



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION FWP PROPOSAL AND INFORMATION SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: December 4, 2025

Agenda Item: 2026 and 2027 Deer and Elk Hunting Regulations, Season Structures, and Hunting District Boundaries

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 15 minutes

Background: Season structures and hunting district boundaries are adopted biennially by the commission for most game species. The proposed changes to deer and elk seasons are described in the attached deer and elk season summary and presented in detail for commission action within the regulation mockup. These regulations include a recent legislative change that states a resident, as defined in 87-2-102, who is 75 years of age or older may use a general elk license to harvest an antlerless elk: (a) during any season in a hunting district in which a youth under 15 years of age may harvest an antlerless elk; and (b) on privately owned land. The commission is considering all regulations and descriptions of boundaries for the 2026 and 2027 deer and elk seasons, whether a change is proposed or not. All other regulations and descriptions of boundaries will remain unchanged unless addressed by the commission.

Public Involvement Process and Results: Public comment will be solicited for a four-week period beginning in late October, and seven hybrid virtual meetings will be held (one in each region) between Oct. 29 and Nov. 14 to answer questions about proposals. Written public comments received during the comment period will be posted online and provided to commissioners at least two weeks prior to the December commission meeting.

Alternatives and Analysis:

The department presented season concepts for discussion for each species during June and July. Based on public feedback and legal analysis, the department refined the concepts and developed proposals for commission action.

Alternative A: The commission may approve the department's recommendation as presented.

Alternative B: The commission may amend the department's recommendation on any aspect of season structure, quota, or hunting district, or on aspects of the regulations that are not proposed for change.

Agency Rationale and Recommendation: The department recommends the commission approve the proposed 2026 and 2027 deer and elk hunting regulations and district boundaries as presented by the department and as detailed in the attached mockup. Any aspect unchanged from the 2025 season will remain in effect for 2026 and 2027, except where affected by routine calendar rotations.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission vote to approve: 1) changes identified in the deer and elk regulation mockup to include opportunities, season dates, quotas, and quota ranges as presented by the department; and 2) all other deer and elk regulations contained in the 2025 regulations, except for those affected by regular calendar rotations, unless addressed in some other proposal to be adopted for the 2026 and 2027 deer and elk hunting seasons and districts.

Season dates

Season 2026	Date conventions
Deer/elk/lion archery	9/5 – 10/18 (first Saturday in September to Sunday before general deer/elk opener)
Deer/elk backcountry	9/15 – 11/29 (9/15 to Sunday after Thanksgiving)
Deer youth	10/15– 10/16 (MEA days; third Thursday and Friday of October)
Deer/elk general	10/24 – 11/29 (37 days ending Thanksgiving Sunday—Saturday start)
Deer/elk shoulder seasons	8/15 – 2/15 (varying dates before and/or after the archery and general seasons)
Deer/Elk Heritage Muzzleloader	12/12 – 12/20 (nine-day season beginning second Saturday following end of general season)

Season 2027	Date conventions
Deer/elk/lion archery	9/4 – 10/17 (first Saturday in September to Sunday before general deer/elk opener)
Deer/elk backcountry	9/15 – 11/28 (9/15 to Sunday after Thanksgiving)
Deer youth	10/21 – 10/22 (MEA days; third Thursday and Friday of October)
Deer/elk general	10/23 – 11/28 (37 days ending Thanksgiving Sunday—Saturday start)
Deer/elk shoulder seasons	8/15 – 2/15 (varying dates before and/or after the archery and general seasons)
Deer/Elk Heritage Muzzleloader	12/11 – 12/19 (nine-day season beginning second Saturday following end of general season)

Summary of proposed changes for deer and elk

Elk

- In Region 1, eliminate Permit To Hunt From a Vehicle opportunities.
- Update Region 1 HD boundaries.
- Established unlimited elk bull permits in HD 101 and offer two separate B licenses for early-general and late season antlerless elk.
- Eliminate antlerless harvest during archery season in HDs 130 and 140.
- Define area within HD 170 where antlerless or brow-tined bull may be harvested.
- Limit open area for elk B license 201-01.
- Increase open archery prison area in HD 213.
- Restore nine-day antlerless private land season in HD 240.
- Adjust quota range for B licenses in HD 250 and add a permitted brow-tined bull season.
- Add a late season for B license in HD 262.
- Adjust boundary between deer-elk HD 311 and 320.
- Expand quota range for 313-00, 313-01, 317-00.
- Legal animal is brow-tined bull and antlerless on general license for first 16 days in HD 319.
- Make either-sex elk the legal animal in HD 315 and add an early and late season for 397-00 license.
- Allow take of antlerless elk off Forest Lands in HD 335.
- Add limited B licenses in HD 360.
- In HD 380, eliminate south and north portions, corresponding elk B licenses, and associated three-week general antlerless elk opportunity. Increase 380-00 B license quota and range, but limit where valid. Implement a late shoulder season in the southeastern part of HD 380 using the 397-00 elk B license.
- In HD 391, add general license antlerless opportunity in late season in southern portion.
- Split HD 413 into prior HD 413 and 432, remove antlerless shoulder season in HD 413, maintain shoulder seasons in HD 432.

- Add early and late shoulder seasons in HD 418 and 441.
- In HD 424, eliminate quota and establish season allowing for antlerless-only harvest during first four days, but brow-tined bull-only thereafter.
- Eliminate archery season dates from the 425-20 license.
- In HD 447, remove general license antlerless opportunity on national Forest Lands, establish a new B-license that is valid across the HD (including USFS), and reduce the ES archery quota.
- Limit use of 411-00 elk B license on FWP WMA in HD 535.
- Remove late season in HD 540.
- Reduce archery elk quotas for 620-21 and 630-21.
- Adjust late season dates for in HD 690 and add general license opportunity for B license holders.
- Limit the use of 005-00 antlerless elk licenses on Forest Land in Region 5.
- Extend season dates for the 005-00 antlerless elk licenses in portion of HD 701, aligning with HD 590.
- Add new either-sex elk permits in HDs 702, 704, and 705 and make B licenses available to permit holders in these HDs with restrictions that mirror the permit.

Mule deer

- Update Region 1 HD boundaries.
- Adjust boundary between deer-elk HD 311 and 320.
- Reduce quota range for license 396-01 in HDs 339 and 343.
- Increase per-person B licenses in HD 388.
- Split HD 413 into prior HD 413 and 432.
- Establish a new B license for antlerless mule deer in each HD 418, 432, and 445.
- Eliminate antlerless mule deer B licenses 441-00 and 450-00.
- Establish buck mule deer permits for archery and general seasons in HD 447 inside USFS boundary.
- Shorten general season and create permit season for buck mule deer in HD 447 outside USFS boundary.
- Shorten general season and create permit season for buck mule deer in HD 471.
- Youth-only either-sex mule deer valid in all HDs on private land only in Region 5.

White-tailed deer

- Update Region 1 HD boundaries, including Libby CWD and Kalispell CWD management zones.
- Eliminate LPT 101-01 antlerless white-tailed deer license.
- Add either-sex opportunity during week one for HD 140 and 141, and season long in HD 150.
- Establish season and license limits for HD 170 CWD season.
- Add either-sex season for first seven days of season in HDs 281, 285, 292, 293, and 298.
- Add a B license for HD 211.
- Remove exclusion of Lake Helena WMA from the general and 003-00 antlerless license.
- Extend antlerless late season in HD 309, 314, and 317.
- Adjust boundary between deer-elk HD 311 and 320.
- Split HD 413 into prior HD 413 and 432.
- Establish late antlerless white-tailed deer season in HD 413.
- Establish a limited entry white-tailed deer antlerless license in HD 455.
- Reduce the antlerless 006-00 B-license per person limit from 3 to 1.