

Adult-Only Harvest Guidelines

Description

Cougar harvest guidelines will apply only to the adult component of the population. Sub-adult cougars and kittens, defined as less than 24 months, would not count towards closure criteria (Harvest Guideline) after December 31. As with the current regulation, the Harvest Guideline would not apply from September 1 thru December 31. Currently about 59% of the recreational harvest is identified as adult and 33% as subadult when checked by the department. For other forms of mortality (e.g. conflict removal), adults account for approximately 45% and subadults account for 37%. Undetermined age and kittens make up the remaining percentages

Sub-adult cougars of both sexes, defined as less than 24 months of age, are excluded from the revised Harvest Guideline calculations and seasonal closure triggers.

Pros	Cons
This option may provide additional recreational opportunity including and later PMU closures in areas where harvest is currently skewed toward sub-adult animals.	Harvest Guidelines may be set lower than they currently are. This may result in less harvest or hunter opportunity in areas with high adult harvest. Messaging to the public will be key.
	Difficult to correctly age cougars in the field. We will have to apply a correction factor when setting guidelines to account for this aging error.

Implementation

Increased training of department staff would be necessary to increase the accuracy of aging. The current hunting season structure would remain, with the only major changes being how the Department applies the sex/age data from checked cougars to the harvest guidelines. This is a simple implementation from the field perspective but messaging the changes to our constituents would require a significant effort.

We would need to recalculate the harvest guideline based on the density estimate of adult cougars (24+ months).