

ALASKA BOARD OF GAME FINDINGS
ANTLERLESS MOOSE IN 20A
PROPOSAL 42
96-103-806

The moose population on the Tanana Flats (GMU 20A) erupted during the 1950s and reached a high by the early 1960s variously estimated at 12,000 to 23,000 animals. During this time, this area became an important moose hunting area for residents of the Fairbanks area. Beginning about 1965, the moose population crashed to about 2,800 moose by 1975. This was attributed to winter weather, including record snowfall in 1970-71, overuse of the range, and poorly regulated hunting, in combination with inadequate monitoring of population trend.

By 1975, it was apparent that wolf predation was limiting recovery of the moose population. The Board implemented a wolf reduction program in 1976 that effectively reduced wolf numbers and allowed moose to increase. Between 1976 and 1996, moose numbers increased from 2,800 to about 14,000. By the mid-1980s, wolf numbers had recovered to pre-control levels but wolf predation was insufficient to limit moose population growth.

Biological information now indicates that if the Tanana Flats moose population increases further, range damage may occur, recruitment may decline as competition for high-quality food increases, and survival will fall. These biological events may precipitate another crash (in conjunction with deep snow) similar to that which occurred in 1965-1975.

After considering public testimony and biological information presented by the Department, the board finds that:

1. Moose populations that increase to high density (generally more than 1.5 moose per square mile in interior Alaska) are at risk for crashes that reduce herd size greatly. Such crashes are precipitated by range damage that may take decades to repair. There are numerous, well-studied case histories of moose populations in Alaska and throughout North America, that document this reality.
2. Crashes of moose populations result in numerous biological and public policy problems as hunters find fewer opportunities to hunt over long time intervals as conservative harvest regulations are required to rebuild the moose populations.
3. Crashes of moose populations are likely preventable if moose populations are carefully monitored, range condition and trend information is available, and harvest regulations are flexible.
4. In order to curb the growth of a moose population approaching carrying capacity, biologists indicate that cow harvests are mandatory. It is not possible to prevent carrying


capacity problems by harvesting only bulls as bull:cow ratios then become distorted and the cow portion of the populations continues to increase.

5. Specifically, with regard to the Tanana Flats moose population, the Board finds that this population, currently at about 14,000 animals, now shows biological signs of approaching carrying capacity. At carrying capacity recruitment is very low, animals are in poor condition, opportunity for harvest is minimal, and range damage may be excessive. Accordingly it is prudent to now consider harvesting a sufficient number of cow moose to slow further population growth. This may involve harvesting up to 1,000 cows.

6. The Board finds that opposition to harvesting cow moose by some local Fish and Game Advisory Committees is strong. Testimony by at least two committees at the March 1996 Board meeting specifically opposed harvesting any cows from the Tanana Flats population, and one committee indicated that it would likely oppose cow moose hunts despite any biological information.

7. The Board finds that there is need for increased public support for harvesting cow moose if we are to fully realize the potential for intensive management that may involve predator reduction programs. Predator control and habitat improvement may result in moose populations that reach high density and subsequently crash, thereby negating efforts to provide maximum hunting opportunity. Cow moose hunts are required to prevent this occurrence, but may be blocked by advisory committee opposition.

8. The Board finds that one way to seek increased support for cow moose hunts is for the Department, the Board, and various interests groups to work closely with advisory committees in order to provide them with adequate information on the risks and benefits of different harvesting strategies. Evidence of this includes the Department's extensive work with local advisory committees that resulted in adoption of Proposal 42A allowing for a limited cow harvest in Game Management Unit 20A in 1996 supported by the advisory committees.


Larry Holmes, Chair
Alaska Board of Game

Date: 4/18/96
Juneau, Alaska

Vote: 6-0-1
absent