

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: February 13, 2019

Agenda Item: Performance-based elk shoulder seasons for 2019

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 40 Minutes

Background: In February 2018, the commission voted to annually adopt elk seasons in the original 43 hunting districts (HDs) with performance-based shoulder seasons, which were adopted in 2016, rather than biennially as is usually done. In December 2018, FWP proposed three performance-based elk shoulder season options in those original 43 HDs for the 2019 hunting season for the commission's consideration. The option the commission adopted for public comment was:

Maintain the current season structure in all districts, including early and late performance-based shoulder seasons for the 2019 license year, to allow for a more comprehensive three-year evaluation of season performance in late summer or early fall 2019.

It should be noted that the 2019 license year goes until February 2020.

This proposal allows for a thorough 3-year evaluation of shoulder seasons as originally laid out in the *Final Elk Season Guidelines: Flexible season structure with performance-based shoulder seasons* guidelines adopted in October 2015. Moreover, it will avoid any regulation change that might be entertained after an analysis of the 2018 harvest in August 2019, well after the regulation booklet is printed. Major season structure changes after the regulations are printed would cause a lot of confusion among hunters and becomes an enforcement nightmare.

Performance-based shoulder seasons in some hunting districts are meant to address problematic distributions of elk rather than overpopulation. These are situations where other methods like game damage hunts, management seasons, herders, kill permits, etc., have failed. Such seasons originally occurred in HDs 101, 109, 292 and, more recently, HD 311 and are not subject to harvest criteria. One of the fundamental objectives of the *Elk Season Guidelines* previously mentioned is to: "Address problematic distributions of elk and elk harvest" (p. 6), and the guidelines further state (p. 2) that "FWP may also propose and the commission may adopt shoulder seasons to address specific local circumstances. Examples of such local circumstances include areas where ... the landscape is dominated by multiple small ownership parcels making it difficult to safely harvest elk or respond to game damage."

Public Involvement Process & Results: Public comment was taken from Dec. 10 through Jan. 18, 2019, and we received 287 comments, which are included in the commission packet. There was a mix of general support and opposition to shoulder seasons. In addition, recurring themes spoke to rifle hunting during archery season, private land harboring and access, length of seasons, support for opening public land, updating the elk plan, and excluding inaccessible elk in objective counts as addressed on page 55 of the elk plan.

Alternatives and Analysis: Proposals may be adopted as proposed, with additions or deletions, or with no change from 2018 (status quo).

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends the commission adopt the current performance-based shoulder seasons in the 43 hunting districts where they were initiated in 2016 for the 2019 license year.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission adopt the current performance-based shoulder seasons in the 43 hunting districts where they were initiated in 2016 for the 2019 license year, and that all other aspects of the elk season remain unchanged unless addressed in other proposals.