

Public Comment Summary
Proposed Wolf Trapping Season
August 2, 2021

Introduction

The department received public comments regarding the proposed wolf trapping season tools through the department website, email and postal mailings. A virtual public comment session was hosted on June 30, 2021. The formal comment period was initiated June 24, 2021 at the Fish and Wildlife (FW) Commission meeting, where public comment was also accepted. An "interested person" letter describing the proposal and initial ranges for consideration was posted on the department website and mailed or emailed to a list of interested parties. Press releases were distributed as well. Public comment ran through July 26, 2021.

The department received over 26,000 public comments. All comments received prior to the comment deadline were forwarded to the FW Commission. Comments received after the deadline have been forwarded to the FW Commission on a weekly basis. Comments were received from the public throughout the United States as well as few international comments. These comments included unique inputs, repeating messages and "form" letters or statements.

This summary is not intended to be a numerical tabulation of supporting or opposing comments (opposition and support were both represented), this summary characterizes rationales, values, topics, themes, and concerns that repeatedly appeared in public comment. It also offers a brief and general department response. As a coarse summary, it is not intended to replace individual comments received and forwarded to the FW Commission. Rather, this summary has been assembled to assist all parties generally recognize and consider relatively consistent elements of public comment.

Opposition

Opposition was expressed throughout the public comment period and included general opposition to the hunting and trapping of wolves as well as more specific objections. Many of the opposing public comment expressed concerns about that as a keystone species, the removal of wolves will have a negative impact on the ecosystem. Many comments expressed an opposition to snares calling them an inhumane practice. In addition, some of the opposing advocacies felt that the limited and intermediate tools did not follow legislative intent.

Department response: The department uses sophisticated tools, models and strategies to monitor wolf populations. From a biological perspective, wolf populations in Montana are robust, capable of sustaining greater harvest than that experienced within the last five years and remain well above the delisting criteria from the most recent recovery goals under the Endangered Species Act. Although the public perception of trapping is not always favorable, contemporary trapping methods when used in conjunction with best management practices result in few non-target captures, limit injury and affect a rapid death when designed to do so.

The proposals under consideration may result in an increased hunter and trapper harvest, but the proposal also contains several opportunities for adjustment should the harvest of wolves increase at a rate greater than expected. Wolves remain an important component of Montana's ecosystems, and harvest of many species remains an important part of the management to address conflicts and other species objectives.

Support

Support was expressed throughout the public comment and included general support of the proposed new tools. More specific advocacies included suggestions for varying levels of tools they supported to include the examples under the limited, intermediate and maximum implementation strategies, although support was sometimes provided for tools beyond the range explicitly provided in the initial examples.

Department response: Season dates and tool implementation recommendations were developed in consideration of other species that may be influenced, including grizzly bears and lynx. From a biological perspective, wolf populations in Montana are robust, capable of sustaining greater harvest than that experienced within the last five years and remain well above the delisting criteria from the most recent recovery goals under the Endangered Species Act. The proposals under consideration may result in an increased hunter and trapper harvest, but the proposal also contains several opportunities for adjustment should the harvest of wolves increase at a rate greater than expected. Wolves remain an important component of Montana's ecosystems, and harvest of many species remains an important part of the management to address conflicts and other species objectives.