

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

Species: Mule and White-tailed Deer
Region: Helena Urban Deer Management, Region 3
Year: 2019-20

1. Describe the proposed changes and provide a summary of prior history.

Proposal:

- The City of Helena has not sought approval to remove deer during winter 2019-20, due to City budget constraints (no funding allocated for urban wildlife in 2019). The City also did not conduct a survey in fall of 2019. Therefore, the quota for winter 2019-20 is 0. In future years, a survey will remain a requirement for seeking approval to remove deer.
- Extend adoption of the programmatic EA *City of Helena Urban Deer Management Plan* indefinitely, unless or until the City of Helena changes its management approach to urban deer or other circumstances arise that would necessitate a change to urban deer management in Helena. The programmatic EA sunsets on December 31, 2019.

Prior History:

- The City of Helena has been trapping deer and donating the meat to Helena Food Share since 2008¹. The number of deer removed and the number approved by the FWC each winter is listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Number of deer removed by the City of Helena and approved quota, Helena, Montana, winters 2008-09 – 2018-19.

Year (winter)	Number removed	Number approved
2008-09	200	200
2009-10	199	200
2010-11	26 ²	50
2011-12	103	220
2012-13	140	200
2013-14	51	70 (effectively 130)
2014-15	60	150, up to 200 if removal of males is disproportionately high
2015-16	99	130, up to 180 if removal of adult males is disproportionately high
2016-17	99	175, up to 225 if removal of adult males is disproportionately high
2017-18	71	175, up to 225 if removal of adult males is disproportionately high
2018-19	27	175, up to 225 if removal of adult males is disproportionately high

- In 2013, the FWPC authorized a quota range of 0-250. Beginning in 2014, proposed removals within this quota range and removal periods are authorized annually by the Region 3 Wildlife Manager, and this information is forwarded as required.
- Since winter 2013-14, the number of adult bucks removed has exceeded the number of adult does removed (Table 2).

¹ An estimated 30,000-35,000 pounds of venison were donated since implementation of the program.

² Although the FWPC approved a take of 50, the City of Helena opted not to take more than 26.

Table 2. Number of deer removed by age and sex class, Helena, Montana, winters 2008-09 – 2018-19.

Year (winter)	Number removed					
	Total	Fawns	Adult females	Adult males	Females (age unknown)	Males (age unknown)
2008-09	200	60	103	37	-	-
2009-10	199	78	68	53	-	-
2010-11	26	11	11	4	-	-
2011-12	103	31	47	25	-	-
2012-13	140	43	62	35	-	-
2013-14	51	17	9	25	-	-
2014-15	60	18	18	24	-	-
2015-16	99	-	-	-	53	46
2016-17	99	22	34	43	-	-
2017-18	71	3	26	42	-	-
2018-19	27	7	8	12	-	-

2. Why is the proposed change necessary?

Urban deer management will be ongoing, as long as the number of deer within the city limits exceeds social tolerance. To assist the City in meeting their goal to maintain a socially tolerable density of deer in town, it is necessary to approve additional removals. The City has thus far adopted 25 deer/mi² as the upper limit for a socially tolerable density and more recently adopted language stating that this density should not be exceeded in any part of the City.

The City does not have funding for urban deer management this year, and the programmatic EA sunsets on December 31, 2019.

3. Provide information related to any factors or circumstances that have relevance to this change.

A survey to estimate the density of deer within the city limits was conducted over five nights during mid September 2018, and the analysis was completed. The density estimate was 23 deer/mi² (CL: 18 - 29 deer/mi²) within the City, and the upper confidence limit overlaps the socially tolerable density (Figure 1; Table 3). We do not account for deer moving in and out of the City, although we do know that this occurs. We make our recommendation based on the 2018 density estimate and based on the now 11-year history of removals and 10-year history of density estimates for the City of Helena. It is a struggle to reach the recommended number of removals, and the recommendation has not been met since winter 2009-2010, the second year of the program. More open winters coupled with trap smart adult does³ are both likely contributing factors, in addition to a reduced density. In reviewing the history, it is apparent that some years yield more removals than others, despite similar density estimates. Note that the confidence limits of the density estimates overlap from 2013 through 2018 (Figure 1; Table 3).

To maintain a socially tolerable density of deer in town, additional removals are necessary. We think removing only 27 deer in winter 2019-19 and not removing any deer this winter, 2019-20, will result in a density above, perhaps well above, 25 deer/mi² in fall 2020. Furthermore, Montana is now a CWD-positive state. While CWD has not been identified in the greater Helena

³ Helena Police Department staff report that does have been observed discouraging other deer from going into or very near traps.

area to date, reducing deer density, especially buck density, and reducing the number of older age bucks within the City is still an important strategy when it comes to managing CWD statewide⁴.

Figure 1. Distance sampling estimate of the density of deer/mi² within the City of Helena, Montana, 2009 – 2018.

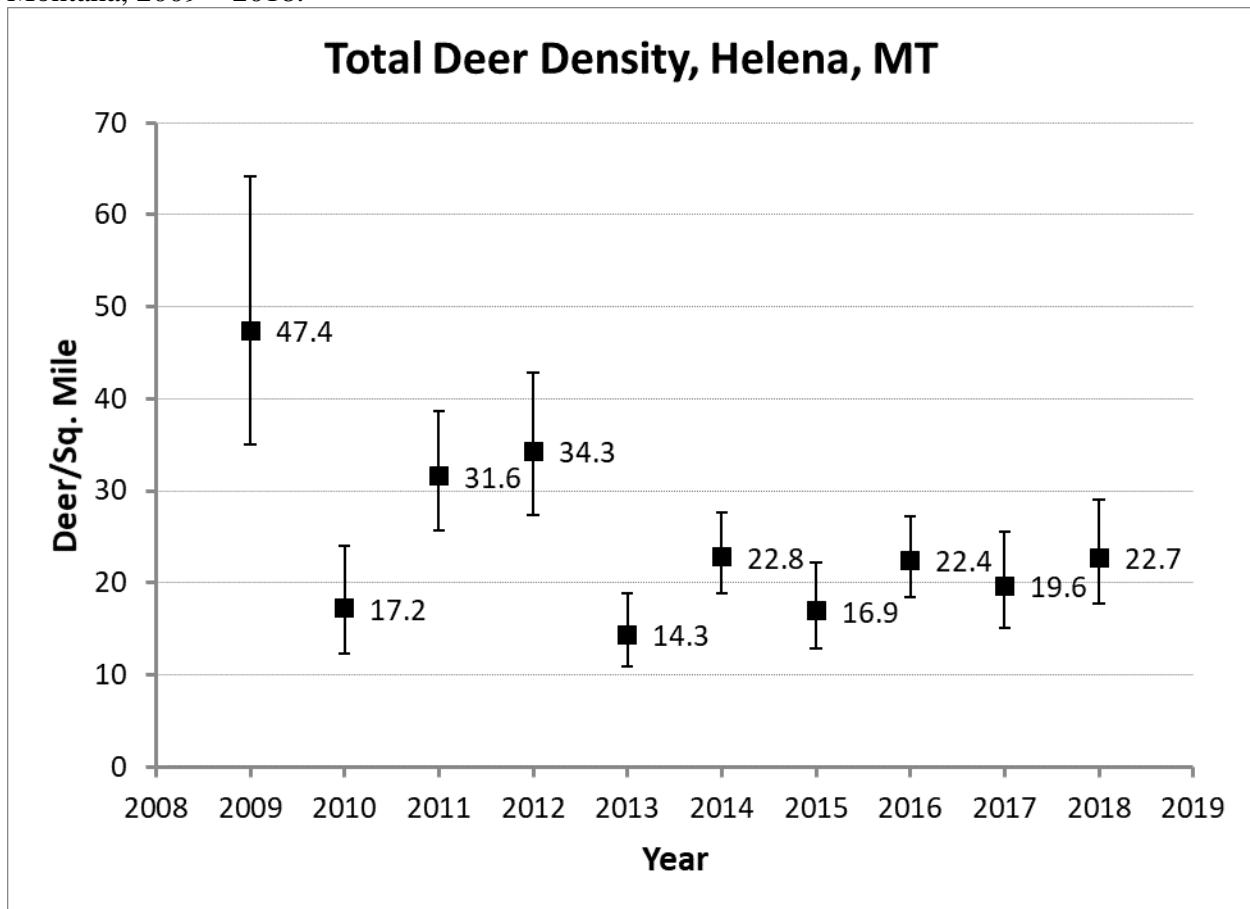


Table 3. Distance sampling estimate of the density of deer/mi² and population projections from those densities within the City of Helena, Montana, 2009 – 2018.

Estimate/Projection	Year										
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	
Density estimate Lower CL (deer/mi ²)	35	12	26	27	12	19	13	18	15	18	
Density estimate Point (deer/mi ²)	47	17	32	34	14	23	17	22	20	23	
Density estimate Upper CL (deer/mi ²)	64	24	39	43	20	28	22	27	26	29	
Population projection - low	385	135	283	302	120	208	141	203	166	195	
Population projection - point	522	189	347	377	158	251	186	246	216	249	
Population projection - high	706	265	425	472	208	304	245	299	281	319	

4. 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).

FWP has not received any comments and has not initiated any contacts with the public on this proposal. The City of Helena conducted extensive public involvement in developing its plan.

⁴ See also Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, 2018. Montana CWD Management. Helena, MT. pp. 1-55.

FWP provided separate 30-day public comment periods for previous Helena urban deer environmental assessments. Public support has been split throughout these earlier processes. Because a quota range of 0-250 was approved by the FWPC in 2013 after a 30-day public comment period, and this recommendation is within that range, approval is authorized by only the Region 3 Wildlife Manager, with notification forwarded as required.

In the past, I discussed trapping issues with the leads for the City of Helena's urban deer survey and removal program. I recommended that if trapping tapered off drastically again, as it has in some years, that they discontinue for the winter, which they did from 2015-16 through 2018-19. In open winters, at some point it is not worthwhile to continue the effort when very few deer continue to be trapped. In addition, we visited about their protocol for baiting traps. I recommended that they try discontinuing pre-baiting (baiting both outside and inside the trap with the trap tied open during the day) once they begin actively trapping deer.

Submitted by: Jenny Sika

Date: 11/13/2019

Approved:

Disapproved / Modified by:

Reason for Modification: