*FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET*

**Meeting Date**: July 12, 2012

**Agenda Item**: Proposed 2012 Fall Upland Game Bird Quotas and Limits

**Division:** Wildlife **Action Needed:** Approval of Final Quotas/Limits

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

**Background:** Upland game bird season dates for 2012 were finalized in February 2012. Other season elements include bag and possession limits and special permit quotas (turkeys). While limits seldom change from year to year, Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM) for sage grouse annually assesses populations and bag limits. AHM recommends a conservative two-bird bag limit if average lek counts are below the long-term average of about 30 males/lek on nearly 90 pre-selected leks. There is also a provision for not opening the season based on consistently low average lek counts (45% or more below long-term average) over a three-year period. If the average count exceeds the long term average, AHM recommends a standard four-bird bag limit.

Heightened public awareness surrounding sage grouse, and potential habitat impacts from energy development, resulted in the commission adopting a conservative two-bird bag limit in 2007, a year of above-average lek counts (33.6 males/lek). This high level of public awareness continues with the March 5, 2010 "warranted but precluded" listing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The two-bird bag limit was maintained in 2008 and 2009 with annual survey averages of 22.9 and 23.3 males/lek, respectively.

The 2010 lek surveys resulted in an average of 20.5 males/lek (12% decline from 2009; 69% of the long term average). While this represented a third consecutive year below the long term average, the 2010 result was within the range of observations recorded since 1980 and at the statewide level was above the closure trigger of three consecutive years at 45% or more below the long term average. The conservative two-bird bag and twice the daily bag possession limit for sage grouse was maintained in 2010.

The 2011 lek surveys revealed a 6% decline from 2010 to 19.2 males/lek. This was approximately 66% of the long term average. At the statewide level this was above the closure trigger of three consecutive years at 45% or more below the long term average. As such, the conservative two-bird bag and twice the daily bag possession limit for sage grouse was again proposed and adopted for 2011.

The 2012 lek surveys revealed no real change from 2011 with an average 19.1 males/lek, which is 66% of the long term average. Given this finding, the final proposal is to maintain the two-bird bag and twice the daily bag possession limit for sage grouse, as originally proposed in May.

Reflecting the typically static nature of upland game bird bag and possession limits as supported by biology and management history, all other upland game bird bag, possession limits and permit quotas are proposed unchanged from 2011 or as otherwise finalized during season structure changes in February 2012. This includes staff consideration of fall turkey permits.

**Public Involvement Process & Results:** Public comment ran through 5:00 PM Monday, June 18. Two comments were received and will be delivered to the Commission for their consideration prior to a final decision on July 12.

**Alternatives and Analysis:** Status and species biology does not require more conservative limits at this time. While populations suffered reduced recruitment during last year's wet spring/summer, the mild 2012 winter and assessments of considerable residual cover suggest potential for strong recruitment in summer 2012.

**Agency Recommendation & Rationale:** FWP recommends maintaining 2011 bag and possession limits and permit quotas for all upland game birds. This is consistent with known biology, management history and survey efforts to date. Season dates were previously set.

**Proposed Motion**

I move to adopt the final 2012 upland game bird bag and possession limits and permit quotas as presented by FWP.