

Idaho Department of Fish and Game's Hunting and Advanced Technology Working Group Recommendations

Preamble

Idaho Department of Fish and Game convened the Hunting and Advanced Technology (HAT) Working Group to “assess public perspectives on what is and is not considered “fair” technology to use in the pursuit of game and develop recommendations to the Commission that strike an appropriate balance between the use of hunting technology and fair chase ethic.” The Charter stated that the HAT Working Group should reach full consensus before moving recommendations forward to the Commission for consideration. In addition, the Charter outlined five sideboards for the Working Group:

- Recommendations must be within the authority of the Commission.
- The scope of work will be limited to deer, elk, pronghorn, moose, mountain goat, and bighorn sheep.
- Recommendations must align with management objectives as identified in species management plans.
- Recommendations must be enforceable.
- The Commission will make the ultimate decision on the recommendations brought forth by the Working Group.

A copy of the Working Group's charter, which was signed by all members of the Working Group, is attached.

In response to an announcement about plans for the HAT Working Group, IDFG received over 750 applications to serve as members of the Working Group. Selections were made with a goal of covering a spectrum of interests, including traditional archers, competitive long-range shooters, houndsmen, trappers, deer and elk hunters, bear baiters, wolf hunters and more, all with varying perspectives and stances on what is and is not "fair" in the pursuit of big game.

Members of the Working Group included: Derick Attebury, Matt Borg, Jason Carr, Jeff Choules, Ken Crane, Dillon Halverson, Tim Frost, Nathan Guy, Larry Hatter, Halli Hemingway, Kimberly Johnson, Jeremiah Mani, Alex Martin, Chelsea Merriman, Bryce Oldemeyer, Kevin Rogers, Tal Sampson, Jeff Shinn, Nicole Swafford, Doug Talbot, Rob Thornberry, Jason Topp, and Dustin Webster. Public information about the Working Group, including the bios of all members can be found on a webpage about the Working Group at: <https://idfg.idaho.gov/hat-working-group>.

The Working Group met a total of eight times: November 2, November 11, and December 2, 2024 and January 4, January 27, February 17, March 10, and March 22, 2025. Three meetings were held in person and five were held online. Recordings of all meetings are available on the Working Group's webpage. Ellary TuckerWilliams, IDFG Legislative and

Community Engagement Coordinator, provided staff support for Working Group meetings. Wendy Green Lowe of P2 Solutions served as the facilitator.

To support the Working Group's deliberations, IDFG conducted a survey that was sent to a random sample of approximately 15,000 Idaho residents who had purchased a license or tag to hunt big game over the past 3-5 years. The survey was sent to a stratified sample of hunters in all seven regions of the state. The purpose of the survey was to give the Hunting and Advanced Technology Working Group insight into the hunting population of Idaho's opinions about the topics under consideration by the Working Group. The survey was conducted between December 3 and December 22, 2024. Ellary Tucker Williams presented summary findings of the survey during the January 4, 2025 meeting. A 17-page summary of the results of the survey was provided and is also available on the Working Groups webpage.

In addition, IDFG provided an opportunity for the public to submit comments relevant to the Working Group's deliberations. A summary of comments as well as a spreadsheet of all comments received was provided to the Working Group in advance of each of their meetings starting with November 11, 2024 meeting.

Informational presentations were provided to the Working Group by

- Gordon R. Batcheller, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
- Toby Boudreau, IDFG Statewide Deer and Elk Coordinator
- Nephi Cole, the National Shooting Sports Foundation
- Dan Forster, the Archery Trade Association
- Scott Lavin, Arizona Game and Fish Department
- Kyle Lehr, Director of Big Game Records, Boone and Crockett Club
- Sergeant Gabe Patterson, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
- Meghan Roos, IDFG Senior Conservation Officer
- Justin Spring, Executive Director, Pope and Young Club
- Abram Summerfield, EOTECH
- Tony Wasley, President, Wildlife Management Institute
- Greg Wooten, IDFG Bureau Chief of Enforcement
- Jon Zinnel, The Kinetic Group

Slides of all presentations were provided to all Working Group members following each meeting.

Numerous other documents were provided to the Working Group over the course of its work, including in chronological order:

November 2, 2024 meeting:

- IDAPA 13 – Idaho Department of Fish And Game Wildlife Bureau 13.01.08 – Rules Governing Taking of Big Game Animals
- Idaho Open Meetings Law

- Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Hunting and Fishing Technology White Paper
- Utah Division of Wildlife Resources Technology Committee Summary

November 11, 2024 meeting:

- Idaho 2023 Bowhunting Regulations prepared by the Archery Trade Association
- Summary Findings of the Bowhunting Equipment Regulation Complexities in the United States, prepared by the Archery Trade Association

December 2, 2024 meeting:

- Boone and Crockett Club Fair Chase Discussion Paper

January 4, 2025 Meeting:

- Topline Report on the Public Survey prepared by Kenneth E. Wallen, Ph.D., University of Idaho College of Natural Resources Department of Natural Resources and Society

All documents provided are attached for reference.

In addition, links were provided to Working Group members for other reference materials of potential interest, including:

Human Dimensions Research

- [Americans' Attitudes Towards Hunting, Fishing, Shooting, and Trapping](#)
- [American Wildlife Values](#)

Boone and Crockett Club Supplemental Information

- Position Statement on Fair Chase: <https://www.boone-crockett.org/bc-position-statement-fair-chase>
- Position Statement on Long Range Shooting: <https://www.boone-crockett.org/bc-position-statement-long-range-shooting>
- Position Statement on Technology and Hunting: <https://www.boone-crockett.org/bc-position-statement-technology-and-hunting>
- Remarks from Wyoming Sportsperson Conservation Panel: <https://www.boone-crockett.org/boone-and-crockett-club-leads-fair-chase-wyoming-sportsperson-conservation-panel>

To support the development of their draft recommendations, the Working Group members developed five principles for their work together, as follows:

1. **Fair Chase Ethic.** *Fair Chase is the ethical, sportsmanlike, and legal pursuit and harvesting of any free-ranging wild game animal in a manner that does not give the hunter an improper or unfair advantage over the animal. As with any guideline, it is still rooted in personal ethics.*
2. **Hunting Opportunity/Idaho Hunting Heritage.** *Will this recommendation maintain our hunting opportunity and preserve our heritage and traditions into the future?*

3. **Perception that recommendations are reasonable.** *Four questions to ask ourselves: 1) Is the recommendation supported by the best available science? 2) Is the recommendation enforceable? 3) Does the recommendation align with public input? 4) Does the recommendation place an undue burden on the hunting public or provide advantage to one group over another?*
4. **Ongoing need to address advancements in technology.** *We recommend that IDFG consider two questions to support the evaluation of new technologies: 1) Does the technology significantly override or disrupt an animal's ability to rely on its natural instincts, defenses, and survival strategies? 2) Does the technology lead to unsustainable harvest rates that jeopardize the health or viability of big game populations or IDFG's species management goals? A yes in response to either of these questions should indicate a need for thoughtful evidence-based research and/or review of the potential objective impacts of that technology on big game animals.*
5. **Perception that the Working Group represents all Idaho hunters.** *Two questions to ask ourselves: 1) Does each recommendation accurately reflect the data from the statewide survey, public comments, and our collective knowledge and experience? 2) Have we worked to develop unbiased opinions and reach a well-informed consensus, guided by the input from hunters across Idaho, with the goal of maximizing opportunities throughout the state?*

The principles were approved by consensus during the March 10, 2025 meeting.

In consideration of their principles, all information available to them, and discussions among members, the Hunting and Advanced Technology Working Group developed and considered numerous draft recommendations. Those that were approved by consensus follow as well as several that the Working Group wanted to pass along to the Commission for further consideration.

Consensus Recommendation Package

The following recommendations were by approved consensus by the Working Group Members in attendance at the March 22, 2025 meeting.

Principles for Evaluating Technology Advancements in the Future

The following guiding principles were used during development of the HAT Working Group's recommendations. These principles and definitions were unanimously supported by all members of the HAT Working Group. The HAT Working Group recommends that the IDFG Commission adopt similar principles to inform future consideration of advancements in technology.

- Fair Chase Ethic
- Hunting Opportunity/Idaho Hunting Heritage
- Regulations that will be perceived as reasonable
- Ongoing need to address advancements in technology
- Regulations attempt to represent the best interests of all Idaho hunters.

Drones

The HAT Working Group recommends that it be unlawful for any person to use any aircraft (including drones, helicopter, and fixed-wing aircraft) to spot, locate, or aid in the taking of any big game ungulates from July 1 through December 31 or dates as determined most appropriate by the Commission.

Smart Optics

The HAT Working Group recommends that the current regulations related to smart optics be kept in place. Under current regulations, smart optics are unlawful when attached to or incorporated into a firearm while scopes with battery powered or tritium lighted reticles are allowed.

Muzzleloader Technology

The Hat Working Group recommends maintaining the current muzzleloader regulations for Muzzleloader-Only Seasons.

Short Range Weapons

The HAT Working Group recommends that the Commission consider the weapons allowed in short range seasons and whether they align with the intent of short range hunting seasons.

Education

To promote ethical hunting practices and fair chase principles, the HAT Working Group recommends the IDFG increase education and outreach efforts. Potential strategies include:

- Updating hunter safety courses with a stronger emphasis on ethics, possibly incorporating more in-person instruction
- Launching a social media campaign focused on ethical hunting and responsible decision-making
- Expanding outreach on wildlife management to improve public understanding
- Strengthening engagement with hunting stakeholder groups to promote ethical hunting values
- Exploring other states outreach and education model (such as Arizona) as a potential framework
- Improving public perception of hunting by emphasizing ethical practices and responsible stewardship.

Transportation

The HAT Working Group recommends that access policies be balanced to provide hunting opportunity mindful of wildlife conservation to promote fair chase and sustainable hunting through strategic management.

Artificial Intelligence

At this time, the HAT Working Group does not have any formal recommendations for restricting the use of AI technologies in hunting. However, the Working Group strongly advises the Commission to closely monitor the rapidly evolving application of AI within the hunting community. As AI technologies continue to advance, new tools and techniques may emerge that could significantly impact hunting ethics and the principles outlined by the HAT Working Group. Maintaining a vigilant and adaptable approach will be critical to preserving Idaho's hunting traditions and ensuring alignment with wildlife management goals.

Modern Archery Optics

The HAT Working Group recommends keeping current archery equipment regulations.

Other Draft Recommendations Considered by the Working Group

The Hunting and Advanced Technology Working Group considered the following draft recommendations but were not able to reach consensus to support them during the final meeting on March 22, 2025. It is important to note this language was not approved by consensus.

Night Vision

The HAT Working Group recommends that it be unlawful to use night vision technology, mounted as well as handheld equipment, for scouting, hunting, or retrieving big game ungulates from July 1 through December 31 or dates as deemed most appropriate by the Commission.

Thermal Imaging Optics

The HAT Working Group recommends that it be unlawful to use thermal imaging technology for scouting, hunting, and retrieving big game ungulates from July 1 through December 31 or dates as determined most appropriate by the Commission.

Transmitting Trail Cameras

For the purposes of hunting and scouting for big game ungulates, the HAT Working Group recommends that it be unlawful to use transmitting trail cameras from July 1 through December 31 or dates as determined most appropriate by the Commission, on public or public access property.