

Activity and Proposed Timeline to Address Trapping Setbacks

In June 2020, the department could report little progress regarding prior direction provided by the commission at the October 2019 meeting. In October 2019, the commission directed the department to work with public stakeholders to expand the list of specific roads and trails in each region that require a setback for trapping. Working with public stakeholders and land management agencies was initially planned for late winter to accommodate workload scheduling. The outreach efforts were hampered by the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and limitations on gathering groups of people. This included challenges to working with federal land managers who hold important knowledge on amount and location of various recreational use on public lands they manage

The department proposed addressing public engagement through the next year, with the intent of providing the commission with a more thoroughly evaluated proposal in June 2021. The commission considered this option, but also asked legal counsel if it would be possible to take address setbacks at the August commission meeting because certain segments of the public had provided some ideas for the commission to consider. Because the commission has the ability to consider establishing additional setbacks for trapping in August, the department initiated a short-term gathering of information for the August 13 commission meeting; the department also developed a longer-term plan to address the topic more fully over the coming year.

The department assembled public comment on the topic of setbacks including those areas and roads and trails where some members of the public indicated they would like to see certain regulations in place. The department made maps to display exactly where the requests were being made and distributed these to each department regional staff where trails occurred. These maps and rapid evaluations were limited only to those received by July 13, 2020. By July 13, the only specific requests to department made through public comment were from the Montana Backcountry Alliance (MBA). These were mapped and provided to regional staff who subsequently contacted other stakeholders to obtain feedback on the suggestions. These requests were limited to Regions 1, 2, and 3.

The MBA requests were received as constructive suggestions from the perspective of one user group. Trapping stakeholders indicated that they might agree with some of the suggested setback areas, but they did not have enough time to evaluate the proposal among others. Trapping stakeholder also indicated that they were strongly resistant to some suggested setbacks and area closures. Some MBA area closure requests were not supported by federal land managers. Many of suggestions from MBA were listed as "no trapping" on a trail or road, but the size and dimensions of some setbacks were unclear. A limited number of alternative suggestions for consideration arrived after July 13, and these have not been evaluated. Department staff strongly believe that trapping setback related decisions would benefit from further and extensive discussion.

Public comments regarding setbacks came in through July 29. The most common comment was in opposition to changing setbacks, although others objected to addressing setbacks when the department did not explicitly note the topic on the agenda. A moderate number of comments were in favor considering some areas for discussion among user groups. Comments in opposition to trapping in general were present in a moderate number. Several comments supported MBA's proposed changes or safety zones. A few commenters mentioned the need for rules governing dogs

on public lands or leash laws. Two additional groups provided suggested areas near Bozeman or Missoula for consideration for closure or extended setbacks.

Given the widely divergent feedback obtained while evaluating the MBA proposed areas and through public comment on the topic, the department did not propose additional setbacks for the commission's consideration at the August meeting. The department believes that this topic would be better handled with more time and public input than that which will have occurred by the August commission meeting.

Proposed Schedule for Formulating Recommended Setbacks for June 2021

Following is a proposed schedule for addressing setbacks in a more thorough fashion so that the department may develop a sound proposal for commission consideration:

- by July 20, 2020 – Reach out to federal and state land managers to begin arranging meetings to discuss areas where winter recreational use with dogs accompanying people is concentrated, common, or virtually absent.
- by Oct. 15, 2020 – Meet with federal and state land managers, trappers, and winter recreational use groups to get their input and begin drafting large blocks of area where different types of setbacks (normal, expanded, no setbacks, no trapping) would be appropriate.
- by Jan. 15, 2021 – Meet internally by Region to compile and produce a draft of a Regional area setbacks map.
- by Feb. 1, 2021 – Schedule and announce meetings to gather public input on the draft regional map.
- by March 1, 2021 – Hold public meetings.
- by April 1, 2021 – Incorporate public feedback into a proposal for the Commission.
- May 2021 – Materials due for June Commission meeting.
- June 2021 – Furbearer Commission Meeting.

Regional staff have begun reaching out to federal and state land management agencies. Progress varies by area. In some cases, initial interactions occurred over the phone and USFS personnel are gathering input internally for a future meeting or discussion. In other cases, USFS indicated an interest in incorporating departmental regulations into recreational management plans. Future meetings were arranged in other cases, and return calls are being waited on in still other cases. Regional staff are examining law enforcement data to better identify areas of historical conflict.