

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: July 13, 2016

Agenda Item: 2016 Upland Game Bird Quotas and Limits

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 30 Min

Background

At the May Commission meeting, FWP proposed no change to the 2015 upland game bird quotas and limits other than calendar rotation, a consideration of crossbows, and possibly sage grouse, depending on lek counts.

Crossbows – FWP proposed that crossbows be considered a legal means of taking mountain grouse and fall turkey.

Sage Grouse – Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM) for sage grouse assesses populations and bag limits. The Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for sage grouse recommends a conservative two-bird bag limit if average lek counts are below the long-term average (LTA). Montana's Commission-approved sage grouse AHM plan provides for closing and opening hunting seasons in all or portions of the state depending on the average number of male birds attending the 88 AHM leks. AHM guidelines call for season closures if average counts are less than 45% below the (LTA) for three consecutive years and for reopening the season if the average count is above that 45% below LTA number for three consecutive years *or* if the count is above the LTA for one year. Because of a heightened awareness of sage grouse and potential human-caused habitat impacts the commission adopted a conservative two-bird bag limit in 2007, a year of above-average lek counts. That bag limit has continued through 2015. In 2014 the commission closed the hunting season in portions Hunting Management Zones 1 and 2 and all of Zone 3 with the understanding that if lek counts met the above criteria FWP would propose reopening those areas.

By 2016 average lek counts have rebounded significantly since recent lows in 2014 and are now above the LTA in the state as a whole and in each of the individual hunting management zones, thus meeting the criteria for reopening. Lek counts in 2016 averaged 33.2 males/lek, 17% above the LTA. Other supporting information is in the Commission packet.

Public Involvement Process & Results

Public comment ended June 18 and we received 12 comments, which were forwarded to the commission. Three favored and one opposed the use of crossbows, one opposed hunting sage grouse while another wanted a sage-grouse opening date that would allow hunting pheasants, too. Other comments spoke to season dates, bag limits, and subjects not related to upland game birds.

Alternatives and Analysis

No alternatives were considered because the proposals are biologically sound and follow Commission and FWP direction.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends adopting the proposed crossbow regulation, sage grouse season, and all other upland game bird bag limits and permit quotas, consistent with known biology, management history and survey efforts to date.

Proposed Motion

I move to approve as final the use of crossbows for mountain grouse and fall turkey, the 2016 sage grouse season, and other upland game bird bag and possession limits and quotas as presented by FWP.