



EDITORIAL

FISH AND WILDLIFE FOR SALE

WDFW Detective Todd Vandivert (Editor)
E-mail: bluemountainpolice@comcast.net

As I was reading through the big game hunting regulations, to make my choices for what special permits I wanted to put in for this year, it again struck me just how much of a disadvantage I am at in my attempts to get a permit for that once in a lifetime trophy. Every time I put in for a drawing, I look at the prior year's data, to judge just what my odds are drawing each permit might be. With odds of anywhere from 1 out of 100, to 1 out of 1,077 (moose), I know that the likelihood of drawing a permit for a "trophy" big game animal are slim to none. I would be totally fine with playing the odds, if it weren't for the fact that I know that if I was in a different category, I would have a much better chance at that lifetime trophy. Right or wrong, in Washington when it comes to hunting (and fishing) we are not all on the same level playing field. Don't get me wrong on this, I am not passing judgment here, just stating the facts (and venting a little).

When it comes to trophy big game opportunities, the first category at a great advantage is certainly tribal members. I simply don't have the time or space here to address the history of tribal hunting in Washington, but suffice it to say that most tribal members don't have too much of a problem legally killing the big game animal of their choice. While I am waiting decades to be drawn for that special permit, an enrolled tribal member can often times simply go out and harvest the animal of their choosing. I also understand that there is little the state can do to restrict tribal hunting, but it does get very frustrating for both our officers and for hunters alike. One thing I will never understand is why tribal members so often target trophy animals when hunting for subsistence and ceremonial purposes. It seems to me that a young barren cow elk eats the same (or better) than a trophy bull.

Wealthy hunters, too, are at a great advantage for being able to take trophy big game animals. Clearly, in Washington money talks and bs walks. I find it ironic that our officers spend a great deal of time and effort, in the pursuit of people involved in the

commercialization of fish and wildlife, but yet the state itself seems to be willing to sell to the highest bidder. Throughout my career, as a Washington Game Warden, I have been told that there are three reasons for our laws/regulations: 1) resource protection, 2) safety, and 3) ethics. Some of our regulations have little to do with safety or resource protection, but are solely based on ethics, for example; baiting of game birds. Since there are always limits and seasons on game birds, why does it matter if those birds are baited in? The reason it is illegal is that most of us consider it unethical to hunt game birds over bait (not fair chase). The same was always true when it came to using more than one line/rod, when fishing, but this year the state decided that if a fisherman buys a "two-pole" stamp, it's now ok. With that in mind, why not a "spotlighting" stamp or a "turkey baiting stamp"? The same logic applies, pay us extra, and we will make it legal.

But back to big game permits; if I had an extra \$65,000 sitting around, I wouldn't have to put in for trophy bull elk permit drawing, I could simply buy the auction big game tag (Governor's Permit). For around \$20,000 I could get that moose permit, or for \$13,000 or \$14,000 I could pick up a goat tag. Now I understand that the big game tag auction brought in over \$200,000 last year, and that the money goes to help wildlife, but it really irritates me that my state literally sells out to the highest bidder, when it comes to trophy opportunities.

Don't have \$65,000 for an elk tag? No problem; just buy an elk tag/permit from one of the landowners who are issued "Landowner Hunting Permits". These permits are given to certain landowners, who then can turn around and sell a portion of the permits to whomever they want, for whatever price they can get. I noticed that many of the elk "Landowner Hunting Permits" hunts run from August 1 through March 31st. Some are for "any elk", some for "antlerless" and others for "any bull elk". I find it interesting that hunters are allowed to hunt "antlerless elk" through the end of March, after many of the bulls have shed their antlers, and when the cows are near full-term pregnancy. It is my understanding that if a landowner chooses to sell the permit, he or she cannot then claim monetary crop damage. I guess it saves WDFW money, but it sure seems like selling wildlife to me.