

FROM FIRST-COME, FIRST-SERVED TO A DRAW

Idaho's New Approach to Nonresident Tags



Idaho replaced first-come, first-served sales for nonresident general season deer and elk tags with an application and draw system developed with Brandt.

Early results show strong demand, broad digital adoption, and new data for future policy decisions. For years, Idaho sold nonresident general season deer and elk tags over the counter on a first-come, first-served basis. For 2026, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game changed that process to an application and draw. The transition responded to mounting frustration with the sales experience, the administrative work required to manage it, limited data about demand, and direct requests from the public for a different approach.

The first draw produced an immediate picture of who wanted a tag, how hunters preferred to apply, and how the new process affected sales. Approximately 42,000 unique hunters applied, including almost 9,000 people who were new to Idaho. All available tags were drawn during each application period, and 97.5 percent of available tags were ultimately sold. Preliminary fiscal results were also positive, with a potential increase of about \$4 million.

Why Idaho Changed the Sales Process

The former over-the-counter system created problems for hunters, license vendors, outfitters, and agency staff. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game identified recurring concerns about fairness, the use of tag mules to obtain tags for other people, outfitter-allocated tags, license vendor challenges, and customer expectations. Those concerns were compounded by a lack of clear demand data. A first-come, first-served sale could show when tags sold, but it did not provide the same view of the full applicant pool that a draw can produce.

The agency formed the Nonresident Tag Issuance Advisory Committee to review how general season deer and elk tags were issued and recommend improvements to the Idaho Fish and Game Commission. Members were selected through a public application process. The 10-member committee represented different stakeholders and met over eight months.



Why Idaho Changed the Sales Process

The former over-the-counter system created problems for hunters, license vendors, outfitters, and agency staff. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game identified recurring concerns about fairness, the use of tag mules to obtain tags for other people, outfitter-allocated tags, license vendor challenges, and customer expectations. Those concerns were compounded by a lack of clear demand data. A first-come, first-served sale could show when tags sold, but it did not provide the same view of the full applicant pool that a draw can produce.

The agency formed the Nonresident Tag Issuance Advisory Committee to review how general season deer and elk tags were issued and recommend improvements to the Idaho Fish and Game Commission. Members were selected through a public application process. The 10-member committee represented different stakeholders and met over eight months.

The Committee Worked Within Defined Limits

Any recommendation had to keep the program fiscally sound, maintain hunter demand, and preserve the required minimum of 10 percent nonresident hunter participation. Recommendations also had to fit the capabilities of Idaho's third-party licensing system. The Commission retained final authority over the committee's recommendations.

How IDFG and Brandt Built the Draw Framework

IDFG worked with Brandt to develop a workable draw framework for 2026. The work combined features from Idaho's existing controlled hunt draw with Brandt's experience supporting drawings in other states. The model also gave Idaho a better way to measure demand.

Brandt met regularly with IDFG's quota and licensing teams to work through Idaho-specific needs. Standing calls and multiple requirements sessions addressed distinct customer groups and quotas, credit card preauthorization, automatic charging, and uncertainty about demand and fiscal effects. The teams began implementation early and conducted extensive testing before the draw opened.

Early results from the 2026 draw



All available tags were drawn in each application period. The difference between tags drawn and sold is important: a successful draw does not guarantee that every tag will complete the purchase process. The 97.5 percent sales rate provides a useful baseline for evaluating future draws and changes to payment, notification, or refund procedures.

Hunters Overwhelmingly Applied Online

Digital applications accounted for 95 percent of participation. Telesales accounted for 3 percent, and in-person applications accounted for 2 percent. The distribution confirms that the online channel carried nearly all application volume, while phone and in-person options remained available for hunters who needed them.

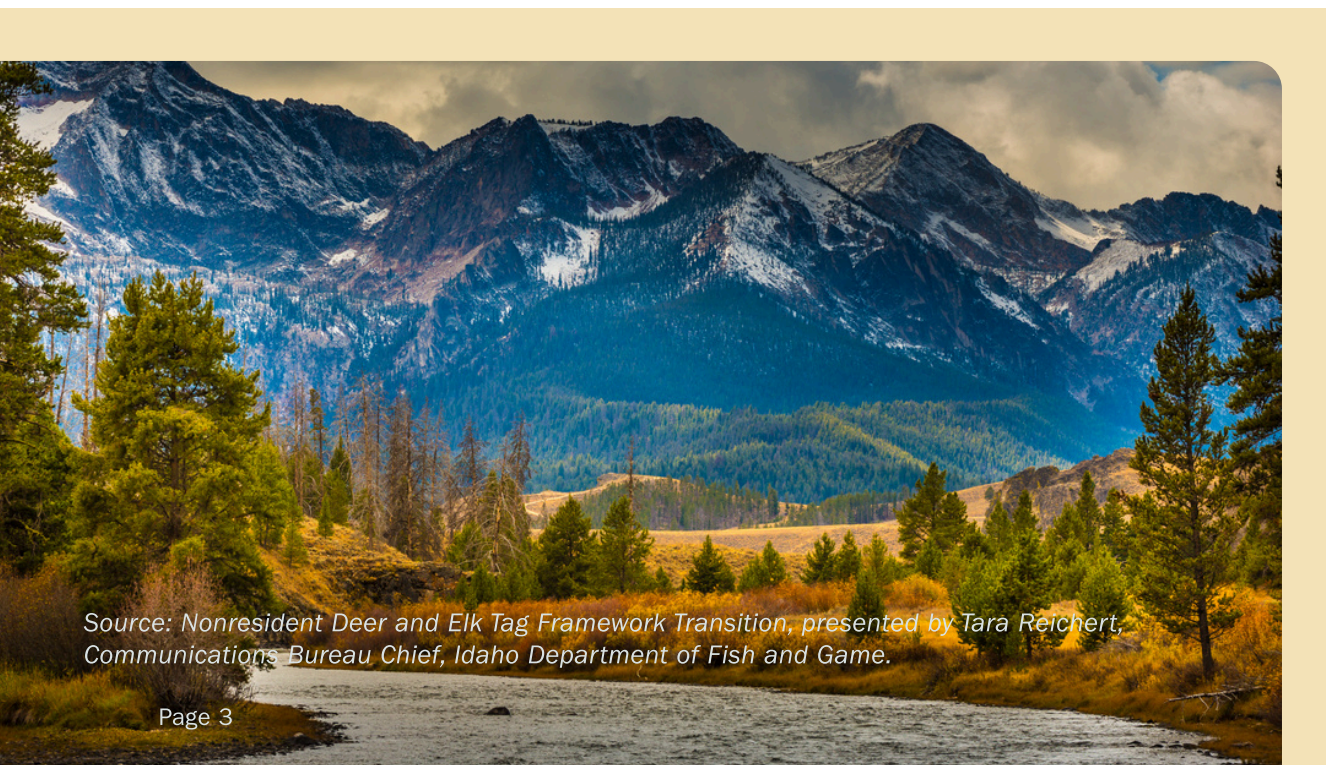
What the New Data Can Answer

The draw does more than allocate tags. It creates a clearer record of total hunter demand, the fiscal effects of the process, and the system functions required to administer a draw. Idaho can use those findings to inform future decisions about nonresident participation limits, including potential 10 percent limits.

The first year also raises questions that require more than one application cycle to answer. The agency plans to evaluate whether the draw moved license sales into December instead of spreading them across the year, whether controlled hunt draw odds change, whether refund requests change, and whether the data support any reduction in nonresident participation.

A Measurable Foundation for Future Decisions

Idaho's move to an application and draw system replaced a high-pressure sales event with a process that can be measured and refined. Close coordination between IDFG and Brandt carried the change from requirements through implementation and testing. The early results show substantial demand, a strong tag sales rate, and widespread use of the online channel. Just as important, the new framework gives the Commission and agency staff evidence they did not have under the former system. Future decisions can now be based on observed applicant behavior, sales outcomes, fiscal results, and system performance rather than on the speed of a first-come, first-served sale.



Source: Nonresident Deer and Elk Tag Framework Transition, presented by Tara Reichert, Communications Bureau Chief, Idaho Department of Fish and Game.