

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: August 18, 2011

Agenda Item: 2011 Final Bison Season and Quotas

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Final 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.

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.

The 2011 license quotas are proposed to remain 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 per state law. Also, 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. Two changes in this final proposal from the initial adoption are the proposed addition of mandatory orientation for those wishing to harvest bison with archery equipment and broader latitude for staff to initiate cow/calf hunters in response not only to a specific number of bison but also consideration of equitable harvest among state licensed and Tribal hunters. FWP and Montana Bowhunters Association are collaborating on archery orientation.

There is a scheduled bison hunting season meeting with Tribal representatives and FWP on August 10. Any outcomes of that meeting will be communicated to the Commission not later than the August 18 commission meeting.

Public Involvement Process & Results: The public comment period ran through 5 PM Monday, July 18. Comments were dominated by support for archery and have been forwarded to staff and the Commission for consideration of final proposals and adoptions at the Aug. 18 Commission meeting.

Alternative and Analysis: Under the current bison hunt EA, only limited opportunity for adjustment is available. New archery legislation requires archery.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends adopting the 2010 bison license quotas for 2011 with archery, mandatory archery orientation, greater flexibility in activating cow/calf hunters and an expansion of HD 385. FWP anticipates no significant impact to the overall bison population.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission adopt the final 2011 bison license quotas with included archery, mandatory archery orientation, greater flexibility in activating cow/calf hunters and expanded hunt area in HD385 as presented by FWP.