

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Justification for R1 Private Land (Non-timber) antlerless opportunity removal

Hunting Districts: 100,101,102,103,104,109,110,120

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

Current opportunity to harvest either-sex white-tailed deer utilizing a General Deer License is limited to archery season, the first week of the general season, to youth (age 10-15) and hunters with a PTHFV throughout the general season, and on private land only, excluding SPP Montana, Green Diamond, Stotze and Simpson (i.e. corporate timberlands), during the last week of the general season.

This proposal would only eliminate the either-sex opportunity for using a General Deer License on private land during the last week of the general season. If adopted, opportunity during the last week of the season (excluding youth and PTHFV) would be limited to antlered buck only on all lands. If this proposal is adopted, additional antlerless licenses may need to be issued in HDs with white-tailed deer game damage issues.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

Approximately 50% of the private, non-tribal, landownership in Region 1 has historically been held by corporate timber companies. Due the relative consistency in ownership, parcel size, and land-use practices, hunting regulations have been able to incorporate season structures specific to these properties and effectively communicate differences within the hunting regulations. Current regulations for HDs identified in this proposal specifically identify properties where either-sex opportunity during the last week of the general season is prohibited. However, recent and rapid large-scale changes in ownership and associated land-use has made it impractical to distinguish these lands from other private ownerships. Doing so would unnecessarily complicate the regulations and create conflict between new landowners and sportsmen.

The objectives of this proposal are to simplify the hunting regulations and prevent confusion and conflict between sportsmen and private landowners as land ownership within the region continues to change. There is not biological justification for this proposal.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

Success will be measured by a reduction of complaints to FWP staff regarding confusion over hunting regulations and opportunities in the identified hunting districts, reduced game violations specific to the proposed change, and general hunter and private landowner satisfaction.

4. 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).

White-tailed deer recruitment in Region 1 has experienced multiple cycles of decline and recovery during the last two decades that correlate with indices of overall winter severity (Figure 1). The Accumulated Winter Season Severity Index (AWSSI) is an index of winter severity that accounts for temperature, snowfall, and snow depth, and is intended to capture winter weather from its earliest occurrence to its last (Boustead et al. 2015). Nonlinear regression (Generalized Additive Model) relating the annual average recruitment in Region 1 to annual winter severity (AWSSI) showed that winter severity explained approximately 78% of the variation in spring recruitment estimates. As expected, more severe winters were correlated with reduced survival and therefore decreased recruitment, although there was variation within narrow regions of the winter severity index. The last two years (2019 and 2020) of relatively mild winter severity, associated mean recruitment levels > 40fawns:100 adults, and

stable to slightly increasing antlered buck harvest trend (Figure 2) indicate an overall stable to increasing white-tailed deer population in Region 1.

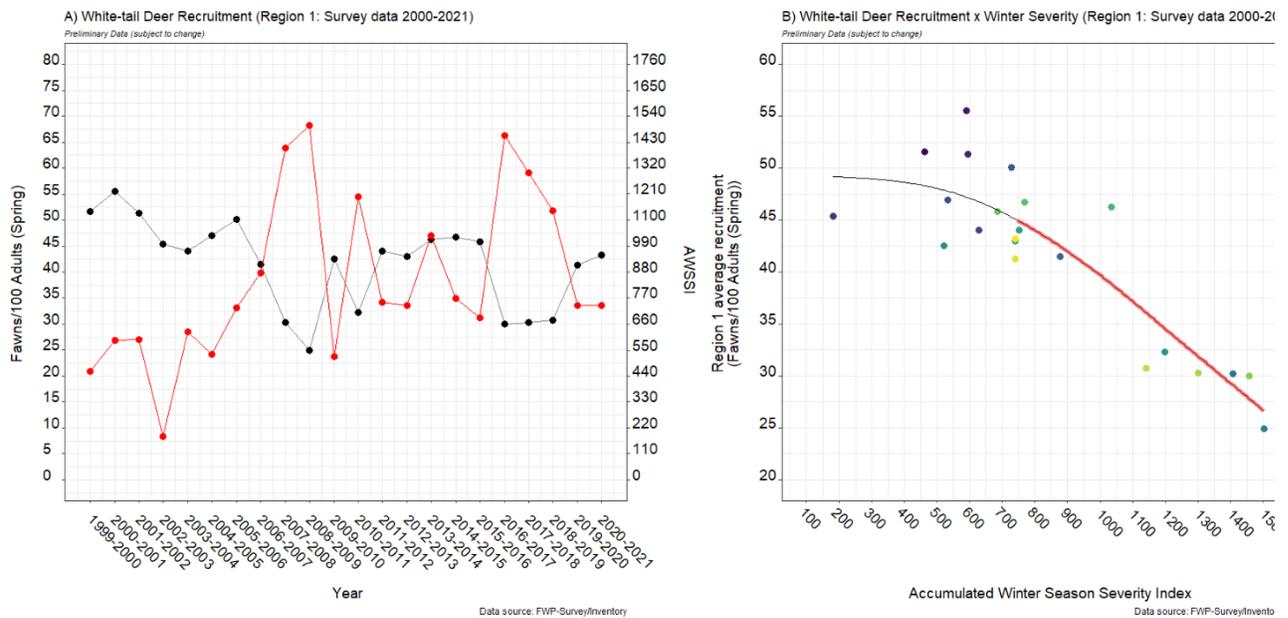


Figure 1: Region 1 WTD winter severity as measured by AWSSI, and relationship to mean annual recruitment.

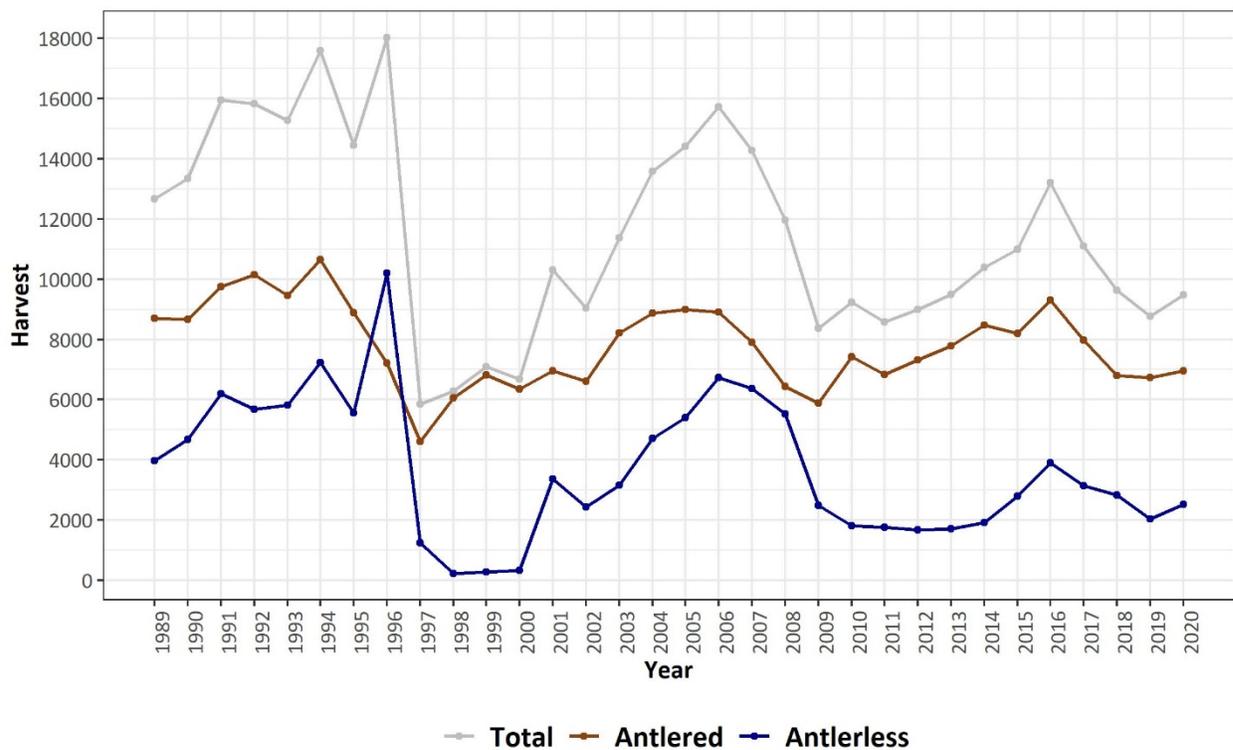


Figure 2: Region 1 WTD annual harvest from phone survey (1989-2020).

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

6. 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, along with others included under the 2021 regulation simplification process, was made available online and made available for public comment September 21 - October 20. A virtual open-house public meeting occurred October 14. Local public gatherings have been limited due to the COVID19 pandemic, though several local sportsmen and landowner contacts have been made by the area biologist. While the majority of comments were supportive or indifferent to the proposed change, those that oppose the proposal cited the already relatively conservative white-tailed deer season structure and loss of additional opportunity as main reasons for opposition. Several private landowners within the affected HDs also expressed opposition to this change as many utilize this opportunity to address game-damage issues and reduce local deer densities on their properties.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
WTD either-sex first week

Hunting Districts: 121, 122, 130

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

This proposal would allow the harvest of either-sex white-tailed deer with a General Deer License during the first week of the general hunting season in HD 130, HD 121 and HD 122. Currently, only antlered buck white-tailed deer can be harvested with a General License throughout the entire general hunting season in these districts. From 2016-2018, either-sex white-tailed deer could be harvested the first and last week of the season with a General Deer License; however, this opportunity was eliminated in 2019 due to decreasing deer trend counts and recruitment data.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The objective of this proposal is to increase the opportunity to harvest antlerless white-tailed deer in these hunting districts. This regulatory change would provide opportunity for meat hunters to harvest an antlerless deer during the first week of the season. We do not feel that this increase in antlerless opportunity would negatively impact the deer populations in these districts, as few people choose to harvest an antlerless deer during the first week of the season. In addition, this would provide land owners the ability to harvest antlerless deer on private property to address potential game damage issues. Future population concerns would be addressed by increasing or decreasing the number of B Licenses issued in each district.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

Success will be measured using annual trend and recruitment surveys in these districts, as well as harvest surveys and game damage complaints. We do not anticipate this change to impact population status of deer in any of these districts; however, we may see a slight increase in doe harvest during the first week of the season. In addition, we may see a reduction of game damage complaints in these districts.

4. 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).

Spring green-up surveys are conducted annually in HD's 130, 121, and 122. From these surveys, we estimate annual recruitment and in some cases, population trends. In HD 130, recruitment has been increasing steadily since 2019, with the past two estimates above 44 fawns:100 adults. In addition, there has been a slight increase in harvest, further indicating a stable to increasing population. In HD 121, recruitment has showed strong increases from 20 fawns:100 adults (2019) to 44 fawns:100 adults (2021). HD 122 has shown similar positive increase in recruitment from 26 fawns:100 (2019) to 44 fawns:100 adults (2021).

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

White-tailed deer recruitment in Region 1 has experienced multiple cycles of decline and recovery during the last two decades that correlate with indices of overall winter severity (Figure 1). The Accumulated Winter Season Severity Index (AWSSI) is an index of winter severity that accounts for temperature, snowfall, and snow depth, and is intended to capture winter weather from its earliest occurrence to its last (Boustead et al. 2015). Nonlinear

regression (Generalized Additive Model) relating the annual average recruitment in Region 1 to annual winter severity (AWSSI) showed that winter severity explained approximately 78% of the variation in spring recruitment estimates. As expected, more severe winters were correlated with reduced survival and therefore decreased recruitment, although there was variation within narrow regions of the winter severity index.

HDs 130, 121 and 122 are a mix of United State Forest Service (USFS), State Timber Land, and private property. These districts are heavily forested; however, extensive networks of USFS roads provide hunting access throughout the areas. In addition, there are numerous, well maintained trails throughout USFS property.

6. 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 has been available online for public comment and was presented at a regional virtual open house. Public comments regarding this proposal was relatively equally split between people who wanted an either-sex opportunity on their General Deer License, and people who did not want to see any antlerless harvest at all in the region.

Table 3. White-tailed deer survey and classification annual summaries for the West Clark Fork, HD 121, 1997-2021.

<i>HD</i>	<i>Survey Year</i>	<i>Adults</i>	<i>Fawns</i>	<i>Uncl.</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Fawns per 100 adults</i>
121	1997	134	30	122	164	22.00
121	1998	119	38	33	157	32.00
121	1999	334	168	154	502	50.00
121	2000	493	202	110	695	41.00
121	2001	526	222	192	748	42.00
121	2002	486	199	167	685	41.00
121	2003	331	140	122	471	42.00
121	2004	455	162	382	617	36.00
121	2005	205	90	117	295	44.00
121	2006	605	239	258	844	40.00
121	2007	481	138	272	619	29.00
121	2008	637	149	150	786	23.00
121	2009	658	135	99	793	21.00
121	2010	584	224	60	808	38.00
121	2011	787	178	76	965	23.00
121	2012	847	289	55	1136	34.12
121	2013	872	317	50	1189	36.35
121	2014	825	315	113	1140	38.18
121	2015	572	223	109	795	38.99
121	2016	849	325	78	1174	38.28
121	2017	1147	214	89	1361	18.66
121	2018	654	183	104	837	27.98
121	2019	897	176	56	1073	19.62
121	2020	675	205	94	880	30.37
121	2021	556	247	54	803	44.42

Figure 1: HD121 Survey Data.

Table 2. White-tailed deer survey and classification annual summaries for the Thompson River, HD 122, 1997-2021.

<i>HD</i>	<i>Survey Year</i>	<i>Adults</i>	<i>Fawns</i>	<i>Uncl.</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Fawns per 100 adults</i>
122	1997	38	8	0	46	21.00
122	1998	42	10	22	52	24.00
122	1999	56	30	5	86	54.00
122	2000	43	15	8	58	35.00
122	2001	33	15	8	48	45.00
122	2002	131	52	27	183	40.00
122	2003	150	61	21	211	41.00
122	2004	58	35	17	93	60.00
122	2005	22	10	5	32	45.00
122	2006	85	32	17	117	38.00
122	2007	58	21	11	79	36.00
122	2008	78	18	5	96	23.00
122	2009	131	21	8	152	16.00
122	2010	63	30	16	93	48.00
122	2011	-	-	-	-	-
122	2012	128	34	8	162	26.56
122	2013	89	36	2	125	40.45
122	2014	164	55	17	219	33.54
122	2015	50	26	2	76	52.00
122	2016	51	21	14	72	41.18
122	2017	58	12	8	70	20.69
122	2018	80	21	5	101	26.25
122	2019	69	18	8	87	26.09
122	2020	78	29	8	107	37.18
122	2021*	330	144	72	474	43.64

* *New survey transects added to increase sample size*

Figure 2: HD122 Survey Data.

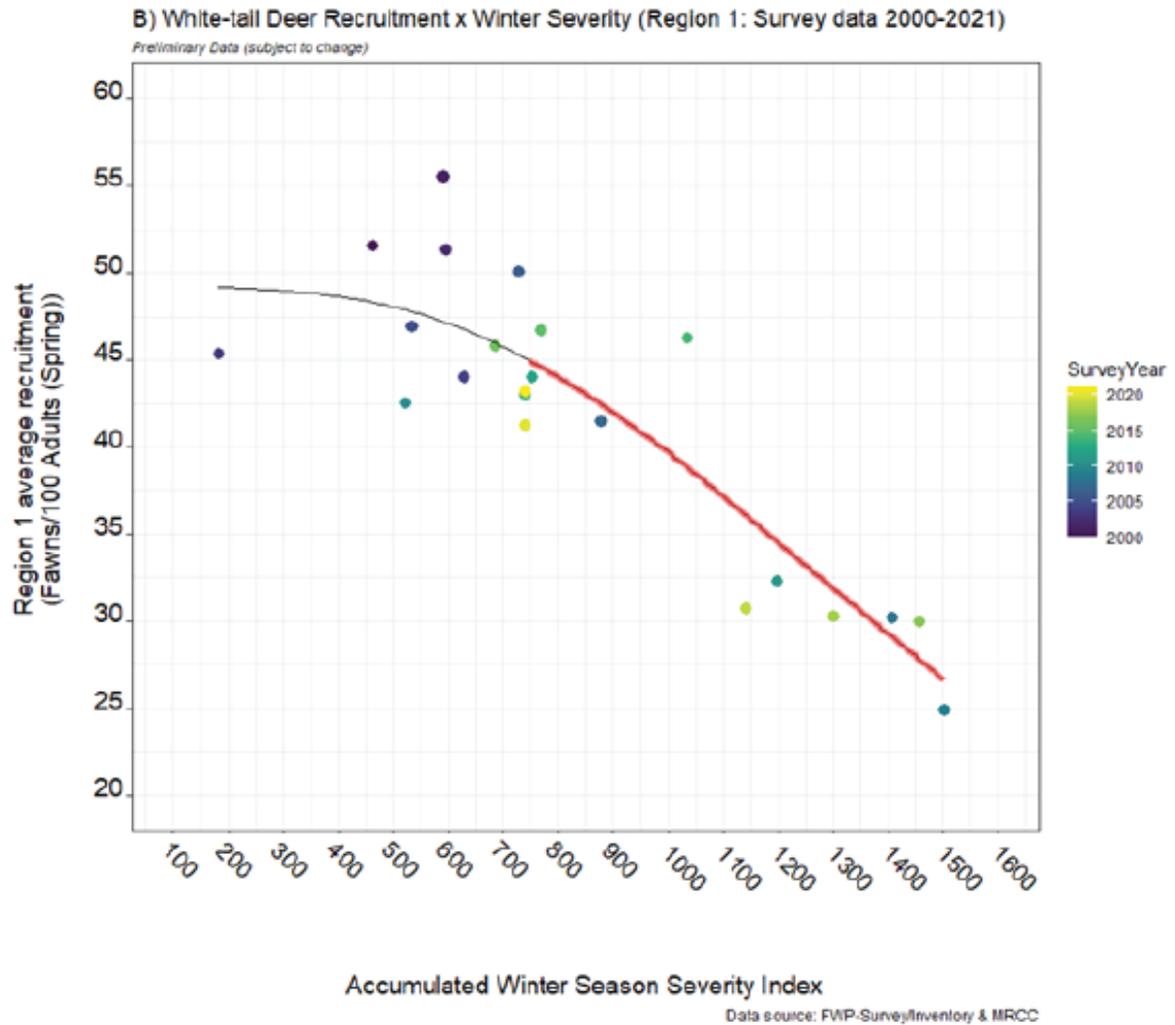


Figure 1. Relationship between mean white-tailed deer recruitment (fawn:100 adults) and mean AWSSI for Region 1. The black line shows the nonlinear fitted regression estimate and the thicker red line shows where the rate of decrease in the fitted estimate is significantly ($\alpha=0.05$). This suggests that as AWSSI increase beyond ~ 750 changes in recruitment become statistically significant. Color of points indicate spring survey year.

Figure 3: Snow index vs recruitment.

Table 1. White-tailed deer survey and classification data for the Swan Valley, HD 130, 1977-2021.

Year	Survey Date	Adults	Fawns	Uncl	Total	Fawns per 100 adults
1977	March 16	59	29	0	88	49
1980	March 26	66	33	0	99	50
1982	April 5, 7, 19	456	144	3	603	32
1998	March 18, 25, 31	69	28	18	115	41
1999	March	220	183	50	453	83
2000		132	84	0	216	64
2001	1-Apr-19	129	77	28	234	60
2002		102	90	0	192	88
2003	19-Apr-25	269	127	34	430	47
2004	April 17-19	330	169	60	559	51
2005	April 26-29	407	208	54	669	51
2007	April 24-26	504	232	27	763	46
2008	April 30, May 2, 5 April 17-21, 23, 25-26	669	255	0	924	38
2009	26	874	174	116	1164	20
2010	April 15-26	913	234	5	1152	26
2011	April 27-30	970	274	0	1244	28
2012	April 30 - May 3	524	265	0	789	51
2013	April 25 - May 1	810	367	16	1193	45
2014	April 25-28, 30 April 30, May 1-2,	860	340	39	1239	40
2015	4-5	410	124	53	588	30
2016	April 18 - 22	510	272	88	869	53
2017	April 30 - May 4	682	242	48	973	35
2018	May 4-8	539	138	50	727	25
2019	April 30, 2-5 May	476	176	35	693	37
2020	April 28-May 2	396	179	18	593	45
2021	April 21-29	432	188	21	620	44

Figure 4: HD 130 survey data.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Combine HDs 102 and 103

Hunting Districts: 102 and 103

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

This proposal would combine HDs 102 and 103, and adjust the northern boundaries of both HDs, creating a new HD 103. The adjusted boundary is created by using well-known landmarks. To our knowledge, there has never been a history of these 2 HDs being combined, and the regulations across both HDs are relatively quite similar.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

Regulations Simplification.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

Success could be measured by a reduction in the number of complaints received regarding the difficulty of FWP's regulations.

4. 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 population status of deer should not decline as a result of combining these 2 HDs.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

Because the regulations and habitat conditions are similar across both of these HDs, we do not anticipate much difference in hunting pressure if the HDs are combined. This proposal should only change how the deer and elk regulations appear by reducing the total number of HDs in Region 1.

6. 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).

Region 1 received a number of comments during the 2021 scoping period ending on 20 October. Few comments were received regarding this proposal, however the majority were in favor of combining HDs 102 and 103.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Justification for Combining HD 101 and 109

Hunting Districts: 101,109

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

This proposal would combine HDs 101 and 109 for elk, mule deer, and white-tailed deer for regulations simplification.

Mule deer season structure is not consistent between HDs 101 and 109. Opportunity using a General License in HD 101 is limited to antlered buck during the six-week archery season and five-week general season. Opportunity using a General License in HD 109 is limited to antlered buck during the six-week archery season and the first three weeks of the general season. Limited draw permits (n = 10) are issued for antlered buck during the last two weeks of the season in HD 109. The HD 109 mule deer season structure was adopted by the commission prior to the 2012 hunting season and was put in place due to hunter interest in maintaining a mature age-class of antlered mule deer by restricting harvest during the last two weeks when deer are more vulnerable to harvest due to migratory and breeding behavior. If this proposal is adopted, the reformed HD 101 would adopt the HD 109 season structure where opportunity using a General License would be limited to the six-week archery season and the first three weeks of the general season, with the last two weeks of the season restricted to limited draw permit holders. The number of permits issued will need to be adjusted pending commission decision.

Elk season structure is consistent between HDs. Opportunity using a General License is limited to either a brow-tined bull or antlerless elk during the six-week archery season, and brow-tined bull only during the five-week general hunting season. An additional 50 private-land only antlerless elk permits are issued to address game damage issues during an established shoulder season, Aug 15 – Feb 15. Permits are already valid in both HDs. HD 109 was created prior to the 2002 hunting season, primarily as means of effectively addressing elk game damage in the North Tobacco Valley. The establishment of the shoulder season permits has largely resolved the game damage issues that prompted HD 109 establishment. However, adopting this proposal would split HD 101 between two elk management units (EMUs) identified in the 2005 elk management plan.

White-tailed deer season structure is consistent between HDs. Opportunity using a General License is limited to either-sex during the six-week archery season, the first week of the general season and the last week of the general season on private land. Exceptions include youth hunters (ages 10-15), and those with a permit to hunt from a vehicle (PTHFV), who can harvest either-sex white-tailed deer on a General License throughout the general season. Each HD offers limited-draw antlerless licenses, valid on private land, to help address concentrations of deer on private agricultural ground. If the proposal is adopted, the number of 101-00 antlerless licenses issued would increase to 200 and the maximum quota range would be set at 800 to reflect the combined districts.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The objective of this proposal is to simplify the hunting regulations by reducing the number of HDs. There is no biological justification for this proposal.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

NA

4. 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).

Mule Deer

Dense timber precludes effective aerial surveys for mule deer in HDs 101 and 109. Limited ground surveys are conducted during spring green-up in HD 109, and buck harvest derived from hunter phone survey data is used to estimate population trends. Across Region 1, mule deer populations have declined since the early 1990s. Prior to 1996, Region 1's mule deer general season structure consisted of two weeks either-sex, followed by three weeks antlered only harvest. In 1997, an antlered buck only regulation was adopted for the general five-week season, though antlerless opportunity was allowed during the six-week archery season. Between 1997 and 2012 limited antlerless harvest opportunities were available within the region, and all antlerless mule deer harvest opportunity was discontinued prior to the 2012 season. Based on harvest survey data, mule deer populations in HD 101 and 109 appear to have been relatively stable for the past ten years, albeit at much lower densities than those observed prior to 1996. This proposal will not affect overall population trend.

Elk

Dense timber precludes effective aerial surveys for elk in HDs 101 and 109. Generally, elk populations occur at low densities throughout Salish and Whitefish Mountain Ranges in small (<50) localized groups. The Tobacco Valley, which occupies the northern portion of HD 101 and the western portion of HD 109 comprises the largest low-elevation winter range for some resident elk populations as well as migratory populations from British Columbia. The size of the migratory population varies according to winter severity and can result in numerous game damage issues within the predominately privately owned valley. Existing elk season structure is consistent between HD 101 and 109 and this proposal is not expected to have a biological impact on elk populations.

White-tailed Deer

Dense timber precludes effective aerial surveys for white-tailed deer in HDs 101 and 109. Ground based recruitment surveys are conducted annually during spring green-up, and buck harvest estimated from hunter phone survey data is used to track changes in population trend. In HD 101 and 109, recruitment has been steadily increasing since 2016 and has been estimated above 40 fawns per 100 adults for the past two years in HD 101, and this past year (2020) in HD 109. Antlered harvest has remained relatively stable during the last three years. The white-tailed deer population is stable to increasing within both HDs. Existing deer season structure is consistent between HD 101 and 109, and this proposal is not expected to have a biological impact on white-tailed deer populations, though may result in a limited compensatory increase in antlered buck harvest if a limited mule-deer season structure is adopted as proposed.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

Mule deer populations in HD 101 and 109 are behaviorally distinct, though there is likely some interchange of individuals between populations. Mule deer in HD 109 are predominantly migratory, moving east into the remote and mountainous conditions of the Whitefish Range and British Columbia during the summer and transitioning to the lower elevation foothills of the Whitefish Range (east HD 109) during the late fall. Mule deer within HD 109 are most vulnerable to harvest while on breeding/winter range where hunter access is improved, and habitat offers improved visibility. No movement studies have been conducted on mule deer within HD 101, though observation and movement data from adjacent HDs suggests that both resident and migratory populations occur. Most resident populations occur within the Tobacco Valley and along Koochanusa Reservoir (east HD 101). Unlike HD 109, there is extensive road access throughout HD 101, though densely timbered conditions still provide some measure of security throughout the hunting season.

6. 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).

Public comment was collected online September 21 – October 20, 2021. A virtual open-house public meeting occurred October 14. A total of 19 comments were received specific to the proposed changes, with 9 generally supportive of the proposal and 8 opposed. While in person discussions and public forums were limited by COVID-19 restrictions, discussions with local hunters suggests that division over this proposal is evenly split due to strong contention over what mule deer season structure will be applied to the much larger and combined HD 101. Overall, there is support or neutrality towards the district combination, as it relates to elk and white-tailed deer season structures.

Supporters of the proposal are generally in favor of restricting mule-deer buck harvest within the combined HD during the last two weeks of the season when bucks are perceived to be more vulnerable to harvest due to breeding behavior or late-season spatial distribution. The season structure in HD 109 is popular with hunters, who perceive an increase in older age-class deer within the HD, and value the season structure as a compromise between a limited permit season structure, and an open opportunity season structure (6 week archery, 5 week general).

Opponents of the proposal are not in favor of restricting opportunity for mule deer bucks during the last two weeks of the season and cite differences in geographic characteristics, road densities mule deer distributions as justification to maintain an open opportunity season structure within 101. Some indicated general support for the HD 109 season structure within its current boundary but were not supportive of extending the season structure to a combined HD 101.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
HD 201 B License, First week either-sex

Hunting Districts: 201

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

HDs 201, 203 & 283 are currently offering limited draw B Licenses for each district. In HD 201 there is a second B License valid for the FourMile portion. All of these previous licenses and portion are removed and are replaced with one limited draw B License valid district wide in the new HD 201. Introduce first week either-sex to replace some of the opportunity lost by removing HD portions at the west end of HD 201 and to increase harvest around the Missoula Valley where WTD numbers are high.

The 260-01 OTC B License for antlerless WTD has been valid in HD 283. With the west half of HD 283 being absorbed into the new HD 201 we are proposing to keep this opportunity in this same part of the district where it currently applies: east of Highway 93.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

To follow guidelines to simplify regulations by reducing number of hunting districts, # of licenses, and portions of districts. Increase opportunity to harvest WTD around the Missoula Valley.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

Success will be measured by whether regulations are simpler for hunters to understand and if WTD estimates stay within or above 10% of the Long Term Average.

4. 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).

Current WTD population estimates for HD 200 are within 10% of the 10-year average.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

6. 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).

The proposal to add either-sex opportunity for the first week of the general season was added specifically in response to public comment generated during the early comment period. With the removal of the WTD portions in HD 200, 201, and 202 around St Regis, which were designed to focus more harvest on private land with game damage, landowners suggested a first week either-sex opportunity. Because this was consistent with what Region 1 was proposing this seemed like it wouldn't further complicate the regs and could be a good compromise with removing the WTD portion opportunities. There were also numerous comments from the public in regards to concerns of CWD in the Missoula Valley with the high deer population.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Bitterroot WTD changes

Hunting Districts: 204, 240, 261, 270

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

This proposal has 3 parts:

- add General License either-sex opportunity to private land only in HDs 204, 261, and 270 (currently exists in HD240).
- remove 299-00 OTC license valid in the above HDs.
- change date of 262-02 license to Jan 15 to standardize deer/elk late season dates (see HD262 mule deer proposal for justification specific to this change).

These HDs (except 240) have had private land either-sex opportunity for the first week only for several years. The 299-00 license was added in 2020 to provide more white-tailed deer opportunity on private lands; however, this option is simpler, and should also relieve some pressure on buck mule deer while focusing on antlerless on private land.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

These changes are intended to simplify regulations by removing an LPT and standardizing General License/B License regulations across multiple Bitterroot HDs. Increasing antlerless harvest is not necessarily an objective, as the changes should, if adopted concurrently, have equivalent impacts.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

The success will be measured via antlerless harvest collected from the hunter phone survey, and reduced hunter confusion.

4. 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 white-tailed deer population in the Bitterroot is not surveyed and is instead monitored via harvest and game damage complaints on private land. Private lands contain the overwhelming majority of white-tailed deer, due to their habituation to human development and preference for lower-elevation/river bottom habitat (most of which is privately owned in the Bitterroot). White-tailed deer populations are generally good and/or higher than landowner tolerance in most of their habitat.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

This regulation applies only to private land in the Bitterroot, and excludes areas where WTD are not doing as well (HD250).

6. 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 was open for public comment in September/October 2021. The Ravalli County Fish and Wildlife Association opposed the move to General License either-sex in HD270 only. Some other commenters opposed

eliminating the 299-00 B License, citing that it was unfair to provide bowhunters with multiple opportunities (i.e. the 260-01 license) while restricting rifle hunters just to the General Deer License. Some commenters wanted both the either-sex General License regulation AND the 299-00 license, stating that deer populations are too high and rifle hunters needed more opportunity. FWP may reinstate the 299-00 at a later date if harvest data suggests that the populations can sustain a heavier harvest.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
HD 200 B License, First week either-sex

Hunting Districts: 200

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

HDs 200, 123 & 124 are currently offering limited draw B Licenses for each district. In HD 200 there is a second B License valid for the Mullan Gulch portion. All of these previous licenses and portion are removed and are replaced with one limited draw B License valid district wide in the new HD 200. Introducing first week either-sex to replace some of the opportunity lost by removing HD portions in the St Regis area and create consistency with R1 regulations.

Currently, only antlered buck white-tailed deer can be harvested with a General License throughout the entire general hunting season in these districts. From 2016-2018, either-sex white-tailed deer could be harvested the first and last week of the season with a General Deer License in HD 123 and HD 124; however, this opportunity was eliminated in 2019 due to decreasing deer trend counts and recruitment data.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

To follow guidelines to simplify regulations by reducing number of hunting districts, # of licenses, and portions of districts.

The objective of this proposal is to increase the opportunity to harvest antlerless white-tailed deer in these hunting districts. This regulatory change would provide opportunity for meat hunters to harvest an antlerless deer during the first week of the season. We do not feel that this increase in antlerless opportunity would negatively impact the deer populations in these districts, as few people choose to harvest an antlerless deer during the first week of the season. In addition, this would provide land owners the ability to harvest antlerless deer on private property to address potential game damage issues. Future population concerns would be addressed by increasing or decreasing the number of B Licenses issued in each district.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

Success will be measured using annual trend and recruitment surveys in these districts, as well as harvest surveys and game damage complaints. We do not anticipate this change to impact population status of deer in any of these districts; however, we may see a slight increase in doe harvest during the first week of the season. In addition, we may see a reduction of game damage complaints in these districts.

4. 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).

Current WTD population estimates for HD 200 are within 10% of the 10-year average. White-tailed deer recruitment in Region 1 has experienced multiple cycles of decline and recovery during the last two decades that correlate with indices of overall winter severity. The Accumulated Winter Season Severity Index (AWSSI) is an index of winter severity that accounts for temperature, snowfall, and snow depth, and is intended to capture winter weather from its earliest occurrence to its last (Boustead et al. 2015). relating the annual average recruitment (in Region 1) to annual winter severity showed that winter severity explained approximately 78% of the variation in spring recruitment estimates (Figure 1). The previous two winters (2019-2020 & 2020-2021) were relatively mild and recruitment estimates for HD 123 and HD 124 showed marked increases. In HD 123, recruitment has showed steady increases from 23 fawns:100 adults (2019) to 47 fawns: 100 adults (2021). HD 124 has shown

similar positive increase in recruitment from 18 fawns:100 (2019) to 43 fawns:100 adults (2021; See Figures 1, 2 & 3).

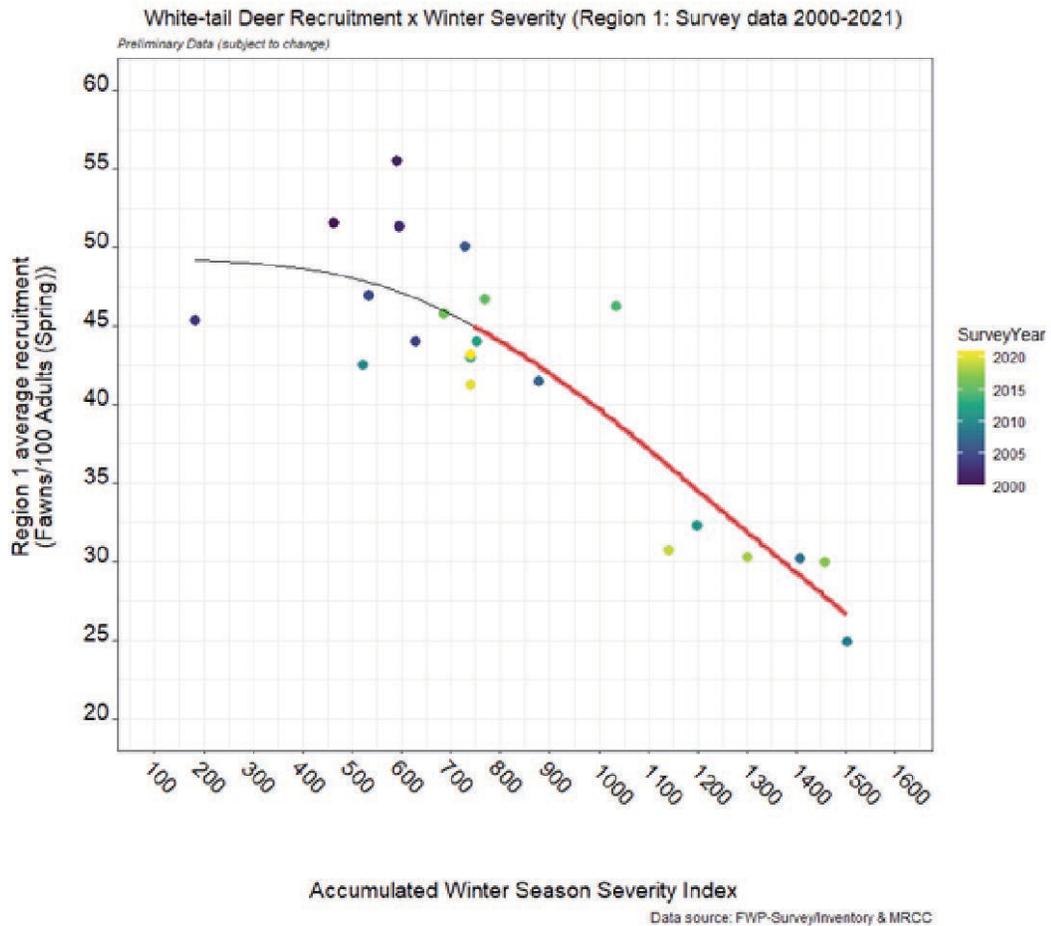


Figure 1. Relationship between mean white-tailed deer recruitment (fawn:100 adults) and mean Accumulated Winter Season Severity Index (AWSSI) for Region 1. The Accumulated Winter Season Severity Index (AWSSI) is an index of winter severity that accounts for temperature, snowfall, and snow depth, and is intended to capture winter weather from its earliest occurrence to its last (Boustead et al. 2015). The black line shows the nonlinear fitted regression estimate and the thicker red line shows where the rate of decrease in the fitted estimate is significantly ($\alpha=0.05$). This suggest that as AWSSI increase beyond ~ 750 changes in recruitment become statistically significant. Color of points indicate spring survey year.

Figure 1.

White-tailed deer survey and classification annual summaries for the Clark Mountain, HD 123, 1997-2021.

<i>HD</i>	<i>Survey Year</i>	<i>Adults</i>	<i>Fawns</i>	<i>Uncl.</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Fawns per 100 adults</i>
123	1997	149	18	41	167	12.00
123	1998	84	27	32	111	32.00
123	1999	90	48	22	138	53.00
123	2000	166	65	9	231	39.00
123	2001	100	50	57	150	50.00
123	2002	135	54	16	189	40.00
123	2003	48	16	22	64	33.00
123	2004	125	49	22	174	39.00
123	2005	35	14	16	49	40.00
123	2006	56	31	17	87	55.00
123	2007	104	50	76	154	48.00
123	2008	188	66	15	254	35.00
123	2009	206	46	7	252	22.00
123	2010	163	59	6	222	36.00
123	2011	153	53	10	206	35.00
123	2012	139	54	16	193	38.85
123	2013	93	31	8	124	33.33
123	2014	139	48	7	187	34.53
123	2015	91	43	7	134	47.25
123	2016	80	32	11	112	40.00
123	2017	104	19	12	123	18.27
123	2018	78	25	7	103	32.05
123	2019	111	26	2	137	23.42
123	2020	76	22	15	98	28.95
123	2021	47	22	2	69	46.81

Figure 2.

White-tailed deer survey and classification annual summaries for Arvilla, HD 124, 1997-2021.

<i>HD</i>	<i>Survey Year</i>	<i>Adults</i>	<i>Fawns</i>	<i>Uncl.</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Fawns per 100 adults</i>
124	1997	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
124	1998	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
124	1999	91	51	22	142	56.00
124	2000	148	61	16	209	41.00
124	2001	73	42	40	115	58.00
124	2002	63	19	38	82	30.00
124	2003	51	17	33	68	33.00
124	2004	65	23	33	88	35.00
124	2005	32	15	12	47	47.00
124	2006	77	30	13	107	39.00
124	2007	64	22	18	86	34.00
124	2008	92	39	15	131	42.00
124	2009	88	21	3	109	24.00
124	2010	69	16	9	85	23.00
124	2011	107	32	6	139	30.00
124	2012	130	47	19	177	36.15
124	2013	142	57	0	199	40.14
124	2014	121	47	14	168	38.84
124	2015	87	40	24	127	45.98
124	2016	133	50	15	183	37.59
124	2017	122	28	5	150	22.95
124	2018	112	19	32	131	16.96
124	2019	74	13	2	87	17.57
124	2020	144	50	24	194	34.72
124	2021	176	77	12	253	43.75

Figure 3.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

The new HD 200 is a mix of United State Forest Service (USFS), State Timber Land, and private property. The district is heavily forested; however an extensive network of USFS roads provides hunting access throughout the district. In addition, there are numerous, well maintained trails throughout USFS property.

6. 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).

In R2, the proposal to add either-sex opportunity for the first week of the general season was added specifically in response to public comment generated during the early comment period and for consistency with R1 proposals. With the removal of the WTD portions in HD 200, 201, and 202 around St Regis, which were designed to focus more harvest on private land with game damage, landowners suggested a first week either-sex opportunity. Because this was consistent with what Region 1 was proposing this seemed like it wouldn't further complicate the regs and could be a good compromise with removing the WTD portion opportunities.

In R1 public comments regarding this proposal was relatively equally split between people who wanted an either-sex opportunity on their General Deer License, and people who did not want to see any antlerless harvest at all in the region.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
HD 202 B License, First week either-sex

Hunting Districts: 202

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

HDs 202 and 203 are currently offering limited draw B Licenses for each district. In HD 202 there is a second B License valid for the Trout-Quartz Creek portion. Both of these previous B Licenses and portion are removed and are replaced with one limited draw B License valid district wide in the new HD 202. Introducing first week either-sex to replace some of the opportunity lost by removing HD portions in the St Regis area and create consistency with R1 regulations.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

To follow guidelines to simplify regulations by reducing number of hunting districts, # of licenses, and portions of districts.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

Success will be measured by whether regulations are simpler for hunters to understand and if WTD estimates stay within or above 10% of the Long Term Average.

4. 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).

Current WTD population estimates for the Lower Clark Fork are within 10% of the 10-year average.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

6. 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).

The proposal to add either-sex opportunity for the first week of the general season was added specifically in response to public comment generated during the early comment period. With the removal of the WTD portions in HD 200, 201, and 202 around St Regis, which were designed to focus more harvest on private land with game damage, landowners suggested a first week either-sex opportunity. Because this was consistent with what Region 1 was proposing this seemed like it wouldn't further complicate the regs and could be a good compromise with removing the WTD portion opportunities.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Apply Deer B License 399-00 to HD 302

Hunting Districts: HD 302

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

This proposal would allow hunters with a Deer B License: 399-00 to harvest antlerless white-tailed deer in the district.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

Increasingly, white-tailed deer are present in areas formerly occupied solely by mule deer. White-tailed deer competition with mule deer is a growing concerns, as is the increasing prevalence of CWD. Applying Deer B License 399-00 throughout the area will provide an additional tool for managing white-tail populations.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

Harvest statistics and/or hunter checks indicating hunters successfully using Deer B License 399-00 in district.

4. 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).

No management objectives are established for white-tail deer in this district. White-tailed deer presence has increased within the district based on reports from sportspersons, landowners and aerial and ground observations. Potential competition with mule deer and other browsers is a concern as is the potential for increased prevalence of CWD.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

Most of this district has seen little or no white-tailed presence historically. Increasingly, white-tailed deer are found in areas formerly inhabited solely by mule deer.

6. 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).

Due to accelerated timeline of this season change process, public comment was likely more limited than usual. The proposal was posted on the FWP Website on September 20th which allowed people to comment online. The proposal was included in an email to the interested party list serve kept by biologist Jesse Newby and was discussed at the Region 3 Open House meeting 10/13/21. Jesse Newby also discussed this proposal with several Beaverhead County landowners and sportspersons, along with the Beaverhead County Chapter of the Mule Deer Foundation.

No comments have been received related to this proposal.

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Make Deer B License: 399-00 valid in HD 303**

Hunting Districts: HD 303

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

This proposal would allow hunters with a Deer B License 399-00 to harvest antlerless white-tailed deer in the district.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

Increasingly, white-tailed deer are present in areas formerly occupied solely by mule deer. White-tailed deer competition with mule deer is a growing concern, as is the increasing prevalence of CWD. Applying Deer B License 399-00 throughout the area will provide an additional tool for managing white-tail populations.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

Harvest statistics or hunter checks indicating hunters used Deer B License 399-00 in district.

4. 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).

No management objectives are established for white-tail deer in this district. White-tailed deer presence has increased within the district based on reports from sportspeople, landowners and aerial and ground observations. Potential competition with mule deer and other browsers is a concern as is the potential for increased prevalence of CWD.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

Most of this district has seen little or no white-tailed presence historically. Increasingly, white-tailed deer are found in areas formerly inhabited solely by mule deer.

6. 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).

Due to accelerated timeline of this season change process, public comment was likely more limited than usual. The proposal was posted on the FWP Website on September 20th which allowed people to comment online. The proposal was included in an email to the interested party list serve kept by biologist Jesse Newby and was discussed at the Region 3 Open House meeting 10/13/21. Jesse Newby also discussed this proposal with several Beaverhead County landowners and sportspeople, along with the Beaverhead County Chapter of the Mule Deer Foundation.

No comments have been received related to this proposal.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Combine Deer/Elk Hunting Districts 320 and 333

Hunting Districts: 320 and 333

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

Remove the northeast portion of HD 333 that sits east of State Highway 359, south of Interstate 90, and west of U. S. Highway 287. Combine the remainder of HD 333 and HD 320 into one HD. The new HD would be numbered 320.

Proposed regulations:

General Deer License: Either-sex mule deer; Either-sex white-tailed deer;

Deer B License: 003-00: Antlerless white-tailed deer. One per hunter and valid across all Region 3 HDs;

Deer B License: 399-00: Antlerless white-tailed deer. One to five per hunter per year based on harvest need and valid across HDs 302, 320, 322, 329, 340, and 360.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

Statewide regulations simplification.

From a biological perspective, the HD combination expands the HD to the Tobacco Root Elk Management Unit scale, which is the scale that elk and mule deer use the landscape. Removal of the northeast portion of the HD will focus the HD on the Tobacco Root Mountain Range. Elk and mule deer regulations have been common across the two hunting districts for many years.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Apply Deer B License 399-00 to HD 331

Hunting Districts: HD 331

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

This proposal would allow hunters with a Deer B License 399-00 to harvest antlerless white-tailed deer in the district using this license.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

Increasingly, white-tailed deer are present in areas formerly occupied solely by mule deer. White-tailed deer competition with mule deer is a growing concern, as is the increasing prevalence of CWD. Applying Deer B License 399-00 throughout the area will provide an additional tool for managing white-tail populations.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

Harvest statistics and/or hunter checks indicating hunters successfully using Deer B License: 399-00 in district.

4. 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).

No management objectives are established for white-tail deer in this district. White-tailed deer presence has increased within the district based on reports from sportspeople, landowners and aerial and ground observations. Potential competition with mule deer and other browsers is a concern as is the potential for increased prevalence of CWD.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

Most of this district has seen little or no white-tailed presence historically. Increasingly, white-tailed deer are found in areas formerly inhabited solely by mule deer.

6. 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).

Due to accelerated timeline of this season change process, public comment was likely more limited than usual. The proposal was posted on the FWP Website on September 20th which allowed people to comment online. The proposal was included in an email to the interested party list serve kept by biologist Jesse Newby and was discussed at the Region 3 Open House meeting 10/13/21. Jesse Newby also discussed this proposal with several Beaverhead County landowners and sportspeople, along with the Beaverhead County Chapter of the Mule Deer Foundation.

No comments have been received related to this proposal.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Apply Deer B License 399-00 to HD 329

Hunting Districts: HD 329

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

This proposal would allow hunters with a Deer B License 399-00 to harvest antlerless white-tailed deer in the district using this license.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

Increasingly, white-tailed deer are present in areas formerly occupied solely by mule deer. White-tailed deer competition with mule deer is a growing concern, as is the increasing prevalence of CWD. Applying Deer B License 399-00 throughout the area will provide an additional tool for managing white-tail populations.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

Harvest statistics and/or hunter checks indicating hunters successfully using Deer B License: 399-00 in district.

4. 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).

No management objectives are established for white-tail deer in this district. White-tailed deer presence has increased within the district based on reports from sportspeople, landowners and aerial and ground observations. Potential competition with mule deer and other browsers is a concern as is the potential for increased prevalence of CWD.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

Most of this district has seen little or no white-tailed presence historically. Increasingly, white-tailed deer are found in areas formerly inhabited solely by mule deer.

6. 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).

Due to accelerated timeline of this season change process, public comment was likely more limited than usual. The proposal was posted on the FWP Website on September 20th which allowed people to comment online. The proposal was included in an email to the interested party list serve kept by biologist Jesse Newby and was discussed at the Region 3 Open House meeting 10/13/21. Jesse Newby also discussed this proposal with several Beaverhead County landowners and sportspeople, along with the Beaverhead County Chapter of the Mule Deer Foundation.

No comments have been received related to this proposal.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
HD 343 Antlerless WTD Adjustments

Hunting Districts: HD 343

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

Make the antlerless WTD opportunity offered for the general rifle season on the General Deer License valid only east of the Continental Divide. Also make the antlerless WTD opportunity offered with the Single Region 3 antlerless WTD B License, 003-00, valid only east of the Continental Divide. With redistricting efforts, a portion of HD 293 would be combined with HD 343. This change would maintain opportunities now offered in HD 343 and continue limiting those opportunities in HD 293, i.e., status quo.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

With redistricting efforts, a portion of HD 293 would be combined with HD 343. This change would maintain opportunities now offered in HD 343 and continue limiting those opportunities in HD 293, i.e., status quo.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

4. 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).

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

6. 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).

Due to the short timeline, and late receipt of comments emailed to the agency at large, only those comments submitted through the online survey portal for Region 3 or received directly (email, other pers. comm.) and those inclusive of Helena area HDs (deer/elk HDs 318, 335, 339, 343, and 388 [also pronghorn]) were able to be reviewed and included in this proposal by the deadline. Additionally, comments that were not specific to a proposed change may not be captured in the list below, but they were considered, particularly when making adjustments to initial recommendations for the Helena area. All comments submitted during the Sept/Oct comment period are to be considered along with comments that will be submitted during the traditional comment period in December and January.

Sept/Oct comment included:

General

3 Opposed to process: take input from hunters and landowners before proposals are put together, not after; pause and engage public first; use traditional process for changes.

6 Opposed to any combining of HDs [3 may be opposed to any of the proposed changes, including combining, unclear from comment], and/or reducing opportunities for any of the Region 3 HDs as proposed in Sept.

1 Opposed to loss of data collected at and loss of management at existing HD scales.

1 Opposed to boundaries based on private property.

WTD

1 Retain single Region 3 antlerless white-tailed deer license.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Combine Gravely Deer/elk HDs

Hunting Districts: 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 330

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

Combine HDs 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, and 330 into one HD. The new HD would be numbered 322. The portion of HD 323 known as the Wall Creek Special Hunt Area would be maintained.

Proposed regulations:

General Deer License: Either-sex mule deer; Either-sex white-tailed deer;

Deer B License: 003-00—Antlerless white-tailed deer. One per hunter and valid across all Region 3 HDs;

Deer B License: 399-00—Antlerless white-tailed deer. One to five per hunter per year based on harvest need and valid across HDs 302, 320, 322, 329, 340, and 360;

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

Statewide regulations simplification.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Rename 317-00 WTB License

Hunting Districts: 314, 317

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

The current 317-00 whitetail B License is valid in both 314 and 317 as supported by the biology and habitat use of whitetail deer in Paradise Valley. This proposal is simply to rename the 317-00 license to an administrative number 397-00. This will simplify regulations and reduce confusion among hunters that think the tag is only valid in HD 317 because of the name.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The objective of this change is to simplify hunting regulations, reduce hunter confusion, and improve accuracy of harvest reporting via phone surveys.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

Success is implied because the objective is simply to rename this opportunity.

4. 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).

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

This change will be administrative only. Hunter opportunity and impact to the resource will not change as this is a simple relabeling of an existing opportunity.

6. 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).

Due to the accelerated timeline for this season setting process, outreach and comment has been somewhat limited. The proposed change has been shared multiple times via the area biologist's (Michael Yarnall) email list serve, discussed at the Region 3 Regulation Simplification Open House (13 October 21), and between the area biologist and a handful of local landowners and sportsmen. Response to date has been positive or indifferent because this change would not result in any changes to on the ground opportunity or management.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
R-4 New WTD B License

Hunting Districts: All R4 except HD 455

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

Remove WTD LPTs 496-00, 497-00, 498-00 which are multi-district valid whitetail B Licenses. These HD "groupings" are currently valid in 496-00 (HDs 413 and 445 = Smith River and Missouri River); 497-00 (HDs 411 and 412 = Snowies, Judiths, Moccasins) and 498-00 (HDs 422 and 444 = lower Sun River). The proposal is to remove these LPTs and replace with a second, region-wide whitetail B License valid by drawing only. New LPT: 004-01 with 2,000 licenses (New established quota range 500-3,000 licenses). Available to Residents and Non-Residents. Valid in all Region 4 HDs except 455. This license will be in addition to the existing 004-00 OTC Region 4 WT B License available to Residents and Non-Residents.

Table 1. Teton River white-tailed deer trend route, spring 1995 – present. This survey is traditionally accomplished during late afternoon/early evening times via fixed-wing plane. The route is approximately 22 square miles (beginning at Pine Butte Swamp, following Teton River bottom and ending at Choteau.

Year	Date/Time	Adults	Fawns	Unclass.	Total	Comments	WT Deer/mi ²
1995	5/18 AM			82	82		3.7 (ground survey)
1996	5/4 AM			106	106		4.8
1997	5/5 PM			389	389		17.7
1998	4/30 PM			489	489		22.2
1999	5/17 PM			154	154		Incomplete survey
2000	5/1 PM			353	353		16.0
2001	4/27 PM			350	350		15.9
2002	No survey						
2003	4/23 PM			157	157	68 mule deer also counted	14.3 (11 square miles surveyed)
2004	4/22 PM			297	297	221 on/adj. to Preserve	13.5
2005	5/13 PM			263	263	165 wt/20md on/adj. to Preserve	11.9
2006	5/15 PM			123	123	94 wt on/adj. to Preserve	5.6
2007	5/11 PM	2	4	162	168		7.6
2008	5/14 PM	40	24	81	145		6.6
2009	5/13 PM	14	2	187	203		9.2
2010	5/11 PM			309	309		14.0
2011	5/11 PM	18	7	359	384		17.5
2012	5/12 PM	1		261	262	47 elk / 7 moose	11.9
2013	5/6 PM			332	332	107 elk / 9 moose (3 collared)	15.1
2014	5/8 PM			560	560	34 elk/2 uncollared moose	25.5
2015	4/17 PM			387	387		17.6
2016	4/21 PM			297	297	94 elk / 6 moose	13.5
2017	5/8 PM	8	3	328	339	69 elk / 1 moose	15.4
2018	5/15 PM			502	502	67 elk	22.8
2019	5/6 PM			467	467	91 elk / 4 g.bears	21.2
2020	5/9 PM			366	366	101 elk	16.6
				Avg.	299		14.2
2021	5/5 PM			325	325	119 elk	14.8

Table 2. Sun River White-tailed deer trend route, spring 1995 – present. This survey is traditionally accomplished during late afternoon/early evening times via fixed-wing plane. The route is approximately 35 square miles (beginning at Simms bridge following Sun River west to Augusta, then southwest up Elk Creek to junction with Smith Creek, then west up Smith Creek to Weisner Ranch).

Year	Date/Time	Adults	Fawns	Unclass.	Total	Comments	WT Deer/mi ²
1995	5/16 PM			319	319		9.1
1996	5/6 AM			399	399		11.4
1997	5/5 PM			353	353		10.1
1998	4/30 PM			235	235		6.7
1999	5/17 PM			248	248		7.1
2000	5/1 PM			187	187		5.3
2001	4/27 PM			422	422		12.1
2002	No survey						
2003	4/23 PM			297	297		8.5
2004	4/22 PM			230	230	58 mule deer	6.6
2005	5/13 PM			462	462	119 mule deer	13.2
2006	5/15 PM			116	116	10 mule deer	3.3
2007*	5/11 PM	18	14	235	267	20 mule deer	7.6
2008	5/14 PM	66	28	208	302		8.6
2009	5/13 PM	58	16	431	505		14.4
2010	5/11 PM	53	22	743	818		23.4
2011	5/11 PM	13	5	965	980		28.0
2012	5/12 PM	1	1	633	635	4 elk by Weisners	18.1
2013	5/6 PM			860	860		24.6
2014	5/8 PM	1	1	1363	1365		39.0
2015	4/17 PM				1058		30.2
2016	4/21 PM			1399	1399		40.0
2017	5/8 PM	12	6	1114	1132	3 elk by LF Ranch	32.3
2018	5/15 PM			1454	1454		41.5
2019	5/6 PM			1538	1538		43.9
2020	5/9 PM			941	941		26.9
				Avg.	651		18.6
2021	5/5 PM			808	808		23.1

*This survey route was unintentionally changed compared to previous years (ended up finishing at the head of Elk cr. instead of the head of Smith cr.).

Figure 1. White-tailed deer survey observation trends for the Sun and Teton River drainage survey areas (1995-present).

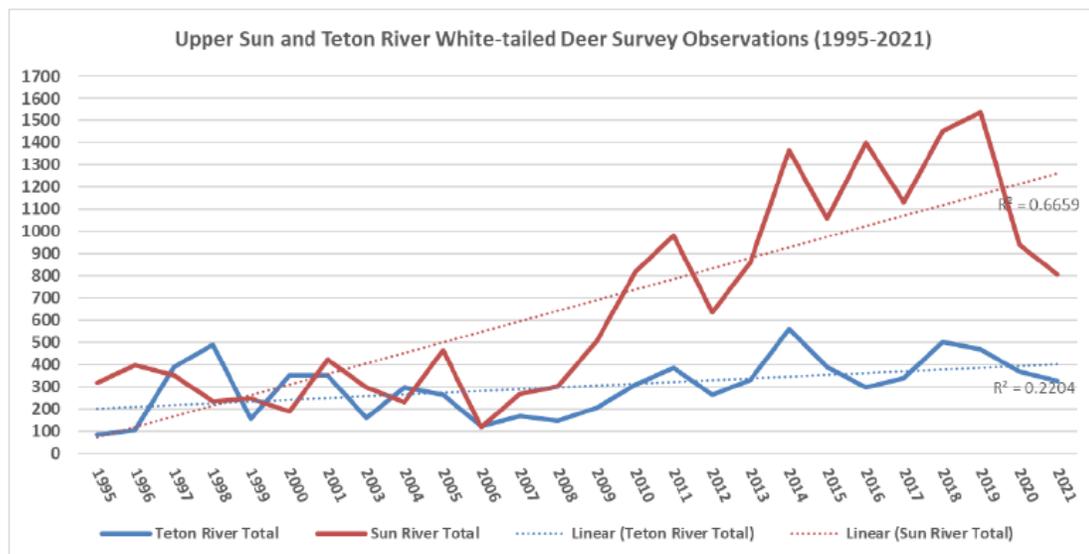


Figure 3.

Figure 2. Region 4 White-tailed Deer Harvest 1960 – 2020.

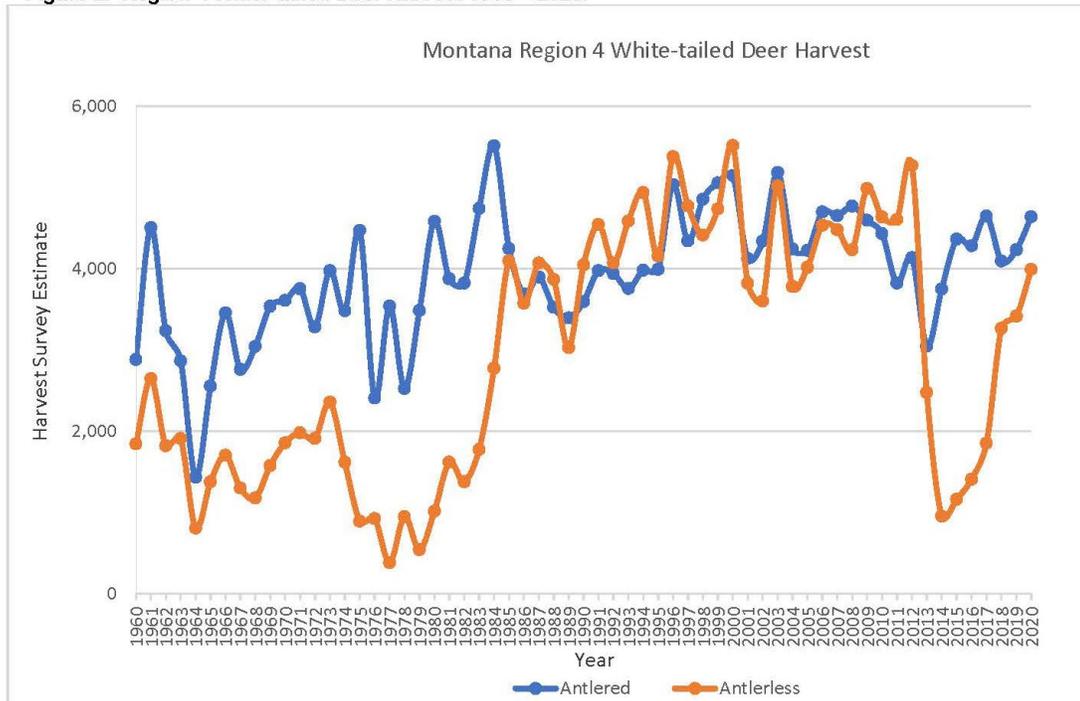


Figure 4.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

Objective of the proposal is to simplify the regulations, remove LPTs, and allow hunters the ability to focus on areas with highly populated whitetail numbers to increase antlerless harvest. This license, which will likely have surplus available after drawing (if undersubscribed), would allow hunters to purchase additional B Licenses which could be a tool to direct harvest in higher populated areas and locations to help reduce white-tail deer numbers, many of which would be associated with areas with chronic landowner damage complaints. An individual can purchase up to seven Deer B Licenses per year (per MT law) through a combination of drawing and surplus (if available).

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

Success of the proposal will show an increased antlerless whitetail harvest and improved hunter/landowner harvest flexibility with a Regional B License vs a limited HD grouping(s). Landowners with high concentrations of whitetails will have an opportunity to purchase and apply for whitetail B Licenses themselves and provide opportunity to hunters that may have numerous B Licenses (if surplus available) to increase harvest where needed.

4. 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 only direct population surveys conducted for white-tailed deer in Region 4 is on the lower Teton and Sun Rivers (Tables 1, 2 and Figure 1). However, regional field observations, conversations with Landowners and harvest data indicate the regional population has steadily increased since the EHD outbreaks of 2012 and 2013. Deer numbers remained high outside the areas affected by the EHD outbreak in the Region. This trend area has shown a stable and increasing population in the past 25 years and remains at all-time highs in some areas.

Figure 2 details WTD harvest in Region 4 from 1960 to 2020. Over this 60-year period, the Regional whitetail population has continued to increase with time as has harvest and hunter opportunity. Increased whitetail hunting opportunity/harvest has a direct correlation to increased whitetail populations. From 1960 to present, annual antlerless WT harvest has risen from about 1,800 in 1960 to 4,000 in 2020 (high of 5,500 in 2000). Whitetail buck harvest has a similar long-term trend of almost 2,900 in 1960 to over 4,600 in 2020 (high of 5,500 in 1984).

Major river drainages such as the Smith, Sun, Missouri, Teton, and Musselshell River with adjoining foothills dissected by numerous creek and river drainages flowing from the mountain habitats provide excellent white-tailed deer habitat. These areas receive good moisture for Montana and have very fertile agricultural lands with an ideal mix of grain, hay and riparian plant communities at lower elevations. Consequently, white-tailed deer production and recruitment is consistently good. The white-tailed deer populations in this area of Region 4 historically have experienced very few outbreaks of EHD compared to populations farther downstream on the Missouri, Judith and Musselshell Rivers, or eastern in Montana and the Dakotas. In the mid-1970s, late-1980s and mid-2010s the Region 4 suffered large EHD die-offs, but populations are very quick to recover.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

Most white-tailed deer in these HDs are associated with private agricultural land where landowner tolerance of high populations levels is an issue. The agricultural and riparian areas of Region 4 provide very productive habitat for area whitetail-tailed deer, which typically have high fawn production and recruitment rates. Consistent access to high quality forage resources results in little winter mortality (no observations or reports of substantial winter mortality) in at least the recent past. When snow depths in the foothills become too extreme, movement of deer downward slope occurs onto more wind-swept farm ground and river/creek bottom riparian vegetation. White-tailed deer competition with mule deer populations is also a concern in some areas of the Region. Reducing whitetail populations where species overlap can increase forage and winter range availability for mule deer which is also a Regional goal.

Hunter access is expected to be good for the licenses with many area landowners in the previously described high concentration areas wanting to see white-tailed deer numbers reduced. Demand for antlerless B Licenses remains high as hunting access for antlerless deer is very good on private land in the Region.

6. 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).

Landowners and local sportsmen who have been contacted about the proposal have been very supportive of the increased flexibility and opportunity. Area wardens contacted also voiced support for the increased opportunity and reduced complexity of the B Licenses. During the 30-day public review period of the 2022/23 season propels Sept/Oct 2021, only two comments were received for this proposal, both in full support.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Add 005-00 Whitetail B License to HD 575

Hunting Districts: 575

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

The proposal is to remove the existing 599-00 whitetail B License opportunity and replace that opportunity with new 005-00 whitetail B License. No changes are anticipated for harvest or hunter opportunity. The objective of the proposal is to simplify regulations. Please refer to the justification for the following proposal for complete information. R5-White-tailed Deer-Structure-Create new 005-00 B License.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Add 005-00 Whitetail B License to HD 590

Hunting Districts: 590

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

The proposal is to remove the existing 597-00 whitetail B License opportunity and replace that opportunity with new 005-00 whitetail B License. No changes are anticipated for harvest or hunter opportunity. The objective of the proposal is to simplify regulations. Please refer to the justification for the following proposal for complete information. R5-White-tailed Deer-Structure-Create new 005-00 B License.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Remove Whitetail B Licenses 597-00, 598-00, and 599-00.

Hunting Districts: 500, 502, 510, 511, 520, 530, 540, 560, 570, 575, 580, 590

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

The proposal is to remove the existing 597-00, 598-00, and 599-00 whitetail B License opportunity and replace that opportunity with new 005-00 whitetail B License. No changes are anticipated for harvest or hunter opportunity. The objective of the proposal is to simplify regulations. Please refer to the justification for the following proposal for complete information. [R5-White-tailed Deer-Structure-Create new 005-00 B License.](#)

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Add New 005-00 Whitetail B License

Hunting Districts: 540

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

The proposal is to remove the existing 598-00 whitetail B License opportunity and replace that opportunity with new 005-00 whitetail B License. No changes are anticipated for harvest or hunter opportunity. The objective of the proposal is to simplify regulations. Please refer to the justification for the following proposal for complete information. R5-White-tailed Deer-Structure-Create new 005-00 B License.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Add 005-00 Whitetail B License to 555

Hunting Districts: 555

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

The proposal is to remove the existing 599-00 whitetail B License opportunity and replace that opportunity with new 005-00 whitetail B License. No changes are anticipated for harvest or hunter opportunity. The objective of the proposal is to simplify regulations. Please refer to the justification for the following proposal for complete information. R5-White-tailed Deer-Structure-Create new 005-00 B License.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Add 005-00 Whitetail B License to HD 502

Hunting Districts: 502

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

The proposal is to remove the existing 598-00 whitetail B License opportunity and replace that opportunity with new 005-00 whitetail B License. No changes are anticipated for harvest or hunter opportunity. The objective of the proposal is to simplify regulations. Please refer to the justification for the following proposal for complete information. R5-White-tailed Deer-Structure-Create new 005-00 B License.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Whitetail Structure for new HD 525

Hunting Districts: 525

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

Hunting districts 520 and 560 were combined into new deer/elk district 525. Both districts contain similar habitat types and offer similar hunter access opportunities. See the following justification for information and new legal description of 525. [R5-Elk-Structure-create new 525.](#)

Both 520 and 560 had either-sex whitetail archery and general seasons with B License opportunity. New district 525 is proposed to have the same whitetail deer season structure-either sex archery and general season with B License opportunity. The district combination was targeted at regulation simplification. No changes in whitetail deer harvest, hunter opportunity, or populations are anticipated from this proposal.

The second element of this proposal is to remove the existing 599-00 whitetail B License opportunity and replace that opportunity with new 005-00 whitetail B License. No changes are anticipated for harvest or hunter opportunity. The objective of the proposal is to simplify regulations. Please refer to the justification for the following proposal for complete information including whitetail deer population status. [R5-White-tailed Deer-Structure-Create new 005-00 B License.](#)

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Whitetail Structure for new HD 515

Hunting Districts: 515

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

Hunting districts 500 and 570 were combined into new deer/elk district 515. Both districts contain similar habitat types and offer similar hunter access opportunities. See the following justification for information and new legal description of 515. R5-Elk-Structure-combine 500 and 570 into new 515.

Both 500 and 570 had either-sex whitetail archery and general seasons with B License opportunity. New district 515 is proposed to have the same whitetail deer season structure-either sex archery and general season with B License opportunity. The district combination was targeted at regulation simplification. No changes in whitetail deer harvest, hunter opportunity, or populations are anticipated from this proposal.

The second element of this proposal proposal is to remove the existing 597-00 and 598-00 whitetail B License opportunity and replace that opportunity with new 005-00 whitetail B License. No changes are anticipated for harvest or hunter opportunity. The objective of the proposal is to simplify regulations. Please refer to the justification for the following proposal for complete information including whitetail deer population status. R5-White-tailed Deer-Structure-Create new 005-00 B License.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Create HD 555 WT

Hunting Districts: 555

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

This proposal reflects no change in hunter opportunity. It simply establishes the WT hunting season for new HD 555.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Whitetail Structure for new HD 535

Hunting Districts: 535

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

Hunting districts 511 and 530 were combined into new deer/elk district 535. Both districts contain similar habitat types and offer similar hunter access opportunities. See the following justification for information and new legal description of 535. R5-Elk-Structure-combine 511 and 530 into new 535.

Both 511 and 530 had either-sex whitetail archery and general seasons with B License opportunity. New district 535 is proposed to have the same whitetail deer season structure-either sex archery and general season with B License opportunity. The district combination was targeted at regulation simplification. No changes in whitetail deer harvest, hunter opportunity, or populations are anticipated from this proposal.

The second element of this proposal proposal is to remove the existing 597-00 and 598-00 whitetail B License opportunity and replace that opportunity with new 005-00 whitetail B License. No changes are anticipated for harvest or hunter opportunity. The objective of the proposal is to simplify regulations. Please refer to the justification for the following proposal for complete information including whitetail deer population status. R5-White-tailed Deer-Structure-Create new 005-00 B License.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
Add 005-00 Whitetail B License to HD 580

Hunting Districts: 580

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

The proposal is to remove the existing 598-00 whitetail B License opportunity and replace that opportunity with new 005-00 whitetail B License. No changes are anticipated for harvest or hunter opportunity. The objective of the proposal is to simplify regulations. Please refer to the justification for the following proposal for complete information. R5-White-tailed Deer-Structure-Create new 005-00 B License.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
New 565 Whitetail Deer Season

Hunting Districts: 560, 565

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

The proposal is to take the existing portion of district 560 south of Falls Creek, and make that portion a new deer/elk hunting district.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The objective of the proposed change is to simplify the hunting regulations for new district 525 and 565, by removing the district portion which has caused confusion in the past. The elk, mule deer, and whitetail deer opportunity in this new district will be the same opportunity as was available in the past.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

The proposal is directed at regulations simplification. There are no biological measures of success associated with this proposal.

4. 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).

No whitetail deer population survey areas exist within district 565. Whitetail populations will be monitored using nearby survey areas in HD 525. HD 565 is used by whitetail deer in the spring, summer, and fall. Whitetail deer generally move north into district 525 during the winter months. Whitetail numbers in these two areas have remained relatively stable at average to above average levels over the past decade.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

The proposal is not related to weather, habitat, or access factors.

6. 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 was available for public input during the initial comment/review period. No comments were received regarding mule deer in new proposed district 565.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
White-tailed Deer 699-00 LPT Remove

Hunting Districts: Region 6 All

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

Eliminate region-wide antlerless whitetail LPT 699-00.

Currently, hunters may purchase one single-region WT license (006-00) and apply for one region-wide WT B License (699-00). The 699-00 license routinely goes surplus and is sold OTC with a limit of up to 7 total Deer B Licenses per hunter. In 2020, we sold 2,145 of the 006-00 (limit of 1 per hunter) and 2,927 of the 699-00 (quota of 3,000 and limit of 7). License vendors have not sold all the 699-00 through surplus during the last two years (1,957 and 2,927 in 2019 and 2020 respectively with quotas of 3,000), indicating the proposed change would not significantly change the total amount sold.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The objective of the eliminating the 699-00 LPT is to reduce the number of License types available. The 699-00 LPT is serving the same purpose as the OTC 006-00 white-tailed Deer B License and can be consolidated into one license. This will simplify the regulations and remove any confusion as to what license is needed and what is valid across the region.

The biological objective the region is to provide antlerless WT deer harvest opportunity in areas of greater whitetail abundance while allowing whitetail populations in other areas to recover from below average levels and reduce the risk of spread of recently detected Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in Region 6. Because whitetails are primarily found on private lands in Region 6, this license provides antlerless harvest as a tool that landowners can use to manage white-tailed deer on private lands to prevent game damage while not allowing too much harvest on the deer population. The ultimate goal is to maintain populations near average levels, while preventing populations from increasing to intolerable high levels that have been seen in the past. These high levels ultimately result in game damage issues and habitat degradation as well as the threat of the spread of CWD in the future.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

Annual deer surveys on whitetail wintering areas, distribution of harvest across Region 6, as well as harvest success will continue to be monitored. Average harvest success rate for whitetail B Licenses is 25%, with an average annual harvest of 1,400 antlerless whitetail. Harvest continues to be well distributed across Region 6, with variable whitetail abundance driving harvest distribution. As whitetail populations increase over time, the proposal allows for B Licenses to continue to be available for hunters throughout the hunting season. If whitetail populations decline due to EHD, high winter mortality, or other factors, we would recommend a reduction in the limit per hunter on the 006-00 license (between 1-6) to reduce the concern about overharvest of some localized whitetail populations.

4. 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 most recent observed white-tailed deer density on the six white-tailed deer trend areas was 9.8 deer/sq. mile, 8% below the long-term average of 10.7 deer/sq. mile.

White-tailed deer populations have been on a slow but steady increase since 2015 but have remained fairly stable since 2017. Population peaks (1996, 2008 and 2011) represent an unsustainable level (>12 deer/sq. mile) as evidenced by the decline in population that follows.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

WT habitat and forage conditions in recent years have been relatively good. Above average precipitation and lower WT densities has allowed river bottom habitat to greatly improve including shrub and cottonwood establishment and growth. WT populations are expected to respond favorably to the improved habitat conditions in those areas. However, there has been a loss of approximately 1 million acres of CRP (54% decrease) since 2010 across the Hi-Line. This reduction in CRP has reduced the amount of high-quality habitat available to WTs and in-turn reduced the reproductive and carrying capacity for WTs in Region 6. No major changes in private land access have occurred, with some improvement to hunting access along the Milk River. Public hunting access has also increased in the NE corner of the region where WT populations are at or above average.

6. 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).

We hear support from private landowners to maintain liberal whitetail B Licenses in order to stay ahead of spikes in whitetail populations. Even with these liberal tools, some landowners start to see game damage at average population levels due to localized deer distribution driven by weather conditions or access restrictions on neighboring properties. Local hunters and Region 6 CAC voiced concern about overharvest of some localized whitetail populations. We feel that being able to adjust the per-person maximum in response to population changes will alleviate that concern. Region 6 We also hear concerns about out-of-area hunters overexploiting the opportunity since there is no limit to the number sold. However, our surplus whitetail licenses currently do not sell out, suggesting this may not necessarily occur.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
White-tailed Deer Remove Per Person Limit 006-00

Hunting Districts: Region 6 All

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

Increase per-person limit on the single region antlerless whitetail (WT) license 006-00 to maximum of 4. This 006-00 license will be available over-the-counter (OTC), valid region-wide and hunters would be able to purchase up to 4 (within the allowable 7 Deer B Licenses).

Currently, hunters may purchase one single-region WT license (006-00) and apply for one region-wide WT B License (699-00). The 699-00 license routinely goes surplus and is sold OTC with a limit of up to 7 total Deer B Licenses per hunter. License vendors have not sold all the 699-00 through surplus during the last two years (1,957 and 2,927 in 2019 and 2020 respectively with quotas of 3,000), indicating the proposed change would not significantly change the total amount sold.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The objective of increasing the per person limit on the 006-00 license (and eliminating the 699-00 license) will essentially combine the two licenses into one OTC license and will still allow hunters to purchase multiple licenses. This will simplify the regulations and remove any confusion as to what license is needed and what is valid across the region. If whitetail populations decline due to EHD, high winter mortality, or other factors, we would recommend a reduction in the limit per hunter to reduce the concern about overharvest of some localized whitetail populations.

The biological objective of the region is to provide antlerless WT deer harvest opportunity in areas of greater whitetail abundance while allowing whitetail populations in other areas to recover from below average levels and reduce the risk of spread of recently detected Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in Region 6. Because whitetails are primarily found on private lands in Region 6, this license provides antlerless harvest as a tool that landowners can use to manage white-tailed deer on private lands to prevent game damage while not allowing too much harvest on the deer population. The ultimate goal is to maintain populations near average levels, while preventing populations from increasing to intolerable high levels that have been seen in the past. These high levels ultimately result in game damage issues and habitat degradation as well as the threat of the spread of CWD in the future.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

Annual deer surveys on whitetail wintering areas, distribution of harvest across Region 6, as well as harvest success will continue to be monitored. Average harvest success rate for whitetail B Licenses is 25%, with an average annual harvest of 1,400 antlerless whitetail. Harvest continues to be well distributed across Region 6, with variable whitetail abundance driving harvest distribution. As whitetail populations increase over time, the proposal allows for B Licenses to continue to be available for hunters throughout the hunting season.

4. 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 most recent observed white-tailed deer density on the six white-tailed deer trend areas was 9.8 deer/sq. mile, 8% below the long-term average of 10.7 deer/sq. mile.

White-tailed deer populations have been on a slow but steady increase since 2015 but have remained fairly stable since 2017. Population peaks (1996, 2008 and 2011) represent an unsustainable level (>12 deer/sq. mile) as evidenced by the decline in population that follows.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

WT habitat and forage conditions in recent years have been relatively good. Above average precipitation and lower WT densities has allowed river bottom habitat to greatly improve including shrub and cottonwood establishment and growth. WT populations are expected to respond favorably to the improved habitat conditions in those areas. However, there has been a loss of approximately 1 million acres of CRP (54% decrease) since 2010 across the Hi-Line. This reduction in CRP has reduced the amount of high-quality habitat available to WTs and in-turn reduced the reproductive and carrying capacity for WTs in Region 6. No major changes in private land access have occurred, with some improvement to hunting access along the Milk River. Public hunting access has also increased in the NE corner of the region where WT populations are at or above average. EHD was also present across the eastern half of Region 6 in Sept/October 2021 and reduced populations across that area.

6. 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).

We hear support from private landowners to maintain liberal whitetail B Licenses in order to stay ahead of spikes in whitetail populations. Even with these liberal tools, some landowners start to see game damage at average population levels due to localized deer distribution driven by weather conditions or access restrictions on neighboring properties. Local hunters and Region 6 CAC voiced concern about overharvest of some localized whitetail populations. We feel that being able to adjust the per-person maximum in response to population changes will alleviate that concern. We also hear concerns about out-of-area hunters overexploiting the opportunity since there is no overall quota to the number sold. However, our surplus whitetail licenses currently do not sell out, also license sales indicate that 95% of the hunters purchasing white-tailed Deer B Licenses are purchasing three or less licenses with 1% purchasing 6 or more, suggesting over exploitation may not necessarily occur.

An original proposal to allow hunters to purchase up to 7 of these WT B Licenses per person went out for 30-day public scoping. We received few comments, but the public did point to the recent EHD outbreak and the opinion that 7 of these B Licenses was excessive. Given the presence of EHD in 2021 decreasing WT licenses in a portion of Region 6 and public scoping comment, we adjusted the per person maximum to 4 for this B License.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
R7-WT Remove 007-01 LPT

Hunting Districts: All Region 7 HDs

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

Eliminate the region-wide 007-01 white-tailed Deer B License. This has been a second opportunity license, managed with a quota, available over the counter to residents only with a quota range of 1,000-2,000. Eliminating the 007-01 license will simplify the regulations to one Region 7 white-tailed Deer B License type.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The objective of this proposal is to simplify the hunting regulations. This proposal will reduce the number of white-tailed Deer B License types in Region 7 from two to one.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

N/A

4. 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).

Harvest and survey flight data indicate the white-tailed deer population in Region 7 is stable, with year-to-year fluctuations driven by weather conditions and hemorrhagic disease outbreaks. Buck harvest in 2020 was 29% above the long-term average, while individual whitetail trend areas ranged from 15% below to 68% above long-term average count, reflective of spatiotemporal variations in whitetail numbers characteristic of the region. A major driver of spatial and temporal variations in whitetail populations, hemorrhagic disease, can cause rapid population declines (typically on a very localized scale), and while areas that have experienced recent hemorrhagic disease outbreaks may have low whitetail numbers, whitetails may remain overabundant in nearby areas. Whitetail B Licenses are an important tool to prevent damage to private land where whitetail densities are high. However, eliminating the 007-01 LPT is not expected to reduce management ability or hunter opportunity, due to a companion proposal that would convert the 007-00 white-tailed Deer B License to a quota, which would allow hunters to purchase surplus licenses when available, and allow FWP to set adaptive quotas to reflect changing population levels.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

Eliminating the 007-01 license is not expected to reduce management ability or hunter opportunity, due to a companion proposal that would convert the 007-00 white-tailed Deer B License to a quota, which would allow hunters to purchase surplus licenses when available, and allow FWP to set adaptive quotas to reflect changing population levels.

6. 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).

During the initial public comment period, 9 comments were received about proposed changes to the white-tailed Deer B Licenses, 6 in favor and 2 opposed. Those opposed expressed concern about lost opportunity to harvest antlerless white-tailed deer. However, removing the 007-01 license is not expected to reduce hunter opportunity, but rather to offer it through the 007-00 license (which is proposed to be changed to a quota in a companion proposal). Based on recent sales, a surplus of 007-00 licenses is likely. When this occurs, it would allow hunters to purchase additional white-tailed Deer B Licenses.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
White-tailed Deer 2022
007-00 Unltd to Quota

Hunting Districts: All Region 7 HDs

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

Convert the 007-00 white-tailed Deer B License (which is currently unlimited, one per hunter) to be managed with a quota, which would allow hunters to purchase surplus licenses when available.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

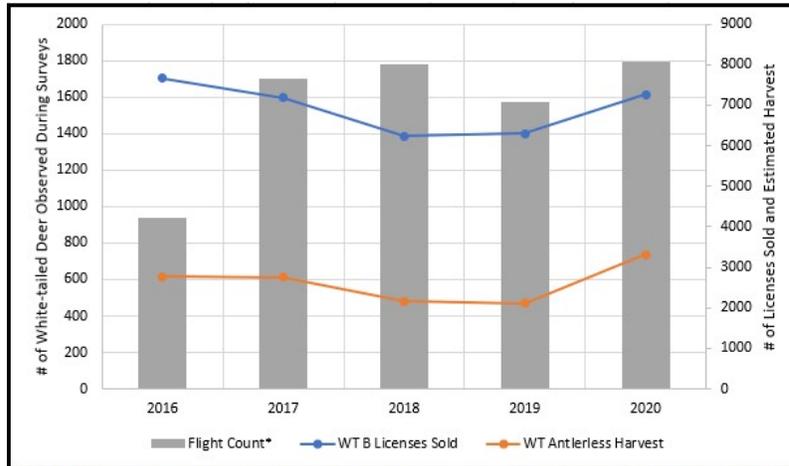
The objective of this proposal is to allow FWP to more effectively set quotas to reflect changing population levels. Along with a companion proposal to simplify hunting regulations by removing the 007-01 white-tailed Deer B License (which would reduce the number of Region 7 white-tailed Deer B Licenses from 2 to 1), this proposal would make the white-tailed deer license structure consistent with the mule Deer B License structure in Region 7.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

The success of this proposal will be measured by analyzing population trend surveys, harvest surveys, game damage complaints, as well as landowner/hunter observations and satisfaction.

4. 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).

Harvest and survey flight data indicate the white-tailed deer population in Region 7 is stable, with year-to-year fluctuations driven by weather conditions and hemorrhagic disease outbreaks. Buck harvest in 2020 was 29% above the long-term average, while individual whitetail trend areas ranged from 15% below to 68% above long-term average count, reflective of spatiotemporal variations in whitetail numbers characteristic of the region. A major driver of spatial and temporal variations in whitetail populations, hemorrhagic disease can cause rapid population declines (typically on a very localized scale), and while areas that have experienced recent hemorrhagic disease outbreaks may have low whitetail numbers, whitetails may remain overabundant in nearby areas. Whitetail B Licenses are an important tool to prevent damage to private land where whitetail densities are high. This proposal is expected to maintain hunter opportunity and improve management ability by allowing FWP to set adaptive quotas to reflect changing population levels.



*Total white-tailed deer observed across six deer trend areas spread across Region 7 that provide populations trends

Figure 1: Region 7 WTD trend and license information.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

This proposal is expected to improve management ability by allowing FWP to set adaptive quotas to reflect changing population levels related to weather, habitat quality, hunter access, and other factors.

6. 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).

During the initial public comment period, 9 comments were received about proposed changes to the white-tailed Deer B Licenses, 6 in favor and 2 opposed. Those opposed expressed concern about lost opportunity to harvest antlerless white-tailed deer. However, a surplus of 007-00 licenses is expected based on recent sales, which would improve hunter opportunity by allowing hunters to purchase additional white-tailed Deer B Licenses.