

Zone 1 Mountain Lion Season Summarized by Greg Freeman, news editor

North Dakota's 2008-09 Zone 1 mountain lion season ended the last week in February when the eighth lion was taken, the state Game and Fish Department's predetermined quota. As of March 15, no lions had been harvested outside of Zone 1.

The final cat was harvested February 23; the sixth and seventh lions were taken November 15. "At this point, it's hard to say for certain why the three-month lag between cats," said Dorothy Fecske, Department furbearer biologist. "It may have been the bitterly cold weather and deep snow causing limited road access, or that people had trouble finding lions."

Just how winter affected the lion population remains to be seen, but Fecske said several factors may influence the North Dakota cougar outlook. "This was an interesting year," she said. "Three of the cats examined had shortened tails from past frostbite damage, and ears on two of the animals were also damaged by frostbite. In addition, lion kittens are susceptible to extreme weather conditions and this winter could reduce survival of this age class."

Most of the cats harvested were young animals, indicating continued breeding activity in the badlands. Only one breeding-age female was taken this year (a 107-pound, 4-5-year-old lion). Based on the exam, Fecske said that cat had nursed one litter in the past and would have had her second litter in September.

"Overall, North Dakota lions are very healthy based on an examination of organ fat reserves and body weights," Fecske said.

Five males and three females were taken in Zone 1. Seven cats were harvested in McKenzie County, and one was taken in Williams County.

The first mountain lion was harvested September 17 near Grassy Butte. The cat was a 107-pound female that appeared to be more than 4 years old. The hunter was specifically targeting a lion; he and his hunting partner used a call to locate and bring the cat into shooting range.

The second cat was harvested by a bow hunter September 20 a few miles southeast of Williston along the Missouri River in Zone 1. The lion was a healthy 95-pound male estimated between 1-2.5 years old.

The third cat was taken October 25 near Lone Butte. The lion was a 74-pound, 1-2.5-year-old female. She had frostbite damage on her ears and tail. In addition, a foot had what appeared to be a trap-related injury. The hunter was specifically hunting for lions.

The fourth lion was harvested November 8 along the Little Missouri River near the Long X Bridge. The hunter was bow hunting, and took the cat with a .22-caliber pistol. The female lion was 1-2.5 years old and weighed 63 pounds. She appeared on the thin side, but otherwise seemed healthy. Similar to the third

cat harvested, the ears and tail appeared to have frostbite damage; the tips of the ears were gone and the tail was short.

The fifth lion was harvested November 10 near Tobacco Garden. The animal was a 1-2.5-year-old male that weighed 101 pounds. The cat appeared in good condition and had about a half-dozen porcupine quills in the chest area.

The sixth and seventh mountain lions were five-month-old males taken November 15 just south of the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park by two deer hunters from the same hunting party. The cats were traveling together.

The eighth lion was taken February 23 southeast of Watford City by a hunter using hounds. The 6-year-old male cat was healthy and weighed 170 pounds. It was the largest male harvested to date in North Dakota.

The Zone 2 hunting season ended March 31. Fecske said it is not unexpected that no lions were taken in the rest of the state because most of our lion habitat is in the western part of the state. "Lions that disperse from this region apparently don't settle down on the prairie, so the chances of harvesting a lion in Zone 2 are much smaller than taking a lion in Zone 1," she said.

MOUNTAIN LION HARVEST LOCATIONS IN NORTH DAKOTA 2008-2009

