

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

**Species:** Mountain Lion  
**Region:** 7  
**Hunting District:** 700  
**Year:** 2026

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

- Change from: LMU 700 quota of 45, regardless of sex
- Change to: LMU 700 female quota of 10, male quota of 35
  
- The mountain lion quota in Region 7 was increased from 35 to 45 for the 2014 season; however, this quota has not been met in any subsequent year. Since 2014, the average annual harvest was 27.58 mountain lions with the fewest lions harvested in 2017 (n=16) and the greatest in 2021 (n=42).
- Experienced houndsmen have reported a noticeable decline in mountain lion presence across the landscape and are advocating for management adjustments to better protect the resource. While quotas are not intended to function as target harvest numbers, the consistent inability to reach the established quota suggests that it may not be providing effective management. Implementing a female-specific quota within the region could help stabilize the population from apparent decline while additional data are collected, without significantly reducing hunting opportunity.
- Mountain lion harvest was increasing from 1990 – 2013 and quotas were adjusted as needed during that period, but from 2014 to 2025 there has been a decrease in harvest trends overtime (Figure 1).

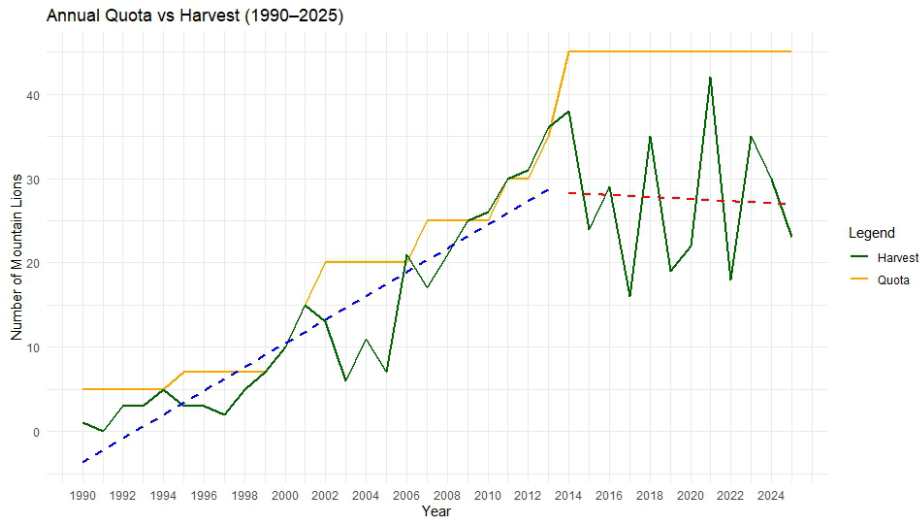


Figure 1. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Administrative Region 7 mountain line annual quotas and respective annual harvest with an increasing trendline from 1990 – 2013 and then a decreasing trendline from 2014 – 2025.

**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.**

- Decrease the number of female mountain lions that can be harvested annually to 10 individuals to support a healthy population without reducing opportunity.

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

- In a healthy and growing mountain lion population, a greater proportion of harvested individuals is expected to consist of older age classes ( $\geq 6$  years). Harvest data, including tooth samples, will continue to be analyzed

annually, with particular attention to trends in the age structure of harvested animals. An increase in the proportion of older individuals, especially females, in the harvest would indicate improved population stability and growth.

- In addition, the frequency with which the annual female quota is met will be evaluated to inform future management decisions. Consistent monitoring of these metrics will allow for adaptive adjustments to ensure the quota effectively supports population sustainability while maintaining hunting 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).**

- The state mountain lion management plan directs R7 mountain lions to be managed with indirect indices of abundance, harvest success, and public input to guide management decisions. Direct measures of population are not yet available in R7, but harvest records show limited older age class individuals ( $\geq 6$  years) being harvested on the landscape and houndsmen are reporting significant population reduction.
- Between the 2014 and 2024 mountain lion season in R7, only 10 of 260 successfully aged individuals (3.85%) were aged with cementum annuli to be 6 years of age or greater. From the same period, only 3.89% ( $n=4$ ) of aged females were in the older age class. From the methods currently available, R7 mountain lion population is likely lower than preferred for sustainable ecosystem health, resource protection, and opportunity.
- Age data between 2014 and 2020 seasons are binned, so a true average age cannot be determined, however, using midpoints for the age classes, the average age from harvested and incidental lions between 2014 and 2024 for females was 2.5 years and 2.7 years for males. For aged mountain lions (harvest and incidental) between 2021 and 2024, the average age of males was 3 years and females averaged 2 years.
- Additionally, had the female-quota of 10 been implemented previously, it would have closed the female harvest within the region for 6 seasons since 2014, specifically for the 2014 ( $n=19$ ), 2016 ( $n=12$ ), 2017 ( $n=10$ ), 2021 ( $n=12$ ), 2023 ( $n=18$ ) which exceeded male harvest ( $n=17$ ), and 2024 ( $n=11$ ) seasons.

**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).**

- Low levels of annual precipitation that lead to lower recruitment of ungulate prey.
- The quota for mountain lions has steadily increased since 1990 in response to opportunity, population growth and social factors. As the quota has not been met since its most recent increase in 2014, it is beneficial for the mountain lion population, resource protection, preservation of opportunity, and ecosystem stability that management shift to be more conservative to protect this essential resource.

**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 first annual R7 Houndsmen Meeting in many years was hosted in Miles City on April 14<sup>th</sup> 2026 at which Brett Dorak (Wildlife Manager) and Amanda Hall (Regional Mountain Lion Specialist) were able to speak with 14 houndsmen and women, including two members of the Montana Houndsmen Association, in attendance regarding their concerns about population numbers and their interest in quota adjustments. The group was overwhelmingly in favor of an overall quota reduction in R7. Given current guidance from the Fish & Wildlife Commission, it was discussed that the addition of a female-quota would be the best starting point for supporting the regional population. The group was in favor of a female quota between 5-10.

Submitted by: Amanda Hall/Brett Dorak  
Date: 4/17/26

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

Approved: BFW, Game Management Bureau, April 20, 2026