



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: June 22, 2022

Agenda Item: 2022 Elk Hunting Access Agreements

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 20 minutes

Background: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' elk hunting access (EHA) agreements provide landowners with an opportunity to obtain an elk license, permit, or combination thereof in exchange for allowing free public hunting access to a minimum of three public hunters – one of which may be selected by the landowner. Permits and licenses issued under this program are valid only on the landowner's property. The program was first codified in 2001, but recent changes to the authorizing statute have increased landowner interest and participation resulting in 13 agreements in 2021.

In response to legislative changes, increased landowner participation, and public comment received regarding 2021 agreements, FWP implemented a new process for soliciting and reviewing these agreements in 2022. As established at the April 19 Fish and Wildlife Commission meeting, the new process requires interested landowners (or their designee) to apply between April 15 and June 1.

If an application is complete, FWP will forward it to the commission for consideration on June 22. If an application is approved and the property is located in a general license/permit area, the two statutorily required public hunter slots will be offered in a random-draw opportunity with public sign-up taking place from June 30 to July 31.

If an application is complete and the property is located in a limited license/permit area, the department will cap additional licenses/permits for EHA cooperators to 10 percent of the commission-approved license or permit quota adopted for the area during the biennial season-setting process. If the number of EHA applicants exceeds that cap, the department will ask that all eligible applications proceed to a random draw. If the number of available license/permits allows, every applicant in the random draw would receive one license/permit before FWP issues a second license/permit to an applicant (or their family member/employee designee). In areas with limited licenses/permits, the two statutorily required public hunters will be randomly selected from the list of permit or license holders already drawn in that area.

A harvest and satisfaction report for the 2021 agreements is provided as context for commission consideration of 2022 applications. All proposed 2022 applications were reviewed by regional wildlife and access staff. Copies of the proposed applications will be posted online prior to the June 22 commission meeting. Based upon elk population status and management objectives, no significant or lasting impacts to the elk resource are anticipated with these agreements.

Public Involvement Process and Results: The 2022 EHA process was discussed at the April 19 commission meeting. Public comment on the proposed 2022 applications will be taken at the June 22 commission meeting.

Agency Rationale and Recommendation: The department requests the 2022 EHA applications be approved as presented and applicants in districts exceeding the 10 percent cap be sent to a random

draw for determination. FWP believes the EHA program has increased public access to elk for wildlife management purposes.

Proposed Motion: I move that the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the 2022 elk hunting access applications as presented by the department and send to a random draw those applications in districts where the number of requests for permits/licenses exceeds the department-imposed cap of 10 percent of the commission-adopted quota previously approved during the biennial season setting process.