



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION FWP PROPOSAL & INFORMATION SHEET

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Meeting Date: June 20, 2024

Agenda Item: 2024 Elk Hunting Access Agreements

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 30 minutes

Background: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' Elk Hunting Access (EHA) Agreement Program provides landowners and/or eligible designees with an opportunity to receive an elk license, permit, or combination of the two in exchange for allowing free public elk hunting. For every three members of the public allowed to hunt under the EHA agreement, the department may issue one license, permit, or combination of the two to the landowner or their designee. The EHA program was first codified in 2001, but recent changes in 2019, 2021, and 2023 to the authorizing statute (§ 87-2-513, MCA) have increased landowner interest and participation resulting in 46 applications in 2024.

Changes for the 2024 program include: 1) landowners must own at least 640 acres of occupied elk habitat; smaller acreages are eligible if the department determines site conditions exist to accommodate successful public hunting; 2) landowners can enroll private land they lease from another landowner for agricultural purposes; and 3) for every permit/license issued to a landowner or designee, at least one of the department-selected public hunters must hold the equivalent license, permit, or combination of the two that is issued to the landowner or the landowner's designee.

An evaluation of the 2023 EHA program was conducted during the fall/winter of 2023 and has been provided to the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission). This will aid their decision-making as they consider the 2024 applications and agreements for those landowners who participated in the 2023 EHA program.

The landowner application period for 2024 was April 5 to May 1. Once the Commission decides which landowners can participate in this year's program, the public will have an opportunity to sign up online (through MyFWP), between July 1 and July 15, for EHA opportunities.

Public Involvement Process & Results: The 2024 EHA process mirrored the 2023 EHA process to include a review by regional staff and their consideration of the proposed agreements. A new application, agreement template, and draft program standard operating procedures were posted to the FWP website on April 5. This year's master list, applications, and proposed agreements and the 2023 evaluation report will be posted to the FWP website no later than two weeks prior to the June 20 meeting. The public may comment on the 2023 evaluation report and proposed 2024 agreements at the June meeting.

Alternatives & Analysis: The department anticipates no adverse biological effects as a result of the proposed EHA agreements.

The Commission has three alternatives: 1) to approve none of the 2024 proposed agreements; 2) to approve some of the 2024 proposed agreements; or 3) to approve all the 2024 proposed agreements.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: The department requests the proposed 2024 EHA agreements be approved as presented and applicants in districts exceeding the 10 percent cap be sent to a random draw for determinations. The department also requests the commission prioritize applications where the landowner is



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willing to allow, in either the regular hunting season or a shoulder hunting season, additional cow harvest by public hunters in addition to the number of public hunters required.

Overall, the department believes the EHA program has increased public access to elk for wildlife management purposes. No significant adverse impacts to the elk resource are anticipated with the proposed agreements based upon elk population status and management objectives.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the 2024 elk hunting access agreements as presented by the department in the master list, and to 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.