Clover Trapping Mule Deer in Northwest Montana: Lessons Learned in a Unique Environment (Poster)

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Mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) populations are in decline in many parts of western Montana, and in 2017, harvest in Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) management region 1 (R1) reached an all-time low. This prompts a need to better understand mule deer habitat selection behaviors in a range of ecosystems. Using resource selection functions (RSFs), we will compare how GPS-collared mule deer select nutritional resources and hiding cover at large scales (home range level) and fine scales (within-home ranges) relative to forage quality in 3 distinct ecosystems throughout western Montana. In February of 2017, we successfully captured 30 mule deer does along the Rocky Mountain Front using helicopter net-gunning, but were unsuccessful in the Whitefish Range and Fisher River drainage of R1 due to dense canopy cover. From December 2017 to present, we have relied on a crew of graduate students, MFWP game wardens and biologists, technicians, volunteers, and private citizens to scout for and clover-trap mule deer in R1. Here we present our capture success rate thus far, though trapping efforts are ongoing. We wish highlight how creative methods and recruitment of help from across a state agency can be pooled to initiate rigorous research in a thickly forested environment on a scarcely seen ungulate.