

PROPOSAL 261

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: Liberalize Brown Bear Season in Unit 9C.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Do Not Adopt**

RATIONALE: The Board accepted an agenda change request from the Naknek AC to consider changes to brown bear seasons and bag limits in Unit 9C during the March 2012 meeting. The department does not recommend adopting this proposal because we have not identified any biological concerns or unintended consequences that resulted from regulatory changes adopted during the March 2011 Board of Game meeting in Wasilla that affect brown bear hunting in Unit 9C. Additionally we do not believe the proposed regulatory changes will address concerns about brown bear predation on moose or caribou that were identified in the proposal.

Prior to the 2011 Board meeting the brown bear season for residents and nonresidents hunting in the Naknek drainage of Unit 9C was September 1 through October 31 and May 1 through June 30. The brown bear bag limit was 1 bear every 4 years and a brown bear locking tag was required for all hunters. The brown bear season in the remainder of Unit 9C was open every-other-year with a fall hunt from October 1 through October 21 during odd-numbered year and a spring hunt from May 1 through May 25 during even numbered years with a bag limit of 1 bear every 4 years.

The former regulation offered additional opportunity to harvest brown bears in the Naknek drainage (relative to the remainder of Unit 9) in an effort to alleviate brown bear problems in the communities of Naknek, King Salmon, and South Naknek; however it did not fully address those concerns. Many of the bears harvested in this special hunt were taken well away from the community by guided hunters, and few were harvested because they were actively causing problems. Hunters were also reluctant to take problem bears if the bears were small in size and counted against the 1 every 4 year bag limit, preferring to maintain the opportunity to potentially harvest a bigger bear in the future.

During the 2011 meeting the Board liberalized the bear regulations in the Naknek drainage to increase harvest opportunity and to address nuisance brown bear problems in local communities. Under the current regulation bear hunting activities in the Naknek drainage are concentrated closer to the communities (within 2.5 miles). The resident hunting season is year-round, and the bag limit is 1 bear per year with no locking tag required. Bear hunting in the remainder of Unit 9C (including the portion of the Naknek drainage that is not included in the special hunt area) is authorized under the standard season for Unit 9 season, which is open every-other-year. While the full implications of these changes cannot be measured until a regulatory year is complete, preliminary harvest data indicates that bear harvest in the Naknek drainage has not been reduced by these regulatory changes. Because there was no change in the number of bears taken and the harvest occurred closer to communities, there is reason to believe that the new regulation has been more successful in targeting bears actively involved in human conflict.

The current proposal liberalizes the bear season in all of Unit 9C (not just the Naknek drainage) with the intent of reducing brown bear predation on moose (few caribou are present in the subunit when brown bears active). However, the proposed season is not expected to affect the rate of bear predation on moose, and it will likely exacerbate the tension that persists in Katmai National Preserve.

Altering the bear hunting season is expected to increase brown bear harvest in the subunit. Unit 9C would become the only area of the state where a resident hunter could potentially harvest a trophy brown bear under a year-round season with a bag limit of 1 bear every year and no locking tag requirement. Nonresident hunters would also have unprecedented opportunity to harvest a trophy brown bear during the extended season with a bag limit of 1 bear every year. Despite the increased harvests bear predation on moose and caribou will not be affected.
