

---

## WHAT HUNTERS PREFER AND VALUE ABOUT MULE DEER HUNTING IN MONTANA

Mike Lewis \*, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Helena, Montana 59620

Quentin Kujala, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Helena, Montana 59620

Justin Gude, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Helena, Montana 59620

During Montana's biennial process for establishing hunting seasons, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) listens to issues, advocacies, opinions and values brought forward by diverse mule deer hunters. In recent years, vocal constituency groups have advocated for season structures that provide more opportunity to harvest mature mule deer bucks, reflective of the recent direction of mule deer management in much of the west. In an effort to better quantify the views and preferences of the Montana hunting public in general, FWP conducted surveys of both resident and nonresident mule deer hunters. Results from the survey confirm that mule deer hunting is very important to Montana's hunters, consistent with the fact that deer hunting is by far the most popular hunting activity in Montana. Approximately two-thirds of the survey respondents prefer less restrictive mule deer hunting regulations compared to more restrictive regulations that increase the probability of harvesting mature bucks by limiting opportunity. Surprisingly, trophy hunting was the least important reason expressed by survey respondents for hunting mule deer in Montana. Many respondents did express concerns about a variety of access related issues. Despite these concerns, respondents reported being generally satisfied with overall mule deer hunting opportunities in Montana, and nearly half of the respondents rated opportunities to hunt large mule deer bucks in the state as being better than average. FWP intends to use results from this survey in the consideration of future management of this important game species that is so highly prized by Montana hunters.