

Saskatchewan Game Allocation Framework

We have all been focused on the long awaited release of the first Game Management Plans for our big game and upland bird species. These science based plans will establish long term population goals for Resource Managers to strive towards. Allocations of those resources is an unenvied responsibility that we all need to understand. Recently I had the opportunity to attend a presentation that laid out the processes, variables and other considerations that are used to determine those allocations.

Many questions as to how these numbers are developed have come over the years and, of course, the assumption was that the process involved a secret meeting where Ministry staff used several sets of dice, darts thrown at options on a wall, and an Ouija Board.

However, that isn't the case. The decision making process is very scientific and uses multiple considerations. The whole process is based on 9 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.

So armed with these principles Ministry staff compile information on the categories listed in Principle 9 to determine the allocations of that species. Here's a description the information researched to quantify each category.

Species Information: Estimated Population and Harvest Levels – Biological and Ecological Information (habitat carrying capacity, natural mortality etc.) – Social Carrying Capacity (over populations effect on crop damage, public safety) – Disease Risk

Hunter Priority: Allocation of resources breaks down into 5 classifications.

1. Conservation of the species.
2. First Nations / Metis sustenance harvest under constitutionally protected Treaty(s) or Rights
3. Saskatchewan Resident
4. Licensed Outfitting
5. Non- Residents

Firearm Type: Strive to maintain a fair balance of opportunities for all firearm types including the premier hunting period (example: during Rut). Restrictions are necessary in the urban zones.

Season Type: Utilizing Open or Close, Regular or Draw seasons, season dates and lengths and specific zones to provide the best opportunities for hunters. Can include herd structure focus to control populations (antlerless tags to reduce populations). Must consider land owner tolerance in these decisions also.

Habitat Availability and Distribution: Must consider the available habitat (especially wintering habitat) and the species distribution in the hunting seasons.

Land Use Activities: Must ensure that considerations are made for other land uses to reduce any potential conflicts. (Agricultural needs, Park visitors seasons etc.)

Hunter Recruitment and Retention: Allocation decisions should support an increase in hunter participation with a major focus on youth. (Youth package and special allocations for youth).

Obviously there is a great deal more involved in developing allocations every year than most people would realize. I hope this sheds some light for you on how the decisions on allocations are made. As the Provincial Game Management Plans unfold over the next few years and we begin the process of reviewing our Draw System this year, I'm confident we can continue to enhance all possible opportunities for Saskatchewan Residents and ensure that our cherished wildlife resources are protected using proven science based protocols free from political interference.

The best month of ice fishing has just arrived. See you on the ice!