

## **FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** February 15, 2018

**Agenda Item:** Expansion of Youth Deer Hunt

**Division:** Wildlife                      **Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 Min

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**Background:** Season structures and hunting district boundaries are adopted biennially for all game species every other year with final adoptions in February. In proposing regulations to the Commission, FWP proposes existing structure except for specific changes.

During the 2017 legislative session Rep. Lavin introduced HB437 that looked to establish a 4-day youth-only deer season in years when MEA days do not immediately precede the opening of the general big game season. Rep. Lavin graciously agreed to withdraw the bill if FWP would bring it before the Fish and Wildlife Commission for their consideration. The language of the bill is as follows:

- (b) To promote and enhance hunting opportunities for Montana's youth, the Commission shall:
- (i) establish a 4-day, youth-only deer season, except that when youth-only deer season immediately precedes the opening of the general big game season, it is limited to 2 days; and
  - (ii) subject to the licensing provisions of Title 87, chapter 2, open the youth-only deer season to all minors who are 10 years of age or older and under 18 years of age.

A few things that need to be brought to the Commission's attention are:

1. During those years when it would be a 4-day youth hunt all 4 days would overlap archery season. Many archers are likely to oppose this.
2. This proposal would change the definition of youth eligibility for the hunt from 10-15 to 10-17.
3. Current youth hunt opportunities in the regulations for the general archery-only or firearms season for deer, elk, and some B licenses for both are restricted to youth ages 12-15. Expanding the upper age limit of youth eligible for the statewide youth deer hunt to 17 is likely to add a level of confusion for hunters trying to differentiate between the statewide youth hunt and other archery and general season youth opportunities.

**Public Involvement Process & Results:** Public comment ran from Dec. 7 through Jan. 24, 2018 and 121 comments were received. Most spoke in opposition to the proposal, although some supported 4 days but not on increasing the age to 17.

**Alternatives and Analysis:** Proposals may be adopted as proposed, or with adjustments, additions, or deletions.

**Agency Recommendation & Rationale:** Based on public comment and staff input, FWP recommends the F&W Commission not adopt the proposed 4-day youth-only deer season in years when MEA days do not immediately precede the opening of the general big game season, and not open the youth-only deer season to all minors who are 10 years of age or older and under 18 years of age.

**Proposed Motion:** I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission not adopt the proposed 4-day youth-only deer season in years when MEA days do not immediately precede the opening of the general big game season, and not open the youth-only deer season to all minors who are 10 years of age or older and under 18 years of age as recommended by FWP. Unless addressed in separate proposals, other aspects of the deer season would remain unchanged.