



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: December 5, 2019

Agenda Item: 2020 Elk Shoulder Seasons

Action Needed: Proposed

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 60 Minutes

Background: Season structures and hunting district boundaries are adopted for most game species every other year between December and final adoptions in February. In proposing regulations to the commission, FWP proposes adopting the existing 2019 structure except for specific changes. Proposals are based on population status and/or other circumstances. **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 proposes changes as below and further explained in the master list in the commission packet.

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

Proposed to continue with no change: HDs 390, 391, 445, 447, 502/510/520/575, 511/530, 540, 560, 570, 580, 590

Proposed to continue with adjustment: HDs 204, 216, 410, 411, 442/444, 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

Add shoulder season: HDs 417, 419

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.

Alternatives and Analysis: Proposals may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, with deletions, or no change from 2019 (status quo). No change would challenge the supporting justifications behind proposals.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt for public comment the 2020 elk shoulder seasons proposals as presented by FWP, and that all other aspects of the elk season remain unchanged unless addressed in other proposals.