

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: January 9, 2014

Agenda Item: Montana CWD Management Plan

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final Action

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 15 minutes

Background

The decision notice and environmental assessment for FWP's "Chronic Wasting Disease Management Plan for Free Ranging Wildlife in Montana" were completed in 2005. The plan sought to outline FWP responses to CWD detection in free-ranging wildlife, particularly deer and elk, by depopulating the local herd when various techniques showed that at least 5 percent of a herd contracted the disease. CWD, then, would be eradicated by removing the host species, typically deer, within some area containing infected individuals.

Similar actions were largely identified in other state wildlife agency plans that also tried to address the issue of CWD in deer. The typical prescription included eradication in specific areas. Subsequent results, however, especially in Wisconsin, showed that eradication efforts failed. Eradication efforts didn't result in a decline in: (1) disease prevalence or (2) the abundance of animals in the infected herd. In addition, those efforts were typically unpopular with the public.

The F&W Commission suspended the management and monitoring elements of the 2005 CWD plan at in April 2013. Subsequently, FWP developed a new plan with specific changes in monitoring and management to address loss of monitoring funds and the experiences of other states and provinces with lethal management. The current knowledge from CWD research, and lessons learned from various management circumstances, hasn't revealed a clear prescription for managing CWD. Current state plans lean heavily on an "adaptive management approach," which depends on research and experience to guide future decisions. Specific prescriptions to depopulate infected herds have largely been abandoned. The Montana EA likewise adopts a thoughtful adaptive management approach.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The draft EA was released Nov. 29, 2013 and followed by a 30-day comment period. FWP received seven comments on the EA with varying points-of-view.

Alternatives and Analysis

The EA included eight alternatives. The decision notice adopts elements of various alternatives to direct CWD surveillance—and a course of action—should CWD be detected in Montana.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale:

FWP recommends adopting the final plan detailed in the decision notice.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission adopt the final decision as described in the decision notice and as presented by FWP.