

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: January 19, 2012

Agenda Item: Bison Management Harvest

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Proposed Rule

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 20 minutes

Background

Bison management continues to evolve in Montana. An Environmental Assessment has been prepared for proposed adaptive management adjustments to the Interagency Bison Management Plan. Proposed adjustments include allowing bison on U.S. Forest Service and other lands north of Yellowstone National Park and south of Yankee Jim Canyon. Bison would not be allowed north of the hydrological divide between Dome Mountain/Paradise Valley and the Gardiner Basin on the east side of the Yellowstone River, and Tom Miner basin and the Gardiner Basin on the west side of the river.

Additionally, at its Dec. 9, 2011 meeting the FWP Commission approved the recommended translocation of quarantined bison to the Fort Peck and Fort Belknap reservations, contingent upon successful negotiation of management plans with the respective tribes. Prior to movement, management plan agreements with each Tribe will include response protocol for bison outside specific translocation areas.

In response to these and other activities aimed at enhancing the number and types of potential bison management tools, FWP is proposing a process to use licensed hunters—or hunters selected from a randomized list—to lethally remove bison outside defined tolerance areas. The proposal focuses on formally identified tolerance areas and times in the Greater Yellowstone area and defined areas where bison have been translocated. This may include authorizing hunters for significant bison removal during or outside the bison hunting season. Bison removed by hunters in this way would be identified as “bison management harvests.” This additional tool is intended to complement existing management efforts that include hazing and lethal removal. While some situations may not easily accommodate hunters, other situations may not require lethal removal of bison. As such, this proposal does not require hunters for every situation where bison are or may be outside tolerance areas and times.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The concepts behind this proposal reflect conversations with regional and Helena FWP staff and the Montana Department of Livestock. Legislative debate and statute has also influenced the development of this proposal. Public comment during the FWP Commission process will include opportunities made available to the general public to include county commissions. DOL will also be asked to review the specific details of this proposal. Public comment on any proposed rule adopted by the FWP Commission on Jan. 19, 2012 will run through 5 PM Feb. 13, 2012. Any final adoption will take place Feb. 16, 2012.

Alternatives and Analysis

Proposals may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, with deletions or no change from 2011 (status quo) as per staff justifications, public comment and/or commission discussion.

Proposed Motion

I move the FWP Commission approve the use of hunters for bison management harvests as presented by FWP.