I. Date of Initial Statement of Reasons: December 15, 2008

II. Dates and Locations of Scheduled Hearings:

(a) Notice Hearing: Date: February 6, 2009
Location: Sacramento

(b) Discussion Hearings: Date: March 4, 2009
Location: Woodland

Date: April 9, 2009
Location: Lodi

(c) Adoption Hearing: Date: April 21, 2009 (Teleconference)
Location: Sacramento

III. Description of Regulatory Action:

(a) Statement of Specific Purpose of Regulation Change and Factual Basis for Determining that Regulation Change is Reasonably Necessary:

Subsection (f)

OPTION #1:

1. Modify Method of Take Equipment Definitions for Muzzleloading Rifle Hunts

Existing regulations provide equipment restrictions to be used to take deer under the conditions of a muzzleloading rifle or muzzleloading rifle/archery deer tag. Currently, sight devices on muzzleloading rifles are restricted to open or “peep” type sights only. By limiting the sights to open or “peep” type sights, a person’s visual acuity becomes the primary factor in limiting the effective range of both modern (in-line) and traditional (flintlock, wheellock, matchlock and percussion) muzzleloading rifles.
Recent advances in muzzleloading rifles, propellants and projectiles have increased the power of muzzleloading rifles resulting in higher muzzle velocities and increased effective killing range. When combined with modern higher powered riflescopes the effective killing range of muzzleloading rifles has increased substantially, placing them on par with many modern centerfire rifles. Considering the increase in technological advances in the power of muzzleloading rifles and resulting effective downrange velocities, the primary intent of restricting the sight type was to maintain a semblance of “traditional” muzzleloading rifles by restricting their effective shooting distance through control of the sight mechanism.

The Department has received several requests from visually impaired hunters to allow the use of scopes on muzzleloading rifles under the conditions of a muzzleloading rifle or muzzleloading rifle/archery deer hunt tag as a reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). The primary concern of these entities is that various sight impairments prevent visually impaired hunters from participating in the muzzleloading rifle deer hunts, or preclude them from making accurate shots based on their inability to focus on either, the sights currently authorized, the target object, or both. A scope would provide the visually impaired with the ability to focus the scope, thus providing a clearer sight picture (generally a scope reticle), as well as a more well focused target object.

The Department believes that allowing the use of any riflescopes (especially scopes in excess of one power; 1X magnification) on muzzleloading rifle deer hunts would result in an increase in deer harvest and hunter success. By allowing scopes with unlimited power on muzzleloading rifles, the effective shooting range is substantially increased due to the increased resolution and power provided by the scope’s additional magnification. The increased effective range would ultimately result in higher deer harvest and increased hunter success, thereby requiring a significant reduction in tag quotas, possible elimination of some muzzleloading rifle deer hunts, and a reduction in hunter opportunity.

However, the Department believes that allowing the use of riflescopes not exceeding one power (1X magnification) would be a reasonable alternative. By limiting the scope power to 1 power (1X magnification) or less, the effective range of muzzleloaders would remain unchanged and no significant change in deer harvest or hunter success would occur. A one power (1X) scope would provide the visually impaired with a mechanism that would allow adjustment of the focus on both the sight mechanism (scope reticle) and the target object, thereby providing visual relief and a reasonable accommodation per their request under the ADA.
The proposed regulation change would allow hunters, including those with visual impairments, to use rifle mounted scopes or other similar devices, not exceeding 1 power (1X) in magnification, while hunting deer under the conditions of a muzzleloading rifle or muzzleloading rifle/archery tag. No increase in deer harvest or loss of hunter opportunity would result from this action and the proposal is consistent with existing deer herd management plan recommendations.

OPTION #2:

1. Modify Muzzleloading Rifle Conditions for Disabled Hunters

Allow disabled muzzleloading rifle hunters that have, and can provide upon request by law enforcement personnel, written medical documentation attesting to their inability to use conventional muzzleloading rifle equipment to use a muzzleloading rifle with a scope during the muzzleloading rifle only hunts. This will result in creating another application process which the Department will have to implement and monitor, and depending upon the level of increased hunter success, may lead to tag quota reductions, possible elimination of hunts and unnecessarily reduce hunter opportunity. This alternative was included for consideration at the specific request of the Fish and Game Commission (meeting held February 5, 2009 in Sacramento).

Subsection (j)

There are currently no Fish and Game Code laws or California Code of Regulations Title 14 regulations relating to the possession of a loaded muzzleloading firearm in a vehicle. There is a Penal Code section relating to the carrying of a loaded firearm in a public place, but this section does not cover some areas of the state where the Penal Code section is not applicable. These areas are commonly frequented by hunters who travel these areas in vehicles. The Fish and Game Code addresses the carrying of both rifles and shotguns in vehicles but does not address muzzleloading firearms. The muzzleloading firearms do not fall under the Fish and Game Code laws as they relate to loaded rifles or shotguns.

By not having laws or regulations regulating the carrying of loaded muzzleloading firearms in either the Fish and Game Code or the California Code of Regulations Title 14, wardens in the field cannot enforce safety regulations relating to the carrying of loaded muzzleloading firearms in vehicles unless the situation falls under the authority of the Penal Code.

The popularity of Muzzloader hunting has increased in recent years due to the increased technology in Muzzleloading firearms. Wardens have seen
an increase in the public using muzzleloading firearms while hunting. Wardens have come across numerous hunters with loaded muzzleloading firearms in vehicles. The only thing a warden can do in these instances is explain the safety ramifications to the hunters. They have no authority to make the person unload the firearm unless the area they are in during the contact is covered by the Penal Code. This is a safety concern to both the hunter and warden who is making the contact. With a regulation prohibiting the carrying of a loaded muzzleloading firearm in a vehicle, it will increase the safety for the hunter, public and wardens or others who contact hunters on roadways or in other public places.

(b) Authority and Reference Sections from Fish and Game Code for Regulation:

Authority: Sections 200, 202 and 203, Fish and Game Code.


(c) Specific Technology or Equipment Required by Regulatory Change: None.

(d) Identification of Reports or Documents Supporting Regulation Change:

2007 Final Environmental Document Regarding Deer Hunting.

(e) Public Discussions of Proposed Regulations Prior to Notice Publication:

The Department conducted a public scoping session in Sacramento on October 11, 2006. Public input, discussions and recommendations regarding the environmental document and mammal hunting and trapping regulations were taken at this time.

Additionally, in 2000, the Department of Fish and Game held a total of twenty-three (23) “Deer Stakeholder” meetings throughout the State. The meetings were open to the public and the Department provided information on a variety of deer management strategies and issues including: Deer Assessment Unit (zone complex) planning and tag draw method alternatives. Attendees were asked to participate in a survey and public comment was also received. The Department also conducted four public meetings at which regulation change concepts and specific proposals for mammals, furbearers, including deer were discussed, and additional public comment was received.

While these meetings were conducted prior to the establishment of current and proposed regulations, the concepts and proposals which were derived
through these meetings are still being implemented as part of the current year regulatory process.

IV. Description of Reasonable Alternatives to Regulatory Action:

(a) Alternatives to Regulation Change:

1. Modify Method of Take Equipment Definitions for Muzzleloading Rifle Hunts

Allow the use of scopes on muzzleloading rifle deer hunts with no restriction of magnification. This alternative was considered and rejected because it would result in an increase in harvest and hunter success by increasing the effective range of muzzleloading rifles. This would result in tag quota reductions, possible elimination of hunts and unnecessarily reduce hunter opportunity.

2. Possession of a loaded muzzleloading firearm in a vehicle

No other reasonable alternatives were identified.

(b) No Change Alternative:

1. Modify Method of Take Equipment Definitions for Muzzleloading Rifle Hunts

The no change alternative was considered and rejected because it would not achieve the objective of the proposed action. This proposal provides for a reasonable accommodation in meeting federal requirements under ADA without any significant effects to the resource.

2. Possession of a loaded muzzleloading firearm in a vehicle

The no change alternative was rejected because the regulation is needed for public safety reasons.

(c) Consideration of Alternatives:

In view of the most current information regarding the methods for taking big game, no reasonable alternative considered would be more effective in carrying out the purposes for which the regulation is proposed or would be as effective and less burdensome to the affected private persons than the proposed regulation.

V. Mitigation Measures required by the Regulatory Action:
The proposed regulatory action will have no negative impact on the environment; therefore, no mitigation measures are needed.

VI. Impact of Regulatory Action:

The potential for significant statewide adverse economic impacts that might result from the proposed regulatory action has been assessed, and the following initial determinations regarding the required statutory categories have been made:

(a) Significant Statewide Adverse Economic Impact Directly Affecting Businesses, Including the Ability of California Businesses to Compete with Businesses in Other States:

The proposed action will not have a significant statewide adverse economic impact directly affecting business, including the ability of California businesses to compete with businesses in other states. The proposed action modifies method of take regulations for existing hunts. Given the number of tags available and the area over which they are distributed, these proposals are economically neutral to business.

(b) Impact on the Creation or Elimination of Jobs Within the State, the Creation of New Businesses or the Elimination of Existing Businesses, or the Expansion of Businesses in California:

None.

(c) Cost Impacts on a Representative Private Person or Business:

The agency is not aware of any cost impacts that a representative private person would necessarily incur in reasonable compliance with the proposed action.

(d) Costs or Savings to State Agencies or Costs/Savings in Federal Funding to the State:

None.

(e) Nondiscretionary Costs/Savings to Local Agencies:

None

(f) Programs Mandated on Local Agencies or School Districts:

None

(g) Costs Imposed on Any Local Agency or School District that is Required
to be Reimbursed Under Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division 4:

None

(h) Effect on Housing Costs:

None
OPTION #1 (subsection (f)):

Existing regulations provide equipment restrictions to be used to take deer under the conditions of a muzzleloading rifle or muzzleloading rifle/archery deer tag. Currently, sight devices on muzzleloading rifles are restricted to open or “peep” type sights only. By limiting the sights to open or “peep” type sights, a person’s visual acuity becomes the primary factor in limiting the effective range of both modern (in-line) and traditional (flintlock, wheellock, matchlock and percussion) muzzleloading rifles.

Recent advances in muzzleloading rifles, propellants and projectiles have increased the power of muzzleloading rifles resulting in higher muzzle velocities and increased effective killing range. When combined with modern higher powered riflescopes the effective killing range of muzzleloading rifles has increased substantially, placing them on par with many modern centerfire rifles. Considering the increase in technological advances in the power of muzzleloading rifles and resulting effective downrange velocities, the primary intent of restricting the sight type was to maintain a semblance of “traditional” muzzleloading rifles by restricting their effective shooting distance through control of the sight mechanism.

The Department has received several requests from visually impaired hunters to allow the use of scopes on muzzleloading rifles under the conditions of a muzzleloading rifle or muzzleloading rifle/archery deer hunt tag as a reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). The primary concern of these entities is that various sight impairments prevent visually impaired hunters from participating in the muzzleloading rifle deer hunts, or preclude them from making accurate shots based on their inability to focus on either, the sights currently authorized, the target object, or both. A scope would provide the visually impaired with the ability to focus the scope, thus providing a clearer sight picture (generally a scope reticle), as well as a more well focused target object.

The Department believes that allowing the use of any riflescopes (especially scopes in excess of one power; 1X magnification) on muzzleloading rifle deer hunts would result in an increase in deer harvest and hunter success. By allowing scopes with unlimited power on muzzleloading rifles, the effective shooting range is substantially increased due to the increased resolution and power provided by the scope’s additional magnification. The increased effective range would ultimately result in higher deer harvest and increased hunter success, thereby requiring a significant reduction in tag quotas, possible elimination of some muzzleloading rifle deer hunts, and a reduction in hunter opportunity.

However, the Department believes that allowing the use of riflescopes not exceeding one power (1X magnification) would be a reasonable alternative. By limiting the scope power to 1 power (1X magnification) or less, the effective range of muzzleloaders would remain unchanged and no significant change in deer harvest or hunter success would
occur. A one power (1X) scope would provide the visually impaired with a mechanism that would allow adjustment of the focus on both the sight mechanism (scope reticle) and the target object, thereby providing visual relief and a reasonable accommodation per their request under the ADA.

The proposed regulation change would allow hunters, including those with visual impairments, to use rifle mounted scopes or other similar devices, not exceeding 1 power (1X) in magnification, while hunting deer under the conditions of a muzzleloading rifle or muzzleloading rifle/archery tag. No increase in deer harvest or loss of hunter opportunity would result from this action and the proposal is consistent with existing deer herd management plan recommendations.

OPTION #2 (subsection (k)):

Allow disabled muzzleloading rifle hunters that have, and can provide upon request by law enforcement personnel, written medical documentation attesting to their inability to use conventional muzzleloading rifle equipment to use a muzzleloading rifle with a scope during the muzzleloading rifle only hunts. This will result in creating another application process which the Department will have to implement and monitor, and depending upon the level of increased hunter success, may lead to tag quota reductions, possible elimination of hunts and unnecessarily reduce hunter opportunity. This alternative was included for consideration at the specific request of the Fish and Game Commission (meeting held February 5, 2009 in Sacramento).

Subsection (j)

There are currently no Fish and Game Code laws or California Code of Regulations Title 14 regulations relating to the possession of a loaded muzzleloading firearm in a vehicle. There is a Penal Code section relating to the carrying of a loaded firearm in a public place, but this section does not cover some areas of the state where the Penal Code section is not applicable. These areas are commonly frequented by hunters who travel these areas in vehicles. The Fish and Game Code addresses the carrying of both rifles and shotguns in vehicles but does not address muzzleloading firearms. The muzzleloading firearms do not fall under the Fish and Game Code laws at they relate to loaded firearms.

By not having laws or regulations regulating the carrying of loaded muzzleloading firearms in either the Fish and Game Code or the California Code of regulations Title 14, wardens in the field cannot enforce safety regulations relating to the carrying of loaded muzzleloading firearms in vehicles unless the situation falls under the authority of the Penal Code.

The popularity of Muzzleloader hunting has increased in recent years due to the increased technology in Muzzleloading firearms. Wardens have seen an increase in the public using muzzleloading firearms. Wardens have come across numerous hunters with loaded muzzleloading firearms in vehicles. The only thing a warden can do in
these instances is explain the safety ramifications to the hunters. They have no authority to make the person unload the firearm. This is a safety to both the hunter and warden who is making the contact. With a regulation prohibiting the carrying of a loaded muzzleloading firearm in a vehicle, it will increase the safety for the hunter, public and wardens or others who contact hunters in public places.
OPTION #1:

Section 353, Title 14, CCR is amended as follows:

§353. Methods Authorized for Taking Big Game.
(a) Except for the provisions of subsections 353(b) through (h), Title 14, CCR, big game (as defined by Section 350, Title 14, CCR) may only be taken by rifles using centerfire cartridges with softnose or expanding projectiles; bow and arrow (see Section 354, Title 14, CCR, for archery equipment regulations); or wheellock, matchlock, flintlock or percussion type, including "in-line" muzzleloading rifles using black powder or equivalent black powder substitute, including pellets, with a single projectile loaded from the muzzle and at least .40 caliber in designation. For purposes of Section 353, a "projectile" is defined as any bullet, ball, sabot, slug, buckshot or other device which is expelled from a firearm through a barrel by force.
(b) Shotguns capable of holding not more than three shells firing single slugs may be used for the taking of deer, bear and wild pigs. In areas where the discharge of rifles or shotguns with slugs is prohibited by county ordinance, shotguns capable of holding not more than three shells firing size 0 or 00 buckshot may be used for the taking of deer only.
(c) Pistols and revolvers using centerfire cartridges with softnose or expanding projectiles may be used to take deer, bear, and wild pigs.
(d) Pistols and revolvers with minimum barrel lengths of 4 inches, using centerfire cartridges with softnose or expanding projectiles may be used to take elk and bighorn sheep.
(e) Except as provided in subsection 354(j), crossbows may be used to take deer and wild pigs only during the regular seasons.
(f) Under the provisions of a muzzleloading rifle only tag, hunters may only possess muzzleloading rifles as described in subsection 353(a) equipped with open sights, or "peep" type sights only, or lawful scope devices as described in subsection 353(j) with magnification capability not exceeding one power (1X power).
(g) Under the provisions of a muzzleloading rifle/archery tag, hunters may only possess muzzleloading rifles with sights as described in subsection 353(f); archery equipment as described in Section 354; or both. For purposes of this subsection, archery equipment does not include crossbows, except as provided in subsection 354(j).
(h) Methods of take within the California condor range. Except as otherwise provided, it is unlawful to use or possess projectiles containing more than one percent lead by weight while taking or attempting to take any big game (as defined in Section 350, Title 14, CCR) in those areas described in Section 3004.5, Fish and Game Code.
(1) Except as otherwise provided, it is unlawful to possess any projectile containing lead in excess of the amount permitted in subsection 353(h) and a firearm capable of firing the projectile while taking or attempting to take any big game within the area described in subsection 353(h). The possession of a
projectile containing lead in excess of the amount allowed in subsection 353(h) without possessing a firearm capable of firing the projectile is not a violation of this section.

(i) Except as otherwise provided, while taking or attempting to take big game under the provisions of Section 353 or Section 354, Title 14, CCR, it is unlawful to use any device or devices which: 1) throw, cast or project an artificial light or electronically alter or intensify a light source for the purpose of visibly enhancing an animal; or 2) throw, cast or project an artificial light or electronically alter or intensify a light source for the purpose of providing a visible point of aim directly on a animal. Devices commonly referred to as "sniperscopes", night vision scopes or binoculars, or those utilizing infra-red, heat sensing or other non-visible spectrum light technology used for the purpose of visibly enhancing an animal or providing a visible point of aim directly on a animal are prohibited and may not be possessed while taking or attempting to take big game. Devices commonly referred to as laser rangefinders, "red-dot" scopes with self-illuminating reticles, and fiberoptic sights with self-illuminating sight or pins which do not throw, cast or project a visible light onto an animal are permitted.

(j) Unless provided in these regulations or any other law, it is unlawful to possess a loaded muzzleloading firearm in any vehicle or conveyance or its attachments which is standing on or along or is being driven on or along any public road or highway or other way open to the public. For the purposes of this section, a muzzleloading firearm shall be deemed to be loaded when it is capped or primed or has an electronic or other ignition device attached and has a powder charge and projectile or shot in the barrel or cylinder.

Section 353, Title 14, CCR is amended as follows:

§353. Methods Authorized for Taking Big Game.

(a) Except for the provisions of subsections 353(b) through (h), Title 14, CCR, big game (as defined by Section 350, Title 14, CCR) may only be taken by rifles using centerfire cartridges with softnose or expanding projectiles; bow and arrow (see Section 354, Title 14, CCR, for archery equipment regulations); or wheellock, matchlock, flintlock or percussion type, including "in-line" muzzleloading rifles using black powder or equivalent black powder substitute, including pellets, with a single projectile loaded from the muzzle and at least .40 caliber in designation. For purposes of Section 353, a "projectile" is defined as any bullet, ball, sabot, slug, buckshot or other device which is expelled from a firearm through a barrel by force.

(b) Shotguns capable of holding not more than three shells firing single slugs may be used for the taking of deer, bear and wild pigs. In areas where the discharge of rifles or shotguns with slugs is prohibited by county ordinance, shotguns capable of holding not more than three shells firing size 0 or 00 buckshot may be used for the taking of deer only.

(c) Pistols and revolvers using centerfire cartridges with softnose or expanding projectiles may be used to take deer, bear, and wild pigs.

(d) Pistols and revolvers with minimum barrel lengths of 4 inches, using centerfire cartridges with softnose or expanding projectiles may be used to take elk and bighorn sheep.

(e) Except as provided in subsection 354(j), crossbows may be used to take deer and wild pigs only during the regular seasons.

(f) Under the provisions of a muzzleloading rifle only tag, hunters may only possess muzzleloading rifles as described in subsection 353(a) equipped with open or "peep" type sights only except as described in subsection 353(j).

(g) Under the provisions of a muzzleloading rifle/archery tag, hunters may only possess muzzleloading rifles with sights as described in subsection 353(f); archery equipment as described in Section 354; or both. For purposes of this subsection, archery equipment does not include crossbows, except as provided in subsection 354(j).

(h) Methods of take within the California condor range. Except as otherwise provided, it is unlawful to use or possess projectiles containing more than one percent lead by weight while taking or attempting to take any big game (as defined in Section 350, Title 14, CCR) in those areas described in Section 3004.5, Fish and Game Code.

(1) Except as otherwise provided, it is unlawful to possess any projectile containing lead in excess of the amount permitted in subsection 353(h) and a firearm capable of firing the projectile while taking or attempting to take any big game within the area described in subsection 353(h). The possession of a projectile containing lead in excess of the amount allowed in subsection 353(h) without possessing a firearm capable of firing the projectile is not a violation of
this section.

(i) Except as otherwise provided, while taking or attempting to take big game under the provisions of Section 353 or Section 354, Title 14, CCR, it is unlawful to use any device or devices which: 1) throw, cast or project an artificial light or electronically alter or intensify a light source for the purpose of visibly enhancing an animal; or 2) throw, cast or project an artificial light or electronically alter or intensify a light source for the purpose of providing a visible point of aim directly on a animal. Devices commonly referred to as "sniperscopes", night vision scopes or binoculars, or those utilizing infra-red, heat sensing or other non-visible spectrum light technology used for the purpose of visibly enhancing an animal or providing a visible point of aim directly on a animal are prohibited and may not be possessed while taking or attempting to take big game. Devices commonly referred to as laser rangefinders, "red-dot" scopes with self-illuminating reticles, and fiberoptic sights with self-illuminating sight or pins which do not throw, cast or project a visible light onto an animal are permitted.

(j) Unless provided in these regulations or any other law, it is unlawful to possess a loaded muzzleloading firearm in any vehicle or conveyance or its attachments which is standing on or along or is being driven on or along any public road or highway or other way open to the public. For the purposes of this section, a muzzleloading firearm shall be deemed to be loaded when it is capped or primed or has an electronic or other ignition device attached and has a powder charge and projectile or shot in the barrel or cylinder.

(k) Upon application to the department, the department may issue a Disabled Muzzleloader Scope Permit, free of any charge or fee, to any person with a physical disability, as defined in 353(k), which prevents him/her from being able to focus on the target utilizing muzzleloading rifles equipped with open or "peep" sights. The Disabled Muzzleloader Scope Permit authorizes the disabled hunter to use a scope on a muzzleloading rifle, as described in subsection 354 (i), with a muzzleloading rifle only tag.

(1) Applications for a Disabled Muzzleloader Scope Permit, 2009/2010 Disabled Muzzleloader Scope Permit Application, (Form FG 539 (New 2/09) shall be submitted to the department at the address specified on the application and shall include:

(A) Applicant's name
(B) Applicant's physical address
(C) Applicant's date of birth
(D) Applicant's Driver's License or DMV Number
(E) Applicant's valid hunting license number
(F) Applicant's telephone number
(G) Applicant's signature
(H) Medical Physician's name
(I) Medical Physician's business address
(J) Medical Physician's business telephone number
(K) Medical Physician's State medical license number
(L) A description of the visual disability requiring this permit
(M) Medical Physician's signature
(N) Signature of the authorizing department employee and date issued

(2) Proof of meeting eligibility requirements may be met by providing a previously issued Disabled Muzzleloader Scope Permit.

(3) The valid Disabled Muzzleloader Scope Permit shall be in the hunter’s immediate possession while hunting and shall be shown on demand to any person authorized to enforce this regulation.

(4) The Disabled Muzzleloader Scope Permit is valid from July 1 through June 30 of the following year.

(I) For the purposes of this section a visual disability means a permanent loss, significant limitation, or diagnosed disease or disorder, which substantially impairs the vision of a hunter, preventing the hunter from viewing and aligning the sights of a muzzleloading rifle with the target in order to hunt deer.