

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: June 9, 2011 **Agenda Item:** 2011 Proposed Bison Season and Quotas

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Proposed Rule

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 20 Minutes

Background: In 2007, Montana's bison season allowed for an "adaptive" response to significant bison movement out of Yellowstone National Park. The "Standard Package" included 18 either sex licenses in HD 385 over three time periods; and 26 either sex licenses in HD 395 for a total of 44 licenses. The "Liberal Package" could have added 100 additional cow/calf licenses to the hunting districts, if 60 or more bison were within a specific district. A second-choice drawing was used to develop lists of hunters who might receive cow/calf licenses. The 2007 season also included a DVD mailing and test to license holders and potential license holders. This season structure matched state-issued licenses with the same number of Tribal Treaty licenses split between the Nez Perce and Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, which were in addition to state-issued Tribal licenses as per MCA 87-2-731.

The 2007 bison-season structure was again proposed and adopted for 2008. While an orientation DVD was mailed, FWP didn't require a test. Also, each district had only one cow/calf list instead of a separate list for each time period. This season structure was adopted for 2009 and again for the 2010 and 2011 seasons. License quota numbers have remained unchanged.

Montana's 2011 license quotas are proposed to remain the same at 44 either sex licenses (18 in HD 385 and 26 in HD 395); and 100 additional cow/calf licenses issued incrementally (54 in HD 385, 46 in HD 395) if conditions warrant. Of the 44 either sex licenses, 16 go to Montana Tribes as per state law. Additionally, the 2011 Legislature identified archery as a means of take for bison and the Eagle Creek portion of HD 385 north of Gardiner is proposed to be expanded north and west.

Also proposed is a harvest quota for the treaty tribes equal to the number of state-issued licenses. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, Nez Perce, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation each have off-reservation hunting rights for bison. FWP's position is that total tribal treaty harvest should not increase but be divided evenly now among these three tribal entities. These Tribal harvest opportunities are in addition to Tribal licenses as per MCA 87-2-731, which are part of the 44 state-issued licenses.

Public Involvement Process & Results: The public comment period on any adopted proposal will run through 5 PM Monday, July 18, with final adoptions at the Aug. 11 Commission meeting.

Alternative and Analysis: Under the current bison hunt EA, only limited opportunity for adjustment is available. Available options include fewer licenses or no hunt. While there are advocates for these alternatives, FWP believes they would reduce potential opportunity beyond necessity. New archery legislation requires archery.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends adopting the 2010 bison license quotas for 2011 with archery included and an expanded hunt area in HD 385. FWP anticipates no significant impact to the overall bison population.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission adopt the proposed 2011 bison license quotas with included archery and expanded hunt area in HD385 as presented by FWP.