



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: February 4, 2022

Agenda Item: WMA Public Use Rules

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background: Since 2012, the commission has adopted public use rules on a biennial schedule for lands acquired for the primary purpose of providing effective fish and wildlife habitat, including Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), Wildlife Habitat Protection Areas, and Fisheries Conservation Areas. FWP is currently working on revising Administrative Rules (12.8.201-12.8.219 ARM) for all department lands to include public use rules on WMAs. FWP is proposing to continue with the current set of public use rules with one edit, in response to public comment, for another year (see attached proposed rules).

Public Involvement Process & Results: FWP received 19 written comments, of which six were not pertinent to WMA public use rules. Two comments supported adopting the rules as proposed. One comment pointed out a proposed season date change for HD282 that would need to be accommodated in the Blackfoot Clearwater WMA open period – in response, we have made an adjustment to the proposed rules. One comment suggested restricting access on the opening day for “horn hunters” through permits. FWP had considered a similar idea prior to submitting this rule package, but instead chose to continue to provide broad public opportunity while addressing safety and crowding concerns by other means. One comment suggested opening WMA winter range areas to non-motorized recreation. The primary purpose of these WMAs is to provide secure wintering habitats for big game. Winter recreation would disturb wintering big game and could displace deer and elk onto neighboring properties. Winter recreation is therefore not compatible with winter range WMAs. One comment suggested open dates should correspond to upland game bird seasons. This too would impact wintering big game during a period when they are under stress, which is incompatible with the primary purpose of winter range WMAs.

Additional received comments will be addressed in the ARM revision process that FWP has underway, including e-bikes on closed roads, vagueness of certain rules, inconsistency of dog leash dates and consideration of e-collars as an alternative to leash requirements, consistent opening dates for all WMAs, and concerns regarding the 50-yard off road camping and firewood collection allowances.

Alternatives & Analysis: The proposed rule set includes one minor edit to accommodate changes to hunting season dates.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends approving the current set of public use rules, as modified, for another year. These rules help ensure the fish and wildlife habitat values, for which these properties were acquired, would be maintained while supporting compatible public uses and allowing the department time to implement a more consolidated rule package in the future.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission approve the WMA public use rules as presented.