

RC31

## MUZZLELOADER DRAWING PERMIT HUNT IN 20(B)

The following is research on a public request on the origin and effect of having the Muzzleloader Permit Hunt for Moose in 20(B) extend from the Chena River drainage into the Salcha River drainage upstream of Goose Creek.

### Background:

Because the Salcha River drainage has, in recent times, had a lower moose density than the rest of 20(B) the public, FAC and the Board of Game have not included areas of the drainage for antlerless moose hunting. The new Muzzleloader Drawing Permit Hunt for Moose does include an antlerless component. In 2010 the Board authorized the MLDMP hunt in response to a public proposal that included the area in the Salcha upstream from Goose Creek.

The drawing permits for the 2011 Muzzleloader hunt are "on the street" and it would be difficult to change the conditions (area) for this year. Nobody has asked that the 2011 hunt be changed and the public is aware of the situation that there is a Salcha portion of the hunt area.

This issue can be addressed before the Board either by an agenda change request (ACR) or during the specific discussion for antlerless moose reauthorization for subunit 20(B). Proposals for the 2012 Region III BOG meeting are due in April and this issue could be a proposal for that meeting.

The Salcha drainage area being included is most likely a product of the BOG "thinking" antlerless should be included in the muzzleloader drawing permit hunt because of the overall high moose population. For the new muzzleloader area in 20(B), antlerless were always part of the proposal. The proposer asked for a bag limit of "bull or cow?".

### Likely 2011 or 2011 & 2012 Muzzleloader hunt under the existing conditions:

The moose population for the muzzleloader hunt is in the upper Chena drainage, especially the Middle Fork and the upper Salcha. These areas have bull – cow ratios. The Chena drainage will be accessed by a trail system from Chena Hot Springs Road. The travel distance to the boundary of the hunt area is basically adjacent to Chena Hot Springs Road. Very little time will be needed to be in "the area open to muzzleloader permit hunting". On the Salcha side a hunter will either need to fly into the area above Goose Creek or face a trail of over 50 miles to reach the hunt area.

The 2011 hunt is from Nov. 1 – 30. Sixty (60) permits have been drawn and are in the process of being issued. To assess the probability for harvest of antlerless moose in the Salcha, I used the history of the 20(A) muzzleloader drawing hunts. For example, access into 20(A) was over the Rex Trail (ground) or by air. The Rex Trail access is comparably long to what would be needed to reach the upper Salcha but 20(A) did not offer any alternatives. (Like being able to hunt a mile or two from the truck on Chena Hot Springs Road.)

Muzzleloader hunts have had 43% of the permitted hunters in the "Did Not Hunt" reporting. Using a similar outcome for the 20(B) hunt, we should expect about 35 hunters. The harvest rate for those who hunted has been 44% which in the 20(B) example would forecast a harvest of 18 moose. The likely choice for these hunters would be a bull moose with an antlerless moose being the backup if a bull were not found during the hunt.

The speculative part of this assessment is the number of hunters likely to hunt in the Chena and the Salcha. With the ease of access in the Chena, it would be generous to assign 1/3 of the harvest to the

Salcha drainage. Using the historical percentages, that would result in a harvest there of 6 moose. The likely antlerless harvest, again using 1/3 of those hunters taking "a moose" would be 2.

If the hunters were evenly distributed half in the Chena and half in the Salcha, that estimate would be 3 (antlerless).

The latest moose population estimate for the Salcha River drainage, 20(B) East, is 3,751.

Choices for the FAC:

- Leave the existing 2011 conditions and bag limit alone, including an antlerless component.
- Ask the Board to remove the antlerless component from the Salcha area.
- Ask the Board to remove the Salcha area from the muzzleloader drawing hunt area.
- Consider a proposal to change the bag limit for the next BOG cycle.

Mike Tinker, Game Subcommittee Chair