



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

RECEIVED

JUN 12 2014

Wildlife Division
PO Box 200701
Helena MT 59620-0701
May 27, 2014

Ravalli County Commissioners

Dear Interested Person:

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Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is requesting public review and comment on the proposed 2014 wolf season, Senate Bill 200 annual wolf quota, 2014-2015 furbearer seasons/quotas, 2014 upland game bird quotas and limits including sage grouse (note specific options for sage grouse), nongame tax check-off work plan, House Bill 454 hunting access agreements, and the Avista Cooperative Management Area. Additional information is below including the deadline for public comment. A wolf stamp donation also identified at the May Commission meeting will be addressed in a separate rule making process currently being developed. That process will include separate public notice and opportunity for public comment.

2014 Wolf Season – Proposed

Proposed adjustments include reducing the closure period in WMUs 313 and 316 from 24 hours to 12 hours and reducing the quota in WMU 313 from 4 to 3. The shorter closure period will have the effect of closing the wolf harvest season at the end of the same day the closure notice is posted. Limited wolf trapping opportunities via drawing are also proposed for the Blackfoot-Clearwater, Fish Creek and Mount Haggin WMAs. All other season components not listed are proposed to be unchanged from 2013. 2013 wolf regulations may be viewed from the Hunting home page on the fwp.mt.gov website.

Senate Bill 200 Annual Wolf Quota – Proposed

There is a proposed statewide 100 wolf annual quota for wolves taken under the terms of Senate Bill 200. Senate Bill 200, passed by Montana’s 63rd Legislature, provides for landowners or their agents, without a wolf license, to take wolves that are a potential threat to human safety, livestock or domestic dogs. This quota and take is separate and in addition to any quota or general harvest associated with the wolf hunting and trapping season and in addition to any landowner take outside of the specific authority identified in Senate Bill 200.

2014-2015 Furbearer Seasons/Quotas – Proposed

Proposed adjustments include increasing the otter harvest quota in Trapping District 1 from 21 to 23 and in Trapping District 2 from 20 to 25, while retaining the per trapper bag limit at two otter. The Trapping District 5 bobcat quota is proposed to be reduced from 300 to 250.

Other proposed changes include expanding trapping opportunity to the Fish Creek WMA and adjusting the deadline to apply for WMA trapping opportunities from September 30 to September 15; clarifying an “open road” on public land in setback definitions as having any type of motorized use at any time of year; reducing the required reporting period for incidental capture of dogs from 48 to 24 hours; requiring trappers to be able to identify bobcat skulls with the corresponding pelts during pelt inspection; and for consistency adjusting the start time for chasing bobcats in areas where the lion season has closed from two hours before sunrise to the more standard ½ hour before sunrise.

All other season components not listed are proposed to be unchanged from 2013. 2013 furbearer regulations may be viewed from the Hunting home page on the fwp.mt.gov website.

2014 – 2015 Upland Game Bird Quotas and Limits including Sage Grouse – Proposed

Observed sage grouse population levels are greater than 45% below the statewide long term average. Montana's 2004 sage grouse management plan identifies a season closure in response to sustained low population levels. Proposed sage grouse options available for public comment include:

- no change from 2013;
- complete statewide closure;
- regional closures;
- shorter seasons and/or reduced bag and possession limits.

Other than proposed sage grouse options, all other upland game bird season components not listed are proposed to be unchanged from 2013. 2013 upland game bird regulations may be viewed from the Hunting home page on the fwp.mt.gov website.

Nongame Tax Check-off Work Plan – Proposed

Under the provisions of 87-5-122, MCA, "the FWP Commission shall review and annually approve the nongame wildlife program's projects recommended by the department for funding from the nongame wildlife account. The commission shall provide for public comment during the review and approval process." While final 2013 tax year donations are unknown at this time, the average received by FWP from the 2004-2012 tax years was \$27,000/year. (As of March 31, 2014, \$19,500 had been donated for tax year 2013, which is average for this time of year.) FWP is proposing the following work in Fiscal Year 2015 with this anticipated funding in addition to some balance in the fund from previous years:

\$30,000	Inventory, monitoring and conservation work on Montana Species of Concern and species in need of inventory as determined through a formal ranking process.
\$10,000	Prioritize habitat for conservation including: 1) identifying the most critical habitat needs for nongame, threatened or endangered species, 2) identifying and monitoring threats to these critical habitats.
\$5,000	Competitive student stipend for nongame research.
\$3,000	Contribution to ongoing Sylvatic Plague Vaccine research in Montana for black-footed ferret recovery.
\$2,000	Education and outreach efforts to promote nongame wildlife appreciation and conservation.

House Bill 454 Hunting Access Agreements – Proposed

Under the provisions of 87-2-513 MCA, FWP received the authority to issue either-sex or antlerless elk permits to landowners for management purposes. The landowner must offer free public elk hunting, meet the various conditions of the statute, and enter a contractual public elk hunting access agreement with FWP. For 2014 there are two proposed access agreements.

- The Swanz Hunting Access Agreement specifically states that in return for allowing access to elk hunters, Mr. Swanz, or a family member, would receive one 411-21 either-sex permit. In turn, FWP would issue four additional 411-21 permits from the already randomized list of unsuccessful applicants for that license permit type. Successful applicants could only hunt on the Swanz deeded property. This agreement was first used in 2002 and has been reapplied annually since then based upon continued positive post-hunt evaluations. The proposed agreement for 2014 represents no change from the 2013 agreement.
- FWP is proposing a new Hunting Access Agreement on the Gillett Ranch. The Gillett Ranch Hunting Access Agreement specifically states that in return for allowing access to elk hunters, Mr. Gillett, or a family member, would receive one 410-22 either-sex permit. In turn, FWP would issue four additional 410-22 permits from the already randomized list of unsuccessful applicants for that license permit type. Successful applicants could only hunt on the Gillett deeded property.

Avista Cooperative Management Area – Proposed

This proposal would establish for two years, through F&W Commission rule, a Cooperative Management Area on Avista Corporation property in Sanders County. These rules are currently covered under a special circumstances agreement through Block Management and have been in effect for about seven years. However, the Block Management program is a hunting access program and there is a need for a commission rule to ensure recreational use rules can be enforced during times when no hunting seasons are in effect. Avista does not accept any monetary payment through Block Management. In return, Avista asks FWP to enforce these regulations on their property. This is a recreational area heavily used by the public along the Clark Fork River near Thompson Falls. The Cooperative Management Agreement rules would provide for managed public access for camping, fishing, hunting, boating and other outdoor activities during parts of the year that fall outside of the general fall hunting season. Several other Avista properties would still remain in the Block Management program for hunting.

COMMENT PERIOD DEADLINE AND FINAL ADOPTION MEETINGS

The public comment period on the proposed 2014 Wolf Season, Senate Bill 200 Annual Wolf Quota, 2014-2015 Furbearer Seasons/Quotas, 2014-2015 Upland Game Bird Quotas and Limits including Sage Grouse, Nongame Tax Check-off Work Plan, House Bill 454 Hunting Access Agreements, and the Avista Cooperative Management Area will extend through 5:00 PM, Monday, June 23. Final adoption on will be made at the July 2014 Commission meeting.

TO MAKE COMMENT

For further clarification, you may call the Wildlife Bureau office at 406-444-2612. To submit comments electronically, this letter with the imbedded links below can be found under "Opportunity for Public Comment" on the Hunting home page at the fwp.mt.gov website. Written comments can be sent to: FWP – Wildlife Bureau, Attn: Public Comment, POB 200701, Helena MT 59620-0701.

2014 Wolf Season – Proposed

The deadline for public comment on this item is 5 p.m., Monday, June 23.

<http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/publicComments/2014/2014proposedWolfSeason.html>

Senate Bill 200 Annual Wolf Quota – Proposed

The deadline for public comment on this item is 5 p.m., Monday, June 23.

<http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/publicComments/2014/proposedSenateBill200AnnualWolfQuota.html>

2014-2015 Furbearer Seasons/Quotas - Proposed

The deadline for public comment on this item is 5 p.m., Monday, June 23.

http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/publicComments/2014/2014_2015furbearerSeasonsQuotas.html

2014-2015 Upland Game Bird Quotas and Limits including Sage Grouse – Proposed

The deadline for public comment on this item is 5 p.m., Monday, June 23.

http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/publicComments/2014/2014_2015proposedUplandGameBirdQuotasLimits.html

Nongame Tax Check-off Work Plan – Proposed

The deadline for public comment on this item is 5 p.m., Monday, June 23.

<http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/publicComments/proposedNongameTaxCheckOffWorkPlan.html>

House Bill 454 Hunting Access Agreements

The deadline for public comment on this item is 5 p.m., Monday, June 23.

<http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/publicComments/2014/houseBill454HuntingAccessAgreements.html>

Avista Cooperative Management Area

The deadline for public comment on this item is 5 p.m., Monday, June 23.

<http://fwp.mt.gov/recreation/publicComments/avistaCooperativeManagementArea.html>