



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION FWP PROPOSAL & INFORMATION SHEET

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Meeting Date: August 19, 2026

Agenda Item: Roosters for Recruitment Pheasant Releases

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background: House Bill (HB) 637 authorized Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to spend up to \$1 million each fiscal year for a pheasant release program with the intention of recruiting and retaining hunters. FWP conducted an environmental assessment (EA) of potential impacts of the program and issued a decision notice in support of the pheasant release program in 2022. Section 87-5-714, MCA, requires the commission approve transplants of pheasants when they are moved from one part of the state to another. The commission approved releasing pheasants on state-owned lands with suitable pheasant habitat for recruitment and retention efforts for 2022-2026.

FWP released 5,730 pheasants in 2022, 10,523 in 2023, 13,964 in 2024, and 9,853 in 2025. The limiting factor to releasing a greater number of pheasants is suitable habitat on state land, not hatching and raising pheasants. To mitigate this, FWP has revised the current EA to include federal and private land for releases. These additional lands must contain suitable habitat and public access. Additional work to secure agreements with federal partners and private landowners will need to occur prior to releases on federal or private lands.

Montana Correctional Enterprises (MCE) is implementing the pheasant-raising program for FWP, including biosecurity protocols that go above and beyond what is required to keep their flock healthy. FWP is mindful of the current spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) and, along with MCE, will follow any additional guidance the Department of Livestock deems necessary.

Public Involvement Process & Results: The revised EA will be released for public comment by July 1 and allow for a 30-day opportunity for public review and comment. FWP will consider all comments, and a Decision Notice will be issued by Aug. 7.

Alternatives & Analysis (may be adjusted after issuance of a Decision Notice): The commission may choose:

Alternative A: The commission approves pheasant releases on state, federal, and private lands that contain suitable habitat for 2026-2031.

Alternative B: The commission does not approve pheasant releases on state, federal, and private lands that contain suitable habitat through fall 2031. Releases only on state land will occur in 2026 from the commission's 2022 decision. No birds will be released after fall 2026, and MCE will maintain a surplus of pheasants without the option of release.

Alternative C: The commission could choose to release pheasants on lands of specific landownership (i.e., state, federal, private) and for a different duration than the five years suggested in Alternative A.

Proposed Motion: Will be determined after issuance of a Decision Notice.