



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Wildlife Bureau
PO Box 200701
Helena MT 59620-0701
May 11, 2012

Dear Interested Person:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is requesting public comment on the proposed 2012 Wolf Season, Quotas and Boundaries, the proposed 2012 Nongame Check-off Work Plan, a proposed 2012 HB 454 Hunting Access Agreement, proposed 2012 Fall Upland Game Bird Quotas and Limits and proposed 2012 Antlerless Elk Harvest Prescriptions for Archery Elk Permit Areas. Additional information is below.

2012 Wolf Season, Quotas and Boundaries – Proposed

2012 will mark Montana's third wolf hunt, the second since the last delisting, and the second of the 5 year monitoring period by the USFWS. Montana also has perhaps the most complex predator-prey system in North America in terms of diversity of predator and prey species. From the first two hunting seasons we have learned much and can refine management. With the close of the 2011-2012 season, Montana still had an increase in the number of wolves in the state. While FWP does not have an overall population objective for wolves, it is clear that a more aggressive wolf hunting season will not hurt wolf populations or genetic diversity. It is the second year post-delisting of the five year monitoring period required by the USFWS. All recommendations within this proposal are consistent with the Montana Grey Wolf Management Plan as approved by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. It is not a time for a radical departure from the grounded incremental approach Montana has taken from the beginning. Montana has been generally well respected in its balanced approach to wolf management, despite viral attacks from both sides of this controversial management issue.

FWP proposes a number of changes from the 2011 wolf season framework:

- The 2012 wolf season proposal includes several adjustments to the 2011 Wolf Management Units (WMUs). The proposal incorporates all of the Bitterroot into WMU 250 and removes that portion from WMU 210. The proposal also removes that portion of old WMU 210 that is east of the Continental Divide (the Big Hole/Tendoys) and defines that area as new WMU 330. Finally, Deer/Elk HDs 280 and 316 would become separate WMUs 280 and 316, with those areas removed as subunits within WMUs 290 and 390.
- The proposal replaces posted quotas in most WMU's with a statewide general season. The exceptions include retaining quotas in WMU 110 (quota = 2) and WMU 316 (quota = 3). Mandatory harvest reporting would remain. This large management scale is consistent wolf biology and the current population size.
- The Commission would authorize FWP to initiate season closures at any time. Closures may be implemented if FWP deems monitored harvest levels excessive in any area. Reported harvest shall be assessed in light of species biology and objectives (see Measurable Objectives below). Any such closure would necessarily include an appropriate timeline and public notice and that may include press releases and posted signs. Anticipated rate of harvest allows this approach. In this manner, the core functionality represented by pre-posted quotas as a means to

- close a harvest season if biologically necessary would remain in place.
- Extend the general season closing date from December 31 to February 28. Hunter orange would not be required to hunt wolves after November 25, 2012. Add a trapping season along with mandatory trapper education. The trapping season would run from December 15 to February 28. Adjust mandatory reporting period to 24 hours.
- The proposed bag limit would be one wolf per hunter/trapper in any combination of hunting or trapping harvest (see next bullets below).
- Electronic calling for taking wolves must be consistent with relevant statute (see next bullet below).
- If relevant statutes are adjusted during any part of the 2012-13 wolf season relative to bag limit, electronic calling and waste of game, FWP proposes here that the bag limit be increased at that time to three wolves per hunter/trapper in any combination of hunting and/or trapping harvest. Similarly, electronic calling for taking wolves is proposed to be available at that time if consistent with relevant statute.
- Hunter/trapper retrieval of harvested wolf parts must be consistent with relevant statute.

Otherwise, the 2012-13 season has similarities with the 2011-12 framework.

MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES:

1. *Maintain a viable and connected wolf population in Montana.*
2. *Gain and maintain authority for State of Montana 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*
7. *Learn and improve as we go.*

Harvest quotas would be 2 in WMU 110 and 3 in WMU 316. These quotas would be retained to continue to address concerns over potentially high harvests near the boundaries of Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks. FWP proposes replacing all other quotas with a general season and to maintain the daily tracking of harvest among WMU's. All wolf harvests would be required to be reported within 24 hours to ensure harvest monitoring capacity.

Proposed wolf season dates would remain similar to the 2011-12 framework, with a later closing date. The wolf archery season would extend from September 1 through the close of the archery elk season. In most WMU's, the general wolf season would run from October 15 through February 28. In WMU's 150 and 316, along with subunit 280 of WMU 290, the general wolf season would open earlier on September 15 to coincide with the early opening of the backcountry elk season.

FWP proposes a trapping season during 2012-13. FWP proposes the following trapping framework and rules:

Statewide Trapping Season: December 15, 2012 - February 28, 2013

Wolf Trapper Orientation – A person must attend a wolf trapping orientation class before setting any trap for a wolf. A certifying letter or validated license will be awarded to those completing trapping

orientation session. This certification must be in possession of any person setting wolf traps and/or harvesting a wolf by trap.

Checking and Placing Traps – Traps are required to be visually checked at least once every 48 hours. Failure to pick up traps at the end of the trapping season or attending them in a manner that wastes animals constitutes a misdemeanor per Montana law.

Trap Identification – Metal identification tags must be fastened to all traps. Metal tags must bear the name and address of the trapper OR a personal identification number, which is the trapper's date of birth and ALS number. Tags should be attached to the end of the chain or other anchoring material at the end farthest from the portion of the device which holds the animal. Landowners who trap on their own lands and irrigation right-of-way contiguous to their land do not need to tag traps.

Trapping Equipment Requirements– Foot-hold traps are legal methods during the wolf trapping season. The inside jaw spread of foothold traps must not exceed nine inches. Conibears or snares may not be used to take wolves.

Legal Hours – Trappers will be allowed to dispatch trapped wolves during all hours including night time. A trapper must immediately dispatch any wolf captured while the trapper holds a valid license authorizing harvest of a wolf.

Landowner Permission – Trappers must obtain permission of the landowner, lessee or their agent before trapping on private land.

Exposed Carcass or Bait – No trap may be set within 30 feet of an exposed carcass or bait that is visible from above. Exposed carcass or bait is defined as the meat or viscera of a mammal, bird or fish, or any part thereof more than one pound in weight. Bleached bones are excluded.

Public Land Roads and Trails – A 50-foot setback is required for foothold traps along open roads and hiking trails on federal and state lands that are designated by administrative signs or numbers.

Public Land Trailheads – On public land, foothold traps are prohibited within 300 feet of a designated or marked trailhead (accessible by highway vehicle).

Public Land Campground – On public land, foothold traps are prohibited within 1000 feet of a designated campground or fishing access site (accessible by highway vehicle).

Occupied Dwellings – Foothold traps are prohibited within 1,000 feet of an occupied dwelling without written notification of the occupant.

Waste of Game –Wolf is excluded from being considered as “suitable for food” under big game regulations. A hunter or trapper that legally harvests a wolf and wishes to retain possession of the hide and skull is required to personally present the hide and skull of a legally taken wolf to a designated FWP employee within ten (10) days after harvest. Evidence of sex must be naturally attached for inspection and tagging purposes. If not released, the hide and skull of incidentally captured wolves must be personally presented to a designated FWP employee within ten (10) days after harvest (see Incidental Take below). The carcass of any wolf taken may be taken in possession or left in the field. Retrieval of harvested wolf parts must be consistent with relevant statute.

Incidental Take – Trappers may not set traps to capture wolves unless they possess a valid license authorizing wolf harvest and have proof of a completed Montana wolf trapper orientation. Wolf traps

must be removed within 24 hours of validating a wolf license on an individual trapper's last legally harvested wolf. A trapper must immediately dispatch and validate the wolf license for the first wolf captured while in possession of an unused and valid wolf license. If a wolf trapper incidentally catches a wolf beyond the legal limit and the wolf is uninjured the trapper must contact FWP within 12 hours to potentially have the wolf fitted with a radio collar and released to assist FWP in management efforts. Depending upon circumstances that may include history of livestock depredations in the area and other radio collars already in place, FWP may prescribe these wolves be lethally removed. All incidentally captured wolves that are injured must be dispatched by the trapper immediately. All incidentally captured wolves that are dispatched must be reported within 24 hours with the skull and pelt presented to FWP within 10 days. It is unlawful for any person to retain possession of an incidentally taken wolf as per Montana law.

Disturbing Traps or Trapped Animals – It is unlawful to destroy, disturb or remove any trap or trapped wildlife belonging to a trapper without permission of the owner of the trap per Montana law.

Procedures to Follow Upon Harvesting a Wolf

- Immediately after killing a wolf, a hunter or trapper must cut out the proper month and date of the kill from the appropriate license and attach it to the hide in a secure and visible manner. This is “validating” the license. All legally taken wolves must have a validated license affixed in this manner.
- To properly validate a license, locate the appropriate month and date the animal was killed and completely cut away (notch out) the month and the first and second digits of the date designations. Removing more than one month or one date designation invalidates the license.
- Evidence of sex must remain naturally intact on the hide.
- A hunter or trapper must personally report any and all wolf kills within 24 hours by calling the Wolf Reporting Number at 1-877-FWP-WILD or 1-877-397-9453 so that FWP can monitor harvest levels. This includes incidental captures that are dispatched. Hunters or trappers are required to provide: name, telephone number, ALS number, species, date of harvest, WMU, deer/elk HD, specific location (legal description), and sex when reporting a wolf harvest. When reporting a wolf harvest, it is unlawful to subscribe to or make any statement that is materially false.
- Upon discovering a wolf in a trap they have set, trappers are required to immediately dispatch any wolf that will not be released.
- A trapper or hunter is required to personally present the hide and skull of an incidentally trapped wolf and any legally harvest wolf for which they wish to retain possession of the skull and/or hide to a designated FWP employee within ten (10) days after harvest.

A hunter or trapper that legally harvests a wolf and wishes to retain possession of the hide and skull or incidentally captures a wolf that must be dispatched is required to personally present the hide and skull to a designated FWP employee within ten (10) days after harvest for the purpose of:

- Inspection and registration of kill to include harvest location and other details,
- Verify evidence of sex,
- Tagging the hide. The hide tag must thereafter remain attached to the hide until tanned or after export.
- Any hide and skull not presented or registered to FWP personnel within ten (10) days of harvest are subject to confiscation.
- It is unlawful for anyone to possess, ship, transport, sell or purchase any wolf, or part thereof, unless the animal has been tagged as prescribed.

A hunter or trapper that legally harvests a wolf and does not wish to retain possession of the hide and skull if allowed by statute is required to personally present the above harvest information to a designated FWP employee within ten (10) days after harvest. Retrieval of wolf parts must be consistent with relevant statute.

FWP will rigorously track wolf harvest through the mandatory harvest reporting system and provide updates to the FWP Commission. Under this proposal, the Commission would authorize FWP to initiate closures in any geographic area at any time if FWP deems harvest excessive in light of species biology and management objectives.

Some elements of the previous wolf season structure assured safety nets were incorporated so that regulated public hunting would not jeopardize wolf population long term viability. The proposed 2012 season structure retains many fundamental features from earlier season structures listed below.

1. Mandatory reporting of successful harvest within 24 hours (formerly 12 hours) so FWP can closely monitor hunter success and harvest levels while addressing backcountry logistics.
2. Harvest monitoring by WMU (includes deer/elk HD within those WMUs).
3. The Commission would authorize FWP to initiate season closures at any time. Closures would be implemented if FWP deems harvest levels excessive in any area.
4. Mandatory pelt/skull inspection within 10 days.
5. Definite season-ending closure date.
6. Baits, scents and dogs may not be used to hunt wolves. Electronic calls may not be used unless authorized by legislation.
7. Adopt season structure annually to better adapt and respond. This proposed season structure is for the 2012 wolf season. Any proposed season for 2013 will be developed, proposed, publicly reviewed and adopted after the 2012 season has concluded.

Other elements proposed include:

1. A hunting season beginning with the start of the general archery season and running through February 28, 2013.
2. The trapping season would run from December 15 through February 28 in all WMU's.
3. The wolf archery season would be concurrent with the elk archery season in each WMU or subunit (September 1 – October 14 in most areas).
4. The wolf rifle season would include the general rifle season in each WMU (October 20 – November 25 in most areas). The wolf rifle season would also include the September 15 start for rifle seasons in backcountry areas of WMUs 150, 280 and 316 and would include the week between the archery and rifle season (October 15 – October 19). The rifle season would close in all WMU's not later than February 28, 2013.
5. Licenses proposed to remain over-the-counter general sale to residents and nonresidents.
6. Any licensed hunter or trapper may take only one wolf in this proposed hunting season unless modified via legislation. If allowed by adjusted legislation, a licensed hunter or trapper could take up to three wolves in any combination of hunting or trapping.

All other season elements not specifically noted are proposed to be unchanged from 2011.

2012 Nongame Check-off Work Plan - Proposed

FWP is proposing the following work in FY13 with this anticipated funding:

\$15,000 - Prioritize habitat for conservation including 1) identifying the most critical habitat needs for nongame, threatened or endangered species, 2) identifying and monitoring threats to these critical habitats.

\$15,000 - Inventory, monitoring and conservation work on species of concern including bald eagles, common loons, bats, and amphibians.

\$5,000 - Competitive student stipend for nongame research.

2012 House Bill 454 Hunting Access Agreement – Proposed

The Swanz Hunting Access Agreement specifically states that in return for allowing access to elk hunters, Mr. Swanz, or a family member, would receive one 411-21 either-sex permit. In turn, FWP would issue four additional 411-21 permits from the already randomized list of unsuccessful applicants for that license permit type (LPT). Successful applicants could only hunt on the Swanz deeded property. This agreement was first used in 2002 and has been reapplied annually since then based upon continued positive post-hunt evaluations. The proposed agreement for 2012 represents no change from the 2011 agreement.

2012 Fall Upland Game Bird Quotas and Limits - Proposed

Reflecting the typically static nature of upland bird bag and possession limits as supported by biology and management history, all upland game bird bag, possession limits and permit quotas are proposed unchanged from 2011 or as otherwise finalized during season structure changes in February 2012. This includes fall turkey permits.

2012 Antlerless Elk Harvest Prescriptions for Archery Elk Permit Areas - Proposed

BREAKS

HD 410 – 300 antlerless elk

HD 417 – 85 antlerless elk

HDs 620/621/622 – 400 antlerless elk combined

HD 700 – 205 antlerless elk

OUTSIDE BREAKS

HDs 401/403 – 50 antlerless elk combined

HD 450 – 50 antlerless elk

HDs 411/511/530 – 375 antlerless elk combined

HD 412 – 150 antlerless elk

HD 426 – 25 antlerless elk

HD 447 – 300 antlerless elk

HDs 500/570 – 45 antlerless elk combined

HDs 502/510 (west of Hwy 310) – 15 antlerless elk combined

HD 520 (south and east of West Fork of Rock Crk) - 35 antlerless elk

HD 575 – 25 antlerless elk (east of Stillwater River), 80 antlerless elk (west of Stillwater River

HD 580 (south of Sweetgrass Creek) – 110 antlerless elk

HD 590 and portion of HD 701 north of the Yellowstone River, south of Hwy 12 and west of Sumatra-Myers Rd. – 225 antlerless elk (Bull Mtns), 45 antlerless elk (Pine Ridge)

HD 702 – 50 antlerless elk

HD 704 -- 115 antlerless elk

HD 705 – 45 antlerless elk

For further clarification, you may call the Wildlife Bureau office at 406-444-2612 or attend one of the public informational meetings listed below.

Public Informational Meetings

May 22, 7 – 9 PM, Holiday Inn Missoula Downtown at the Park, Missoula
May 22, 7 – 9 PM, Holiday Inn, Bozeman
May 22, 7 – 9 PM, FWP R4 Conf Room, Great Falls
May 22, 7 – 9 PM, FWP R5 Conf Room, Billings
June 13, 7 - 9 PM, Flathead Valley Community College, Kalispell

COMMENT PERIOD DEADLINES

The deadline for public comment on the proposed 2012 Wolf Season, Quotas and Boundaries is 5:00 PM Monday, June 25, 2012. Final adoption on these items will be made at the July 12, 2012 FWP Commission meeting.

The deadline for public comment on the proposed 2012 Nongame Check-off Work Plan, House Bill 454 Hunting Access Agreement, Fall Upland Game Bird Quotas & Limits and Antlerless Elk Harvest Prescriptions for Archery Elk Permit Areas is 5:00 PM Monday, June 18, 2012. Final adoption on these items will be made at the July 12, 2012 FWP Commission meeting.

TO MAKE COMMENT

For further clarification, you may call the Wildlife Bureau office at 406-444-2612. To submit comments electronically, this letter with the imbedded links below can be found under “Opportunity for Public Comment” on the Hunting home page at the fwp.mt.gov website. Written comments can be sent to: FWP – Wildlife Bureau, Attn: Public Comment, POB 200701, Helena MT 59620-0701. **Please note different comment deadlines.**

Imbedded Links to Submit Public Comment

2012 Wolf Season, Quotas and Boundaries – Proposed (*The deadline for public comment on this item is 5:00 PM Monday, June 25, 2012.*)

http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/publicComments/2012_13proposedWolfHunt.html

2012 Nongame Check-off Work Plan - Proposed (*The deadline for public comment on this item is 5:00 PM Monday, June 18, 2012.*)

<http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/publicComments/2012proposedNongameCheckoffWorkPlan.html>

2012 House Bill 454 Hunting Access Agreement – Proposed (*The deadline for public comment on this item is 5:00 PM Monday, June 18, 2012.*)

<http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/publicComments/2012proposedHB454huntingAccessAgreement.html>

2012 Fall Upland Game Bird Quotas and Limits – Proposed (*The deadline for public comment on this item is 5:00 PM Monday, June 18, 2012.*)

<http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/publicComments/2012proposedFallUGBquotasAndLimits.html>

2012 Antlerless Elk Harvest Prescriptions for Archery Elk Permit Areas – Proposed (*The deadline for public comment on this item is 5:00 PM Monday, June 18, 2012.*)

<http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/publicComments/proposedHarvestPrescriptionsArcheryElkBundled.html>