

*The following staff comments were prepared by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game for use at the Alaska Board of Game meeting, March 18 - 28, 2016 in Fairbanks, Alaska, and are prepared to assist the public and the 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 139 – 5 AAC 85.040(a)** Hunting seasons and bag limits for goat, Unit 14C.

**PROPOSED BY:** Alaska Department of Fish and Game

**WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO?** This proposal changes the hunt structure for nonresident goat hunts in Unit 14C from a registration hunt to a drawing hunt.

**WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?** Nonresidents are allowed to hunt goats in Unit 14C with a registration permit from August 16–October 15; however nonresident hunters are restricted to archery only from August 16–August 31.

**WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED?**

Nonresident hunting opportunity would occur under a drawing permit hunt structure. This hunt structure would give management biologists a better tool to achieve the harvest allocation for residents and nonresidents, which was prescribed by the board.

**BACKGROUND:** During the 2015 season, the nonresident portion of the hunt was closed after being open for three days, and the nonresident harvest quota was exceeded. In years prior, the nonresident portion of the hunt was also closed after very short seasons (less than a week) because the nonresident harvest quota was exceeded. Based on this pattern, the department has concluded that the registration hunt structure does not allow for timely management of harvest to achieve the allocation prescribed by the board and to keep the harvest within the prescribed quotas.

**DEPARTMENT COMMENTS:** The department **SUPPORTS** this proposal.

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

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**PROPOSAL 140 – 5 AAC 85.025 (17).** Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

**PROPOSED BY:** Charles Lean

**WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO?** This proposal would modify Unit 22 caribou regulations by: 1) lengthening hunting seasons for resident hunters, and 2) establishing an annual bag limit of 20 caribou per year for resident hunters. Current (RY15) daily bag limit for resident hunters, and seasons and bag limits for nonresident hunters remain unchanged.

## WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

### **Resident Hunting Seasons and Bag Limits**

<u>Area</u>	<u>Resident Bag Limit</u>	<u>Season Dates</u>
22A north of Golsovia	5 caribou/day, calves may not be taken	
	Bulls	Jul. 1- Oct. 14 Feb. 1- Jun. 30
	Cows	Sep. 1- Mar. 31
22A remainder	5 caribou/day, calves may not be taken	may be announced*
22B west of Golovnin Bay	5 caribou/day, calves may not be taken	
	Bulls	Oct. 1- Oct. 14 Feb. 1- Apr. 30
	Cows	Oct. 1- Mar. 31
22B remainder	5 caribou/day, calves may not be taken	
	Bulls	Jul. 1- Oct. 14 Feb. 1- Jun. 30
	Cows	Sep. 1- Mar. 31
22C	5 caribou/day, calves may not be taken	may be announced*
22D Kougarok, Kuzitrin, Agiapuk	5 caribou/day, calves may not be taken	
	Bulls	Jul. 1- Oct. 14 Feb. 1- Jun. 30
	Cows	Sep. 1- Mar. 31
22D Pilgrim	5 caribou/day, calves may not be taken	
	Bulls	Oct. 1- Oct. 14 Feb. 1- Apr. 30
	Cows	Oct. 1- Mar. 31
22D Remainder	5 caribou/day, calves may not be taken	may be announced*
22E east of and including Sanaguich	5 caribou/day, calves may not be taken	
	Bulls	Jul. 1- Oct. 14 Feb. 1- Jun. 30
	Cows	Sep. 1- Mar. 31
22E remainder	5 caribou/day, calves may not be taken	may be announced*

\* In areas with a season that “may be announced”, bulls may not be taken October 15–January 31, and cows may not be taken April 1–August 31.

Nonresident hunting is authorized during fall seasons, which are listed in the *2015-2016 Alaska Hunting Regulations* summary booklet.

**WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED?** The proponent suggests the following resident bag limit for all Unit 22 hunt areas:

**For residents, 5 caribou per day, 20 caribou per year, calves may not be taken**

<u>Area</u>	<u>Season Dates</u>
22A north of Golsovia	Jul. 1- Jun. 30
22A remainder	may be announced
22B west of Golovnin Bay	Jul. 1- Jun. 30
22B remainder	Jul. 1- Jun. 30
22C	may be announced
22D Kougarok, Kuzitrin, Agiapuk	Jul. 1- Jun. 30
22D Pilgrim	Oct. 1- Apr. 30
22D Remainder	may be announced
22E east of and including Sanaguich	Jul. 1- Jun. 30
22E remainder	may be announced

**BACKGROUND:** The Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WAH) peaked at 490,000 caribou in 2003. In 2013 the herd was estimated at 235,000 indicating a ~7% annual rate of decline between 2003 and 2011; the rate increased to an estimated ~15% annually between 2011 and 2013. The 2015 census failed due to poor photography conditions; however, other metrics suggest the herd is currently declining at a reduced rate, estimated at ~7% annually. Prior to RY15, local Alaskan harvests have been estimated at 12,000 caribou per year based on data and patterns available through community harvest assessments. Range-wide, the department is concerned that we have gradually been exceeding a 2% cow harvest since RY2011.

Compliance with the provision that Alaska residents living north of the Yukon River and that hunt in that area do not need harvest tickets/reports, but must register with ADF&G or an authorized representative within the area is low. The department has not had a reporting mechanism or follow-up with those few who register. The exception is in Nome, where harvests have been documented through a harvest report system that requires hunt reports to be submitted within one month of the end of a regulatory year and follow-up has occurred. Other Alaskan and nonresident harvests are largely documented by the harvest ticketing reporting system.

The unusual availability of caribou along the Nome road system in fall 2015 will likely continue the trend and contribute to total cow harvests above the management objective of 2% cow harvest during RY15 due to recent changes in bull and cow seasons. Current year harvests and harvests by sex are not known but increased availability of caribou along the Nome road system in Unit 22 in future years would likely increase conservation concerns due to the declining condition of the herd.

In the smaller communities outside Nome in Unit 22 subsistence household survey data indicate that between 1998-2014, sex of caribou harvest is approximately 31% cows and 55% bulls and 14% of harvested animals of unknown sex. In small communities outside Nome in Unit 22 where harvest by sex and month of harvest is known, sex of caribou harvest is approximately 26% cows, 64% bulls, and 10% of harvested animals of unknown sex. There is potential for high harvests of cows in the future. Keeping harvest at sustainable levels will be important during a time when the WAH is declining. Increased information on harvest levels, timing and sex of harvest is also becoming increasingly important.

The department has primarily relied upon permits in the Nome area, and community based harvest assessment surveys outside the Nome area to understand WAH caribou harvests. The proponent suggests a harvest ticket system with an annual bag limit of 20 caribou that if adopted would likely provide more information about Unit 22 annual caribou harvests. If the WAH continues to decline, understanding harvest at a level that allows for responsive hunt management will become increasingly important. Increased harvest report data from Unit 22, even if not matched in Units 23 or 26A, would help manage the WAH. Considering Unit 22's longer regulatory history related to registration and Tier II hunts, this area of Region 5 seems the likely candidate to institute a more intensive harvesting reporting program, and evaluate the success for harvest reporting options in other areas of Region V.

**DEPARTMENT COMMENTS:** The department **SUPPORTS** this proposal if it is **AMENDED** to convert the hunt structure in Unit 22 to a registration permit hunt and the current season closure dates are retained. The department is opposed to the change in season dates and instead recommends Unit 22 seasons close March 31 to continue with recent rangewide efforts to reduce cow harvests by reducing spring opportunity, while protecting maternal caribou during calving and responding to reindeer herding interests.

The department recommends transition to a registration permit to provide hunt managers with additional tools to achieve more timely and accurate harvest reporting. **Amended Seasons and Bag Limits for Residents**

<u>Area</u>	<u>Resident Bag Limit</u>	<u>Season Dates</u>
22A north of Golsovia	Bulls	Jul. 1- Jun. 30
	Cows	Jul. 1- Mar. 31
22A remainder		may be announced
22B west of Golovnin Bay	Bulls	Oct. 1- Apr. 30
	Cows	Oct. 1- Mar. 31
22B remainder	Bulls	Jul. 1- Jun. 30
	Cows	Jul. 1- Mar. 31
22C		may be announced
22D Kougarok, Kuzitrin, Agiapuk	Bulls	Jul. 1- Jun. 30
	Cows	Jul. 1- Mar. 31
22D Pilgrim	Bulls	Oct. 1- Apr. 30
	Cows	Oct. 1- Mar. 31
22D Remainder		may be announced

22E east of and including Sanaguich	Bulls	Jul. 1- Jun. 30
	Cows	Jul. 1- Mar. 31
22E remainder		may be announced

**COST ANALYSIS:** Approval of this proposal may result in additional costs to the department to reach out to communities currently without the requirement.

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**PROPOSAL 141 – 5 AAC 85.056.** Hunting seasons and bag limits for wolf.

**PROPOSED BY:** Denali National Park and Preserve

**WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO?** This proposal shortens the wolf hunting season in the Stampede Corridor in Unit 20C and adjacent to Denali National Park from Aug. 10–May 31 to Aug. 10–April 15.

**WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?**

**5 AAC 85.056 (a)(2). Hunting seasons and bag limits for wolves**

	<b>Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)</b>	<b>Nonresident Open Season</b>
<b>Units and Bag Limits</b>		
...		
Units 12, 20, and 25(C)	Aug. 1–May 31	Aug. 1–May 31
...		

**WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED?** If adopted, this proposal would shorten the wolf season by 47 days in the affected portion of Unit 20C to eliminate the overlap with the bear baiting season in that area. The wolf hunting season would overlap with the bear baiting season for one day on April 15, and trappers would still be allowed to take wolves until April 30 with a trapping license.

**BACKGROUND:** The current low population of wolves may be unprecedented for Denali National Park, but it is not unprecedented in the Interior Alaska ecosystem. The low wolf population is commensurate with the low population of ungulates in the park on which wolves depend for food. This does not constitute a threat to the wolf population, and is well aligned with the NPS management philosophy of allowing natural processes to occur. In Unit 20A immediately adjacent to the east side of the park, the moose population is high, resulting in a

wolf population density approximately four times higher than in the park. This provides ample opportunity to compensate for the loss of wolves residing primarily within the park, particularly on the east side, through dispersal of wolves from Unit 20A.

In general, wolf populations in Alaska are regulated by prey abundance and availability, natural mortality, and emigration. There is consensus among ADF&G and DNP biologists that the take of wolves that spend much of their lives inside the park by hunters and trappers outside the park is not sufficiently large to regulate the Denali Park wolf population. Thus, neither approval nor denial of the requested closure is likely to appreciably affect the Denali Park wolf population.

The board has recognized trade-offs among viewing and consumptive uses in this area in the past. Those concerns led to the previously approved “buffer” area closed to the taking of wolves. The board may want to consider whether the changes in bear hunting regulations will affect wolf harvest patterns and the allocation between viewing and hunting and trapping opportunities. The new bear hunting regulations may increase the probability of take of wolves right before the summer visitor viewing season. This timing of take may preclude wolves re-colonizing those areas in time for the summer visitor season and affect the allocation between viewing and hunting and trapping.

ADF&G has no conservation concerns regarding wolves in Unit 20C, including the area closed by Emergency Order (EO) in May 2015. This area was closed in order to allow the Board of Game time to revisit the issue of wolf hunting seasons and bag limits without additional take of wolves adding to the controversy. We believe the controversy regarding the so-called “wolf buffer” centers around the allocation of wolves between harvest through trapping and hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities for Park visitors. Allocation issues are the purview of the Board of Game.

**DEPARTMENT COMMENTS:** The department is **NEUTRAL** on this proposal. There are no biological concerns for wolf population or associated with the wolf harvest in this area.

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

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**PROPOSAL 142 – 5 AAC 92.108.** Identified big game prey populations and objectives. **5 AAC 92.121(b)** Intensive Management Plan, Unit 13 wolf predation control area.

**PROPOSED BY:** Alaska Department of Fish and Game

**WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO?** This proposal reauthorizes the Unit 13 IM program and provides new regulatory language that conforms to the department’s protocol for IM regulations.

**WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?**

The Unit 13 IM program is described in 5 AAC 92.121(b), which is scheduled to expire on October 31, 2016.

**WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED?** The Unit 13 IM program would be reauthorized, and predator control activities would be authorized until June 30, 2027. The new regulatory language conforms to the department’s protocol for IM plans and does not change how the control activities would be conducted.

**BACKGROUND:** Unit 13 is an important area for producing high levels of moose for human consumptive use and to help meet subsistence needs. The Unit 13 IM program has been in place since 2001. During this time, the moose populations have generally increased, and moose hunting opportunities have been liberalized. The department recommends that this program continue with the goal of reaching the IM objectives established by the board.

**DEPARTMENT COMMENTS:** The department **SUPPORTS** this proposal.

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

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**PROPOSAL 143 – 5AAC 92.990(21).** Definition of deleterious exotic wildlife.

**PROPOSED BY:** The Board of Game

**WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO?** This proposal adds Eurasian collared doves to the definition of deleterious exotic wildlife.

**WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?**

5 AAC 92.990(a)(21) “deleterious exotic wildlife” includes

- (A) English sparrow;
- (B) Raccoon;
- (C) Starling
- (D) Unconfined or unrestrained;
  - i. Belgian hare;
  - ii. Muridae rodent;
  - iii. Rockdove;
- (E) Feral
  - i. Ferret;
  - ii. Swine;

There is no open season or bag limit for Eurasian collared doves.

**WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED?** Including Eurasian collard doves in the definition of deleterious exotic wildlife would result in a no closed season and no bag limit for the birds.

**BACKGROUND:** Eurasian collared doves were accidentally introduced to North America in the 1980s. Collared doves are not migratory, but they are strong dispersers. The first populations were established in Florida, and they had spread across the US by 2004. In Alaska, they have been sighted in the Interior, Central, and Southwest portions of the state.

Eurasian collared doves compete with other dove species for resources, but their impacts are not well studied.

**DEPARTMENT COMMENTS:** The department **SUPPORTS** this proposal.

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

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