



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

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Meeting Date: December 14, 2021

Agenda Item: 2022–2023 Bighorn Sheep Hunting Regulations, Season Structures, and Hunting District Boundaries

Action Needed: Proposed

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 15 Minutes

Background: Season structures and hunting district boundaries are adopted biennially by the commission for public comment in December with final adoption in February for most game species. The department is proposing several changes to bighorn sheep hunting season structure, along with several hunting district boundary changes to combine and simplify districts where possible, facilitate management, and increase opportunity. The proposed changes to bighorn sheep seasons are detailed in the attached bighorn sheep hunting master lists, and hunting boundary changes are referenced in individual proposals. The proposed changes to boundaries are detailed on the attached bighorn sheep boundary change master list. These lists are presented for commission action and public review. The commission is also considering all regulations and descriptions of boundaries for the 2022-2023 antelope season and will adopt regulations in total in a future meeting, whether a change is proposed or not. All other regulations and descriptions of boundaries will remain unchanged unless addressed by the commission.

Public Involvement Process and Results: The department initiated a public scoping process in August 2021, substantially earlier than in prior years, to increase the amount of public dialogue about a substantial number of considerations that the public had shared with the department previously regarding both seasons and hunting district boundaries. The department used the input received at virtual open houses, meetings, and in written material to tailor the proposals before the commission. Additional public comment will be accepted on the proposals adopted for comment by the commission. Public comment will be accepted for all regulations whether a change is proposed or not. Public comment will be accepted through Jan. 14, 2022, at 5:00 p.m.

Alternatives and Analysis: The department presented conceptual changes for each species season structure and hunting district boundaries for public discussion and feedback beginning in August. The proposals being presented to the commission include changes incorporated in response to that feedback. The commission may provide the department with additional amendments on any aspect of season structure, quota, or hunting district for any species, and the department will seek additional public comment on all proposals and on those aspects of the regulations that do not change but complete a regulation package for 2022-2023. A final recommendation will be presented to the commission at their February meeting.

Agency Recommendation and Rationale: The department recommends the commission approve for public comment the proposed 2022 and 2023 hunting regulations and district boundaries as presented by the department and as outlined in the attached master lists. Any aspect unchanged from 2021 seasons will remain in effect for 2022 and 2023, except where affected by routine calendar rotations.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission vote to adopt for public comment: 1) Changes identified in the Bighorn Sheep Master List and the Bighorn Sheep Boundary Changes Master List as presented by the department; and 2) All other bighorn sheep regulations contained in the 2020–2021 booklet to be adopted for the 2022 and 2023 bighorn sheep hunting seasons and hunting districts.