

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

Species: Fisher

Region: 1

Year: 2019

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

Decrease the harvest quota of fisher in R-1 from 1 to 0, beginning with the 2019 season.

In 1983, the trapping season for fisher was re-opened for the first time in over 20 years. A quota of 10 was established for R-1 and season dates were from 12/1 to 12/31. In 1994, the quota was reduced to 5 for R-1. This quota was further reduced to 2 in 1997, and the season was extended to 2/15 to coincide with the closing date for marten. In 2016, the quota was reduced to 1 and only in the Cabinet Mountains.

2. Why is the proposed change necessary?

The current harvest of fishers is most likely not sustainable, due to the small size and isolation of the Cabinet Mountain fisher population.

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).

The history of fishers and their historic distribution in Montana is uncertain; however, it is believed that unregulated fur trade in the late 1800s and early 1900s nearly eradicated Montana's fisher populations (Powell 1993), and by the 1920s, fishers were presumed extirpated (Weckworth and Wright 1968). In 1989 and 1991, 110 fishers (32 from Minnesota and 78 from Wisconsin) were released into the Cabinet Mountains (Roy 1991, Heinemeyer 1993). These individuals established the current population of fisher in the east and west Cabinet Mountains in Idaho and Montana.

Prior to the 1989 and 1991 releases of fishers to the Cabinets, the only known capture of a fisher in that general area was in 1987 in Eddy Creek, south of the Clark Fork River. Since then, all fishers trapped in Region 1, except for three, have been in Sanders and Lincoln Counties. A total of 81 fishers (37 females, 41 males, 3 unclassified individuals) were harvested in Region 1 from 1979–2018.

Recent surveys have indicated low occupancy of fisher in the Cabinet Mountains, and a recent study has indicated that the West Cabinet population of fisher in Idaho and Montana are small and genetically isolated (Lucid et al 2019). Lucid et al. (2019) suggest that without human intervention, the West Cabinet population of fishers will not persist.

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).

Fisher are heavily reliant on old growth forest types that provide cavity trees for denning. Much of the old growth forest in the Cabinet Mountains has been logged, reducing potential den sites for females. The lack of suitable habitat may be depressing the current population of fishers in Montana.

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).

This proposal to reduce the fisher quota in R-1 to 0 is a result of a joint meeting of Montana FWP, The Montana Trapper's Association (MTA), Montana Fur Harvester's (MFH), and trappers unaffiliated with either organization. This proposal was supported by both associations.

Submitted by: Jessy Coltrane
Date: 4/29/2019

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification: