



The Izaak Walton League of America

Defenders of Soil, Air, Woods, Waters, and Wildlife

8/12/2024

South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks
523 East Capitol Avenue
Pierre, SD 57501

Re: SD IWLA Comments on the Draft Pronghorn Antelope Action Plan

The South Dakota Division of the Izaak Walton League of America (Division) appreciates this opportunity to comment on the Draft Pronghorn Antelope Action Plan 2024-2028.

Division members enjoy hunting, fishing, and the many other outdoor recreational activities South Dakota offers. Many of our members also enjoy hunting pronghorn antelope.

This plan will guide pronghorn antelope management in South Dakota. The plan is subject to a formal evaluation within 5 years of its adoption with any needed updates and changes occurring prior to that date. The plan hopes to ensure that the state's pronghorn population and their habitat are appropriately managed.

The Division supports the efforts by the GFP to gather thoughts and opinions of hunters, landowners, and other stakeholders in the planning and program activities related to pronghorn management. Antelope hunting is extremely popular in South Dakota. We agree that hunting is the best management tool for pronghorn populations across the state.

The Division urges GFP to continue all the pronghorn surveys in South Dakota. This includes the harvest, aerial, and herd composition surveys. We support conducting survival and disease monitoring, especially for epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) and bluetongue.

We also support doing surveys on the impacts of winter severity and drought in the 27 pronghorn management units.

The Division supports using pronghorn abundance, depredation, landowner tolerance, hunter surveys, and the previous harvest numbers to set management objectives for each unit.

The Division agrees with all five objectives in the draft plan, and we strongly support the following:

Objective 1: Manage for biologically and socially acceptable pronghorn populations in each firearm management unit within South Dakota.

- c) Gather input from landowners and the public on pronghorn population unit objectives.

- h) Investigate and collect biological samples from reported or observed sick or dead pronghorn demonstrating symptoms of concern.

Objective 2: Manage pronghorn populations for both maximum and quality recreational hunting opportunities, considering all social and biological inputs.

- Modify and adopt future hunting season structure as needed to maximize hunting opportunities for unique hunters, minimize regulation complexity, and maximize population growth to meet objectives as soon as possible.

Objective 3: Cooperatively work with private landowners, organizations, and other agencies to resolve pronghorn depredation to agricultural crops and other social conflict issues.

- Respond to all pronghorn depredation concerns on private land promptly.
- Encourage the enrollment of willing landowners who are experiencing chronic pronghorn depredation issues into Walk-In Area and Controlled Hunting Access Programs to allow public hunting access.
- Utilize pool hunts when warranted to address pronghorn depredation concerns.
- Expand hunting opportunities, when possible, to address depredation on private lands.
- Where needed, evaluate additional depredation management strategies to increase acceptance of pronghorn population goals.

Objective 4: Cooperatively work with private landowners and public land managers to create, enhance, restore, and protect pronghorn habitat.

- Develop program options to restore pronghorn forage and security cover in shrub steppe habitats through plantings and management assistance.
- Annually strive to restore and establish 1,000 acres of new grassland habitat west of the Missouri River.
- Annually strive to improve and enhance 50,000 acres of grassland habitat in western South Dakota by supporting improved grazing systems on private lands.
- Annually strive to replace a minimum of 40 miles of woven wire or other non-wildlife friendly fences with wildlife-friendly fences.

Objective 5: Cooperatively work with private landowners and public land managers to provide and enhance hunting access for pronghorn.

- Annually lease an additional 20,000 acres of private land for pronghorn hunting opportunities through GFP access programs.

The pronghorn antelope is an iconic prairie species, native only to North America. The Division believes we must diligently work to preserve, protect, enhance, and restore grassland and rangeland habitat that a healthy pronghorn antelope population requires.

We encourage management efforts that result in healthy pronghorn populations that provide a quality hunting experience while also meeting landowners' tolerance.

The South Dakota Division of the Izaak Walton League of America thanks you for this opportunity to comment on the Draft Pronghorn Antelope Action Plan 2024-2028 and for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Lepisto". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P".

Paul Lepisto
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