



# MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

**Meeting Date:** Aug. 17, 2023

**Agenda Item:** Fall 2023–Winter 2024 Furbearer and Wolf Trapping and Hunting Seasons and Quotas

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 60 Minutes

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**Background:** Last year, the department combined the furbearer and wolf hunting and trapping regulations in a single published document. Furbearer and wolf regulations are revisited annually with the Fish and Wildlife Commission to ensure the most recent data are available for consideration.

Part of the department's recommendation that would remain unchanged from last year:

- A total quota of 100 wolves in increments of 25 in accordance with MCA 87-1-901 section 3(c), commonly known as SB 200, for the total number of wolves that may be taken by a landowner or the landowner's agent on the landowner's property at any time without the purchase of a Class E-1 or Class E-2 wolf license when the wolf is a potential threat to human safety, livestock, or dogs.
- Maintaining the floating start date for wolf trapping within regions or portions of regions in occupied grizzly bear habitat. This floating start may begin the Monday after Thanksgiving (Nov. 27, 2023), or any day thereafter as determined by the department based upon a real time reading of conditions. If the department does not select a date prior to Dec. 31, 2023, then the season will open on Dec. 31 and close on March 15. However, the area in which this floating start date applies will change from last year and is described below.

Further, a non-target capture of one lynx or one grizzly bear shall initiate a commission review with potential for rapid in-season adjustments to trapping regulations. The commission shall be similarly re-engaged for any additional non-target capture of lynx or grizzly bear.

**Public Involvement Process and Results:** Department staff have attended meetings about trapping and hunting of furbearers and wolves, which include regional Montana Trappers Association meetings. Public comment will be solicited for a four-week period starting June 23. Public comments will be posted online and provided to commissioners at least two weeks prior to the August commission meeting.

**Alternatives and Analysis:** Furbearer and wolf harvest is analyzed based on population and harvest monitoring data collected by the department. Population and occupancy models assist the department in assessing specific species and populations.

Alternative A: The commission may approve the fall 2023–winter 2024 furbearer and wolf trapping and hunting seasons and quotas as presented by the department.

Alternative B: The commission may choose to amend the proposal presented by the department and adopt the amended version.

**Agency Rationale and Recommendation:** The department recommends the commission adopt the furbearer and wolf trapping and hunting regulations as presented.

- Recommend renaming Trapping Districts, to be called Regions. Trapping Districts correspond with regional boundaries and legal descriptions will remain the same. This will limit confusion about the applicability of quotas for hunters pursuing bobcats and wolves.
- The statewide wolf population is being reduced as directed by the legislature. To facilitate a measured reduction over time, quotas are recommended at the average harvest levels from the last five years, which is 289 wolves statewide distributed as follows:
  - Region 1 – 120 wolves,
  - Region 2 – 91 wolves,
  - Region 3 – 52 wolves,
  - Region 4 – 15 wolves,
  - Regions 5 through 7 – 5 wolves,
  - Wolf Management Unit 313 – 6 wolves.
- The floating start date would apply to an area described as the Occupied Grizzly Bear Range which is based on a modeled occupancy based on known locations and exclusions of mathematical outliers. The Occupied Grizzly Bear Range is delineated on the attached map and will be available for viewing through the FWP Hunt Planner Mapping application for field use.
- Harvest data characteristics for bobcat indicate recruitment was limited in recent years in Regions 5 and 6. In response, reductions in harvest are recommended.
  - Recommend reducing the quota for bobcat within Region 5 from 100 to 50.
  - Recommend reducing the quota for bobcat within Region 6 from 50 to 25.
- Recommend amending the closed area for marten in response to continued efforts to introduce these furbearers into formerly occupied habitat.
  - Marten trapping is closed in ~~Wheatland and Judith Basin counties and those portions of Meagher and Cascade counties that are east of the Smith River or east of Highway 89 as it runs south from White Sulphur Springs~~ that portion of Montana north of Interstate 90 and east of Interstate 15.

**Proposed Motion:** I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt the fall 2023–winter 2024 furbearer and wolf trapping and hunting seasons and quotas as presented by the department, with all other aspects regarding prior seasons and regulations included, except for those influenced by routine calendar rotations.