

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: December 8, 2011

Agenda Item: 2011 Wolf Season Extension

Division: Fish & Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Final Rule

Time Needed for Presentation: 30 minutes

Background: With federal delisting, wolf management in Montana is the full responsibility of the state. The FWP Commission first approved wolf hunting regulations and seasons in 2008 and those were adopted for Montana's first wolf hunting season in 2009. For the 2010 season, which was blocked by a court ruling, the FWP Commission adopted a statewide quota of 186 in 13 wolf management units. WMUs or subquotas were adopted to limit early season backcountry harvest and/or harvest north of Yellowstone National Park. An archery-only season, limited to no more than 20 percent of the quota, was also adopted. Only legal hunting harvest would count towards quotas and quota over-runs were to be subtracted from a nearby unit or statewide quotas.

For 2011, the commission adopted a statewide quota of 220 and an additional WMU in the Bitterroot Valley. Except for calendar rotation of dates, other proposed season elements were unchanged from the 2010. Modeling predicts this quota will result in a 25 percent reduction from the 2010 minimum of 566 to an estimated 425. A competing model predicts a 7 percent decline. Objectives of the season proposal are: 1) maintain a viable and connected wolf population in Montana; 2) maintain authority to manage wolves; 3) maintain positive and effective working relationships with livestock producers, hunters, and other stakeholders; 4a) reduce wolf impacts on livestock; 4b) reduce wolf impacts on big game populations; 4c) maintain sustainable hunter opportunity for wolves; 4d) maintain sustainable hunter opportunity for ungulates; 5) increase broad public acceptance of sustainable harvest and hunter opportunity as part of wolf conservation; 6) enhance open and effective communication to better inform decisions and; 7) learn and improve as we go. **As a proposed refinement to the July 2011 adoption, this proposed extension extends wolf hunting through January 31, 2012 unless a WMU quota or subquota is met earlier. This proposal is to address the potential that wolf harvest through December 2011 will be significantly less than prescribed quotas and would apply only to areas that have not met the originally prescribed quotas.** There is no change in this final proposal from the initial Commission adoption on a season extension.

Public Involvement Process & Results: Public comment was accepted through Nov. 28. Comments will be forwarded to the Commission for their review. As of Nov. 17, nearly 100 comments were received. Consistent with other wolf discussions, perspectives are diverse. This includes strong expressions of support as it relates to filling the wolf harvest quota. Any final adoption will take place at the Dec. 8 Commission meeting.

Alternatives and Analysis: This proposal addresses the potential that wolf harvest through December 2011 will be significantly less than described quotas. Alternatives would be the Dec. 31 end date or some later date after January.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: The proposal is aligned with known biology, management history and survey efforts and sits within the wide spectrum of public comment.

Proposed Motion: I move to adopt as final the season extension for the 2011 wolf season as presented by FWP.

FINAL ADOPTION: *On 12/8/11 FWP further suggested and Commission adopted an end date of 2/15/12 and suspension of hunter orange requirement for remainder of 2011 season and extension.*