

Washoe County Advisory Board to Manage Wildlife –
April 23, 2025 minutes

1. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE** [Non-action item]
2. **CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL** [Non-action item]

Members in Attendance

1. Coby Rowe, Chairman
2. Ryan Browne, Vice Chairman
3. Steve Robinson
4. Matt Melarkey
5. Jim Rhea

Others in Attendance

1. Mel Belding
2. Joel Blakeslee
3. Sean Espinosa, NDOW
4. Cooper Munson, NDOW
5. John Ewanyk, NDOW
6. Cody Knight
7. John Sutton
8. James Pichel
9. Whitney Robinson
10. Dakota Kruise
11. Jonathan Lesperance
12. Sean Shea
13. Lou Benetti
14. George Forbush
15. Mitch Bailey

3. **PUBLIC COMMENTS**–[Non-action item]

There was no public comment.

4. **Approval of March 3, 2025 minutes**–[For possible action]

Member Rhea motioned for approval of the March 3, 2025 CAB minutes. Member Melarkey seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

5. **BOARD MEMBER MEETING ASSIGNMENT**–[Non-action item]

Chair Rowe asked who would be able to attend the upcoming Commission meeting. Board members noted they would be able to be in attendance for the

Washoe County Advisory Board to Manage Wildlife –
April 23, 2025 minutes

upcoming Commission meeting in Reno.

6. COMMITTEE, MEMBER AND LIAISON UPDATES-[Non-action items]

Chair Rowe said he received correspondence regarding the petition that was on the agenda for the meeting.

7. CORNER CROSSING PROGRAM- [Informational Only]

Senior Deputy Attorney General Craig Burkett provided an update to the CAB regarding recent judicial rulings that pertained to corner crossing and how those rulings may affect neighboring districts including Nevada. He explained there was a case in the 10th Circuit regarding hunters and a ranch owner and the court had sided with hunters. He noted that A federal three-judge panel has sided with a group of hunters who faced civil trespassing charges stemming from elk-hunting excursions into “checkerboard” land in Carbon County, Wyoming. He went on to discuss how the ruling may impact lands in neighboring states and districts.

8. Consent Agenda [For Possible Action]

- A. Fiscal Year 2025 Predation Management Plan: Amendment #1**
- B. Fiscal Year 2026 Predation Management Plan**
- C. Biennial Big Game Release Plan for Fiscal Years 2025 and 2026 Amendment # 4**
- D. Legislative Committee Report**

The CAB chose to pull items 8a and 8c from the consent agenda for additional discussion. There was no public comment.

Member Melarkey moved to approve items 8b and 8d for approval as written and to remove items 8a and 8c for additional discussion. Vice Chair Browne seconded. The carried unanimously.

9. Consent Calendar items pulled for further discussion [For Possible Action]

- A. Fiscal Year 2025 Predation Management Plan: Amendment #1**

Chair Rowe opened the item to review an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2025 Predation Management Plan to alter funding distribution between existing projects. Member Melarkey said he had some issues

Washoe County Advisory Board to Manage Wildlife –
April 23, 2025 minutes

with the proposal as written. His concerns focused on money allocation for certain projects. He provided a proposal with new allocations that he thought might better address the needs of each of the projects and also noted that the sage grouse plan was overfunded. Sean Espinosa, NDOW, said the issue with the proposal was that the work the money was allocated to go to had already started and the funds were already in use. Based on the information provided by Mr. Espinosa, Member Melarkey chose to withdraw the proposal.

During public comment, Mel Belding said he thought an audit may be needed to gather information regarding the allocated funds. The board chose to not take action on the item.

**C. Biennial Big Game Release Plan for Fiscal Years 2025 and 2026
Amendment # 4**

Chair Rowe opened the item to discuss an amendment to the Department's Biennial Big Game Release Plan for Fiscal Years 2025 and 2026. Sean Espinosa, NDOW, explained the reasons for these amendments being heard were due to the fluid situation in southern Nevada. Due to the uncertainty of the water in southern Nevada. The ongoing drought had caused the Department to update its plans to address the ongoing lack of water. This amendment was necessary to add the Tobin Range and to add the Clan Alpine mountains. Mr. Espinosa detailed translocation of sheep that were planned in the ranges. Member Robinson asked if there were additional areas that could be augmented beyond the Muddy Mountains. Mr. Espinosa said there are many diseased sheep in other ranges which would not allow the translocation of sheep off of the Muddy Mountains. Member Melarkey asked if Unit 181 could be added, but Mr. Espinosa said there was a bad strain of pneumonia in Unit 181.

During public comment, Mel Belding said he had spoken with vets and they say that a ewe can pass antibodies to its lambs.

Member Robinson moved to approve as written with the following recommendations: Recommend increasing Desert Bighorn Sheep being relocated from unit 268 (Muddies) to the following Cortez Range 30 sheep, Tobin Range 60 sheep, and Clan Alpine Range 50 sheep. Vice Chair Browne seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

10. Petition – Mr. Cody Knight- [For Possible Action]

Chair Rowe opened the item to discuss Mr. Knight's petition. Mr. Knight explained his proposition for hound hunting permit to be implemented in Nevada for hunting with dogs for mountain lion, bobcat, and black bear. He

Washoe County Advisory Board to Manage Wildlife –
April 23, 2025 minutes

explained that this proposition models regulations already outlined in Idaho, Montana, and other western states. The objectives are to increase revenue for the Nevada Department of Wildlife, fund future mountain lion studies and enforcement, increase opportunities for Nevada residents, preserve the tradition of hound hunting, and promote wildlife conservation and ethical practices in hunting game with hounds.

Chair Rowe moved to public comment before comment from the board. John Sutton gave public comment in support of the petition. James Pechal spoke in support of the permit. Whitney Robinson spoke in support of the petition. Dakota Kruse also spoke in support of the petition. Jonathan Lesperance spoke as neutral for the petition. Mitch Bailey spoke in opposition of the petition. Sean Shea spoke in opposition to the petition as proposed but did find the overall idea compelling. George Forbush spoke in support of the petition being moved forward so it could have additional discussion at the Commission level.

Member Rhea said he thought there were good points in the petition, but as written he would not be able to support the petition. Chair Rowe also said that while he did agree with the reasoning behind the petition, he said there are still too many questions for him to be able support it. Vice Chair Browne agreed with the other members and said he would not be able to support the petition without additional information. Member so the CAB discussed the proposed petition and ultimately thought it may be best to withdraw the petition and file again with changes. The reasoning to withdraw the petition was because if the petition was denied by the Commission, then the issue could not be petitioned again for five years.

Member Robinson moved to deny the petition submitted by Cody Knight as written. Member Melarkey seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

11. Discussion on Coyote Hunting Contest Regulations [For Possible Action]

Chair Rowe opened the item to discuss proposed seasons and licensing for coyote hunting contests. The Commission directed the Department to draft two regulation alternatives regarding coyote hunting contests: Alternative 1 would require individuals participating in coyote hunting contests to hold a valid Nevada hunting or trapping license. Alternative 2 would require individuals or entities organizing coyote hunting contests to obtain a permit from the Department prior to holding the event. Both alternatives establish an exception for season dates for coyote hunting contests in NAC 503.090 which currently there is no closed season and would require an exception to NAC 503.193, overriding the exception of a license to hunt unprotected species, which currently allows a person to hunt unprotected wild birds or mammals without a hunting license or permit.

Washoe County Advisory Board to Manage Wildlife –
April 23, 2025 minutes

During public comment, George Forbush said stakeholders he had engaged with were in support of what was approved by the subcommittee and the proposed regulation on the agenda for this meeting was not discussed at the subcommittee hearings he had attended. Lou Bennetti said he agreed with what Mr. Forbush had said. He said that law enforcement have the capability to manage the contests based on the recommendations that were proposed by subcommittees and the proposed regulation was more than what was needed to effectively run the contests. Ash Casselli also agreed with Mr. Forbush and he said that the proposed regulations were overreach.

Member Melarkey asked the department about the application that was contemplated in the proposed regulation. Wes Coons said there would be an opportunity to review the applications. Vice Chair Browne said he was not in support of the proposed regulations. Chair Rowe said he too was not in support of the regulation as proposed.

Member Melarkey moved to accept the regulations with the following changes: Strike Alternative #2, Support Alternative #1 only. Member Robinson seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

12. Commission Regulations– [For Possible Action]

A. Commission Regulation 25-12, 2025 Black Bear Quotas and Harvest Limits

Chair Rowe opened the item to consider adopting the 2025 hunting season quotas and harvest limits for black bear. Members of the CAB discussed the recommended quotas for the season and were generally in favor of the recommendations. John Ewanyk, NDOW, presented data from the previous year to provide context regarding the proposed quotas for the upcoming season. Mr. Ewanyk also noted that no units closed due to reaching the harvest limits. Member Robinson said he would like to see the sow harvest limit eliminated because the Department had noted there were no biological reasons for the limit. Members of the CAB discussed changes to tag limits and adjustments that would need to be made to non-resident tags if resident tags were adjusted. Ultimately members of the CAB said that with the population dip it would probably be best to leave the recommended quotas as written.

During public comment Sean Shea said there should be a change to the wait period for hunters who drew tags. Jonathan Lesperance said he agreed with the CAB to remove the sow quota limit and he agreed the limit was not necessary. He added that the population was so large in California that a small dip in the Nevada population would be replaced quickly by bears crossing state lines. Joel Blakeslee agreed with the removal of the sow quota.

Washoe County Advisory Board to Manage Wildlife –
April 23, 2025 minutes

Chair Rowe motioned to approve Commission General Regulation 25-12's quotas as written and to remove the sow quota limit. Member Melarkey seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

B. Commission Regulation 25-13 – Big Game Quotas for the 2025-2026 Season – Wildlife

Chair Rowe opened the item to approve regulations for the numbers of tags to be issued for mule deer, antelope, elk, moose, bighorn sheep, and mountain goat for the 2025-2026 season. The CAB decided to hear each quota by species.

Antelope

Chair Rowe asked John Ewanyk to provide information on the quota recommendations. Beginning with pronghorn, Mr. Ewanyk said that three years of improved habitat conditions and good fawn recruitment have helped to increase the population estimate for pronghorn in Hunt Unit 011. Both the hunt success and the 15" or better are stable within the unit. Due to the high buck ratio observed on survey and the increase in population size, NDOW recommends a minor increase in ALW tags this year. Due to the increased success for the primitive weapon tags and the low demand, both primitive weapon classes saw a decrease in recommended tags for Hunt Unit 011. He added that this year, aerial survey time was increased for Unit Grouping 012-014 to better assess population dynamics of the herd. The increased survey time in the unit grouping resulted in a higher sample size of pronghorn, with an observed buck ratio that has declined again for the third straight year. As a result, NDOW is recommending a reduction in the number of ALW tags. Due to the decreased success rates for muzzleloader tag holders, the 2025-2026 recommended quota increases by 5 tags. The pronghorn herd in Unit 015 remains stable with a population estimate of 1,000. Hunt unit 015 has benefitted from several years of quality fawn ratios and multiple years of high buck ratios observed on surveys. Harvest success for the unit remains stable, and the 15" or better metric saw an increase this past year. For the 2025-2026 season, NDOW recommends similar quotas to last year. The Management Area 2 pronghorn herd continues to do well. On survey this year, Management Area 2 had a fawn ratio above maintenance level, which helped the population estimate increase to 700. This unit grouping has experienced high success rates for five consecutive years, and a high buck ratio was observed again on this year's survey. The 15" or better metric rebounded this year, increasing by 5%. As a result, NDOW is recommending a slight increase in tags for the unit grouping.

Member Robinson asked why the horn size had decreased in certain units. Mr. Ewanyk said the decrease was minimal, but thought that some of the bucks that were harvested in the previous year were older.

Washoe County Advisory Board to Manage Wildlife –
April 23, 2025 minutes

During public comment, Sean Shae said this year he had seen three antelope to be mounted and the horns were shorter than ears. He said there is a problem with hunters looking for bucks in the horns shorter than ears hunts when they should be hunting does. Mel Belding said units 012 and 014 were not looking good and he said he would like to see the quotas lowered in those units.

Member Rhea said he agreed with Mr. Belding and would support lowering the quotas in units 012 and 014.

Chair Rowe moved to approve Antelope 2151 as approved, with the following changes: Unit 12-14 Lower from 90 to 75 Resident 10-8 Non-Resident. Unit shows low percentage on horns greater than 15". Member Melarkey seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

California Sheep

Mr. Ewanyk said they were unable to have a survey in unit 012 but overall the unit appears to be doing well based on last year's survey. He also noted that 30 sheep had been added into the unit from California. The recommendation for unit 012 was to keep the tag recommendation the same. Mr. Ewanyk spoke about surveys in unit 022 and noted the unit was looking good too. In unit 033, there was no survey due to weather conditions, but based on available data the unit appeared to be doing well.

During public comment Sean Shae said he agreed with the lower recommendation for unit 022.

Member Robinson moved to approve the California Bighorn sheep recommendation as written. Member Melarkey seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Elk

There was no discussion or public comment.

Member Melarkey moved to accept the elk recommendation as written. Vice Chair Browne seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Moose

During annual big game surveys in 2024-2025 classified 51 moose (114 bulls:100 cows and 29 calves:100 cows). This was the second highest count on record during the annual survey cycle and was achieved without dedicated survey time. The population estimate increased by 11% to 125 adults. Growth was moderated by below-average calf recruitment.

Washoe County Advisory Board to Manage Wildlife –
April 23, 2025 minutes

Chair Rowe moved to accept the moose recommendation as written. Vice Chair Browne seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Goat

There was no discussion or public comment.

Member Robinson moved to accept the goat recommendation as written. Member Melarkey seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep

There was no discussion or public comment.

Member Melarkey moved to accept the Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep recommendation as written. Member Melarkey seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Nelson Bighorn Sheep

Members of the CAB discussed concerns regarding the tag allocations that were recommended. The Department is recommending 206 any legal weapon desert ram tags, 14 archery ram tags and 100 ewe tags for the 2025 season. These recommendations represent increases of 18 %, 180 %, and 67 % from 2024, respectively. Most of these increases are a product of the Muddy Mountains (Hunt Unit 268) sheep herd. By far, this is the largest desert bighorn sheep herd in Nevada with an estimated 600 animals in 2025. During the 2024 survey lambs: 100 ewes combined in Units 267 and 268. Due to severe drought conditions in southern Nevada, reliance on water developments in the Muddy Mountains and poor habitat conditions, it is a necessity to remove bighorns from this range through a combination of translocations and hunter harvest to reduce competition for water and forage and maintain a healthy herd now and into the near future to the degree possible.

During public comment, Mel Belding and Sean Shea agreed with the members of the CAB that recommendation should be changed

Member Robinson moved to accept Nelson Bighorn 3151 as written with the following changes: Unit 268 Lower Tags to (early) 20 Resident 2 Non Resident. (late) 20 Resident 2 Non Resident. Ewe Hunt 3181 Unit 268 Lower to 9 Resident 1 Non Resident. Recommend moving Nelsen sheep to units NDOW has determined “clean”. The motion carried unanimously. Member Melarkey seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Mule Deer

Washoe County Advisory Board to Manage Wildlife –
April 23, 2025 minutes

Mr. Ewanyk provided the CAB with data and context regarding the recommendations. This year there were no fall deer surveys for Management Area 1, and the spring surveys were shortened due to weather. As a result, this year's quota recommendation relies heavily on the past few year's harvest data. Harvest metrics for this unit grouping remain stable with a three year average success rate of 43% and three year average of 54% four point or better in the harvest. Deer in this unit grouping continue to occur at low density, despite the population estimate showing a small increase from the previous year. As a result of the increased population size, and the stable harvest success, NDOW recommends a slight increase in tags this year for unit grouping 011-013. This year there were no fall deer surveys for Management Area 1, and the spring surveys were shortened due to weather. Hunt Unit 014 is managed as an alternative unit for higher success rates, higher percentage of four point in the harvest, and higher buck ratios. For Unit 014, the three year average harvest success is 57%, the three year average four point or better bucks in the harvest is 36% and the three year buck ratio is 41 bucks per 100 does. Due to Hunt Unit 014 only hitting two of the three metrics of an alternative unit, NDOW recommends keeping tags similar to last year until all three alternative unit metrics are met. This year there were no fall deer surveys for Management Area 1, and the spring surveys were shortened due to weather. Resident mule deer in this hunt unit continue to occur at low density until the winter migration from California which provides a moderate influx of new individuals. Success rates for the hunt unit rely heavily on early winter snow conditions pushing deer into Nevada for the late season hunt. Hunt Unit 015 is managed as a non-standard unit, and the three year harvest success average is at 29%, which is just below objective for non-standard units. As a result, NDOW recommends keeping quotas similar to the year prior until success rates increase. This year there were no aerial surveys conducted in Hunt Unit 021 due to inclement weather during the scheduled flights. California Department of Fish and Wildlife surveyed the California portion of this interstate herd and observed fawn ratios well above maintenance level, which lead to an increase in the population estimate for 021. Hunt Unit 021 is managed as a non-standard unit, which targets harvest success between 35-45%. For Hunt Unit 021, the three year average ALW success is above the 35-45% metric at 48%. Similarly, the four point or better in the harvest remains high with a three year average of 55%. As a result, NDOW recommends a slight increase in tags this year. This year there were no aerial surveys conducted in Hunt Unit 022 due to inclement weather during the scheduled flights. The mule deer population in Hunt Unit 022 remains stable, and buck ratios remain high the past three years that surveys occurred. Harvest success remains high, and the percentage of four point or better in the harvest continues to increase. Harvest metrics as well as high buck ratios indicate that this population can sustain an increase in tags this year.

*Washoe County Advisory Board to Manage Wildlife –
April 23, 2025 minutes*

During public comment, Mel Belding added he thought some of the recommendations appeared high.

Chair Rowe moved to accept the mule deer hunt as written. Vice Chair Rowe seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

13. Future Meeting Agenda Items – Informational only- Public Comment Allowed

Chair Rowe said he was working to have a representative from the BLM to give a presentation regarding habitat management at an upcoming meeting.

14. Public Comment [Non-action item]

There was no public comment.

15. Adjournment [Non-action item]

Chair Rowe adjourned the meeting at 9:47 p.m.