

**Alaska Board of Game Committee Meeting on
Copper Basin Area Subsistence Hunting Regulations
(Units 11, 12 and 13)**

Second Committee Meeting - March 7, 2014
Anchorage Alaska

Background

The Alaska Board of Game Committee to address Copper Basin Area Subsistence Hunting Regulations met for the second time on March 7, 2014. The committee will meet again in Anchorage on April 18, with the objective of identifying solution(s) to submit to the Board as proposal(s) by May 1 for consideration during the 2015 meeting cycle. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) recommends that all of the Committee recommendations for changes be submitted to the Board for their information. Some may require Board action as a proposal, while others may be able to be implemented through the department's discretionary authorities. Committee members and meeting attendance are listed at the end of this document.

The Board of Game established the Copper Basin Tier I Community Subsistence Hunts (CSH) for caribou and moose in 2009 (5 AAC 92.074(d) *Community Subsistence Harvest Areas*). The CSH permit program allows communities or groups of 25 or more individuals to apply annually for a CSH permit for caribou, moose, or both in an established CSH area. These groups may select, from their group members, individual harvesters who may possess particular expertise in hunting to harvest caribou and/or moose on behalf of the community or group. In establishing the Copper Basin CSH, the Board of Game developed findings in 2006 and 2011 that characterize the pattern of customary and traditional use that they intended hunt subscribers to follow.

At its December 2, 2013 meeting, the Committee identified three main issues related to the CSH program and brainstormed a number of potential solutions.¹ The three issues are:

- I. Impacts of increased participation in the community subsistence hunt, affecting access to resource by other participants
- II. Harvest of “any bull” moose in high use subareas reduces harvest opportunity in other areas
- III. Reduced subsistence harvest opportunity for caribou

ADF&G Presentations

At its December meeting, the Committee asked the ADF&G Division of Subsistence and Division of Wildlife Conservation to evaluate the brainstormed solutions and present additional information about the mechanism, feasibility, and possible effects of each.

¹ The December 2, 2013 meeting summary and more information about the issues and brainstormed solutions can be found under “Meeting Summary” at:
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=gameboard.meetinginfo&date=12-02-2013&meeting=anchorage>

Committee members had the opportunity to ask questions of staff during this session. Information presented by ADF&G staff on March 7, 2014, can be viewed under “ADF&G Reports” at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=gameboard.meetinginfo&date=03-07-2014&meeting=anchorage>²

Points made by ADF&G in response to specific Committee questions included:

- In Unit 13A, participation increased from 25% of the total CSH participants to 40% of the total in 2013. There was little change in Units 13B, C and D. Participation in Unit 13E declined from 25% of the total in 2012 to 19% of the total in 2013. Units 13 A and B (on the road system) have the highest participation.
- Regarding the CSH caribou hunt, in 2011 there were five to six CSH groups that were from areas nearby GMU 13. By 2013, there was more participation from groups in the MatSu, Anchorage and Kenai. The opportunity to use a designated hunter may be an attraction for the CSH caribou hunt. However, it was noted that the CSH salvage requirements may somewhat dissuade participation.

Committee Discussion

Following the ADF&G presentations, Committee members were polled on the list of potential solutions that had been evaluated. They were asked, “With consideration of your interests, as well as the interests you have heard expressed by other committee members ... [which potential solutions] merit further consideration”? Subsequent discussion, summarized below, focused on the potential solutions of highest interest to the group.

The Committee has not completed its in-depth discussion of all of the issues and potential solutions below, and will continue that at its April 18 meeting. The notes below capture some key points made on March 7, but do not represent full discussion of these issues or potential solutions.

Issue I – Impacts from Increased CSH Participation

Status of committee consideration of Issue I: The committee didn’t finish its discussion of items 1-4 below, and will continue at its April meeting.

1. Ensure that communities or groups approved to participate in the moose and caribou CSH meet the intent of the Board of Game findings for the CSH program. This may

² Materials presented include, ADF&G Division of Wildlife Conservation’s document: “Assignments from the Alaska Board of Game Meeting December 2, 2013, on Copper Basin Area Subsistence Hunting Regulations”, and ADF&G Division of Subsistence’s documents: “Draft Copper Basin CSH Annual Report Explanation”, “Draft Copper Basin CSH Annual Report Questionnaire”, and “Draft Copper Basin CSH Annual Report Questionnaire Overview”.

include development and use of new non-subjective qualification criteria for evaluation of CSH applications and annual hunt reports.

Points raised in discussion:

- Support by some committee members for a more rigorous questionnaire and annual report requirement, to ensure CSH groups meet the Board’s requirements.
 - The department would need direction from the Board on the point threshold that groups must meet to participate in the CSH program, and on the status of groups that did not meet this threshold (e.g., conditional approval?; ineligible?; set term of future ineligibility?).
 - Concern raised that groups may not be truthful in their CSH application and annual report, but that this is not detected and they are not penalized.
 - Suggestion made that CSH groups that do not submit the annual report not be allowed to participate in the following year. (This is currently not the case.)
 - Suggest that there be better tracking of the individuals and households within each group and their past compliance and reporting.
 - Concern that ADF&G does not have the budget or the staff to audit group reports for compliance with the CSH program. As an alternative, one committee member recommended *random audits* of applications and/or reports, with a penalty for not being truthful to deter noncompliance. Another alternative would be to *relax reporting requirements for a group that had met requirements over a longer-term*, and had already showed its compliance with the Board findings.
 - Suggestion that CSH harvest must be reported in person to ADF&G office (e.g., Glenallen, Cantwell), and that parts be shared with the Ahtna community members.
 - Suggestion that trophy destruction be required.
 - Suggestion that CSH groups apply to the Board of Game for approval, rather than to ADF&G.
2. Set seasons and bag limits for the CSH program moose harvest to match the general hunt. This would eliminate the incentive of the 20-day early start and harvest of “any-bull” moose, which attract people to participate in the CSH. With this change, the CSH would operate as a “party hunt” where tags could be shared, but under general hunt rules.
 3. Require a longer-term commitment to the CSH program. For example, require groups to commit to participating for five years, as long as the CSH program operates as a Tier I hunt and its rules are otherwise not substantially changed.

Points raised in discussion:

- Suggestion to require a two-year commitment to the CSH program (not as long as the five year suggested previously).

- Concern that it requiring an individual or a household to commit to hunting only within a specific area of the public domain is trying to establish a local subsistence priority and is discriminatory.
4. Change eligibility for participation to 25 households per group, rather than 25 individuals per group. The definition for “household” would mean that group of people domiciled in the same residence per 5 AAC 92.990 (23) *Definitions*.

Points raised in discussion:

- Concern that groups may just re-form in accordance with new requirement. This may not be effective at reducing impacts from a high total number of participants.
- Concern that this change would just reduce opportunity and would be a “paperwork nightmare”.

Note – Under Issue I, the Committee did not indicate strong interest in continuing to discuss the following potential solution, which had been identified at its December meeting: “Reduce incentives for participation in the CSH, such as by providing less than the current 20-day early start, or changing from ‘any-bull’ to something less than SF50/4BT.”

Issue 1 “BIN” –

ADF&G raised two specific questions for Committee advice related to Issue I. These include:

- What should be the penalty for not providing required annual report?
- What should be the penalty for not reporting a harvested animal? This currently disqualifies an individual hunter from receiving a permit the following year, but should it impact the CSH group in which that individual participates?

Issue II – Harvest of “Any-Bull” Moose in High Use Subareas Reduces Harvest Opportunity in Other Subareas

1. Establish a firm “any-bull” quota per subarea (perhaps established by the Board), so that a harvest that exceeds the quota in one subarea would not reduce the quota (and harvest opportunity) in another subarea.

Status of committee consideration: There was no objection to moving this recommendation forward to the Board.

Points raised in discussion:

- Group consensus to move this recommendation forward to the Board.
- This would provide more certainty by subarea.
- Comment that closing distant subareas in response to high harvest in one subarea (e.g. 13A) doesn’t make sense, from the standpoint of avoiding over-harvest.

- If quota is exceeded in a year, ADF&G would adjust the quota in subsequent year(s) to manage to the target bull:cow ratio. Noted that any extra quota could be allocated to the new December any-bull hunt.
 - Comment that establishing subarea quota(s) may just move hunters and hunting effort into other subareas, increasing participation and competition in those areas.
2. Provide for more rapid harvest reporting and more responsive in-season management during the any-bull harvest. Ideas discussed include ensuring there is weekend staffing/tracking of the harvest by ADF&G biologists, and more rapid communication between ADF&G and hunters regarding actual harvest and EOs (e.g., cell phone?, radio?). ADF&G noted that the repercussion of not having rapid reporting of harvest is more conservative in-season management. (Noted that there is currently no penalty for late reporting.)

Status of committee consideration: There was no objection to recommending to the Board that ADF&G establish a more rapid reporting requirement and get the word out about emergency closures as quickly as possible.

Points raised in discussion:

- Group consensus to move this recommendation forward to the Board.
 - Concern that 12-hour reporting requirement might be too short; 24-hours seems more feasible. (ADF&G thinks 12-hour phone reporting would be feasible.)
3. Allow any-bull hunt Monday-Friday only (in entire CSH, or only in high-use subareas?)

Status of committee consideration: The committee didn't finish its discussion of this item and will continue at its April meeting.

Points raised in discussion:

- Allowing any-bull on weekdays only, or at least having the early season start on a weekday, may make it easier to manage the hunt so that the high harvests in some subareas do not rapidly exceed the overall quota and reduce any-bull opportunity in other subareas.
- Noted that it would be important to provide early notice of such a change, as people may have already calendared days off from work to hunt. (2014 is due to open on Sunday, August 10. Could delay to Monday to moderate the harvest.)
- Some committee members expressed concern that weekday-only hunting opportunities would provide some advantages to local hunters

New potential solutions suggested by Committee members on March 7 related to Issue II included the following. *The committee didn't finish its discussion of these suggestions and may wish to continue at its April meeting.*

- Recommended that new requirements (e.g., weekday only “any bull” hunt, rapid harvest report requirement) apply only to Unit 13A, rather than the entire unit. This is

the area with high use that requires additional management action. (However, in response, others noted that if requirements are more restrictive only in Unit 13A, it would likely just displace hunters to neighboring subareas and move the problems around.)

- During the early start (prior to general hunt), have two four-day periods where no motorized vehicles can be used off roads to access the hunt. Retrieving the harvested animal with a motorized vehicle would be allowed.
- During the early start (prior to general hunt), do not allow hunting for moose or caribou for one day following the use of an off-road motorized vehicle.
- Do not allow the harvest of antler-legal bulls during the CSH early start. This would reduce the impact to the success of the general hunt. (Note, in 2013, 77% of antler legal bulls were taken during the early season.)

Note - Under Issue II, the Committee did not indicate strong interest in continuing to discuss the following potential solutions that had been identified at its December meeting:

- Establish a maximum number of CSH groups per subarea and require groups to register for a specific subarea.
- Establish different season lengths for different subareas, providing longer seasons in areas with lower participation.
- Provide an antlerless hunt, to reduce pressure on any-bulls and to provide an alternate subsistence resource to meet needs. (Note, however, that one committee member would like to see this issue considered, as he believes that there is a harvestable cow surplus.)
- Change from annual “any-bull” opportunity, to only allowing a group to periodically participate in the any-bull hunt (interval not specified).

Additionally, at the March meeting, the committee heard from ADF&G regarding its proposed CSH management actions for moose in 2014, which are listed below. The Committee’s recommendations to the Board or the department would not take effect in time to affect management of the 2014 hunt. ADF&G’s proposed actions include:

- Implementation of one locking tag per three households in each CSH group
- Tighter reporting requirements (within 12 hours of kill, by phone or internet)
- No any-bull opportunity in Unit 13A (due to bull:cow ratio below management objectives)
- Remainder of Unit 13, limit “any-bull” hunt to Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and no restriction on antler legal bulls
- No restriction on “any bull” in Unit 11 until quota is reached
- Manage the “any bull” quota within the 100 allocated and to keep moose populations within objectives.

Issue III – Reduced Subsistence Harvest Opportunity for Caribou

Status of committee consideration: The Committee did not have adequate time to address Issue III on March 7, and it will be discussed further at the April meeting.

1. Suggest that the CSH for caribou be managed to ensure that the community hunt continues into the winter season as long as the CSH cap of 300 caribou is not exceeded.

Other Discussion

In addition to the discussion of the three Issues above, some committee members expressed their belief that the Board's Findings that established the CSH are inappropriately distinguishing between different types of subsistence hunters. They note that there is not a conservation concern that needs to be addressed that requires a special hunt and recommend that the CSH be discontinued.

Next Steps – Follow-up

- The Committee asked ADF&G (with assistance of the facilitator) to write up the potential solutions in BOG proposal format, for the committee to consider for action at its final meeting in April. The draft proposals will be distributed to the Committee at least 7 days prior to the meeting.
- Committee members will also have the opportunity to present any additional proposals to the full group, by at least 7 days prior to the meeting.
- At April 2014 Committee meeting:
 - Continue discussion of Issues
 - Review draft proposals and any additional proposals submitted by the Committee
 - Committee discussion and action on proposals
 - Next steps / Assignments

Meeting Attendance

Committee Members

Stosh Hoffman, Board of Game

Nate Turner, Board of Game (Committee chair)

Teresa Sager Albaugh, Board of Game

Don Holum, Denali AC

Chuck McMahan, Copper Basin AC

Dan Montgomery, Matanuska Valley Advisory Committee AC

Frank Neumann, Anchorage AC

Nick Jackson, Ahtna, Inc.

Sky Starkey, Ahtna, Inc.

Jim Colver, MatSu Fish and Wildlife Commission

Rod Arno, Alaska Outdoor Council

Note: Committee member John Schandelmeier, Paxson AC, was not present

Board of Game (present in audience)

Ted Spraker, Chair, Board of Game

Pete Probasco, Board of Game

ADF&G Staff

Lem Butler, ADF&G, Division of Wildlife Conservation

Bruce Dale, ADF&G, Division of Wildlife Conservation

Jim Fall, ADF&G, Division of Subsistence

Davin Holen, ADF&G, Division of Subsistence

Dave Koster, ADF&G, Division of Subsistence

Lisa Olson, ADF&G, Division of Subsistence

Frank Robbins, ADF&G, Division of Wildlife Conservation

Kristy Tibbles, ADF&G Board Support

James Van Lanen, ADF&G, Division of Subsistence

Doug Vincent-Lang, ADF&G, Division of Wildlife Conservation

Other Agencies

Mike Mitchell, Alaska Department of Law

Public

Gloria Stickwan, Ahtna, Inc.

Linda Tyone, Ahtna, Inc.