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JUN 18 2015



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Ravalli County Commissioners

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Wildlife Division
PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701
June 12, 2015

Dear Interested Person:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is requesting public review and comment on the following items. Supporting information on these items can be found on our website under "Opportunity for Public Comment" at fwp.mt.gov/hunting/ and/or fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/.

GUIDELINES FOR ELK SHOULDER SEASONS

Guidelines for developing and proposing elk hunting seasons to ultimately improve elk harvest management have been proposed. The guidelines include all currently available harvest tools (existing season structures, license/permit types, game damage hunts, management seasons, and season extensions) and add A7 licenses, antlerless permits, and performance-based shoulder seasons as options.

A "shoulder season" is defined as any firearm season printed in the hunting regulations that occurs outside the 5-week general firearm season and is between August 15 and February 15. A shoulder season may include antlered and antlerless elk. Harvest criteria have been proposed to ensure transparent agency and public assessment of how shoulder seasons are performing.

Proposed guidelines also include "fundamental objectives" to describe management success and to ensure transparent agency and public assessment of how overall elk harvest management is progressing. These fundamental objectives are listed below and have no individual priority ranking.

FUNDAMENTAL OBJECTIVES

Elk considerations:

- Manage elk populations to objective as rapidly as possible.
- Increase harvest of elk, where appropriate.

Hunter and landowner considerations:

- Address problematic distributions of elk and elk harvest.
- Enhance free public access to bulls and cows on private land during the general seasons.
- Reduce exclusive access to elk.
- Enhance landowner flexibility to manage elk hunting on their property.
- Reduce game damage.
- Reduce hunter impacts on landowners (e.g., cost of hiring additional staff, loss of productivity, property damage from hunters, etc.).
- Simplify rules and regulations.

Logistical considerations:

- Balance statewide consistency with local flexibility of regulations, rules, and policies.
- Keep staff time and cost down.

2015 DEER AND ELK QUOTAS OUTSIDE BIENNIAL QUOTA RANGES

Proposed changes to elk B-licenses outside the adopted biennial quota range include increasing licenses in HDs 319, the south ½ of HD 380, and HDs 391 and 392. There is a proposed decrease in elk B-licenses valid in the entire hunting district for HD 380. There are no proposed changes outside of adopted ranges for deer B-licenses. These changes are proposed to manage elk populations to objective, minimize conflicts on private land, and encourage elk use of public land.

2015 ANTELOPE QUOTAS OUTSIDE BIENNIAL QUOTA RANGES

FWP proposes to decrease antelope either-sex licenses and doe/fawn licenses in HD 390 outside of the adopted range in order to increase the size of the antelope herd.

2015 BISON QUOTAS

There are no changes proposed from the 2014 bison quotas.

2015 TENDOYS BIGHORN SHEEP LICENSES

FWP proposes to issue unlimited over-the-counter either-sex bighorn sheep licenses to accomplish the depopulation phase of the Depopulation and Restocking of the Tendoy Mountains Bighorn Sheep Herd project. The EA and DN are available on-line.

STATEWIDE BISON DRAFT EIS – INFORMATIONAL

FWP is seeking public comment on a statewide bison conservation and management Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that evaluates opportunities for bison restoration somewhere in Montana. The EIS considers four alternatives, one of which is a no action alternative. Three alternatives evaluate broad scenarios for bison restoration on different types of land, i.e., private, public or tribal, and at different herd size scales.

TO MAKE A COMMENT

For further clarification, you may call the Wildlife Division office at 406-444-2612. Comments can be made online at fwp.mt.gov by clicking on 'Submit Public Comments' or by using the links below. Written comments can be sent to: FWP – Wildlife Division, Attn: Public Comment, POB 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701.

COMMENT PERIOD DEADLINE AND FINAL ADOPTION MEETINGS

- ✓ **Guidelines for Elk Shoulder Seasons**
fwp.mt.gov/hunting/publicComments/2015/guidelinesForElkShoulderSeasons.html
 - *The public comment period will extend through 5 p.m., Monday, August 10.*
 - *Final adoption will occur at the October Commission meeting.*

- ✓ **2015 Deer and Elk Quotas Outside Biennial Quota Ranges**
fwp.mt.gov/hunting/publicComments/2015/2015DeerElkQuotasOutsideQuotaRanges.html
 - *The public comment period will extend through 5 p.m., Thursday, July 2.*
 - *Final adoption will occur at the July Commission meeting.*

- ✓ **2015 Antelope Quotas Outside Biennial Quota Ranges**
fwp.mt.gov/hunting/publicComments/2015/2015AntelopeQuotasOutsideQuotaRanges.html
 - *The public comment period will extend through 5 p.m., Thursday, July 2.*
 - *Final adoption will occur at the July Commission meeting.*

- ✓ **2015 Bison Quotas**
fwp.mt.gov/hunting/publicComments/2015/2015BisonQuotas.html
 - *The public comment period will extend through 5 p.m., Monday, July 13.*
 - *Final adoption will occur at the August Commission meeting.*

- ✓ **2015 Tendoy Bighorn Sheep Licenses**
fwp.mt.gov/hunting/publicComments/2015/2015tendoyshd315BighornSheepLicenses.html
 - *The public comment period will extend through 5 p.m., Thursday, July 2.*
 - *Final adoption will occur at the July Commission meeting.*

- ✓ **Statewide Bison DRAFT EIS**
fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/publicComments/2015/draftEisBisonConservAndMgmtInMT_draftEIS.html
 - *The public comment period will extend through 5 p.m., Friday, September 11.*
 - *Public hearings will be held across the state in late summer.*
 - *The EIS can be viewed and downloaded at FWP's website or obtained on a CD at FWP's headquarters office in Helena. To request a CD copy of the EIS be mailed to you, send a written request to: FWP – Statewide Bison EIS, PO Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620.*