

FWP proposal to be amended: Black Bear Regulations

Commissioner: Brian Cebull

Date Received by Commission: February 7, 2024

Proposed Amendment: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt the following amendment to the proposed 2024 and 2025 Black Bear Regulations:

1. Establish a new BMU within the boundary of the current BMU 520 that encompasses deer/elk HD 565 and the western section of HD 525 along the USFS boundary line as shown in the map below.

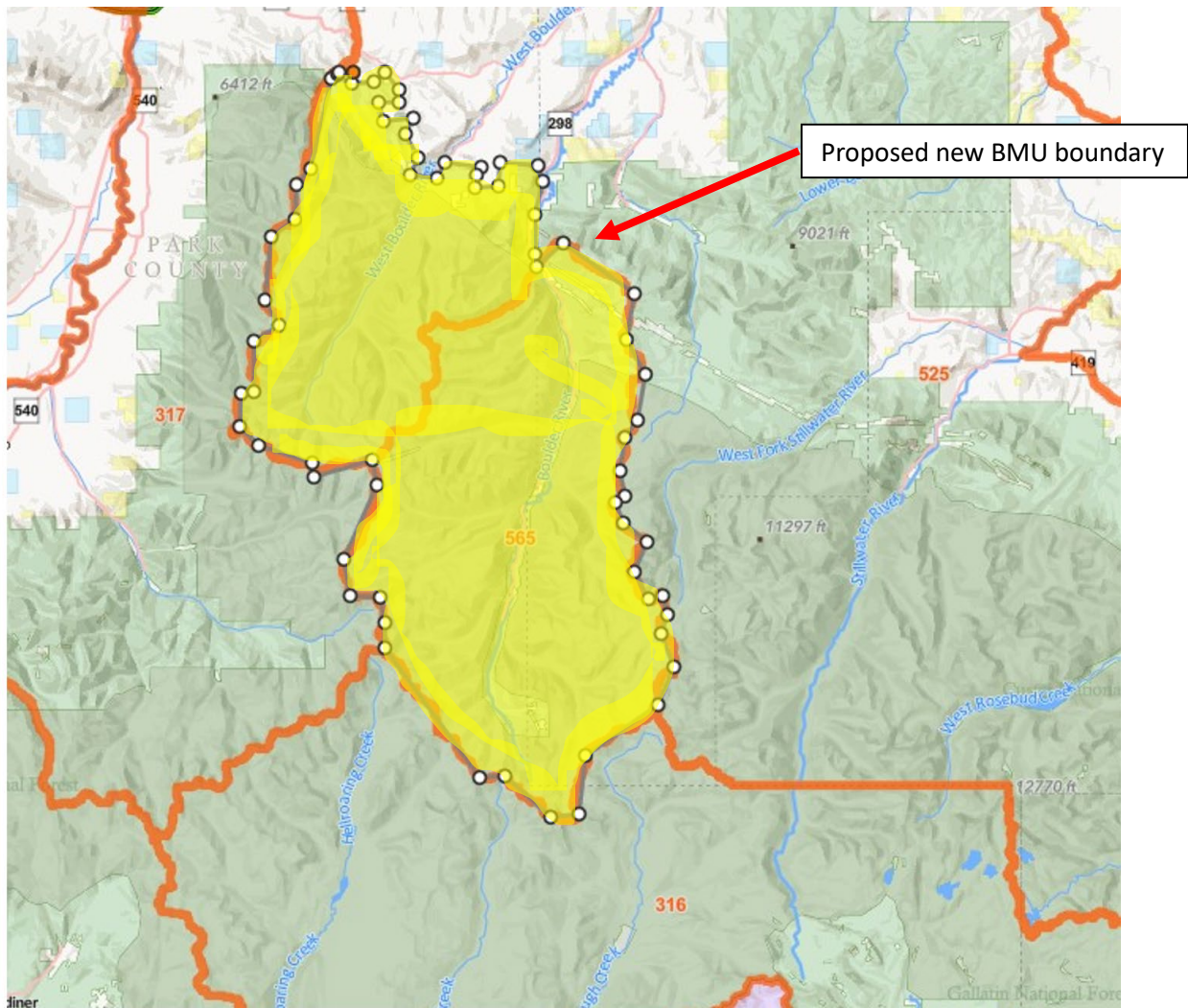
The proposed new BMU would have the following rules:

- a. Fall and Spring female harvest quotas established by the Department that would be deducted from the current BMU 520 Fall and Spring quotas.
- b. A Spring season opener of May 25 with a close date once the female quota is reached or June 15, whichever is earlier.

Requested by FWP: No

Rationale and Background: Currently BMU 520 is a relatively large area that extends from the Beartooth Mountains in the south to I-90 in the north and is comprised of a wide variety of ecosystems ranging from high-elevation mountains to lush river bottoms. Traditionally, the Fall and Spring season in BMU 520 closes within just a few weeks of opening due to the filling of the female quotas with a majority of the bears harvested in the lower elevations of the BMU. This proposed amendment will create a new BMU that is comprised of only the higher-elevation, mountainous upper drainages of the Main Boulder and West Boulder Rivers with a later Spring season starting date of May 25.

The creation of this new BMU is expected to increase the harvest of higher elevation boars which should help decrease predation pressure on ungulates including deer, elk, and sheep which utilize these areas for fawning/calving starting in June, long after bear hunting in BMU 520 is closed. Also, shifting a portion of the original female quotas from BMU 520 to this new BMU with its much shorter and later Spring season will help spread out the bear harvest in the region and may result in an overall lower female harvest if the female quotas are not reached by the June 15 close.



Department response:

Due to the small size of the new proposed bear management unit (BMU) and the corresponding low female quota that would need to be imposed, the duration of the spring season often may be shorter than the proposed three-week season. With the later start date, hunter pressure within the proposed BMU may be substantial because other BMUs may have closed by this date. This could result in an accelerated harvest over the quota. The department recommends a reduction in the female quota for existing BMU 520, which will likely influence an earlier closure for this BMU. Hunters occasionally harvest bears that may be engaged in conflict behavior later in the spring season, and earlier closures may limit hunter harvest as an option to address conflict.

If adopted, the department would recommend a minor realignment of the proposed boundary so that hunters could more easily discern the boundary:

- Describing the boundary of BMU 520 as – 520 Beartooth Face: Those portions of Carbon, Park, Stillwater and Sweet Grass Counties lying within the following described boundary: Beginning on

Interstate 90 at Big Timber, then east along said interstate to its intersection with State Route 78 at Columbus, then south along said route to State Route 421, then easterly and southerly along said route to US Highway 212 near Joliet, then northerly and easterly along said highway to its junction with US Highway 310 at Rockvale, then southerly along said highway to its intersection with State Route 72 about one mile south of Bridger, then southerly along said route to the Montana-Wyoming Border, then westerly along said border to the Custer-Gallatin National Forest Boundary south-east of Albino Lake, then northerly and westerly along said boundary to the Park-Stillwater County line, then north and west along said line to the Custer-Gallatin National Forest Boundary near Timberline Mountain, then northerly along said boundary ~~to the Slough Creek-Boulder River Divide near Columbine Pass, then southwesterly along said divide and northwesterly along the Boulder River-Buffalo Fork Divide through Boulder pass, then northwesterly along the Hellroaring Creek-Boulder River Divide past Crow Mountain, then north and west along the Boulder River-Mill Creek Divide to Mt. Cowan, then north along the Yellowstone River-West Boulder Divide to Elephant Head Mountain, then north down~~ to the head of the East Boulder River, then north along the East Boulder River/Main Boulder River divide to the north end of Contact Mountain, then south and west off said Mountain to the Boulder River at the confluence with Falls Creek, then south along said creek to the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Boundary, then north and west along said boundary to Mission Creek, then north down Mission Creek to Interstate 90, then east along said interstate to Big Timber, the point of beginning.

- Numbering the new BMU as 530 and describing the boundary as – 530 Upper Boulder: Beginning at the intersection of the Main Boulder Rd and Falls Creek, then south along said creek to the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Boundary, then northwest along said boundary to Mission Creek, then south along said creek to Elephant Head Mountain, then south along the Yellowstone River-West Boulder Divide to Mt. Cowan, then south and east along the Boulder River-Mill Creek Divide to Boulder Mountain on the Main Boulder River/West Boulder River divide, then south along the Main Boulder River-Mill Creek divide through Silver Pass and The Pyramid to Crow Mountain, then south and east along the Main Boulder River-Hellroaring Creek divide through Boulder Pass and Shepherd Peak, then south and east along the Main Boulder River-Buffalo Fork divide, then north and east along the East Fork of the Main Boulder River-Slough Creek divide to Columbine Pass and the boundary between the Gallatin and Custer National Forests, then north along said boundary to the head of the East Boulder River, then north along the East Boulder River/Main Boulder River divide to the north end of Contact Mountain, then south and west off said Mountain to the Boulder River at the confluence with Falls Creek, then south along said creek to the Main Boulder Rd, the point of beginning.
- Adjusting the female quota for BMU 520 to be 9 in the spring and 7 in the fall, which, when harvested, would close the season to black bear hunting.
- Establishing the female quota for the new BMU 530 as 3 in the spring and 3 in the fall, which, when harvested, would close the season to black bear hunting.