



AN ACT GENERALLY REVISING THE FIXING OF UPLAND GAME BIRD SEASONS; REQUIRING THE FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION TO ALLOW RESIDENTS TO HUNT PRIOR TO NONRESIDENTS FOR ALL UPLAND GAME BIRDS EXCEPT MOUNTAIN GROUSE; PROVIDING A DEFINITION; AMENDING SECTION 87-1-304, MCA; AND PROVIDING A DELAYED EFFECTIVE DATE.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

Section 1. Section 87-1-304, MCA, is amended to read:

"87-1-304. Fixing of seasons and bag and possession limits. (1) Subject to the provisions of 87-5-302 and subsections (7) through ~~(9)~~(10) of this section, the commission may:

- (a) fix seasons, bag limits, possession limits, and season limits;
- (b) open or close or shorten or lengthen seasons on any species of game, bird, fish, or fur-bearing animal as defined by 87-2-101;
- (c) declare areas open to the hunting of deer, antelope, elk, moose, sheep, goat, mountain lion, bear, wild buffalo or bison, and wolf by persons holding an archery stamp and the required license, permit, or tag and designate times when only bows and arrows may be used to hunt deer, antelope, elk, moose, sheep, goat, mountain lion, bear, wild buffalo or bison, and wolf in those areas;
- (d) subject to the provisions of 87-1-301(6), restrict areas and species to hunting with only specified hunting arms, including bow and arrow, for the reasons of safety or of providing diverse hunting opportunities and experiences; and
- (e) declare areas open to special license holders only and issue special licenses in a limited number when the commission determines, after proper investigation, that a special season is necessary to ensure the maintenance of an adequate supply of game birds, fish, or animals or fur-bearing animals. The commission may declare a special season and issue special licenses when game birds, animals, or fur-bearing

animals are causing damage to private property or when a written complaint of damage has been filed with the commission by the owner of that property. In determining to whom special licenses must be issued, the commission may, when more applications are received than the number of animals to be killed, award permits to those chosen under a drawing system. The procedures used for awarding the permits from the drawing system must be determined by the commission.

(2) The commission may adopt rules governing the use of livestock and vehicles by archers during special archery seasons.

(3) Subject to the provisions of 87-5-302 and subsection (7) of this section, the commission may divide the state into fish and game districts and create fish, game, or fur-bearing animal districts throughout the state. The commission may declare a closed season for hunting, fishing, or trapping in any of those districts and later may open those districts to hunting, fishing, or trapping.

(4) The commission may declare a closed season on any species of game, fish, game birds, or fur-bearing animals threatened with undue depletion from any cause. The commission may close any area or district of any stream, public lake, or public water or portions thereof to hunting, trapping, or fishing for limited periods of time when necessary to protect a recently stocked area, district, water, spawning waters, spawn-taking waters, or spawn-taking stations or to prevent the undue depletion of fish, game, fur-bearing animals, game birds, and nongame birds. The commission may open the area or district upon consent of a majority of the property owners affected.

(5) The commission may authorize the director to open or close any special season upon 12 hours' notice to the public.

(6) The commission may declare certain fishing waters closed to fishing except by persons under 15 years of age. The purpose of this subsection is to provide suitable fishing waters for the exclusive use and enjoyment of juveniles under 15 years of age, at times and in areas the commission in its discretion considers advisable and consistent with its policies relating to fishing.

(7) In an area immediately adjacent to a national park, the commission may not:

- (a) prohibit the hunting or trapping of wolves; or
- (b) close the area to wolf hunting or trapping unless a wolf harvest quota established by the commission for that area has been met.

(8) The commission may authorize a wolf trapping season that opens the first Monday after Thanksgiving and closes March 15 of the following calendar year, except that the commission may adjust the dates for specific wolf management units based on regional recommendations.

(9) There is established a special muzzleloader heritage hunting season that begins on the second Saturday after the end of the regular season and lasts 9 days. During this season, subject to the provisions of 87-6-401(1)(i) and rules adopted by the commission, a person may take a deer or elk with a valid license or permit using plain lead projectiles and a muzzleloading rifle that is charged with loose black powder, loose pyrodex, or an equivalent loose black powder substitute and ignited by a flintlock, wheel lock, matchlock, or percussion mechanism using a percussion or musket cap. The muzzleloading rifle must be a minimum of 45 caliber and may not have more than two barrels."

(10) (a) Except on privately owned lands that are not a part of a hunting access program pursuant to 87-1-246 through 87-1-249 and 87-1-265, the commission shall allow residents as defined in 87-2-102 to begin hunting 10 days prior to nonresidents for all upland game birds, including ring-necked pheasant, but excluding mountain grouse.

(b) For the purposes of this subsection (10), "mountain grouse" means blue grouse, spruce (Franklin) grouse, and ruffed grouse.

Section 2. Effective date. [This act] is effective March 1, 2026.

- END -

I hereby certify that the within bill,
SB 514, originated in the Senate.

Secretary of the Senate

President of the Senate

Signed this _____ day
of _____, 2025.

Speaker of the House

Signed this _____ day
of _____, 2025.

SENATE BILL NO. 514

INTRODUCED BY G. HUNTER, M. YAKAWICH

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