



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

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Meeting Date: Feb. 16, 2024

Agenda Item: Peregrine Falcon Falconry Take for 2024–2025 Biennium

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) de-listed peregrine falcons, range-wide, in 1999 when there were fewer than 30 known occupied territories in Montana. Monitoring since that time has shown steady increases in the number of nesting pairs and the production of young, primarily in western Montana. More than 100 occupied territories have been observed annually since 2012 with an average production of more than two fledged birds per year/territory. Estimates of nest distribution and productivity are conservative as a mandatory post-delisting monitoring period ended in 2015, and monitoring since that time has not kept up with population expansion into central and eastern Montana.

Previous take proposals have been based on the 2012 productivity estimate of 203 young fledged and the agreed take of not more than 5 percent of annual productivity described in the department's 2007 final state environmental assessment (EA). In the 2012–2013, 2014–2015, 2016–2017, 2018–2019, 2020–2021, and 2022–2023 bienniums, take operated under a 10-bird quota for resident falconers with an additional single permit for nonresident take. Resident take over these bienniums resulted in the take of six, three, four, three, one, and two peregrine(s), respectively, of the 10 allowed per biennium. Three additional birds were taken by nonresidents across the last five bienniums. While this low level of take over the years demonstrates a small demand for wild-born Montana peregrines, the department does not recommend any change to the current quota system pending completion of an EA under the National Environmental Policy Act by USFWS that will allow for normalized take across the falcon's range. This analysis has been delayed but will hopefully be completed soon.

Public Involvement Process and Results: Public comment was solicited for a four-week period following the Dec. 14, 2023, commission meeting. Written public comments received during the comment period will be posted online and provided to commissioners at least two weeks prior to the February commission meeting.

Alternatives and Analysis: Peregrine populations in Montana appear stable to increasing. Although the level of take has been low in recent years, reducing the present quota has the potential to limit opportunity for take. The department anticipates no adverse biological consequences to the peregrine population in Montana as a result of this limited take.

Alternative A: The commission may approve the continued live capture of peregrine falcons for falconry as presented by the department.

Alternative B: The commission may amend the number approved for live capture or deny the proposed season as presented by the department.

Agency Recommendation and Rationale:

Based on findings in the department's 2007 final EA and the history of peregrine take in Montana, the department recommends that the commission:

- Authorize resident take of 10 nestling or fledged peregrines during the 2024–2025 biennium,
- Authorize nonresident take of one nestling or fledged peregrine through a 2024–2025 permit,
- Restrict take to the period of June 1 to Aug. 31,
- Allow only general or master falconers to take peregrines,
- Prohibit take from eight nests that offer high-value wildlife viewing opportunity,

- Blodgett and Painted Rock aeries in the Bitterroot,
- Johnsrud aerie on the Blackfoot River,
- Frenchtown aerie on the Clark Fork River,
- Woods Bay aerie near Flathead Lake,
- Coulter (or Meriwether) aerie on the Missouri River,
- Sacrifice Cliff aerie on the Yellowstone River near Billings,
- Headwaters Aerie near Three Forks,
- Bonner-Blackfoot River aerie just north of the town of Bonner, near Milltown State Park,
- Prohibit the sale, barter, or exchange of birds from the wild, and
- Require each falconer who takes a peregrine from the wild to report the take to the department and the USFWS within five days of take of the bird. This step will provide the department the ability to monitor the number of birds taken and any need for an emergency closure of the biennial season.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission vote to approve the take of up to 10 peregrine falcons for falconry purposes by residents and one peregrine falcon for falconry purposes by nonresidents during the 2024–2025 biennial take period, as well as other recommendations as described above and presented by the department.

Alternative Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission vote to approve the take of up to 10 peregrine falcons for falconry purposes by residents and one peregrine falcon for falconry purposes by nonresidents during the 2024–2025 biennial take period, as well as other recommendations as described above and presented by the department, with the following amendment (Insert changes here).