

**PRELIMINARY
RECOMMENDATIONS
BOARD OF GAME PROPOSALS**

November 2009

Alaska Department of Fish & Game

Division of Wildlife Conservation

The department's recommendations are based on analysis of the proposals with available information. These recommendations may change after further analysis based on public comment or additional information.

PROPOSAL 1

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal modifies the resident registration moose hunt in the portion of Unit 18 within the Goodnews River drainage by changing the season from Aug 25-Sept 20 to Sept 1-Sept 30 and it removes the harvest quota of 10 antlered bulls currently applied to this permit hunt.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Amend and Adopt.**

RATIONALE: Due to the small moose population in the area identified in the proposal, the Board of Game authorized an Aug 25-Sept 20 registration permit hunt and the department uses discretionary authority to manage the hunt with annual harvest quotas to prevent overharvest of the population. Recent surveys have shown increasing numbers of moose with the most recent survey in January 2009 finding 145 moose. This is an increase of about 23 moose compared to the previous years' count. Harvest in the last two years, 13 and 10 antlered bulls, respectively, have been regulated by quotas, but have not required early emergency closures to prevent overharvest. In each year the season remained open until the scheduled closure of Sept 20. Since the moose population is small, but increasing, and the department can effectively limit harvest through quota management, we recommend amending the proposal to allow hunting by registration permit during the month of September (as proposed) with quotas established by the department. In response to increasing numbers of moose, we anticipate adjusting the quota upwards as the population increases. If the current status of the population prevails, the quota during the next season is expected to be 'up to 20 bulls' which allows for a substantial increase above the current quota of 10 bulls. Providing a season without quota would lead to concerns for overharvest in the population.

PROPOSAL 2

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal adds 10 days to the resident registration moose hunt (RM615) in the portion of Unit 18 within the Lower Kuskokwim River by changing the season from Sept 1-Sept 10 to Sept 1-Sept 20 with no change to the antlered bull bag limit.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Do Not Adopt.**

RATIONALE: The fall 2009 registration permit hunt in the Kuskokwim River area was the first hunting season in this area following a five-year season closure to allow moose populations to increase. The hunt was extremely popular, nearly 1400 people got permits, and a minimum of 1100 hunted. The quota of 75 moose was reached during the 10-day season and towards the end of the season there was consideration of an early emergency closure to prevent overharvest of the population. Even though an early closure was not needed, the level of interest and number of hunters in the field make a 20-day season unreasonable considering the size of the moose population, available harvest, and areas of habitat accessible to hunters. In this years' hunt, water levels were very low which effectively limited access and provided protection to moose. In a more normal year, hunters might be more effective and reach the harvest objective before the end of a 10-day season. Until the population is substantially larger and the risk of overharvest is diminished, the department recommends continuing the current 10-day registration permit season with harvest quota management. Additional opportunities may be warranted in the future and

these will be considered at future board meetings when population data support additional harvest.

PROPOSAL 3

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal adds a general season winter moose hunt for residents with a bull bag limit during Jan 1-Jan 5 in the portion of Unit 18 within the Lower Kuskokwim River hunt area where the current season is a residents only by registration permit (RM615) for antlered bulls during a Sept 1-Sept 10 season.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Do Not Adopt.**

RATIONALE: The fall 2009 registration permit hunt in the Kuskokwim River area was the first hunting season in this area following a five-year season closure to allow moose populations to increase. The hunt was extremely popular, nearly 1400 people got permits, and a minimum of 1100 hunted. The quota of 75 moose was reached during the 10-day season and towards the end of the season there was consideration of an early emergency closure to prevent overharvest. In this years' hunt, water levels were very low which effectively limited access and provided protection to moose. In a more normal year, hunters might be more effective and reach the harvest objective before the end of a 10-day season. Until the population is substantially larger and the risk of overharvest is diminished, the department does not support additional opportunity with the proposed winter season. We do not recommend opening a winter hunt until the fall harvest is substantially below the harvestable surplus.

PROPOSAL 4

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal modifies the boundary of the resident registration moose hunt in the portion of Unit 18 within the Kuskokwim River drainage by using the north bank of the Johnson River and other identifiable topographic features in the hunt area.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Adopt.**

RATIONALE: Staff proposal; see issue statement.

PROPOSAL 5

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal modifies the general season moose hunt in the northern and western portion of Unit 18 by: changing the southern boundary of the Lower Yukon hunt area to the north bank of the Kashunuk River and other identifiable features, lengthening the winter season by 39 days with changes from Dec 20-Jan 20 to Dec 20-Feb 28, and removing the regulatory language authorizing emergency order closures to prohibit the taking of calves.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Adopt.**

RATIONALE: Staff proposal; see issue statement.

PROPOSAL 6

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal modifies the general season wolf hunt in Unit 22 by shortening the season 122 days with changes from Aug 1-Apr 30 to Nov 1-Mar 31 and by reducing the bag limit 50 % with changes from 20 wolves to 10 wolves per season.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Do Not Adopt.**

RATIONALE: Unit 22 wolf hunting seasons and bag limits were liberalized during the 2007 Board of Game meeting to provide additional hunting opportunity. The hunting bag limit was increased from five to twenty wolves per year and season dates lengthened to provide additional opportunity without exceeding the earliest or latest closing dates used elsewhere in the state for areas that do not have active predator management programs.

Anecdotal data suggest wolf numbers have increased rapidly during recent years and wolves are now seen in all areas of the Nome road system, including areas west of Nome where they have previously been found at low numbers. Most wolf harvests in Unit 22 are opportunistic and wolf sealing records from 1997-2008 show an average annual harvest of 41 wolves per regulatory year with harvest numbers ranging from 20-74 wolves. The trend and range of wolf harvest suggests the wolf population is not being impacted by current seasons and bag limits. Therefore, the department does not support the proposed reductions in wolf hunting opportunity.

PROPOSAL 7

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal modifies wolverine hunting and trapping in a portion of Unit 22 by lengthening the hunting season 30 days (from Sept 1-Mar 31 to Sept 1-Apr 30) and trapping by 15 days (from Nov 1-Apr 15 to Nov 1-Apr 30), and by applying these changes to the portion of the unit that matches the geographic areas associated with moose hunts in Unit 22D Remainder, Unit 22D Southwest and Unit 22E.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Do Not Adopt.**

RATIONALE: Harvests of wolverines in Unit 22 are primarily by hunters and trappers in Units 22A and 22B where approximately 64% of the annual harvest occurs. Overall, during 1995–2008, 557 wolverines have been sealed in Unit 22, for a mean of 43 per year. Of these, 51% wolverine were either trapped or snared, 42% were shot; and 4% were harvested by unknown methods.

A key component of viable wolverine populations is the survival of reproductive females. Recent genetic research on wolverines in Unit 1B indicates that recruitment of reproductive females is primarily from females that are born within the region and survive to reproductive age. Female wolverines do not reproduce young until at least three-years old and often they only successfully raise one or two young every other year. To maintain sustainable populations of wolverine, the harvest of females with dependent young should be minimized. Wolverine kits are born in February and early March and remain in the den until late May. During this late winter period reproducing females are vulnerable to trapping because they travel extensively to obtain food while attempting to meet the energetic demands of lactation. Harvesting reproductive female

wolverines during this period could have negative ramifications on future recruitment into the population.

Wolverine populations have not been estimated in Unit 22; however, areas with low harvests probably indicate areas with low population levels. The amount of harvest from the proposed area is not known (because of the irregular parts of Unit 22D), but it is estimated to be low based on the harvest reported from Unit 22E where an average 5 wolverine are taken annually. Since population estimates are not available, productivity rates are low, animals become more vulnerable through increased movement and dispersal later in the year, and few areas serve as 'refugia' in Unit 22, there is potential for decreased population size if the seasons are lengthened. Without better population estimates or harvest information, the department recommends no changes to the wolverine hunting and trapping seasons, especially in an area that typically has low harvests of wolverines. Additionally, maintaining a hunting season closing date of March 31 provides consistency across the majority of game management units in the state, except for January 31 and February 15 closures in south central and southeast Alaska, respectively.

PROPOSAL 8

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal changes the trophy destruction requirement for subsistence muskox hunts in Unit 22 so that horns removed from the skull by the hunter are not subject to trophy destruction when horns are removed from the unit. Only horns that are naturally attached to the skull at the time of removal from the game management unit are subject to trophy destruction by the department.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Take No Action.**

RATIONALE: Trophy destruction of muskox skulls taken in subsistence hunts is authorized under discretionary permit hunt conditions (5AAC 92.052 (5)) and does not require further Board action at this time. The Seward Peninsula Muskox Cooperators group has never reached consensus on this topic and views from the group range from requiring immediate trophy destruction to none at all.

PROPOSAL 9

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal changes the same day airborne take of caribou in Unit 22 from an allowable period of January 1 through April 15 to anytime during all open caribou seasons in the unit.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **No Recommendation.**

RATIONALE: This is an allocation issue to be determined by the Board of Game. The requested changes would potentially increase opportunity for hunters using aircraft access in Unit 22. In some cases, efficiency of harvest may be improved due to hunting in close proximity to aircraft landing areas. However, the relative abundance and distribution of caribou away from aircraft landing areas minimizes widespread impacts related to same day airborne hunting.

PROPOSAL 10

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal adds 15 days to brown bear hunting in the southern portion of Unit 22A by changing the season from Aug 1-May 31 to Aug 1-Jun 15 with no changes to bag limit or residency requirements.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Do Not Adopt.**

RATIONALE: This proposal would extend the season to June 15 in the southern portion of Unit 22A where overharvest would easily occur due to seasonal aggregations of bears along the coastline of southern Norton Sound. During late May and early June, brown bears congregate along the coastline in this area to feed on spawning herring or stranded marine mammals. When attracted to the coastline for food, bears become more vulnerable to hunting and there is the potential for overharvest. Due to conservation concerns, the department supports current brown bear seasons and their associated harvest levels in Unit 22A.

Since 1997, brown bear regulations have been incrementally liberalized to increase harvest and reduce brown bear numbers throughout Unit 22 and these changes have been applied to Unit 22A where harvests have been increasing in recent years. Two of the highest annual harvests in Unit 22A have been documented in 2006 and 2008 with 47 and 42 bears, respectively, compared to the 5-year average of 37 brown bears annually during 2004-2008. Harvests in Unit 22A have increased 181% compared to the 5-year trends in annual harvest prior to liberalization of regulations (1993-1997). Since trends in harvest information show continual increases, providing additional opportunity through extended seasons is not recommended at this time.

PROPOSAL 11

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal adds the drawing application requirement of signed guide client agreements with guides in good standing for nonresident moose hunt DM845 in Unit 22B. Also, the proposal modifies that application process by allowing guides to submit applications for as many permits as available in the hunt.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **No Recommendation.**

RATIONALE: This is a nonresident requirement and an allocation issue among guides to be determined by the Board.

Unit 22 currently has drawing permit hunts for moose and brown bear. The proposed changes apply to nonresident drawing hunts for moose in Unit 22B and would make the application and selection process more complicated for hunters and may reduce the number of qualified applicants if Guide Use Area restrictions are implemented. Also, the proposal affects the guide requirements for nonresidents hunting moose and changes the number of applications that may be submitted for individual drawing permit hunts.

The proposal requests that all successful nonresidents meet the guide-client requirement, regardless of whether they use a guide or not. This requirement potentially conflicts with Alaska Statute 16.05.407 which does not require a nonresident to have a guide to hunt moose. In areas where a guide-client agreement has been implemented for moose, two types of hunts are

available for nonresidents- the available permits are allocated and nonresidents can choose to apply for either the guided hunt or the non-guided hunt.

The proposal also requests that guides be limited to submitting the same number of applications as the number of permits available. If 8 permits are available, each guide could submit no more than 8 client applications. In the last application period, only eleven total applications were submitted for this hunt.

PROPOSAL 12

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal modifies the resident registration moose hunt in Unit 22B Remainder (also described as Unit 22B, west of the Darby Mountains) by: changing the season from Sept 1-Sept 14 to Sept 17-Sept 30; applying up to 5 additional bull moose to the winter season quota if not harvested in the fall hunt; and, requiring that registration permits be available (only) in the communities of Golovin and White Mountain.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: Do Not Adopt.

RATIONALE: The moose population in Unit 22B west of the Darby Mountains declined 7% annually from 1987 to 1999. Since 1999 the population has remained stable with moose densities at 0.24/mi² and recruitment rates between 4%-10%. The Board of Game authorized a Sept 1-Sept 14 registration permit hunt for this area, including adjacent areas along the Nome Road System, and the department manages the hunt with annual harvest quotas to help the moose populations increase.

Adjusting season dates to Sept 17-Sept 30 would allow hunting of medium and large size bulls as they become vulnerable during the rut. Additional harvest on this segment of the population would reduce breeding bulls at a time when population recovery is needed. Due to conservation concerns related to productivity of this moose population, the department recommends no changes to the season dates in Unit 22B Remainder.

PROPOSAL 13

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal adds 15 days to the brown bear hunt in Unit 22C by changing the season from May 10-May 25 to May 1-May 31 with no changes to the bag limit of one bear every four regulatory years.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: Do Not Adopt.

RATIONALE: Lengthening the brown bear season in Unit 22C would likely increase harvest due to better spring traveling conditions during early May (before deterioration of snow condition) and through ease of access for hunters from the community of Nome. The department does not support providing additional opportunity due to high harvests in the unit and we recommend no changes to the season in Unit 22C.

Since 1997 brown bear regulations have been incrementally liberalized to increase harvest and reduce brown bear numbers throughout Unit 22. Since 1998 harvest has averaged 93 bears per

year which is a 69% increase compared to the preceding 8 years when an average of 55 bears per year were harvested. In Unit 22C increases in harvest have been greater where, during the same time period, harvest has increased 88% and has an average annual harvest of 15 bears per year. Trends in harvest information show continual increases and have not stabilized; providing additional opportunity through extended seasons is not recommended at this time.

The moose population in Unit 22C is above our management objective and currently supports a harvest quota of 40 bull moose and 15 antlerless moose annually, and does not appear to be adversely impacted by brown bear predation.

PROPOSAL 14

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal opens a nonresident hunt for caribou in Unit 22D Remainder, the western portion of unit, by changing the season from ‘season may be announced by emergency order’ to an opening of ‘no closed season’ for bulls and a Jul 1-May 15 season for cows. The proposed season in Unit 22D Remainder does not affect residents and makes nonresident hunting more liberal than resident hunting, and it makes nonresident hunting the same as the eastern portion of Unit 22D.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Take No Action.**

RATIONALE: The intended nonresident caribou season described in this proposal already exists in regulation, and the proponent requested through Board’s Support that the proposal be removed from discussion during the Board of Game meeting. The proponent mistakenly applied the moose hunt area definition of ‘Unit 22D Remainder’ to caribou hunting, and now understands that the desired nonresident caribou season exists in the proper hunt area defined for caribou.

PROPOSAL 15

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: For the portion of Unit 22E located within the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, this proposal modifies all brown bear hunting in the affected area by changing the bag limit for all hunters from ‘one bear per year’ to ‘one bear per four years’, and by shortening all seasons 31 days through changes from Aug 1-May 31 to Sept 1-May 31. All hunts are affected because the proposal does not distinguish residency, general season hunts, or subsistence hunts.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Do Not Adopt.**

RATIONALE: Since 1997 brown bear regulations have been incrementally liberalized to increase harvest and reduce brown bear numbers throughout Unit 22. Since 1998 harvest has averaged 93 bears per year which is a 69% increase compared to the preceding 8 years when an average of 55 bears per year were harvested. Unit 22E reported brown bear harvest increased from 3 bears per year to 5 bears per year since 1997. Despite increases in harvests, the trends of mean skull size and mean age have remained stable indicating that populations are not being negatively impacted by current harvest regimes. Additionally, Unit 22E has a subsistence hunt by registration permit for ‘one bear every regulatory year’ and shortening the season and changing the bag limit to ‘one bear per four years’ will affect subsistence users. If this proposal

is adopted, the subsistence brown bear hunt will be restricted such that the Board will need to discuss whether a reasonable opportunity for customary and traditional uses of brown bear is still provided. Based on general information on bear abundance, harvest data and trends, and impacts to subsistence seasons, the department recommends no changes to Unit 22E brown bear season or bag limit. This action also maintains consistency among season dates (Aug 1-May 31) and bag limits (1 bear per regulatory year) in Units 22B, 22D, and 23.

PROPOSAL 16

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal modifies the allocation of nonresident drawing permits for muskox hunt DX097in Unit 22E to a dedicated 10% of the available permits by changing the regulation from ‘up to 10 percent of permits allocated to nonresidents’ to ‘10 percent of permits shall be allocated to nonresidents’.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Take No Action.**

RATIONALE: Allocation of nonresident drawing permits for muskox in Unit 22E was considered in Proposal 17 and no further action by the Board is needed; see rationale for Proposal 17.

PROPOSAL 17

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal modifies the allocation of nonresident drawing permits for muskox hunt DX097in Unit 22E to a dedicated 20% of the available permits by changing the regulation from ‘up to 10 percent of total permits’ to ‘20 percent of total permits’ allocated to nonresident hunters. An alternative option in the proposal is a 15 percent allocation of permits to nonresidents.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **No Recommendation.**

RATIONALE: This is an allocation issue to be determined by the Board. The Seward Peninsula Muskox Cooperators Group did not discuss this issue as a full body at their 2008 meeting.

PROPOSAL 18

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal modifies the general season wolf hunt in Unit 23 by shortening the season 122 days with changes from Aug 1-Apr 30 to Nov 1-Mar 31 and by reducing the bag limit 50 %, from 20 wolves to 10 wolves per season.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Do Not Adopt.**

RATIONALE: While formal surveys to document wolf abundance in Unit 23 have not been conducted for many years, anecdotal reports, traditional ecological knowledge, and incidental

observations during surveys for other species indicate that wolf numbers are stable or increasing in the unit. Considering the presence of the Western Arctic caribou herd throughout Unit 23 and the abundance of other prey species there is no reason to believe that wolf numbers are low.

Current seasons and bag limits in Unit 23, consistent with other areas of the state, allow for opportunity without exceeding the earliest or latest season dates used for areas that do not have active predator management programs. Although wolf pelts are not prime in August, the opportunity to harvest a wolf while hunting other species is attractive to some hunters, especially nonlocal hunters who appreciate trophies even if the pelts are not prime. August harvests are not a primary concern because sealing records show that <1% of harvest is taken during this period of time. Conversely, April is one of the more popular months for wolf harvest and represents 14% of the annual harvest. An overwhelming majority of these hunters are Unit 23 residents (74%) who place a high value on wolves as a source of fur for parka ruffs and handicrafts. The take by unit residents is probably higher, and more significant for local use, because community harvest data suggests that sealing records reflect only a portion of the actual wolf harvest by Unit 23 residents.

On the average, hunters harvest 3-4 wolves annually and they rarely, if ever, take 10 wolves per year. With gas prices high in rural Alaska, liberal bag limits help individuals maximize their efforts. Additionally, most wolves are taken under trapping licenses (during seasons with no bag limits) making reductions in hunting bag limits a moot point.

Since generalized information on abundance, availability of prey, harvest data and patterns, and use by unit residents, suggest there are no compelling reasons to restrict seasons or bag limits for wolves in Unit 23, the department recommends no changes to current seasons and bag limits for wolf hunting.

PROPOSAL 19

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal creates a mandatory orientation requirement for pilots transporting hunters and game in Unit 23 by requiring the one-time completion of a department-approved certified education course related to big game and subsistence hunting, meat care, social conflicts, and other relevant topics in the unit. This requirement would not apply to pilots who only transport hunters between publicly owned airports.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Adopt.**

RATIONALE: This proposal is a consensus recommendation from the Unit 23 User Conflict Working Group. Several state organizations, including the Board of Game, Big Game Commercial Services Board, Division of Wildlife Conservation, Department of Natural Resources, and several Fish and Game Advisory Committees helped develop this proposal. In addition, individuals representing Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, National Park Service, guides, transporters and nonlocal hunters contributed to the development of this consensus proposal. It attempts to reduce conflicts among user groups through education rather than by reducing hunting opportunity or restricting commercial hunting-related services in Unit 23.

PROPOSAL 20

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal modifies the general season wolf hunt for residents and nonresidents in Unit 23 by adding 31 days to the season with changes from Aug 1-Apr 30 to Aug 1-May 31.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Do Not Adopt.**

RATIONALE: Wolves give birth in May and early June. Extending the season past April 30 would likely result in orphaned pups that cannot be humanely treated or euthanized. Extending the wolf season into the pupping period is a management option applied to game management units with active predator control programs, which is not the case in Unit 23.

PROPOSAL 21

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would change the effective dates of the Noatak Controlled Use Area from Aug 25-Sept 15 to Aug 15-Sept 30. These changes would lengthen the period that prohibits use of airplanes to access hunting areas within the corridor by 25 days. This proposal is identical to Proposal 22.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Take No Action.**

RATIONALE: See rationale for Proposal 22. This proposal has the same effect as Proposal 22 and no further action by the Board is required.

PROPOSAL 22

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would change the effective dates of the Noatak Controlled Use Area from Aug 25-Sept 15 to Aug 15-Sept 30. These changes would lengthen the period that prohibits use of airplanes to access hunting areas within the corridor by 25 days. This proposal is identical to Proposal 21.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **No Recommendation.**

RATIONALE: This is an allocation issue among user groups for determination by the Board. This proposal is a consensus recommendation from the Unit 23 User Conflict Working Group. Representatives of several state organizations, including the Board of Game, Big Game Commercial Services Board, Division of Wildlife Conservation, Department of Natural Resources and several fish and game advisory committees, helped develop this proposal. In addition, individuals representing the BLM, USF&WS, NPS, Northwest RAC council, NANA Corporation, the Northwest Arctic Borough, Maniilaq Association, the Kotzebue IRA, guides, transporters and nonlocal hunters contributed to this proposal as well.

The Noatak CUA was established during the 1988-1989 regulatory year to reduce conflicts between hunters from the communities of Noatak and Kotzebue who access hunting areas by boat, and commercial operators/nonlocal hunters who primarily use airplanes to access hunting areas. The original CUA extended along the main stem of the Noatak River between the

Kugururuk River and Sapun Creek, and was in effect Aug. 20-Sept. 20. In 1994-1995 the lower boundary of this CUA was expanded to the Noatak River mouth, and its duration reduced to Aug. 25-Sept. 15 to more effectively reduce conflicts while minimizing impacts on nonlocal hunters and commercial operators. From 1994-1995 until about 2000, the CUA reduced hunting-related airplane activity and conflicts in the protected corridor. However, since about 2000, the timing of the fall Western Arctic Caribou Herd migration has been more variable and generally 2-6 weeks later than in previous years. Now, there is no 3-week-long period that can predictably encompass the period when caribou will be available to subsistence hunters. In some recent years, few caribou have been available in the lower Noatak drainage before the CUA has ended on September 15th. This proposal attempts to respond to variation in the timing of the fall caribou migration and minimize conflicts among users by expanding the effective dates of the CUA to ensure a reasonable opportunity for customary and traditional uses.

PROPOSAL 23

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: For the portions of Unit 23 that are located within the Noatak National Preserve, this proposal modifies brown bear hunting in the affected area by: changing the bag limit for all hunters (resident and nonresident) from ‘one bear per year’ to ‘one bear per four years’; shortening resident seasons (general and subsistence) 31 days through changes from Aug 1-May 31 to Sept 1-May 31. There are no changes to the nonresident seasons of Sept 1-Oct 10 and Apr 15-May 31. All hunts are impacted because the proposal affects residency bag limits, general season hunts, and subsistence hunts.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Do Not Adopt.**

RATIONALE: Brown bear populations show no sign of decline throughout Unit 23. Harvest levels have fluctuated over time, but appear to be most influenced by non-regulatory factors (*e.g.* weather, economics) rather than regulatory changes. Annual variation in median skull size and median age of harvested bears is characterized by a flat trend line that shows no change in median values for more than 20 years. Additionally, preliminary results from a bear survey conducted in the Noatak and Wulik river drainages by the National Park Service and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game during May-June 2008 suggest that bear numbers have increased compared to the last census of the area completed in 1987. While data from this population estimate are not finalized, and cannot be applied unit-wide, they are consistent with reports from the public and traditional ecological knowledge that suggest brown bear populations are not declining, and are probably increasing, in portions of Unit 23.

Harvest data shows that residents of Unit 23 were the majority of users (59%) that harvested brown bears more frequently than once every 4 years. Among unit residents, bears may be taken annually (or more frequently than every four years) for subsistence uses because Inupiat hunters of inland communities have traditionally harvested brown bears for meat, fat, and hides (Loon and Georgette 1989). This proposal allows for subsistence hunting with registration permit RB700 and may negatively impact users participating in the state subsistence hunt by shortening the season. If this proposal is adopted, the subsistence brown bear hunt will be restricted such that the Board will need to discuss whether a reasonable opportunity for customary and traditional uses of brown bear is still provided. Furthermore, guide use area number 23-02, which contains most of the Noatak Preserve, has some of lowest levels of repeat harvest in the unit which indicates that more restrictive bag limits are not needed to limit harvest in this area.

Although the proposal seeks to change regulations within the Noatak National Preserve, having a separate season and bag limit for a small portion of the unit creates complicated regulations that are not supported by population, harvest, or hunting pattern data. The department favors uniform unit-wide regulations so that confusion between differing federal and state regulations are not increased or accentuated.

The department continues to receive reports of problem bears near human camps. The ‘one bear per year’ bag limit allows people the opportunity to harvest and use these bears without resorting to Defense of Life and Property regulations, and this has likely improved the accuracy of brown bear harvest data in Unit 23.

PROPOSAL 24

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal adds 21 days to the brown bear nonresident drawing hunt in Unit 23 by changing the season from Sept 1-Oct 10 to Sept 1-Oct 31. The proposal refers to one drawing hunt (DB767), but the general proposal language would apply to multiple drawing hunts DB761 through DB767 located throughout Unit 23.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Amend and Adopt.**

RATIONALE: The harvest of brown bear by nonresidents is maintained within sustained yield levels because harvest is limited by the number of available drawing permits (the maximum being defined in regulation for each area), not the length of the season. Extending the fall season might increase hunting success slightly due to additional opportunity. Additionally, hunting the latter 20 days of October may allow harvest of bears with higher fur quality prior to denning. The proposed extension still maintains a closed period between spring and fall drawing hunts that helps to distribute effort in space and time. The department recommends amending the proposal to apply the Sept 1-Oct 31 season to all nonresident brown bear drawing hunts in Unit 23 rather than the single hunt (DB767) identified in the proposal. Without this action, regulations will be excessively complicated and burdensome to users.

PROPOSAL 25

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would change the nonresident bag limit in Unit 23 from ‘any caribou’ to a more restrictive ‘bulls only’ bag limit, and would increase the nonresident bag limit from ‘one caribou per regulatory year’ to ‘two bulls per season.’ Since bulls currently have ‘no closed season’, the proposal effectively requests a nonresident bag limit of ‘two bulls per regulatory year’.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Take No Action.**

RATIONALE: Nonresident caribou bag limits were considered in Proposal 26 and no further action by the Board is needed; see rationale for Proposal 26.

PROPOSAL 26

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would increase the nonresident and alien bag limit for caribou in Unit 23 from ‘one caribou total’ to ‘five caribou total.’ The proposal also presents an alternative option to increase this bag limit only in ‘remote’ portions of the unit not customarily accessed by boat or foot.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Do Not Adopt.**

RATIONALE: The department does not support increases to nonresident bag limits. In 2006-2007, the nonresident caribou bag limit in Unit 23 was reduced from 5 to 2 per year, and beginning in 2007-2008 it was further reduced to 1 caribou per year. The intent of these reductions was to more equitably distribute hunters among management units used by the Western Arctic Herd and thereby reduce conflicts among guides, transporters, local residents and visiting hunters in Unit 23. Reducing the nonresident bag limit from 5 to 2 caribou per year in 2006-2007 had no effect on the number of nonresident hunters who visited Unit 23 (343 nonresident hunters each year before and after the bag limit change). However, when the nonresident bag limit was further reduced to 1 caribou per year during 2007-2008 and 2008-2009, the number of nonresident caribou hunters decreased about 40% (average 214 hunters) compared to 2005-2006 and 2006-2007. No caribou harvest data are available for the current hunting season (fall 2009).

It appears that the current nonresident bag limit of 1 caribou per year is working as intended. In combination with educational efforts to improve handling of meat and more stringent salvage requirements for moose and caribou in Unit 23, the reduction in nonresident hunters helped reduce user conflicts during the fall of 2007 and 2008. The number of conflicts reported during September 2009 was somewhat higher than the previous 2 years, but this was partly influenced by the overall scarcity of caribou throughout most of the unit. Increasing opportunity for nonresident caribou hunters through changes to the bag limit would likely increase their numbers and could reverse the reduction in user conflicts experienced during recent years.

Increasing the nonresident caribou bag limit only in remote portions of Unit 23 has been discussed by the Unit 23 User Conflict Working Group, and during meetings held in Kiana, Noatak and Shungnak by a subcommittee of this working group during 2008. To date, there has been no consensus on this point. During each of these meetings, residents of Unit 23 consistently and strongly opposed increasing the nonresident caribou bag limit anywhere in Unit 23 out of concern that even if limited to ‘remote’ portions of the unit, the increased airplane traffic and nonresident hunting effort would likely result in deflection of caribou along migration routes and make them less available to subsistence hunters. In contrast, commercial operators have consistently pressed for increasing the nonresident caribou bag limit.

PROPOSAL 27

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal modifies the nonresident bag limit for caribou in Unit 23 by changing the bag limit from ‘one caribou total’ to ‘five caribou total’ with the option that the proposed increase for nonresidents could be ‘two caribou total’. Same effect as Proposal 28.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Take No Action.**

RATIONALE: Nonresident caribou bag limits were considered in Proposal 26 and no further action by the Board is needed; see rationale for Proposal 26.

PROPOSAL 28

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal modifies the nonresident bag limit for caribou in Unit 23 by changing the bag limit from 'one caribou total' to 'five caribou total' with the option that the proposed increase for nonresidents could be 'two caribou total'. Same effect as Proposal 27.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Take No Action.**

RATIONALE: Nonresident caribou bag limits were considered in Proposal 26 and no further action by the Board is needed; see rationale for Proposal 26.

PROPOSAL 29

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal shortens the Unit 26A wolf hunting season by 112 days by changing the season from Aug 10-Apr 30 to Nov 1-Mar 31 with no change to the bag limit.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Do Not Adopt.**

RATIONALE: Wolf numbers in Unit 26A have increased in recent years and there is no justification to shorten the season for population reasons. Under current regulations the number of wolves counted in the Colville River study area increased from 2.2 to 4.4 wolves per 1000 square kilometers between 1998 and 2008. The number of wolves seen per hour during moose censuses increased from 0.13/hr to 1.78/hour between 2002 and 2008.

Shortening the hunting season would have very little impact on the number of wolves harvested. From 2001 to 2009 between 0 and 3 wolves annually were reported harvested from August-September each year through hunting. From 2001-2008 between 0 and 3 wolves annually were reported harvested during April through hunting and trapping. Only during April 2009 have harvests been higher when 14 wolves were taken by trapping and none taken by hunting.

Wolf predation is currently a component of population dynamics affecting the Colville River moose population. The percentage of short yearlings in spring trend counts in 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009 was 23%, 22%, 15%, and 2% respectively. The total number of moose counted in the trend count area has decreased from 610 to 364 (40%) in the last 3 years. The department is studying the effects of disease, habitat, predation, and weather on the population to determine the causes of the decline. Although the study is not finalized, it is apparent that as the wolf population has increased moose adult and calf mortality has also increased.

The proposal states that shortening the season would reduce the number of low quality hides harvested. This may be true, however very few wolves are taken during August and September,

and this take does not significantly impede the later take of higher quality hides. Harvests during the early portion of the season are primarily by hunters seeking a secondary animal while on a moose or caribou hunt and the current wolf population warrants this level of opportunity. Regarding harvests during late spring, wolves on the North Slope tend to maintain prime hides later than some other areas due to persistent cold temperatures. During most years not many wolves were taken during April, but in 2009 14 wolves were harvested on 9 April and sealed in the Barrow office. When examined, these hides were in good condition; we do not have hide quality information for wolves harvested later in April.

PROPOSAL 30

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal adds 74 days to the mink and weasel trapping in Unit 26A by changing the season from Nov 1-Jan 31 to Nov 1-Apr 15 and making the season the same as the trapping season in Units 22 and 23.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Adopt.**

RATIONALE: Staff proposal; see issue statement.

PROPOSAL 31

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal increases the bag limit for resident subsistence brown bear hunting in Unit 26A by changing bag limit from ‘one bear every regulatory year by permit’ to ‘two bears every regulatory year by permit’.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Do Not Adopt.**

RATIONALE: Adopting this proposal is not likely to greatly increase brown bear harvest in Unit 26A where current harvest is well below the sustainable levels, independent of other changes in regulation. However, the department would like to incrementally liberalize brown bear regulations through changes to season length before making changes to bag limit. Lengthening the season to ‘no closed season’ (Proposal 32) is the preferred incremental change and we would like to assess the effects of a longer season before increasing the bag limit, as requested in this proposal.

PROPOSAL 32

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal modifies the resident subsistence brown bear permit hunt in Unit 26A by adding 30 days to the season and changing the season dates from Jul 1-May 31 to ‘no closed season’ (Jul 1-Jun 30).

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Amend and Adopt.**

RATIONALE: This proposal continues the process of incrementally liberalizing brown bear regulations in Unit 26A and it is unlikely that ‘no closed season’ would greatly increase bear

harvest. The department recommends amending the proposal to include ‘no closed season’ for resident general season hunting in addition to ‘no closed season’ for the subsistence hunt to minimize confusion by keeping the same season for all resident hunts in the unit. The department does not recommend extending the season for nonresidents because it is unlikely that nonresident hunters will be attracted to this remote area when tag fees are required and when there is no opportunity to combination hunt with other big game species. Wherever applied, extending the brown bear season does not create a conservation concern because current brown bear harvest in Unit 26A is well below the sustainable harvest level where for the last 8 years, average annual harvest has been less than 2% of available harvest.

The amended proposal would provide subsistence hunters the opportunity to harvest brown bears when they go to their subsistence camps in June. It would also allow local residents a method to legally harvest problem bears that come into villages or break into cabins during June. People would then be able to utilize the bears rather than be limited by Defense of Life and Property restrictions. Additionally, muskox numbers in Unit 26 have declined and extending the brown bear season might slightly reduce bear predation on muskox.

PROPOSAL 33

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal shortens the wolf trapping season in Units 22, 23, and 26A by 30 days by changing the season from Nov 1-Apr 30 to Nov 1-Mar 31 with no change to the bag limit.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Do Not Adopt.**

RATIONALE: In Units 22, 23, and 26A, the wolf trapping season of Nov 1-Apr 30 provides consistent seasons across the majority of northern and western Alaska without exceeding the latest closing dates (Apr 30) used elsewhere in the state for areas that do not have active predator management programs. In other areas, earlier trapping season dates (with openings on Oct 1 or Oct 15) are found in portions of interior and south central Alaska where wolf populations are abundant. The Nov 1-Apr 30 season is found in neighboring Units 21 (except 21A), 24, and 26B providing consistency across this portion of the state.

Formal surveys to document or estimate wolf abundance in Units 22, 23, and 26A have not been completed by the department. Instead we have used localized efforts determine wolf presence and information gained through harvest/sealing records to assess population status. In Unit 22A, a track survey was completed in February 2006 to assess wolf status in an area where moose levels are extremely low; nine wolves were found during the survey and there were no signs of caribou in the area. Across the remainder of the Unit 22, the majority of harvest is by trapping and total wolf sealing records from 1997-2008 show an average harvest of 41 wolves, annually, and an increasing trend in observations and variation in harvest indicates populations are not being impeded or impacted by current seasons and bag limits. In Unit 23, anecdotal reports, traditional ecological knowledge, incidental observations during surveys for other species, and sealing records indicate that wolf numbers are similar to previous years. In Unit 26A, wolf track counts in the Colville River drainage show an increasing trend in wolf numbers and density. Considering prey species on a region-wide basis, the presence of the Western Arctic caribou herd throughout Units 22, 23, 26A, suggest available prey would be capable of supporting high numbers of wolves. In Unit 22, wolf abundance increases during winter months (October–April) when caribou were present on winter range.

In many parts of the area affected by this proposal, wolf harvest in April occurs primarily by local residents who place a high value on wolves as a source of fur for parka ruffs and handicrafts. In northern portions of the state fur quality is retained during April, probably due to late thaw and persistent cold temperatures.

Since generalized information on abundance, availability of prey, harvest data and patterns, and use by unit residents, suggest there are no compelling reasons to restrict seasons or bag limits for wolves in Units 22, 23, and 26A, the department recommends no changes to current seasons and bag limits for wolf trapping.

PROPOSAL 34

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would modify the definition of edible meat for game taken in Units 23 and 26A by including disease as a factor that can render meat inedible and, therefore, not subject to 'edible meat' salvage requirements.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Take No Action.**

RATIONALE: The department considers the current regulations adequate for defining edible meat and meat salvage requirements for game in Units 23 and 26A. The department also provides educational materials to assist hunters in identifying and understanding wildlife diseases that may be encountered and their associated human health risks. The department is also sensitive to current legal proceedings regarding meat salvage and recommends the Board take no action on this proposal.

PROPOSAL 35

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal requests revision of the Amount Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) findings for moose in Units 18, 19 and 21 based upon the amounts needed for all communities in these areas. This proposal originally only addressed moose in Unit 18 and, through action/deferrals by the Board, the scope of the proposal was expanded to include revisiting ANS determinations in adjoining game management units.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **No Recommendation.**

RATIONALE: This is an allocation issue to be determined by the Board. The Board made a positive customary and traditional use finding for moose in Unit 18 in 1987 and subsequently in 1992 determined the amount reasonably necessary for subsistence (ANS) to be 80-100 moose. In considering this proposal, the Board will need to evaluate the harvestable surplus and recent harvest history for moose in Units 18, 19 and 21. Additionally, if the Board revises ANS findings, the Board will need to determine whether existing seasons and bag limits still provide a reasonable opportunity for subsistence uses.
