

PROPOSAL 72

5 AAC 85.045. Hunting seasons and bag limits for moose.

Change the resident moose hunt structure in Unit 15C as follows:

- 1) Convert season from general hunt to a registration hunt, as per existing Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) protocols for in-person registration hunts elsewhere in the state. Open to residents only with restriction: hunters who obtain a permit for this hunt are ineligible to hunt bull moose in any other unit during the calendar year.
- 2) Split season dates concurrent with start date of the late season controlled use hunt period.
First season: September 1 through September 14.
Second season: September 15 through September 25.
- 3) Limit harvest in first season to: quota set annually by ADF&G, as per management objectives, using existing ADF&G protocols for registration hunts elsewhere in the state.
Second season harvest: No quota
- 4) First season bag limit: “any bull” with more than a forked antler on one side.
Second season bag limit: bull with minimum of 50-inch outside spread, or minimum of four brow tines on at least one antler.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? 1) Unacceptably high sublegal harvest resulting from current legal bull bag limit.

- 2) ADF&G annual bull harvest objectives have not been met for many years, but ADF&G surveys report a high bull:cow ratio. This supports an opportunity to harvest more bulls.
- 3) Limited resident opportunity to harvest a legal bull for food/subsistence. A large number of hunters are competing for a low number of legal bulls and are unsuccessful.
- 4) Harvesting yearlings, fork or spike bulls minimizes the meat yield of the moose and can adversely impact the ability to sustain future bull harvest numbers.
- 5) Current regulations characterize a trophy hunt vs. an opportunity to harvest game food.
- 6) Law enforcement personnel in the field are unable to manage compliance with regulations.
- 7) A percentage of hunters want to maintain the current bag limit or antler restrictions, but a majority wants to put a moose in the freezer.

What may happen if these problems are not solved: Game management objectives will not be met.

Area resident hunter harvest opportunity will continue to be compromised by bag limit restrictions and by too many hunters competing for this limited resource.

The quality of the hunting experience and our subsistence-based dependence on this food source will continue to be compromised by these factors and the sublegal hunting activity resulting from pressure to harvest a legal bull.

Compliance and enforcement demands will continue to exceed the capacity of law enforcement personnel and resources. The requirement for hunters to certify that they viewed and passed a legal bull moose orientation video certainly did very little to reduce the frequency of sublegal kills in 2017.

1) More than 20% of our annual bull harvest is sublegal. This is a lost resource. This moose herd has been under intensive management, but our ADF&G biologists are recommending that this classification be lifted. With current antler restrictions (bag limit), management harvest objectives are not being met and our regulations do not reflect this. Too many hunters are victims of failure to read their tape measures correctly or poor eye sight when counting brow tines or estimating antler spread, creating an environment which overloads our law enforcement in the field. This results in their lost opportunity to harvest food and subjection to a misdemeanor offense and fine.

2) Southern Peninsula advisory committees continue to support measures to sustain higher harvest numbers than what we have experienced for more than a decade. The priority has been to be able to harvest a moose for food and at the same time provide an opportunity to harvest a mature bull in the later season. The current state bag limit restrictions and the objectives upon which they are based are in conflict with the fact that communities within Unit 15C are federally recognized as subsistence users of this game resource.

3) Restricting the yearling harvest to spikes-only and mature bulls to minimum 50 inches or four brow tines were efforts to reduce pressure on and sustain an acceptable number of harvestable bulls as well as to manage bull:cow ratios. If we were growing a herd of cattle, we wouldn't harvest yearlings nor would we only harvest old bulls.

This proposal improves the quality of the resource harvested because local area hunter opportunity to harvest a legal moose will increase with a registration hunt with proposed restrictions and a change in the bag limit. ADF&G harvest objectives can be met and controlled. Simplification of the definition of legal bull will relieve the hunter and law enforcement personnel. Splitting the season will offer more opportunity to harvest a meat bull in the first season and help ensure maximum opportunity for a mature bull in the late season controlled use hunt period.

Those likely to benefit: Local area residents wanting increased opportunity to harvest game for subsistence, late season trophy hunters, ADF&G moose population managers, and law enforcement and compliance personnel.

Those likely to suffer: Nonresidents and resident hunters who live outside of the area who are not present during the registration period, as well all hunters unwilling to sacrifice eligibility to hunt elsewhere during the same year will suffer.

Other solutions considered and reasons rejected:

1) Considered not splitting the season but addressed concern that quota could be met prior to the late season controlled use hunt period, which would deprive hunters who traditionally hunt during that time and target mature trophy bulls as the rut begins.

2) Considered capping number of permits. A residency requirement does not significantly reduce the number of hunters in the field nor prevent this “any bull” hunt from becoming targeted by hunters residing outside of the area. Capping the number of permits is a matter of using statistics to achieve desired harvest levels rather than providing opportunity to area hunters willing to sacrifice eligibility elsewhere in order to support the objectives of these proposed regulation changes.

3) Establishing our eligibility for a Community Subsistence Harvest is an alternative which addresses several components of this proposal, but simultaneously continuing our current general hunt and bag limit for all other hunters does not address any of the other problems cited as reasons for this proposal.

PROPOSED BY: Michael Schuster

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