



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: Dec. 14, 2023

Agenda Item: 2024 and 2025 Bighorn Sheep Hunting Regulations, Season Structures, and Hunting District Boundaries

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 15 Minutes

Background: Season structures and hunting district boundaries are adopted biennially by the commission for most game species. The proposed changes to bighorn sheep seasons are described in the attached bighorn sheep season summary and presented in detail for commission action within the regulation mockup. The commission is considering all regulations and descriptions of boundaries for the 2024 and 2025 bighorn sheep seasons, 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: Public input was solicited through 34 public meetings during June and July where concepts for biennial season setting were discussed. Public comment will be solicited for a four-week period following the Oct. 19 commission meeting, and seven hybrid virtual meetings will be held (one in each region) between Oct. 30 and Nov. 10 to answer questions about proposals. Written public comments received during the comment period will be posted online and provided to commissioners at least two weeks prior to the December commission meeting.

Alternatives and Analysis: The department presented concepts for discussion for each species during June and July. Based on public feedback and legal analysis, the department refined the concepts and developed proposals for commission action.

Alternative A: The commission may approve the department's recommendation as presented.

Alternative B: The commission may amend the department's recommendation on any aspect of season structure, quota, or hunting district or on aspects of the regulations that are not proposed for change.

Agency Recommendation and Rationale: The department recommends the commission approve the proposed 2024 and 2025 hunting regulations and district boundaries as presented by the department and as detailed in the attached mockup. Any aspect unchanged from 2023 season will remain in effect for 2024 and 2025, except where affected by routine calendar rotations.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission vote to approve: 1) changes identified in the bighorn sheep regulation mockup to include opportunities, season dates, quotas, and quota ranges as presented by the department; and 2) all other bighorn sheep regulations contained in the 2023 regulations, except for those affected by regular calendar rotations, unless addressed in some other proposal to be adopted for the 2024 and 2025 bighorn sheep hunting seasons and districts.

Alternative Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission vote to amend: 1) changes identified in the bighorn sheep regulation mockup to include opportunities, season dates, quotas, and quota ranges as presented by the department as follows(insert changes here); and 2) all other bighorn sheep regulations contained in the 2023 regulations, except for those affected by regular calendar rotations, unless addressed in some other proposal to be adopted for the 2024 and 2025 bighorn sheep hunting seasons and districts.

Season dates

Season 2024	Date convention
Moose/sheep/goat	9/15 – 12/1 (9/15 to Sunday after Thanksgiving; some districts vary)
Moose/sheep/goat archery	9/7 – 9/14 (first Saturday of September to 9/14; some districts vary)

Season 2025	Date convention
Moose/sheep/goat archery	9/6 – 9/14 (first Saturday of September to 9/14; some districts vary)
Moose/sheep/goat	9/15 – 11/30 (9/15 to Sunday after Thanksgiving; some districts vary)

Summary of proposed changes for bighorn sheep

- Change quota range for the 214-60 legal ram bighorn sheep license from 2–8 to 1–8.
- Close sheep hunting in HD250. Currently there is 1 Either-sex Sheep permit.
- Add a limited Adult Ewe license to HD270 (East Fork herd), with a quota of 3 and a quota range of 1–5.
- Reopen bighorn sheep season in HD 381 for 1 any ram during archery and general rifle seasons but remove the Region 4 portion of the district from the boundary.
- Change the HD 303 Gardner Closure Area Restricted Area Description to address an area of confusion near the Gardiner Airport and McConnell Fishing Access (a USFS access site).
- Adjust the HD 303 Boundary to clean up a sliver of land along the Yellowstone River between Yankee Jim and Big Creek that is not within either HD 300 or 303 by aligning HD 303 in this area with the Yellowstone River instead of Hwy 89.
- Reopen HD 305 (South Yellowstone) to sheep hunting with a single ram license by drawing with a season that ends Oct. 31, quota of 1 with a range of 1–5.
- Reduce quota for 482-20 from 15 to 5. No change to quota range.

Hunting district boundary changes

HD 250–West Fork Bitterroot

Page 10 of the 2022–2023 Hunting District Legal Description.

Reason for Change: closing bighorn sheep hunting in this hunting district.

~~250 West Fork Bitterroot: That portion of Ravalli County lying within the following described boundary: Beginning at the West Fork Bitterroot Road where it crosses the Trapper Creek drainage southwest of the Trapper Creek Job Corps, then briefly southwest on said road to its junction with the ridgeline between the Spade Creek and Piquette Creek drainages (along the boundary between the West Fork and Darby Ranger Districts), then up said ridgeline to USFS Trail 601 and Shook Mountain, then south on said trail to Medicine Point and USFS Trail 56, then south on said trail to the headwaters of Base Creek, then southeast down said creek to its junction with Wiles Creek, then east down said creek to its junction with Warm Springs Creek, then southeast up said creek to its junction with Porcupine Creek, then southeast up said creek and along the headwaters in Sections 24 and 25, Township 1 South, Range 20 West, to the ridgeline between Camp~~

~~Creek and Shields Creek, then south on said ridgeline to the Montana-Idaho border, then in a southwesterly and northerly direction along said border to its junction with the Trapper Creek headwaters, then east and southeast down said creek to its junction with the West Fork Bitterroot Road, the point of beginning.~~

Gardiner closed to all hunting of big game

Page 19 in 2023 Moose-Sheep-Goat-Bison regulations

Reason for Change: to provide a less confusing and enforceable closure boundary.

Gardiner Hunting Closure; Closed to all hunting: Beginning at the Junction of U.S. Hwy 89 and Little Trail Creek, then up Little Trail Creek to the posted line (approx. 1/2 mile above U.S. Hwy 89), then southeasterly along said line to the Travertine-Trail Creek Road, then easterly along said road to its intersection with the Gardiner-Jardine Road, then northeasterly along said road to Eagle Creek, then southerly down said creek to the YNP boundary, then westerly along said boundary to the intersection with Stevens Creek, ~~then northeasterly in a straight line~~ at the Stevens Creek/Yellowstone River confluence, then downstream (northwesterly) to the marked line at the USFS boundary on the east bank of the Yellowstone River (the boundary between T9S R8E S17 and T9S R8E S16), then northerly along said section line to Riverview Drive, then easterly along Riverview Drive to the intersection with U.S. Hwy 89, then northwesterly along said highway to the junction of Little Trail Creek, the point of beginning.

HD 303–South Absaroka

Page 11 of the 2022–2023 Hunting District Legal Description.

Reason for Change: to incorporate a sliver of land that is currently not a portion of either HD 300 or HD 303.

That portion of Park County lying within the following-described boundary: Beginning at the point where US Highway 89 leaves Yellowstone National Park at Gardiner, then northerly along said highway to the Highway 89 Bridge over the Yellowstone River at Gardiner, then downstream (northerly) along said river to its junction with Six Mile Creek, then up said creek (southeasterly) to its intersection with State Highway 540 (East River Road), then northeasterly on said highway to the intersection of Sixmile Creek Road, then southerly on said road to the intersection with the westerly branch of Sixmile Creek in the NE1/4 Section 29, T6S, R8E, then southerly up said creek to the North Fork of Sixmile Creek to Monitor Peak, then easterly and northerly along the Mill Creek-Bear and Hellroaring Creeks divide to Mount Wallace, then easterly and northerly along the Mill Creek-Hellroaring Creek divide to Crow Mountain, then southerly along the Hellroaring Creek-Bridge Creek divide to the saddle between Crow Mountain and Bridge Mountain in Section 3, T11E, R7S, then southerly from this saddle down the West Fork of Hellroaring Creek to Hellroaring Creek, then southerly down said creek to the Yellowstone National Park boundary, then westerly along said boundary to US Highway 89 at Gardiner, the point of beginning.

HD 305–South Yellowstone

Not in the current 2022–2023 Hunting District Legal Description.

Reason for Change: reopen HD 305 for bighorn sheep hunting.

Those portions of Park County lying within the following described boundary: Beginning at the intersection of Reese Creek and the Yellowstone River (near Beattie Gulch north of Gardiner), up said creek to the Yellowstone National Park Boundary, then northwesterly along said boundary to Shooting star Mountain, then northeasterly along the Tom Miner Creek-Cinnabar Basin divide to Black Mountain, then northeasterly along the Tom Miner Creek-Sphinx Creek divide to the Yellowstone River, then upstream (southerly) along said river to the mouth of Reese Creek, the point of beginning.

HD 381–Sleeping Giant

Not in the current 2022–2023 Hunting District Legal Description.

Reason for Change: reopen HD 381 to bighorn sheep hunting.

That portion of Lewis and Clark county lying within the following-described boundary: Beginning at the bridge over Rock Creek on Interstate 15, (approximately three miles northeast of Wolf Creek), then southeasterly along Rock Creek approximately one mile to its confluence with the Missouri River, then southerly up the west bank of the Missouri River to Hauser Dam, then southerly along Hauser Dam Road to its junction with Country Side Road, then westerly along said road to its junction with Mountain Meadows Road, then westerly along said road to where it becomes Snowdrift Road, then west along said road to its junction with Collins Drive, then north along Collins Drive to the north boundary of Section 4, T11N, R3W, then west along the north boundary of Section 4 and Section 5 to Interstate 15, then northerly along said Interstate approximately two miles to the north boundary of Section 31, T12N, R3W, at the north of the split median of Interstate 15, then following the north boundary of Section 31 westerly to the northeast corner of Section 36, T12N, R4W, then southerly along the east boundary of Section 36, then west along the south boundary of Section 36 to Green Meadow Drive, then south along Green Meadow Drive to its junction with Woodland Hills Road, then west on Woodland Hills Road to its junction with Lone Mountain Road, then south along Lone Mountain Road to Highway 279 (Lincoln Road West), then westerly and northerly along said route to Flesher Pass, then northeasterly along the Continental Divide to the North Fork Lyons Creek, then southeasterly along the northern hydrologic divide of the North Fork Lyons Creek to Interstate 15, then north along said interstate to Rock Creek Bridge, the point of beginning.