

ISSUES SUBMITTAL FORM

Date: 12/09/2020

ISSUE: Should the harvest limit, season dates, and hunting area boundary be modified for hunting Greater Prairie Chickens in Colorado?

DISCUSSION (FACTS AND FIGURES, EXPLANATION OF ISSUE):

In 2011, regulation changes established the current hunting boundary for Greater Prairie Chickens (GPC) as the Nebraska/Kansas border on the east, Highway 36 on the south, Highway 71 on the west, and Interstate 76 on the north. These boundaries were set to protect remnant birds outside of this area, at that time. Over the past 10 years, Greater Prairie Chickens have expanded their range and increased in numbers. Today, numerous established breeding areas (leks) have been documented across Morgan, northern Kit Carson, and southern Washington and Yuma counties and in agricultural fields north of I-76 along the South Platte River. In the spring of 2020, Area personnel documented over 40 leks in Game Management Units (GMU) 103, 109, and across Morgan County. Therefore, we do not see a need to continue to restrict GPC hunters to only areas north of Hwy 36, east of Hwy 71 and south of Interstate 76. In addition, extending the season to January 31st to coincide with the close of pheasant season would also provide hunters more time to potentially harvest birds.

Because hunter participation and harvest have remained low since GPC hunting began in 2000, when 35 hunters harvested 22 birds, there is no evidence that the GPC population is in jeopardy from overharvest. Over the past 20 years, the number of birds harvested has remained low (<50 birds/yr) during periodic surveys. In addition, spring breeding surveys have shown a 60% increase in the number of breeding leks and the average number of males on each lek has increased 30% over the past 20 years. Therefore, we propose changing from a season limit of two birds to a daily bag limit of 2 birds and a possession limit of 6 birds, to provide GPC hunters more opportunities to hunt and harvest more birds. Expanding the area for GPC hunting, extending the season, and changing to bag and possession limits would provide more opportunities to hunt and harvest Greater Prairie Chickens in eastern Colorado.

In an effort to reduce regulation complexity and promote more hunter participation, we are proposing several changes to the current Greater Prairie Chicken season structure, which includes the following:

- 1.) Change from a season limit to daily bag and possession limits of 2 birds and 6 birds, respectively.
- 2.) Extend the GPC season to close on January 31st, for consistency with the closing date for pheasant.
- 3.) Expand the hunting area to include GMUs 103 and 109, Morgan County and the South Platte River. This would establish the new hunting boundary as the Nebraska/Kansas border on the east, Interstate 70, and Highways 59 and 36 on the south, Highway 71 in Washington County, Morgan County lines, and Highway 71 in Weld County on the west, and Highways 14, 138, and the Nebraska border on the north (See attached map).

CPW will continue to ask a GPC question on the Harvest Information Program (HIP) survey. A random sample of hunters, who indicated some likelihood to hunt GPC in the HIP survey, will be periodically surveyed to estimate harvest, hunter numbers, and hunting days for GPC. Likewise, spring breeding surveys will continue to be conducted each year.

STATE LAW REQUIRES CPW TO SOLICIT INPUT FROM STAKEHOLDERS THAT MAY BE AFFECTED POSITIVELY OR NEGATIVELY BY THE PROPOSED RULES. THE FOLLOWING STAKEHOLDERS HAVE BEEN ADVISED OF AND INVITED TO PROVIDE INPUT ON THE REGULATORY CHANGES PROPOSED IN THIS ISSUE PAPER:

***IT IS ASSUMED THAT ALL NECESSARY INTERNAL PARTIES HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED*.**

Stakeholders include:

- GPC hunters and falconers
- Landowners in Logan, Kit Carson, Morgan, Phillips, Sedgwick, Washington, and Yuma counties

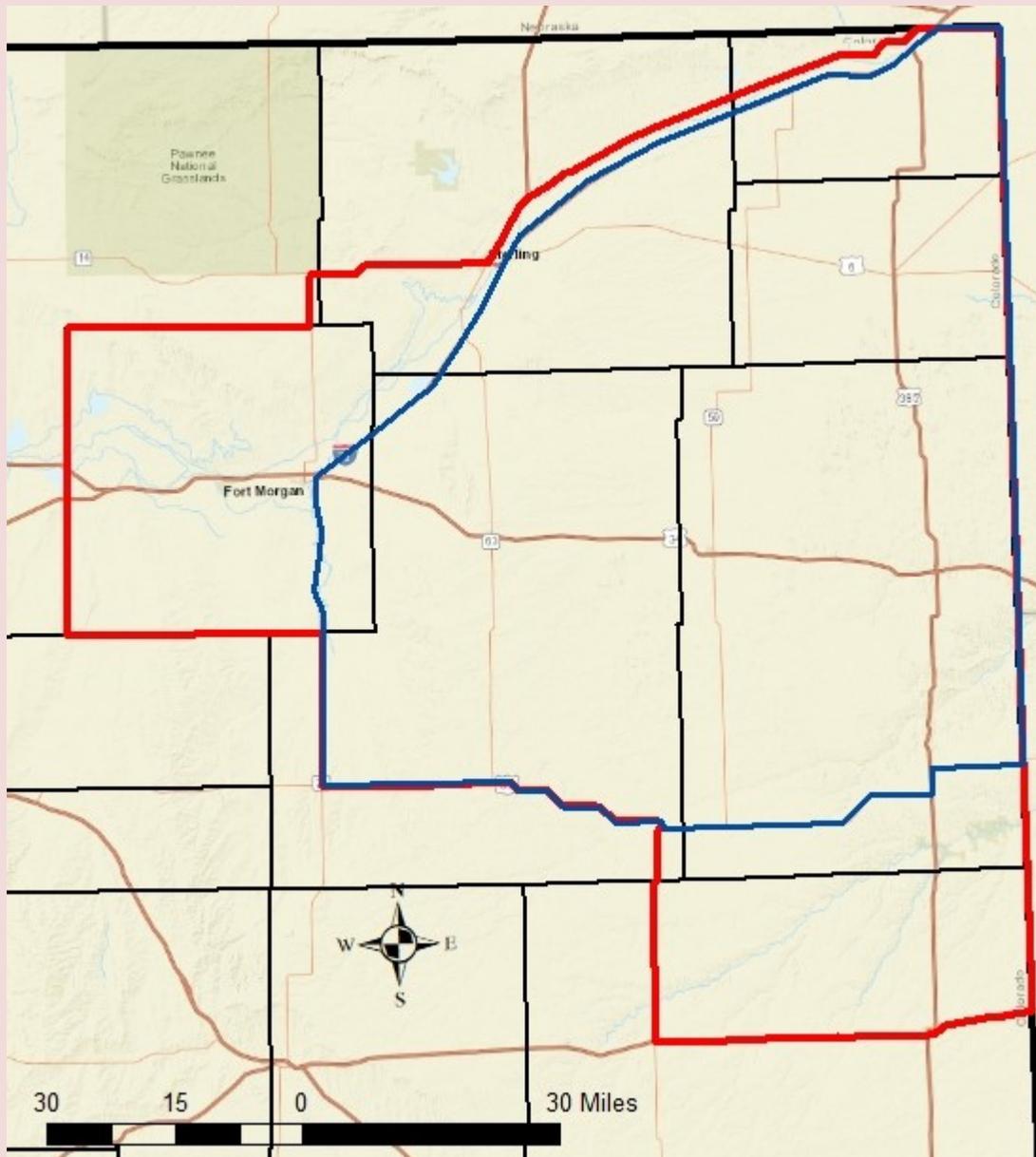
No stakeholders have been notified.

ALTERNATIVES: (POSSIBLE OUTCOMES or POSSIBLE REGULATIONS):

***Preferred Alternative*:**

1. Change to a daily bag limit of 2 birds and a possession limit of 6 birds. Extend the GPC hunting season to close on January 31st to coincide with the closing date for pheasants, east of I-25. Expand the hunting area to include GMUs 103 and 109, all of Morgan County, and those portions east of Highway 71 and south of Highways 14 and 138.
2. Status Quo – Continue with current prairie chicken hunting seasons and regulations.

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| Issue Raised by: | Josh Melby, DWM, Todd Cozad, DWM, Larry Conger, DWM, Ben Meier, DWM, Marty Stratman, Wildlife Biologist |
| Author of the issue paper (if different than person raising the issue): | Marty Stratman, Wildlife Biologist |
| CC: | Area 3, Area 14, Woodward, Schmidt, McGee, Schaller, Stiver, Gorman, Eckert, Dreher, Leslie, Ackerman |
| APPROVED FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION BY: | Brian Dreher |
| REQUIRES NEW SPACE IN THE BROCHURE? | X YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| ARE ADEQUATE STAFF AND FUNDING RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO IMPLEMENT? | X YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| REGION, BRANCH, OR SECTION LEADING IMPLEMENTATION | |
| RECOMMENDED FOR CONSENT AGENDA? | <input type="checkbox"/> YES x NO |



— Current GPC Hunting Boundary
— Proposed New GPC Hunting Boundary