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PRESS RELEASE

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Resident Hunting Opened for Stranded Musk Oxen in Unit 18

(Bethel) The Alaska Department of Fish and Game is opening a resident hunting season for musk oxen that are stranded on free-floating ice floes completely surrounded by salt water in Unit 18. The hunting season opens October 15, 2015 and residents taking musk oxen from ice floes must comply with hunt conditions specified in regulation 5 AAC 92.046 *Permits for taking incidental or stranded musk oxen*. The area affected by this announcement includes coastal marine waters adjacent to muskox populations located on Nunivak and Nelson islands in Unit 18.

Hunting of musk oxen stranded on ice floes is a new regulation adopted by the Alaska Board of Game at its March 2015 meeting in Anchorage. The following hunt conditions apply to the new hunt:

- 1) Season opening by emergency order in Game Management Unit 18;
- 2) Musk oxen are stranded on free-floating ice floes completely surrounded by salt water;
- 3) A resident may harvest the stranded musk oxen without a permit;
- 4) Resident tag is waived (e.g. no tag required);
- 5) Bag limit of up to 2 musk oxen per person;
- 6) The hunter must demonstrate the ice floe conditions by submitting photographic evidence to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game within 48 hours of harvest.

Survey results show that the Nunivak and Nelson Island muskox population are above management objectives. Surveys completed in June 2015 revealed a Nunivak Island population of 740 muskoxen, a level above the management objective of 500–550 musk oxen, and a Nelson Island minimum population count of 944 musk oxen, also above the management objective of 250–450 musk oxen. Maximized permit hunting has been implemented by the department to reduce populations to management objectives over a multi-year period. At present, populations can sustain the additional harvest of stranded musk oxen.

For unknown reasons during winter, musk oxen occasionally wander onto sea ice adjacent to their terrestrial habitat and incidentally become stranded when marine conditions cause ice movements and floes to develop before musk oxen can reach safety. Opening hunting under these specific conditions allows harvest opportunity of animals likely to be lost by drowning.

All other muskox hunting regulations in Unit 18 remain unchanged by this emergency order.

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