

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: February 15, 2018

Agenda Item: Direction to Department for No Grizzly Bear Hunt in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem

Division: Wildlife **Action Needed:** Final **Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 30 Mins

Background: In July 2016, to meet requirements of a proposed federal delisting rule for grizzly bears in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE), the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted a grizzly bear hunting season structure and adopted a tri-state Memorandum of Agreement with Idaho and Wyoming that included a process for allocating available discretionary harvest mortality between the states. Based on the 2017 population estimate of 718 and known and probable mortalities that occurred in 2017, there are a maximum of 17 independent males and 2.5 independent females potentially available for harvest in the demographic monitoring area of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The default for allocation of these bears is by proportion of the DMA in each state. Because Montana comprises 34% of the DMA, 34% of the available mortality would be 0.9 independent females and 5.9 independent males.

Public Involvement Process & Results: There has been no public comment on this topic specific to a 2018 hunting season, although there was extensive public review and comment on a GYE Grizzly Bear Hunting Season Structure and Tri-State MOA that underwent a public review and Commission approval process. They were explained in depth at a Commission work session in May 2016. They were adopted for public comment at the Commission's May 2016 meeting, and then were open for a 31-day public comment period. More than 1,200 comments were received and reviewed. The season structure and MOA were finalized at the Commission's July meeting following additional public comment. It was clear throughout the process that the season framework was necessary to meet the delisting requirements of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, but there would be no proposed season at least until delisting was finalized. Any proposed season would require additional Commission action to, at a minimum, set quotas.

Alternatives and Analysis: Per the tri-state MOA, options available to the Commission include 1) seeking some or all of the available harvest mortality to initiate a hunting season in 2018 and direct the Department to prepare a hunting season proposal for Fall 2019; 2) not seek any of the available harvest mortality and allow Idaho and or Wyoming to utilize some or all of it for hunting in their state, or 3) direct the Department to notify Idaho and Wyoming that Montana will reserve the available mortality but not implement a hunting season in 2018. The Wyoming Wildlife Commission has instructed the Wyoming Game and Fish Department to develop a hunting season proposal for their consideration, indicating they will be implementing a Fall hunting season in 2018. The Idaho Commission will address the topic at their March meeting. Per the adopted grizzly bear hunting regulation framework, Montana could only implement a season if at least one female was available, and would close the season if the female quota was reached, meaning Montana could implement a season in Fall 2018 with a female quota of 1 and male quota of not more than 6. Alternatively, Montana could reserve up to 1 female and 6 males but not hunt them. If the Commission selects option 1, the Department would present a hunting season regulation proposal in April, and a final recommendation in June. If Option 2 or 3 were selected, no further action would be required.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: Because the available mortality, especially independent females, is very limited, and because of ongoing litigation challenging the delisting, FWP recommends the Fish and Wildlife Commission not implement a hunting season in 2018, and reserve available grizzly bear mortality based on the default allocation based on proportion of the DMA.

Proposed Motion

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission not implement a grizzly bear hunting season in 2018, that Montana reserve 34% of the available grizzly bear harvest mortality in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem based on Montana comprising 38% of the Demographic Monitoring Area, and that the Department notify the Wyoming and Idaho fish and wildlife agencies that Montana is reserving this level of mortality.