

# GAME, FISH, AND PARKS COMMISSION ACTION PROPOSAL

## Mountain Lion Hunting Season

Chapter 41:06:02 and 41:06:61

<b>Commission Meeting Dates:</b>	<b>Proposal</b>	<b>July 10-11, 2025</b>	<b>Yankton</b>
	<b>Public Hearing</b>	<b>September 4, 2025</b>	<b>Rapid City</b>
	<b>Finalization</b>	<b>September 4-5, 2025</b>	<b>Rapid City</b>

### PROPOSED CHANGES

**Duration:** 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 hunting seasons

**Season Dates:** Black Hills Fire Protection District (BHFPD):  
December 26, 2025 – April 30, 2026  
December 26, 2026 – April 30, 2027

\* Access permit intervals that allow the use of dogs for hunting in the designated unit within the BHFPD during the 2025-2026 season:

- i. 3 permits: Dec. 26, 2025 – Jan. 15, 2026.
- ii. 3 permits: Jan. 16 – Feb. 5, 2026.
- iii. 3 permits: Feb. 6 – Feb. 26, 2026.
- iv. 3 permits: Feb. 27 – Mar. 19, 2026.
- v. 3 permits: Mar. 20 – Apr. 9, 2026.

\* 2026-2027 season:

- i. 3 permits: Dec. 26, 2026 – Jan. 15, 2027.
- ii. 3 permits: Jan. 16 – Feb. 5, 2027.
- iii. 3 permits: Feb. 6 – Feb. 26, 2027.
- iv. 3 permits: Feb. 27 – Mar. 19, 2027.
- v. 3 permits: Mar. 20 – Apr. 9, 2027.

\* *Recommended change to intervals and temporary access unit boundaries*

Outside Black Hills Fire Protection District:  
December 26, 2025 - Dec. 25, 2026  
December 26, 2026 – Dec. 25, 2027

**Open unit:** Statewide

**Licenses:** Unlimited (1 license per individual), residents only

**Harvest Limit:** BHFPD: 60 mountain lions or 40 female mountain lions  
*Includes harvest using temporary access permits that allow the use of dogs*

### **Requirements and Restrictions:**

1. No person may harvest more than one (1) mountain lion in a season.
2. No person may hunt mountain lions with the aid of traps or bait.
3. Shooting hours are ½ hour before sunrise to ½ hour after sunset.

4. No mountain lion with a spotted coat (kitten) and no mountain lion accompanying another mountain lion may be harvested.
5. A person may use an electronic call to hunt mountain lions.
6. All firearms, muzzleloaders, and archery equipment must meet the same minimum requirements as established in administrative rule for deer hunting.
7. The Game, Fish and Parks Commission, by resolution, may authorize the mountain lion season to extend beyond April 30.
8. The use of dogs to hunt mountain lions is allowed:
  - a. Year-round outside of the BHFPD, and;
  - b. From December 26 to April 30 within the designated area of the BHFPD for a person with an access permit that will be issued by a random drawing.
9. A person using dog in the designated access permit area within the Black Hills Fire Protection District shall attempt to harvest the first legal mountain lion they have a reasonable opportunity to harvest, except under the condition where the lion pursued shows obvious signs of lactation.
10. Licensed hunters must accompany the dog handler when the dogs are released and must continuously participate in the hunt thereafter until the hunt is completed.
11. All mountain lions harvested within the Black Hills must be presented to a department representative at the Rapid City Regional Office within 24 hours of harvest for inspection. Any person who harvests a mountain lion outside of the Black Hills region must present the mountain lion to a department representative within 24 hours of harvest.

**Proposed changes from last year:**

1. Modify § 41:06:61 to expand season dates and increase the unit size where hunting with dogs is allowed within the BHFPD (Figure 1), and no longer require access permits to hunt mountain lions in Custer State Park without the use of dogs. Hunting mountain lions in the designated area with the use of dogs will be allowed for a total of fifteen individuals with access permits, provided the harvest limit has not been met. Three access permits will be issued in each of five 21-day intervals, starting December 26, provided the harvest limit has not been met.

**SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION**

Three-year averaged population estimates using the Lincoln-Petersen (LP) method suggest the mountain lion population has remained within the population objective of 200-300 individuals since 2019 (Figure 2). While the most recent LP estimate suggests a population above objective, the 3-year average is a more reliable estimate because it mitigates potentially misleading inference resulting from sampling variation, especially when sample size are low as indicated by large confidence intervals in some years (e.g., 2017/18, 2024/25). The overall trend under the current management structure in the Black Hills and since 2009 suggests a stable population.

Dogs were used to aid the harvest of about one-quarter of mountain lions and success in Custer State Park with the use of dogs averaged 62%, while harvest without the use of dogs averaged 4% (Table 1). The recommended change to expand the area and time in which hunting with dogs may occur in the Black Hills is intended to promote additional mountain lion harvest in an area of the Black Hills that traditionally has relatively low mountain lion harvest (Figure 3). Harvest success with the use of dogs is expected to increase above the 62% average (Table 1).

While the population has remained relatively stable in the Black Hills, harvest has increased the past two hunting seasons, and this recommendation is expected to further increase harvest. Consistent harvest at the current rate may reduce the population. Department staff will continue to monitor mountain lion harvest and population trends to assess impacts of potentially increased harvest.

Table 1: Mountain lion harvest for the Black Hills Fire Protection District, Custer State Park, and Prairie with and without the use of dogs. Success rates, where available, are included in parentheses.

Year	Black Hills	Custer State Park		Prairie		Statewide		Total
	No Dogs	No Dogs	w/ Dogs	No Dogs	w/ Dogs	No Dogs	w/ Dogs	
2020/21	39 (3.6%)	0	9 (73.3%)	4	6	43	15	58
2021/22	34 (3.3%)	1	7 (66.0%)	2	8	37	15	52
2022/23	37 (3.4%)	0	7 (70.0%)	4	10	41	17	58
2023/24	42 (3.8%)	0	5 (46.7%)	2	6	44	11	55
2024/25	45 (3.9%)	0	7 (56.0%)	7	7	52	14	66
Average	39 (3.6%)	0.2	7 (62.4%)	4	7	43	14	58

Figure 1. Black Hills Fire Protection District boundary with recommended new unit where access permits will be available to harvest mountain lions with the use of dogs (black diagonal hashed lines).

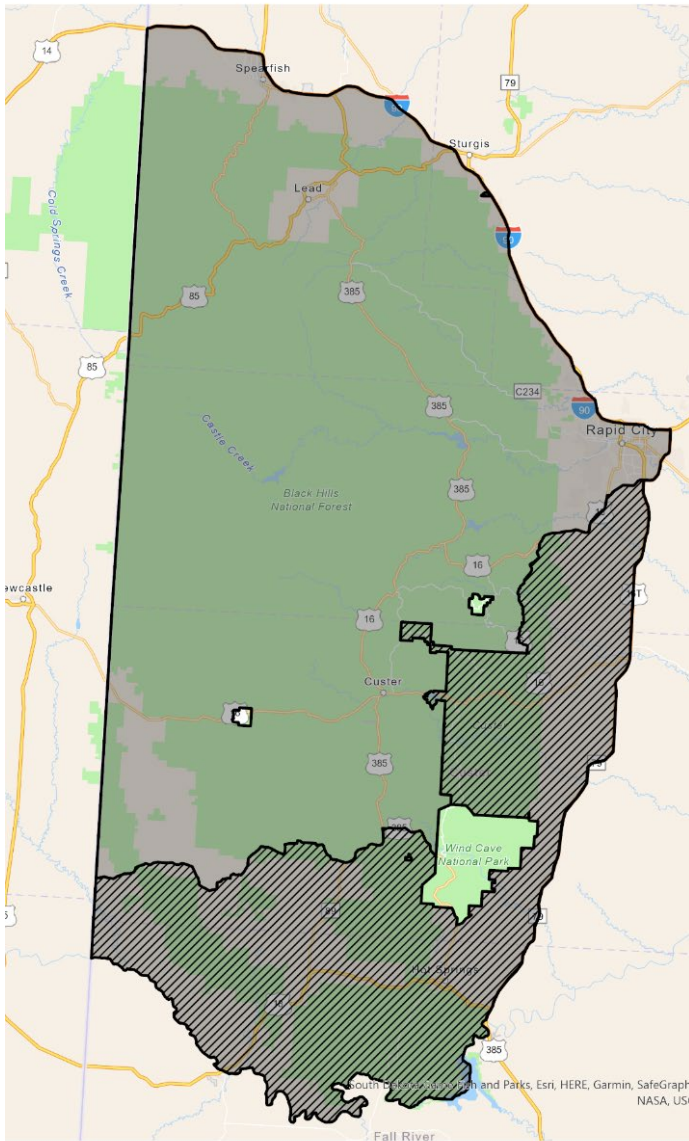


Figure 2. Mountain lion population objective (200-300), population estimates (dashed line), and inverse-variance weighted 3-year averaged estimates (solid line) for the Black Hills of South Dakota.

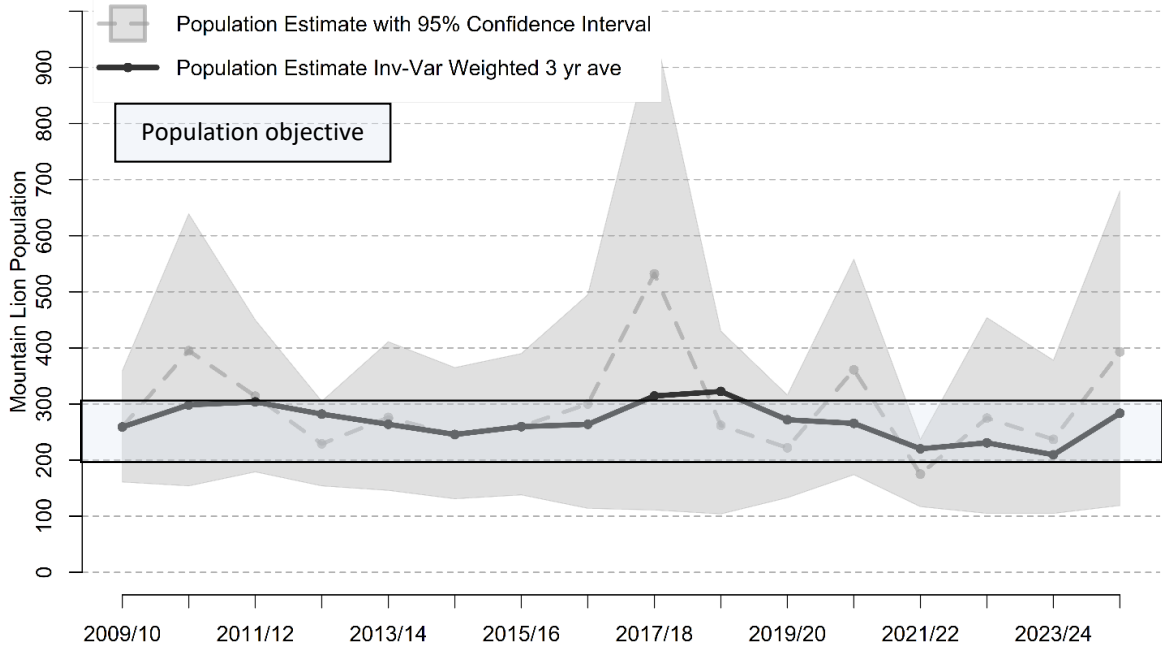
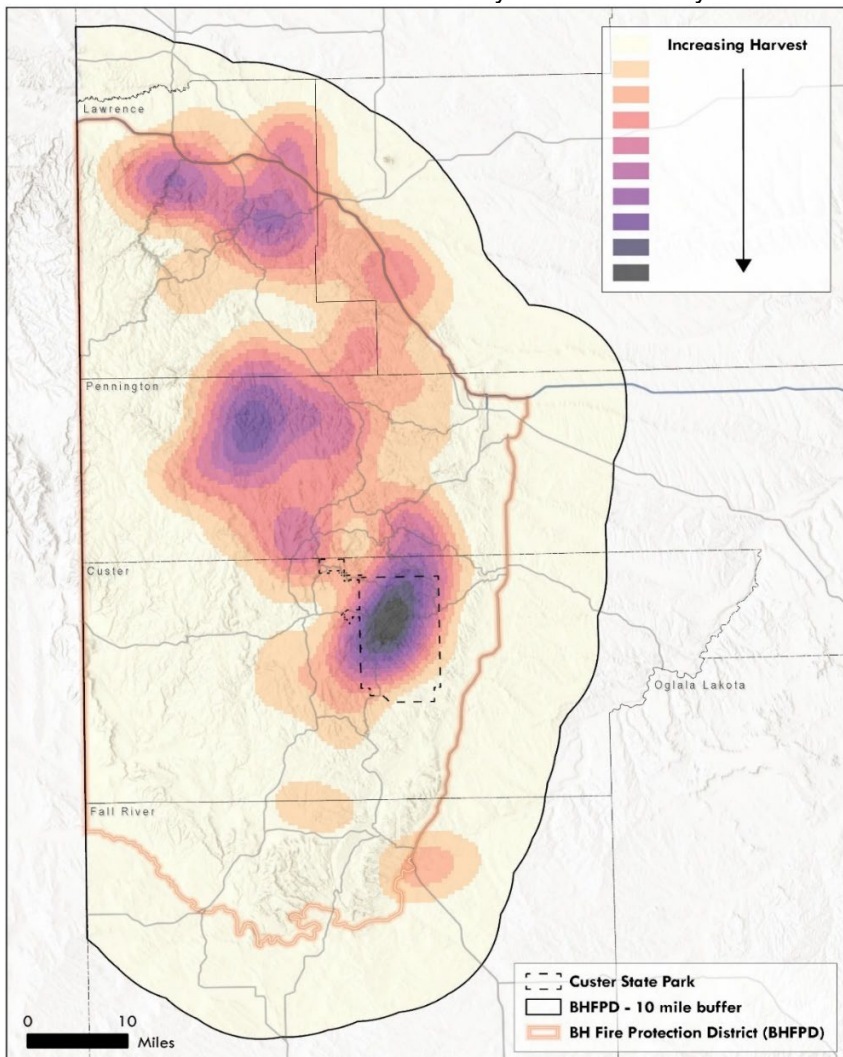


Figure 3. Harvest of mountain lions shaded by harvest intensity from 2020 to 2025.



## DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

**41:06:61:02. Black Hills Fire Protection District -- Harvest limit -- Season dates -- Season closure.** The season harvest limit for the area within the Black Hills Fire Protection District is 60 mountain lions or 40 female mountain lions. The mountain lion hunting season in the Black Hills Fire Protection District is open December 26 through April 30, provided that the department shall close the mountain lion hunting season in the Black Hills Fire Protection District if the harvest limit for that area is reached prior to April 30. ~~Custer State Park is closed to mountain lion hunting, except for 75 persons who possess a mountain lion license and a temporary access permit structured to include:~~

- ~~— (1) Four hunting intervals, each having 15 access permits in which hunting with dogs is not allowed; and~~
- ~~— (2) Five hunting intervals, each having three access permits in which hunting with dogs is allowed.~~

~~— Hunting in Custer State Park must begin with an interval that allows the use of dogs and must rotate every 14 days with an interval that does not allow the use of dogs, until the mountain lion season closes in the Black Hills Fire Protection District. The temporary access permits are issued free of charge and may be issued by a random drawing.~~

Temporary access permits will be issued by a random drawing that permits an individual to hunt with the use of dogs in the Black Hills Fire Protection District. An individual must possess a mountain lion hunting license and temporary access permit to hunt with dogs in those portions of the Black Hills Fire Protection District within an area bounded as follows: beginning at the junction of State Highway 79 and U.S. Highway 16/East Catron Boulevard in Rapid City, then westerly along U.S. Highway 16 to its junction with the Black Hills National Forest boundary, then southerly along the Black Hills National Forest boundary to its junction with the South Rockerville Road, then southerly along the South Rockerville Road to its junction with State Highway 40, then easterly along State Highway 40 to its junction Pennington County Road 330 (Playhouse Road), then southerly to its junction with U.S. Highway 16A, then southerly along U.S. Highway 16 to its junction with the north boundary of Custer State Park, then westerly along the Custer State Park Boundary to its junction with the northwest corner of Custer State Park, then southerly along the west Custer State Park boundary and Wind Cave National Park boundary to U.S. Highway 385, then northerly along U.S. Highway 385 to its junction with State Highway 89, then southerly along State Highway 89 to its junction with 18 Mile Road (Forest Service 316), then westerly along 18 Mile Road to its junction with Pleasant Valley Road (Forest Service 715), then westerly along Pleasant Valley Road to its junction with Pilger Mountain Road/Dewey Road (Forest Service 769), then westerly along Pilger Mountain Road/Dewey Road to the South Dakota-Wyoming state line, then southerly along the state line its junction with the Cheyenne River, then easterly along the Black Hills Fire Protection District southern boundary to the southeast corner of the Black Hills Fire Protection District, then northerly along the Black Hills Fire Protection District eastern boundary to the point of the beginning.

Three temporary access permits will be available in each of five consecutive twenty one day intervals, beginning on December 26.

**41:06:61:06. Application requirements -- License and season restrictions -- Special conditions -- Carcass check-in procedures.** Only a resident may apply for a mountain lion hunting license. The following requirements, restrictions, special conditions, and procedures apply to all licenses issued under this chapter:

- (1) No person may harvest more than one mountain lion in a season;
- (2) No person may harvest or attempt to harvest a mountain lion with a spotted coat or any mountain lion accompanying another mountain lion;
- (3) No person may hunt mountain lions with the aid of traps or bait;

(4) The use of dogs to hunt mountain lions is allowed only during those specified hunting intervals and specified area in Custer State Park that allow the use of dogs; within the Black Hills Fire Protection District for an individual with a temporary access permit; and year-round outside of the Black Hills Fire Protection District;

(5) No person may release dogs on tracks indicating multiple mountain lions traveling together;

(6) In Custer State Park the Black Hills Fire Protection District, a person using dogs shall attempt to harvest the first legal mountain lion the person has a reasonable opportunity to harvest, except under the condition in which the lion pursued shows obvious signs of lactation;

(7) Licensed hunters must accompany the dog handler when the dogs are released and must continuously participate in the hunt until the hunt is completed;

(8) A person may use any firearm, muzzleloader, or bow and arrow established by statute or administrative rule as legal implements for the taking of deer; and

(9) All mountain lions harvested must be presented to a department representative within twenty-four hours of harvest for inspection.

(10) Only residents of the state may apply for a license or an access permit.

#### RESIDENT/NONRESIDENT CRITERIA

None.

#### RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION (R3) CRITERIA

1. Does the regulation or fee inhibit a user's ability to participate? No.
2. Does the regulation increase the opportunity for new and existing users? Yes, hunting opportunity with the use of dogs will be expanded.
3. How does the regulation impact the next generation of hunters, anglers, trappers and outdoor recreationists? NA.
4. Does the regulation enhance the quality of life for current and future generations by getting families outdoors? NA.

#### FISCAL IMPACT

None.

APPROVE	_____	MODIFY	_____	REJECT	_____	NO ACTION	_____
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