

MOUNTAIN LION

The 2025/26 Black Hills season opened on December 26, 2025 and closed on April 30, 2026. The harvest limit was 60 total or 40 female mountain lions. After the Black Hills season closed, anyone with a valid 2026 license who did not take a mountain lion could hunt through December 25, 2026 on land that was located outside the Black Hills Fire Protection District.

There were 2,896 resident mountain lion licenses issued prior to the end of the 2025/26 Black Hills season. A total of 14 access permits were also issued for the Dog Access Permit Area (DAPA) including Custer State Park (CSP) allowing the use of dogs. The DAPA was expanded outside CSP for the 2025/26 season and included parts of Pennington, Custer, and Fall River counties.

Email survey requests were sent to all hunters who purchased a license before the Black Hills season ended and had a valid email address listed in the license database. Phone contact was also attempted for DAPA permit holders who did not respond to the email survey. The survey response rate was 44%. Active hunters reported hunting an average of 7.3 days outside of CSP and 3.7 days inside CSP. Average hunter satisfaction within the Black Hills Fire Protection District was 4.54 and 5.00 for DAPA holders. Satisfaction was based on a numerical scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 7 (very satisfied), 4 being neutral.

The overall Black Hills success rate was 3.28%, with a total of 32 mountain lions harvested, 16 of which were females. Hunter success for active mountain lion hunters in the Black Hills (excluding DAPA) was 2.70%, whereas success for those with a DAPA permit was 47.6%. Check station data for the Black Hills showed that 7 mountain lions were harvested in Custer County, 14 in Lawrence County, 6 in Pennington County, 1 in Fall River County, and 4 in Meade County. Six mountain lions were harvested by hunters with access permits that allowed the use of dogs, of which 5 were within CSP and 1 was in Fall River County within the DAPA.

A total of 3 mountain lions were harvested on the prairie outside of the Black Hills Fire Protection District from May 1, 2025 to April 30, 2026, which included 1 sub-adult male, and 2 sub-adult females.

2025/26 Black Hills Mountain Lion Harvest Projections

Last Revised:
11-Aug-26

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11-Aug-26

Unit/Type	Resident Licenses		Response Rate	Active Hunters				Active Hunter Success	Harvest Reports						Total Lion Harvest	Mean Satisfaction Rating		Average Days Hunted		
	Avail.	Sold		Black Hills	CSP	Dog Area	Combined		Males			Females				BHills	Dog Permit	BHills	CSP	DAPA
									Adult	Subadult	<1 year	Adult	Subadult	<1 year						
Black Hills (no access permit)	Unlimited	2,882	44%	957	23	44	962	2.70%	5	4	1	9	7	0	26	4.50	—	7.3	3.4	6.1
Dog Access Permit holders	15	14	71%	6	13	6	13	47.6%	2	3	0	0	1	0	6	4.75	5.00	7.8	4.3	8.0
Totals		2,896	43.8%	963	35	49	974	3.28%	7	7	1	9	8	0	32	4.54	5.00	7.3	3.7	6.3

Harvest statistics for 2016/17 - 2025/26 Black Hills Mountain Lion seasons (excluding DAPA)

YEAR	Season Length (Days)	Licenses Sold	Active Hunters	Harvest		Average Days Hunted	Average Satisf
				Males	Females		
2016/17	96	2,561	1,153	10	13	6.9	4.51
2017/18	96	2,878	1,199	7	15	7.3	4.87
2018/19	96	2,818	1,132	8	6	6.9	4.81
2019/20	127	2,907	1,144	15	25	8.3	4.65
2020/21	126	3,208	1,214	17	22	7.1	4.68
2021/22	126	2,894	1,025	10	24	6.2	4.58
2022/23	126	2,628	999	12	25	8.1	4.89
2023/24	127	2,842	1,115	13	29	7.3	4.93
2024/25	126	3,044	1,199	19	26	7.0	4.93
2025/26	126	2,896	963	10	16	7.3	4.54

Harvest statistics for 2016/17 - 2025/26 in the Dog Access Permit Area

YEAR	Season Length (Days)	Permits Issued	Active Hunters	Harvest		Average Days Hunted	Average Satisf
				Males	Females		
2016/17	96	57	37	4	3	3.7	5.13
2017/18	96	57	41	5	4	4.0	5.26
2018/19	96	57	38	5	2	4.3	5.63
2019/20	127	74	39	9	2	5.0	5.18
2020/21	126	75	42	6	3	4.3	4.95
2021/22	126	68	36	6	2	4.6	5.22
2022/23	126	67	24	4	3	5.6	5.41
2023/24	127	75	44	4	1	4.0	4.99
2024/25	126	62	40	4	3	4.3	4.67
2025/26	126	14*	35	5	1	3.7	NA

*Dog Access Permits only. CSP was opened to all license holders that did not have an access permit in 2025/26 and the area open to hunters with dog access permits was expanded beyond CSP.

Reported participation and mean days hunted in the Dog Access Permit Area

2025/2026 Mountain Lion Dog Access Permit Statistics	Access Permit Unit Date Intervals					TOTAL
	Dec. 26 Jan 15	Jan 16 Feb 5	Feb 6 Feb 26	Feb 27 Mar 19	Mar 20 Apr 9	
Permits Issued	3	2	3	3	3	14
Sample (n)	3	2	3	3	3	14
Responded (N)	1	2	3	2	2	10
Response Rate	33%	100%	100%	67%	67%	71.4%
Reported Hunted CSP	1	2	3	2	1	9
Reported Hunted Dog area outside CSP	0	1	3	0	0	4
Projected Hunted CSP	3	2	3	3	2	13
Projected Hunted Dog Area outside CSP	0	1	3	0	0	4
Projected Days Hunted CSP	30	8	8	14	6	66
Mean Days Hunted CSP	10.0	4.0	2.7	4.5	4.0	5.2
Projected Days Hunted Dog Area outside CSP	0	7	25	0	0	32
Mean Days Hunted Dog Area outside CSP	0.0	7.0	8.3	0.0	0.0	8.0
Projected Days BH excluding CSP	0	7	24	0	0	31
Mean Days Hunted BH excluding CSP	0.0	7.0	8.0	0.0	0.0	7.8
Lions Harvested ^b	2	0	1	3	0	6
Lions Harvested CSP ^b	2	-	1	2	-	5
Lions Harvested Dog area outside CSP ^b	0	-	0	1	-	1

b. total lions harvested based on mandatory check-in data, not returned surveys.

Lion hunters' preference for mountain lion population over the next 5 years

	All Licensed Lion Hunters	Inactive Lion Hunters	Active Lion Hunters	Harvested a Lion
Decrease A Lot	15.9	17.3	13.6	11.8
Decrease A Little	19.8	19.0	21.3	17.6
Stay About the Same	39.7	38.4	42.1	29.4
Increase A Little	10.3	8.9	12.9	35.3
Increase A Lot	4.0	3.4	4.9	5.9
Not Sure	10.17	12.98	5.37	0.0
N	1,160	732	428	17
Mean*	2.63	2.56	2.73	3.06

*Mean preference is based on a scale of 1-5, where "1" is decrease a lot, "3" is stay the same, and "5" is increase a lot.