

**FWP proposal to be amended: Deer Regulations**

**Commissioner:** Pat Tabor

**Date Received by Commission:**

**Proposed amendment:** I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission establish rules that limit the hunting and harvest of antlerless mule deer in Region 7 to "valid only on private land," and that on all public lands and those lands enrolled in Block Management in Region 7 be closed to the taking of antlerless mule deer.

**Requested by FWP:** No

**Rationale and Background:**

- We are all concerned about the sustainability of our mule deer population across the state. Since being on the Commission, I have heard countless comments from many sportsman across the state that we should stop harvesting mule deer does statewide, but in particular I have heard consistent concerns by folks focused on Region 7.
- It has been proffered that limiting antlerless mule deer hunting to private land, will reduce overcrowding on publicly accessible lands and will help to increase mule deer populations and hunting quality on those same lands. There is a increased recognition that by issuing additional licenses/permits on private land you will increase populations on public land, reduce crowding and improve hunt quality on public lands.
- Limiting antlerless deer harvest to private lands is a common practice in Montana, all designed to address the same issues raised by sportsmen in Region 7. Presently restrictions for antlerless harvest exist in 15 deer HDs that are restricted to hunting on private land only and 28 elk HDs that restrict hunting to private land only including 4 HDs within Region 7. Additionally, the Department is proposing HD 410, 411, 412, 417, 419, and 426 - mule deer B licenses - change from district wide to valid "Only on private land."

**Department response:**

The proposed amendment is unlikely to have a biologically meaningful effect on mule deer in Region 7. Mule deer B licenses have been reduced by over 90% since 2020 and access to antlerless hunting has been substantially restricted when compared with prior years due to changes implemented in June 2023 through commission action. This amendment may adversely affect cooperators in Block Management Access programs, however it is not anticipated to have any adverse biological effects on mule deer in Region 7.