

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: July 13, 2016

Agenda Item: 2016/2017 Fisher Season & Quotas

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 45 Min

Background

Fisher in the Northern U.S. Rockies exist at the southern edge of the species distribution and are limited to the wettest forested areas west of the continental divide in central and northern Montana and Idaho. Total population size in both states is unlikely to have ever been more than about 1,000-1,500 fisher. Thus fisher distribution and numbers in Montana have always been relatively limited and will remain so. An annual season for fisher has been in place since 1983 and has been approached conservatively given the limited numbers and distribution of the species. At the May 2016 meeting, the commission proposed to zero the quota which would eliminate the opportunity to harvest fisher in Montana.

FWP proposes to delineate four fisher management units based on the unique history, status, and conservation approaches needed in each area. These are the Bitterroot, Cabinet, Yaak, and Continental Divide Units. For harvest quotas in these units we propose zero in the Continental Divide and Yaak Units, one in the Cabinet Unit, and five with a female subquota of one in the Bitterroot Unit. More information on fisher populations, management goals and harvest strategies are found in the season justification in the Commission packet.

FWP will insert recommendations for avoiding incidental take of fisher by marten trappers in the 2016 trapping regulations, which does not require Commission action. Also, it has been on FWP's docket for over a year to develop a fisher management plan. It is next in line after the completion of the bobcat plan, which is nearly done.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP staff attends annual district meetings of the Montana Trappers Association each spring, and public comment was accepted at the May meeting and until June 17. The 135 public comments that were not general anti-trapping statements and were focused on the fisher proposal were evenly split regarding their support of (68) or opposition to (67) the elimination of the fisher harvest opportunity.

Alternative and Analysis

Alternatives to the above proposal include adopting the Commission's May proposal of a zero harvest quota, adopt quota numbers other than proposed here, maintain the 2015 season structure and harvest quota of 7, or other options as considered.

Agency Recommendation and Rationale

Recommend establishing 4 fisher management areas: Bitterroot, Cabinet, Yaak, and Continental Divide, with associated harvest quotas of zero in the Continental Divide and Yaak Units, one in the Cabinet Unit, and five with a female subquota of one in the Bitterroot Unit. This is consistent with existing information and represents reasonable and appropriate consideration of applicable science and comment.

Proposed Motion

I move to establish four fisher management units, a Bitterroot, Cabinet, Yaak, and a Continental Divide Unit, as described, with harvest quotas to be five with a female subquota of one in the Bitterroot Unit, one in the Cabinet, and zero in the Yaak and Continental Divide Units.