

RC 64



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR SEAN PARNELL

**Department of
Fish and Game**

DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
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To the communities of Tununak, Nightmute, Cheforak, Newtok and Toksook Bay:

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) is seeking input on future muskox hunts from the landowners of Nelson Island. At the January meeting in Kotzebue, the Alaska Board of Game (BOG) removed the limit on registration permits for Nelson Island. Further action by the Board is scheduled for the Statewide meeting during March 14-18, 2014 in Anchorage, Alaska when the board will consider additional hunt types and methods of allocating permits to hunters. Comments from the communities will help the board develop regulations that are compatible with private ownership of the majority of Nelson Island.

The BOG is made up of seven members from the public appointed by the governor and confirmed by a legislature. The BOG is tasked with establishing hunting and trapping regulations across Alaska. ADF&G is tasked with providing biological data and determining the harvestable surplus in the game populations being considered for regulation change. At the Kotzebue BOG meeting, department Proposal 6 removing the limit on Nelson Island registration permits was approved by the board, to be effective for the next regulatory year. The BOG unanimously voted to increase the number of permits that can be issued, but they would like to consider how those permits are allocated to the public at the March 2014 meeting. Currently registration permits are issued first-come first-served on a rotational schedule in one of the five villages composing of the landowners of Nelson Island. These villages are Newtok, Toksook Bay, Tununak, Nightmute and Cheforak. In any given year residents of all five villages may receive permits, however the hosting community generally receives the largest proportion of permits. On average five permits go to other Alaskans, most of whom reside on the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta. In the history of the hunt only one permit has gone to a nonresident.

The current Nelson Island muskox population is above the management goals of 350 to 450 muskox. The last survey in July 2012 counted 761 on Nelson Island and ADF&G expects the population could now be as high as 900 animals based on the 22% annual rate of population growth. If the muskox population remains high, over 450 animals, we believe there is a risk of damage to the range, especially winter range. Higher harvests will be needed to control the population growth, perhaps as many as 150 animals per year (100 cows and 50 bulls) for the next several years. The first hunt with higher harvests would occur during the next regulatory year in winter 2015.

The BOG agrees with the Department that temporary increases in harvest are necessary to reduce the population to management objectives. Increased numbers of permits gives the opportunity to change the types of hunts and the way permits are issued. In this regard, the BOG has directed ADF&G to get feedback from the landowners on the following hunts and permit options:

Option 1: Add a Bull Drawing Hunt

Continue with a registration hunt for the majority of permits, but also create a drawing hunt for residents and nonresidents to hunt bulls. This hunt would require a \$500 tag fee for resident hunters. This type of hunt might provide an economic opportunity for local people to guide hunters or to charge a fee for hunters to hunt on village corporation lands. If this option sounds feasible, ADF&G would like to know how many drawing permits should be allocated for this type of hunt, and the best time of year to offer the drawing hunt to residents and nonresidents.

Option 2: Registration Permits Available Online

Continue with a registration hunt and allow permits to be available online on a first-come first-served basis. The first people to logon through the internet would receive the permits. This option would be open to residents of Alaska and nonresidents.

Option 3: Registration Permits Available in Nelson Island Communities (unissued permits in other communities)

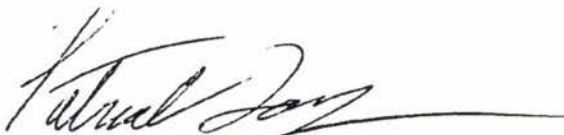
Continue with a registration hunt and allow the majority of permits to be available in the villages on a first-come first-served basis. Similar to what is currently done with the caveat that any permits not issued in the village they would be offered over-the-counter in Bethel on a first-come first-served basis. For example if the department wanted to issue 150 permits in Tununak but only 100 people were in line the remaining 50 permits would be issued in Bethel.

Option 4: Combined Registration, Draw, Online and Other Communities

This option combines Options 1, 2, and 3 where some permits are given out in the village of a first-come first-served basis, some permits are given out in a draw hunt, some of the permits are given out online, and some of the permits are given out in other locations. For example you might say in years the department wants to issue 120 permits we give 100 permits in Toksook Bay, 10 be allocated to a draw hunt, 10 are given out online, with any remaining permits given out in other locations like Bethel.

ADF&G remains neutral on how and where these permits are available to hunters as this is an allocation issue and not a biological issue. ADF&G and the BOG would like your input on what style of hunt you like to see in the near future. The BOG meets to make decisions on this issue in March 2014. Your timely response is needed. If you have any questions regarding this letter please call or email me.

Sincerely,



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