

*The following proposal was submitted prior to the proposal deadline but was inadvertently excluded from the proposal book. It is scheduled for consideration by the Board of Game at the Statewide Regulations meeting in March 2016.*

**PROPOSAL 138 - 5 AAC 85.055. Hunting seasons and bag limits for Dall sheep.** Change nonresident, general sheep hunts on state and BLM lands to drawing permit hunts.

We again ask the board to first deal with the unlimited guide numbers and unlimited nonresident opportunity across the state, as a first attempt to conserve sheep, reduce crowding and conflicts, before also limiting resident opportunities. Do not go back on your words and your testimony over the years about what is really causing the bulk of our problems. Harken back to the words of the current chairman who represented the board before the legislature in 2013 and said: *“And we have two major concerns ... one is conservation of the resource and the 2nd concern the Board of Game has – and we’ve addressed this quite a bit – is crowding. And we feel that under the current system where there is no limit to the number of guides that can operate on state and BLM-managed lands, this has resulted in some fairly heavy generally localized overharvest of game and certainly crowding.”*

*“And here's something else that I'm really concerned about. Is that, there's a difference in having guides competing with guides, that's one issue, but the way I look at it as a BOG member, and a real state's rights sort of guy, is that this really puts a lot of competition on residents. Because guides are well equipped, they have large camps, wall tents, a string of horses, aircraft, they're set up, I mean this is their business. For your average hunter that goes in there for a long weekend or a week or whatever, those guys, those residents have a tough time dealing and getting game in places where you have a lot of guide competition.”* – Board of Game Chairman Ted Spraker, House Resources Committee hearing, March 11, 2013

We don't believe resident sheep hunters currently need to be limited further in any way. That very well may need to happen down the line in some areas, and as our primary concern is the sheep resource we would support some limits on resident opportunity should the need arise. Let's deal with the primary known problems and issues first. As the executive director of the Alaska Professional Hunters Association wrote to the Palin administration back in 2008: "Currently, overcrowding of guides on state lands combined with decreasing wildlife populations is stimulating social disorder between hunter user groups and biological harm to our wildlife which leads to establishment of the restrictive drawing permit hunts." That statement has been echoed by the board ever since.

**We propose that all current general season nonresident sheep hunts move to draw-only hunts statewide, excluding USF&WS & NPS lands.** That's a first step to determine outcomes for the sheep resource, the crowding issues and conflicts, and whether or not it induces resident hunters to again hunt in areas they have abandoned due to these issues.

We understand the impacts this has on individual guides and their business model and stability, but the bottom line is that there is just no other way around these kind of limits being placed on nonresident sheep hunters (and thus guides).

We are willing to support a higher allocation level than others who have proposed similar nonresident limits. We are not beholden to some strict, low nonresident allocation levels. Currently, nonresident guided sheep hunters take 40% of the total statewide sheep harvest. We can support nonresident allocation levels set so in no subunit on state or BLM lands does nonresident guided

harvest exceed 30% of the total harvest. These types of decisions and allocation levels are best decided on a subunit by subunit basis across the state by the board with input from ADF&G biologists and managers.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Known sheep conservation concerns and negative impacts to resident sheep hunters identified by the Alaska Board of Game and the big game guide industry regarding unlimited big game guide numbers in conjunction with unlimited nonresident sheep hunting opportunities.

For nearly ten years the Alaska Board of Game and the big game guide industry has been aware of, identified, and spoken publicly on the record about their concerns surrounding unlimited big game guiding on state and BLM lands, especially as it relates to Dall sheep conservation and sheep hunting. The board has also publicly testified before the legislature about the negative impacts unlimited guides along with unlimited nonresident sheep hunting opportunity has had, and is having, on the sheep resource and on resident sheep hunters.

The board's (and the guide industry's) preferred solution to these known problems was a state-sanctioned and state-run "Guide Concession Program" (GCP) that would limit the number of big game guides that could operate on state and BLM lands. Limiting the number of guides would also thus limit the number of nonresident sheep hunters who are required by law to hire a guide.

The GCP went through years of contentious hearings and meetings and was never authorized by the legislature and is likely to never come about. When the public continued to submit proposals to the board asking them to use their authority to take care of these known problems by limiting all nonresident sheep hunting opportunity to draw-only hunts, the board backtracked on previous statements and public testimony and claimed they needed more study on the issue.

After more study and more meetings, the board then did something quite extraordinary; as a body they created their own board-generated sheep proposal that included options to limit resident sheep hunting opportunity that were never before submitted by the public or the guide industry. The board now alludes that if any changes are to be made, there should be a "shared burden" among all user groups. It's like the boards' previous statements and testimony over the years never happened.

Alaska Backcountry Hunters & Anglers has been heavily involved in sheep issues over the years, with proposals to the board along with oral testimony and written comments. We have attended and spoken before Advisory Committee meetings and Big Game Commercial Services Board meetings. All along we have tried to work with the guide industry and guides and AC members and the boards for a workable and fair compromise concerning nonresident allocation levels.

We have continually stated that our primary concern was the sheep resource and that our secondary concern was the fear of losing yet more resident sheep hunting opportunity (as happened in subunits 13D/14A) due to these known issues and problems with unlimited guides and unlimited nonresident sheep hunting opportunity.

We attended the sheep "town hall" meeting in Wasilla in February 2015 with some 167 members of the public present, many of whom stood up to speak to the crowd and the board. There was broad disagreement on solutions to the problems but there was one thing every single person agreed on: sheep populations were down.

The Alaska Department of Fish & Game, in their oral reports at sheep meetings and in their sheep report also stated that sheep populations over the past four decades have diminished. At the same time, nonresident sheep hunter numbers have remained flat, while resident sheep hunter numbers have dropped.

If this problem is not solved, there will be continued localized diminished populations of full-curl rams that threaten population sustainability and resident general open season sheep hunting opportunities, continued user conflicts and crowding, and continued inequitable nonresident sheep harvest rates in some areas.

This proposal addresses improving the quality of the resource harvested. By limiting nonresident sheep hunting opportunities statewide we thus limit the number of guides they must hire, thereby reducing total sheep harvests, better conserving sheep populations, as well as improving the quality of sheep hunts for both guided and unguided hunters by reducing crowding and conflicts afield.

Those who will benefit from this proposal will be ALL those who put the resource first and wish to see our sheep populations conserved and sustained. All resident hunters who want to see their general open season sheep hunting opportunities retained. All guided nonresident hunters who don't want to compete with so many other guided hunters and who favor a more quality sheep hunt.

Those who will suffer will be some guides who will suffer monetarily because of the lower number of nonresident clients. Division of Wildlife Conservation funding would decrease because of a decrease in nonresident sheep tags being sold, and some local economies could see a decrease in nonresident hunting-related tourism, but it's important to emphasize that these same things would happen if the proposed Guide Concession Program, which the board supported, was implemented. Nonresident sheep hunters would lose the guarantee to be able to hunt Dall sheep in Alaska, and would have to take their chances with a draw-only hunt.

Other solutions considered: Continuing to wait for the proposed Guide Concession Program to be implemented. Rejected because we have already waited too long for this proposed concession program to be implemented, and it now appears it will never come about.

Only making some of the known problem areas of the state draw-only for nonresidents. This was rejected because it has the potential to spread the problems to the areas still open to general season nonresident sheep hunting.

Various kinds of limits on resident sheep hunting opportunity statewide in areas still open to general season hunt opportunity, in conjunction with our proposed solution. Rejected because we don't believe we need that at this time, but our primary concern is sheep conservation so that sheep hunting by all can continue, and we do believe it is important that resident sheep hunters are fully cognizant this may be necessary down the line.

**PROPOSED BY:** Alaska Chapter Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (HQ-C15-168)  
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