



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: December 10, 2020

Agenda Item: WMA Public Use Rules

Action Needed: Endorsement **Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 minutes

Background: Since 2012, the commission has adopted public use rules on a biennial schedule for lands acquired for the primary purpose of providing effective fish and wildlife habitat, including Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), Wildlife Habitat Protection Areas, and Fisheries Conservation Areas. Following that schedule, FWP is proposing an updated list of commission rules. However, unlike past years, the department is recommending the finalized version of these rules be put into use for one year only - 2021. In addition to these *commission rules*, public use of these lands is also subject to *administrative rules* (12.8.201-12.8.219 ARM). FWP has initiated updating the public recreation ARM rules for WMAs and Fishing Access Sites. Some of the commission rules that are in this proposal will likely be moved into ARM. Upon completion of ARM revision, FWP would again offer a revised set of commission rules for adoption in approximately one year.

FWP proposes retaining the existing commission rules except as modified. An overview of proposed modifications are as follows: opening the Ray Kuhns WMA earlier (April 15) to support turkey hunting, as wintering deer have typically moved off of the WMA by that time; prohibition of off road use of bicycles; prohibition of any motor- or engine-powered vehicles on routes that are closed to motorized vehicles (as revised, this would include e-bikes); improved wording for leash requirements for pets on nesting bird properties in Region 1; and a prohibition against unauthorized trail construction. These recommended changes are intended to provide protection to wildlife habitats, avoid direct disturbance of fish and wildlife, and support additional hunting opportunity.

Public Involvement Process & Results: There has been no public involvement to date regarding this proposal. If endorsed by the commission, the proposed rules would be released for public comment.

Alternatives & Analysis: Based on the public response, the department may recommend additional modifications when seeking final approval from the commission.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends endorsing these public use rules as modified. These proposed rules help ensure the fish and wildlife habitat values, for which these properties were acquired, will be maintained while supporting compatible public uses.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission endorse the WMA public use rules as presented, allowing the department to release these for public review and further refinement.