

Outfitter-Sponsored Licenses: Issues and Ideas

Paper prepared by PL/PW Council – June 8, 2009

The variable-priced outfitter-sponsored license system has successfully accomplished the goals that the original system was designed to accomplish:

1. provide hunter management assistance and impact payments to landowners
2. provide stability to the outfitting industry
3. provide access to private lands for hunters.

Currently there are perceptions that the variable-priced license system has caused some unanticipated problems and needs some adjustments. The real or assumed issues are as follows (F- denotes Fact; P denotes perception):

1. **F** - Uncertain, fluctuating funding is generated for the Block Management Program (BMP), making it difficult to forecast the annual BMP budget. This can cause budget surpluses without the authority to spend from the legislature and potential lost opportunities to enroll more BMA's.
2. **F** - Licensed hunting outfitters are the only regulated entity for which private land use data is available; data is not available for other, non-regulated private land hunting management systems, such as leasing by clubs or individuals, charging of trespass fees, and unlicensed outfitting on a landowner's own land;
3. **F** - National and world events (Sept. 11, economic recession) have greater influence on outfitter-sponsored license sales/demand than Montana specific events, creating uncertainty in license sales.
4. **F** - Convergence of license costs for B-10 (elk/deer combo) and B-11's (deer combo) can cause problems, because when the fees for these two licenses are nearly the same, the hunter often purchases the B-10 license (elk/deer combo) instead of the B-11 (deer combo). This can cause an oversell in the B-10 license which increases the cost of the B-10 the following year
5. **P** - Existence of outfitter-sponsored license has increased private land being leased by outfitters.
6. **P** - Existence of outfitter-sponsored license causes private land to be leased by outfitters;
7. **P** - increased cost of license has caused problems, including.
 - Difficulty for outfitters to book hunters beyond current year;
 - A rich man's sport image and loss of long-time clients due to cost increases;
 - Restriction of opportunity for family hunts (because of high costs of licenses);
8. **P** - Poor technical basis is used for selecting the price of the outfitter-sponsored license. Although a reasonable track record has been achieved with regard to target numbers of license sale, the Recommendation Committee and Commission has used a very unsophisticated methodology to determine the price of the licenses.

SUGGESTION: When the B-10 elk-only portion is purchased by a hunter, the split-off deer license should be sold as a B-11 to help increase funding for Block Management.