

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Species: Turkey
Region: 4
Hunting District: 445 (Cascade County)
Year: 2021
LPT: 445-20

- 1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.). REMEMBER THIS STEP IS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE INITIAL ENTRY INTO THE DATABASE—SO FOLKS CAN START THIS NARRATIVE WITH #2 BELOW.**

Increase the number of 445-20 spring turkey gobbler licenses from 20 to 40.

- 2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The objective of the proposal is to provide additional turkey hunting opportunities. The proposal may also direct hunters to landowner with growing turkey populations and those who wish to alleviate potential damage.

- 3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.**

Success will be measured by increased hunter opportunity, landowner feedback and hunter-harvest surveys.

- 4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

Turkey populations in HD 445 are robust and continue to expand throughout the Missouri River corridor Expansion and increasing numbers are occurring on the lower Smith River and along upper Belt Creek. Anecdotal evidence suggests numbers are stable or growing. Feedback from both traditional and non-traditional landowners suggest habitat is available and bird numbers are increasing. In 2016, 75% of license holders were successful in harvesting a male turkey. In 2020, a phone survey revealed approximately 70% of license holders were successful. This rate is higher than average in Montana (~50%) suggesting the opportunity is highly valued amongst hunters.

- 5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

Habitat quality in the district is stable. Cottonwood/shrub riparian habitat intermixed with cropland along the Missouri River and lower stretches of the Smith Rivers support acceptable survival rates during long, winters. Land use in the foothills of the Little Belts has not changed drastically and hunting opportunities continue to improve. The 2019 Hunter Harvest Surveys suggest turkeys have expanded further up Belt Creek than previously thought. While residential development continues to expand south of Great Falls, historical access opportunities remain available. Private landowner tolerance for turkey hunting is stable or increasing. Continued turkey expansion up the Smith River has the potential to increase spring hunting opportunities there in the future.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

The majority of the 2020 445-20 turkey permit holders were contacted for a phone survey to learn more about their experience. For those who were able to hunt the experience was always described as excellent. Most hunters were able to be selective with their harvest and virtually no competition existed between hunters. Hunting occurred across the entire expanse of known occupied turkey habitat in the district. Hunting occurred primarily on private land but some of that private land was under conservation easement with FWP. Two conservation easements south of Great Falls were hunted for turkeys in 2020. All hunters contacted said they would apply for the permit again; and all agreed increasing the number of permits would be acceptable/satisfactory.

Each year the regional office responds to reports of turkeys in newly-developed residential areas south of Great Falls. Many reports suggest turkey numbers are increasing. Reports suggest people support a modest number of turkeys but recognize overabundance can create damage and safety concerns. Reports of there being too few turkeys by both hunters and non-hunters are rare. Turkey hunting around the Great Falls area still feels like a new opportunity for many hunters. Making available 20 additional licenses is consistent changes in 2015 and 2017. This proposal would complement that in HD 400 where an increase in licenses is also being proposed; 40 licenses would be available in each hunting district in 2021. Additional support for the proposal was provided by Safari Club International and Area Game Wardens

Submitted by: Region 4 Area Biologists Jake Doggett and Ryan Rauscher

Date: 11/10/2020

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification: