

Fish and Wildlife Commission Policy on Archery Season Intent and Equipment Evaluation Criteria

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Whereas, the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (Department) and the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) have the responsibility of providing hunting opportunities to multiple constituencies while governing hunting seasons to ensure the continued diversity, health, and security of game animals;

**Whereas**, the Department, Commission, and the bowhunting community have a collective interest in managing archery-only season length, structure, and its methods and means in order to balance the impacts to game animals as well as social considerations such as tolerance of bowhunting by landowners, rifle hunters, and the general public;

**Whereas**, the commission may adopt rules regarding the use and type of archery equipment that may be employed for hunting and fishing purposes, taking into account applicable standards as technical innovations in archery equipment change (87-1-301(2), MCA);

**Whereas**, the Commission has the authority to set policies for and approve regulations for special seasons and methods and means of hunting;

**Whereas**, defining and controlling technology is crucial to managing both the biological and social impacts of bowhunting;

**Therefore**, the Commission establishes the following policy:

### **Montana Archery Season Intent, Bowhunting Principles, and Archery Equipment**

#### ***Montana Archery Season Intent***

Montana designed its archery-only seasons to protect its unique bowhunting opportunities for the benefit of current and future hunters. Montana has a six-week statewide archery-only season plus multiple additional site/time specific hunts, providing one of the most extensive archery hunting opportunities in the nation. Montana possesses many highly coveted game species, several of which also have specific archery only seasons. Archery recruitment is robust, and participation has doubled each decade over the past thirty years. Bowhunting participation among Montana's women and youth exceeds the national average, thereby ensuring recruitment of future generations.

Montana has abundant and diverse statewide opportunities for mixed weapons adjacent to the archery-only season. These exist within Weapons Restriction Areas as well as during the five-week general season. These opportunities ensure the full inclusion of a broad constituency of hunters, including those with disabilities, women, youth, and older hunters. Hunters consistently express high satisfaction in the variety and quality of the hunting experiences within the state. The Montana bowhunting community expresses strong advocacy towards maintaining their current archery opportunities and promotes archery season as remaining separate from other methods and means.

## ***Bowhunting Principles***

Bowhunters must develop absolute proficiency with their equipment as well as the ability to get close enough for a shot through an intimate knowledge of the animal's habits and habitat. The National Bowhunter Education Foundation teaches bowhunters to limit their shots to responsible distances within the hunter's personal limitations and the limitations of the individual's bow. While bowhunting was historically subsistence in nature, in modern times it represents the apex of hunting challenge through the enhancement of one's woodsmanship capabilities and the deliberate limitation of equipment range.

Bowhunting is by definition a close-range sport which demands the highest fair chase ethic. The close-range, fair chase nature of bowhunting offers the animal the greatest opportunity to escape. In essence, bowhunting is the ultimate test of the skill and woodsmanship of the hunter. Montana's fair chase ethic mirrors the Boone & Crockett Club's position, "Fair chase is an approach that elevates the quality of the chase, the challenge, and experience above all else. By not overwhelming game species with human capabilities, fair chase helps define a hunter's engagement in conservation." According to the Pope & Young Club, fair chase principles dictate that the hunter is at the disadvantage and must hone the skills of discipline, patience, perseverance, and woodsmanship rather than reliance on equipment advancements in order to harvest animals. Fair chase depends on the concept that, more often than not, the animal will evade the hunter. This concept of fair chase is essential to bowhunting, and the challenges inherent to the sport are what make Montana's archery only seasons exceptional.

Montana's six-week bowhunting season was granted with the understanding that historical archery equipment was an effective means to ethically harvest game animals with minimal impact to the resource. Bowhunting was unique enough in its practices to warrant a distinct season of its own, demonstrating an acceptance that certain equipment restrictions were necessary in order to limit harvest rates. Montana's game management entities and the bowhunting community must carefully consider whether additional equipment is necessary to the bowhunting experience and whether advancement might threaten the opportunities provided during the six-week archery-only bowhunting season.

## ***Archery Equipment***

Montana has adopted a unique set of equipment regulations based upon the priorities of effective, ethical harvest, fair chase ideals, and minimal impact to the resource. These methods and means assure that Montana maintains the original focus of bowhunting as a challenging, close-range sport.

Current regulations state that a legal hunting bow shall be a longbow, flatbow, recurve, or compound bow designed to be shot vertically and at least 28 inches in total length. The bow must be hand-drawn and held by the shooter's own muscle power. The sole exception to this method is granted to physically disabled bowhunters, who are exempted from the requirement of holding or shooting the bow with their hands through the Permit To Modify Archery Equipment. There is no minimum draw weight requirement in Montana, and compound bows of up to 80% let-off are legal, allowing for the fullest participation by youth, women, and older bowhunters.

Montana does not allow crossbows during archery-only seasons, but they are legal for use in Weapons Restricted Areas and during general seasons.

Arrows are the most important component in ensuring an effective, ethical kill. An arrow's effectiveness is dependent on the broadhead's cutting edge and the arrow's momentum upon reaching its target. For this reason, arrows and broadheads must meet specific minimum requirements. They must be at least 20 inches in length and no less than 300 grains. Broadheads must have at least two cutting edges, weigh no less than 70 grains, and must be at least 7/8 inches at the widest point. Arrows should be weighted and matched in relationship to the hunting bow's draw weight in order to effectively transfer sufficient energy to the arrow and achieve good penetration, thereby ensuring quick and humane kills. Montana currently does not allow electronics or luminous chemicals to be used on a bow or arrow during archery-only seasons.

### **Archery Equipment Evaluation Process and Criteria Matrix**

Proposals for archery equipment shall be submitted to the Department and Commission through the existing biennial season setting process. Proposals should include the reason for inclusion of the equipment and its potential impacts to archery-only seasons. Proposals shall be submitted to the Department during the scoping period for consideration as a formal proposal. The following evaluation criteria will be used by the Department in their decision to advance a proposal to the Commission and by the Commission in their decision to advance a proposal to the public comment period and to potentially adopt a proposal as final.

The goal of the criteria matrix is to assist the Department, Commission, and interested Public in the assessment of archery equipment for suitability within archery only seasons. The matrix is a set of questions intended to identify potential impacts to archery seasons and opportunities. In order for a proposal to move forward, new or additional equipment or devices must not change the close-range focus of archery seasons, provide unnecessary advantage to the hunter, or diminish the fair chase principles inherent to bowhunting. Most (not all) of the questions are framed so that "yes" answers speak *against* a specific proposal moving forward. While this matrix will not and cannot eliminate all debate it will provide a visible and standardized review to help inform decisions about new or additional archery equipment not currently allowed.

### **Archery Equipment Evaluation Matrix**

#### **Evaluation Criteria**

Does the equipment change the fundamental nature and intent of archery seasons as stated in the policy? A "no" answer supports the proposal.

Is the equipment likely to detract from the historical intent of Montana archery season; namely that the season was intended for high quality archery opportunity with relatively low harvest rates? A "no" answer supports the proposal.

Does the equipment challenge, contradict, or lessen Montana's principle of fair chase? A "no" answer supports the proposal.

Does this equipment have the potential to increase fish and game violations, such as shooting outside of legal shooting hours? A “no” answer supports the proposal.

Does the equipment have the potential to increase archery harvest such that it may result in increased bowhunter impact on the resource and increase the possibility of limited permits? A “no” answer supports the proposal.

Does the equipment have the potential to increase archery harvest such that the increased harvest either increases conflict among or within user groups or have other negative social implications such as diminished sportsman/ landowner relations? A “no” answer supports the proposal.

Is the equipment likely to improve any of the ethical challenges/problems with archery-only hunting? A “yes” answer supports the proposal.