



Quota Hunt Program December 2012



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Hunting and Game Management

Introduction:

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) made major changes to the quota hunt program in 2009. This presentation covers draft rule amendments and other changes to further improve the program.

Background:

- Quota hunts began on public lands in 1975



- Many changes and improvements over time
- Worked closely with stakeholders for over two years
- Commission action in February 2009 with changes implemented in 2009-2010
- Commissioners were updated each year



Background History:

Florida's quota hunt program helps FWC manage overcrowding, hunting pressure, harvest, and quality of the hunting experience on public lands. The program began in 1975.

Many attempts were made to improve the program over time, but FWC continued to receive complaints from the public regarding perceived fairness of how permits are allocated.

Staff worked closely with stakeholders for over two years, holding working group and general public meetings to develop proposed changes.

Commissioners took final action at the February 2009 Commission meeting to revise the system.

Changes were implemented for the 2009-10 hunting season.

Staff has provided regular updates to the Commission – most recently at the June 2012 Commission meeting.

Changes Made



Balancing Fairness and Flexibility

- **Fairness: Nontransferable** - Quota permits are now nontransferable
- **Flexibility: Guest permits** - Most limited entry hunts now allow a guest permit

Other Changes:

- Print permits at home
- Longer application periods
- Return permits by mail for re-issuance



The major challenge was to balance fairness with flexibility.

To address fairness, permits were made non-transferable. This focused on issues such as people applying for multiple permits, hoarding permits and enhancing FWC's ability to spread out opportunity to more people. This change was controversial, with strong feelings on both sides.

To address flexibility, a guest permit was made available for each quota permit. The host and guest must enter and exit the area together and share the bag limit. Some worried about overcrowding and overharvest, but guest permits were generally accepted as a positive change.

Customers may now print most permits at home, providing additional convenience.

The first application period was extended to 30 days and hunters have more hunt types they can apply for.

In addition, permits may now be returned for re-issuance. If the returned permit was obtained with preference points, these are reinstated to the applicant and an additional point awarded.

Outcomes

- Hunter participation has remained stable
- Sales of WMA permit/license have increased
- Guest permits are popular
- Deer and turkey harvest has not increased
- Most public comments have been positive, but improvements needed



Non-transferable permits resulted in fewer permits being used, but on many areas guest permits appear to make up the difference. Hunter participation has remained relatively stable.

The sale of wildlife management area permits (and those licenses that include a WMA permit) have remained stable or increased over time.

Guest permits are well received.

On most areas, deer and turkey harvest has remained stable since prior to the changes in 2009. We did not see an increase in harvest due to guest permits.

We have received many positive comments on the new system, but improvements are needed. Some hunters say they are able to get permits for popular areas that they were unable to obtain in the past. New hunters are using the management area system and able to hunt popular areas. Some hunters still do not like the changes and prefer the old system. Many have suggested improvements.

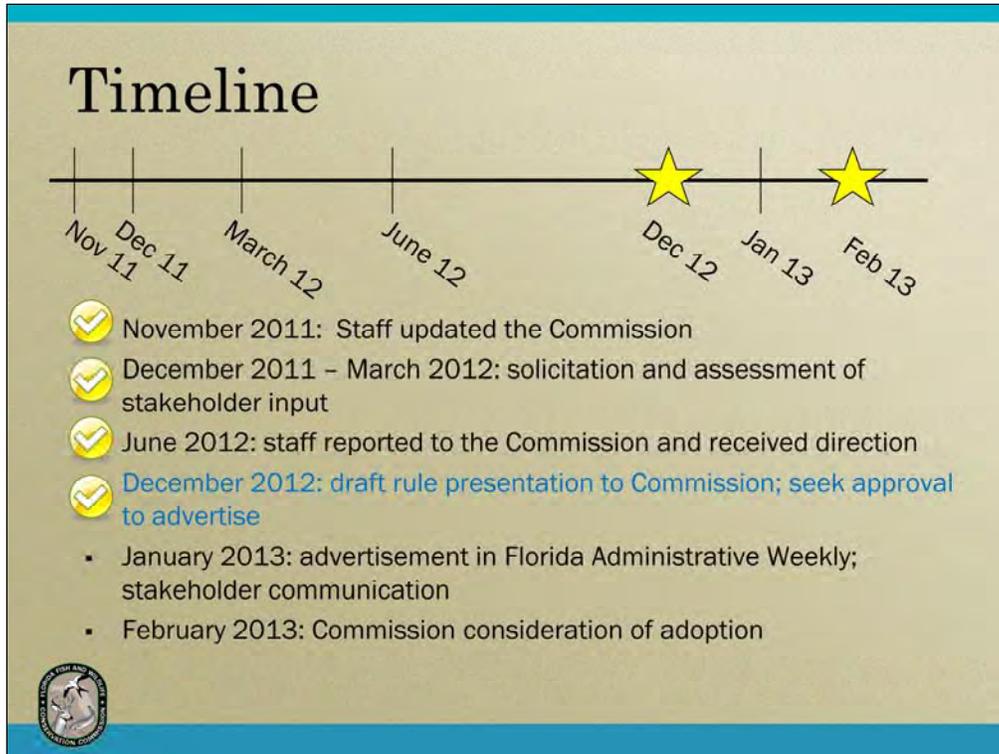
Recommendations for Improvement

- Revise guest permits
- Address returned & re-issued permits
- Review bag limits
- Examine mobility-impaired hunts
- Make the system easier to use & understand



Staff has listened to stakeholders and heard the following:

- Guest permits should be more user friendly and permit holder should be able to take different guests on different days of the hunt.
- Improve the process for returning and re-issuing permits.
- Review bag limits and standardize as much as possible. Allow the guest and host to harvest a deer or turkey on those areas where possible.
- Continue to work with mobility-impaired hunters to address their concerns.
- The system is too complex.



This is the timeline presented at the November 2011 Commission meeting.

Staff worked with stakeholders and listened to ideas on how to improve the current quota hunt program.

Staff reported back to the Commission in June 2012 and was provided direction to proceed with developing draft rule changes to accomplish this.

Today, staff is presenting these rule changes and seeking approval to publish in the Florida Administrative Weekly in January 2013.

Staff proposes to present rules for final consideration at the February 2013 Commission meeting.

Non-Regulatory Improvements

- A new vendor should help improve service
- Staff is implementing changes to our website per customer requests
- Include better instructions
- Address in Hunter Education classes
- Provide more reminders of application dates
- Allow permit transactions from home



The Commission has contracted with a new vendor (Brant Information Services) to provide improved service.

Staff is continuously making improvements to our website and procedures, based on customer feedback. Many suggestions from customers have already been implemented.

Instructions for how to apply for a quota permit are being improved.

The quota system will be addressed in Hunter Education classes and students will be instructed on how to apply.

Some stakeholders would like more reminders of application dates. This can be accomplished through electronic media and our website.

Quota permits and guest permits may now be applied for and printed at home, providing additional convenience to customers.

Other Changes

- Reviewed bag limits on area by area basis
- Standardized as much as possible
- Allow host and guest to harvest an animal, where possible
- Allow additional permits for some mobility-impaired hunts



Bag limits are set on each area, depending on game populations, management objectives, harvest pressure and sustainable yield.

Staff has reviewed bag limits and standardized where possible. This was presented in specific area proposed rules.

Mobility-impaired hunters often have sudden medical situations that prevent them from attending hunts. Staff proposes to allow a portion of the no-show permits to be issued prior to the hunt at the pre-hunt meeting or the check station on those mobility-impaired hunts that have check stations. These areas include Babcock Ranch Preserve, Suwannee Ridge, Blackwater – Hutton Unit, Econfinia Creek, and Seminole Forest. This has been done on a pilot project in the Northwest Region and has worked well.

68A-15.005

The proposed rule would:

- Allow the permit holder to take a different guest each day of the hunt
- Require host to provide guest permit information
- Have host and guest enter and exit together, share vehicle and bag limit



The proposed rule amendment would:

Allow a host to bring a different guest each day of the hunt. Currently, this is restricted to only one guest per hunt and the guest must apply for the permit using the host's information. The new system would issue a guest permit that contains the host's information with each quota. Guest information could simply be completed on the permit form and the guest could accompany the host, provided all required licenses and permits were in possession. Although the system would only track permit information on the host, this eliminates complexity and gives more freedom and flexibility to the host and the guest. The host would continue to be responsible for the guest, both host and guest would enter and exit the area together, share the same vehicle and share the bag limit.

68A-15.005

The proposed rule would:

- Allow unused permits to be returned electronically for re-issuance
- Require unused permits be returned 10 days prior to the hunt to receive preference point incentive
- Repeal sunset provisions in this rule



The proposed rule amendment would:

Allow unused permits to be returned electronically for re-issuance. Currently, unused permits must be mailed to the Commission and postmarked prior to the hunt. This has resulted in many permits being received too late to be re-issued.

The return of preference points for unused permits was meant to be an incentive for those that returned permits in time to be re-issued. To incentivize the return of unused permits in time for them to be processed, advertised and re-issued, preference points would only be reinstated if received at least 10 days prior to the hunt.

Currently, returned permits are batched and re-issued on a monthly basis. Staff would be able to do this on a weekly basis with electronic return.

A final list of quota permit holders would be made available to Law Enforcement and check station staff prior to the hunt.

At the June 2012 Commission meeting, the Commission directed staff to draft rule language repealing the sunset provisions contained in this rule:

Provision in 68A-15.005

(6) Sunset of Revised Quota System.

The Commission intends to sunset the rule amendments approved on February 4, 2009 and made effective May 1, 2009 that made changes to the quota hunt permit system prohibiting transferability of permits and allowing for guest permits. Therefore, Commission staff shall present at the next regularly scheduled Commission meeting after November 1, 2012 draft rule proposals necessary to repeal those rule amendments unless prior to that deadline the Commission directs staff to prepare draft rules to repeal or amend the deadline in this subsection.

Recommendation

- Approve draft rule language in 68A-15.005, F.A.C. and direct staff to advertise in Florida Administrative Weekly, with final consideration in February



Staff recommends approval of draft rule language in 68A-15.005, F.A.C., direction to advertise in the Florida Administrative Weekly in January 2013 and bring back final rule for consideration at the February 2013 Commission meeting.