



State of Utah

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Utah Wildlife Board/Regional Advisory Council Members

FROM: Darren DeBloois, Predatory Mammals and Furbearer Program Coordinator

DATE: July 7, 2021

SUBJECT: 2021-22 COUGAR PERMIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Because of new legislation (Utah Code 23-16-10) implemented in 2020, some actions have taken place under the authority of the Division Director. These actions include predator management plans for 33 of the 54 designated cougar hunting units in the state. Cougar units with predator management plans in place will be open for unlimited year-round harvest to decrease cougar population densities. The objective of this management action is to lower predation rates on mule deer and bighorn sheep populations that have seen significant declines in recent years. The Director implemented predator management plans on two additional units in July to address concerns for mule deer populations. Those units are **Beaver, East and Plateau, Fishlake.**

Units with predator management plans for bighorn sheep populations are:

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| Beaver, West |
| Book Cliffs, Rattlesnake Canyon/Nine Mile, South |
| Central Mtns, Nebo-West Face |
| Fillmore, Oak Creek |
| Fillmore, Pahvant |
| Henry Mtns |
| Kaiparowits |
| La Sal |
| Nine Mile, North |
| North Slope, Summit/West Daggett |
| North Slope, Three Corners |
| Oquirrh-Stansbury, West |
| Pine Valley, South |
| San Juan, Desert |
| San Rafael |
| Wasatch Mtns, Avintaquin/Currant Creek |
| Wasatch Mtns, Cascade |
| Wasatch Mtns, Timpanogos |
| Zion |



Units with predator management plans for mule deer populations are:

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| Beaver, East |
| Book Cliffs, East |
| Cache |
| Central Mtns, Northeast Manti |
| Central Mtns, Northwest Manti |
| Central Mtns, Southeast Manti |
| Central Mtns, Southwest Manti |
| Ogden |
| Plateau, Boulder |
| Plateau, Fishlake |
| Plateau, Thousand Lakes |
| San Juan, Mountains |
| South Slope, Yellowstone |
| Southwest Desert |

Additionally, the Division Director has declared a fall spot and stalk season for cougars beginning August 1, 2021 and ending December 31, 2022. Hunters who want to take advantage of this hunt may purchase a \$30 permit over the counter and take a cougar without the use of dogs during this season. This hunt has been authorized to continue annually.

The above actions have been implemented and will be presented as informational items during this year’s RAC and Board process.

The following recommendations will be presented for public input and Wildlife Board consideration:

This year the Division is recommending some changes to try to clarify regulations in the guidebook and we will be recommending changes to Cougar Rule (R657-10) and the Cougar Management Plan to reflect those changes. Rule and Plan changes can be found in the red line copies in your packet. We hope that with all the recent changes implemented by the Legislature and the Board, we can give people clear direction on how they can obtain permits and hunt in Utah.

Permit and harvest objective recommendations can be found in the chart in your packet. All 54 cougar management units will either have a harvest objective recommended, or will be under a predator management plans and no harvest objective will be recommended. Of the 20 units with harvest objectives, we will recommend limited entry seasons on designated units. The number of permits available through the draw will be equal to the harvest objective for that unit. In the chart, units with predator management plans will be designated



as “Unlimited”, units with harvest objectives will be indicated by “HO”, and “HO with LE” will indicate units with limited entry seasons. We have made these recommendations taking into consideration cougar harvest data from 2018-2021, prey population dynamics for mule deer and bighorn sheep, and using the Utah Cougar Management Plan. Except for the **East Canyon** unit, adjustments to permits are within the parameters set out in the Utah Cougar Management Plan, and will help ensure healthy cougar populations while addressing local issues of concern including impacts to specific prey populations, livestock depredation and maintaining cougar hunting opportunities across the State. In the case of the **East Canyon** unit, the Division feels like the reason older age class animals are not showing up in the harvest is due to limited access on a largely private land unit and the cougar population can sustain and increase in harvest objective.

The recommendation table includes several categories of management actions that a cougar unit can fall into depending on how the three-year average of harvest parameters aligns with the management goals for the unit. The table divides cougar units into those categories and indicates under the “Plan Action for Permits/Quota” column the options for permit or quota changes spelled out in the plan. You will also find a column for the difference from last year’s harvest objective, which shows how this year’s recommendation compares to last year.

We will be recommending a new recommendation time frame. Beginning this December, we are recommending bringing cougar recommendation out with bear recommendations. At this meeting we will make recommendation for July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2023. As with black bear, we propose a three year recommendation cycle with no changes to harvest objectives for three years unless a unit must be placed under predator management, or some other emergency situation arises. We still recommend meeting annually in December to discuss cougar and bear updates and trends. This would open up the July/August RAC and Board meetings for other topics.

Recommended season dates are as follows:

Harvest objective and unlimited:

November 3, 2021 through June 30, 2022

La Sal; San Juan, Mountains; and Book Cliffs, East: no dogs April 14 through June 30, 2022 except for people with valid bear permits

Pursuit season: November 3, 2021 through May 31, 2022

La Sal; San Juan, Mountains; and Book Cliffs East units November 3, 2021 through June 30, 2022 except for people with valid bear permits

Restrictions on the La Sal; San Juan, Mountains; and Book Cliffs, East are to avoid confusion during non-resident bear hunting restrictions on those units. Hunters with valid bear permits during this period can use dogs to pursue and/or hunt bears and cougars.



We are recommending some changes to cougar rule (R657-10). We have made some changes to clarify the rule for hunters and general housekeeping. We eliminated the text under legal weapon requirements and referred instead to Big Game Rule requirements. This change ensures that any weapon legal for the take of Big Game will also be legal for cougars and any changes to Big Game rule will automatically be captured in Cougar rule. We recommend changing the type language in the trapping section of the rule to require “authorization” from the DWR to remove a dead cougar accidentally caught in a trap instead of “written permission”. We are eliminating obsolete cougar control permits from the rule. Language restricting types of weapons a pursuer may have in their possession has been eliminated. We recommend eliminating the call in “hotline” to check on a units harvest status. Hunters can check out website for that information. Details of these changes can be seen in the red-line rule included with this packet.

According to the Cougar Management Plan, an review of the document would take place in 2020. We convened an internal group to begin that review and determine if we needed any major changes and should form a committee for that purpose. DWR determined that no major changes were needed at this time. We are recommending a few minor revisions to capture requirements of new legislation, and to mirror the changes we are recommending to clarify the guidebook. A red-line copy of the changes to the Plan are included with this packet.

