

Comments to Board of Game; Spring 2015 meeting; Central/Southwest Region,2/13 to 2/20/2015; Wasilla

Proposal #207 – Plane hunting is very effective and is improving steadily.

1. Not feasible to expect hunters to follow, nor for Troopers to enforce.
2. Instead of 2pm, I suggest noon. By then, the sheep will have been out of their beds to feed at least once from the night before and had a chance to reposition. And hunters would get an opportunity to actually watch their quarry from the ground and enjoy the “hunt” experience much more than just landing, walking to where the animal was spotted from the air the night before, and killing. The noon time would not be a handicap for the great majority of hunters or guides. Only a very few people that want the quickest “hurry up to kill and get out” result (for money or bragging rights) would be affected. Noon would still give hunters enough time to hunt the first day after flying and if successful in the afternoon, be able to get back off the top to a safe place for the night.
3. I think two variables would make it more difficult to enforce, and 24/48 hours would just add an extra full day to a hunt, which is too much in my opinion.

Proposal #208

Keeping the status quo would be okay, because I believe it is mostly the weather and predators that have caused the last 20 or so years of sheep population decline. However, the unknown is whether the elimination of the older class of rams, say 10, 11, and 12 year olds, from the population has caused some of the sheep population reduction from the lack of old-age wisdom to guide the herds. Perhaps changing the regulations slightly would help restore some of that wisdom, reduce early season conflicts, bring back some of the older-really trophy class-rams, reduce overall harvest, and thus, satisfy many of the complaints from the sheep hunting public. And, we have kept the status quo for three decades of dropping sheep populations, perhaps we should DO something.

If possible with current statute/regulations that are in place, I would prefer to see a few changes to existing sheep hunting regulations that go into effect for the next three years and expire (sunset) at that time. We could then see the effects were positive and if they would still be needed, and decide whether to put them, or another combination of changes in place for the next cycle.

If we do make changes, I would like to see the Board use some of the least drastic options they have listed on Proposal 208. We should make slight changes that affect several user groups, so we all have some stake in the changes. I would like the resident sheep hunters to have a drawing for one of three season start dates: August 10th, August 15th and August 20th. Using a drawing will allow hunters to choose partners-with a party hunt application-who can

also hunt the same period. Hunters who draw the first period for 2015 will only be able to draw for one of the other two periods for 2016, and in 2017 hunters will all get the one they did not get for the first two years of this three-year regulatory cycle. All hunters can hunt the rest of the season from August 25th to September 20th in all of the three years. Any hunters who don't apply, will automatically have the August 20th as a start date.

We know nonresidents have the highest success rate, so we should reduce their harvest. Obviously we have significantly fewer sheep to hunt, or we wouldn't be considering all these changes. So resident hunters have to be given priority, and non-resident harvest has to be reduced. The easiest way with the resident plan I just suggested is to delay their season until August 20th. This way, residents will be given their Priority in a time of obvious shortage. However, only 2/3 of residents will get the earlier than non-residents start date, the other 1/3 or more will start hunting the same day as non-residents. Residents have a slight priority.

To include airplane hunters in the changes, do as I suggested for Proposal #207; make any airplane hunter wait until noon after any day they are airborne before they can shoot, or help another person hunt - unless that person arrived in a plane the day before the hunt.

I have nothing against the guiding industry. I want it to stay in place in Alaska for nonresidents to be able to hunt, and because APHA does a significant amount of good for all of us hunters. I am actually a sustaining a life member of APHA. There are only a few "bad" guides, and only a few hunters who misuse airplanes to hunt. By the same token, there are a few bad resident hunters. Any poor reputation any of these groups has comes from just a few poor examples in each group.

These suggestions are what I think would improve sheep hunting in Alaska, and the sheep populations in the next few years. We Alaskans are very lucky to have plenty of sheep we can hunt every year. But, we should try to keep enough sheep on the mountain for future hunters to enjoy as we have.

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