

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

**Meeting Date:** March 23, 2015 (conference call)

**Agenda Item:** Bighorn Sheep Hunting District 305 Closure

**Division:** Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

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

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## **Background**

The bighorn sheep herd in hunting district (HD) 305, the South Yellowstone herd, suffered a pneumonia die-off in late 2014 that took 30 percent or more of the entire herd and 40 percent or more of the mature rams. This herd averaged 80 animals since 2006, ranging from 64 to 96. Since 2011, an average of 14 legal rams, with a high of 17 in 2014, has been observed by FWP.

This past winter, FWP documented a loss of 30 sheep - including 7 mature rams - but there were likely others that were not found. Most of the dead sheep were found in the Gardiner/Cinnabar area, and it was not until recently the extent of the die off was fully evaluated and the decision made to seek a season closure.

The biological reason for a closure is clear but there is also a social component to consider. FWP has issued one legal ram license for the past several years, but success has been low with one ram taken in the past five years. With the recent die-off, and the chances of hunter success further diminished, FWP does not want to see a hunter use up preference points and then not be allowed to apply for another license for seven years, by drawing a license in HD 305 where there is such a low chance of success. Baring another disease outbreak, or other unforeseen events, FWP does not expect this to be a permanent closure; HD 305 would reopen to hunting when the population recovers.

## **Public Involvement Process & Results**

This has been opportunistically discussed with local residents and hunters, but has not been formally presented to any group. None of the people contacted so far have objected to the proposed closure.

## **Alternatives and Analysis**

The alternative would be to not close the season; the hunter who draws the license would have a small chance of harvesting a ram, lose preference points, and be unable to apply for another bighorn sheep license for seven years.

## **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends that the Commission close HD 305 to bighorn sheep hunting until such time that the population recovers and the season can be reopened.

## **Proposed Motion**

I move that bighorn sheep hunting district 305 be closed to bighorn sheep hunting for the 2015 season and until such time that the population recovers as recommended by FWP.