

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION
Mule Deer 2025
R6-Mule Deer-Quota-Decrease Mule Deer Permit 652-50

Hunting Districts: 652

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

Decrease the HD 652-50 antlered buck mule deer permit from 125 to 100.

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 increase the post-season density of observed mule deer back towards the minimum objective of 3 deer/mi², and a lesser objective to increase the age structure of bucks.

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 a post-season aerial trend survey and a post-season harvest survey provided to each hunter that requests a tooth for aging along with other harvest metrics.

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).

The management objectives for HD 652 are to maintain a buck:doe ratio of >40 bucks:100 does, have a minimum post-season density of 3 deer/mi², a minimum of 50% of harvested bucks are > 4.5 years old, and a minimum of 30% of bucks are > 5.5 years old.

The buck:doe ratio is currently 49 bucks:100 does, a decrease of 35% from the previous year and is 33% below the long-term average. Although it is within objective, low populations can cause buck ratios to be misleading. For instance, the 49 bucks:100 does comes from a total count of 55 adult mule deer, with 18 bucks and 37 does. The average number of bucks seen on this post-season trend survey in the last 10 years is 52.

Density is currently at 1.4 deer/mi², a 60% decrease from the previous year and 53% below the minimum objective.

Harvest metrics are being achieved, but have been trending towards younger animals the past 4 years. Since a high of 93% and 60% in 2020, for > 4.5 years old and > 5.5 years old respectively, the 2023 harvest was down to 71% and 35%, for the same age ranges.

Additionally, due to low population concerns resulting from the 2023 post-season survey, the 652-01 antlerless mule deer b-license was reduced for the 2024 season from 100 to 25.

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 lower mule deer numbers observed in HD 652 is likely due to multi-year drought conditions, and a severe winter in 2022-2023.

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).

HD 652 has a mail-back survey associated with the 652-50 permit, where hunters often add comments to speak to the deer population in the area. Many hunters from the 2023 season survey noted the population being low and quality of bucks seen being dissappointing. While the age results still suggest we are achieving our harvest metrics, comments from hunters indicate they are having to be quite selective to find the older age class bucks.

Submitted by: Aaron O'Harra

Date: 09/19/2024

Game – BFW October 23, 2024