

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: November 10, 2011

Agenda Item: 2011 Proposed Wolf Season Extension

Division: Fish & Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Proposed Rule

Time Needed for Presentation: 30 minutes

Background

With federal delisting, wolf management in Montana is the full responsibility of the state. The FWP Commission first approved wolf hunting regulations and seasons in 2008 and those were adopted for Montana's first wolf hunting season in 2009. For the 2010 season, which was blocked by a court ruling, the FWP commission adopted a statewide quota of 186 in 13 wolf management units. WMUs or subquotas were adopted to limit early season backcountry harvest and/or harvest north of Yellowstone National Park. An archery-only season, limited to no more than 20 percent of the quota, was also adopted. Only legal hunting harvest would count towards quotas and quota over-runs were to be subtracted from a nearby unit or statewide quotas.

For 2011, the commission adopted a statewide quota of 220 and an additional WMU in the Bitterroot Valley. Except for calendar rotation of dates, other proposed season elements were unchanged from the 2010. Modeling predicts this quota will result in a 25 percent reduction from the 2010 minimum of 566 to an estimated 425. A competing model predicts a 7 percent decline. Objectives of the season proposal are: 1) maintain a viable and connected wolf population in Montana; 2) maintain authority to manage wolves; 3) maintain positive and effective working relationships with livestock producers, hunters, and other stakeholders; 4a) reduce wolf impacts on livestock; 4b) reduce wolf impacts on big game populations; 4c) maintain sustainable hunter opportunity for wolves; 4d) maintain sustainable hunter opportunity for ungulates; 5) increase broad public acceptance of sustainable harvest and hunter opportunity as part of wolf conservation; 6) enhance open and effective communication to better inform decisions and; 7) learn and improve as we go. **As a proposed refinement to the July 2011 adoption, this proposed extension extends wolf hunting through January 31, 2012. This proposal is to address the potential that wolf harvest through December 2011 will be significantly less than described quotas.**

Public Involvement Process & Results

Public comment will run through Monday, Nov. 28. Any final adoption will take place at the Dec. 8 Commission meeting

Alternatives and Analysis

This proposal addresses the potential that wolf harvest through December 2011 will be significantly less than described quotas. Alternative would be the status quo Dec. 31 ending date or some later date after January. The Idaho hunting season ends March 31 in much of that state. No end date ensures quotas are met. A later ending date overlaps the hunt period with more of the breeding season with no certainty of impacts specific to Montana's wolf population.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

The proposal is aligned with known biology, management history and survey efforts and sits within the wide spectrum of public comment.

Proposed Motion

I move to adopt the season extension for the 2011 wolf season as presented by FWP.