

Mule Deer – HD 391



Draft Changes for 2022-2023 Hunting Regulations:

- Combine Hunting Districts 391 and 392 into one district, HD 391.
- Season structure would be:
 - Either-sex mule deer during the general archery season;
 - Five-week general antlered buck mule deer during the rifle season (unlimited mule deer permit would be eliminated);
 - 391-02 antlerless mule deer B-licenses (not valid on U.S. Forest Service lands)

Biological Implications:

There is some concern regarding what biological impacts this proposed change may have on the area's mule deer population, particularly on the buck segment of the population, as national forest land in the current HDs 391 and 392 has very low security and will get a lot of hunters under a general antlered buck season regulation. HD 391 was switched from unlimited mule deer buck permits to general antlered buck starting with the 2020 hunting season, so there has only been one year of harvest data available since that change was made. However, mule deer buck harvest in HD 391 in 2020 was 160 percent of the average buck harvest going back to 2016 when a major boundary change affecting HDs 391 and 392 was implemented.

Social Implications:

The proposal aligns with the directive to combine HDs and simplify regulations to the extent possible. The proposal is being made to make mule deer regulations across the main body of the Big Belt Mountains (current HDs 391, 392 and 446) more similar. For example, HDs 391 and 446 are currently general antlered buck while HD 392 has unlimited mule deer buck permits.

It is expected that most folks will be okay with combining HDs 391 and 392, but there may be some opposition to making the mule deer season regulation general antlered buck rather than having the area be under an unlimited (or limited) mule deer permit season structure.

District biologist:

Adam Grove

406-266-3367 • adgrove@mt.gov