

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS**  
**HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**  
**Black Bear 2022**  
**Black Bear Hound Hunting Regulations**

**Hunting Districts:** Statewide

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

The proposal is to add a black bear hound hunting and hound training season during regular black bear seasons statewide, except in occupied grizzly bear habitat in BMUs 100, 101, 103, 104, 110, 120, 121, 122, 123, 130, 140, 141, 150, 170, that portion of 200 that includes the Ninemile watershed north of I-90, 216 east of the Granite/Ravalli county line, 280, 290, 300 west of I-15, 301 west of I-15 from Chester to Hwy 69 near Fort Benton, 309, 317, 341, 400 north and west of I-15/Hwy 87 between Helena and Fort Benton, west of Hwy 223 between Fort Benton and Hwy 2 at Chester, south of Hwy 2 between Chester and I-15 at Shelby, and west of I-15 between Shelby and the Canadian border, 510 West of Hwy 310, and 520. This delineated area mirrors the area with restrictions on wolf trapping due to concerns associated with the federally listed grizzly bear.

In addition, Montana statute allows nonresidents to pursue black bears with hounds during hunting seasons or hound training seasons if they obtain a Class D-4 nonresident hound license. A non-resident Class D-4 black bear hound license may be issued to successful applicants valid from March 1 to June 30 that may be used in open BMUs designated above. The total number of nonresident hound licenses is limited by law to not more than 80. FWP recommends those be split between black bears and mountain lions, and for black bears recommends the following:

No more than 2 in BMU 200,  
No more than 2 in BMU 216,  
No more than 3 in BMU 240,  
No more than 1 in BMU 300,  
No more than 2 in BMU 301,  
No more than 3 in BMU 316,  
No more than 3 in BMU 319,  
No more than 3 in BMU 400,  
No more than 1 in BMU 510,  
No more than 4 in BMU 580,  
No more than 4 in BMU 600, and  
No more than 4 in BMU 700.

**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.**

Hunting black bears with hounds was authorized during the 2021 legislative session. The objective of this proposed change is to implement current statute.

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

The success of this proposal will be measured by tracking black bear harvest through mandatory harvest reporting. Successful hunters will also be required to submit a premolar from any black bear harvested and provide it to a department office within 10 days either in person or by mail (postmarked within 10 days). Regional measures of success will vary.

**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).**

Black bear populations vary by region.

**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).**

N/A

**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 department initiated a public scoping process in August 2021, substantially earlier than in prior years, to increase the amount of public dialogue about a substantial number of considerations that the public had shared with the department previously regarding both seasons and hunting district boundaries. The department used the input received at virtual open houses, meetings, and in written material to tailor the proposals before the commission.

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS**  
**HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**  
**Black Bear 2022**  
**Align BMUs with Elk/Deer HDs**

**Hunting Districts:** 100, 101, 103, 104, 110, 120, 121, 122, 123, 130, 140, 141, 150, 170

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

We propose to remove the existing Black Bear Management Units (BMU) as defined in the Black Bear Regulations and align the numbering system and boundaries with elk and deer hunting district boundaries. Black Bear Management Units within Region 1 currently have a distinct numbering sequence and boundaries that do not match or align well with elk and deer hunting district boundaries. This has been confusing for sportsmen and sportswomen and unnecessary often requiring successful hunters to report both the BMU and the Elk/Deer Hunting District to ensure there wasn't confusion in reporting harvest location. By aligning BMU and Elk/Deer districts we will be consistent between the black bear and elk/deer hunting districts and reduce confusion. Biologists will still be able to utilize previous harvest data as specific location information was collected with each harvested bear. That information can be queried and applied at the elk/deer hunt district level. Future information will be standardized and black bear management decisions can be made at the same scale as elk and deer.

**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.**

The objective is to reduce confusion for sportsmen/women and simplify the regulations so black bear management units and elk/deer hunting district boundaries and numbering system are the same. It will simplify the reporting information hunters need to supply upon harvest. This will also allow for management decisions to be made at the same scale as elk and deer.

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

Success will be fewer complaints about the numbering system for black bear management units and more accurate information on harvest location.

**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 will not change the population status as there is no limit on harvest for black bears. Season lengths will stay the same, Black bear numbers in Region 1 appear to be stable.

**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).**

This change will only affect how the regulations look and how harvest data is reported. It has no biological affect on the bear population.

**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).**

FWP Region 1 received comment during the 2021 season setting scoping period which ended Oct 20, 2021. The public had the opportunity to comment on this specific proposal. Only a few comments regarding this proposal were received but all were in favor of the change. This proposal was also discussed with the Region 1 Citizen's Advisory Committee and no concerns were expressed.

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS**  
**HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**  
**Black Bear 2022**  
**Region 6 Black Bear Season**

**Hunting Districts:** 600

**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 is to create a new black bear management unit (BMU 600) that includes all of Region 6. This black bear management unit would provide an either-sex black bear hunting opportunity for the Spring (April 15-May 31), Archery only (September 4-September 14), and Fall (September 15-November 28) seasons. Hound hunting would be established during the Spring (April 15-May 31) season with the addition of a hound training season (June 1-June 15). There would be a Spring quota of 4 bears and a Fall quota of 4 bears. There is currently no black bear management unit or black bear season in any part of Region 6.

**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.**

The objective of this proposal is to provide an opportunity to harvest black bears and to help reduce or slow the increasing number of human-black bear conflicts in the region. There have been an increasing number of black bear sightings and human-black bear conflicts in Region 6 and in neighboring areas in the last 5 years.

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

The success of this proposal will be measured through tracking of black bear harvest through mandatory harvest reporting. Success will also be determined through monitoring of human-black bear conflicts in the Region that are reported to the Department or that require an FWP response.

**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).**

There currently is no population survey data for black bears in Region 6. The increasing number of black bear sightings and conflicts suggest an increasing number of black bears. There has been no black bear harvest in Region 6. If a black bear season is established in Region 6, black bear sex and age data will be collected for harvested bears to help provide information on black bear population size and age structure in Region 6. However, the low levels of expected black bear harvest likely will not provide enough data for population monitoring in the region. The primary objective of this season is to provide hunting opportunity and reduce black bear conflicts and not for management of black bears to a specified population goal.

**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).**

The majority of occupied black bear habitat in Region 6 is located in the Bears Paw Mountains, Little Rockies, and Missouri River Breaks. There is a mix of public and private land and in some areas public access may be a factor that limits black bear hunting opportunity.

**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 proposed black bear season was not part of the recent regulations simplification public comment period. Landowners and hunters in the region have reported a perception of increasing black bear numbers in the region. Comments advocating for a black bear hunting opportunity and desire for a reduction in black bear conflicts have been received. The specific details of this proposal have not been formally presented to the public or the Region 6 Citizen Advisory Committee.

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS**  
**HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**  
**Black Bear 2022**  
**BMU 7 Black Bear Hunting with Hounds and Quota of 2**

**Hunting Districts:** BMU7

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

The proposal is to add a black bear hound hunting and hound training season to the Region 7 (BMU 700) spring black bear harvest opportunities. The black bear hound hunting season will have a quota of 2 bears and would occur from April 15 through May 31, or until the quota of 2 bears taken is reached, whichever occurs first. A hound training season will run from June 1 to June 15.

Region 7's black bear population is still growing and establishing its spatial footprint and as a result of an expanding, healthy population the first black bear season was implemented in 2006 with a spring quota of 2 and a fall quota of 2. Since then, the fall quota has been incrementally increased to 12 (Table 1), and the spring quota has increased to 4 (Table 2). There has never been a season in which hound hunting for bears was legal, prior to the upcoming 2022 season.

**Table 1. Region 7 fall black bear quotas and harvest, 2006-21.**

Year	Quota	Harvest	Male	Female	Season Close
2006	2	0	0	0	none
2007	2	0	0	0	none
2008	2	2	2	0	2-Oct
2009	2	1	1	0	none
2010	4	4	3	1	19-Oct
2011	4	4	2	2	27-Nov
2012	4	4	2	2	13-Oct
2013	8	3	3	0	none
2014	8	4	4	0	none
2015	8	8	4	4	30-Oct
2016	8	5	3	2	none
2017	8	9	6	3	24-Oct
2018	8	8	6	2	29-Oct
2019	8	9	8	1	17-Oct
2020	8	5	4	1	none
2021	12	15	9	6	24-Sep
Totals	96	81	57	24	

**Table 2. Region 7 spring black bear quotas and harvest, 2006-21.**

Year	Quota	Harvest	Male	Female	Season Close
2006	2	0	0	0	none
2007	2	1	1	0	none
2008	2	0	0	0	none
2009	2	1	1	0	none
2010	2	1	1	0	none
2011	2	1	1	0	none
2012	2	1	1	0	none
2013	2	2	2	0	16-May
2014	2	2	1	1	21-Apr
2015	2	1	1	0	none
2016	2	2	1	1	10-May
2017	2	2	2	0	25-May
2018	4	1	1	0	none
2019	4	1	1	0	none
2020	4	4	2	2	11-May
2021	4	4	2	2	20-May
Totals	40	24	18	6	

**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.**

During the 2021 legislative session hunting bears with hounds newly became legalized. This allowed biologists to assess bear hunting opportunities and quotas in a new light. All indicators (harvest, observation frequency and location, cub observation, property damage frequency and location, and livestock depredation) suggest that regional black bear populations continue to grow and expand. The proposed change is needed to reduce black bear conflicts, maintain social tolerance of black bears across a landscape held mostly in private ownership, maintain public safety, optimize sportsman’s recreational opportunities, and maintain long-term species health by managing populations within natural capacities.

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

No formal population surveys have been completed in Region 7. Other indices (referenced above and below) will be used to assess regional black bear populations, including continuing to track harvest and age data.

**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).**

No formal population surveys have been completed in Region 7. Other indices (referenced above) suggest that regional black bear populations remain healthy, and continue to grow and expand. The regional management objectives are to optimize sportsmen harvest opportunity and maintain social tolerance of black bears by proactively addressing private property damage and livestock depredation through hunter harvest. Allowing bear hunting with dogs with the proposed quota of 2, effectively increases the region 7 over all spring harvest and addresses both of these objectives.

Since the implementation of a black bear season in 2006, there has been a continual increase in the frequency and spatial extent of black bear observations, property damage reports, and landowner complaints. What was once a relatively rare occurrence on or surrounding the Ashland Ranger District of the Custer National Forest now includes regular observations extending north to Miles City, Cohagen, Terry, and Forsyth, east to Hammond and northeast to Ekalaka.

During May 2012, a black bear was lethally removed by a sheep producer after it attacked and killed 10 lambs. This was the first livestock depredation harvest since implementing a black bear hunting season. Following the close of the 2012 fall season, reports of black bears damaging stock-tanks and hovering near livestock continue to be fielded by area staff.

Local reproduction is occurring and bears are not just immigrating from other sources as evidenced, for example, by spring 2012 reports of a sow with three cubs near Birney and a sow with two cubs south of Ekalaka. With this being the case, area bear populations are anticipated to increase in the future.

When the fall harvest quota was at 4, it was met annually (Table 1); twice by mid October or 4 weeks into the 10-week general black bear season. During 2013-2020 in which the fall quota was 8, it was met four times. In 2021 the fall quota was raised to 12 and was met three weeks into the season. From 2006-12, the spring quota was never met. However, from 2013-20, the spring quota was filled 6 of 9 years.

Since initiating a black bear season in Region 7 through 2021, 106 bears have been harvested; eighty-one (76%) during fall seasons (Table 1) and twenty-four (23%) during spring seasons (Table 2). Seventy-four (70%) were male and thirty-one (30%) female.

Sixty-five harvested bears between 2007 and 2019 were aged using cementun annuli analysis (Table 3). Forty-two (65%) were <3 years old, 14 (21%) were aged between 3-5 years, and 9 (14%) was >5 years old (Table 3). Although a small sample and short trend, this indicates that Region 7 has an established population with representation across age classes. Ages from 2020 and 2021 harvests will not be available until summer 2022.

**Table 3. Region 7 harvested black bear ages, 2006-19.**

Season	Number Aged	1-2 years	3-5 years	≥6 years
2006	0	0	0	0
2007	1	0	1	0
2008	1	1	0	0
2009	2	2	0	0
2010	4	2	2	0
2011	4	2	1	1
2012	4	3	1	0
2013	4	2	1	1
2014	6	3	2	1
2015	9	8	0	1
2016	6	4	1	1
2017	8	2	4	2
2018	9	7	0	2
2019	7	6	1	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>9</b>

**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).**

During the summer and fall season of 2011 and 2012, wildfires burned greater than 600,000 acres across Region 7. Black bear observations and hunter harvest during the 2011 and 2012 fall season indicate that direct impacts to bear populations were localized and minimal.

Published literature suggests that in the short-term, decreased forage and den site availability due to wildfires may cause bear displacement. In the long-term, an increased mosaic of successional stages (early succession grass and shrubs to late succession ponderosa pine) will increase needed edge between foraging and cover areas. Increased grass, forb, shrub, insect, ungulate, and small mammal production following recent wildfires will increase black bear forage availability and improve forage quality. Several researchers have documented black bear reproduction increases in response to improved forage quality and quantity following wildfire events. The harsh winters of 2009-10 and 2010-11 appear to have had no negative impacts to area bear populations. Since 2012 there have been little to no weather/habitat factors that would greatly influence Region 7's bear population.

**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).**

Contact has been made with sportsmen, area landowners, block management cooperators, USFS personnel, MFWP area wardens, outfitters and wildlife related business owners. The consensus of these contacts expressed agreement with and support for a black bear hound hunting and training season, as well as a hound hunting quota of 2 in Region 7. Please see Attachment 1 for specific comments. Much of the more formal information was gathered in 2012, but the sentiment since then has remained similar.

ATTACHMENT 1

- In general, sportsman (local and non local) inquires (phone calls and field visits) about black bear hunting in southeastern Montana are on the rise; especially sportsman looking to do combine bear hunts with spring turkey and fall mule deer and elk hunts. Sportsmen have shown consensus support for increased harvest opportunities.
- The majority of southeast Montana landowners utilize lands to produce cattle and sheep. Their tolerance for large predators such as black bears and mountain lions remains extremely low. Quick response by MFWP to depredation issues and a willingness to maintain a liberal and proactive management philosophy with regards to regulated harvest is critical to maintaining any tolerance. Landowner support for increasing the bear quota remains overwhelming; especially following this past summer where a well documented sheep depredation occurred, multiple sows with cubs were observed, bears were observed where they haven't been, and stock tank damage again increased.
- United States Forest Service Wildlife Biologist Autumn Keller (Ashland Ranger District) supports the proposed hound hunting season, quota, and hound training season.
- Bureau of Land Management Wildlife Biologist Kent Undlin (Miles City field office) supports the proposed hound hunting season, quota, and hound training season. He stated that he liked how we were providing different hunting opportunities, but also keep other hunters and their hunts in mind. He believes many turkey hunters will be glad for the timing of the hound hunting and training season, as it should not interfere with many turkey hunts during the proposed dates.
- Block Management Cooperator Betty Simonitsch has been surprised by increased bear observations in the Ekalaka area over the past couple of years; especially observing a sow with two cubs on the ranch. Mrs. Simonitsch has concerns about the livestock impacts associated with increased bear populations and would support increased harvest as a proactive approach. (2012)
- Block Management Cooperators Brian and Maggie Dice have reported increased black bear observations on their ranch near Stacey over the past couple of years and have endured increased damage to stock tank floats from black bear use. The Dice's would like to see more bear harvest as a proactive approach to reduce landowner conflicts. (2012)
- Hammond area rancher Dwayne Talcott expressed the need for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to remain liberal with black bear and mountain lion harvest as a proactive approach to minimize livestock conflict and maintain social tolerance. Mr. Talcott would like to see the black bear quota increased. (2012)
- "From my conversations with landowners and hunters, sightings continue to rise. We had several bear issues this year - Frank Hagen Ranch (in ranch dump). Troy handled one in Biddle (livestock depredation). Jack handled one off of lower Beaver Creek (getting into food attractants - feeding issues). Todd Enders dealt with one in Ekalaka (stock tank damage). This is par for the last couple of years, but definitely up from the last 10 years where we had one per year or one every other year. If you see that that the biology is there to support the increased quota, I see no reason not to support it. I'm in support of more opportunity for hunters and as you know a longer hunting season means more opportunity to use hunters as a management tool for problem bears." - Ashland area Game Warden Bill Dawson. (2012)
- Doug Gardner, Owner/Operator of Gardner Ranch Outfitters, reported observing three bears during the first week of the archery season. This was after the archery sub-quota had been filled. Mr. Gardner was surprised over the quick end of the archery bear season and felt there would be plenty of room to increase harvest in the coming seasons. (2012)