

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 6

INTRODUCED BY J. HINKLE, L. DEMING, S. MANESS, M. MARLER, J. SECKINGER

A RESOLUTION OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MONTANA URGING THE PROTECTION OF MONTANA'S TRADITIONAL NOVEMBER MULE DEER HUNT.

WHEREAS, this resolution may be cited as the "Traditional November Mule Deer Hunt Protection Resolution"; and

WHEREAS, the House of Representatives is the closest representation of the people of the state; and

WHEREAS, to increase populations of mule deer, antlerless harvest is minimized, and to decrease populations of mule deer, antlerless harvest is maximized; and

WHEREAS, except to increase the buck-to-doe ratio at certain times, mule deer buck harvest is generally not a major factor in population management; and

WHEREAS, Montana is unusual among the states in that, apart from the early 1900s, and despite recurrent increases and decreases in mule deer populations, it has always allowed the harvest of mule deer bucks during the rut period; and

WHEREAS, harvesting mule deer bucks during the rut gives hunters the opportunity to harvest a mature deer, because older deer are more active at that time; and

WHEREAS, Montana hunters have long-standing personal and family traditions of hunting mule deer during the rut; and

WHEREAS, Montana has hunting families whose traditions of hunting mule deer during the rut are generational and culminate with Thanksgiving when families are together; and

WHEREAS, it is essential to preserve the long-standing opportunity and tradition of November mule deer hunting and of mule deer buck harvest during the rut period while allowing the management of mule deer buck harvest in hunting districts where it may be beneficial for population management; and

WHEREAS, between trophy management and opportunity management, Montana has historically focused on providing greater opportunity for hunters; and

WHEREAS, a Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks survey conducted in 2022 showed that 71% of

1 respondents either "support" or "strongly support" the timing of the current 5-week general rifle season for mule
2 deer, which is an increase of 10% in the "strongly support" category in the 11-year period after a similar survey
3 was conducted in 2011; and

4 WHEREAS, in the same 2022 survey, nearly two-thirds of respondents stated they "support" or
5 "strongly support" the hunting of mule deer bucks during the rut in Montana, while only 16% stated they
6 "oppose" or "strongly oppose" the hunt; and

7 WHEREAS, after nearly 10 decades of decreases and increases in mule deer populations, removing
8 the mule deer hunt from the month of November and removing the hunt permanently from the rut would be
9 drastic and not science based.

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11 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF
12 MONTANA:

13 That the House of Representatives urges the Fish and Wildlife Commission to strongly consider:

14 (1) retaining the cherished and long-held traditions of the November mule deer hunt, including
15 hunting mule deer bucks during the rut, and resisting the movement of the mule deer season earlier into the
16 month of October;

17 (2) keeping in mind the Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks' survey results in which
18 respondents greatly supported the timing of the current mule deer hunting season;

19 (3) aggressively restricting the harvest of antlerless mule deer in regions where populations are
20 below the objective, or below the objective in the long-term average for a period of years, until populations
21 recover;

22 (4) restricting antlerless mule deer harvests until populations strengthen in districts that are at the
23 objective but are trending toward below the objective;

24 (5) restricting the harvest ~~in no more than 20% of the districts in a given season, for no more than~~
25 ~~two seasons within a 6-year period, and not~~ NO earlier than November 6 in general hunting districts, in order to
26 retain opportunity for hunters if the commission ~~decides~~ FINDS IT NECESSARY to restrict the harvest of mule deer
27 bucks during the rut;

28 (6) rotating any necessary restrictions as much as possible by district to continue providing

1 opportunity for rut harvests in ~~some~~ MOST areas of the state while other districts are restricted AND ONLY AS LONG
2 AS NEEDED TO RECOVER BUCK-TO-DOE RATIOS; and

3 (7) adding biological triggers to restrictive mule deer management, such as increasing the buck-to-
4 doe ratio in districts in which the buck-to-doe ratio has dropped below 15 bucks for every 100 does according to
5 postseason surveys.

6 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Chief Clerk of the House send a copy of this resolution to the
7 Governor and to each of the seven Commissioners of the Fish and Wildlife Commission.

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