

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: May 9, 2013

Agenda Item: 2013 Proposed Wolf Season, Quotas and WMU Boundaries

Division: Fish & Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Proposed Rule

Time Needed for Presentation: 1 hour

Background: Regulated public hunting and trapping of wolves was endorsed by the Governor's Wolf Advisory Council in 2000 and is included in Montana's wolf conservation and management plan. The FWP Commission adopted a conservative hunting-only quota of 75 wolves for the 2009 season. That wolf hunting season closed with a legal harvest of 72. The minimum wolf count increased in 2009 from 497 to 524 wolves. For the 2010 season (blocked by court ruling) the Commission adopted a statewide quota of 186 with 13 wolf management units (WMU's). The 2011 season had a statewide hunting-only quota of 220 wolves with 14 WMUs. Modeling predicted harvest equal to this quota would result in up to a 25% percent reduction from the 2010 minimum of 566 to 425. Including a season extension to Feb 15, 2012, 166 wolves were harvested with three of the 14 WMU's closing due to their quota being met. WMU boundaries were again modified for 2012-13. There was no statewide quota and trapping was added as a method of take from Dec 15, 2012 through Feb 28. During 2012, 2,414 trappers completed the Montana Wolf Trapper Education Course. The regular rifle season was expanded to run from Oct 15, 2012 through Feb 28, 2013. The Commission approved a 3 wolf bag limit that was implemented with the passage of House Bill 73. By season end, trappers harvested 97 wolves while hunter harvested 128 (225 total).

The following changes from the 2012-13 wolf season framework are proposed for 2013-14. The archery season will open on Sept 7 and run through Sept 14. The rifle season would open on Sept 15 and close on Mar 31. Trapping dates would remain the same (Dec 15 – Feb 28), and trappers would be required to complete the Montana or Idaho Wolf Trapper Education Course. The bag limit would be 5 wolves per person in any combination of wolves taken by hunting or trapping. WMU 316 would be expanded to include portions of HD 313 and would have a quota of 7 wolves. The quota of 2 wolves will remain in WMU 110. Hunters would be allowed to take wolves over bait placed for trapping. Trappers would be required to dispatch wolves via gunshot. In Regions 1-5, trappers would be required to set pan tensions on wolf traps to 10 pounds. This standard would minimize the take of lynx, wolverines, and other non-target species.

Public Involvement Process & Results: The public comment period will run through 5:00 PM Monday, June 24. The final adoption is scheduled for July 10, 2013.

Alternatives and Analysis: The proposals may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, with deletions or no change from 2012-13 (status quo) as per staff justifications, public comment and/or Commission direction

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: The proposal is aligned with known biology, management history and experience, survey efforts, and public comment. This proposal is consistent with other species proposals and continues to value wolves as an integral component of functioning ecosystems. The proposal is consistent with the Montana Gray Wolf Management Plan.

Proposed Motion: I move to adopt the proposed 2013-14 wolf season as presented by FWP.