



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: December 5, 2019

Agenda Item: 2020 Elk Shoulder Seasons – Commission-revised & Adopted Proposal

Action Needed: Proposed

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 60 Minutes

Background: Most season structures and hunting district boundaries are adopted every other year between December and February. FWP proposes adopting the existing 2019 structure except for specific changes outlined below. During its Dec. 5 meeting the commission voted to modify FWP's original proposal that had been posted online and FWP's changes in response to commission direction are highlighted in yellow below. This agenda item speaks only to elk shoulder seasons. Other elk season changes are proposed under a separate agenda item.

Shoulder seasons are a management tool designed to address over-objective populations and problematic elk distributions that have been unable to be addressed by other means. Application and continuation of these seasons depends on satisfying both harvest objectives and other fundamental objectives specified in the *Elk Season Guidelines* adopted by the commission in 2015 (in commission packet). These guidelines include important caveats to be considered if objectives are not met due to weather and/or elk distribution or other factors. Examples include the poor elk harvest in 2016 because of weather, elk that move among hunting districts, or seasons that do not run long enough to harvest enough elk. Cow elk harvest in Region 5, where populations have been chronically and egregiously over objective, increased by 62% when the season was lengthened from Jan. 1 to Feb. 15. FWP presented evaluations of harvest and fundamental objectives in August and October, respectively. Differing from other season structures that can continue indefinitely unless proposed to be changed, the *Guidelines* specify shoulder seasons be re-proposed following evaluations.

There are currently shoulder seasons in 58 hunting districts. FWP's proposed changes and modifications in response to Commission direction (in yellow) are below and further explained in the master list.

HDs that are above objective and meeting all harvest criteria

Proposed to continue with no change: HDs 312, 317, 446, 500

Proposed to continue with adjustment: HDs 210/211, 212/213, 215, 261/262, 290/298, 412, 421/423, 449/452

HDs that are above objective and not meeting all harvest criteria

Originally proposed to continue with no change: Remove or not implement shoulder season and replace with specific antlerless-only licenses valid during general rifle season to Jan 1.: HDs 390, 391, 411, 417, 419, 445, 447, 502/510/520/575, 511/530, 540, 560, 570, 580, 590

Proposed to continue with adjustment: HDs 204, 216, 410, 422/444, 620/621/622, 630/631, 680/690

HDs that are at/below objective

Proposed to continue with no change: HDs 101/109, 451

Proposed to continue with adjustment: HDs 217, 240, 291, 292, 293, 309, 311

Remove shoulder season: HDs 393, 632

Public Involvement Process & Results: Elk season comments received during the Aug. 15 – Sep. 16 scoping were used by biologists and managers in developing proposals. In addition to public comment on proposed elk season structure changes taken during the Dec. 5 commission meeting, public comment will run through 5 p.m., Jan. 22, 2020. Any final adoptions will take place at the February 2020 commission meeting.

Adopted Motion: I move the commission approve the Department's recommendations with the following exceptions: shoulder seasons will be removed from those districts that are above objective, that are not meeting criteria and for which the Department did not propose any new changes, along with HD 411 as well as the Department's recommendations regarding HDs 417 and 419, and further direct the Department to look at harvest methods for these districts that include management seasons and/or game damage hunts and/or LPTs to include but not necessarily limited to LPTs that may qualify as a third elk license and that these specific LPTs would be valid from the beginning of general big game season until January 1.