



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: February 4, 2021

Agenda Item: 2021 Deer Season Structure in HD 400, 401, 403, 406

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 15 minutes

Background: In February 2020, the commission adopted a biennial season structure for deer hunting throughout most of Montana. Due to differing public perceptions regarding the implementation of the department's proposal, the commission approved the deer hunting season structure in HDs 400, 401, 403, and 406 for a single year and asked the department to bring the topic back to the commission for evaluation and consideration for the 2021 season structure.

The department proposed the following options to capture the different advocacies that addressed this topic:

- A. Three weeks with a general license season and two weeks with limited entry white-tailed deer and mule deer antlered buck permits in each of 400, 401, 403, and 406.
- B. Revert to a three-week general license season as approved for 2019 season.

At the December 2020 commission meeting, the commission directed the department to seek public input on Option A.

Public Involvement Process and Results: Public comment was accepted during the December commission meeting and through January 11, 2021, at 5 p.m. Based on department assessment of 60 individual responses to the request for public comment, 56.7 percent expressed dislike of Option A, whereas 43.3 percent expressed support. The department also conducted a post-hunting season survey of the 420 buck permit holders. Two hundred forty-eight hunters responded to the survey, with 71 percent of those with an opinion expressing support for the season structure in Option A. Although not yet final, the harvest success from this survey would result in a 27 percent reduction of the antlered buck permit quota for the 2021 season if adopted.

Alternatives and Analysis: Proposals may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, with deletions, or no change. The season structure was designed to increase harvest of male deer by 10 percent to maintain low Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) prevalence and reduce the potential for spread. A positive CWD mule deer buck was harvested in HD 400 in 2020 with this season structure. Option A will allow the department to continue efforts to manage CWD, better evaluate the season structure and determine any effects to hunting access on private lands. The efficacy of this season structure cannot be fully evaluated without harvest survey data, which is typically received in late spring following hunting season, and additional deer population survey data.

Proposed Motion:

I move the commission vote to adopt as final Option A for the 2021 deer season in HDs 400, 401, 403, and 406 as presented by the department, with all other aspects of 2021 deer seasons unchanged except those influenced by routine calendar rotations.