

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: October 13, 2016

Agenda Item: 2017 Fishing Regulations

Division: Fisheries

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 15 Min

Background

Montana's fishing-regulation process is based on a four-year cycle. The first year of every cycle establishes fishing regulations that have undergone internal review by FWP including consideration of ideas, comments, and regulation suggestions from the public. Once approved by the Commission in the first year of the cycle, these regulations are meant to remain in place four years during which time their effectiveness is evaluated with respect to fish management objectives as well as angler use and satisfaction. Recommendations to change these regulations in subsequent years are limited to specific eligibility criteria associated with need to improve existing regulations for one or more of the following reasons: clarifications, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, or management plans.

Public Involvement Process & Results

On August 11, 2016 15 new fishing regulation proposals were approved for public comment by the Fish & Wildlife Commission, initiating a 30-day public comment period that ran through September 12. During the comment period, FWP received 279 comments, including 62 via an online survey that also produced 206 selections characterizing respondents' opinion on the various proposals as Support, Oppose, or No Opinion. FWP received 7 other comments by email. Of total preferences expressed, 60% supported one or more of the proposed changes, 26% offered no opinion, and 14% expressed opposition, sometimes offering an alternative regulation instead.

Alternatives and Analysis

The Commission may dismiss, modify, and/or approve any of the regulations recommended by FWP for the 2017 fishing year. Combined with approval to carry the remaining 2016 fishing regulations forward into 2017, final approval will determine fishing regulations that will take effect on March 1, 2017.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

After further internal review incorporating public comment, FWP recommends approval of 14 of the 15 proposals as they were initially presented to the Commission in August. FWP recommend withdrawal of one proposal affecting the Big Hole River. These relatively minor adjustments to existing regulations in the 2017 fishing year are intended to improve ease of understanding, relevancy, and the consistency of protections for our fisheries in the upcoming years.

Proposed Motion

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt FWP's proposed fishing regulations including the changes recommended for the 2017 fishing season.