

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: George Warthen, Director, Hunting and Game Management
Date: December 11, 2019
Subject: Draft Rule – Proposed Rule Changes for Hunting 2020 – 2021

Purpose:

Obtain approval for advertising draft rule amendments that will revise select statewide hunting regulations, revise specific area regulations and conform hunting dates to calendar date changes on Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), Wildlife and Environmental Areas (WEAs) and Miscellaneous Areas.

Why:

These changes will enable better management of fish and wildlife resources.

Top Points:

- 1) Over 110 requests for changes received – 59 of those moving forward.
- 2) Active online public commenting since September 6th.
- 3) Comments received have been generally supportive of most proposals.

Affected Parties:

Hunters of deer, fox, coyote, wild hogs; turkey, small game and racoons; all users of the WMA system.

Summary:

During 2019, over 110 requests for changes were received and evaluated. Most of the rule proposals that are substantive were summarized and published online for public comments beginning September 6th. Public notification of the commenting opportunity was made through FWC's HuntFlorida Facebook page, HGM's Hunting Hot Sheet, and through a GovDelivery notice to over 342,000 unique subscribers. Over 9,000 persons have provided input, with it being generally supportive of most of the proposals. The significant proposals are summarized in the background information for this item. Staff will continue to gather input on the proposed rule amendments via an online commenting tool until the draft rule amendments are presented at the final public hearing in February 2020.

Some of the most notable draft rule change proposals include:

- The establishment of the Silver Springs Wildlife Management Area (~4,900 acres in Marion County), which would provide brand new deer, turkey, and small game hunting opportunities.
- A suite of proposals that would allow families to better recreate together by letting an additional non-hunting family member or guest attend established family and youth hunts on a number of wildlife management areas.
- New public hunting opportunities in nearly all regions of the state that would add general gun, family deer dog, wild hog-still, spring turkey, small game, released quail, and night-time raccoon hunts and remove some of the quota requirements for wild hog-dog hunts.

Staff Recommendation:

Approve the draft rule amendments for advertising and direct staff to return in February 2020 for final adoption. Provide any direction or guidance as staff continues with final rulemaking.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

George Warthen, Director, Hunting and Game Management
Paul Scharine (Presenter), Hunting and Game Management

Summary of Proposed Hunting Rule Changes

(X) 68A-12.002 General Methods of Taking Game and Crows; Prohibitions – The proposed rule amendment would clarify existing restrictions related to the use of semi-automatic rifles for hunting game and for the use of shotguns for hunting migratory game.

(X) 68A-12.007 Hunting Dogs; Molesting Game in Closed Season; Training; Field Trials; Prohibited for Certain Hunting – The proposed rule amendment would require that all free running dogs used for pursuing deer, wild hog, fox or coyote (except for dogs used to pursue fox or coyote during sanctioned mounted field trial events) must be equipped and monitored with devices that allow remote tracking (Global Positioning System (GPS) or telemetry) and behavior correction. The device(s) must be attached by a collar or similar means and must be used to prevent dog egress into unauthorized areas. Removing, tampering, or otherwise interfering with any collar or tag (including remote tracking devices and behavior correction collars) of a dog used for hunting without the owner's permission is prohibited. The tracking device requirement in this rule would not take effect until July 1, 2021 and the correction device requirement in this rule would not take effect until July 1, 2022.

(X) 68A-15.006 Regulations Relating to Miscellaneous Areas – The proposed rule amendments would revise or establish specific area regulations on miscellaneous areas as follows:

(1) **Babcock Ranch Preserve Tier I** – during the family hunt allow 1 additional adult supervisor that may participate in the hunt to assist the youth hunters but may not harvest game.

(2) **Babcock Ranch Preserve Tier II** – allow wild turkey to be hunted during muzzleloading gun and crossbow seasons and when general gun season overlaps with Zone A fall turkey season.

(X) 68A-15.061 Specific regulations for Wildlife Management Areas - Southwest Region – The proposed rule amendment would adjust season dates to conform to calendar year changes and revise specific area regulations on Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) in the Southwest Region as follows:

(1) **Chassahowitzka WMA** – remove reference to Swamp Grade when describing the dog hunt area, this road no longer exists; and allow wild turkey to be hunted in the Annuteliga Hammock (the area east of US Highway 19) during spring turkey season.

(2) **Green Swamp West WMA** – change allowed vehicle access times on the day preceding special opportunity spring turkey season hunts (scout day) from 1½ hours before sunrise until 1½ hours after sunset to 1½ hours before sunrise until 3:00 p.m.

(3) **KICCO WMA** – allow 1 additional non-hunting guest on family and youth turkey hunts.

(4) **Hilochee WMA** – expand small game season by 7 days (from 17 to 24 days) at the beginning of the season; and establish a 3-day general gun hunt opening the Saturday following the close of muzzleloading gun season (10 no-cost quota permits, no exemptions).

(5) **Hilochee WMA, Osprey Unit** – establish a 3-day general gun hunt opening the Saturday following the close of muzzleloading gun season (10 no-cost quota permits, no exemptions).

(6) **Upper Hillsborough WMA** – change the quota hunt for wild hog-dog from 20, no cost, quota permits (no exemptions) to 20, no-cost, daily quota permits available first-come, first-served at the check station each day of the season.

(X) 68A-15.062 Specific regulations for Wildlife Management Areas - North Central Region – The proposed rule amendments would adjust season dates to conform to calendar year changes and revise specific area regulations on wildlife management areas (WMAs) in the North Central Region as follows:

(1) **Bayard WMA** – allow each youth turkey quota permit holder to bring 1 additional non-hunting guest; and allow the youth turkey non-hunting guest to camp in Area 3 with the youth turkey quota permit holder.

(2) **Big Shoals WMA** – allow the use of dogs to hunt small game during small game season.

(3) **Camp Blanding WMA** – change the general gun dog hunt from two 9-day hunts (320 no-cost quota permits each hunt, exemptions allowed) to one 10-day and one 11-day hunt (200 no-cost quota permits, exemptions allowed); during the wild hog-dog season allow hunting only from 1½ hours after sunset until 1½ hours before sunrise, and shift the January wild hog-dog season hunt to occur following the close of zonal deer season; and allow scouting the day before each youth spring turkey hunt.

(4) **Gulf Hammock WMA** – allow nighttime raccoon hunting with the use of dogs during small game season.

(5) **Hatchet Creek WMA** – allow each family and youth turkey quota permit holder to bring 1 additional non-hunting guest.

(6) **Holton Creek WMA** – move the last (December) general gun mobility-impaired hunt to the 3rd weekend in November.

(7) **Mallory Swamp WMA** – remove the shoulder height requirement for hunting dogs.

(8) **Raiford WMA** – allow access year-round for fishing through designated entrances.

(9) **Thomas Creek WMA, Kings Road Unit** – allow each family and youth turkey quota permit holder to bring 1 additional non-hunting guest.

(10) **Troy Springs WMA** – establish a spring turkey season with three 3-day hunts (no quota permit required, Friday-Sunday).

(11) **Twin Rivers WMA** – remove the zone tag requirement during the family hunt.

(X) 68A-15.063 Specific regulations for Wildlife Management Areas - Northwest Region – The proposed rule amendment would adjust season dates to conform to calendar year changes and revise specific area regulations on Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) in the Northwest Region as follows:

(1) **Aucilla WMA** – shift the September wild hog-dog hunt to occur the first weekend in September (1 week earlier) to avoid overlapping the opening weekend of archery season.

(2) **Blackwater WMA** – allow dogs to be used for hunting deer in the dog hunt area during the 2-day family hunt; require that all free-running dogs used to pursue deer, fox or coyote anywhere within Blackwater WMA must be equipped and monitored with devices that allow remote tracking (Global Positioning System (GPS) or telemetry) and behavior correction; allow any dog for hunting small game (quail, rabbit, squirrel and migratory game) during small game season.

(3) **Eglin WMA** – limit shooting hours during spring turkey season to ½ hour before sunrise until 1 p.m.; increase antler point regulation for harvesting antlered deer in Jackson and Brier Creek units to at least 4-points on one side or a 14-inch main beam; and allow northern bobwhite quail to be released and taken by

shotgun during the small game season (Sikes and Choctaw units only). A daily no-cost permit and proof that that the northern bobwhite quail were purchased from a licensed game farm would be required for each individual or group participating.

(4) **Escambia River WMA** – establish one 2-day family deer dog hunt to occur the last weekend in December (within the Dog Hunt Area only).

(5) **Plank Road WMA** – increase antler point regulation for harvesting antlered deer to at least 3-points on one side or a 10-inch main beam; and establish one 3-day wild hog-still hunt each month from May through September.

(6) **Perdido River WMA** – prohibit motor vehicle access on Frank Reeder Loop Road from May through September.

(X) 68A-15.064 Specific Regulations for Wildlife Management Areas - South Region – The proposed rule amendment would adjust season dates to conform to calendar year changes and revise specific area regulations on Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) in the South Region as follows:

(1) **Allapattah Flats WMA** – allow harvested deer to be dismembered before leaving the area.

(2) **Big Cypress WMA** – establish that hunters must check in and out when entering and leaving the area and check all harvested game when check stations are staffed.

(3) **Everglades and Francis S. Taylor WMA** – remove bag limit and 15-inch shoulder height restriction for hunting wild hog.

(4) **Holey Land WMA** – remove bag limit and 15-inch shoulder height restriction for hunting wild hog.

(5) **J.W. Corbett WMA** – establish that tree stands, deer stands, and elevated shooting platforms may only be brought onto the area beginning 6 a.m. the day prior to archery season and must be removed no later than 6 p.m. the day following the close of general gun season; and during the August closure, allow campers to line up at an interior gate beginning 5 p.m. the Wednesday prior to the start of archery season.

(6) **Picayune Strand WMA** – increase the wild hog bag limit to 1 per person but no more than 2 per quota permit during muzzleloading gun and general gun seasons, remove 15-inch shoulder height restriction for hunting wild hog.

(7) **Rotenberger WMA** – remove bag limit and 15-inch shoulder height restriction for hunting wild hog.

(X) 68A-15.065 Specific Regulations for Wildlife Management Areas - Northeast Region – The proposed rule amendment would adjust season dates to conform to calendar year changes and revise specific area regulations on Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) in the Northeast Region as follows:

(1) **Charles H. Bronson WMA** – allow each youth turkey quota permit holder to bring 1 additional non-hunting guest.

(2) **Little Big Econ WMA** – allow each youth turkey quota permit holder to bring 1 additional non-hunting guest.

(3) **Richloam WMA** – allow limited fishing (hook and line only) in designated areas at the fish hatchery.

(4) **Little Big Econ WMA** – restrict vehicular access during scouting days and hunting seasons to 1 ½ hours before sunrise until 1 ½ hours after sunset.

(5) **Seminole Forest WMA** – prohibit public access during the mobility-impaired hunts except for individuals participating in the hunts, their assistants and through-hikers on the Florida National Scenic Trail.

(6) **Seminole Forest WMA – Lake Tracy Unit** - allow each youth turkey quota permit holder to bring 1 additional non-hunting guest.

(7) **Silver Springs Forest WMA** – establish open seasons and regulations for a new WMA (4,900 acres) in Marion County as follows: one 16-day archery hunt (20 no-cost quota permits, no exemptions); one 3-day muzzleloading gun season (20 no-cost quota permits, no exemptions), one 9-day general gun hunt (quota of 20 no-cost quota permits, no exemptions); a 2-day youth turkey hunt (5 no-cost quota permits, no exemptions); two 4-day (Thurs – Sun) spring turkey hunts (5 no-cost quota permits, no exemptions); a small game season from the last weekend in November through the first weekend in January (Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays only, walk-in access only); each youth turkey quota permit holder may bring 1 additional non-hunting guest; fishing and frogging year round; allow the take of all legal game, wild turkey, fish, frogs and furbearers excluding bobcat and otter; prohibit the harvest of antlered deer not having at least one antler with three or more points or a 10-inch main beam; hunting wildlife with dogs, other than bird dogs or retrievers, is prohibited, except any dog may be used to take small game (quail, rabbit, squirrel and migratory game birds) during the small game season; allow the take of wild hogs during the small game season; allow access year round from 1.5 hours before sunrise until 1.5 hours after sunset; and allow vehicles only on designated roads, only during quota hunts and only for individuals participating in the hunt (and their guests).

(8) **Three Lakes WMA** – allow wild hog to be taken during small game season.

(9) **Three Lakes WMA, Prairie Lakes Unit** – allow wild hog to be taken during small game season.

(X) 68A-17.005 Specific regulations for Wildlife and Environmental Areas - The proposed rule amendment would adjust season dates to conform to calendar year changes and revise specific area regulations on Wildlife and Environmental Areas (WEAs) as follows:

North Central Region

(1) **Suwannee Ridge WEA** – move the last (December) general gun mobility-impaired hunt to the third weekend in November.

South Region

(2) **John G. and Susan H. Dupuis Jr.** – allow harvested wild hog to be dismembered before checking at the check station, and correct an error related to missing hunt dates for the existing April wild hog-still hunt.