

RC 23

From: Dale, Bruce W (DFG)
To: Frank Woods III
Cc: Nelson, Hazel C (DFG); Vincent-Lang, Douglas S (DFG); Tibbles, Kristy R (DFG); Butler, Lem G (DFG)
Subject: 17B,C moose hunt season extension
Date: Friday, January 03, 2014 4:09:51 PM

Frank,

This is formal notification of our analysis of the Manokotak request, and our decision to deny that request using state E.O. authority. This does not stop the village from pursuing an extension through emergency regulations by the Board of Game. Please let us know if you would like to pursue that option.

As you and I discussed on the phone, the division looks forward to hearing how the village fares in the upcoming 17A moose and Nushagak caribou hunts. I believe those opportunities should provide needed resources to the village. We also discussed the lack of information to evaluate harvest to date and status of the moose population. I believe we all agreed that no one wants to unnecessarily reduce future moose availability.

Looking forward, we discussed several ways that we could improve the hunt opportunity and administration. The division looks forward to assisting you and the village with development of board proposals for the May 1 deadline. Also, please be aware that Lem Butler (Region IV Acting Regional Supervisor) will be discussing this decision with the Village Council on Tuesday. Please pass along this information for us.

Sincerely,

Bruce

Bruce Dale
Deputy Director
Division of Wildlife Conservation
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Palmer, AK

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Background:

The department received a request from the Bristol Bay Native Association, on behalf of the Manokotak Village Council, to extend the winter moose season two additional weeks in Unit

Dept. response to RC21

17C.

The department recommends that the winter moose hunting season not be extended at this time because:

1. There is substantial additional opportunity to harvest moose and caribou this winter in the area of the petitioning village. Nushagak caribou, Unit 17A moose, and Mulchatna caribou all provide additional resources for subsistence uses. All of these resources are available within 15 miles of the village.
2. Harvest information is not available for the 2013 Unit 17 hunts at this time, so the number of moose harvested in those areas during the autumn and winter seasons this regulatory year are not known, nor is hunter effort. More information on harvest and effort relative to annual averages will be available after the reporting deadline of January 15.
3. The population has not been surveyed since 2008, and cannot be compared to population objectives at this time, and no information is available on calf ratios to predict population trends. Therefore it is not known whether supplemental harvest this year will reduce the availability of moose for harvest in subsequent years.
4. To date, we have no similar petitions within the rest of the RM585 hunt area which encompasses all of Units 17B and 17C. This is a very large area with many villages and users. Extending this hunt may result in broad areas of overly high harvest.

Additional Information:

Moose hunting opportunities in Unit 17B and 17C are administered jointly using harvest ticket and registration permit hunts. General season hunters with a harvest ticket are allowed to participate in the fall hunt, but are limited by an antler restriction. RM583 is a fall registration permit hunt for any bull moose, and RM585 is the winter registration permit hunt for antlered bull moose. The RM585 winter hunt closes on December 31 (today), and harvest reports are due on January 15.

Because registration permits are issued on paper permits in Unit 17 villages, there is a delay in compiling electronic data for the registration hunts. For this reason, very little information is available through Winfonet to serve as a basis for decision making, and even general statements about hunter effort and success cannot be made at this time. Additionally, the number of moose harvested under the general season regulations will not be known until March.

Due to the lack of current information about this moose population and current level of harvest, we recommend that the season should not be extended as a conservative management approach to ensure that the population and future hunting opportunity are not

adversely affected by this decision.

Like most moose hunts in the state, moose hunting in Unit 17 is not managed by a quota system. Late winter moose surveys are conducted on a rotational basis every 3 years to estimate moose density, and the bull and calf ratios are unknown. Moose are managed by adjusting season length to regulate harvests in a manner that does not result in an adverse affect on the moose population or hunting success. Hunting regulations are designed to produce an average harvest that does not have a negative effect on the moose population and provides for stable season lengths. A quota system would make it difficult for hunters to plan hunts and anticipate opportunity for both the registration and general hunts.

It should also be noted that RM583 and RM585 are regularly challenged at Board meetings and have been the focus of discussions of whether the department is abusing its discretionary authorities in favor of local residents. Extending those seasons may fuel that debate. Additionally, a season extension is not supported by all local residents, some of whom report anecdotal observations suggesting that there are fewer moose in Unit 17C, near Dillingham and Manokotak.

Additionally, decisions will also need to be made about the extent of the hunt area if the season is extended; whether the season extension will be limited to the immediate area around Manokotak or applied to a larger area in Unit 17C, as suggested by BBNA. The RM585 winter registration hunt includes all of Units 17C and 17B. If the season extension is applied to all of Unit 17C, it would allow additional hunting opportunity for most of the major communities in Unit 17 and affect moose populations in areas that may be experiencing different population trends. Any decision made on how the hunt area should be limited will have implications for the allocation of hunting opportunity in Unit 17 and will be viewed favorably or unfavorably by different segments of the public.

If the decision is made to extend the RM585 winter season, we will need to move very quickly. Registration permit holders have already begun submitting their permit hunt reports, and new permits may need to be issued. The bag limit – 1 antlered bull – cannot be altered with this authority and antlered bulls become increasingly rare as antler drop continues through early winter,

There are currently two winter caribou hunts open in Unit 17 and a winter moose hunt in Unit 17A that is scheduled to open January 7-31 with a 2 moose quota. The Mulchatna caribou runs through March 15, and a federal registration caribou hunt for the nearby Nushagak caribou herd runs through March 31. The Unit 17A moose population and Nushagak caribou herd have both been underutilized in the past and additional hunting opportunity is being offered this year. The Nushagak caribou herd is very accessible to residents of Manokotak. Winter travel conditions are expected to provide Manokotak residents with very good access to these populations.

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