

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: May 12, 2016

Agenda Item: 2016 Wolf Hunting Seasons, Quotas, HD Boundaries, and SB 200 Quotas

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Proposed

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 60 Min

Background: Regulated hunting and trapping of wolves was endorsed by the Governor's Wolf Advisory Council in 2000 and is included in Montana's wolf conservation and management plan. Wolf seasons have evolved over the years from the first season in 2009 having a conservative hunting-only quota of 75 wolves, to including trapping in 2012, to the current season with no quota except near the national parks and sportspeople may take up to five wolves. Montana's wolf management is a success story in that we maintain a healthy, viable and connected population while allowing harvest and reducing conflicts. Other than regular calendar rotation and the specific WMU 313 proposal outlined below, FWP is proposing no change to the 2015-16 season structure.

In WMU 313 we are proposing to 1) increase the quota from two to six wolves, 2) institute a split season with the wolf quota divided equally into 2 hunt periods to minimize the chance of overharvesting any one particular pack, and 3) institute a no wolf trapping zone in the Deckard Flat – Trail Creek elk closure area because of concerns over conflict with recreationists and dogs. Since 2011 FWP staff has counted between 18 and 40 (average of 29) wolves using WMU 313, and wolf harvest quotas to date have been set at levels that are a *de facto* strategy to increase wolves. The objective of this proposal is to stabilize the number of wolves that use WMU 313 by harvesting slightly less than 29% (a harvest rate supported by the scientific literature) of counted wolves, allow for increased and sustainable hunter opportunity, and yet have minimal impact on recreational wolf viewing in Yellowstone National Park. We seek to maintain wolf numbers at a level that balances the competing social expectations of stakeholders who hunt wolves, elk and other affected prey while at the same time having minimal impact on recreational wolf viewing in the Park for stakeholders with that interest. It strikes a good social balance.

Senate Bill 200 allows landowners to take wolves that are a potential threat to human safety, livestock or domestic dogs. The Commission annually approves a quota for SB 200 take, which last year was up to 100 in separate commission-approved intervals of 25. Typically, few wolves are taken under SB 200 with 6 in 2014 and 12 in 2015. FWP proposes no change to the SB 200 quotas.

Public Involvement Process & Results: The public comment period for any adopted proposal will run through 5 p.m., Friday, June 17, with final action at the July Commission meeting.

Alternatives and Analysis: The proposals may be approved as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, with deletions or no change from 2015-16 per staff justifications, public comment and/or commission direction.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: This mostly status quo proposal is aligned with known biology, management history and experience, livestock depredation trends, survey efforts, and public comment. It's consistent with wolf season objectives, other species management and continues to value wolves as an integral component of functioning ecosystems. The proposal is consistent with the Montana Gray Wolf Management Plan.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission approve for public comment the proposed 2016-2017 wolf season as presented by FWP.