

PROPOSAL 30

5 AAC 92.520(a). Closures and restrictions in state game refuges.

Create a youth hunt for waterfowl in the Unit 1C Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge as follows:

Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge Youth Hunt Area: Unit 1C; the area is open to waterfowl hunting from September 16 through September 18 by a child aged 10 to 17 years of age who has successfully completed a Department of Fish and Game-approved hunter education class and who is accompanied by a licensed resident adult aged 21 years of age or older.

*A permit may be issued to a child aged 10 to 17 who will be accompanied in the field by a resident adult 21 years of age or older, with the child being the permittee. Both the adult and child will need the Mendenhall Waterfowl Permit (WU001).

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? We propose to create a three-day youth-only hunt on the Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge to occur during the first three days of the waterfowl season (September 16 through September 18). Open to a child 10 to 17 years of age who has successfully completed a Department of Fish and Game-approved hunter education class and who is accompanied by a licensed resident adult aged 21 years of age or older, this hunt would be the first of its kind in Alaska.

As national organizations like Delta Waterfowl, Ducks Unlimited, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have found, waterfowl hunter numbers in the US have been on a steady decline for the last several decades (see especially <https://deltawaterfowl.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/LoomingCrisis.pdf>). Important efforts are in place to recruit underrepresented groups like women (Becoming an Outdoors Woman) and youth (hunter education courses), and there are efforts to engage with lapsed and new adult hunters, too, but these educational opportunities are not always met with adequate youth-friendly access to hunting opportunity.

There is significant interest in shooting sports among the younger generations in Juneau—the Juneau Youth Trap Shooting Team saw significant growth over the last few years, for example. The key to this program’s success lies in dedicated youth-only time at the Juneau Gun Club and appropriate adult supervision and coaching. Not all of these shooters have made the transition to field shooting, however, as the Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge can be intimidating. The majority of Juneau road-system waterfowl hunting effort takes place on the Mendenhall Wetlands (ADF&G reports that over 2,000 hunter days result in over 3,000 ducks taken annually on the Refuge), so even with 13 access points and approximately 3,800 acres, the good hunting spots accessible without a boat get crowded, especially early in the season. Without this dedicated youth hunt the barriers to entry for next generation of waterfowl hunters will remain high.

Although we are requesting a three-day youth hunt, we considered requesting both a single day and a week-long hunt. The latter would ensure that weekend opportunities would be available for all interested youth and their adult mentors, while the shorter hunt might not allow all young

hunters the chance to get out due to school or mentor work obligations. We think a three-day hunt will create access for youth without adversely impacting adult access to the resource.

The Juneau-Douglas Fish and Game Advisory Committee was consulted on this drafting of proposal, as was the leadership of the local chapter of Ducks Unlimited, and there is general support for the idea among these organizations.

Finally, we feel that this proposal is consistent with the Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge Management Plan's goal of enhancing public use, as the change would directly enhance opportunity for "public use of fish, wildlife, and refuge lands" (http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/lands/protectedareas/management_plans/mendenhall.pdf).

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