

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
STAFF COMMENTS
FOR PROPOSALS 209 - 212
CENTRAL/SOUTHWEST REGION IV PROPOSALS
ALASKA BOARD OF GAME MEETING
WASILLA, ALASKA
FEBRUARY 13 - 20, 2015



The following staff comments were prepared by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game for use at the Alaska Board of Game meeting, February 13 – 20, 2015 in Wasilla, Alaska, and are prepared to assist the public and board. The stated staff comments should be considered preliminary and subject to change, if or when new information becomes available. Final department positions will be formulated after review of written and oral testimony presented to the board.

PROPOSAL 209 - 5 AAC 085.015(a) Hunting seasons and bag limits for black bear, Unit 6D.

PROPOSED BY: David Pinguoch

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? Adoption of this proposal would change the bag limit for black bears in 6D to one bear every three regulatory years.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

Seasons and Bag Limits	Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Nonresident Open Season
(2)		
...		
6(D)	Sept. 10-June 10	Sept. 10-June 10
1 bear		
...		

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? Changing to a “one bear every three regulatory years” regulation will reduce harvest among users that annually hunt black bears in Unit 6. However, most successful hunters have only killed one black bear in Unit 6D (10 year average of 77 %). A review of the last 10 years of data suggests a reduction in harvest by 10% with the proposed action. Of the remaining hunters, 9% have killed three or more in a ten year period. These hunters may be more likely to harvest a black bear for food and the most impacted by this proposed action.

BACKGROUND: Black bear harvests increased in Unit 6D from the late 1990s to 2007. The Board has taken modest regulatory changes (2005 and 2009) to address the concern of unsustainable black bear harvest in Unit 6D. The number of harvested bears in Unit 6D has declined steadily since 2007 and the department has concerns that further harvest at current levels will lead to declines in the bear population. While harvest was declining at an average of 5% per year from RY07-RY11, the harvest in RY12 was 23% lower than the previous year and the harvest in RY13 was 48% lower than RY12. Additionally, anecdotal reports from a diverse group of users suggest a decline in bears during the last decade. The percentage of females in the harvest has increased in the last three regulatory years and has been above management objectives in every year since 2006. Three of the last five years have had exceptional weather that may have impacted black bear behavior, availability for harvest, and possibly survival.

Currently, the hunt proceeds with unlimited participation under a general season harvest ticket and successful hunters must report within 15 days of harvest and have their bear sealed within 30 days of harvest.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for Unit 6 black bears and an amount reasonably necessary for subsistence of 80–120 bears in all of Unit 6.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **SUPPORTS** measures to reduce black bear harvest in Unit 6D; however, see Proposals 210 and 211 which provide alternatives..

The board should consider how adoption of the proposal continues to provide a reasonable opportunity for subsistence uses of GMU 6 black bears.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 210- 5 AAC 085.015(a) Hunting seasons and bag limits for black bear, Unit 6D.

PROPOSED BY: Bradford von Wichman

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? Adoption of this proposal would establish a registration hunt for black bears in Unit 6D.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

Seasons and Bag Limits	Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Nonresident Open Season
(2)		
...		
6(D)	Sept. 10-June 10	Sept. 10-June 10
1 bear		
...		

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? This proposal seeks to establish a registration hunt for black bears in Unit 6D. A registration hunt would allow for more timely monitoring of harvest, and location of animals harvested and would allow the department to more easily close the season if, where, and when necessary. The department will present harvest quotas for portions of Unit 6 and close the season when the quota is reached.

BACKGROUND: Black bear harvests increased in Unit 6D from the late 1990s to 2007. The Board has taken modest regulatory changes (2005 and 2009) to address the concern of

unsustainable black bear harvest in Unit 6D. The number of harvested bears in Unit 6D has declined steadily since 2007 and the department has concerns that further harvest at current levels will lead to declines in the bear population. While harvest was declining at an average of 5% per year from RY07-RY11, the harvest in RY12 was 23% lower than the previous year and the harvest in RY13 was 48% lower than RY12. Additionally, anecdotal reports from a diverse group of users suggest a decline in bears during the last decade. The percentage of females in the harvest has increased in the last three regulatory years and has been above management objectives in every year since 2006. Three of the last five years have had exceptional weather that may have impacted black bear behavior, availability for harvest, and possibly survival.

Currently, the hunt proceeds with unlimited participation under a general season harvest ticket and successful hunters must report within 15 days of harvest and have their bear sealed within 30 days of harvest.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for Unit 6 black bears and an amount reasonably necessary for subsistence of 80–120 bears in all of Unit 6.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **SUPPORTS** measures to reduce black bear harvest in Unit 6D.

The board should consider how adoption of this proposal continues to provide a reasonable opportunity for subsistence uses of GMU 6 black bears.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 211- 5 AAC 085.015(a) Hunting seasons and bag limits for black bear, Unit 6D.

PROPOSED BY: David Pinguoch

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? Adoption of this proposal would reduce the fall season for black bears in Unit 6D by 15 days.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

	Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Nonresident Open Season
Seasons and Bag Limits		

(2)

...

6(D)

Sept. 10-June 10

Sept. 10-June 10

1 bear

...

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? The black bear season would begin September 25 instead of September 10. The vast majority (10 year average of 82%) of harvested bears are taken in the spring. Although the proportion of females taken is higher in the fall (45% females in the fall harvest compared with 30% females in the spring harvest), the total contribution of the fall harvest to the total is minimal. Had the September 25 season start date been used the last 10 years, an average of 36 bears (17 of which were sows) would not have been taken. The overall impact of a season date change on the harvest would be a 9% reduction in harvest based on the last 10 years.

BACKGROUND: Black bear harvests increased in Unit 6D from the late 1990s to 2007. The Board has taken modest regulatory changes (2005 and 2009) to address the concern of unsustainable black bear harvest in Unit 6D. The number of harvested bears in Unit 6D has declined steadily since 2007 and the department has concerns that further harvest at current levels will lead to declines in the bear population. While harvest was declining at an average of 5% per year from RY07-RY11, the harvest in RY12 was 23% lower than the previous year and the harvest in RY13 was 48% lower than RY12. Additionally, anecdotal reports from a diverse group of users suggest a decline in bears during the last decade. The percentage of females in the harvest has increased in the last three regulatory years and has been above management objectives in every year since 2006. Three of the last five years have had exceptional weather that may have impacted black bear behavior, availability for harvest, and possibly survival.

Currently, the hunt proceeds with unlimited participation under a general season harvest ticket and successful hunters must report within 15 days of harvest and have their bear sealed within 30 days of harvest.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for Unit 6 black bears and an amount reasonably necessary for subsistence of 80–120 bears in all of Unit 6.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **SUPPORTS** measures to reduce black bear harvest in Unit 6D. The board should consider how adoption of this proposal continues to provide reasonable opportunity for subsistence uses of GMU 6 black bears.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 212 - 5 AAC 092.540 (11) Unit 6B Controlled Use Area.

PROPOSED BY: Copper River/Prince William Sound Advisory Committee

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal seeks to clarify the regulation regarding the use of motorized transportation in the Unit 6B controlled use area since the failure of a bridge has altered access to the area. New language is indicated in bold underline below:

(11) Unit 6 (B) Controlled Use Area:

(A) the area consists of all of Unit 6(B);

(B) the area is closed to the use of any motorized vehicle for moose hunting **or transporting hunters or their gear, from August 15-September 4**, with the exception of vehicles on the maintained surface of the Copper River Highway, Carbon Mountain Road, the Clear Creek boat launch, **and vessels crossing (ferry/transfer vessels) at mile 36 bridge (wash-out) which can be conducted in a substantially straight line and no more than ¼ mile above or below the bridge.** Moose may not be taken until after 3:00 a.m. on the day following the day which any motorized vehicle is used for transportation, from September 5 through October 31

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

5 AAC 92.540. Controlled use areas. In the following areas, access for hunting is controlled as specified:

...

(11) Unit 6(B) Controlled Use Area:

(A) the area consists of all of Unit 6(B);

(B) the area is closed to the use of any motorized vehicle for moose hunting until after 3:00 a.m. on the day following the day which any motorized vehicle is used for transportation, from September 5 through October 31; however this provision does not prohibit motorized access via, or transportation of game on, the Copper River Highway, Carbon Mountain Road, and the Clear Creek boat launch;

...

Permit conditions have been used since RY93 to prohibit the use of any motorized vehicle for moose hunting or transporting hunters or their gear for the first 4 days of moose season and for 2 weeks prior to the start of the season (August 15-September 4).

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? This proposal would resume access to a hunt area where “walk-in” hunting has become limited due to the failure of a bridge. There are no biological concerns related to this proposal. However, access to a larger hunt area could more evenly distribute hunters in the field. The language in this proposal seeks to clarify the conditions of this hunt. Proposed language would do the following:

- Specifically allow use of a boat to cross the Copper River where the bridge washed out.
- Put into regulation the dates (August 15-September 4) that have been used by discretionary permit hunt conditions since at least 2003 that prevent the early set-up of moose hunting camps using motorized vehicles.

- More clearly state the dates of the “walk-in” hunt opportunity that is already established in regulation.

BACKGROUND: The moose season in GMU 6B runs from September 1-October 31 by registration permit only. Many hunters participating in hunts in Unit 6 are very efficiently using air boats and jet boats to support their hunt and harvest quotas can be taken very quickly. Some hunters desired a non-motorized experience early in the season during which a hunter “walks in” from the highway or uses a canoe. Since 1993 there has been a 4-day “walk in” hunt at the beginning of the season where motorized vehicles can only be used on the Copper River Highway, Carbon Mountain Road, and the Clear Creek boat launch. Originally managed through hunt conditions, the board codified the restriction in 2004. At the same time, the Board codified the current rule prohibiting same-day motorized hunting. Beginning September 5 hunters may use motorized transport (other than highway vehicles), but not until after 3:00 a.m. the day following use. Since these regulations have been in place, a bridge on the Copper River Highway at mile 36 completely failed in August 2011. Residents have been waiting for the bridge to be replaced, but the Alaska Department of Transportation (DOT) does not have the funding, and DOT recently indicated that there are no plans in the near future to accomplish the repairs. Current funding outlooks also suggest that this will be a low priority. As a result, more than half of the access corridor that was previously used is not available and a regulatory fix is appropriate.

As currently written, the only exceptions where motorized vehicles can be used to support moose hunting are the Copper River highway, Carbon Mountain road and the Clear Creek boat launch. Without the bridge at mile 36, it is difficult for hunters to access this area. It is also unclear if it is legal to use the road right of way (where the bridge used to be) to transport vehicles across the river. This proposal addresses this confusion.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department supports the concept of this proposal as a measure to clarify existing intent of regulations. We recommended the board **Amend and Adopt** the proposal language as follows:

(11) Unit 6 (B) Controlled Use Area:

(A) the area consists of all of Unit 6(B);

(B) the area is closed to the use of any motorized vehicle for moose hunting **or transporting hunters or their gear from August 15-September 4**, with the exception of vehicles on the [MAINTAINED SURFACE OF THE] Copper River Highway, Carbon Mountain Road, the Clear Creek boat launch, **and boats crossing at mile 36 bridge (wash-out) which can be conducted in a substantially straight line and no more than ¼ mile above or below the bridge.** Moose may not be taken until after 3:00 a.m. on the day following the day which any motorized vehicle, **(except vehicles on the Copper River Highway, Carbon Mountain Road, the Clear Creek boat launch, and boats crossing at mile 36 bridge which can be conducted in a substantially straight line and no more than ¼ mile above or below the bridge,** is used for transportation, from

September 5 through October 31

The reference to “maintained surface” should be removed because the road is no longer maintained past the bridge wash-out. As written by the proposer, it is not clear where motorized vehicles can be used and not be in violation of the no-same-day-motorized rule.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.
