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# Hunting Access In Idaho 2021

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The Policy Analysis Group was established by the Idaho legislature in 1989 to provide objective analysis of the impacts of natural resource proposals. Issue Briefs are timely summaries of research relevant to current natural resource topics.

**Introduction:** There is increasing concern and attention in Idaho among hunters over access to public land and other spaces that have historically been available to the general public. Perceptions of less access, increasing difficulty of access, or the lack altogether may affect the amount of time invested in hunting or satisfaction with hunting. It may also lead to hunters abandoning the activity and discourage participation by new hunters.

More specifically, different types of access problems may exist within the larger challenge of access. These include distinctions between public and private lands. Is there, for example, clear demarcation between public and private? Have private lands become more inaccessible themselves or in comparison to public lands? Additionally, the method of access (i.e., motorized/nonmotorized), species hunted (large game/small game), and different methods of hunting (bow/firearm) may add to management complexity by creating subcategories of users who see the problem of access in different ways.

There is at present limited information on what hunters think about or define as access in Idaho. Whether, for instance, different users see a general problem of access, or whether there are important differences among hunters in how the access question is understood. This *Brief* summarizes findings from an initial set of questions asked of resident big game hunters as part of a broader Idaho Department of Fish and Game study. The goal is to provide initial empirical data and context to the evolving discussion of hunter access, and general outdoor recreation public access, to Idaho lands.

**Data Collection:**

In 2020, IDFG and the College on Natural Resources of the University of Idaho conducted a study of Idaho resident elk and deer hunters that focused on their perception of crowding—density in specific contexts and locations by segments of hunting population. Employing a stratified random sampling design, the study used a web-based survey to capture variation by IDFG administrative regions and hunter type. The target population was Idaho resident elk and deer hunters who hunted as part of 2019 general season, drawn from general tag purchasers (elk, regular deer, and white-tailed deer) who provided an email contact.

Email invitations were sent to over 37,000 hunters, with data collection beginning in March 2020. Just over 10,000 hunters responded, with just under 50% of those classifying themselves as elk hunters. The relatively high response rate, approximately 33%, and diverse pattern of response representative of the socio-economic and geographic diversity of the state’s hunting populations, provides a statistically robust picture of Idaho hunters and offers insight into what they think about the current state of hunting in Idaho.

Respondents were asked to indicate what species they hunted (elk, whitetail, or mule deer), the type of elk tag (A or B), and which IDFG region hunted (Panhandle, Clearwater, Southwest, Magic Valley, Southeast, Upper Snake, Salmon). Respondents were asked to rate access to public and private lands on 5-point Likert scale—ranging from 1 (much less) to 5 (much more). The generalized question was, “**Since you started hunting in Idaho, how has access to hunting lands changed in Idaho**”. Additionally, the question was divided into two separate answers for public and private lands.

**Elk:** Approximately half of elk hunters felt there was no change in access, while almost the same number said there was less or much less access. There was, however, wide regional variation with those in southern Idaho indicating less access than those in the Clearwater and Panhandle regions.

Public (IDFG Study Question-Elk-Q24)

	<u>n</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
Statewide	4989	2.5	0.8	12%	35	48	4	1
Panhandle	722	2.6	0.8	10	31	53	6	0
Clearwater	709	2.6	0.7	7	28	58	6	1
Southwest	786	2.3	0.8	16	39	42	3	0
Magic Valley	656	2.4	0.8	16	38	41	5	0
Southeast	622	2.4	0.8	13	41	40	5	1
Upper Snake	774	2.5	0.8	11	37	47	4	1
Salmon	720	2.5	0.8	11	33	52	3	1

Response scale: 1 (much less), 2 (less), 3 (no change), 4 (more), 5 (much more)

N=sample size, M=mean, SD=standard deviation, 1-5=percentages

Private (Elk-Q25)

	<u>n</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
Statewide	4989	2.2	0.9	26	31	38	5	0
Panhandle	722	2.5	0.9	18	29	45	8	1
Clearwater	709	2.3	0.9	23	32	39	5	0
Southwest	786	2.2	0.9	29	29	38	4	1
Magic Valley	656	2.1	0.9	31	30	35	4	0
Southeast	622	2.1	0.9	33	33	28	6	1
Upper Snake	774	2.2	0.9	26	33	38	3	0
Salmon	720	2.3	0.9	23	29	44	4	0

**Deer:** By species, deer hunters expressed the greatest feeling of access loss, with more than 50% of respondents indicating less access. There was regional variation, with hunters in northern Idaho reporting more access than southern Idaho, though notably the difference between north and south is far less on private lands.

Public (Deer-Q26)

	<u>n</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
Statewide	3513	2.4	0.8	14%	38	43	5	1
Panhandle	648	2.5	0.8	14	34	47	5	1
Clearwater	204	2.6	0.8	7	31	54	6	1
Southwest	692	2.3	0.8	15	42	39	4	0
Magic Valley	562	2.4	0.8	15	41	39	5	1
Southeast	599	2.3	0.8	17	41	37	4	1
Upper Snake	545	2.5	0.8	11	39	45	5	1
Salmon	263	2.6	0.7	8	25	61	4	1

Private (Deer-Q27)

	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Statewide	3513	2.2	0.9	27%	32	36	5	0
Panhandle	648	2.4	0.9	17	34	42	7	0
Clearwater	204	2.3	1	26	29	38	5	1
Southwest	692	2.1	0.9	30	29	37	3	0
Magic Valley	562	2.2	0.9	27	33	33	6	0
Southeast	599	1.9	0.9	39	33	25	3	0
Upper Snake	545	2.2	0.9	29	32	35	4	1
Salmon	263	2.5	0.8	15	29	51	4	1

**Whitetail:**

Whitetail deer hunters were the most satisfied with access to public land with just 40% indicating there was less. For private lands there was a sense of less access, however it was generally viewed as less a problem than for other species and other regions.

Public (Whitetail-Q25)

	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Statewide	2003	2.6	0.7	9%	31	55	4	1
Panhandle	389	2.6	0.7	8	28	58	5	1
Clearwater	587	2.7	0.7	6	30	57	6	1
Southwest	622	2.4	0.7	11	37	50	2	0
Magic Valley	63	2.6	0.7	10	23	65	3	0
Southeast	42	2.7	0.6	2	33	57	7	0
Upper Snake	219	2.5	0.8	14	27	54	5	0
Salmon	81	2.7	0.8	10	23	58	8	1

Private (Whitetail-Q26)

	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Statewide	2003	2.3	0.9	22%	32	39	6	1
Panhandle	389	2.5	0.9	17	30	45	8	1
Clearwater	587	2.3	0.9	24	31	37	7	1
Southwest	622	2.2	0.9	23	35	38	4	0
Magic Valley	63	2.2	0.9	22	38	35	5	0
Southeast	42	2.5	0.9	17	26	48	10	0
Upper Snake	219	2.3	0.9	25	32	36	7	0
Salmon	81	2.5	1	18	30	41	9	3

**Summary:** Idaho hunters think there is less access to public and private lands. It is not, however, currently seen as a major problem. On public land the mean response, adjusted on statewide basis, was just 2.5. This indicates hunters feel access is less than previous years but not a level to suggest to

policymakers a need for immediate action. Awareness and concern over access to private lands is more pronounced, with the statewide mean 2.2. Overall, between 55-60% of hunters surveyed thought there was *less or much less access* to private lands. Deer hunters across the state were most aware of less access on public and private lands. Regionally, in the Southeast more than two-thirds feel there is less access, especially for elk and deer on private lands, while in the Southwest it is whitetail hunters on public and private lands

**Next Steps:** The initial, albeit limited, data supports what has seemed intuitive, Idaho hunters are increasingly attentive to a lack of access to Idaho lands. This implies a growing policymaking challenge for government agencies that manage hunting and public lands in Idaho. For example, managers and policymakers may ask if these *perceptions* of less access align with past and ongoing efforts to increase the quantity of accessible land to hunters. There is also a need for further, more direct, study of the access issue in Idaho. For example, it is not clear whether increased hunter attention is because access to private lands is becoming problematic (more difficult to get to) or private lands are increasingly being removed from hunting access altogether. Additionally, the initial IDFG study suggests a need for a larger, more inclusive, look at access issues in Idaho that includes other types of recreational activities (off-road vehicle, biking, rafting, and hiking) that use public and private lands in Idaho.