



February 1, 2018

Resources and Environment Committee
 Idaho Senate
 Sen. Steve Bair, Chairman
 Idaho State Capitol Building
 700 W. Jefferson St.
 Boise, ID 83702

Re: Idaho Disabled Veterans Special Big-Game Tags Proposed Rule

Mr. Chairman and Senators:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding the proposed Rule change affecting Idaho Special Big Game Tags for Disabled Veterans.

Tree Top Ranches (“TTR”) has been a supporter of this program since it was first proposed by [then] IDF&G Commission Chairman Dr. Wayne Wright, and brought to fruition by Attorney Jay Rosenthal. Dr. Wright and Attorney Rosenthal deserve full credit for making this excellent program happen.

Since then, TTR has had the honor and the privilege of, in collaboration with the Idaho Division of Veteran Services (“IDVS”), hosting the Special Big Game Tag recipients selected by IDVS. Usually we host two (2) disabled veterans for an elk hunt at our Bennett Mountain Ranch. Our guests have included veterans with all manner of serious disabilities—significant paralysis, missing limbs, and so on. Two years ago we hosted a veteran who was totally blind. Nevertheless, our collaboration has been 100% successful; every single veteran we’ve hosted has gone home with a very nice elk and a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Under the current Rule IDVS has received two tags; these and the other 3 are distributed at the “discretion of the [IDF&G] Director”. Under the proposed Rule, our IDVS program would be designated one (1) tag, with the others distributed by random-drawing. We believe changing from this IDVS 2-tag/discretion-based program to a random drawing is entirely out of line with the intent, and the best interests of this program. We offer the following comments:

- 1) The **intent** of this program was very clear; to provide the *best experience* for the *most deserving, worst-wounded* veterans. This should continue to be the basis for this program;
- 2) These hunts should be set up for success. It’s crucial that the sponsors/hosts are not only able to provide a first-class hunt, but also that they are ready and able to deal with problems. Not all sponsors/hosts are equally suited to meet these objectives. Sponsors/hosts should be deliberately chosen for their ability to provide the best, safest experience. This doesn’t happen by random drawing;
- 3) Discretion is also critical in the selection of tag recipients themselves. Applicants need to be vetted for their service and disabilities. And going back to the intent, tags cannot be distributed to the most-deserving and worst-wounded by drawing names out of a hat;

- 4) Lastly, the IDVS-TTR 2-tag program has been **exemplary** of how this program can be carried out. There is no reason it should be changed.

We respectfully request that the Committee decline to approve the proposed Rule. Instead, we would hope that IDF&G would reach out to IDVS and other experienced, interested parties to find better ways to resolve the “more applicants than tags” situation. IDVS and others are passionate and devoted to veteran opportunities, and dedicated to finding improvements through challenges like this.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,



Larry Williams
Tree Top Ranches, LP