



# MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

**Meeting Date:** December 14, 2021

**Agenda Item:** 2022-2023 Hunting Season Dates

**Action Needed:** Proposed      **Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 Minutes

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**Background:** Season dates are currently adopted biennially for all game and managed species. This happens every other winter with adoptions for public comment in December and final adoptions in February. These dates are a combination of fixed dates (e.g., mountain grouse season Sept. 1 opener) and “formula” dates (e.g., general deer and elk is defined by counting backwards five weeks from Thanksgiving Sunday). For the “formula” dates, there is an annual change due to the progression of the calendar from one year to the next. That means at least one day’s difference and, periodically, nearly a full week. In some cases, these annual movements can place season dates in conflict with public expectations or traditions. Some specific areas have exceptions to these general statewide dates by species. Those exceptions are also proposed again for 2022 and 2023 or are proposed to be different within individual species-specific proposals.

There are no proposed changes from 2021 in statewide date definitions, and there are no proposed changes to the December adoption addressing these dates.

**Alternatives and Analysis:** Season dates may be adopted as proposed, with adjustments, with additions, with deletions, or no change from 2021 (status quo). Because of warmer weather trends, there has been some advocacy to shift the five-week general elk and deer seasons at least one week later. That is shown on the Alternative season dates list, and would result in a two-week “dead week” between the archery-only and general deer/elk seasons, with the exception of the youth hunt days, which are tied to the MEA days. Heritage muzzleloader season would also be shifted a week later because it is tied statutorily to the end of the general big game season. The shift in the general season will result in overlap with the beginning of the mountain lion hound season, which currently starts on Dec. 1, after the end of the general big game season. There has also been a public request that the commission consider a later end date to pheasant season to Jan. 31 (currently ends on Jan. 1).

**Public Involvement Process & Results:** Public comment will be accepted through Jan. 14, 2022, and forwarded to commissioners and FWP staff for their consideration. As part of scoping efforts in September, FWP did ask the question: *Should elk and/or deer seasons begin earlier, later, run longer or shorter, or have more time between archery and rifle seasons?* Very few responded to that question, and comment was mixed. A theme that emerged was concern about the general deer season overlapping the mule deer rut. Shifting the general deer season a week later would put the rut more into the middle of the season instead of the end.

**Proposed Motion:** I move that the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt as final the 2022 and 2023 hunting seasons dates as proposed by FWP, excepting those dates addressed in other species-specific proposals.