

## How the Limited Entry Hunting (LEH) system works

Except for submitting an application and receiving an authorization, most hunters are not aware of many aspects of the LEH system. Here's an overview of how the system works.

### The start: setting the LEH regulations

In January, regional Wildlife Biologists review information from the previous year's hunts, population status of individual herds, changes in habitat, changes in access, previous weather conditions and many other factors that may affect a particular herd or hunt area. From this information, the biologists formulate site and species LEH regulations for the coming season. These are submitted as recommendations to the Wildlife Management Section of the Fish and Wildlife Branch for review and approval by the Director.

When the regulations are approved, the process of preparing the *LEH Synopsis* begins. All regulations are translated into specific hunt descriptions and, in some cases, maps of special areas are prepared. Included in the *Synopsis* are instructions on how to apply for Limited Entry Hunts. The *LEH Synopsis* is distributed to hunting licence issuers and posted on <http://www.gov.bc.ca/hunting> in April. Once a draw opens, hunters can apply for LEH online, or at Service BC, FrontCounter BC, or participating vendor locations. To be eligible for a draw, applications must be received by the Fish and Wildlife Branch by the draw's deadline date. Deadline dates are published in the current *LEH Synopsis*.

### Processing applications received from hunters

Each year, the Fish and Wildlife Branch expects over 175,000 LEH applications to be submitted by hunters.

In 2016, the Fish and Wildlife Branch moved to an online system, whereby all LEH applications are entered directly into an online system. Hunters can submit their own application online at [www.gov.bc.ca/hunting](http://www.gov.bc.ca/hunting), or they can submit the application through a Service BC, FrontCounter BC or participating licence vendor. All applications, no matter where in the province they are submitted, are entered into the same database.

Within the new online system, each hunter has a unique Fish and Wildlife profile and Fish and Wildlife ID (FWID), to which their LEH applications are associated. Not only can hunters apply online, they can also confirm at any time that their application has been submitted by going online and accessing their Fish and Wildlife profile.

The new system enforces rules, such as mandatory contact information. This greatly reduces many of the errors that were caused by paper-based application cards, such as illegible writing resulting in incorrect information being entered into the system. Hunters can now enter and/or verify their own profile information within the system, and make updates as needed, such as name or address changes.

The new system validates LEH applications as they are being submitted. For example, it will not allow a hunter to submit more than one LEH application per species. It will also provide hunters with information about their previous LEH applications, from 2016 onwards.

*NOTE: While paper-based applications were still being accepted for the fall 2016 draw, all paper-based application cards will be eliminated by 2017.*

## **Enhanced odds**

Over the years, many unsuccessful Limited Entry Hunting applicants have suggested that the draw should be changed to increase the chances of those who were previously not drawn. In 1993, a new “enhanced odds” system was introduced, on a trial basis, for elk in the Kootenays (Region 4). The new system reduced (by up to 50%) the likelihood of being drawn for elk anywhere in Region 4 if the applicant had been drawn in the previous year. Thus, by reducing the chances of being drawn for previously successful applicants, this system improved the odds for those who had been unsuccessful. It is important to note that previously successful people could still be drawn, but their chances were reduced compared to those who had not been previously drawn.

After a three-year trial period and consultation with the B.C. Wildlife Federation, this system was introduced province wide for all species except for mule deer. Anyone who submits an application for a species (other than mule deer) that they were drawn for the previous year has their chance of being drawn reduced by 50% compared to a previously unsuccessful applicant. In the case of moose and (Roosevelt) elk in Regions 1 & 2, anyone drawn in the previous three years will have their chances reduced by 66%.

## **The draw**

### **1. The computer checks all applicants for previous success**

Immediately prior to the draw, a special computer program is run which checks all applications against the draw results from the previous year, and for moose applications and Region 1 & 2 elk applications, the draw results from the previous three years. Any applicants who were previously drawn and have applied again for the same species are noted, and a “flag” is added to their application record. Only applications from hunters who were previously drawn receive these “flags”.

### **2. Random numbers are created and assigned to individual applications**

To begin the draw, the computer assigns a random identification number to each application on the computer. After each application is given a random number, the computer then reorders the applications sequentially, from the lowest random number to the highest. An individual applicant’s name, FWID, address, or when the application was submitted, has absolutely no influence on how the applications are ordered. The “luck of the draw” is decided by the random number assigned to any given application: the lower the number, the greater the likelihood of being drawn.

The randomly numbered applications are now in an order that the computer will use to assign LEH Authorizations.

### **3. The computer assigns authorizations for “First Choice” hunts**

The computer assigns authorizations in the following manner. The computer looks at the first application (the one with the lowest random number), and determines what “First Choice” hunt is requested. The computer then assigns an authorization for this hunt to the applicant. The computer then moves to the very next application and looks at the “First Choice” hunt and assigns an authorization for this hunt to the applicant and so on. As this process proceeds, the authorizations available for each hunt gradually become fully allocated. As explained above, some applications are “flagged” to indicate that the applicant was drawn the previous year. The computer completely ignores every other “flagged”

application it encounters, thus cutting the chances of previously successful applicants by 50% compared to those who were not drawn the previous year. For moose and elk in Regions 1 & 2, it ignores two out of every three flagged applications, cutting the odds of previously successful applicants by 66%.

When the computer looks at an application, determines the “First Choice” hunt requested and finds that authorizations for this hunt have already been fully allocated, it immediately moves on to the next application. This step-by-step process through the applications continues until the last application (the one with the highest random number) has been looked at for “First Choice” hunt by the computer. When this point is reached, the computer then goes back to the beginning and begins to look at each application again in the order of lowest to highest random number. Once again, the computer looks at first choices only, but this time it does not reduce the chances of flagged applications. The reason for this is that the authorizations for some hunts will not have been completely given out on the first pass the computer makes. If authorizations are still available, then they are in such low demand that it does not make sense to deny them to previously successful applicants.

#### **4. The computer assigns authorizations for “Second Choice” hunts**

Once again, after having reached the end of the second pass, the computer returns to the beginning. The computer now looks only at applications that were not assigned authorizations for “First Choice” hunts. The computer determines from each application, in order, what “Second Choice” hunt is requested and assigns an authorization to the applicant if there are authorizations still available for this hunt. If this hunt is already fully subscribed, the computer immediately moves on to the next application. This process continues application by application, until all the applications have again been looked at by the computer. At this point, all of the applications have been checked three times by the computer. Again, “flags” are ignored on this pass.

#### **5. How Group applications are handled in the draw**

Throughout the above process, in all of the three passes through the applications, Group applications are treated exactly as an individual application. In other words, only one random number is assigned for a group. If any member of the group is “flagged” as previously successful, then the entire group is treated as “flagged”. If the group is drawn, then all members of the group receive authorizations to hunt. However, if the computer looks at a group application and there are too few authorizations still available for the hunt of choice to give each member of the group an authorization, then the entire group is passed over and not assigned any authorizations. The computer then moves to the next application.

#### **6. LEH Shared moose and bison hunts**

Limited Entry Shared moose hunts were introduced in the 2001 draw on an experimental basis for late bull hunts in Region 3 only. Shared bison hunts were introduced in 2014 (previously only individual applications were available). Shared hunts are similar to group hunts, but instead of all group members being entitled to take a moose or bison, there is a group limit. Under Limited Entry Shared Hunting, a group of two may take only one moose or bison, while a group of three or four may take two moose or bison. However, if there is only one remaining authorization available, and a group of three or four is drawn, the group will be authorized to take only one moose or bison. It does not matter which group member actually harvests the moose or bison, but all participating group members must possess a valid species hunting licence and no individual group member may kill more than one moose or bison.

The idea behind Limited Entry Shared hunting is to give more hunters the opportunity to hunt without increasing the number of animals harvested. Applicants are not required to apply for these hunts as part of a group – they may apply as individuals if they wish – but group Shared Hunt applications have a higher chance of being drawn than single applications. Unlike the regular group applications described in the previous section, group Shared Hunt applications enter the draw individually rather than as one. If any member of a group application for a Shared Hunt is drawn, then the entire group is drawn. Therefore, a group of four applying for a Shared Hunt has four chances to be drawn whereas an individual application has only one chance.

This concept was confined to the pilot project in Region 3 for three years. After the 2003 draw, Limited Entry Shared moose hunts were evaluated and the decision was made to expand them to all moose hunts in all areas of the province, commencing with the 2004 draw.

### **Follow up to the draw: notification of applicants**

After the completion of the draw, the computer generates the LEH authorization forms based on the draw results. These authorizations will contain the applicant's name, address, FWID and the Limited Entry Hunt assigned, with species, type of animal (e.g., Bulls only, Antlerless only), season dates and the odds of being drawn on the first choice. Also printed on the authorizations are any special hunt conditions that must be followed. These authorizations are immediately mailed to the applicants. In some cases, special instructions or requests for information from the hunter, such as tooth return envelopes, may be included with the authorization at the time of mailing.

An Individual authorization form is divided into three equal-sized sections, one above the other. Authorizations are printed first and unsuccessful notices are printed below. If an applicant was drawn for an elk and a mule deer but was unsuccessful for a goat and a sheep, they would receive a form with their elk authorization printed in the top third, their mule deer authorization printed in the middle third and their unsuccessful notice for goat and sheep printed in the bottom third.

A Shared authorization form covers one full page and includes your hunting partners' name(s) and FWID(s) as well as a "Harvest Details" section that you complete upon harvest of the shared animals.

After all this effort, it is disappointing to have a number of Limited Entry Authorizations returned by the Post Office as undeliverable. This occurs because hunters have moved, have not informed the Fish and Wildlife Branch of their new address and have not left a forwarding address. Although Branch personnel make every effort to locate hunters, often these authorizations can only be placed in a special file, awaiting inquiry from the hunter.

Hunters can also check their own results online through the BC Hunting online service at [www.gov.bc.ca/hunting](http://www.gov.bc.ca/hunting).

### **LEH hunters participate in wildlife management**

Following a Limited Entry Hunt, each hunter possesses information vital to the management of the species they were hunting. Almost all successful Limited Entry Hunt applicants are contacted by mail after their hunting season is over and asked to complete a

harvest survey. This special questionnaire provides wildlife managers with important information on the success of Limited Entry hunts, which can be used in the preparation of the following year's Limited Entry Hunting regulations. Failure of hunters to return questionnaires or other information requested at the time they receive their authorizations may result in regulations for following hunting seasons being somewhat more conservative than would otherwise be necessary.

Receipt and processing of returned questionnaires and the provision of harvest survey results to wildlife managers bring the cycle of LEH back to its starting point for another year with the formulation of seasons and regulations.