

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: February 12, 2015

Agenda Item: Bighorn Sheep HD 315 Boundary Change

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 15 Minutes

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Background: Bighorn sheep hunting district 315, the Tendoy Mountains, currently includes the year-round range of the Tendoy Mountains sheep herd and a portion of the summer range of an interstate herd on the Idaho border in Idaho's Hunt Area 30. The two ranges are separated by Big Sheep Basin and the Medicine Lodge and Muddy Creek drainages – about 10 miles at their closest. The interstate herd offers very limited harvest opportunity to Montana hunters. Sheep typically move back into Idaho by the time the season opens and none of the rams taken in Montana's HD 315 over the last 15 years has come from the interstate herd. Harvest management of that herd best rests with Idaho Fish & Game. FWP wants to focus its management on the Tendoy sheep and we do not want to harvest sheep out of the interstate herd. Moreover, if the project to depopulate the Tendoy Mountains herd for later restocking comes to fruition starting in 2015 we do not want an aggressive harvest strategy in the Tendoy to affect the interstate herd. We are therefore proposing to redefine the boundary of HD 315 to include only the Tendoy Mountains. The area biologist, Craig Fager, would like this proposed new boundary to be in place permanently so as to facilitate management of the Tendoy Mountains bighorn sheep herd and not affect the interstate herd.

Public Involvement Process & Results: In addition to public comment taken at the January 15th public comment was taken through 5 p.m., Jan. 26, 2015. We received 14 comments: 11 in favor including the Wild Sheep Foundation, 2 that wanted to expand the current HD boundary and one that spoke to the interstate herd. All comments were forwarded to the Commission. Final Commission consideration will be taken up at the February meeting.

Alternatives and Analysis: If the proposed boundary change is not adopted, then the possible future action of using public hunting to depopulate the Tendoy Mountains bighorn sheep herd for subsequent restocking could also result in harvesting sheep in the interstate herd, which we do not want.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends that the Commission adopt the proposed boundary change to bighorn sheep hunting district 315 as outlined above.

Proposed Motion: I move to adopt the final boundary change in bighorn sheep hunting district 315 as presented by the Department.