

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: December 7, 2017

Agenda Item: Bridger Special Chronic Wasting Disease Hunt

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

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Background: Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is an always-fatal neurologic disease like mad cow disease that affects deer, elk, moose and caribou. It usually takes 1½ - 2 years from animal infection to death. Given enough time, perhaps decades, to infect a large portion of a herd ($\geq 20\%$), CWD can cause population declines of $\geq 30\%$. There are no known risks to livestock or humans. On November 7, before CWD was found in Montana, FWP presented a draft CWD management plan to the F&W Commission that it adopted for public comment. FWP informed the Commission that if CWD was found before final adoption of the plan, FWP was prepared to put the plan in action.

As of this writing (Nov. 21) CWD has been confirmed in two mule deer bucks in HD 510, one 10 miles southeast of Bridger and the other 3 miles south of Belfry. As outlined in the draft Plan, FWP has assembled an Incident Command team and initiated a response, including plans for a Bridger Special CWD Hunt to determine disease prevalence in the infected herd. We have defined an Initial Response Area (IRA) around the known positives as of Nov. 21, determined the number of deer within that area, and determined the need to harvest and sample 368 mule deer. Other CWD positives may be found through ongoing surveillance between this writing and the end of the general season that would expand the IRA. In that case we would redefine the IRA and sampling needs and need to issue more licenses before initiating the hunt and selling licenses. With what is known on Nov. 21 we are seeking authority for 1000 mule deer B Licenses for the Bridger Special CWD Hunt. Licenses will be only valid within the IRA and issued for two hunt periods with both antlerless-only and either-sex licenses issued in proportion to antlerless and antlered deer in the population. Licenses would go on sale beginning Dec. 11 for the hunt to begin Dec. 15. Special regulations, a map, and other specifics of the Bridger Special CWD Hunt as defined on Nov. 21 are in the Commission packet. We request adoption of a range 1,000 – 2,000 licenses to facilitate expansion of the IRA if necessary between this writing and the final hunt definition on or shortly after Dec. 7, when test results from CWD surveillance samples from the general season are expected. All definition of the hunt and licenses are within statutory and Commission authority.

Public Involvement Process & Results: FWP has informed area residents and landowners of finding CWD and our plans for management with public information through several venues plus letters and public meetings.

Alternatives and Analysis

Proposals may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, with deletions or no change from 2017 (status quo). No action would prevent the Bridger Special CWD Hunt from occurring.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

Rationale for this proposal is included in Commission information packet and may be further articulated at the Dec. 7 Commission meeting.

Proposed Motion

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the Bridger Special Chronic Wasting Disease Hunt as presented by FWP.