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From: Montana FWP - Region 5 <montanafwp@announcements.mt.gov>
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To: Ravalli County Commissioners Office
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Warm weather, mixed results for opening weekend in south-central Montana



FWP NEWS RELEASE

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THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

	Year	Hunters	White-tailed deer	Mule deer	Antelope	Elk	% Success
Billings	2023	163	7	12	7	9	21
	2022	282	5	20	10	8	16
	2021	337	14	49	15	27	32
	Avg.	302	9	41	10	21	26
Lavina	2023	440	8	28	5	23	15
	2022	551	15	21	2	21	11
	2021	458	12	37	5	14	NA
	Avg.	423	24	31	12	18	NA
Big Timber	2023	234	26	40	20	28	49
	2022	250	22	20	23	28	37
	2021	213	21	42	11	23	46
	Avg.	282	23	40	25	20	38
Columbus	2023	131	10	14	0	6	23
	2022	129	12	12	0	10	26
	2021	81	16	14	1	5	44
	Avg.	190	21	37	2	6	35

Region 5 check station results from 2023, 2022, 2021 and the long-term average for opening weekend.

Warm weather, mixed results for opening weekend in south-central Montana

BILLINGS - Warm, mild weather across south-central Montana led to mixed hunter numbers and success for the 2023 big game general hunting season opening weekend. The general season opened Saturday, Oct. 21, and will run until Sunday, Nov. 26.

Over this opening weekend, 968 big game hunters visited check stations in south-central Montana. This is a decrease from the 1,212 hunters observed over the same weekend in 2022. Hunter numbers and success rates varied across the region.

Check stations operated both Saturday and Sunday in Billings, Lavina, Big Timber, and Columbus for the general season opener. Billings, Lavina and Big Timber check stations will operate only on Sunday until the closing weekend of the general season, when they will operate on both Saturday, Nov. 25, and Sunday, Nov. 26. The Columbus check station will operate both Saturday and Sunday for every weekend of the general season. Hunters are required to stop at any game check station they pass, regardless of success.

Forecasted highs in the 20's and potential snow will impact animal movement and hunting conditions later this week and into the weekend.

FWP congratulates all new hunters on their first harvests of deer, elk and antelope!

Hunters throughout Montana are reminded to:

- Plan ahead for access.
- Respect private property.
- Practice safe hunting.
- Turn in poachers at 1-800-TIP-MONT.

For more information on hunting ethics, visit: fwp.mt.gov/itsuptous.

Hunting regulations for deer, elk and antelope are available online at: fwp.mt.gov/binaries/content/assets/fwp/hunt/regulations/2023/2023-dea-regulations-final-for-web.pdf.

Billings Check Station

The Billings check station was slow over opening weekend, with just 163 hunters stopping. This is the lowest hunter number on record for opening weekend at the Billings check station. Success rates, however, were higher than last year at 21% and near the long-term average.

Harvest for mule deer and antelope were below last year's, while white-tailed deer and elk saw a slight increase from opening weekend last year. Overall harvest for all species was below the long-term average.

Lavina Check Station

Lavina was the busiest check station in the region, with 440 big game hunters visiting over opening weekend. This is down, however, from the 551 hunters that visited the Lavina check station over opening weekend in 2022. Of these hunters, only 15% were successful—the lowest rate in the region—in harvesting game.

Elk harvest was slightly up from last year and the long-term average, with 23 at the check station this weekend. Mule deer and antelope harvest was up from last year but below the long-term average, while white-tailed deer harvest for this area was below the harvest last year and below the long-term average. A single moose—the only in the region—was checked at the Lavina check station.

Big Timber Check Station

Hunter success was highest at the Big Timber check station. Nearly half of the 234 hunters that visited this check station were successful in harvesting game. Harvests for white-tailed deer, mule deer, and elk were above the long-term average for this area. The majority of elk at this check station were bulls harvested on private land. Antelope harvest was below average.

This was the busiest check station for bird hunters, with 30 upland and/or waterfowl hunters stopping over the weekend.

Columbus Check Station

The Columbus check station had 131 big game hunters over the weekend, the lowest in the region but consistent with hunter numbers recorded during 2022 opening weekend. Harvest for both deer species at this check station was below the long-term average. Mule deer harvest for this area has been low for multiple years, while white-tailed deer harvest has seen more fluctuation.

The majority of harvested deer from this area were antlerless. All six harvested elk that came through this check station were bulls from private land.

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