

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

Species: Mountain Lion
Region: 2
Hunting District: 204/260/261/262
Year: 2021

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

Increase female mountain lion quota from 1 to 2. The female quota for these combined districts decreased from 3 to 2 in 2012, then decreased further to 1 in 2015 following a public meeting in which participants sought to decrease the female quota in this area in exchange for increasing it in neighboring HD270.

- 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 proposed change is to reduce mountain lion conflict on private lands in these HDs. Mountain lions are numerous in this HD, as evidenced by the typically fast fill rate of the quota, and the increasing depredation issues with livestock and pets in the area.

- 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 hunter harvest of female mountain lions in this management unit, and lion conflict information provided by USDA Wildlife Services and FWP conflict specialists.

- 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).**

A 2012 study by FWP estimated the lion density was similar across all Bitterroot HDs. From 2012-2014, quotas across the Bitterroot were increased in order to achieve a 30% reduction in lion densities; following this targeted reduction, lion densities in the upper Bitterroot HDs (HDs 250 and 270) were estimated again and showed that the reduction had been met. However, these HDs have female harvest quotas of 3 and 5, respectively, while the HD 204/261/262/260 quota has remained at 1 since 2015. Conflicts with livestock are frequently reported, especially in HDs 262 and 261. Between 2017-2021, there have been at least 8 incidents of lions killing pets/livestock, plus additional sightings of lions near homes and school bus stops.

- 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).**

These HDs continue to undergo a shift from primarily agricultural operations to suburban housing developments, many of which (especially those located further from population centers) are made up of small acreages that attract hobby farmers. Several large cattle, sheep, and goat ranching operations still exist as well. Lions seeking to move across the valley are often forced to move through neighborhoods or seek out the few open areas that still exist between developments, all of which put them into closer proximity to humans, pets, and livestock. The existing mountain lion quota in the area, combined with the increase in private land conflict, suggest that "problem" lions may be animals dispersing from an area at or over the carrying capacity of the habitat.

- 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 is supported by the Ravalli County Fish and Wildlife Association, who supported an even greater increase in the female harvest quota, as well as breaking up the unit into its 4 components (each with its own quotas). The North Bitterroot game warden J. Singleterry also strongly supports raising quotas of both sexes in this HD for the primary purpose of reducing conflict. Many area houndsmen, homeowners, and livestock producers have also expressed their support of this proposal and would be willing to testify to such.

This proposal is not expected to be supported by all area houndsmen, many of whom want reduced quotas to ensure high mountain lion populations.

Submitted by: Rebecca Mowry

Date: 2/12/2021

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification: