



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: August 20, 2021

Agenda Item: Pheasant Releases

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background: FWP has administered a pheasant release program since 1987, whereby landowners or pheasant producers raise and release pheasants for population enhancement and expanded public hunting opportunity. Private landowners who release birds on their land receive cost reimbursement through the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program (UGBEP). For fall 2021, the department is proposing to continue the purchase and release of pen-reared pheasants on private lands for population enhancement purposes. New in 2021, the department is also proposing pheasant releases on state wildlife management areas for hunter recruitment purposes. This combination of proposed pheasant releases is intended to expand hunting opportunity on private lands and serve as a young hunter recruitment tool during the youth weekend pheasant hunting season on wildlife management areas. MCA 87-5-714 requires the commission approve transplants of pheasants when they are moved from one part of the state to another.

Public Involvement Process and Results: The Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program Citizen Advisory Council was informed of the proposal during their March 2021 meeting. Upon commission endorsement, the department sought public input through July 26, 2021. A total of 71 comments were received, of which 18 commented against both forms of pheasant release (UGBEP and youth recruitment); 13 commented against UGBEP pheasant releases but were silent on youth recruitment releases; 10 commented against youth recruitment releases but were silent on UGBEP releases; one commented in favor of youth recruitment releases and against UGBEP releases; 26 commented in favor of one or both types of releases; and three offered no position for or against. Negative comments toward the proposal included concerns about cost and low survival rates of pen-raised pheasants; some suggested pheasant releases are a poor use of funds; some encouraged use of the limited resources on habitat projects that have longer lasting benefits; some expressed general concerns about using pheasants as a recruiting tool because of the skill required to harvest a pheasant; one questioned whether hunting pen-raised pheasants is actually fair-chase hunting; one expressed concern about the potential for disease transmission; and one expressed a dislike for hunting pen-raised pheasants in place of wild birds.

Alternatives and Analysis: The intent of this proposal is to expand pheasant hunting opportunity and to encourage young hunter participation. FWP has been mandated by the legislature to proceed with both types of pheasant release to help expand hunting opportunity and as part of FWP's hunter recruitment efforts.

Agency Recommendation and Rationale: The department recommends the commission approve the planned releases of pen-reared pheasants on private lands and state wildlife management areas as proposed by the department.

Proposed Motion:

I move the commission approve the department's planned pheasant releases on private lands and state wildlife management areas as presented.