



Game Allocation Framework



Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment
2017



Introduction

Wildlife in Saskatchewan are a public resource belonging to all Saskatchewan residents. The conservation and allocation of these resources, on behalf of the public, are the responsibility of the Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment (the ministry). The ministry is developing a long-range *Game Management Plan* that is a collection of documents that provides a strategic framework for the conservation of Saskatchewan's wildlife and important habitats, and forms the basis for ensuring that current and future generations continue to enjoy the harvest of game species. The *Game Allocation Framework* document is a component of the overarching *Game Management Plan*.

This policy outlines allocation of game species in Saskatchewan, including big game and game birds. It covers the broad principles that govern how harvestable game is allocated to hunters, and provides direction to guide decision-making when competing interests are identified for a particular allocation decision. Decisions not covered by this policy must be supported by science and strong

rationale that complement the decision-making framework outlined in this document.

Game allocation is the process of distributing or provisioning game hunting opportunities among hunters using legally established hunting licences and season structures. The ministry relies on many tools to manage game and allocate harvest, some of which are establishing draw (quota limited) or regular (open quota) seasons, establishing season dates, implementing sex and/or age harvest restrictions and prescribing firearm usage.

The management of any game species may require a unique mix of allocation tools, and the ministry will strive to provide all hunters with quality hunting opportunities that are consistent with the following principles and rationale.



Principles

1. Hunting is a traditional, recognized and legitimate use of wildlife resources that provides important social, cultural and economic benefits for Saskatchewan residents.
2. Saskatchewan provides a diversity of hunting opportunities which must be maintained and managed for future generations. The ministry's goal is to optimize hunting activities while ensuring game populations are sustainable and at a socially-acceptable level.
3. Wildlife is a public trust. The ministry will strive to maintain public access and hunting opportunities for all Saskatchewan residents, regardless of social or economic status.
4. Decisions regarding game allocation will reflect the priority and interests of all Saskatchewan residents, including hunters, trappers, landowners, outfitters, naturalists and the general public. Allocation of game for special interest groups will be avoided unless they align with the broader allocation framework.
5. Decisions regarding game allocations typically are made at the regional, ecozone or landscape scale. Wildlife management zones (WMZs) have been delineated to support management of game species.
6. Management of one species will not be to the detriment of another species.
7. Maintain fair and equitable opportunity for hunters to purchase a licence for game species.
8. A licence provides the purchaser with a hunting opportunity, meaning hunters are offered time in the field and are not guaranteed to successfully harvest an animal.
9. Decisions regarding game allocation must consider the following: species information, hunter priority, firearm type, season type, season timing and duration, animal class, habitat availability, land-use activities and hunter recruitment and retention.

Species Information

The available harvest for any one species is determined from a combination of factors including:

- Wildlife population levels (e.g., population survey data, public reports of local populations)
- Harvest information (e.g., hunter harvest survey results, licence sales, unregulated harvest estimates)
- Biological and ecological knowledge (e.g., biological carrying capacity, life history traits, habitat preferences, natural mortality, species behaviour)
- Social carrying capacity (e.g., crop damage, public safety concerns)
- Disease levels and risk of spread in wildlife populations
- Specific targets or thresholds as identified in species management plans (e.g., herd structure ratio)

Hunter Priority

The ministry will strive to provide harvest of game species to regulated hunters, as well as rights-bearing individuals, whenever possible. Wildlife resources are allocated in the following priority:

- A. Conservation is the primary consideration before any harvest is to be allowed.
- B. First Nations and Métis rights holders have the first right of access to game populations for sustenance purposes under the authority of a constitutionally-protected Treaty or Aboriginal right.
- C. Saskatchewan residents who hold a valid hunting licence are given first priority in allocation of the remaining allowable harvest.
- D. Licensed outfitters may receive an allocation of provincial game birds and forest big game resources when available. Game species may be allocated by open quota, an assigned harvest or client quota, or based on a land area. The ministry understands that the outfitting industry needs advanced notice of changes to their allocations and will attempt to provide notification prior to changes being implemented.

- E. Non-residents of Saskatchewan may be afforded any harvestable surplus that is remaining and will not have opportunities beyond those afforded to Saskatchewan residents.

Firearm Type

Recognizing that firearm preference differs between hunters and that the type of firearm allowed can influence the quality of the hunt for many hunters, the ministry will consider firearm type in allocation decision-making. The following key principles guide allocation by firearm type:

- The premier hunting opportunity will be firearm-inclusive, meaning all lawful firearm types will be permitted during this period.
- Seasons for specific firearm types will be considered outside the premier hunting opportunity and will be set based on a fair balance of opportunities amongst all firearm users, the effects on other firearm users and available season dates. Seasons dedicated to a specific firearm type may be combined with compatible firearm types.
- Specific firearm types (archery, crossbow, muzzleloader or shotgun) may be given preference in urban zones (e.g., Saskatoon WMZ), due to their limited range and the subsequent differing hunting practices.
- Hunting opportunities may be re-evaluated as firearm technology advances.

Season Type

The designation of a season type is a primary tool to meet species population and land use tolerance goals. Options include closed, regular, draw and quota-limited regular seasons or a combination thereof.

- Open seasons (i.e., unlicensed hunting opportunities) are not used to manage game species in Saskatchewan.
- Closed seasons (i.e., no hunting) are used when populations of select game species are at a level where a harvestable surplus is not available. These hunting restrictions may be province-wide or limited to specific wildlife management zones.
- Regular seasons (i.e., unlimited quota) are offered when populations are sustainable, well distributed, and the supply of the species or

age class is greater than the demand by hunters. Regular seasons may overlap the peak breeding period if population objectives are being met. A strong hunter heritage or tradition exists around many regular seasons because hunters have come to expect an annual hunting opportunity. In times of low population and to avoid allocating via a draw season, the ministry will explore one or more of the following methods to limit harvest in order to maintain a regular season:

- ~ season length
- ~ timing of season to avoid periods when animals are most vulnerable (e.g., premier hunting opportunity)
- ~ establishing sex or age-specific seasons
- ~ regulating vehicle use
- ~ limiting harvest by residency type
- ~ limiting zone or region in which season applies
- Draw seasons provide opportunities to only those hunters who are successful in the big game draw. The draw is used when hunting opportunities are limited due to reduced populations, population distribution range is limited, or when hunter demand is greater than allowable harvest. Key considerations for using draw seasons include:
 - ~ Big game draw seasons are designed to provide the premier hunting opportunity for a species. Any regular seasons for that species will be designed to ensure the draw hunt is not adversely affected.
 - ~ Draw seasons during the premier hunting opportunity will be firearm-inclusive, allowing archery, crossbow, muzzleloader, shotgun and rifle opportunities to run concurrently. This concurrent season format is justified due to the short time period, limited number of hunters and unique opportunity.
 - ~ Draw quotas may be used to target specific age and gender class (e.g., antlerless only).
 - ~ Quota-limited seasons, with an established number of licences offered on a first come-first served basis, are used to provide select hunting opportunities, such as unallocated big game draw licences or big game management licences (BGML).

These opportunities are generally used to respond to situations requiring a targeted hunting effort or where harvest goals are not being met, but the population cannot sustain a regular season. These licences are generally limited to a particular wildlife management zone(s) or select geographic area (e.g., a single rural municipality).

Season Timing and Duration

Setting season dates allows wildlife managers to make adjustments to overall harvest by aligning or avoiding times when animals are more vulnerable and by timing seasons when hunters are able to access animals. Generally speaking, seasons are set to avoid the harvest of females that have young of the year that cannot yet fend for themselves, or are in the later stages of their pregnancy. In some cases, the time of day is used to regulate harvest (e.g., before October 15, hunting for dark geese is restricted to morning only in select southern zones in an effort to retain birds in staging areas and provide extended hunting opportunities).

Seasons are also timed to factor in hunter and landowner interests. Hunters are seeking ample opportunity to hunt on weekends, under the best possible weather conditions and with minimal hunter distribution or crowding. Landowners prefer to have seasons that occur after the majority of farming activities are completed, and to have predictable season dates so they can plan fall land-use activities accordingly. In general, standardization and simplification of season dates are advantageous in terms of hunter and landowner acceptance, compliance and enforcement.

Varying the length of seasons also provides opportunity to regulate overall harvest. In addition, careful design of season length can be used to maintain positive relationships between hunters and landowners. A longer season gives hunters more opportunity, increases the probability of successful harvest and spreads hunters out, thereby relieving pressure on both the animals and landowners. Shorter seasons concentrate hunters, put more pressure on the animals and landowners, and create fewer opportunities for hunters to harvest an animal.

The ministry attempts to minimize overlapping seasons for different species as a method of providing quality hunting opportunities. However,

some overlap of hunting seasons is necessary as the majority of hunting seasons occur during a 10-week period. To minimize overlapping seasons, the ministry will strive to: a) establish species-specific seasons to run consecutively rather than concurrently; b) maintain fixed season dates unless there are management concerns; and c) distribute season opening dates such that different species will have different opening dates, when possible.

Animal Class

The ministry establishes hunting opportunities to achieve age class and herd structure objectives identified in individual species management plans. This is accomplished by issuing licences that may limit harvest based on age or sex criteria.

- Either-sex licences allow the hunter the opportunity to harvest either a female or male animal of any age. This is often the most preferred opportunity, as it facilitates the highest hunter success. Hunters most often harvest adult male animals during this season. This licence type is often used when game populations are stable and widespread.
- Antlerless licences direct harvest to the reproductive component of the populations (e.g., a female animal or an animal that was born that year). Wildlife managers employ these licences to reduce populations or to balance the sex ratio in populations where hunter demand generally selects male animals.
- Adult male-only licences restrict big game hunters to harvesting a male greater than one year of age in order to limit the effect of harvest on population growth or to balance herd structure. For most game species, a significant number of males can be removed from a population without impacting the growth of that population. Additionally, in terms of game bird licences, ring-necked pheasant harvest is restricted to males of any age.

Habitat Availability and Distribution

Habitat availability and distribution varies across Saskatchewan and must be considered when making game allocation decisions in the province. Habitat, and particularly winter habitat, is a key factor in determining the population level in an area. Additionally, the availability and distribution of cover habitat influences detection and the vulnerability of a species to harvest. For example, a moose in the farmland may be more easily detected than in the forest.

Land-Use Activities

Allocation decisions must consider other activities occurring on the landscape, such as agricultural practices on private land, increasing urbanization, public and agricultural use of Crown lands and peak park visitation times. Agricultural producers control access over much of the land in southern Saskatchewan; therefore, a positive relationship between hunters and agricultural producers is key to the successful management of game species.

The ministry will consider timing hunting seasons to reduce conflict with other human activity on the landscape. In addition, the ministry supports the use of unique hunting strategies to manage game populations at the urban/rural interface (e.g., shotgun seasons).

Hunter Recruitment and Retention

Allocation decisions designed to increase hunter participation will be considered both as a recruitment tool and to encourage family participation in Saskatchewan's hunting heritage. This may be accomplished through reduced licence fees and preferred hunting opportunities (e.g., 20 per cent of antlerless mule deer licences are allocated to youth hunters and a youth package that includes game bird and first white-tailed deer licences at a considerably reduced cost.)



Definitions

Available harvest – The percentage of a game population which can be removed through hunting while maintaining a sustainable population. This harvest level is modified or targeted dependant on population targets of a particular game species (e.g., population growth, reduction, or maintenance).

Biological carrying capacity – The maximum population size of a biological species that the environment can sustain indefinitely, given the food, habitat, water, and other necessities available in the environment.

Game class – Age class and gender of individuals, usually separated into adult males (yearlings or older), adult females (yearlings or older) and young of year (regardless of gender).

Herd structure – The combination of age and sex classes represented in a given population, usually represented as male:female or juvenile:female ratios.

Hunting opportunity – Refers to the period a hunter has to harvest an animal, also known as 'days in the field'.

Peak breeding period – The portion of the breeding season when mature males are most vulnerable, usually the period from the beginning of breeding (onset of estrous) until 50 per cent of the females have been bred; term usually refers to big game species.

Premier hunting opportunity – The best available hunting season, which considers all aspects of quality hunting opportunities; often is synonymous with peak breeding period.

Quality hunting opportunities – Hunting opportunities that include a combination of factors such as low hunter densities, reasonable access to habitat, plentiful game populations and undisturbed animals, but is largely based on personal preference.

Scale – The spatial measure of an object or a process, or its amount of spatial resolution (e.g., an elk population may be considered at the regional, ecozone or landscape scale).

Social carrying capacity – The maximum population size of a biological species that will be tolerated by the stakeholders and public affected by the species.

