

**Alaska Board of Game Committee Meeting on
Copper Basin Area Subsistence Hunting Regulations
(Units 11, 12 and 13)**

Anchorage Alaska
December 2, 2013

Background

The Alaska Board of Game established a committee, chaired by Board Vice-Chairman Nate Turner, to discuss issues and seek solutions related to the Copper Basin Area subsistence hunting regulations in Units 11, 12 and 13. The committee met on December 2, 2013 in Anchorage for an initial discussion of issues and potential solutions. The committee will meet again in Anchorage in March/April, with the objective of identifying solution(s) to submit to the Board of Game by May 1, 2014 for consideration during the 2014-2015 Board meeting cycle. Committee members and meeting attendance are listed in Attachment 1.

The Copper Basin Tier I Community Subsistence Hunts (CSH) for caribou and moose were established by the Board of Game in 2009 (5 AAC 92.074(d) *Community Subsistence Harvest Areas*). The CSH permit program allows communities or groups of 25 or more individuals to apply annually for a CSH permit for caribou, moose, or both in an established CSH area. These groups may select, from their group members, individual harvesters who may possess particular expertise in hunting to harvest caribou and/or moose on behalf of the community or group. In establishing the Copper Basin CSH, the Board of Game developed findings in 2006 and 2011 that characterize the pattern of customary and traditional use that they intended hunt subscribers to follow (Attachment 2).

Background information presented by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) Division of Wildlife Conservation can be viewed under “Meeting Documents” at: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=gameboard.meetinginfo&date=12-02-2013&meeting=anchorage>.¹ There are no biological concerns for moose or caribou in the CSH area at this time, but there is a complex management regime. The department recommends that there be some stability in management in coming years, so the effectiveness of management actions can be evaluated.

This meeting summary briefly describes three main issues related to the CSH program identified by the committee on December 2. It lists potential solutions for each issue that one or more members would like to discuss at future meetings.² Finally, it outlines additional information to be presented by ADF&G staff at the committee’s next meeting, to inform their further discussion of these issues.

¹ Materials presented include: (1) Unit 13 Hunt History, (2) Summary of Board Actions Affecting Unit 13 Hunts, and (3) 2009 Modifications to Unit 13 Hunting Regulations.

² The potential solutions discussed on December 2 and listed in this summary do not represent a consensus of committee members. All solutions identified by one or more committee members were listed and will be discussed at future meetings.

Issue I – Increased Participation in Community Subsistence Hunt

Participation in the CSH for both moose and caribou has risen dramatically since 2009. For moose, the number of communities participating has increased from 19 to 41 and the number of individuals from 378 (in 2009) to 2,066 (2013). For caribou, the number of communities has increased from 28 to 41 and the number of individuals from 665 (in 2011) to 1,424 (2013). This increase in participation has raised issues with access to the resource, since harvest in higher use areas has in some seasons caused a reduction of harvest opportunity in others due to in-season management.

The following potential solutions were identified by one or more committee members, for further discussion at a future meeting:

- Ensure that communities or groups approved to participate in the moose and caribou CSH meet the intent of the Board of Game findings for the CSH program (Attachment 2). This may include development and use of new non-subjective qualification criteria for evaluation of CSH applications and annual hunt reports.
- Set seasons and bag limits for the CSH program to match the general hunt. This would eliminate the incentive of the 20-day early start and harvest of “any-bull” moose, which attract people to participate in the CSH. With this change, the CSH would operate as a “party hunt” where tags could be shared, but under general hunt rules.
- Reduce incentives for participation in the CSH, such as by providing less than the current 20-day early start, or changing from “any-bull” to something less than SF50/4BT.
- Require a long-term commitment to the CSH program. For example, require groups to commit to participating for five years, as long as the CSH program operates as a Tier I hunt and its rules are otherwise not substantially changed.
- Change eligibility for participation to 25 *households* per group, rather than 25 individuals per group. The definition for “household” would mean that group of people domiciled in the same residence per 5 AAC 92.990 (23) *Definitions*.
- Discontinue the CSH program. (Noting that harvest from the general moose season and Tier I caribou exceed the amount reasonably necessary for subsistence.)

Assignments

In preparation for the next committee meeting, ADF&G will complete the following assignments related to Issue I:

1. Division of Subsistence – Present a recommendation for how to evaluate the applications and post-hunt reports of CSH communities/groups to ensure their participation meets the intent of the Board of Game’s findings for the program (Attachment 2).

2. Division of Wildlife Conservation – Analyze how changing the CSH seasons and bag limits to match the general hunt would work. What would be the effect?
3. Division of Wildlife Conservation – Analyze how a change to 25 “households” (not individuals) would work in the CSH program. What would be the effect?

Issue II – Harvest of “Any-Bull” Moose in High Use Subareas Reduces Harvest Opportunity in Other Subareas

ADF&G manages to a harvest quota of 100 any-bulls in the CSH area. In recent years, high any-bull harvest in heavily-hunted subareas of Unit 13 (especially 13A) have caused ADF&G to close the season early throughout the CSH area to avoid harvesting over quota. The in-season closure has resulted in loss of harvest opportunity for many CSH participants, including those who hunt in the more remote areas of the unit. For example, in 2013, ADF&G established a harvest quota of 16 any-bull moose in Unit 13A. Forty-two were taken in 13A in the early days of the hunt and ADF&G closed the any-bull season by Emergency Order (EO), curtailing any-bull harvest opportunity in other subareas.

The following potential solutions were identified by one or more committee members, for further discussion at a future meeting:

- Establish a firm “any-bull” quota per subarea (perhaps established by the Board), so that a harvest that exceeds the quota in one subarea would not reduce the quota (and harvest opportunity) in another subarea.
- Establish a maximum number of CSH groups per subarea and require groups to register for a specific subarea.
- Establish different season lengths for different subareas, providing longer seasons in areas with lower participation.
- Provide an antlerless hunt, to reduce pressure on any-bulls and to provide an alternate subsistence resource to meet needs.
- Provide for more rapid harvest reporting and more responsive in-season management during the any-bull harvest. Ideas discussed include ensuring there is weekend staffing/tracking of the harvest by ADF&G biologists, and more rapid communication between ADF&G and hunters regarding actual harvest and EOs (e.g., cell phone?, radio?).
- Allow any-bull hunt Monday-Friday only (in entire CSH, or only in high-use subareas?)
- Change from annual “any-bull” opportunity, to only allowing a group to periodically participate in the any-bull hunt (interval not specified).
- Make no change to the 2014 regulation that will provide one locking tag for any-bull per three households. Need to evaluate what effect this new regulation will have on participation in the “any-bull” hunt. (Note, however, that there are

members of the committee who question whether this new regulation is equitable or workable.)

- NOTE: In addition to these potential solutions, ADF&G asked that the committee make a recommendation regarding what ADF&G should do to address any “leftover quota” of any-bull moose. For example, in 2013, 85 any-bull were harvested, of the quota of 100.

Assignments

In preparation for the next committee meeting, ADF&G Division of Wildlife Conservation will complete the following assignments related to Issue II:

1. Evaluate the mechanism, feasibility and effects of each of the potential solutions listed above. How would each of these ideas work? What would be the effect(s)? For example, what would be proposed opening and closing periods for hunt in each subarea? Under what conditions, where, and how would ADF&G consider an antlerless hunt and what would be the effect(s)?

Issue III – Reduced Subsistence Harvest Opportunity for Caribou

Concern was raised that in 2013, the caribou hunt in the CSH closed on September 20, and then has not reopened for the October 21-March 31 season. The concern is that the caribou season is being closed (or not reopened for a late season), even though the community harvest needs have not been met.

The following potential solution was identified by one or more committee members, for further discussion at a future meeting:

- Suggest that the CSH for caribou be managed to ensure that the community hunt continues into the winter season as long as the CSH cap of 300 caribou is not exceeded.

Assignment

In preparation for the next committee meeting, ADF&G Division of Wildlife Conservation will complete the following assignments related to Issue III:

1. Evaluate the mechanism, feasibility and effect(s) of each of this change in management.

Meeting Attendance

Committee Members

Nate Turner, Board of Game (committee chair)
Jim Colver, MatSu Fish and Wildlife Commission
Stosh Hoffman, Board of Game
Nick Jackson, Ahtna, Inc.
Mike Kramer, Alaska Outdoor Council
Chuck McMahan, Copper Basin AC
Dan Montgomery, Matanuska Valley Advisory Committee AC
Frank Neumann, Anchorage AC
Sky Starkey, Ahtna, Inc.

Note: Committee members Teresa Sager Albaugh, Board of Game, and John Schandelmeier, Paxson AC, were not present

Board of Game (present in audience)

Ted Spraker, Chair, Board of Game
Bob Mumford, Board of Game
Pete Probasco, Board of Game

ADF&G Staff

Lem Butler, ADF&G, Division of Wildlife Conservation
Bruce Dale, ADF&G, Division of Wildlife Conservation
Jim Fall, ADF&G, Division of Subsistence
Davin Holen, ADF&G, Division of Subsistence
Leigh Honig, ADF&G, Division of Wildlife Conservation
Jim Holmes, ADF&G, Division of Wildlife Conservation
Lisa Olson, ADF&G, Division of Subsistence
Frank Robbins, ADF&G, Division of Wildlife Conservation
Becky Schwanke, ADF&G, Division of Wildlife Conservation
Kristy Tibbles, ADF&G Board Support
James Van Lanen, ADF&G, Division of Subsistence
Doug Vincent-Lang, ADF&G, Division of Wildlife Conservation
Natalie Weber, ADF&G, Division of Wildlife Conservation
Sherry Wright, ADF&G Board Support

Public

Michelle Anderson
Eleanor Dementi, Ahtna, Inc.
Craig Fleener
Bill Folsom, Matanuska Valley AC
R.L. Holt
Randy Hope
Bart Saunders, Alaska Range Commission, Subsistence Group
Gloria Stickwan, Ahtna, Inc.
Linda Tyone, Ahtna, Inc.
Pete Zazilenski