

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

Species: Mountain Lion
Region: All
Hunting District: All
Year: License Year 2020

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 will implement House Bill 311 as passed by the 2019 Montana State Legislature. HB311 created a Non-resident Hound Handler License (Class D-4). Statutory limitations of HB311 include that no more than 35 D-4 licenses may be issued in any year, and no more than 2 in any district. A D-4 license is for personal use only and cannot be used to assist any other person in the pursuit of a lion for harvest. The cost of a D-4 license is \$500 and will be adjusted annually by the consumer price index. HB311 requires that the license fees be used for mountain lion management, conservation, and monitoring. Non-resident outfitters and guides licensed via Title 37 chapter 47 part 3 (a Montana Licensed Outfitter/Guide), and non-residents hunting with any outfitter licensed via Title 47 chapter 37 part 3 are not required to have a Class D-4 license.

FWP proposes to implement HB311 as stated in statute with the first draw for D-4 licenses to occur for license year 2020 concurrent with other big game drawings. Thirty-five D-4 license applicants would be selected from those that apply. All lion districts would be eligible, but only the first two applicants to be drawn for a specific district will receive the license for that district.

While the statute allows for limiting the number of nonresident hunters in lion districts and for the Commission to attach certain conditions to the use of a D-4 license, no limits or conditions are proposed at this time.

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.

HB311 is state statute and must be implemented. The objective that the bill was designed to address was the practice of non-resident houndsmen using their hounds to help multiple individuals harvest lions. This results in earlier closure of quotas, less opportunity for resident lion hunters, and less opportunity for Montana outfitters. The current situation also is subject to abuse where non-resident houndsmen can use their hounds to help an unlimited number of "friends" harvest lions and then get compensated for doing so, which is illegal outfitting but difficult to prove. Furthermore, the playing field has not been level with regard to rules that licensed Montana outfitters must abide by vs. non-resident hound handlers. For example, licensed Montana outfitters must have insurance and are assigned specific areas where they are permitted to operate. Non-resident hound handlers are not subject to these requirements and expenses.

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

It is reasonable to think that implementation of HB311 will reduce the actual and potential for illegal outfitting, will provide residents with more opportunity, and will provide Montana licensed outfitters with more business. Success of the proposal can be measured by successful implementation of the draw for D-4 licenses, a lower number of lions being taken by non-residents, and the perception on the part of resident lion hunters and Montana licensed outfitters that less illegal outfitting is occurring.

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).

This proposed change to mountain lion regulations will not alter the status of the lion population.

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).

Data collected during lion harvest inspections provide some insight into how HB311 may or may not impact opportunity. During the past 10 license years, 2009-2018, FWP personnel inspecting lions recorded the dog owner's state of residency during 53% of all inspections where dogs were used to harvest a lion. For the 53% of cases where state of residence of the dog owner was recorded, an average of 14 non-residents and 6 Montana residents harvested lions with non-resident hounds each year. If the proportions of the unknown 47% are similar and factored in, these data suggest approximately 37 hunters (residents and non-residents) harvest lions using non-resident hounds on average each year. Therefore, it appears that HB311 would limit approximately 2 hunters per year from harvesting a lion with non-resident hounds. It should be noted though that these hunters are not necessarily excluded from harvesting a lion, they would just have to use a Montana licensed outfitter to do so. Known harvest of lions with non-resident hounds occurs in all FWP regions. Data on known non-resident hound harvest shows that more than 2 lions are occasionally harvested in one district in a year, so the proposal will eliminate some concentration of non-resident hound harvest.

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).

HB311 was passed by the State Legislature and was supported during legislative testimony by the Montana Outfitters and Guides Association, resident houndsmen, Citizens for Balanced Use, and the Montana Wildlife Federation. A very limited number of people were opposed because they thought the bill empowered Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks too much or that more enforcement of current regulations could solve the problem. Proponents of the bill were more numerous and commonly described their experiences encountering illegal outfitting where non-resident houndsmen are seen with multiple groups of "friends" they were helping hunt lions.

Submitted by: Bob Inman, Carnivore/Furbearer Coordinator

Date: 14 November 2019

Approved: John Vore, Game Management Bureau Chief / 15 November 2019
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification: