



# MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

**Meeting Date:** August 20, 2021

**Agenda Item:** Proposed Extension of Late Elk Shoulder Season

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 Minutes

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**Background:** The commission adopted "Final Elk Season Guidelines - Flexible season structure with performance-based shoulder seasons" on Oct. 8, 2015. The stated intent was to supplement existing antlerless elk harvest, not replace or reduce harvest during existing general archery or firearm seasons. Elk shoulder seasons provide the ability to harvest more antlerless elk, although the distribution of the harvest may not be consistent temporally.

Several hunting districts (HDs) currently remain above objective even with late shoulder seasons. The commission may consider extending shoulder seasons in HDs that have late seasons that currently end before Feb. 15, 2022, to increase antlerless harvest or alter elk distributions. Any extension could apply to all license-permit types valid in those HDs. Currently, those elk HDs include:

262, 290, 298, 390, 391, 393, 411, 417, 502, 510, 511, 520, 530, 540, 560, 575, 580, and 590.

HD 314 was added to the units under consideration for a shoulder season ending on Feb. 15.

**Public Involvement Process and Results:** Public comment on extending shoulder season dates in 18 hunting districts and adding a shoulder season in HD 314 was accepted from June 25 through July 30, 2021. The department received 256 comments about extending shoulder season, and the vast majority opposed extending shoulder seasons. The department later sought comment on expanding shoulder seasons in those 19 hunting districts to include public lands. Between July 16 and July 30, FWP received 135 comments regarding the inclusion of public lands in late shoulder seasons, and 127 opposed that option. Those comments, along with internal comments, highlighted the complexities associated with adding this additional component, such as general season licenses and permits being valid only on private lands.

**Alternatives and Analysis:** A number of these elk shoulder seasons have had earlier ending dates because of public input from landowners and hunters. Although there is some opposition to extending season dates, longer seasons consistently result in increased harvest of elk. Areas open to hunting in the late shoulder season could be adjusted to include those areas open during standard seasons for the various hunting districts, although some U.S. Forest Service lands and Wildlife Management Areas that provide winter range should not be included. In some areas, public land hunting may push elk back onto private lands.

**Agency Rationale and Recommendation:** The department supports the addition of a late shoulder season in HD 314, and adoption of the proposed late season end date extension for fall 2021–winter 2022 in the other 18 hunting districts. Because of the complexities of expanding shoulder seasons to

public lands, the department recommends not including it in adjustments to the 2021 shoulder season structure but considering it later as part of the biennial season setting process.

**Proposed Motion:**

I move the commission vote to approve the addition of a shoulder season in HD 314 (LPT 314-00) and extend the late season to Feb. 15, 2022, for all relevant license-permit types for antlerless elk shoulder seasons in Hunting Districts 262, 290, 298, 314, 390, 391, 393, 411, 417, 502, 510, 511, 520, 530, 540, 560, 575, 580, and 590.