

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON-QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Wolf

Region: 3

Hunting District: WMU 313 and 316

Year: 2022–2023

1. Describe the proposed season or quota changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types).

The department proposes to eliminate wolf management units (WMUs) within Montana except for WMU 313, which is recommended to be a combination of former WMUs 313 and 316. In lieu of smaller WMUs, the department proposes managing wolves by Trapping District (TD). Additionally, the department proposes establishing a wolf harvest quota of 10 for new WMU 313 that is independent of any thresholds for the state or TD 3.

2. Why is the proposed change necessary?

During the wolf trapping and hunting season in 2021–2022, a disproportionate number of wolves were harvested in former WMU 313 (18 of 85 taken within TD 3) with another 3 taken within former WMU 316. Although this single year of harvest is not sufficient to create any long-lasting biological harm to Montana's wolf population, vocal public sentiment has favored some limitation on future harvest within this southern portion of Region 3. The level of harvest within these two former WMUs is already consistent with reducing the statewide population. Further distributing wolf harvest proportionally across the state in relation to wolf distribution will be more effective at reducing the statewide population as directed by the Legislature.

3. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

Wolf distribution within the state is not uniform. Wolf populations seem robust in the southern portion of Region 3, but the harvest in 2021–2022 was disproportionately greater within former WMU 313. To redistribute the harvest within this WMU and distribute the harvest more proportionately within Region 3 and the state, the proposed boundary change and quota should favorably address harvest.

In accordance with legislative and Commission direction, the department is recommending harvest to reduce the statewide wolf population to a lower yet sustainable level. Focusing harvest in a single portion of the state is ineffective in meeting that objective and the proposed adjustment should direct hunters into other portions of the state to meet the management objectives established by the Legislature and Commission.

Based on wolf population data from 2011–2015, the period when most recent data are available, the average number of wolves in the proximity of proposed WMU 313 is 29 (range 18–40). Research has shown that harvest must exceed 29 to 48 percent of a wolf population before a decline is observed (Adams et al. 2008, Gude et al. 2012). A quota of 10 represents an “average” mortality rate of 34%, which should result in a slightly declining population at this very local scale. Because

21 wolves were removed from this same area last year, that population is anticipated to be at the lower end of the measured range noted above, and the mortality rate may be greater than the average if the quota is achieved.

The Department recommends that the threshold for Commission review remain at 82 for the remainder of TD 3 as it was last year and in addition to and independent of the quota of 10 in WMU 313. Similarly, the statewide threshold for review outside of new WMU 313 is proposed to be 450 and in addition to and independent of the quota of 10 in WMU 313.

4. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, temperature-precipitation information).

Weather and habitat are unlikely to influence this recommendation.

5. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

Staff from Region 3 have discussed the results from the last hunting and trapping season with the Montana Trappers Association regional representatives, representatives from Yellowstone National Park, and Wolves of the Rockies, although the specifics of this proposal were developed after those conversations.

Submitted by: Brian Wakeling

Date: 05/18/2022

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor/Date

Disapproved/Modified by: _____
Name/Date

Reason for Modification: