

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
Mule Deer 2025
Adam Grove

Hunting Districts: 380

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 reduce the number of 380-50 antlered mule deer permits from the current quota level of **950 to 700**. At the 2023 application rate of 1,077, approximately 65% of 1st choice applicants would still receive a 380-50 antlered mule deer permit with the proposed quota reduction.(Figure 1)

Year	Total	M	F	Fawns	# Unl/Limit	Unl/Limit Perm	% Mgmt	HD 380	B-license	% Mgmt	Anti- Harv
	Harvest				Permits	Harvest	Success	B-licenses	Harvest	Success	General
2023*	337	293	44	0	950	223	23.4	99	25	25.1	14
2022*	325	268	58	0	1200	190	15.8	200	36	17.8	10
2021*	383	280	103	0	1268	225	17.8	250	74	29.8	12
2020	401	301	96	5	1153	260	22.5	250	83	33.2	7
2019	352	260	91	0	1307	224	17.1	250	79	31.7	0
2018*	431	332	98	0	1388	267	19.2	250	79	31.4	19
2017	402	295	105	3	1277	243	19	150	60	39.7	15
2016	445	382	63	0	1338	329	24.6	50	19	38.4	24
2015	422	389	29	5	1455	355	24.4	28*	12	42.9	14
2014	310	296	14	0	1269	263	20.7	0	-	-	11
2013	322	280	42	0	1426	255	17.9	150	36	24.0	3
2012	391	308	83	0	1610	275	17.1	150	69	46.3	3
2011	441	384	57	0	1484	367	24.7	150	52	34.7	0
2010	465	400	66	0	1484	358	24.2	150	53	35.1	6
2009	539	400	135	3	1343	365	27.2	300	109	36.2	18
2008	614	506	107	0	1347	472	35	197	68	34.4	12
2007	644	541	95	8	1302	477	36.6	200	75	37.5	16
2006*	811	642	167	3	1247	517	41.5	200	110	54.9	34
2005*	751	575	174	3	1227	496	40.4	100	49	48.6	24
2004*	674	499	174	2	1097	438	39.9	100	46	45.7	23
2003	645	532	111	2	1252	464	36.8	150	75	50.0	14
2002	585	515	69	0	1064	430	40.4	100	40	40.0	12
2001	428	381	42	0	925	322	34.8	50	24	48.0	6
2000	561	546	15	0	850	288	33.9	-	-	-	0
Ave	493	405	87	1	1274	343	27.5	162	59	38.1	12
*00-'22											
*Tremendous amount of illegal buck harvest on general license reported - correct?											
Large amount of illegal buck harvest on a general license reported every year; large amount of "illegal" harvest period											
^2015 B-licenses were for game damage hunt (small portion of district only), use of Deer A for antlerless also allowed											
Unlimited permits were changed to limited permits in 2022											

Figure 1: Table 1. HD 380 past license/permit history

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 the proposal is to reduce the amount of antlered mule deer harvest in HD 380 to help increase overall mule deer numbers in the HD. Overall mule deer numbers in HD 380 continue to be well below the long-term average. An additional benefit would likely be an overall decline in the number of total hunters (deer and elk) hunting in HD 380. HD 380 gets a lot of hunting pressure, as it is one of the mostly heavily hunted elk hunting districts in the state.

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

Success of the proposal's objective will result in more bucks and more total mule deer being observed during the HD 380 post-season mule deer trend survey. Harvest success on the 380-50 antlered mule deer permit will be monitored via the Department's annual telephone harvest survey.

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).

HD 380 went from unlimited mule deer buck permits to limited buck permits during the 2022 statewide regulation simplification effort. Mule deer numbers associated with national forest land in the HD appear to continue to be well down based on the HD’s Limestone Hills trend area which is believed to monitor mostly migratory deer (Table 2). Although, it should be noted that the trend area is only representative of a portion of HD 380. However, using mule deer buck harvest in the HD as a surrogate for survey trend information would also indicate that overall mule deer numbers are still down in the HD, as the mule deer buck harvest (293 – high amount of what appears to be illegal general license harvest reported) in 2023 was approximately 28% below the long-term average of 405. In addition, the success rate on the 380-50 buck permit has been less than 25% for a great number of years now (since 2009).

YEAR	POST-SEASON (Total Deer)	FAWNS-100 ADULTS (Post-Season)	SPRING (Total Deer)	FAWNS-100 ADULTS (Spring Recruitment)	BUCKS-100 DOES (Post-Season)
	2023/24	214	40.8	113	22.8
2022/23	285	27.2	159	20.5	7.2
2021/22	256	37.6	145	27.2	9.4
2020/21	236	21.6	117	39.3	14.8
2019/20*	269	29.3			5.6
2018/19	100	17.6	317	16.1	18.1
2017/18	330	34.7	367	19.5	22.5
2016/17	335	43.2	254	31.6	15.8
2015/16	138	40.8	107	35.4	12.6
2014/15	123	36.7	-	-	7.1
2013/14			166	25.0	
2012/13					
2011/12		-	236	20.0	-
2010/11	394	22.6	116	30.3	11
2009/10	464	24.6	166	26.7	6.7
2008/09	437	29.3	375	30.2	8.4
2007/08	556	28.3	514	26.5	11.5
2006/07	786	24.7	463	21.6	18.8
2005/06	593	44.9	177	37.6	14.9
2004/05	787	25.7	233	26.9	11.1
2003/04	461	30.3	366	33.6	15.5
2002/03	422	33.1	381	34.3	7.8
2001/02	556	31	456	23.7	9.9
2000/01	520	31.3	420	23	10.8
Ave ('00-'22/'23)	402	30.7	277	27.5	12.0

- 2015 Spring survey flown but no deer observed (timing), not indicative of trend
 * No spring survey flown due to Covid concerns

Figure 1: HD 380 mule deer trend survey information

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 proposed quota reduction will result in a decrease in both resident and non-resident opportunity. There is no desire to significantly reduce the number of limited permits in this HD to turn it into a 'trophy' management area. Significantly limiting the number of permits would result in significant hunter displacement which would result in increased hunting pressure in surrounding general license areas. In addition, while CWD has not been found in the HD yet, it is likely only a matter of time given that it has been found in WTD in the HD to the immediate south of HD. As a result, there is no desire to have a trophy like level of bucks per 100 does ratio in the HD.

The desire with the proposed quota change is simply to increase the number of both bucks and overall mule deer present in the HD to some degree and to maintain a bucks per 100 does ratio somewhere in the vicinity of 12-15 bucks per 100 does.

The area has been in moderate to severe drought conditions since last winter, so forage conditions heading into this fall and winter are a concern. Given that current forecasts are for normal to above-average (more severe) winter conditions, fawn survival and even adult survival are of a concern for this winter. Depending upon on what happens this winter, fawn production next spring could also be negatively impacted.

Hunting access is generally good in the HD with lots of public land and 20+ FWP Block Management areas. In addition, many private landowners in the HD who aren't in Block Management also allow at least some level of public hunting access.

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).

Individuals contacted about the proposal have been overwhelmingly supportive of the proposal with many individuals calling for an even larger reduction in permit numbers than what has been proposed. In response to the comments received, the initial proposal to drop the number of permits to only 750 was changed to 700 – don't want to go with a larger reduction because of hunter displacement concerns. While there might be some limited opposition to the proposal, we've been hearing concerns from both hunters and landowners the last several years about overall mule deer numbers and mule deer buck numbers being down. Buck quality (lack of a large number of mature bucks) is also an issue of concern, at least on public land areas in the HD. As a result, it's expected that the overwhelming majority of people would be supportive of the proposal. When the idea of reducing the number of mule deer buck permits was discussed with the Elkhorns Working Group, the members were supportive of or at least apparently okay with the idea, as no objections to the proposal were received.

Submitted by: Adam Grove

Date: 09/10/2024

Game – BFW October 23, 2024