

Addendum to the
2019 Supplemental Environmental Document
to the
2010 Final Environmental Document
Regarding Elk Hunting

Title 14, California Code of Regulations,
Sections 353, 364 Elk, 364.1 SHARE Elk, 555 Cooperative Elk Hunt
Zones, and 555.1 Conflict Zone Cooperative Elk Hunt Zones,
2026 Hunting Season

Lead Agency:
California Fish and Game Commission, under the
California Environmental Quality Act

Prepared by:
California Department of Fish and Wildlife

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Introduction

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has prepared this addendum pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), California Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq., to inform consideration by the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) of proposed amendments to existing regulations governing elk hunting in California (California Code of Regulations (CCR), Title 14, sections 353, 364, 364.1, 555, 555.1). California Fish and Game Code (FGC) Section 3950 designates elk as a game mammal in California. FGC sections 203 and 332 authorize the Commission to determine the area or areas, seasons and hours, bag and possession limit, sex, and total number of elk that may be taken pursuant to its regulations. FGC Section 203.1 requires the Commission to consider populations, habitat, food supplies, the welfare of individual animals, and other pertinent facts when establishing hunting regulations for elk. The Commission establishes elk hunting tag quotas through regulations amended annually, or as needed, based on current population estimates derived from population surveys by the Department.

The Commission serves as the CEQA lead agency when it promulgates new or amends the elk hunting regulations (Public Resources Code, Section 21067; CEQA Guidelines Section 15367, Title 14, CCR). The Commission established maximum tag quotas for all elk hunting zones (EHZs) in California in 2010 with, among other things, the certification of a Final Environmental Document under CEQA (2010 Elk ED) (SCH No. 200912083). The Commission amended the existing regulations in 2019 by, among other things, certifying a Final Supplemental Environmental Document under CEQA (2019 Elk SED) (SCH No. 2018112037). The 2010 Elk ED and the 2019 Elk SED provide relevant and important informational value as the Commission, as CEQA lead agency, considers proposed amendments to the existing regulations for the 2026 elk hunting season in California. This addendum documents the Commission's consideration of related environmental effects.

Earlier Project Approval

CEQA review of the proposed project was conducted in accordance with the Commission's certified regulatory program approved by the Secretary for the California Natural Resources Agency pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21080.5 (See generally California Code of Regulations, Title 14, sections 781.5 and 15251(b)). CEQA requires all public agencies in the State to evaluate the environmental impacts of discretionary projects they propose to carry out or approve, including promulgating regulations, which may have a potential to significantly affect the environment.

In 2010, the Commission certified a Final Environmental Document Regarding Elk Hunting (2010 Elk ED) (SCH No. 200912083) as the lead agency under CEQA as part of the Commission's review and adoption of the elk hunting regulations.

In 2019, the Commission amended the elk hunting regulations and certified a Final Supplemental Environmental Document Regarding Elk Hunting (2019 Elk SED) (SCH No. 2018112037) which focused on the potential for any new significant or substantially more severe environmental impacts from an increase in the tag quota range in the Northwestern, Northeastern, and Marble Mountains EHZs. The Commission considered the proposed project increase of 20 tags and three alternatives. The Commission as lead agency certified the SED and determined adoption of the amended regulations as proposed would not result

in any new significant or substantially more severe environmental effects than previously identified by the Commission in 2010. The Commission approved the increase of 31 tags for the 2019-20 elk hunting regulations.

In 2020, the Commission amended the elk hunting regulations and adopted hunt-specific tag quota adjustments across multiple Elk Hunt Zones (EHZs) for the 2020–21 season. For general draw hunts, tag adjustments across the Northwestern, Marble Mountains, Independence, Lone Pine, West Tinemaha, Goodale, Whitney, Grizzly Island, and Fort Hunter Liggett EHZs resulted in a net decrease of 8 bull tags, a net decrease of 26 antlerless tags, and a net decrease of 4 spike tags. For SHARE hunts, changes in the Northwestern, Marble Mountains, and Bear Valley EHZs resulted in a net increase of 23 bull tags and a net increase of 2 antlerless tags. Apprentice hunt adjustments in the Grizzly Island and Fort Hunter Liggett EHZs resulted in a net increase of 1 bull tag, a net decrease of 3 antlerless tags, and a net decrease of 2 spike tags. Military hunt adjustments in the Fort Hunter Liggett EHZ resulted in a net decrease of 4 bull tags, a net decrease of 4 antlerless tags, and a net 0 change of either-sex tags. Collectively, these changes reflect a redistribution of hunting opportunity across hunt types and regions, including a shift toward increased bull hunting opportunity through SHARE hunts in northwestern California and reductions in antlerless and spike tag availability in several EHZs.

In 2023, the Commission amended the elk hunting tag quotas in the Siskiyou and Northwestern EHZs, adding 10 and 22 tags, respectively; modified the boundaries of the Bear Valley, Cache Creek, and La Panza EHZs; and created the Gabilan, Central Coast, and Tehachapi EHZs, adding 80 elk tags across these new zones. The Commission approved the tag allocations, boundary modifications, and new hunt zones for the 2023-24 elk hunting regulations.

In 2024, the Commission amended elk hunting tag quotas for Grizzly Island EHZ in periods 10, 12, 13 by a total of 5 bull general tags, and hunt tag quotas for Siskiyou, Northwestern, Tehachapi, and Mendocino Shared Habitat Alliance for Recreational Enhancement (SHARE) elk hunts, increased tag quotas of 36, 32, 65, and 44, respectively. Tehachapi and Northwestern EHZs were designated as conflict zones, which allowed for increased cooperative hunt area tags to be available in those zones.

The adopted 2025 regulations adjusted the general hunt tag allocations in the Gabilan, Lake Pillsbury, and Tehachapi EHZs, introduced archery-only hunts in the Central Coast, La Panza, and Siskiyou EHZs, and adjusted tag quotas for the SHARE program in the Bear Valley EHZ. These changes were informed by population survey data collected by the Department and aligned with population management goals outlined in the 2010 Elk ED, as well as environmental, biological, and social factors. Six additional bull tags were added in the Gabilan EHZ, and five additional bull tags were added in the Tehachapi EHZ for general hunts. In the Lake Pillsbury EHZ, two additional bull tags and four antlerless tags were added. Three EHZs were allotted additional tags for archery-only seasons: in the both the Central Coast and La Panza EHZs, five bull and five antlerless tags were added; in the Siskiyou EHZ, ten bull tags were added. Tags were also increased in the SHARE program. The Bear Valley EHZ added five antlerless tags. In the Northwestern EHZ, harvest under a SHARE tag was allowed year-round.

Proposed Amendments to Elk Hunting Regulations

The proposed regulatory action would amend sections 353, 364, 364.1, 555, and 555.1 of Title 14, CCR, governing elk hunting seasons, tag quotas, hunt area definitions, methods of take, and tag eligibility. The proposed amendments are intended to maintain sustainable harvest, improve management flexibility, address localized elk conflicts, and expand equitable public hunting opportunity, while remaining consistent with statewide elk population objectives.

The proposed amendments include six components:

1. *Modifications to Authorized Methods of Take for SHARE Elk Hunts*

The proposed regulation change in Section 353 would authorize the use of shotguns firing slugs (non-lead, pursuant to Section 250.1, Title 14, CCR) as a method of take for elk during certain SHARE hunts.

This modification is intended to improve hunter safety and management flexibility in areas where centerfire rifle use may be constrained by proximity to residences, agricultural operations, or roadways. The proposed change applies only to specified SHARE hunts and does not alter methods of take for general elk hunts.

This amendment does not increase harvest levels and does not result in new environmental impacts.

2. *Establishment of a Balance of State Elk Management Zone*

The proposed regulations would establish a new Balance of State Elk Management Zone (EMZ), defined as all areas of California not currently included within existing EHZs described in Section 364.

The purpose of this zone is to provide a regulatory framework for managing elk populations that occur outside traditionally defined hunt areas, particularly in regions where elk are expanding their geographic distribution. Establishment of this zone does not authorize additional hunting tags or seasons and allows for future implementation of managed hunting opportunities through the SHARE program where biologically appropriate.

This amendment does not expand the statewide maximum harvest capacity analyzed in prior CEQA documents.

3. *Adjustments to Elk Tag Quotas in Existing Hunt Areas*

The proposed regulations increase bull tag quotas for the Owens Valley Tule Elk Management Unit general methods, archery, and muzzleloader hunts including the Bishop, Tinemaha, West Tinemaha, Tinemaha Mountain, Independence, Whitney, and Lone Pine EHZs.

These quota adjustments are intended to better align harvest levels with current population conditions, including elevated bull-to-cow ratios and increasing minimum population counts that are nearing the maximum population level for Owens Valley set in FGC Section 3951. The proposed changes do not introduce hunting into new areas and do not exceed the range of harvest levels analyzed in the 2010 Environmental Document or the 2019 Supplemental

Environmental Document. Tag quotas may be modified in future years based on updated population survey and harvest data.

4. *Expansion and Adjustment of SHARE Elk Hunting Opportunities*

The proposed regulations would increase the number of Department-administered SHARE elk tags statewide and expand SHARE eligibility to the Central Coast EHZ and the Balance of State EMZ. These amendments are intended to:

- Increase public access to elk hunting opportunities
- Encourage private landowner participation in elk habitat stewardship
- Provide tools to address localized elk conflict on private lands

SHARE elk hunts would remain subject to established tag quotas, hunt-specific seasons, and method-of-take restrictions. The proposed changes do not introduce new environmental effects beyond those previously analyzed for regulated elk hunting programs.

5. *Modifications to Cooperative Elk Hunting Area Provisions*

The proposed regulations would amend provisions governing Cooperative Elk Hunting Areas (CEHAs) and Conflict Zone Cooperative Elk Hunting Areas to clarify tag eligibility and explicitly exclude the Balance of State EMZ from CEHA eligibility.

These amendments are intended to ensure that management within the Balance of State EMZ prioritizes public hunting access and consistency with statewide elk management objectives. No new hunting opportunities are created by this amendment, and no environmental impacts result.

6. *Clarification of Elk Tag Eligibility Across Issuance Types*

The proposed regulations would clarify that an individual may receive only one elk tag per license year across all elk hunting issuance types, including general draw hunts, SHARE hunts, CEHAs, and fundraising tag hunts.

This amendment is intended to improve regulatory clarity and ensure equitable distribution of limited elk hunting opportunities. The clarification does not change the number of tags issued and does not affect harvest levels.

No Subsequent Environmental Document is Required

In general, CEQA applies whenever a public agency proposes to carry out or approve a discretionary project. (Public Resources Code, subdivision 21080(a)). CEQA provides that, where a public agency proposes to modify a previously approved project for which a final environmental document was prepared and certified:

“The lead agency or a responsible agency shall prepare an ***addendum*** to a previously certified EIR if some changes or additions are necessary but none of the conditions described in Section 15162 calling for preparation of a subsequent EIR have occurred.” (Title 14, CCR Section 15164)

A subsequent environment document (Title 14, CCR Section 15162) is required when there is substantial evidence that:

- Substantial changes are proposed in the project, which will require major revisions to the previous environmental impact report (EIR) or negative declaration due to the involvement of new significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects.
- Substantial changes occur with respect to the circumstances under which the project is being undertaken, which will require major revisions to the previous EIR or negative declaration due to the involvement of new significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects.
- New information of substantial importance, which was not known and could not have been known with the exercise of reasonable diligence at the time the previous EIR was certified as complete or negative declaration was adopted, becomes available.

A supplement to an EIR (Title 14, CCR Section 15163) may be prepared rather than a subsequent EIR when:

- Any of the conditions described in Section 15162 would require the preparation of a subsequent EIR, and.
- Only minor additions or changes would be necessary to make the previous EIR adequately apply to the project in the changed situation.
- The supplement to the EIR need contain only the information necessary to make the previous EIR adequate for the project as revised.

An addendum to a previously certified EIR (Title 14, CCR Section 15164) is proper when:

- Some changes or additions are necessary but none of the conditions described in Section 15162 calling for preparation of a subsequent EIR have occurred.
- The decision-making body shall consider the addendum with the final EIR prior to making a decision on the project.

No Additional Impacts Under CEQA

The Commission has determined that amending the current elk hunting regulations based on annual survey results will not result in any new or significant or substantially more severe environmental impacts than previously analyzed and disclosed in the 2010 Elk ED and 2019 Elk SED for this project.

This project does not have the potential to degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, reduce the number or restrict the range of rare or endangered plant or animal, or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory. There are no impacts to the habitat of fish and wildlife species.

This approval action adjusts the previous year's general and SHARE tag quotas based on more current population information, creates the new Balance of State Elk Management Zone, adds a legal method of take to SHARE hunts, and clarifies elk tag eligibility. No other

aspect of the project is changed. No new significant or substantially more severe impacts under CEQA will occur due to this change.

Amendment of the Elk Hunt Regulations

The Commission subjected the draft to its own review and analysis. Based on that review and analysis, the draft reflects the independent judgment of the Commission and fulfills the Commission's responsibilities.

In conclusion, the Commission finds that amending the elk hunt regulations in Title 14, CCR sections 353, 364, 364.1, 555, and 555.1, will not result in any new significant or substantially more severe environmental effects than previously analyzed and disclosed in the 2010 Elk ED and the 2019 Elk SED. The Commission also finds that subsequent or supplemental review beyond this Addendum is not warranted pursuant to Title 14, CCR, Section 15164, in connection with this proposed action.



Melissa Miller-Henson, Executive Director
California Fish and Game Commission

June 16, 2026

Date