



FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AMENDMENT

FWP proposal to be amended: *2026 Mountain Lion Hunting Regulations*

Commissioner: *Susan Kirby Brooke, Region 3*

Date Received by Commission Liaison: **Tuesday, May 26, 2026 – 10:19 a.m.** (Amendment #2)

Proposed Amendment: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt the following amendment to the Montana Mountain Lion Hunting Regulations.

- *I move the Commission amend the directive to the Department from the recommendations made during the 2023 season-setting meeting by replacing the objective of achieving a percentage reduction in mountain lion numbers with a recommendation that lion harvest quotas be established using current population modeling data and input from the annual regional public lion management meetings, recognizing that the Department must adapt predator management in Ungulate Hunting Districts of Concern as appropriate.*

Requested by FWP: YES NO (check one)

Rationale and Background:

In 2023 this Commission directed the FWP to reduce mountain lion numbers in certain Lion Management Units (LMUs) by percentages of the estimated population up to 40% over six years. At that time, the population of lions in Region 3 was estimated using data compiled from NW Montana. Today we have before us quota numbers for Region 3 that suggest we have met the 40% reduction based on recent data from the Southwest Ecoregion population modeling study. Having met the population decline directives in certain LMUs set by this Commission in 2023, the Department would recommend LMU harvest quotas using the best science and population data



available, in concert with stakeholder public comments and apply adaptive management in ungulate hunting districts of concern moving forward.

The reason this amendment is not specific to Region 3 is due to feedback from stakeholders that managing lion populations with a percentage of reduction without current and reliable population modeling data is short sighted and not biologically defensible.

Lion stakeholder groups have recently organized in nearly all the Regions and want to have public meetings with area biologists at the region level prior to the annual Commission quota setting meeting.

Department Response:

This amendment does not provide the department with specific direction regarding the desired trajectory of the mountain lion population. In 2023, the commission directed the department to reduce the Northwest Ecoregion by 30% within 6 years, the West-central Ecoregion by 35% in 6 years, and the Southwest Ecoregion by 35% within 6 years. This approximate reduction was calculated by the department by compiling each of the individual quotas adopted by the commission in that year. To monitor progress towards that goal, the department uses an Integrated Population Model (IPM) that is still in development and spatially explicit capture-recapture (SECR) models. The SECR estimates are based on field collection of DNA that allows the department to estimate the number of mountain lions in an area at a point in time. Consequently, the SECR estimates are redeveloped in the Northwest, West-Central, and Southwest ecoregions 6 years after the initial estimate. The IPM uses a variety of inputs including harvest, survival and reproductive rates from telemetry studies, and population estimates from SECR. At this time, we have not yet completed the resampling of any ecoregion, although the Northwest Ecoregion resampling is currently underway. Consequently, the department cannot conclusively state that any targeted reduction has yet been reached, although the difference will prove useful in evaluating our statistical power of our SECR and IPM estimates.

Our IPM and SECR estimate do indicate that the Southwest Ecoregion is in decline, and our current recommendation is intended to limit the rate of decline, but still meet the commission's direction.

The department's current recommendation meets all aspects of this amendment. The current recommendation is biologically sound and our monitoring is designed to measure the degree of reduction, if any, when complete. The recommendation is not universally supported by all sectors of the public, and we have not surveyed the public to determine the degree of support from all sectors of the



public. Our data cannot dictate the "right" number of mountain lions to manage towards within the biological extremes of abundance. The department's methods can be used to scientifically achieve the social target selected by the commission.

The department's current recommendation meets all aspects of this amendment and the department respectfully offers no change to address it.

