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MEMORANDUM

TO: Wildlife Board and Regional Advisory Council Members

FROM: Darren DeBloois, Private Lands/Public Wildlife Coordinator

DATE: November 17, 2025

SUBJECT: Cooperative Agreements for Big Game and Turkey

DWR is proposing a new rule for Cooperative Agreements for Big Game and Turkey. The proposed rule for Cooperative Agreements aims to establish a proactive, mutually beneficial framework for managing big game and turkey populations that utilize private cultivated lands. This approach is rooted in the recognition that achieving population objectives and enhancing wildlife health often depends on the quality and availability of forage on private property.

The core rationale is as follows:

1. **Population Enhancement:** The agreements are specifically designed to benefit **below-objective big game or turkey populations** by incentivizing landowners to manage their crops or livestock forage in a manner conducive to wildlife nutrition.
2. **Improved Forage and Nutrition:** Direct payments to landowners for forage or crops used by wildlife will **increase forage availability and nutrition** during critical periods, thereby supporting healthier, more productive herds and flocks.
3. **Alternative to Depredation Programs:** The agreement offers an alternative to the existing reactive depredation programs. By entering into an agreement, a landowner accepts the wildlife use in exchange for defined compensation and cooperation toward shared management goals, allowing the Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) to move away from costly, reactionary depredation responses. The agreement is **in lieu of participation in depredation programs**.
4. **Meeting Management Goals:** The agreements mandate that all participating lands **must meet defined goals and objectives** for wildlife management, ensuring that public funds are used effectively to achieve specific conservation outcomes.
5. **Hunter Opportunity and Herd Management:** By improving population health and ensuring adequate resources, the program can help **reduce female harvest** where necessary to promote growth, ultimately leading to sustained populations and an **increase in hunter opportunities** in the future.

In essence, this rule shifts the management paradigm from addressing conflict after it occurs (depredation) to creating structured, voluntary partnerships with private landowners to actively manage habitat and forage, thereby serving the broader public interest in robust big game and turkey populations. DWR is recommending a new rule to define how we may enter into cooperative agreements with private landowners to work toward enhancing big game and turkey populations that use private cultivated lands.