

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Spring Turkey Season Quota Adjustment

Region: 4

Hunting District: Chouteau (R4 portion), Toole, Pondera, Liberty, and Teton Counties

Year: 2021

LPT: 400-20

- 1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.). REMEMBER THIS STEP IS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE INITIAL ENTRY INTO THE DATABASE—SO FOLKS CAN START THIS NARRATIVE WITH #2 BELOW.**

- 2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The proposal is to provide additional spring hunting opportunity in response to increasing turkey numbers by increasing 400-20 spring turkey licenses from 20 to 40 in the northern portion of Region 4. The spring gobbler season proposed will be a limited entry special permit (by drawing only) offering 40 permits for the spring 2021 season.

- 3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.**

This increase will provide additional recreational opportunities to the public who have shown an increasing interest for wild turkeys in Region 4. Benefits of the increased number of licenses expanded opportunities for the public and Landowners to hunt/view/listen to wild turkeys, improved Landowner relations with FWP and the public, and potential added revenue to the local economy from expenditures by turkey hunters and viewers. Success of the increased number of licenses will be increased public turkey hunting opportunity. Turkey populations have increased to allow a reasonable amount of harvest opportunity. Another success of the proposal will be providing a tool for area landowners experiencing damage. Depending on winter severity and turkey populations, some landowners experiencing turkey game damage and expressed disappointment that additional turkey harvest was not available to disperse resident turkeys.

- 4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

Until the early 2000's, there was a limited entry spring gobbler season in Toole and Pondera Counties, along with an unlimited fall season in the Chouteau County portion of Region 4. These seasons were closed due to declining bird numbers and a lack hunter/landowner support for the fall season in the Region 4 portion of Chouteau County. In recent years, numbers have been slowing increasing and expanding along the Missouri, Teton and Marias drainages. Field biologist, landowner and hunter observations of turkeys on the Marias River east of Interstate 15 of flocks exceeding 40 turkeys are not uncommon. Landowners in the same area frequently report turkey observations. Recent turkey damage on the Marias River east of Interstate 15 included estimates of approximately 60 birds. Other populations of birds inhabit areas on the Teton River below Tiber dam, near the Dent Bridge, downstream along the lower Marias River and at the confluence of the Marias, Teton and Missouri Rivers near Loma.

- 5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

Recent climatic conditions have allowed turkey populations to increase to sufficient levels to offer additional turkey hunting opportunity. Hunter access to turkeys should remain good throughout the area. There are several large Block Management Areas along the lower Marias and Teton Rivers, along with scattered public lands. Private land access should also be good throughout.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

In previous meetings landowners near the confluence of the Marias, Teton and Missouri Rivers have expressed wanting to see wild turkey populations increased to a huntable population. Limited number of permits and favorable climatic conditions have allowed turkey populations to increase sufficiently to allow greater spring turkey hunting opportunity. Meetings with these landowners in the past were very successful in securing release sites, habitat availability and access for the public.

Area sportspeople, including the National Wild Turkey Federation, SCI, Russell Country Sportsmen, Conrad Sportsman Alliance, and Montana Sportsmen Alliance are in full support of turkey hunting opportunities and turkey management in the area.

Landowners over the past few years have commented on increased number of birds increased opportunity for hunters.

Submitted by: **Jake Doggett & Ryan Rauscher, FWP Area Wildlife Biologists, Great Falls and Conrad**

Date: **11/05/2020**

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification: