

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: February 10, 2017

Agenda Item: Wildlife Management Area Biennial Public Use Rules

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 Min



Background

Public use rules for Wildlife Management Areas, Wildlife Habitat Protection Areas, and Fisheries Conservation Areas (FCAs) are adopted by the Fish & Wildlife Commission on a biennial schedule. FWP is recommending retaining existing rules with three edits and one addition. A copy of the proposed rules with highlighted and underlined edits is part of the Commission packet. The first proposed edit is to eliminate Osprey View FCA as one of the exceptions for year round accessibility. This change would make the property open to year round access which is compatible with the property's habitat values. The second directs public users of Foy's Bend FCA to special hunting restrictions posted on site. This property has operated on a reservation system with designated days of the week that are rested from public access to help retain game on the property during hunting season and to maximize harvest. The third proposed edit is a requirement for daily removal of tree stands from the FCAs in the Flathead Valley in Region 1. This is intended to provide equal opportunities for the public to hunt on these properties that are heavily used.

The new rule pertains to the use of drones and similar remotely controlled vehicles. The addition would prohibit the use of these vehicles except as authorized in writing by the regional wildlife manager for educational value or other public benefit. The purpose for such a restriction is to avoid potential impacts such as vehicles can have on habitat function and wildlife distribution and behavior.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP made the proposed rules available for public review (Dec. 12 - Jan. 13). Six comments relating to WMA public use rules were received. Four comments supported the rules as proposed. One comment suggested eliminating Rule 13 because of the restrictions it places on sport shooting. The commenter also suggested this section of the rules eliminates opportunity for hunting non-game species or field-checking whether a weapon is sighted in, which is not correct. Rule 13 allows weapons discharge "for all lawful hunting purposes". A second commenter recommended placing restrictions on antler hunting from horses because of fairness and safety concerns.

Alternatives and Analysis

Options include retaining past rules without any edits or additions, accepting rules as proposed, or further revisions, based on public comments.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the Commission adopt the rules as proposed in December, with no additions or edits. Wildlife staff will visit further pertaining safety concerns raised about antler hunting on WMAs. The rules serve to "protect fish and wildlife habitat, wildlife presence on WMAs, and public use of the WMAs, including but not limited to fishing, trapping and hunting opportunities. All other uses are secondary and must be in accord with the primary goals and objectives of the wildlife management areas."

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission adopt the biennial public use rules as proposed.