



Wildlife Division
PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701
September 21, 2018

Dear Interested Person:

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

Beattie Gulch Area Bison Hunting Closure for Montana License Holders

FWP proposes to close a small portion of HD 385 in the Beattie Gulch area to hunters holding a Montana FWP license (a.k.a. "state hunters" as distinguished from Tribal hunters) to address hunter safety issues. In recent years 200-300 bison are harvested every year within a quarter-mile-square area at the mouth of Beattie Gulch and the density of hunters has increased beyond what FWP considers safe. It is common for 20-30 or more hunters to shoot simultaneously as groups of bison cross the boundary. The objective of this proposal is to implement measures for hunter safety while maintaining fair chase hunter opportunity and success in the rest of the hunting district. This closure will only apply to hunters with a state bison license (state hunters). FWP has limited ability to regulate the exercise of off-reservation treaty hunting by tribes. Forty FWP licenses valid for the Gardiner Basin portion of HD 385 were issued for the 2018 season, which opens Nov. 15. The rest of HD 385 would remain open thus maintaining hunter opportunity across the hunting district.

Bison hunting was re-established in Montana in 2005 after a 14-year hiatus. The bison season structure was based on guidelines for fair-chase hunting as required by MCA 87-2-730 and within the provisions of the Dec. 22, 2000 Interagency Bison Management Plan. The intent of MCA 87-2-730 and the 2004 Bison Hunt EA (revised in 2008) was to allow hunters to harvest wild bison under fair chase conditions without endangering the bison population or creating public safety issues.

The primary corridor for bison migrating north of Yellowstone Park is through Beattie Gulch, and hunters congregate here to take advantage of migrating herds. Though this closure will impact hunter opportunity, it is unknown whether hunter success will be negatively impacted. If FWP and the Tribes exercising their off-reservation treaty hunting rights are successful in working out a safety measure acceptable to all parties, FWP will reconsider the safety closure.

TO MAKE A COMMENT

For further clarification or additional materials, click on the link below, call the Wildlife Division office at 406-444-2612, or email at fwpwld@mt.gov. Comments will be accepted: online by using the link below; in writing sent to the address above; and by email to fwpwld@mt.gov.

<http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/publicComments/2018/beattieGulchBisonHuntingClosure.html>

COMMENT PERIOD DEADLINE & FINAL ADOPTION MEETING

Public comments will be accepted until **Friday, October 12, 2018 at 5:00 PM**, and at the **October 17th** Commission meeting, with final adoption at the **October 17th** Commission meeting.