

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: August 8, 2013

Agenda Item: 2013 Bison Season and Quotas

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Final Rule

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background

In 2007, Montana's bison season allowed for an "adaptive" response to significant bison movement out of Yellowstone National Park. The "Standard Package" included 18 either-sex licenses in HD 385 over three time periods; and 26 either-sex licenses in HD 395 for a total of 44 licenses. The "Liberal Package" could have added 100 additional cow/calf licenses to the hunting districts, if 60 or more bison were within a specific district. A second-choice drawing was used to develop lists of hunters who might receive cow/calf licenses. The 2007 season also included a DVD mailing and test to license holders and potential license holders. This season structure matched state-issued licenses with the same number of Tribal Treaty licenses split between the Nez Perce and Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, which were in addition to state-issued Tribal licenses as per MCA 87-2-731.

The 2007 bison season structure was again proposed and adopted for 2008. While an orientation DVD was mailed, FWP didn't require a test. Also, each district had only one cow/calf list instead of a separate list for each time period. This season structure was adopted for 2009 and again for the 2010 season. The same framework was adopted in 2011 with the addition of archery and mandatory archery orientation, along with an expanded hunt area. The 2012 and 2013 season structure was finalized in February 2012.

FWP proposes increasing the number of licenses offered in both bison hunting districts, during the last hunt in each district. This change is consistent with public comment advocating more opportunity. Licenses in 385-02 would be increased from 6 to 9, and licenses in 395-02 would be increased from 10 to 13. The overall Montana 2013 license quotas would be increased from 44 to 50 either-sex licenses (21 in HD 385 and 29 in HD 395); and 100 additional cow/calf licenses issued incrementally (54 in HD 385, 46 in HD 395) if conditions warrant. Of the 50 either-sex licenses, 16 go to Montana Tribes as per state law. Additionally, four Tribes have asserted Treaty hunting rights (Confederated Salish and Kootenai, Nez Perce, Umatilla, and Shoban), and have stated intentions to hunt bison in the same areas outside Yellowstone National Park, but have not committed to any specific limit.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The public comment period ran through 5 p.m., Monday, July 22. FWP received three comments that suggested higher quotas and raised concerns regarding tribal harvest.

Alternative and Analysis

Under the current bison hunt EA, only limited opportunity for adjustment is available. The F&W Commission could adopt quotas as proposed, adopt the 2012 quotas (no change) or adopt reduced quotas. While there are advocates for more conservative alternatives, FWP believes those options would reduce potential opportunity beyond necessity.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends adopting the adjusted bison license quotas for 2013. FWP anticipates no significant impact to the overall bison population.

Proposed Motion

I move the commission adopt the final 2013 bison license quotas as presented by FWP.