



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION FWP PROPOSAL & INFORMATION SHEET

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Meeting Date: June 12, 2026

Agenda Item: License Year 2027 Mountain Lion Regulations on the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Charles M. Russell and UL Bend National Wildlife Refuges.

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 20 minutes

Background: Hunting regulations on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) properties do not always correspond with Montana's hunting regulations adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission. While Montana allows hunting mountain lions with hounds from Dec. 1 to April 14 in much of Montana, mountain lion hunting with hounds is currently restricted by the USFWS on the Charles M. Russell (CMR) and UL Bend (ULB) Wildlife Refuges. The USFWS has prioritized further aligning refuge regulations with state regulations. FWP staff have met with the CMR to commonly define hound hunting mountain lion regulations on the CMR and ULB refuges. This reconciliation sought to limit potential impacts to wintering elk and other wildlife on critical CMR and ULB winter ranges while jointly supporting expanded hound hunting opportunity for mountain lions on refuge lands.

Starting with the 2027 license year, the specific regulation changes proposed would allow for hound-hunting lions on the CMR and ULB refuges from Dec. 1, 2027, until the appropriate harvest quotas are filled or Feb. 1, 2028 (whichever comes first). Sensitive to the potential to impact wintering ungulates, this is a shorter lion hound-hunting season than in other areas of Montana. This proposal would not influence the existing archery and fall lion seasons without dogs already present on the CMR and ULB. The hound training license and season would remain unchanged as restricted and unavailable for use on the CMR and ULB.

The agencies agreed to propose these hound hunting changes to both the USFWS and FWP regulations (rather than just the USFWS' CMR and ULB regulations) for consistent and clear public outreach. These proposed hound hunting changes for the CMR and ULB refuges would read as an additional opportunity on the refuge lands. In the Montana mountain lion hunting regulations, this proposed hound hunting change for the CMR and ULB refuges would be more restrictive than the lion hound hunting season in other areas of Montana which currently runs to April 14. Having different processes and timelines, each agency agreed to propose these regulation changes to potentially be in place (if approved) beginning with the 2027 license year. This is the earliest the USFWS process could be concluded.

Public Involvement Process & Results: This proposal will be publicly posted on the FWP website not less than two weeks before the June 12 commission meeting. The public could submit comments online and could also provide input during the June 12 meeting.

Alternatives & Analysis:

Alternative A: The commission could choose to adopt these changes beginning with the 2027 license year, facilitating both agencies communicating the same lion hound hunting opportunities on refuge lands (assuming the USFWS process concluded with adoption as well.) While more restrictive than lion hound

hunting in other areas where the hound hunting season ends April 14, this would be an expanded opportunity relative to the current restriction on hound-hunting lions on the CMR and ULB refuges. If the USFWS did not adopt these changes for the 2027 license year, the hound hunting regulations for Montana could be changed again prior to season start.

Alternative B: The commission could choose not to adopt these changes beginning with the 2027 license year. If the USFWS did adopt these changes, the two agencies would then communicate different lion hound hunting seasons for the CMR and ULB refuges, adding to public confusion. If the USFWS did not adopt these changes, nothing would change and the USFWS would continue to not allow hound hunting for mountain lions.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: Contingent upon the USFWS adoption of these changes in 2027, FWP recommends adopting the proposed lion hound hunting opportunities on the CMR and ULB refuges commonly with the USFWS, and to communicate the refuge opportunity in the Montana mountain lion hunting regulations starting with the 2027 license year.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve annual mountain lion hound hunting on the CMR and ULB refuges starting Dec. 1, 2027, until the appropriate harvest quotas are filled or Feb. 1, 2028 (whichever comes first). If the USFWS does not adopt these changes starting with the 2027 license year, the hound hunting regulations for Montana would revert to the current regulation language, ending on April 14.