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Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

JUN 16 2017

Ravalli County Commissioners

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Wildlife Division
 PO Box 200701
 Helena, MT 59620-0701
 June 12, 2017

Dear Interested Person:

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

Furbearer and Trapping Regulations, Seasons and Quotas – Proposed

FWP proposes to:

- 1) Establish a **Trapper Education Program and Mandatory Trapper Education requirement** for most people trapping furbearers, predators (coyote, weasel and skunk), wolves, fox, badger and racoon to start taking effect in 2018.
- 2) By the 2019 trapping season require **Modifications** to ground-set foothold traps set for the above species that include a center swivel, an additional chain swivel, and jaws with minimum offset and thickness. Persons trapping for purposes of livestock or property protection would be exempt from these requirements.
- 3) Increase the Regions 1 and 2 otter per-person take and possession limit from 2 to 3.

Mandatory Trapper Education will ensure that new trappers have the basic knowledge and skills to trap safely, humanely, and effectively. It will also provide peer-to-peer interaction that sets ethical standards even where regulations may not exist or provide clear guidance or may be difficult to enforce. The Trapper Education program will also cover wolf trapping so that in the future there will not be a separate wolf trapping class.

Trap modifications including center swivels, offset jaws, and minimum thickness (lamination) are Best Management Practices that have been shown to increase animal comfort and decrease injury. Today's trappers consider these features necessary to trap ethically and humanely.

The proposed increase the Regions 1 and 2 otter per-person take and possession limit from 2 to 3 is to better match opportunity with the distribution of trapping.

Nongame Check-Off Work Plan – Proposed

Under MCA 87-5-122, "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 2016 tax year donations are unknown now, the average received by FWP from the 2004-2015 tax years was \$30,000/year. FWP is proposing the following work in FY18 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.
- \$15,000** Wildlife viewing and outreach projects that encourage more Montanans to appreciate Montana wildlife.
- \$ 5,000** Competitive student stipend for nongame research.

HD 311 Late Shoulder Season North of Highway 84 (Bozeman to Norris Road)– Proposed

Elk season structure changes are normally proposed in December with final action in February during odd-numbered years. Occasionally FWP comes before the commission when exceptional circumstances warrant a proposal outside this cycle. The proposed shoulder season in HD 311 is one such exceptional circumstance.

FWP proposes to institute a shoulder season beginning this fall and running from the end of general firearms season to Feb. 15, 2018 in the north half of HD 311 – that portion north of Highway 84. The objective is to reduce game damage and reduce brucellosis risk by changing elk distribution through prescribed hunting pressure. This proposal responds to a marked and sudden change in the distribution of over 1,800 elk that has been difficult to manage using traditional game damage and management hunts, and hazing and herders among a patchwork of numerous landowners. Although elk are not over objective in HD 311 the shoulder season guidelines allow for a shoulder season under these circumstances. This area is also within the brucellosis Designated Surveillance Area, and the elk herd of most concern here, the one at the north end of the Spanish Peaks, has a seroprevalance of 22.5%. Ranchers are very concerned about these elk mixing with their cattle.

TO MAKE A COMMENT

For further clarification or additional materials, you may call the Wildlife Division office at 406-444-2612 or email at fwpwd@mt.gov. Comments will be accepted: online by using any of the links below; in writing sent to the address above; and by email to fwpwd@mt.gov.

COMMENT PERIOD DEADLINE & FINAL ADOPTION MEETING

All proposed items will be accepting public comments until **July 16, 2017 at 5 p.m.** with final adoption at the **August Commission meeting**.

- ✓ **Furbearer and Trapping Regulations, Seasons and Quotas – Proposed**
<http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/publicComments/2017/furbearerTrappingProposals.html>
- ✓ **Nongame Check-Off Work Plan – Proposed**
<http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/publicComments/2017/nongameCheckoff.html>
- ✓ **HD 311 Late Shoulder Season North of Highway 84 (Bozeman to Norris Road)– Proposed**
<http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/publicComments/2017/HD311ShoulderSeason.html>