



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: October 28, 2021

Agenda Item: 2021 Deer and Elk Muzzleloader Heritage Season Clarification

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Minutes

Background: During the 2021 Legislative Session, House Bill 242 was adopted and signed into law that establishes a nine-day muzzleloader heritage season for deer and elk that begins on the second Saturday following the end of the regular season. To address this new statute, the commission must consider options to establish a muzzleloader heritage season for the upcoming fall season (2021). The department prepared and recommended an approach to the commission in its August 20, 2021 meeting that any unused license-permit valid during the general season for hunting deer and elk in a specific hunting district would be valid during the muzzleloader heritage season in accordance with the authorizations and restrictions associated with that license-permit. However, the motion/action by the commission did not match the coversheet that allowed for any license/permit valid during the season to be used during the muzzleloader heritage season. The department today seeks clarification of the commission's action.

For clarification, the department is recommending that any unused license-permit valid on the last day of the general season (i.e., November 28, 2021) would be valid during the December 11–19, 2021 muzzleloader heritage season. In several hunting districts (HDs), some species (e.g., either sex white-tailed deer in HD 100) have a short season and may not biologically support greater harvest (other species may be taken in muzzleloader heritage season within that HD) or an unlimited general season is followed by a permitted season (e.g., HDs 400, 401, 403, and 406) and increased harvest by allowing participation from the unlimited general season hunters may influence age structure of the mule deer population. In some elk hunts, open areas expand between early and late seasons (e.g., HD 212).

Public Involvement Process and Results: The department received just over 150 comments on the original muzzleloader heritage season proposal. About 80 comments supported the proposed seasons, another 40 comments expressed dislike for the addition, and about 30 comments suggested modifications (some of which could not be implemented due to statutory limitations).

Alternatives and Analysis: This muzzleloader heritage season is required by statute. After reviewing public comments and degree of support again, the department recommends the licenses valid on the last day of general season be used for the muzzleloader heritage season. Statute requires the use of hunter orange during any firearm season, and hunters must wear hunter orange during this muzzleloader heritage season.

Agency Rationale and Recommendation: The department recommends the commission adopt the proposed muzzleloader heritage hunting license clarification.

Proposed Motion:

I move that the commission vote to adopt deer and elk muzzleloader heritage seasons for 2021 with the licenses/permits valid on the last day of the general season as presented in the appended draft muzzleloader heritage regulations.