MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION
FWP PROPOSAL AND INFORMATION SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: December 10, 2026

Agenda Item: Defining management subunits for use during epizootic hemorrhagic disease outbreaks

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Minutes

Background: Epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) is a seasonal viral illness that primarily affects white-tailed deer, although pronghorn and mule deer may be affected as well. It is caused by the orbivirus and is highly prevalent in the United States, driving noticeable localized wildlife die-offs during late summer and early autumn. The virus is primarily spread through the bites of *Culicoides* midges, which are common during warm and wet periods, and outbreaks frequently end following the first hard frost of the year.

EHD outbreaks do not occur every year, and they often vary locally in severity. When they do occur, hunt management responses may be prudent to reduce added mortality on local wildlife populations and manage hunter expectations in areas with reduced abundance. Within much of Montana, deer, elk, and antelope hunting districts are small enough in size to be able to make suitable adjustments with clarity. Yet in eastern Montana, many hunting districts are larger in size. Consequently, the department is recommending the establishment of several EHD subunits (descriptions attached) that are clearly defined and in which management prescriptions, quotas, and hunting seasons may be adjusted when necessary. The department is not considering any changes at this time, but adopting the boundaries is likely to facilitate rapid implementation of changes when necessary.

The Commission is authorized to establish the hunting, fishing, and trapping rules of the department, including as related to hunting districts and subunits. MCA § 87-1-301.

Public Involvement Process and Results: Public comment will be solicited for a four-week period beginning in October. Public comments will be posted online and provided to commissioners at least two weeks prior to the December commission meeting.

Alternatives and Analysis: Approval of the EHD management subunits will facilitate recommendations to amend prescriptions, quotas, and hunting seasons should an EHD outbreak be detected in eastern Montana at some point in the future.
Alternative A: The commission may choose to approve the EHD management subunits as presented.
Alternative B: The commission may choose to amend or not approve the EHD management subunits.

Agency Recommendation and Rationale: The department recommends the commission approve the EHD management subunits.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission to approve the EHD management subunits as presented by the department.