



Montana Fish & Wildlife Commission

MINUTES

Montana Fish and Wildlife Teleconference Commission Meeting

FWP Headquarters

1420 East 6th Avenue, Helena, MT

March 23, 2015

Commission Members Present via phone:

Dan Vermillion, Chairman, Richard Stuker Vice-Chairman,
Richard Kerstein, Matt Tourtlotte and Gary Wolfe

Fish, Wildlife & Parks Staff Present: Jeff Hagener, Director, John Vore, Neal Whitney

Guests: No public was present.

Topics of Discussion:

1. Call to Order
2. Bighorn Sheep Hunting District 305 Closure
3. Public Comment – For Issues Not On This Agenda

1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Vermillion called the meeting to order at 8:31 a.m.

2. Bighorn Sheep Hunting District 305 Closure

John Vore, Game Management Bureau Chief explained the South Yellowstone bighorn sheep herd in hunting district (HD) 305, suffered a pneumonia die-off in late 2014 that took 30 percent or more of the entire herd and 40 percent or more of the mature rams. The herd averaged 80 animals since 2006; since 2011, an average of 14 legal rams (17 in 2014), have been observed by FWP. This past winter, FWP documented a loss of 30 sheep, including 7 mature rams. Most dead sheep were found in the Gardiner/Cinnabar area; the extent of the die off was fully evaluated and the decision made to seek a season closure. The biological reason for a closure is clear but there is also a social component to consider; FWP has issued one legal ram license for several years; success has been low with one ram taken in the past five years. With the recent die-off, and the chances of hunter success further diminished in this HD, FWP does not want a hunter to lose preference points and not be allowed to apply for another license for seven years. FWP does not expect this to be a permanent closure and would reopen when the population recovers. The Department conversed with local residents and hunters, but has not been formally presented to any group; no opposition has been expressed. One written comment was received in opposition of the proposal.

Karen Loveless, Region 3 Wildlife Biologist stated she flew this area on March 22; found one dead and other sick sheep; ram counts are down 50 percent from last year.

Action: Vice-Chairman Stuker moved and Commissioner Tourtlotte seconded the motion that the bighorn sheep hunting district 305 be closed to bighorn sheep hunting for the 2015 season and until such time that the population recovers as recommended by FWP.

Vice-Chairman Stuker asked what the current total (estimate) number of sheep is.

Loveless stated the current estimated total count is 55; 89 last year.

Commissioner Tourtlotte asked when the last significant die-off in this area was.

Loveless stated there has never been a pneumonia die-off; pink eye disease event took place in the 1980's that reduced the population significantly.

Howard Burt, Region 2 Wildlife Biologist stated there are three domestic sheep operations in this area.

Chairman Vermillion stated even under the best conditions this hunt is tough; is an important herd, wildlife viewing as well as hunting.

Steve Bullock, Governor

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Montana Fish,
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Commissioner Wolfe asked if the three domestic sheep operations were private or included on public land grazing permits.

Chairman Vermillion and Burt stated they are private operations.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed.

3. Public Comment – For Issues Not On This Agenda

Chairman Vermillion and Director Hagenner discussed reappointments matters.

Action: Vice-Chairman Stuker moved and Chairman Vermillion seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting. Motion Passed.

The meeting adjourned at 8:44 a.m.



Dan Vermillion, Chairman



M. Jeff Hagenner, Director