

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: July 10, 2014

Agenda Item: 2014 Wolf Season - Proposed

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed for Presentation: 1 hour

Background

Regulated public hunting and trapping of wolves was endorsed by the Governor's Wolf Advisory Council in 2000 and is included in Montana's wolf conservation and management plan. The Commission adopted a conservative hunting-only quota of 75 wolves for the 2009 season. That wolf hunting season closed with a legal harvest of 72. The minimum wolf count increased in 2009 from 497 to 524 wolves. For the 2010 season, which was blocked by court ruling, the Commission adopted a statewide quota of 186 with 13 wolf management units. The 2011 season had a statewide hunting-only quota of 220 wolves with 14 WMUs. Including a season extension to Feb. 15, 2012, 166 wolves were harvested with three of the 14 WMU's closing due to their quota being met. WMU boundaries were again modified for 2012–13. There was no statewide quota and trapping was added as a method of take from Dec. 15, 2012 through Feb. 28, 2013. During 2012, 2,414 trappers completed the Montana Wolf Trapper Education Course. The regular rifle season was expanded to run from Oct. 15, 2012 through Feb. 28, 2013. The Commission approved a 3-wolf bag limit that was implemented with the passage of House Bill 73. By season end, trappers harvested 97 wolves while hunter harvested 128 (225 total).

Changes to the 2013–14 wolf season included adjusting the archery season to run from Sept. 7–14. The rifle season opened Sept. 15 and closed March 15. The bag limit was 5 wolves per person in any combination of wolves taken by hunting or trapping. WMUs 313 and 316 north of Yellowstone National Park had quotas of 4 and 3 wolves respectively. Trappers were required to dispatch wolves via gunshot. In Regions 1–5, trappers were required to set pan tensions on wolf traps to 10 pounds to minimize the take of lynx, wolverines, and other non-target species.

For the 2014–15 wolf season, proposed adjustments include reducing the closure period in WMUs 313 and 316 from 24 hours to 12 hours. Limited wolf trapping opportunities via drawing are also proposed for the Blackfoot-Clearwater, Fish Creek, and Mount Haggin WMAs. Final proposed adjustments include increasing the quota in WMU 313 from 3 to 4 reflecting surveyed wolf numbers in that area. FWP proposes to confirm the "open" road definition as it was in 2013 and also to confirm the list of 500-foot setbacks for ground sets along high recreational use roads and trails applies to wolf trapping. All other season structures are proposed to remain unchanged from the 2013–14 wolf season.

Public Involvement Process & Results

Public comment ended June 23 with comments forwarded to the Commission. There was a relatively large volume with comments including general opposition to wolf harvest and also to the quota reduction in HD 313.

Alternatives and Analysis

The proposals may be approved as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, with deletions or no change from 2013–14 per staff justifications, public comment and/or Commission direction

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

The proposal is consistent with the Montana Gray Wolf Management Plan.

Proposed Motion

I move to adopt as final the 2014-15 wolf season as presented by FWP.