

GROUPS PROTEST MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS GRIZZLY BEAR PLAN THAT HAS “SLEEPER” HUNTING PROVISION

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MISSOULA— Several Montana-based conservation organizations today filed protest comments (attached) with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks regarding its public comment and hearing process on their plans to manage grizzly bears in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE).

Of major concern is a “sleeper” provision that authorizes and requires sport hunting of grizzly bears in the NCDE, which includes Glacier National Park and the Bob Marshall Wilderness region in northwest Montana.

The protest letter states:

Despite numerous disingenuous public statements from FWPs personnel, hunting is an imminently foreseeable result of delisting and management by FWPs. The Montana Fish & Game Commission previously approved ARM 12.9.103, **which authorizes grizzly bear hunting** in Montana. This rule will become part of the proposed ARM if approved. It states:

ARM 12.9.103 (c) **Hunting and recreational use.** *The commission recognizes its responsibility to consider and provide for recreational opportunities as part of a grizzly bear management program. These opportunities shall include sport hunting, recreational experiences, aesthetics of natural ecosystems, and other uses consistent with the overall welfare of the species.*

(c)(ii) Sport hunting is considered the most desirable method of balancing grizzly bear numbers with their available habitat, minimizing depredations against private property within or adjacent to grizzly bear habitat, and minimizing grizzly bear attacks on humans. (ARM 12.9.103).

The word shall has specific legal force and meaning. It means an action or plan is not optional. The public has not been informed of this plan to hunt the NCDE grizzly bear sub-population. It will be a matter of official policy that sport hunting of grizzly bears in Montana shall occur and “will be the most desirable method of balancing grizzly bear numbers...”

This sleight of hand has not been explained to the general public and is not included in the informational materials provided by FWPs at the public hearings. The FWPs has not revealed that hunting is the method they will use to limit population growth and reduce total population numbers by as many as 250 grizzly bears. Artificially constraining grizzly numbers in the Wildernesses of the NCDE also flies in the face of the Wilderness Act and FS regulations and policies.”

“They want to use “sport hunting” as a cure-all,” said Mike Bader, an independent consultant in Missoula. “The hidden agenda is disgraceful.”

The groups also object to the format used for public hearings, which put public comment last after lengthy presentations by FWPs officials. They ask the new Administrative Rule be rejected and previous ARM 12.9.103 be rescinded at the December meeting of the Montana Fish & Game Commission.

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