

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: July 9, 2015

Agenda Item: 2015 Early Season Migratory Bird Regulations

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Proposed

Time for this Presentation: 20 minutes

Background

Migratory bird seasons have direct federal oversight. Hunting seasons must be set within federal frameworks. Mourning dove and common snipe have fixed season dates—Sept. 1–Oct. 30 for doves; Sept. 1–Dec. 16 for snipe—and fixed bag/possession limits from year to year. No changes are proposed for the 2015 mourning dove and common snipe seasons.

The Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) of sandhill cranes is annually monitored, with individual states' allowable harvest quotas based on observed numbers and coordinated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In Montana, crane numbers (3-year average) and hunter access have been used to set permit numbers for each of five areas (Dillon/Twin Bridges/Cardwell/Bozeman, Warm Springs area, Ovando-Helmville, Wheatland/Meagher/Golden Valley/portion of Sweetgrass Counties, and Broadwater County). The 3-year average of RMP crane numbers increased after the multi-state, coordinated survey in September 2014, so the allowable harvest for each state will be increased. Montana's RMP harvest allocation will be increased from 127 in 2014 to 176 in 2015. FWP proposes maintaining permit numbers in most hunting units for the 2015 season, but in the Dillon/Twin Bridges/Cardwell/Bozeman unit, an increase in hunter numbers from 100 to 120 (2 permits per hunter) is proposed. This slight increase is expected to be compatible with the allocation, crane numbers, and hunter access. The remainder of the Central Flyway is under frameworks for mid-continent sandhill cranes, for which the federal framework remains unchanged for 2015.

- Other than the increased crane permits in the one unit, FWP proposes no changes to either RMP or the mid-continent crane season for 2015—although season dates would change for both due to calendar progression, but with no change in season length.
- Season dates for RMP sandhill cranes (special drawn permits): Sept. 12–Oct. 4
- Season dates for mid-continent sandhill cranes: Oct. 3–Nov. 29

Alternatives and Analysis

Proposals may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, or with deletions as per staff justifications, public comment, and/or Commission discussion.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The public comment period on any adopted proposal will run through 5 p.m. Aug. 3, with final adoption at the Aug. 6 Commission meeting. Public comment is typically limited on this topic.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the Commission adopt for public comment the proposed 2015 early migratory seasons. This is consistent with known wildlife biology, management history, and survey efforts. The proposed seasons are within the frameworks established by the USFWS.

Proposed Motion

I move the Fish & Wildlife Commission to adopt for public comment the 2015 early season migratory bird seasons as presented by FWP.