 12 and 13 for the single zone fundraising tags; modify hunt tag quotas for existing zones; and assign tag quotas to the recommended new zones.

Tag quotas are established based on a variety of factors, including sheep population density and abundance, age and sex composition, and distribution. Population estimates from recent surveys support an increase in tag quotas in several existing hunt zones. However, final tag quotas cannot be determined until surveys are completed and all data are analyzed. Surveys and analyses are scheduled for completion by spring 2026. At the adoption hearing, the Department will recommend final tag quotas for each zone and the zone for single zone fundraising tag 2 based upon findings from 2025-26 surveys.

Further details of the recommended changes are available in the draft initial statement of reasons (ISOR; Exhibit 2) and draft proposed regulatory language (Exhibit 3).

Today the Department will give a presentation summarizing the recommended regulation changes (Exhibit 5).

### Significant Public Comments (N/A)

### Recommendation

**Commission staff:** Authorize publication of a notice of intent to amend regulations related to bighorn sheep hunting as recommended by WRC and the Department.

**Staff Summary for December 10-11, 2025  
For Background Purposes Only**

**Committee:** Support the recommended regulation changes related to bighorn sheep hunting.

**Department:** Authorize publication of a notice of intent to amend regulations as detailed in the draft ISOR and draft recommended regulatory language (exhibits 2 and 3).

**Exhibits**

1. Memo transmitting ISOR, received November 7, 2025
2. Draft ISOR dated November 1, 2025
3. Draft proposed regulatory language
4. Draft economic and fiscal impact statement
5. Department presentation

**Motion**

Moved by \_\_\_\_\_ and seconded by \_\_\_\_\_ that the Commission authorizes publication of a notice of its intent to amend Section 362, related to bighorn sheep hunting.

**Staff Summary for February 11-12, 2026  
For Background Purposes Only**

## 21. Bighorn Sheep Hunting

### Today's Item

Information

Action

Discuss proposed amendments to regulations for bighorn sheep hunting.

### Summary of Previous/Future Actions

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wildlife Resources Committee (WRC) vetting</li> <li>• WRC discussion and recommendation</li> <li>• Notice hearing</li> <li>• <b>Today's discussion hearing</b></li> <li>• Adoption hearing</li> </ul> | <p>May 15, 2025; WRC</p> <p>September 11, 2025; WRC</p> <p>December 10-11, 2025</p> <p><b>February 11-12, 2026</b></p> <p>April 15-16, 2026</p> |
|--|---|

### Background

At its December 2025 meeting, the Commission authorized publication of a notice of its intent to amend bighorn sheep hunting regulations to add three new hunt areas in San Bernardino County, increase flexibility for single zone fundraising tags, and modify hunt tag quotas. At the April meeting, the Department will provide its final recommendations based upon analyses and findings from 2025-2026 bighorn sheep surveys, scheduled for completion in March 2026. See Exhibit 1 for additional background information and a description of the proposed amendments. Further details of the proposed changes are available in the initial statement of reasons (Exhibit 3) and proposed regulatory language (Exhibit 4).

The notice for the proposed amendments authorized in December was published in the California Regulatory Notice Register on January 23, 2026. No comments have been received since its publication.

Today's meeting is an opportunity for public discussion of the proposed regulations.

### Significant Public Comments (N/A)

### Recommendation (N/A)

### Exhibits

1. [Staff summary for Agenda Item 10, December 2025 Commission meeting \(for background purposes only\)](#).
2. [Department memo, received November 7, 2025 22](#)
3. [Initial statement of reasons, dated January 8, 2026](#)
4. [Proposed regulatory language](#)
5. [Appendix B1 of the "North Central Deserts Bighorn Conservation Unit Plan"](#)

### Motion (N/A)

# Memorandum

Received November 7, 2025  
Original signed copy on file

**Date:** November 10, 2025

**To:** Melissa Miller-Henson  
Executive Director  
Fish and Game Commission

**From:** Charlton H. Bonham  
Director

**Subject:** **Item for December 10-11, 2025 Fish and Game Commission Meeting: Regulatory Action to Amend Section 362, Title 14, California Code of Regulations, re: Nelson bighorn sheep hunting.**

Please find attached the Initial Statement of Reasons to amend Section 362, Title 14, California Code of Regulations, regarding Nelson bighorn sheep hunting. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) requests consideration of publication of notice at the December 10-11, 2025 Fish and Game Commission meeting.

The proposed amendments would add three new hunt areas to San Bernadino County, Granite and North Bristol Mountains (Zone 11), Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains (Zone 12), and Castle Mountains and Piute Range (Zone 13); identify new zones for the single zone fundraising tags; and modify hunt tag quotas. The proposal is necessary to expand hunt opportunities for Nelson bighorn sheep, maximize revenue in fundraising tags, and manage for sustainable bighorn sheep hunts and populations.

If you have any questions on this item, please contact Scott Gardner, Wildlife Branch Chief, at (916) 801-6257. The Department point of contact for this rulemaking is the Statewide Bighorn Sheep Coordinator, Paige Prentice, who can be contacted at [BigGame@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:BigGame@wildlife.ca.gov).

ec: **California Department of Fish and Wildlife**

Chad Dibble, Deputy Director  
Wildlife and Fisheries Division

Scott Gardner, Chief  
Wildlife Branch

Dr. Mario Klip, Environmental Program Manager  
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Melissa Miller-Henson, Executive Director  
California Fish and Game Commission  
November 10, 2025  
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**Fish and Game Commission**

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State of California  
Fish and Game Commission  
Initial Statement of Reasons for Regulatory Action

Amend Section 362  
Title 14, California Code of Regulations  
Re: Nelson Bighorn Sheep

I. Date of Initial Statement of Reasons: January 8, 2026

II. Dates and Locations of Scheduled Hearings

(a) Notice Hearing:

Date: December 10, 2025

Location: Sacramento

(b) Discussion Hearing:

Date: February 12, 2026

Location: Sacramento

(c) Adoption Hearing:

Date: April 16, 2026

Location: Sacramento

III. Description of Regulatory Action

(a) Statement of Specific Purpose of Regulatory Change and Factual Basis for Determining that Regulation Change is Reasonably Necessary

Unless otherwise specified, all section references in this document are Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR).

The California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) periodically considers recommendations from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) to amend Nelson bighorn sheep regulations. Considerations include recommendations for adding new hunt zones, adjusting tag quotas (total number of hunting tags to be made available), setting hunt periods, modifying zone boundaries, and authorizing methods of take, among others, to help achieve management goals and objectives for Nelson bighorn sheep. To maintain appropriate harvest levels and hunting quality, tag quotas must be adjusted periodically in response to dynamic environmental and biological conditions.

The proposed changes focus on adding three new hunt zones for Nelson bighorn sheep in subsection 362(a), reallocating fundraising tags in subsection 362(b), and adjusting tag quotas in subsection 362(d). The last time these regulations were subject to an amendment was 2025-2026. The proposed amendments here represent the cumulation of the Department's internal discussions/data analysis. The proposed changes are necessary to maintain sustainable hunt opportunities, and for consistency with management unit plan recommendations and the California Fish and Game Code (FGC). Subdivision (b)(2) of FGC Section 4902 states the Commission may not adopt regulations authorizing the sport hunting in a single year of more than 15 percent of the mature Nelson bighorn rams in a single management unit. The following management recommendations are consistent with this mandate.

## **Background**

Current regulations in Section 362 establish Nelson bighorn sheep hunt zones, specify tag quotas for each hunt zone and specify season opening and closing dates in accordance with management goals and objectives described in the management unit plans. Current regulations specify the two single zone fundraising tags are allocated to zones 2 and 10. Tag quotas are established based on a variety of factors, including population density and abundance, age and sex composition, and distribution. Individuals are awarded a bighorn sheep hunting tag through the Department's Big Game Drawing. A limited number of fundraising tags are also available for purchase, usually by auction, via non-governmental organizations that assist the Department with fundraising. Harvest of a bighorn sheep is authorized for an individual with a tag for a respective hunt zone and season.

The Department's goal is to increase bighorn sheep hunting opportunities where feasible and compatible with population objectives, in which case recommendations will be offered to the Commission. The Department has identified three potential hunt zones that have stable populations that can support sustainable harvest levels while meeting management goals and objectives.

Per subdivision (d) of FGC 4902, the Commission shall direct not more than three of the tags available for issuance for the purpose of raising funds. All revenue from the sale of fundraising tags shall be deposited in the Big Game Management Account. Since the first Nelson bighorn sheep fundraising tag was sold in 1987, the Department has raised over \$6 million for the management of big game species and habitats. Over the last ten years, Nelson bighorn sheep fundraising tags have raised an average of \$253,832 per year for big game management. The current regulations allow for one open zone fundraising tag and two single zone fundraising tags. The single zone fundraising tags may be moved to different zones based on survey data and Department needs. This flexibility will allow the Department to continue to manage hunting opportunities compatible with population objectives, while also maximizing fundraising opportunities and revenue.

### ***Existing Authorities***

FGC Section 200 provides the Commission with the power to regulate the take or possession of birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, and reptiles.

FGC Section 203 specifies that the Commission has authority to promulgate regulations concerning open and closed seasons, bag and possession limits, hunt zones, methods of take, and restrictions based on physical distinctions.

FGC Section 203.1 requires the Commission to consider populations, habitat, food supplies, animal welfare, and other pertinent facts.

FGC Section 1050 describes the process and procedure for assigning fees to hunting entitlements.

FGC Section 3950 defines game mammals and specifies that Nelson bighorn sheep are game mammals only for the purposes of sport hunting as described in FGC Section 4902.

FGC Section 4902 authorizes the Commission to adopt regulations for the biologically sound management of Nelson bighorn sheep, including sport hunting of mature bighorn rams;

specifies the bighorn resident hunting tag fee, authorizes the Commission to adopt the bighorn nonresident hunting tag fee; specifies conditions regarding the sale of bighorn fundraising tags; and requires a mandatory hunter orientation training.

## **Proposed Regulations**

### ***Section 362 Nelson Bighorn Sheep***

- **Amend subsections 362(a) and (b)** to add three new hunt zones in San Bernardino County for bighorn sheep: Granite and North Bristol Mountains (Zone 11), Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains (Zone 12), and Castle Mountains and Piute Range (Zone 13). The season for all three zones would match the other zones in the area starting the first Saturday in December and extending through the first Sunday in February. Table 1 and Figure 1 reflect the proposed tag ranges and locations of these zones.
  - Problem Statement: There are relatively few Nelson bighorn sheep hunting opportunities in California but there are many healthy bighorn populations on public land that can biologically support sustainable harvest but are not currently in designated hunt zones.
  - Statement of Purpose: The purpose of this proposal is to increase hunter opportunity through the creation of three new hunt zones in Nelson bighorn populations. These populations have been monitored by the Department for more than five years and can sustainably support harvest.
  - Statement of Benefits: The proposal is consistent with the Statewide Bighorn Sheep Conservation and Management Plan and the North Central Deserts Bighorn Conservation Unit Plan, and hunters' requests for new hunting opportunities.
  - Statement of Necessity: This proposal is necessary to increase hunter opportunity while maintaining biologically sound harvest levels and meeting management goals.

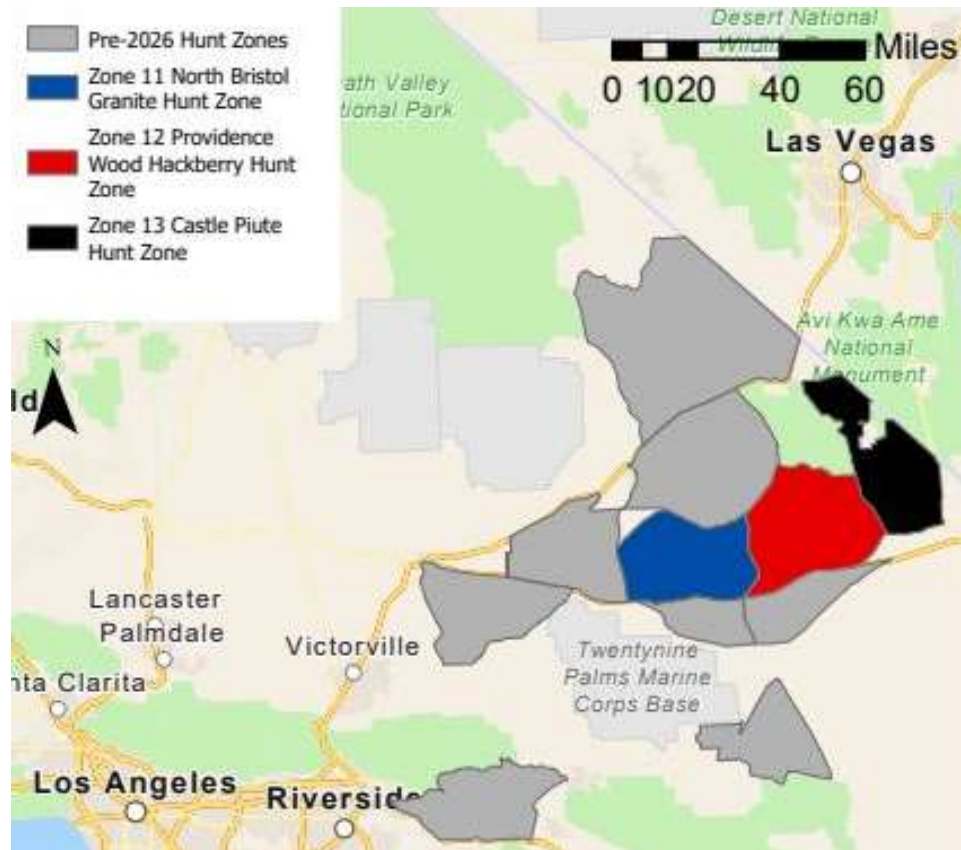


Figure 1. The three proposed hunt zones in San Bernardino County in relation to the existing hunt zones in the area. The three proposed zones from west to east are the Granite and North Bristol Mountains (Zone 11, in blue), the Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains (Zone 12, in red), and the Castle Mountains and Piute Range (Zone 13, in black).

- **Amend subsections 362 (b)(2) and (3)** to identify new zones 11, 12 and 13 for the Single Zone Fundraising tags. Existing regulations provide for allocation of two Single Zone fundraising tags and specify the season for each zone.
  - Problem Statement: Nelson bighorn sheep populations are subject to annual population fluctuations, and it is important to have flexibility to re-assign the fundraising tags to different zones to ensure sustainable harvest levels and to maximize fundraising potential.
  - Statement of Purpose: The purpose of this proposal is to allow flexibility to ensure sustainable harvest levels and maximize fundraising potential.
  - Statement of Benefits: The proposal is consistent with the Statewide Bighorn Sheep Conservation and Management Plan and the North Central Deserts Bighorn Conservation Unit Plan.
  - Statement of Necessity: This proposal is necessary to maintain flexibility to ensure biologically sound harvest levels and meet management goals.
- **Amend subsection 362(d)** to adjust tag quotas across existing zones and assign tag quotas to the proposed new zones to ensure data-driven sustainable harvest numbers. Population estimates from recent surveys support an increase in tag quotas in several

existing hunt zones. Final tag quotas for bighorn sheep cannot be determined until surveys are completed and all data are analyzed. Surveys and analyses are scheduled for completion by Spring 2026. The Department's final tag quota recommendation will be based upon a biologically appropriate harvest of bighorn sheep. Due to the timing of administrative procedures and requirements of the FGC, the Department submits proposed regulatory changes to the Commission prior to completion of all surveys, necessitating a proposed range of tags. The Department will recommend final tag quotas for each zone and the zone for single zone fundraising tag 2 in the Preadoption Statement of Reasons based upon findings from 2025-2026 surveys.

- Problem Statement: Nelson bighorn sheep populations are subject to annual population fluctuations, and it is important to have flexibility to adjust tag numbers ensure biologically sustainable harvest.
- Statement of Purpose: The purpose of this proposal is to provide the Department with flexibility to adjust the number of tags, as needed, based on recent data and the best available science.
- Statement of Benefits: The proposal is consistent with the Statewide Bighorn Sheep Conservation and Management Plan and the North Central Deserts Bighorn Conservation Unit Plan.
- Statement of Necessity: This proposal is necessary to allow flexibility to adjust tag numbers based on the best available science and to ensure biologically sound harvest levels while meeting management goals.

Table 1. Proposed Number of Nelson Bighorn Sheep Tags by Hunt Zone

<b><i>Nelson Bighorn Sheep Hunt Zones</i></b>	<b><i>Tag Allocation 2025</i></b>	<b><i>Proposed Tag Allocation 2026</i></b>
Zone 1 -- Marble/Clipper Mountains	1	[0-3]
Zone 2 -- Kelso Peak/Old Dad Mountains	3	[0-4]
Zone 3 -- Clark/Kingston Mountain Ranges	4	[0-4]
Zone 4 -- Orocopia Mountains	1	[0-2]
Zone 5 -- San Gorgonio Wilderness	1	[0-3]
Zone 6 -- Sheep Hole Mountains	1	[0-2]
Zone 7 (Period 1) -- White Mountains	3	[0-4]
Zone 7 (Period 2) -- White Mountains	2	[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	4	[0-6]
Zone 10 (Period 2) -- Newberry, Rodman, Ord Mountains	4	[0-6]
Zone 11 -- Granite and North Bristol Mountains	--	[0-3]
Zone 12 -- Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains	--	[0-3]
Zone 13 -- Castle Mountains and Piute Range	--	[0-4]
Open Zone Fundraising Tag	1	1
Single Zone Fundraising Tag 1: Zone 10	1	1
Single Zone Fundraising Tag 2: Zone [1-13]	1	1
<b>Total:</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>[3-58]</b>

(b) Goals and Benefits of the Regulation

It is the policy of the state to encourage the preservation, conservation, and maintenance of wildlife resources under the jurisdiction and influence of the state. This policy shall include, but is not limited to, the following objectives:

The maintenance of sufficient populations of all species of wildlife and the habitat necessary to provide for the beneficial use and enjoyment of wildlife by all citizens of the state, to perpetuate all species of wildlife for their intrinsic and ecological values, as well as for their direct benefits to all persons, to provide for aesthetic, educational, and non-appropriative uses of the various wildlife species, to maintain diversified recreational uses of wildlife, including the sport of

hunting, as proper uses of certain designated species of wildlife, consistent with the maintenance of healthy, viable wildlife resources, the public safety, and a quality outdoor experience, to alleviate economic losses or public health or safety problems caused by wildlife to the people of the state either individually or collectively in a manner designed to bring the problem within tolerable limits consistent with economic and public health considerations and the objectives.

The proposed regulations will provide Nelson bighorn sheep hunting opportunities while maintaining sustainable population sizes in accordance with management recommendations in existing unit plans, and so as not to exceed the 15 percent threshold identified in subdivision (b)(2) of FGC section 4902.

(c) Authority and Reference Sections from Fish and Game Code for Regulation

Authority: 200, 203, 203.1, 265, 1050, and 4902 Fish and Game Code

Reference: 1050, 3950, and 4902 Fish and Game Code

(d) Specific Technology or Equipment Required by Regulatory Change:

None

(e) Identification of Reports or Documents Supporting Regulation Change

- [2019 Environmental Document Regarding Bighorn Sheep Hunting](#)
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2025. [The Conservation and Management Plan for Bighorn Sheep in California](#). California Department of Fish and Wildlife, West Sacramento, CA, USA.
- North Central Deserts Bighorn Conservation Unit Plan—final draft will be shared upon completion

(f) Public Discussions of Proposed Regulations Prior to Notice Publication

- Wildlife Resources Committee, May 2025
- Wildlife Resources Committee, September 2025

#### IV. Description of Reasonable Alternatives to Regulatory Action

(a) Alternatives to Regulation Change

No alternatives were identified by or brought to the attention of Commission staff that would have the same desired regulatory effect.

(b) No Change Alternative

Without the proposed changes, no new hunting zones would be added and the outstanding issues concerning the regulations currently governing bighorn sheep hunting would remain unaddressed. The no change alternative would not be consistent with maintaining bighorn sheep populations within desired population objectives. Subdivision (b) of FGC Section 4902 and management unit plans specify desired harvest levels. Retaining the current tag quota for each zone may not be responsive to environmental and biological changes in the status of

various herds. The no-change alternative would not allow for adjustment of tag quotas in response to changing environmental and biological conditions.

#### V. Mitigation Measures Required by Regulatory Action

The proposed regulatory action will have no negative impact on the environment; therefore, no mitigation measures are needed.

#### VI. Impact of Regulatory Action

The potential for significant statewide adverse economic impacts that might result from the proposed regulatory action has been assessed, and the following initial determinations relative to the required statutory categories have been made:

##### (a) Significant Statewide Adverse Economic Impact Directly Affecting Businesses, Including the Ability of California Businesses to Compete with Businesses in Other States

The proposed action will not have a significant statewide adverse economic impact directly affecting business, including the ability of California businesses to compete with businesses in other states. The proposed action will potentially add up to 10 tags in three new hunting zones across a large geographic region and will adjust tag quotas for existing hunts with a potential of 28 more tags for new and existing zones combined. Given the number of tags available and the area over which they are distributed, these proposals are economically neutral to business.

##### (b) Impact on the Creation or Elimination of Jobs Within the State, the Creation of New Businesses or the Elimination of Existing Businesses, or the Expansion of Businesses in California; Benefits of the Regulation to the Health and Welfare of California Residents, Worker Safety, and the State's Environment

The Commission does not anticipate impacts on the creation or elimination of jobs within the state, the creation of new business, the elimination of existing businesses, or the expansion of businesses in California because the expected economic impacts of the proposed regulations are unlikely to be substantial enough to significantly stimulate demand for goods or services related to Nelson bighorn sheep hunting. If greater numbers of hunters visit the areas in the state with increased opportunities, businesses that provide goods and services to Nelson bighorn sheep hunters could benefit from small increases in sales. Conversely, if fewer tags are awarded and fewer hunters visit the areas in the state with decreased opportunities, businesses that provide goods and services to Nelson bighorn sheep hunters could be negatively affected from small decreases in sales. Anticipated benefits to the environment include, but are not limited to, the maintenance of populations of Nelson bighorn sheep to ensure their continued existence and supporting recreational opportunity, and funding wildlife conservation through the fees that hunters pay for licenses and tags. While there are no anticipated benefits to worker safety, hunting is an outdoor activity that can provide several health and welfare benefits to California residents, including the benefits of fresh game to eat and exercise from outdoor recreation.

##### (c) Cost Impacts on a Representative Private Person or Business:

The total potential range of tags across all zones is anticipated increase by up to 28 tags across a large geographic area, so no net economic impacts to individuals or to businesses

that support Nelson bighorn sheep hunts are anticipated. As such, the Commission does not anticipate significant impacts on the representative private persons or businesses.

(d) Costs or Savings to State Agencies or Costs/Savings in Federal Funding to the State:

The Commission does not anticipate any new costs or savings to state agencies or costs/savings in federal funding to the state. However, Department revenue will potentially increase with a proposed increased number of available bighorn sheep tags (see STD399 and Addendum).

(e) Nondiscretionary Costs/Savings to Local Agencies: None

(f) Programs Mandated on Local Agencies or School Districts: None

(g) Costs Imposed on Any Local Agency or School District that is Required to be Reimbursed Under Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division 4, Government Code: None

(h) Effect on Housing Costs: None

## VII. Economic Impact Assessment

(a) Effects of the Regulation on the Creation or Elimination of Jobs Within the State

The Commission does not anticipate impacts on the creation or elimination of jobs within the State.

(b) Effects of the Regulation on the Creation of New Businesses or the Elimination of Existing Businesses Within the State

The Commission does not anticipate impacts on the creation of new businesses, the elimination of existing businesses within the state because the expected economic impacts of the proposed regulations are unlikely to be substantial enough to significantly stimulate demand for goods or services related to Nelson bighorn sheep hunting.

(c) Effects of the Regulation on the Expansion of Businesses Currently Doing Business Within the State

The Commission does not anticipate impacts on the expansion of businesses currently doing business within the state because the expected economic impacts of the proposed regulations are unlikely to be substantial enough to significantly stimulate demand for goods or services related to Nelson bighorn sheep hunting.

(d) Benefits of the Regulation to the Health and Welfare of California Residents

Hunting is an outdoor activity that can provide several health and welfare benefits to California residents. Hunters and their families benefit from fresh game to eat, and from the benefits of outdoor recreation, including exercise. People who hunt have a special connection with the outdoors and an awareness of the relationships between wildlife, habitat, and humans, and can be a family tradition and a bonding activity.

(e) Benefits of the Regulation to Worker Safety

The Commission does not anticipate impacts on worker safety.

(f) Benefits of the Regulation to the State's Environment

The Commission anticipates benefits to the state's environment in the sustainable management of Nelson bighorn sheep populations. Adoption of three new hunt zones and science-based tag quotas provides for the management of Nelson bighorn sheep population to ensure their continued existence and supports recreational opportunities. The fees that hunters pay for licenses and tags help fund wildlife conservation.

## Informative Digest/Policy Statement Overview

Unless otherwise specified, all section references in this document are Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR).

### Background

The California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) periodically considers recommendations from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) to amend bighorn sheep hunting regulations. Considerations include recommendations for adjusting tag quotas, setting hunt periods, modifying area boundaries, and authorizing methods of take, among others, to help achieve management goals and objectives for bighorn sheep.

Current regulations in Section 362 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 bighorn sheep hunting. Individuals are awarded a bighorn sheep hunting tag through the Department's Big Game Drawing. A limited number of fundraising tags are also available for purchase, usually by auction, via non-governmental organizations that assist the Department with fundraising.

Harvest of a bighorn sheep is authorized for an individual with a tag for a specific hunt zone and season. Tag quotas are established based on a variety of factors including population density and abundance, age and sex composition, and distribution.

### Proposed Changes

**Amend subsections 362(a) and (b)** to add three new hunt areas in San Bernardino County for bighorn sheep: Granite and North Bristol Mountains (Zone 11), Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains (Zone 12), and Castle Mountains and Piute Range (Zone 13). The season for all three zones would match the other zones in the area starting the first Saturday in December and extending through the first Sunday in February.

Bighorn sheep are widespread in San Bernardino County, and these populations have been monitored for over 5 years. The proposed changes would increase the number of tags available and the geographic areas, or hunt zones, available for hunting.

**Amend subsections 362 (b)(2) and (3)** to identify new zones 11, 12 and 13 for the Single Zone Fundraising tags.

Existing regulations provide for allocation of two Single Zone fundraising tags and specify the season for each zone. This proposal allows for the possible reallocation of these tags to the new zones based on population survey results to maintain biologically sound hunting opportunities and continue to generate revenue.

**Amend Subsection 362(d)** to modify hunt tag quotas for each hunt zone (Table 1 in the Initial Statement of Reasons).

Periodic adjustments of tag quotas in response to dynamic environmental and biological conditions are necessary to maintain sustainable populations of Nelson bighorn sheep, provide hunt opportunities, and ensure consistency with statutory authorities and management recommendations. Due to the timing of administrative procedures and requirements of the California Fish and Game Code, the Department submits proposed regulatory changes to the Commission prior to completion of

all surveys. The Department will recommend final tag quotas for each zone and the zone for single zone fundraising tag 2 based upon analyses and findings from 2025-2026 surveys, scheduled for completion by March 2026.

**Benefit of the Regulations:**

The proposed regulations will provide Nelson bighorn sheep hunting opportunities while maintaining sustainable population sizes in accordance with management recommendations in existing unit plans, and so as not to exceed the 15 percent threshold identified in subdivision (b)(2) of Fish and Game Code Section 4902.

**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 Nelson bighorn sheep. No other state agency has the authority to adopt regulations governing hunting of Nelson bighorn sheep. 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 hunting of Nelson bighorn sheep; therefore, the Commission has concluded that the proposed regulations are neither inconsistent nor incompatible with existing state regulations.

**ECONOMIC AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT  
(REGULATIONS AND ORDERS)**

STD. 399 (Rev. 10/2019)

**ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT**

DEPARTMENT NAME <b>California Fish and Game Commission</b>	CONTACT PERSON <b>David Thesell</b>	EMAIL ADDRESS <b>fgc@fgc.ca.gov</b>	TELEPHONE NUMBER <b>916-201-6201</b>
DESCRIPTIVE TITLE FROM NOTICE REGISTER OR FORM 400 <b>Amend Section 362, Title 14, CCR: Re: Bighorn sheep hunting 2026-27</b>			NOTICE FILE NUMBER <b>Z</b>

**A. ESTIMATED PRIVATE SECTOR COST IMPACTS** *Include calculations and assumptions in the rulemaking record.*

1. Check the appropriate box(es) below to indicate whether this regulation:

- a. Impacts business and/or employees
- b. Impacts small businesses
- c. Impacts jobs or occupations
- d. Impacts California competitiveness
- e. Imposes reporting requirements
- f. Imposes prescriptive instead of performance
- g. Impacts individuals
- h. None of the above (Explain below):

**Proposed annual updates to Bighorn sheep hunting regulations have no new private sector costs. See addendum.**

***If any box in Items 1 a through g is checked, complete this Economic Impact Statement.  
If box in Item 1.h. is checked, complete the Fiscal Impact Statement as appropriate.***

2. The \_\_\_\_\_ estimates that the economic impact of this regulation (which includes the fiscal impact) is:  
(Agency/Department)

- Below \$10 million
- Between \$10 and \$25 million
- Between \$25 and \$50 million
- Over \$50 million *[If the economic impact is over \$50 million, agencies are required to submit a [Standardized Regulatory Impact Assessment](#) as specified in Government Code Section 11346.3(c)]*

3. Enter the total number of businesses impacted: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe the types of businesses (Include nonprofits): \_\_\_\_\_

Enter the number or percentage of total businesses impacted that are small businesses: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Enter the number of businesses that will be created: \_\_\_\_\_ eliminated: \_\_\_\_\_

Explain: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Indicate the geographic extent of impacts:  Statewide  
 Local or regional (List areas): \_\_\_\_\_

6. Enter the number of jobs created: \_\_\_\_\_ and eliminated: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe the types of jobs or occupations impacted: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Will the regulation affect the ability of California businesses to compete with other states by making it more costly to produce goods or services here?  YES  NO

If YES, explain briefly: \_\_\_\_\_

**ECONOMIC AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT  
(REGULATIONS AND ORDERS)**

STD. 399 (Rev. 10/2019)

**ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT (CONTINUED)**

**B. ESTIMATED COSTS** *Include calculations and assumptions in the rulemaking record.*

1. What are the total statewide dollar costs that businesses and individuals may incur to comply with this regulation over its lifetime? \$ \_\_\_\_\_

a. Initial costs for a small business: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Annual ongoing costs: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Years: \_\_\_\_\_

b. Initial costs for a typical business: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Annual ongoing costs: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Years: \_\_\_\_\_

c. Initial costs for an individual: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Annual ongoing costs: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Years: \_\_\_\_\_

d. Describe other economic costs that may occur: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. If multiple industries are impacted, enter the share of total costs for each industry: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. If the regulation imposes reporting requirements, enter the annual costs a typical business may incur to comply with these requirements. *Include the dollar costs to do programming, record keeping, reporting, and other paperwork, whether or not the paperwork must be submitted.* \$ \_\_\_\_\_

4. Will this regulation directly impact housing costs?  YES  NO

If YES, enter the annual dollar cost per housing unit: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Number of units: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Are there comparable Federal regulations?  YES  NO

Explain the need for State regulation given the existence or absence of Federal regulations: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Enter any additional costs to businesses and/or individuals that may be due to State - Federal differences: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**C. ESTIMATED BENEFITS** *Estimation of the dollar value of benefits is not specifically required by rulemaking law, but encouraged.*

1. Briefly summarize the benefits of the regulation, which may include among others, the health and welfare of California residents, worker safety and the State's environment: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Are the benefits the result of:  specific statutory requirements, or  goals developed by the agency based on broad statutory authority?

Explain: \_\_\_\_\_

3. What are the total statewide benefits from this regulation over its lifetime? \$ \_\_\_\_\_

4. Briefly describe any expansion of businesses currently doing business within the State of California that would result from this regulation: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**D. ALTERNATIVES TO THE REGULATION** *Include calculations and assumptions in the rulemaking record. Estimation of the dollar value of benefits is not specifically required by rulemaking law, but encouraged.*

1. List alternatives considered and describe them below. If no alternatives were considered, explain why not: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**ECONOMIC AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT  
(REGULATIONS AND ORDERS)**

STD. 399 (Rev. 10/2019)

**ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT (CONTINUED)**

2. Summarize the total statewide costs and benefits from this regulation and each alternative considered:

Regulation: Benefit: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Cost: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Alternative 1: Benefit: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Cost: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Alternative 2: Benefit: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Cost: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

3. Briefly discuss any quantification issues that are relevant to a comparison of estimated costs and benefits for this regulation or alternatives: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Rulemaking law requires agencies to consider performance standards as an alternative, if a regulation mandates the use of specific technologies or equipment, or prescribes specific actions or procedures. Were performance standards considered to lower compliance costs?  YES  NO

Explain: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**E. MAJOR REGULATIONS** *Include calculations and assumptions in the rulemaking record.*

***California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal/EPA) boards, offices and departments are required to submit the following (per Health and Safety Code section 57005). Otherwise, skip to E4.***

1. Will the estimated costs of this regulation to California business enterprises exceed \$10 million?  YES  NO

***If YES, complete E2. and E3  
If NO, skip to E4***

2. Briefly describe each alternative, or combination of alternatives, for which a cost-effectiveness analysis was performed:

Alternative 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Alternative 2: \_\_\_\_\_

*(Attach additional pages for other alternatives)*

3. For the regulation, and each alternative just described, enter the estimated total cost and overall cost-effectiveness ratio:

Regulation: Total Cost \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Cost-effectiveness ratio: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Alternative 1: Total Cost \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Cost-effectiveness ratio: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Alternative 2: Total Cost \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Cost-effectiveness ratio: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

4. Will the regulation subject to OAL review have an estimated economic impact to business enterprises and individuals located in or doing business in California exceeding \$50 million in any 12-month period between the date the major regulation is estimated to be filed with the Secretary of State through 12 months after the major regulation is estimated to be fully implemented?

YES  NO

*If YES, agencies are required to submit a [Standardized Regulatory Impact Assessment \(SRIA\)](#) as specified in Government Code Section 11346.3(c) and to include the SRIA in the Initial Statement of Reasons.*

5. Briefly describe the following:

The increase or decrease of investment in the State: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The incentive for innovation in products, materials or processes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The benefits of the regulations, including, but not limited to, benefits to the health, safety, and welfare of California residents, worker safety, and the state's environment and quality of life, among any other benefits identified by the agency: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**ECONOMIC AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT  
(REGULATIONS AND ORDERS)**

STD. 399 (Rev. 10/2019)

**FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

**A. FISCAL EFFECT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT** *Indicate appropriate boxes 1 through 6 and attach calculations and assumptions of fiscal impact for the current year and two subsequent Fiscal Years.*

1. Additional expenditures in the current State Fiscal Year which are reimbursable by the State. (Approximate)  
(Pursuant to Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution and Sections 17500 et seq. of the Government Code).

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

a. Funding provided in \_\_\_\_\_

Budget Act of \_\_\_\_\_ or Chapter \_\_\_\_\_, Statutes of \_\_\_\_\_

b. Funding will be requested in the Governor's Budget Act of \_\_\_\_\_

Fiscal Year: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Additional expenditures in the current State Fiscal Year which are NOT reimbursable by the State. (Approximate)  
(Pursuant to Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution and Sections 17500 et seq. of the Government Code).

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

*Check reason(s) this regulation is not reimbursable and provide the appropriate information:*

a. Implements the Federal mandate contained in \_\_\_\_\_

b. Implements the court mandate set forth by the \_\_\_\_\_ Court.

Case of: \_\_\_\_\_ vs. \_\_\_\_\_

c. Implements a mandate of the people of this State expressed in their approval of Proposition No. \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Election: \_\_\_\_\_

d. Issued only in response to a specific request from affected local entity(s).

Local entity(s) affected: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

e. Will be fully financed from the fees, revenue, etc. from: \_\_\_\_\_

Authorized by Section: \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ Code;

f. Provides for savings to each affected unit of local government which will, at a minimum, offset any additional costs to each;

g. Creates, eliminates, or changes the penalty for a new crime or infraction contained in \_\_\_\_\_

3. Annual Savings. (approximate)

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

4. No additional costs or savings. This regulation makes only technical, non-substantive or clarifying changes to current law regulations.

5. No fiscal impact exists. This regulation does not affect any local entity or program.

6. Other. Explain \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**ECONOMIC AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT  
(REGULATIONS AND ORDERS)**

STD. 399 (Rev. 10/2019)

**FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT (CONTINUED)**

**B. FISCAL EFFECT ON STATE GOVERNMENT** *Indicate appropriate boxes 1 through 4 and attach calculations and assumptions of fiscal impact for the current year and two subsequent Fiscal Years.*

1. Additional expenditures in the current State Fiscal Year. (Approximate)

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

*It is anticipated that State agencies will:*

a. Absorb these additional costs within their existing budgets and resources.

b. Increase the currently authorized budget level for the \_\_\_\_\_ Fiscal Year

2. Savings in the current State Fiscal Year. (Approximate)

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

3. No fiscal impact exists. This regulation does not affect any State agency or program.

4. Other. Explain The tag limit is proposed to increase 0-28 for the 2026-27 season, which could provide up to \$23,209 in additional revenue, as well as a potential increase in fundraising tag revenue. See addendum.

**C. FISCAL EFFECT ON FEDERAL FUNDING OF STATE PROGRAMS** *Indicate appropriate boxes 1 through 4 and attach calculations and assumptions of fiscal impact for the current year and two subsequent Fiscal Years.*

1. Additional expenditures in the current State Fiscal Year. (Approximate)

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

2. Savings in the current State Fiscal Year. (Approximate)

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

3. No fiscal impact exists. This regulation does not affect any federally funded State agency or program.

4. Other. Explain \_\_\_\_\_

FISCAL OFFICER SIGNATURE

DATE

DocuSigned by:  
  
Dan Reagan

1/12/2026

*The signature attests that the agency has completed the STD. 399 according to the instructions in SAM sections 6601-6616, and understands the impacts of the proposed rulemaking. State boards, offices, or departments not under an Agency Secretary must have the form signed by the highest ranking official in the organization.*

AGENCY SECRETARY

DATE

 Melissa A. Miller-Henson Bryan Cash

1/15/2026

01/07/2026

*Finance approval and signature is required when SAM sections 6601-6616 require completion of Fiscal Impact Statement in the STD. 399.*

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE PROGRAM BUDGET MANAGER

DATE



**STD. 399 Addendum**  
**Amend Section 362 of**  
**Title 14, California Code of Regulations,**  
**Regarding Bighorn Sheep Hunting 2026-27**

**Proposed Regulations**

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) recommends that the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) amend Section 362 of Title 14, California Code of Regulations, to add three new hunt zones in San Bernardino County for bighorn sheep, add tag quotas for the new hunt zones, modify tag quotas for existing hunt zones, and identify new zones for single zone fundraising tags.

**Background**

Periodic adjustments to tag quotas are necessary to maintain sustainable populations of Nelson bighorn sheep, provide hunt opportunities, and ensure consistency with statutory authorities and management recommendations. Considerations include recommendations for adjusting tag quotas, setting hunt periods, modifying area boundaries, and authorizing methods of take, among others, to help achieve management goals and objectives for bighorn sheep.

Due to the timing of rulemaking requirements, the Commission must receive proposed changes to existing regulations before the Department completes bighorn sheep surveys (anticipated in spring 2026) in order for any changes to take effect for the next hunting season. Therefore, a range of numbers are proposed for bighorn sheep tags.

The Department's goal is to increase bighorn sheep hunting opportunities where feasible and compatible with population objectives. Should the objectives be met, specific recommendations for tag adjustments within the identified ranges will be presented to the Commission in April 2026.

The total net number of tags are proposed to increase from the previous year (see Table 1), so no adverse economic impacts to individuals or to businesses that support Nelson bighorn sheep hunts are anticipated from a loss of hunting opportunities. The proposed increase in hunt quotas by up to 28 additional tags is anticipated to add to the demand for goods or services related to bighorn sheep hunting. If greater numbers of hunters visit the areas in the state with increased opportunities, businesses that provide goods and services to bighorn sheep hunters could benefit from small increases in sales for that license year.

Note that Table 1 includes three proposed new hunting zones that are shown in bold and underlined text; the proposed new zones are described in detail in the initial statement of reasons for the rulemaking.

**Table 1: Proposed Number of Nelson Bighorn Sheep Tags by Hunt Zone**

<b>Nelson Bighorn Sheep Hunt Zones</b>	<b>Current Tags</b>	<b>Proposed Tags</b>
Zone 1 -- Marble/Clipper Mountains	1	0-3
Zone 2 -- Kelso Peak/Old Dad Mountains	3	0-4
Zone 3 -- Clark/Kingston Mountain Ranges	4	0-4
Zone 4 -- Orocopia Mountains	1	0-2
Zone 5 -- San Geronio Wilderness	1	0-3
Zone 6 -- Sheep Hole Mountains	1	0-2
Zone 7 (Period 1) -- White Mountains	3	0-4
Zone 7 (Period 2) -- White Mountains	2	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	4	0-6
Zone 10 (Period 2) -- Newberry, Rodman, Ord Mountains	4	0-6
<b><u>Zone 11 -- Granite and North Bristol Mountains</u></b>	--	0-3
<b><u>Zone 12 -- Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains</u></b>	--	0-3
<b><u>Zone 13 -- Castle Mountains and Piute Range</u></b>	--	0-4
Open Zone Fundraising Tag	1	1
Single Zone Fundraising Tag 1: Zone 1-13	1	0-1
Single Zone Fundraising Tag 2: Zone 1-13	1	0-1
Total	30	1-58

**Economic Impact Statement**

**Section A. Estimated Private Sector Cost Impacts**

**Question 1. Answer:** h. None of the above.

No new private sector costs are necessarily incurred with the proposed bighorn sheep regulatory amendments. The Commission is not aware of any cost impacts that a representative private person or business would necessarily incur in reasonable compliance with the proposed action because the proposed amendments will set hunting quotas in specific areas throughout the state without imposing new private sector costs. The net increase in bighorn sheep hunting opportunities is expected to have no changes to individual or business fees, equipment, and reporting requirements.

## Fiscal Impact Statement

### Section B. Fiscal Effect on State Government

**Answer:** 4. Other.

Department workload is projected to be unchanged from currently existing budgets and resources, as the monitoring required for expansion of the bighorn sheep hunt into Zones 11, 12, and 13 is expected to be folded into the existing budget and enforcement duties. However, Department revenue will potentially increase with a proposed increased number of available bighorn sheep tags. If up to 28 more bighorn sheep tags become available, at the 2026 price of \$558.50 for a resident and \$2,072.75 for a non-resident, the projected increase in revenue in 2026-2027 could be up to \$23,209.25 (assuming an increase of 23 resident tags and 5 non-resident tags sold; non-resident tags are limited to 10% of tags issued out of the total number of tags, which would be 58 tags if the number of tags increases by 28).

Additionally, the expansion of the hunting zones beyond zones 2 and 10 for two of the three fundraising tags may renew interest in the auction from hunters. While it is difficult to predict the amount of revenue that this will generate, historically the Department has earned an average of approximately \$321,736 from the annual fundraising auction, and presumably the Department would raise a similar amount of revenue from the interest in accessing novel hunt zones. Revenue from the fundraising tag between 2021 and 2025 is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Department Bighorn Sheep Fundraising Tag Revenue, 2021-2025**

Year	Revenue
2021	\$285,561.80
2022	\$321,994.26
2023	\$301,101.25
2024	\$230,021.75
2025	\$470,000.00
Average	\$321,735.81

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

**MEMORANDUM**

Received March 30, 2026  
Original signed copy on file

Date: March 30, 2026

To: Melissa Miller-Henson, Executive Director  
Fish and Game Commission

From: Meghan Hertel, Director

**Subject: Item for the April 15-16, 2026, Fish and Game Commission Meeting Re: Pre-Adoption Statement of Reasons for Nelson Bighorn Sheep**

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has prepared the attached Pre-Adoption Statement of Reasons (PSOR) to summarize and provide responses to public comments received by the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) on the proposed amendments to Section 362 regarding bighorn sheep hunting. The Department is not recommending any amendments to the regulatory text based on comments received.

In the PSOR, the Department has provided its final recommendations for tag quotas that were initially recommended as ranges. The Department recommends the Commission adopt the proposed rulemaking for Nelson bighorn sheep.

If you have any questions on this item, please contact Scott Gardner, Wildlife Branch Chief, at (916) 801-6257. The Department point of contact for this rulemaking is the Statewide Bighorn Sheep Coordinator, Paige Prentice, who can be contacted at [BigGame@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:BigGame@wildlife.ca.gov).

ec: **California Department of Fish and Wildlife**

Chad Dibble, Deputy Director  
Wildlife and Fisheries Division

Scott Gardner, Branch Chief  
Wildlife Branch



Melissa Miller-Henson

March 30, 2026

Page 2

Dr. Mario Klip, Environmental Program Manager  
Wildlife Branch

Chelle Temple-King, Senior Supervisor  
Wildlife Branch

Regina Vu, Regulations Specialist  
Wildlife Branch

Paige Prentice, Statewide Bighorn Sheep Coordinator  
Wildlife Branch

Ona Alminas, Env. Program Manager  
Regulations Unit

Emily McKim, Senior Regulatory Scientist  
Regulations Unit

**Fish and Game Commission**

David Thesell  
Deputy Executive Director

Ari Cornman  
Wildlife Advisor

Sherrie Fonbuena  
Analyst



<i>Nelson Bighorn Sheep Hunt Zones</i>	<i>Tag Allocation 2025</i>	<i>Proposed Tag Allocation 2026</i>
Zone 5 -- San Gorgonio Wilderness	1	1
Zone 6 -- Sheep Hole Mountains	1	1
Zone 7 (Period 1) -- White Mountains	3	2*
Zone 7 (Period 2) -- White Mountains	2	1*
Zone 8 -- South Bristol Mountains	1	1
Zone 9 -- Cady Mountains	2	2
Zone 10 (Period 1) -- Newberry, Rodman, Ord Mountains	4	4
Zone 10 (Period 2) -- Newberry, Rodman, Ord Mountains	4	4
Zone 11 -- Granite and North Bristol Mountains	--	1*
Zone 12 -- Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains	--	2*
Zone 13 -- Castle Mountains and Piute Range	--	2*
Open Zone Fundraising Tag	1	1
Single Zone Fundraising Tag 1: Zone 10: Newberry, Rodman, Ord Mountains	1	1
Single Zone Fundraising Tag 2: Zone 12: Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains*	1	1
Total:	30	33*

\*Denotes a change from the 2025/2026 hunt year.

## VI. Summary of Primary Considerations Raised in Opposition and in Support

Please see Attachment 1, Responses to public comments received through February 27, 2026.

## Updated Informative Digest/Policy Statement Overview

Unless otherwise specified, all section references in this document are Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR).

### Background

The California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) periodically considers recommendations from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) to amend bighorn sheep hunting regulations. Considerations include recommendations for adjusting tag quotas, setting hunt periods, modifying area boundaries, and authorizing methods of take, among others, to help achieve management goals and objectives for bighorn sheep.

Current regulations in Section 362 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 bighorn sheep hunting. Individuals are awarded a bighorn sheep hunting tag through the Department's Big Game Drawing. A limited number of fundraising tags are also available for purchase, usually by auction, via non-governmental organizations that assist the Department with fundraising.

Harvest of a bighorn sheep is authorized for an individual with a tag for a specific hunt zone and season. Tag quotas are established based on a variety of factors including population density and abundance, age and sex composition, and distribution.

### Proposed Changes

**Amend subsections 362(a) and (b)** to add three new hunt areas in San Bernardino County for bighorn sheep: Granite and North Bristol Mountains (Zone 11), Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains (Zone 12), and Castle Mountains and Piute Range (Zone 13). The season for all three zones would match the other zones in the area starting the first Saturday in December and extending through the first Sunday in February.

Bighorn sheep are widespread in San Bernardino County, and these populations have been monitored for over 5 years. The proposed changes would increase the number of tags available and the geographic areas, or hunt zones, available for hunting.

**Amend subsections 362 (b)(2) and (3)** to identify new zones 11, 12 and 13 for the Single Zone Fundraising tags.

Existing regulations provide for allocation of two Single Zone fundraising tags and specify the season for each zone. This proposal allows for the possible reallocation of these tags to the new zones based on population survey results to maintain biologically sound hunting opportunities and continue to generate revenue.

**Amend Subsection 362(d)** to modify hunt tag quotas for each hunt zone (Table 1 in the Initial Statement of Reasons).

Periodic adjustments of tag quotas in response to dynamic environmental and biological conditions are necessary to maintain sustainable populations of Nelson bighorn sheep, provide hunt opportunities, and ensure consistency with statutory authorities and management recommendations. Due to the timing of administrative procedures and requirements of the California Fish and Game Code, the Department submits proposed regulatory changes to the Commission prior to completion of

all surveys. The Department will recommend final tag quotas for each zone and the zone for single zone fundraising tag 2 based upon analyses and findings from 2025-2026 surveys, scheduled for completion by March 2026.

#### Benefit of the Regulations:

The proposed regulations will provide Nelson bighorn sheep hunting opportunities while maintaining sustainable population sizes in accordance with management recommendations in existing unit plans, and so as not to exceed the 15 percent threshold identified in subdivision (b)(2) of Fish and Game Code Section 4902.

#### 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 Nelson bighorn sheep. No other state agency has the authority to adopt regulations governing hunting of Nelson bighorn sheep. 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 hunting of Nelson bighorn sheep; therefore, the Commission has concluded that the proposed regulations are neither inconsistent nor incompatible with existing state regulations.

#### Update

**The original proposed language provided a range of tag quota allocations for Nelson bighorn sheep hunting, and provided a range of possible zones for single zone fundraising tag #2 as surveys and data analysis had not been completed by the administrative deadline for notice.**

**Following recent completion of surveys and data analysis, the Department's final recommendations for many of the tag allocations retain the same allocation as those for 2025/2026 hunt year. However, the Department recommends decreasing the tag allocation for Zone 7 (Period 1) -- White Mountains from 3 to 2, and decreasing the tag allocation for Zone 7 (Period 2) -- White Mountains from 2 to 1. The Department's final recommendations for tag allocations for new zones 11 --Granite and North Bristol Mountains, 12 -- Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains, and 13 -- Castle Mountains and Piute Range are 1, 2, and 2, respectively. The Department's final recommendation for single zone fundraising tag #2 is Zone 12: Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains. The table provided in the pre-adoption statement of reasons includes the final recommendations for all tag allocations.**

### 362 Pre-Adoption Statement of Reasons – Bighorn Sheep Hunting (2026)

#### Attachment 1– Responses to Public Comments

Responses to written comments (1) received up to February 27, 2026, and to oral comments (1-5) received at the December 10, 2025 and the February 12, 2026, Fish and Game Commission meetings.

#	Commenter Name, Affiliation, Comment Format, Date Received	Comment Summary	Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) Recommended Response
1	Jacinthe Messier, Tribal Historic Preservation Office representing the Paskenta Band of Nomlaki Indians, and speaking on behalf of Grindstone Indian Rancheria, Oral Comment, 12/10/25, written comment, 12/15/2025	1a. When it comes to bighorn sheep hunting the presentation was well done but lacking an indigenous perspective. The proposed changes lack clear definition of certain terminology and demonstrate insufficient respect for Indigenous rights related to traditional Indigenous subsistence, and species associated hunting and trapping practices. I would like a definition for the term viable as used to describe bighorn sheep populations in Section 362	The term “viable” is used several times in the California Fish and Game Code without being specifically defined. However, in this context it is intended to consider limitations by Fish and Game Code Section 4902(b)(2), by using modeled projections that consider the population size and recruitment rate and show a stable or increasing population, that can support consistent harvest.

### 362 Pre-Adoption Statement of Reasons – Bighorn Sheep Hunting (2026)

#### Attachment 1– Responses to Public Comments

#	Commenter Name, Affiliation, Comment Format, Date Received	Comment Summary	Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) Recommended Response
1 con't	Jacinthe Messier, Tribal Historic Preservation Office representing the Paskenta Band of Nomlaki Indians, and speaking on behalf of Grindstone Indian Rancheria, Oral Comment, 12/10/25, written comment 12/15/2025	1b. As a tribe, we disagree with the concept of sport hunting.	The term “sport hunting” is used several times in the California Fish and Game Code without being specifically defined. However, it is understood to mean hunting for purposes other than profit. In Section 4902, the California Legislature has delegated authority to the Commission to adopt regulations for the sport hunting of mature Nelson bighorn rams.
2	Bill Gaines, California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation, Oral Comment, 12/10/25	We really appreciate the partnerships that have been built between the Department and the wild sheep groups and guides. We met with the Department months ago to discuss the possibility of these new zones and we are pleased to see that the management plan is done and these zones are being proposed along with the fundraising tags. Thank you, good work, and we look forward to a positive adoption in April.	Comment noted.

### 362 Pre-Adoption Statement of Reasons – Bighorn Sheep Hunting (2026)

#### Attachment 1– Responses to Public Comments

#	Commenter Name, Affiliation, Comment Format, Date Received	Comment Summary	Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) Recommended Response
3	Chriss Bowles, California Bowmen Hunters, Oral Comment, 12/10/25	We want to lend our support from the bowhunting community for the package and regulations presented for wild sheep. This is the most work I've seen go into the desert wild sheep program in many years, we fully support this package and appreciate the hard work.	Support noted.
4	Bill Gaines, California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation, Oral Comment, 02/12/26	Thank you to the Department for getting the sheep plan done and offering increased opportunity. Phenomenal job this year. We fully support the proposal.	Support noted.
5	Donald C. Martin, California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation President Emeritus, Oral Comment, 02/12/26	I echo what Bill Gaines said. Special thanks to the team for getting this package done. Please support this proposed rulemaking.	Support noted.
6	JR Young, Oral Comment, 2/12/2026	I'm in support.	Support noted.

## Revised Proposed Regulatory Language

Section 362, Title 14, CCR, is amended as follows:

### § 362. Nelson Bighorn Sheep.

(a) Areas:

*[... No changes to subsections (a)(1) through (a)(10)...]*

#### (11) Zone 11 (Granite and North Bristol Mountains)

(A) Area: In that portion of San Bernardino County beginning at the junction of Interstate Highway 40 and Crucero Road; east on Interstate Highway 40 to the junction with Kelbaker Road; north on Kelbaker Road to Kelso Depot; west on the Union Pacific Cima Subdivision Railroad track to the intersection with the South Powerline Road; southwest on the South Powerline Road to the intersection with Crucero Road; south on Crucero Road to the point of the beginning.

#### (12) Zone 12 (Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains)

(A) Area: In the portion of San Bernardino County beginning at the junction of Interstate Highway 40 and Kelbaker Road; east on Interstate Highway 40 to the junction with County Route 66; northeast on County Route 66 to the junction with Lanfair Road; north on Lanfair Road to the junction with Cedar Canyon Road; west on Cedar Canyon Road to the junction with Kelso Cima Road; southwest on Kelso Cima Road to the junction with Kelbaker Road; south on Kelbaker Road to the point at the beginning.

#### (13) Zone 13 (Castle Mountains and Piute Range)

(A) Area: In the portion of San Bernardino County beginning at the junction of Nipton Road and Ivanpah Road; south on Ivanpah Road and continuing when it becomes Lanfair Road to the junction of Lanfair Road and County Route 66; east on County Route 66 to the junction with U.S. Route 95; north on U.S. Route 95 to the California-Nevada border; northwest on the California-Nevada border to the junction with Castle Mountains National Monument boundary; following the Castle Mountains National Monument boundary south then west then north back to the California-Nevada border; northwest on the California-Nevada border to the junction with Nipton Road; west on Nipton Road to the point at the beginning.

(b) Seasons:

(1) Open Zone Fundraising Tag: The holder of the fundraising license tag issued pursuant to subdivision 4902(d) of the Fish and Game Code may hunt in Zones with at least one general public tag:

(A) Zones 1 through 4, 6, ~~and 8, 9, and 10,~~ through 13: Beginning the first Saturday in November and extending through the first Sunday in February.

(B) Zone 5: Beginning the third Saturday in November and extending through the third Sunday in February.

(C) Zone 7: Beginning the first Saturday in August and extending through the last Sunday in September. Beginning again, the third Saturday in December and extending through the first Sunday in February.

(2) Single Zone Fundraising Tag 1: Based on the zone issued, the holder of the fundraising license tag issued pursuant to subdivision 4902(d) of the Fish and Game Code may hunt:

(A) Zones 1 through 4, 6, and 8, 9, and 10, through 13: Beginning the first Saturday in November and extending through the first Sunday in February.

(B) Zone 5: Beginning the third Saturday in November and extending through the third Sunday in February

(C) Zone 7: Beginning the first Saturday in August and extending through the last Sunday in September. Beginning, again, the third Saturday in December and extending through the first Sunday in February.

(3) Single Zone Fundraising Tag 2: Based on the Zone issued, the holder of the fundraising license tag issued pursuant to subdivision 4902(d) of the Fish and Game Code may hunt:

(A) Zones 1 through 4, 6, and 8, 9, and 10, through 13: Beginning the first Saturday in November and extending through the first Sunday in February.

(B) Zone 5: Beginning the third Saturday in November and extending through the third Sunday in February.

(C) Zone 7: Beginning the first Saturday in August and extending through the last Sunday in September. Beginning, again, the third Saturday in December and extending through the first Sunday in February.

(4) Except as provided in subsection 362(b)(1), (2), and (3), the Nelson bighorn sheep season in the areas described in subsection 362(a) shall be defined as follows:

(A) Zones 1, 2, 3, through 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, and 13: Beginning the first Saturday in December and extending through the first Sunday in February.

(B) Zone 5: Beginning the third Saturday in December and extending through the third Sunday in February.

(C) Zone 7:

1. Zone 7 (Period 1): Beginning the third Saturday in August and extending through the last Sunday in September.

2. Zone 7 (Period 2): Beginning the first Saturday in January and extending through the first Sunday in February.

(D) Zone 10:

1. Zone 10 (Period 1): Beginning the first Saturday in December and extending through the first Saturday in January.

2. Zone 10 (Period 2): Beginning the first Sunday in January and extending through the first Sunday in February.

(5) Except as specifically provided in section 362, the take of bighorn sheep is prohibited.

(c) Bag and possession Limit: One mature ram defined as follows: a male Nelson bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*) having at least one horn, the tip of which extends beyond a point in a straight line beginning at the front (anterior) edge of the horn base, and extending downward through the rear (posterior) edge of the visible portion of the eye and continuing downward through the horn. All reference points are based on viewing the ram directly from a 90 degree angle from which the head is facing. A diagram showing the correct viewing procedure shall be distributed by the department to each successful applicant.

(d) Number of License Tags:

<i>Nelson Bighorn Sheep Hunt Zones</i>	<i>Tag Allocation</i>
Zone 1 – Marble/Clipper Mountains	1 <del>[0-3]</del> <u>1</u>
Zone 2 – Kelso Peak/Old Dad Mountains	3 <del>[0-4]</del> <u>3</u>
Zone 3 – Clark/Kingston Mountain Ranges	4 <del>[0-4]</del> <u>4</u>
Zone 4 – Orocopia Mountains	1 <del>[0-2]</del> <u>1</u>
Zone 5 – San Gorgonio Wilderness	1 <del>[0-3]</del> <u>1</u>
Zone 6 – Sheep Hole Mountains	1 <del>[0-2]</del> <u>1</u>
Zone 7 (Period 1) – White Mountains	3 <del>[0-4]</del> <u>2</u>
Zone 7 (Period 2) – White Mountains	2 <del>[0-4]</del> <u>1</u>
Zone 8 – South Bristol Mountains	1 <del>[0-3]</del> <u>1</u>
Zone 9 – Cady Mountains	2 <del>[0-4]</del> <u>2</u>
Zone 10 (Period 1) – Newberry, Rodman, Ord Mountains	4 <del>[0-6]</del> <u>4</u>
Zone 10 (Period 2) – Newberry, Rodman, Ord Mountains	4 <del>[0-6]</del> <u>4</u>
<u>Zone 11- Granite and North Bristol Mountains</u>	<del>[0-3]</del> <u>1</u>
<u>Zone 12 -Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains</u>	<del>[0-3]</del> <u>2</u>
<u>Zone 13- Castle Mountains and Piute Range</u>	<del>[0-4]</del> <u>2</u>

<i>Nelson Bighorn Sheep Hunt Zones</i>	<i>Tag Allocation</i>
Open Zone Fundraising Tag	1
Single Zone Fundraising Tag 1: <del>Zone 10</del> <u>Zone 10</u>	1
Single Zone Fundraising Tag 2: <del>Zone 2</del> <u>Zone 11</u> <del>12</del>	1
Total:	<del>30</del> <del>3</del> <del>58</del> <u>33</u>

(e) Conditions:

(1) Nelson bighorn rams shall only be taken between one-half hour before sunrise and one-half hour after sunset.

(2) Only methods specified in sections 353 and 354, Title 14, CCR, for taking bighorn sheep may be used.

(3) Each tagholder shall possess a spotting telescope capable of magnification of 15 power (15X), which is not affixed to a rifle, while hunting.

(4) Successful general tagholders shall present the head and edible portion of the carcass of a bighorn ram to the department's checking station within 48 hours after killing the animal. All successful tagholders shall notify the department's Bishop office by telephone at (760) 872-1171 within 24 hours of killing the animal and arrange for the head and carcass to be examined.

(5) All successful bighorn sheep tagholders shall make the horns of each ram available to the department to be permanently marked in the manner prescribed by the department for identification purposes within 48 hours of killing the animal. The purpose of the permanent marking shall be to identify Nelson bighorn rams which were legally taken and which may be transported and possessed outside the areas described in subsection 362(a).

(6) The department reserves the right to take and use any part of the tagholder's bighorn ram, except the horns, for biological analysis as long as no more than one pound of edible meat is removed.

NOTE: Authority cited: Sections 200, 203, 203.1, 265, 1050 and 4902, Fish and Game Code.

Reference: Sections 1050, 3950 and 4902, Fish and Game Code.

# MEMORANDUM

Received April 1, 2026  
Original signed copy on file

Date: March 30, 2026  
To: Melissa Miller-Henson, Executive Director  
Fish and Game Commission  
From: Meghan Hertel, Director

**Subject: Submission of Addenda to CEQA Documents for Amendments to Section 362, Title 14, California Code of Regulations (CCR), RE: Bighorn Sheep**

Please find attached the addendum to the 2019 California Environmental Quality Act Environmental Document regarding bighorn sheep hunting. The Department of Fish and Wildlife recommends adoption of the proposed regulations, slated for adoption at the Commission's April 15-16<sup>th</sup>, 2026 meeting.

If you have any questions regarding this item, please contact Scott Gardner, Wildlife Branch Chief, at (916) 801-6257.

Attachment

ec: **Department of Fish and Wildlife**

Chad Dibble, Deputy Director  
Wildlife and Fisheries Division

Scott Gardner, Chief  
Wildlife Branch

Dr. Mario Klip, Environmental Program Manager  
Wildlife Branch



Chelle Temple-King, Supervisor  
Wildlife Branch

Paige Prentice, Statewide Bighorn Sheep Coordinator  
Wildlife Branch

Regina Vu, Regulations Coordinator  
Wildlife Branch

Ona Alminas, Env. Program Manager  
Regulations Unit

Emily McKim, Senior Regulatory Scientist  
Regulations Unit

### **Fish and Game Commission**

David Thesell  
Deputy Executive Director

Ari Cornman  
Wildlife Advisor

Sherrie Fonbuena  
Analyst

Addendum to the  
2019 Environmental Document  
Regarding Bighorn Sheep Hunting

Regularly noticed rulemaking action to amend

Title 14, California Code of Regulations  
Section 362 Bighorn Sheep  
2026 Hunting Season

Prepared by:

California Department of Fish and Wildlife

on behalf of

California Fish and Game Commission

as

Lead Agency under the

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

December 2025

(OAL Notice No. **Z2026-0113-08**)

## Introduction

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has prepared this addendum pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq., to inform consideration by the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) of proposed amendments to existing regulations governing bighorn sheep hunting in California (California Code of Regulations (CCR), Title 14, Section 362). Fish and Game Code (F&G Code) Section 3950(b) designates Nelson bighorn sheep as a game mammal in California. F&G Code Section 203 authorizes the Commission to fix the area or areas, seasons and hours, bag and possession limit, sex, and total number of bighorn sheep that may be taken pursuant to its regulations. F&G Code Section 203.1 requires the Commission to consider populations, habitat, food supplies, the welfare of individual animals, and other pertinent facts when establishing hunting regulations for bighorn sheep. The Commission establishes bighorn sheep hunting tag quotas through regulations amended annually, as needed, based on current population estimates derived from surveys by the Department.

The Commission serves as the CEQA lead agency when it promulgates and amends bighorn sheep hunting regulations. (Public Resources Code, Section 21067; CEQA Guidelines Section 15367, Title 14, CCR).<sup>1</sup> The Commission established maximum tag quotas for all bighorn sheep hunting zones in California in 2019 with the certification of a Final Environmental Document under CEQA (2019 Bighorn Sheep Hunting ED) (SCH No. 2018112036). The 2019 Bighorn Sheep ED provides relevant and important informational value as the Commission as CEQA lead agency considers proposed amendments to the existing regulations for bighorn sheep hunting in California. In 2024, an addendum documented the Commission's consideration of adjusting tag quotas for the 2025-2026 hunt season and subsequently determined that the adjustments would have no additional effects than previously analyzed in the 2019 Bighorn Sheep Hunting ED. This addendum documents the Commission's consideration of related environmental effects for 2026 and subsequent hunt seasons.

## Earlier Project Approval

CEQA review of the proposed project was conducted in accordance with the Commission's certified regulatory program approved by the Secretary for the California Natural Resources Agency pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21080.5 (See generally Title 14, CCR Section 781.5 and Section 15251(b)). CEQA requires all public agencies in the State to evaluate the environmental impacts of discretionary projects

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<sup>1</sup> The "CEQA Guidelines" are found in Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, commencing with section 15000.

they propose to carry out or approve, including promulgating regulations, which may have a potential to significantly affect the environment.

In 2019, the Commission certified a Final Environmental Document Regarding Bighorn Sheep Hunting (2019 Bighorn Sheep Hunting ED) (SCH No. 2018112036) as the lead agency under CEQA as part of the Commission's review and adoption of the Bighorn Sheep Hunting regulations which focused on the potential for significant environmental impacts from

- 1) an increase in the tag quota ranges for Marble Mountains Hunt Zone by one tag, the Clark/Kingston Mountain Range Hunt Zone by two tags, and the White Mountains Hunt Zone by one tag;
- 2) increasing the individual tag quotas in other zones within previously analyzed quota ranges;
- 3) establishing a new hunt zone in the Newberry, Rodman, and Ord Mountains;
- 4) and reallocating a fundraising tag.

The Commission considered the proposed project increase of 10 tags and two alternatives. The Commission, as lead agency, certified the ED and determined adoption of the amended regulations as proposed would not result in any new significant or substantially more severe environmental effects. The Commission approved the increase of 10 tags for the 2019-20 bighorn sheep hunting regulations.

## **Proposed 2026 Changes for Nelson Bighorn Sheep Hunting**

The bighorn sheep fundraising tags, hunt zones, seasons, and tag quota ranges described in the 2019 Bighorn Sheep Hunting ED are the basis for the distribution and number of tags currently allocated to all zones in regulation.

Amendments to the fundraising tags are intended to increase opportunity and fundraising potential but do not alter the overall number of tags available.

Amendments to add three new hunt zones in and around the Mojave National Preserve which are intended to increase hunter opportunity, but only by a maximum of ten tags. Up to 3-4 tags will be distributed per new zone, thus spacing the hunters out across the landscape. In comparison, in 2022 the Mojave National Preserve estimates they had around 773,000 visitors. The predicted impact of 3-4 hunters to each of these areas is expected to be minimal and it is anticipated that there will be minimal overlap with Preserve visitors.

Amendments to alter general hunt tag quotas in existing ranges are intended to maintain sustainable harvest levels and are based on GPS data collected by the Department. Monitoring will continue to occur to ensure sustainable harvest levels are

not exceeded. Data collection and analyses for hunt zones was completed in early March.

For 2026, the Department recommends increasing the total number of tags from 30 to 33. This net increase is attributed to the establishment of the three new hunt zones. In all existing hunt zones, except Zone 7, the Department does not recommend any changes to tag allocations. For Zone 7, the 2025 hunt year was the first year that separate fall and winter hunt periods were implemented. The split periods saw increased harvest success, perhaps due to lower hunter pressure from the temporal separation of hunts. The Department recommends a reduction in tags across the two hunt periods to adjust for long-term sustainability.

In all, this net increase will not cause any new significant or substantial impacts to the environment. The Department continues to monitor populations and recommend hunt tags using the same processes as documented in the 2019 Bighorn Sheep Hunting ED.

<b><i>Nelson Bighorn Sheep Hunt Zones</i></b>	<b><i>2019 ED Tag Allocation Range</i></b>	<b><i>2025 Tag Allocation</i></b>	<b><i>2026 Proposed Tag Allocation Range</i></b>	<b><i>2026 Proposed Tag Allocation</i></b>
Zone 1 – Marble/Clipper Mountains	0-5	1	[0-3]	1
Zone 2 – Kelso Peak/Old Dad Mountains	0-2	3	[0-4]	3
Zone 3 – Clark/Kingston Mountain Ranges	0-4	4	[0-4]	4
Zone 4 – Orocopia Mountains	0-2	1	[0-2]	1
Zone 5 – San Gorgonio Wilderness	0-3	1	[0-3]	1
Zone 6 – Sheep Hole Mountains	0-2	1	[0-2]	1
Zone 7 – White Mountains	0-6	-	-	-
Zone 7 (Period 1) – White Mountains	-	3	[0-4]	2
Zone 7 (Period 2) – White Mountains	-	2	[0-4]	1
Zone 8 – South Bristol Mountains	0-3	1	[0-3]	1
Zone 9 – Cady Mountains	0-4	2	[0-4]	2
Zone 10 – Newberry, Rodman, Ord Mountains	0-6	-	-	-
Zone 10 (Period 1) – Newberry, Rodman, Ord Mountains	-	4	[0-6]	4

<b>Nelson Bighorn Sheep Hunt Zones</b>	<b>2019 ED Tag Allocation Range</b>	<b>2025 Tag Allocation</b>	<b>2026 Proposed Tag Allocation Range</b>	<b>2026 Proposed Tag Allocation</b>
Zone 10 (Period 2) – Newberry, Rodman, Ord Mountains	-	4	[0-6]	4
Zone 11 – Granite and North Bristol Mountains	-	-	[0-3]	1
Zone 12 – Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains	-	-	[0-3]	2
Zone 13 – Castle Mountains and Piute Range	-	-	[0-4]	2
Open Zone Fundraising Tag	0-1	1	1	1
Single Zone Fundraising Tag 1: Zone 10	0-1	1	1	1
Single Zone Fundraising Tag 2: Zone 2 [1-13]	0-1	1	1	1
<b>Total:</b>	<b>0-40</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>[3-58]</b>	<b>33</b>

The 2026 proposed changes are intended to increase hunter opportunity and are supported by data collected by the Department. The 2026 recommended net increase of 3 tags, to a maximum of 33 mature Nelson bighorn rams accounts for approximately 0.73% of the estimated 4,500 Nelson bighorn sheep statewide. This is less than the maximum number of tags documented in the 2019 Bighorn Sheep Hunting ED, that analyzed a maximum of 42 tags out of an estimated 4,000 Nelson bighorn statewide (approximately 1.05%) would not have a significant negative effect. Similarly, the proposed increase in tag quota ranges within individual zones fall within the 15% of the mature ram population estimated for those populations. Furthermore, the 2019 Bighorn Sheep Hunting ED analyzed the addition of a new hunt zone (for up to 6 tags) and also concluded that at these low harvest numbers there will not be any significant impacts to the environment. There are no new significant or substantially more severe impacts from amending the bighorn sheep hunting regulations as proposed.

## **No Subsequent Environmental Document is Required**

In general, CEQA applies whenever a public agency proposes to carry out or approve a discretionary project. (Public Resources Code, subdivision 21080(a)). CEQA provides that, where a public agency proposes to modify a previously approved project for which a final environmental document was prepared and certified:

“The lead agency or a responsible agency shall prepare an **addendum** to a previously certified EIR if some changes or additions are necessary but none of the conditions described in Section 15162 calling for preparation of a subsequent EIR have occurred.” (Title 14, Section 15164)

- A subsequent environment document (Section 15162, Title 14, CCR) when there is substantial evidence that:
  - Substantial changes are proposed in the project, which will require major revisions to the previous environmental impact report (EIR) or negative declaration due to the involvement of new significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects.
  - Substantial changes occur with respect to the circumstances under which the project is being undertaken, which will require major revisions to the previous EIR or negative declaration due to the involvement of new significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects.
  - New information of substantial importance, which was not known and could not have been known with the exercise of reasonable diligence at the time the previous EIR was certified as complete or negative declaration was adopted, becomes available.
- A supplement to an EIR (Section 15163, Title 14, CCR) may be prepared rather than a subsequent EIR when:
  - Any of the conditions described in Section 15162 would require the preparation of a subsequent EIR, and
  - Only minor additions or changes would be necessary to make the previous EIR adequately apply to the project in the changed situation.
  - The supplement to the EIR need contain only the information necessary to make the previous EIR adequate for the project as revised.
- An addendum to a previously certified EIR (Title 14, CCR Section 15164) is proper when:
  - Some changes or additions are necessary but none of the conditions described in Section 15162 calling for preparation of a subsequent EIR have occurred.
  - The decision-making body shall consider the addendum with the final EIR prior to making a decision on the project.

## **No Additional Impacts under CEQA**

The Commission has determined that amending the current bighorn sheep hunting regulations based on annual survey results will not result in any new or significant or substantially more severe environmental impacts than previously analyzed and disclosed in the 2019 Bighorn Sheep ED for this project.

This project does not have the potential to degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife

population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, reduce the number or restrict the range of rare or endangered plant or animal, or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory. There are no impacts to the habitat of fish and wildlife species.

This approval action adds three new hunt zones; reassigns the zone for previous year fundraising tags to allow for more flexibility and increased fundraising potential; and adjusts tag quotas based on current population information. No other aspect of the project has changed. No new significant or substantially more severe impacts under CEQA will occur due to this change.

### **Amendment of the Bighorn Sheep Hunting regulations**

The Commission subjected the draft to its own review and analysis. Based on that review and analysis, the draft reflects the independent judgment of the Commission and fulfills the Commission's responsibilities.

In conclusion, the Commission finds that amending the bighorn sheep hunt regulations in CCR, Title 14, Section 362, will not result in any new significant or substantially more severe environmental effects than previously analyzed and disclosed in the 2019 Bighorn Sheep Hunting ED. The Commission also finds that subsequent or supplemental review beyond this Addendum is not warranted pursuant to CCR, Title 14, Section 15164, in connection with this proposed action.

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Melissa Miller-Henson, Executive Director  
California Fish and Game Commission

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Date



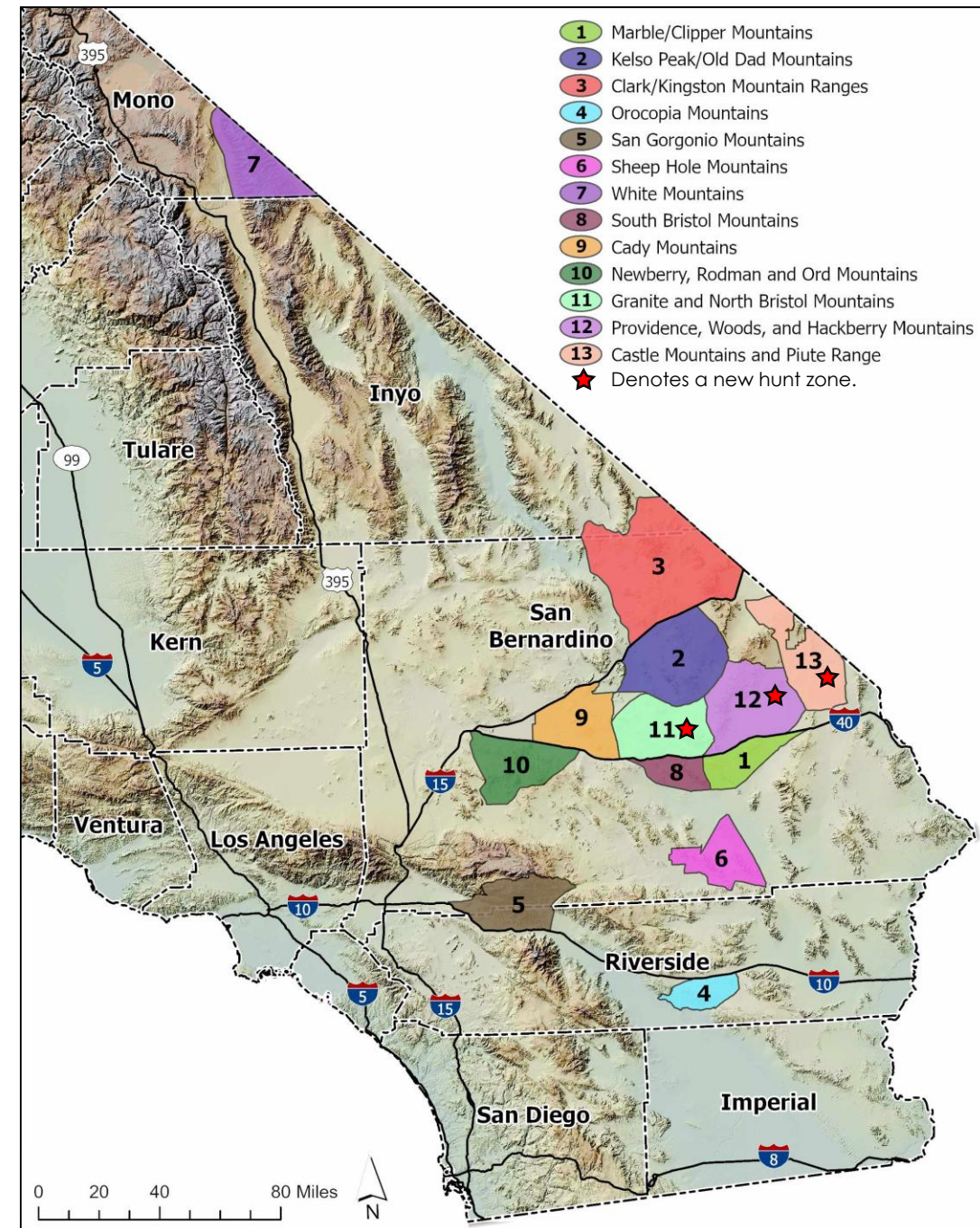
Photo Credit: CDFW

# DESERT BIGHORN SHEEP HUNTING: FINAL RECOMMENDATION

Supplemental document prepared for the Fish and Game Commission  
for the April 16, 2026 meeting

# New Hunt Zones

- Recommend to add three zones
  - Zone 11: Granite and North Bristol Mountains
  - Zone 12: Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains
  - Zone 13: Castle Mountains and Piute Range
- Located in NCD BCU, in and around Mojave National Preserve



# Reallocate Single Zone Fundraising Tags



Photo Credit: CDFW

- Reallocate one of the Single Zone Fundraising Tags (SZFT)
  - SZFT 1: Zone 10 (no change)
  - SZFT 2: Zone 2 → Zone 12
- Maximize fundraising potential while maintaining general tag opportunity
- Three fundraising tags FY 2026/2027:
  - Open Zone Tag
  - SZFT 1: Zone 10 Newberry, Rodman, and Ord Mountains
  - SZFT 2: Zone 12 Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains



# Modify General Drawing Tag Quotas

Nelson Bighorn Sheep Hunt Zones	2025 Tag Allocation	Tag Quota Ranges	2026 Recommended Tag Allocation
Zone 1 Marble/Clipper Mountains	1	[0-3]	1
Zone 2 Kelso Peak/Old Dad Mountains	3	[0-4]	3
Zone 3 Clark/Kingston Mountain Ranges	4	[0-4]	4
Zone 4 Orocopia Mountains	1	[0-2]	1
Zone 5 San Gorgonio Wilderness	1	[0-3]	1
Zone 6 Sheep Hole Mountains	1	[0-2]	1
Zone 7 (Period 1) – White Mountains	3	[0-4]	2
Zone 7 (Period 2) – White Mountains	2	[0-4]	1
Zone 8 South Bristol Mountains	1	[0-3]	1
Zone 9 Cady Mountains	2	[0-4]	2
Zone 10 (Period 1) – Newberry, Rodman, Ord Mountains	4	[0-6]	4
Zone 10 (Period 2) – Newberry, Rodman, Ord Mountains	4	[0-6]	4
Zone 11 Granite and North Bristol Mountains	--	[0-3]	1
Zone 12 Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains	--	[0-3]	2
Zone 13 Castle Mountains and Piute Range	--	[0-4]	2
<b>Total</b>	27	[0-55]	30

Highlight denotes changes from notice meeting



# Questions | Contact

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Paige Prentice, Statewide Bighorn Sheep Coordinator  
Big Game Unit, Wildlife Branch  
[BigGame@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:BigGame@wildlife.ca.gov)

