

# ***FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET***

**Meeting Date:** February 11, 2016

**Agenda Item:** Elk Districts with Expanded Permission to Hunt from a Vehicle

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 15 minutes

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## **Background**

Hunters with a Permit To Hunt From a Vehicle (PTHFV) may harvest any legal game from a vehicle. Ninety-one of the 165 hunting districts (HDs) in Montana currently do, or are proposed to, offer opportunities for anyone to harvest an antlerless elk with a general license. FWP proposes to allow PTHFV holders additional opportunities to harvest antlerless elk in 41 HDs in Regions 2 and 3 where such opportunities are currently (2015 regulations) not available to a general license holder. **This list of proposed HDs has changed slightly from the December proposal because upon review it was found that there was already antlerless opportunity in 3 HDs in R3.** The R2 HDs are: 201-00, 204, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 240, 261, 262, 283, 291, 292, and 293. R 3 HDs are: 300, 301, 302, 317, 318, 319, 328, 329, 331, 332, 334, 335, 339, 340, 341, 343, 350, 360, 361, 370, 380, 388, 391, and 392. If all proposals now before the Commission are adopted there would be antlerless opportunity for any hunter in more HDs and the above list of special-opportunity HDs would be reduced by 6 in R2 and 7 in R3. HDs in other regions were not considered because if current proposals before the Commission are adopted Regions 4, 5 and 7 will have antlerless opportunity for a general license holder in almost all hunting districts (51 of 55 HDs combined). Region 6 is a mixture of permit-only and general-license opportunities and HDs with general-license opportunities are already either-sex. Region 1 has lower densities of elk overall and consequently additional opportunities to harvest cows won't be offered.

In 2012, the Blackfoot Access Group supported FWP in suspending special privileges for PTHFV holders to hunt antlerless elk, due in part to elk declines on public lands in Region 2 and in part to loosened criteria (since 2001) for individuals to qualify for a PTHFV, which led to abuse of the hunting privilege. The Blackfoot Access Group worked in the 2013 legislative session to restore tighter criteria for issuing the PTHFV and the F&W Commission committed to revisiting the topic of allowing special privileges for PTHFV holders to harvest antlerless elk. FWP regional wildlife biologists considered elk population status and trends in every hunting district and predicted that the proposed PTHFV opportunity would not contribute to an overharvest in the districts identified above.

## **Public Involvement Process & Results**

The Region 2 specific proposal was developed in active collaboration with the Blackfoot Access Group. The Region 3 portion of the proposal includes HDs that currently do not have a general antlerless opportunity but do offer a youth opportunity. Public comment ran from Dec. 10 to Jan 25. We received 22 comments with 9 in favor, 6 opposed and, others spoke to concerns about specific areas and a variety of motorized access issues. All comments are included in the Commission packet.

## **Alternatives and Analysis**

No alternatives were analyzed.

## **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends that the Commission approve the proposal to allow PTHFV holders to harvest antlerless elk in the 41 hunting districts in Regions 2 and 3.

## **Proposed Motion**

I move the Commission approve FWP's proposal to allow PTHFV holders an expanded opportunity to harvest antlerless elk in the listed 41 hunting districts in Regions 2 and 3.