

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

Species: Mountain Lion
Region: 4
Hunting District: 418/420/448
Year: 2021

- 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 would increase mountain lion quotas in this LMU from 4 female / 4 male to 5 female / 5 male. This Lion Management Unit was created in 2000, at which time the quota was set at 7 female / 5 male. LMU 418's quota was reduced to 4 female / 4 male in the mid 2000's when Region 4 reduced most lion quotas over 20%. Although Region 4 quotas have generally returned to levels equal to those of the early 2000's, LMU 418 quotas have not been adjusted in over 15 years. The LMU 418 harvest density is lower than in other Little Belt Mountains LMUs, primarily due to the relatively low quotas in the Unit. In recent years, the male quota is always met (often quickly), and the female quota is also often filled.

- 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 objectives of this proposal are to 1) to increase lion harvest opportunity where lion numbers have increased over the last 15 years, 2) to provide harvest opportunity consistent with that offered in adjacent LMUs that have similar amounts and quality of lion habitat, 3) reduce conflicts with landowners and agricultural operations and, 4) reduce predation of recovering mule deer and a newly introduced bighorn sheep herd.

- 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 manifest in increased lion harvest opportunity, reduced landowner conflicts, and reduced predation of mule deer and bighorn sheep.

- 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).**

FWP is currently working to develop specific objectives for the West Central Mountain Lion Ecoregion (which includes LMU418); no specific lion population objectives currently exist. However, the MT Mountain Lion Management Strategy states that Region 4 will generally support management that maintains stable lion abundance and which minimizes conflicts between agricultural producers and lions. Lion distribution and abundance have increased in central Montana over the last 20 years, a trend consistent with initial data provided by the MT mountain lion integrated population model. The average age of lions harvested in LMU 418 has also been steadily increasing over the last 15 years.

- 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).**

A significant portion of this LMU is rugged, remote, and difficult to hunt with hounds—those areas have little harvest history despite good predicted habitat and available prey. Snow conditions are more variable in LMU 418, compared to other Little Belt LMUs, and limit effective harvest during low snow years.

- 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 has discussed this proposal with area landowners and several local hound handlers who support it. As of March 2021, 3 of the 45 bighorn ewes FWP reintroduced into HD418 in December 2020 have been killed by lions. FWP has been urged by sportsmen and landowners who support wild sheep restoration to allow harvest opportunity in LMU 418 that is similar to that offered in adjacent LMUs.

Submitted by: Jay Kolbe

Date: 2/12/2021

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification: