



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: February 4, 2022

Agenda Item: 2022–2023 Upland Game Bird, Turkey, and Migratory Bird Hunting Regulations, Season Structures, and Hunting District Boundaries

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 15 Minutes

Background: Season structures and hunting district boundaries are adopted biennially by the commission for public comment in December with final adoption in February for most game species. The department is proposing a few changes that will influence turkey hunting season structure and hunting district boundaries. The proposed changes to turkey seasons (Region 4 spring season liberalization and fall closure) are detailed in the attached turkey hunting master lists, and hunting boundary changes are referenced in individual proposals. The Commission adopted a proposal for public comment to extend the pheasant, sharp-tail grouse, partridge, and forest grouse seasons to Jan. 31, as well as a proposal to allow air rifles during the fall turkey and forest grouse seasons. No other changes were proposed for upland game bird seasons or season structure, and only the Spring Light Goose Conservation Order is being proposed as a change to migratory bird seasons. All other regulations and descriptions of boundaries will remain unchanged unless addressed by the commission.

Public Involvement Process and Results: Public comment was accepted through Jan. 21, 2022. Any adjustments based on final public comment will be made at the Feb. 4 Commission meeting. Based on public comment, the department is recommending no changes to the migratory bird regulations adopted in December. Generally, there was not support for extending upland game bird seasons. Common public concerns included potential energetic impacts from disturbing birds in the cold of winter, concerns by landowners who are done with hunters, and concern by trappers about game bird dogs getting caught in traps. Support for the later ending date was based on additional opportunity, but was limited. There was minimal comment on use of air rifles for hunting turkeys or forest grouse.

Alternatives and Analysis: The department recommends the migratory bird regulations proposal be adopted as proposed, with no changes to the December adoption. That includes the addition of the Spring Conservation Order hunt in the Central Flyway. The extended season dates for pheasants, partridge, sharp-tail grouse and forest grouse was not well supported by hunters or landowners. The proposal to allow air rifles for fall turkey and forest grouse is justified based on safety reasons. No other changes are proposed for the upland game bird regulations.

Agency Recommendation and Rationale: The department recommends the commission approve the proposed 2022 and 2023 migratory bird hunting regulations and district boundaries as presented by the department and as outlined in the attached master lists. The department recommends the commission adopt the 2022 and 2023 upland game bird regulations and turkey regulations to include the use of a .177 caliber air rifle shooting a pellet at least 1250 feet per second as specified by the manufacturer or a .22 caliber air rifle shooting a pellet at least 950 feet per second as specified by the manufacturer for fall turkey and mountain grouse. The department recommends the commission NOT adopt the Jan. 31 season ending date for pheasant, partridge, sharp-tail grouse, and forest grouse. Therefore, season dates would remain unchanged. Any other aspect unchanged from 2021 seasons will remain in effect for 2022 and 2023, except where affected by routine calendar rotations.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission vote to adopt: 1) Changes identified in the Upland Game Bird, Turkey, and Migratory Game Bird Master List and the Turkey Boundary Changes Master List as presented by the department, including authorizing the use of a .177 caliber air rifle shooting a pellet at least 1250 feet per second as specified by the manufacturer or a .22 caliber air rifle shooting a pellet at least 950 feet per second as specified by the manufacturer during Fall turkey and mountain grouse seasons; and 2) All other upland game bird, turkey, and migratory game bird regulations contained in the 2020–2021 booklet to be adopted for the 2022 and 2023 upland game bird, turkey, and migratory game bird hunting seasons and hunting districts.