



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

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Meeting Date: February 22, 2023

Agenda Item: WMA Public Use Rules

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background: The commission has adopted public use rules biennially, and more recently, annually for FWP lands specifically acquired for the purpose of providing effective fish and wildlife habitat. Those department lands comprise Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), Wildlife Habitat Protection Areas, and Fisheries Conservation Areas. Rules adopted on a regular schedule are referred to as “seasonal rules” and in this proposal would serve as the public use rules for calendar year 2023. The purpose of these rules is to manage public uses while protecting fish and wildlife habitats. FWP is also currently working on public use Administrative Rules (12.8.201-12.8.219 ARM), revising and combining into one public use rule set for all types of department lands. The revised ARM rules are scheduled to be completed by fall 2023 for 2024 implementation.

Public Involvement Process & Results: Past iterations of the proposed seasonal rules have been posted for public review each time prior to commission adoption, dating back to 2012 when originally adopted. Public comment will be solicited for a four-week period starting Dec. 21, 2022. Public comments will be posted online and provided to commissioners at least two weeks prior to the February commission meeting.

Analysis & Alternatives: The proposed seasonal rules comprise 25 rules that include winter range seasonal closures, allowances for camping, off-road vehicle use, firewood collection, and other public use activities.

Alternative A: The commission may adopt the seasonal public use rules as proposed.

Alternative B: The commission could choose to not approve the proposed rules or the commission could make adjustments to individual rules within the rule set. If the proposed rules were not approved, then those restrictions would not be implemented. This would likely lead to damage to the WMAs and the resources they are intended to conserve.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: The department recommends adoption of the seasonal rules as proposed. These rules have been effective in managing public uses in a manner that protects fish and wildlife habitats. A more thorough and refined agency-wide set of public use rules will be proposed at a later date through the ARM process.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the WMA public use rules for the 2023 calendar year as proposed.