



DRAFT Montana Mountain Lion Monitoring & Management Strategy

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks is committed to maintaining sustainable lion populations in all suitable habitats of our state. Over the last 25 years FWP has made significant investments in field research that helps inform our lion management. With this and research done in other states and provinces, we propose to use the latest science and state-of-the-art methods and tools to monitor Montana's lion populations. Keeping in mind our goal to maintain sustainable populations, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks has completed a draft of a *Montana Mountain Lion Monitoring & Management Strategy* as an important component of lion management. You can view the draft Strategy online at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/publicComments/2018/mtnLionMgmtStrategy.html>.

Because we know lion populations function in big landscapes our approach includes defining four *Lion Ecoregions* in Montana, large landscapes of similar habitat within which populations perform similarly. FWP proposes to periodically develop estimates of mountain lion numbers within the Northwest, West-Central and Southwest ecoregions using a genetically-based field sampling method known as *Spatial Capture-Recapture*, or SCR. This is a relatively new but well-proven method for estimating populations. Using these population estimates plus our understanding of lion ecology and lion harvest data managers will employ a sophisticated statistical model known as an *Integrated Population Model*, or IPM, that integrates all the information to predict the effects lion harvest on populations. Over time, this monitoring program will reduce uncertainty about the effects of lion harvest and improve FWP's ability to meet management objectives.

Following an adoption of a final strategy, determining those management objectives is the next step in our process. How many lions do Montanans want on the landscape, and where? Do Montanans want more, fewer, or about the same number of lions that we have now? To determine that FWP will reach out to anyone with an interest in lion management – hunters, houndsmen, wildlife viewers, livestock producers and others – through various venues to include public meetings, social media, etc. As stated in the Strategy, “FWP and the public will collectively evaluate an ecoregion's monitoring data, develop objectives, and decide on an overall management harvest prescription for the ecoregion. Managers will then recommend individual Lion Management Unit harvests that implement the prescription, distribute hunter effort, and address local concerns.”

We hope you will take the time to review our draft *Montana Mountain Lion Monitoring & Management Strategy* and provide us with helpful comments to make it better. We also hope you will become involved when we go about the public process of determining lion population objectives.

Sincerely,

John Vore
Game Management Bureau Chief