



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: Aug. 17, 2023

Agenda Item: Mountain lion season structure and quotas for fall 2023–winter 2024

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 20 minutes

Background: Following discussion at the June 8, commission meeting, the Fish and Wildlife Commission asked the department to consider methods by which season structures could be amended to facilitate achieving mountain lion quotas within those lion management units (LMUs) in which the quotas are not reached. Achieving the quota is important if the trajectory for those populations is going to meet the objectives set at the June meeting. There are a number of factors that influence the likelihood of meeting the quota, which include access, weather conditions, abundance of mountain lions, and hunter effort. Although the commission can't influence all of these variables, the commission has the discretion to make changes to hunt structure, which may increase hunter effort.

Public Involvement Process and Results: The commission listened to public input at the June 8 meeting when quotas were discussed. Public comment will be solicited for a four-week period starting June 23. Public comments will be posted online and provided to commissioners at least two weeks prior to the August commission meeting.

Analysis and Alternatives: The department is presenting a recommendation to allow any mountain lion license that is unfilled on March 1, 2024, to become eligible for use in any LMU that has not yet reached its quota. This does not alter the bag limit or season dates for any LMU.

Another option is to eliminate the sex-specific quotas and simply establish a single quota for total mountain lion harvest. While this option is less restrictive for mountain lion hunters, harvest of female mountain lions is critical in attaining the population trajectory set at the June 2023 meeting. The West-central Lion Ecoregional Population Objective Committee (W-C LEPOC), which will begin meeting in late August, will be in good position to further evaluate this option and provide a recommendation to the department as part of the biennial season-setting process to be addressed by the commission in December 2023.

Alternative A: The commission may choose to adopt the recommendation to allow any unfilled mountain lion license to become eligible for use in any LMU that has not reached its quota on March 1, 2024, until the end of the season on April 14, 2024.

Alternative B: The commission may choose to amend or deny the recommendation offered by the department.

Agency Recommendation and Rationale: The department recommends the commission adopt the recommendation as presented. The added mobility starting March 1 for hunters with unfilled licenses allows for the fundamental season structure adopted last year to be in place for most of the season. At the same time, the additional mobility will potentially increase the number of LMUs where harvest quotas are filled.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the validity of any unfilled mountain lion license on March 1, 2024, to include any LMU that has not reached the total or sex-specific quotas until those quotas are filled or the season end date is reached, with all other aspects of existing regulations unchanged, as presented by the department.