



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

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Meeting Date: December 14, 2021

Agenda Item: Pheasant Releases

Action Needed: Final and Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background: FWP has administered a pheasant release program since 1987 under the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program (UGBEP), whereby landowners or pheasant producers raise and release pheasants for population enhancement and expanded public hunting opportunity. Private landowners who release birds on their land receive cost reimbursement through the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program (UGBEP).

MCA 87-5-714 requires the commission approve transplants of pheasants when they are moved from one part of the state to another. The department is seeking final approval for a five-year period, for calendar years 2022 through 2026, to continue the release of pen-reared pheasants on private lands within occupied pheasant habitat for population enhancement and hunting access purposes through the UGBEP.

New in 2021, as a result of new legislation from the 2021 legislature (HB 637), the department is setting up a pheasant release program on state-owned lands for hunter recruitment purposes, and specifically youth hunter recruitment. Pheasants may be released in currently occupied pheasant habitat or in unoccupied suitable habitat. The department seeks to complete an environmental assessment analyzing potential impacts of this program.

Public Involvement Process and Results: UGBEP upland game bird releases are required by statute that authorizes the program, have been ongoing since 1987, and are familiar to the public. While some previous commenters have opposed pheasant releases in favor of habitat enhancement, statute requires a minimum level of expenditures on stocking upland game birds. Upon approval to proceed with the environmental assessment for the pheasant stocking for hunter recruitment, the department will conduct an EA that will include opportunity for public review and comment. That comment will be considered in a final decision notice and request for final approval by the commission if the decision is to proceed with pheasant stocking.

Alternatives and Analysis: The intent of this proposal is to enhance pheasant populations, expand pheasant hunting opportunity and to encourage young hunter participation. The legislature has authorized funding and mandated upland game bird releases for UGBEP (MCA 87-1-247) and authorized funding for pheasant releases for hunter recruitment (HB 637).

Agency Recommendation and Rationale: The department recommends the commission give final approval for the release of pen-reared pheasants for population enhancement to satisfy the UGBEP statute (MCA 87-1-247 and 87-5-714), and to endorse proceeding with an environmental assessment of pheasant stocking on state-owned lands for hunter recruitment purposes, as described by HB 637 and the Montana legislature.

Proposed Motion:

I move the commission approve the release of pheasants for population enhancement per the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program for calendar years 2022-2026, as proposed by the department, and endorse completion of an environmental assessment of pheasant stocking on state-owned lands for hunter recruitment purposes.