

**MOUNTAIN LION MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES
FOR
LION DAU L-20
GAME MANAGEMENT UNITS
68, 681, 76, 79, 80, & 81**

Prepared for:
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Southeast Region

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DESCRIPTION OF DATA ANALYSIS UNIT, HABITAT, AND PAST MANAGEMENT:

Mountain lion DAU L-20 is located in south central Colorado on the west side of the San Luis Valley. The primary drainages are the Rio Grande, Conejos River, and Saguache Creek. The DAU consists of six game management units 68, 681, 76, 79, 80, and 81.

The DAU is considered to be only fair to poor lion habitat. It is generally bordered on the east by agricultural lands at lower elevation. As the elevation increases from east to west from 7,500 feet to over 13,000 feet, the vegetation changes from pinion-juniper to aspen and Douglas fir, to spruce-fir to alpine along the continental divide. Lions generally inhabit the lower elevation areas of the DAU but may be found at higher elevations preying on both elk and deer at any time of the year. Historically the area supported a higher mule deer population than at present. The decline in mule deer was evident in the 1970's and became more pronounced in the 1980's and 1990's. Currently mule deer are at low population levels in this DAU. Elk populations in the DAU peaked in the late 1980's and have declined somewhat with more liberal antlerless hunting opportunities. It appears that lions utilize elk as the primary prey species in this DAU.

The sport hunting harvest over the last ten years has increased from a low of 0 in 1989 to a high of 9 in 1994. The average sport harvest is 4 lions per year. The 1999 quota in the DAU was 13.

There is some lion depredation on livestock but it is somewhat sporadic. From 1990 to 1998 there was a total of \$1,836 in game damage claims. The depredations included sheep, goats, and cattle. Claims averaged \$305 per year with a range of \$145 to \$525.

ISSUES:

- Outfitters want quotas raised despite the fact the quotas are not currently met.
- The CDOW wants to maintain a viable lion population in the DAU that is in balance with the habitat, prey and social values.

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- Some people believe that mountain lions are suppressing deer and elk populations.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS: Sport hunting will be the primary management tool to insure healthy and viable mountain lion populations and to provide for maximum hunter opportunity. Recent studies have indicated that predation by mountain lions on deer and elk is not a major factor in population regulation, however, there are no studies from this DAU. The preferred management recommendation is to maintain license quotas at or below present levels for 5 years to monitor harvest levels and hunter success for the following reasons:

- Current quotas are not met.
- Damage is not excessive and within acceptable levels.