

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: October 8, 2015

Agenda Item: Guidelines for Elk Shoulder Seasons

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed for Presentation: 1 hour

Background

In summer 2014, FWP Director Jeff Hagener authorized an internal process to explore and develop guidelines for the 2016–2017 biennial elk season setting process. This was in response to Gov. Bullock’s charge to improve landowner relations and specifically in response to criticism that FWP was not meeting elk objectives. Fifteen to 20 FWP staff members (representing the Enforcement Division, Wildlife Division, and regional supervisors) met for five three-day meetings from fall 2014 through spring 2015. The structured discussion was facilitated by research staff from the University of Montana. Given past ineffectiveness with late seasons, and the current over-objective status in many areas, Director Hagener charged the work group to develop a “next” iteration of more effective elk harvest management. The internal work group reviewed management history, research, and circumstances across Montana to develop these proposed guidelines.

The guidelines include:

1. Fundamental objectives to help guide and assess elk-season effectiveness.
2. Shoulder seasons as an option before and after the existing general firearm season.
3. Performance criteria to assess whether or not shoulder seasons should be maintained.
4. Additional permit/license types.

Public Involvement Process & Results

Public comment was extended from July 13 to Aug. 28. More than 1,000 comments were received and forwarded to the Commission. Comments were generally split between opposition and support. Based upon public input the proposed final guidelines have been modified. A public comment summary and the final proposed guidelines are available from FWP.

Alternatives and Analysis

The guidelines may be approved as proposed or with adjustment based upon additional staff input, public comment, and/or Commission direction. If approved, the guidelines would assist staff preparations, Commission decision-making, and address public expectations of process for biennial season setting. If the guidelines are not approved they would not be available for use as formally endorsed guidelines.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

This proposal is aligned with known biology, management history, and experience. In order to benefit from that collective understanding, FWP recommends adoption.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission adopt as final the proposed Guidelines for Elk Shoulder Seasons as presented by FWP.