# Public Comment Summary 2012 Proposed Wolf Hunting and Trapping Seasons July 12, 2012

### Introduction

FWP received comments to proposed 2012 wolf hunting and trapping seasons via the website (survey monkey), email and hard copy mailings. The formal comment period was functionally initiated May 10, 2012 with that day's FWP Commission meeting and adoptions. In addition to a press release calling for public comment, an "interested person" letter generally describing the proposed season and quotas was posted on the website and mailed to an established list of interested parties.

In all, 6,505 comment entries were received through the deadline of 5:00 PM, June 25, 2012. All told, 1,927 comment entries were received electronically via the survey monkey web interface and 4,578 written/email comments were also received from the general public. Comments reflected diverse perspectives from Montana and other states/countries and included unique inputs as well as common or repeating messages referencing the local, regional and/or statewide scale.

Not a tabulation of supporting vs. opposing comment numbers (both support and opposition were represented across the total comment set), this document represents an effort to enumerate rationales and values that *repeatedly* surfaced in public comment (listed here in no specific order). As a coarse summary, it is not intended to replace, dismiss or represent all/any comments received and forwarded to the Commission and FWP staff. Rather, this summary has been assembled only to assist all parties generally recognize and consider relatively consistent elements of public comment so that those elements at least (along with any others) may be better considered in light of proposal justifications.

# **Topics and Themes**

## **Trapping**

Some comments voiced concerns over impacts of trapping. Common concerns included non-target catch (pets, other wildlife); public safety; ethics; physical/emotional suffering; fair chase; commercialize wildlife through sale of pelts; impact to tourism revenue. Some comments voiced support for trapping and cited a number of anticipated benefits. Some proposed liberalization of the proposed trapping season with common suggestions including longer seasons; relax or remove trap check requirement; and add snaring.

FWP Response: Trapping is recognized as a legitimate means of take for many species in Montana. Furthermore, trapping was recognized as a valid means of take and an eventual element of wolf population management in the Montana Gray Wolf Conservation and Management Plan. FWP proposes implementing a number of measures with wolf trapping to minimize adverse impacts and potential conflicts with

trapping. Among those measures, wolf trappers will be required to attend a wolf trapper education course that will emphasize ethics and practices that will minimize trapping impacts. FWP recognizes that conflicts occur between user groups on public lands. One important view is that while many recreationists enjoy use of public lands year-round, trappers are present for a short time frame during winter when conflicts with other users would typically be diminished. FWP intends to comprehensively manage wolves in a manner comparable to other managed species, and in a manner that precludes any reasonable likelihood of relisting. This includes careful consideration of means of take, season of take relative to biology, demographic capacity for increased harvest, public values and management effectiveness. Future proposals will likely consider various measures to liberalize seasons as appropriate.

## Concern over Wolf Hunting, Trapping, and Harvest

Some expressed concern over wolf numbers, distribution and pack structure; opposed hunting and trapping; suggested reduced hunter take; concern over the lack of quotas and potential overharvest that would not be sustainable; suggested slower pace and/or less aggressive approach to liberalization.

FWP Response: One intent of the proposed wolf season is a reduction of the wolf population in response to circumstances that include the current wolf population size, livestock loss and ungulate population levels. The prescribed 2012 reduction is intended to be measurable, responsive and consistent with long term maintenance of the species. Guiding inputs incorporate other mortality sources and enforcement structure. If this proposal realizes the intended population reduction, by definition the proposal is not sustainable over time—and is not intended to be. That is, this proposal is for the 2012 season only. Appropriately, results will be evaluated and incorporated into future management proposals.

#### Livestock Loss

Concern over livestock loss; hunt to reduce losses to livestock; hunting not a replacement for effective/timely response to livestock loss.

*FWP Response*: FWP did not intend that this hunting season would remove or fully replace the option of site specific response to livestock depredations. Hunting may assist the resolution of conflicts between wolves and livestock in those situations that overlap the hunting season. A reduction in the wolf population size and/or local wolf presence via hunter harvest has potential to reduce livestock depredations. Livestock losses and associated frequency of complaints tend to diminish with wolf hunting.

## Impacts to Deer and Elk Populations

Some expressed concerns over wolf impacts to deer and elk; hunting opportunity and heritage being lost; manage for balance, may be too late already; more wolves than

people think; hunt to reduce losses to wild ungulates; wolf harvest needs to be big enough to realize a positive impact to wild ungulates.

FWP Response: Specific details of wolf-ungulate relationships on Montana's landscape continue to be measured and incorporated into management decisions. Management intent is a reasoned balance that incorporates all species' long term viability, ecosystem presence and associated values to the extent possible.

## Value of Wolves in Ecosystems

Wolf valuable addition to restored ecosystem; let balance develop with less or no hunting; oppose wolf hunting/carnivore hunting/lion hunting; relative small impact to livestock industry

FWP Response: Wolves are a native wildlife species with a contribution to ecosystem function. Specific details of wolf-ungulate relationships on Montana's landscape continue to be measured for continued incorporation into management decisions. Management intent is a reasoned balance that maintains all species' long term viability, ecosystem presence and associated values to the extent possible. Impacts to the livestock industry can be measured at multiple scales and can be significant at the scale of the individual livestock producer.

## **State Management**

Hunting and trapping are appropriate management tools; manage like other species; support state management.

*FWP Response*: FWP intends to comprehensively manage wolves in a manner comparable to other managed species. Montana has a successful history of wildlife management and expects wolf management to be no exception.

## <u>Liberalize Harvest Opportunity and Levels of Harvest</u>

Liberalize harvest opportunity, seasons and licenses to the extent possible; longer seasons; support the addition of trapping; include snaring as a means of take; multiple wolves per hunter; yearlong and/or spring seasons; eliminated 5 day waiting period; allow electronic game calls; reduce license cost; eliminate quotas; aerial hunting; predator status.

FWP Response: FWP intends to comprehensively manage wolves in a manner comparable to other managed species, and in a manner that precludes any reasonable likelihood of relisting. The 2012 proposal incorporates several liberalizations including a longer season, general hunting, and trapping, along with proposals to accommodate increased bag limit and electronic calls with legislation.