

PROPOSAL 74

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

Open a resident drawing hunt for moose in Unit 15C as follows:

Unit 15C, Resident Hunters:

1 antlered bull, by drawing permit only; up to 200 permits may be issued.

This number was arrived at by adding the 142 moose current harvest average plus 160 (200 draw permits at a conservatively high success rate of 80%) equals 302 moose, squarely within the harvest objective of 200–350. This hypothetical calculation includes the entire harvest structure.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Provide additional harvest opportunity due to high moose population in Unit 15C. Currently, Unit 15C is above the intensive management (IM) population objective, far below IM harvest objective, and the bull:cow ratio is very high; substantial opportunity is thus being underutilized. There is adequate room to add 200 “any antlered bull” draw permits, and these would work well alongside current selective harvest strategy (SHS) regulations to balance the herd and provide prime opportunity in a high use area.

- The latest point estimate as of this writing for moose in Unit 15C shows a population of 3,529; above the IM objective of 2500–3500.
- Last five years harvest average is 142 moose; well below harvest objective for Unit 15C of 200–350 moose. Of those 142, 27 were cows taken under DM549 and 118 were general season bulls. Hunters are excited about seeing many bulls but frustrated because most don't meet the current requirement of spike, 50-inch, or four brow tines.
- Bull:cow ratios have increased steadily from 19 to 55 bulls per 100 cows in the last five years, with total moose remaining roughly constant or increasing. An adequate and sustainable ratio is normally considered to range about 25–30 bulls per 100 cows; about half of Unit 15C's current ratio of 55:100 cows. One bull can service dozens of cows.
- Current regulatory hunt structure in Unit 15C consists of spike/50-inch or four brow tines for the general bull hunt, along with DM549 antlerless hunt (25–30 cows taken annually) and the targeted hunt (yet to be authorized) for highway corridor during heavy snow years.

We appear to have a substantial number of additional bulls available for harvest. High bull:cow ratios can lead to stressed moose populations as more bulls than necessary for the herd's productivity compete for browse and habitat with the future of the herd: the cows and calves. Nutritional stress, while truly a factor of population, may also be exemplified by percent calves (last five years high 20, currently 11) and lower twinning rate. Additionally, for the bulls, mating stress and less nutrition on a per-animal basis may produce less antler growth, which puts more mid-size “illegal class” bulls in the population, compounding the situation of too many bulls competing for browse and perhaps also exacerbating illegal take with its inherent enforcement, prosecution and regulation costs. Longer term nutritional stress may play out in genetics. The Unit 15C moose population is over objective yet the harvest is less than half of its objective. This prime freezer-filling opportunity should be utilized to provide maximum benefit to hunters.

We think the population will respond favorably, we will stay within harvest objectives, and hunters will be happy with a better chance at winter meat if we offer up to (at Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) discretion) 200 “any antlered bull” permits by drawing in addition to the existing hunt structure.

Other solutions were considered to add opportunity and bring down the bull to cow ratio: A registration “any bull” hunt would be more difficult for ADF&G to manage in-season and make Alaska Wildlife Trooper enforcement more complicated. It would surely necessitate small window “hunt periods;” these are undesirable due to traditional family camp activity and also to ethical moose harvesting weather, which is spotty at best in the warm maritime climate of Unit 15C. A return to more liberal selective harvest strategy (SHS) antler restrictions (add forked antler and reduce to 3 brow tines/50-inch) was rejected due to overly adequate bull:100 cow ratio (indeed, the SHS may be working TOO well). Removal of the existing cow hunt makes some mathematical sense with respect to sex ratio, but removed from consideration due to popularity, low harvest (25–30 cows/ year), and is only a very small portion of Unit 15C in suburban Homer. Changing the entire general harvest ticket hunt to allow “any antlered bull” would be too liberal, resulting in heavy localized overharvest even if the season is drastically shortened (undesirable again due to weather and loss of opportunity to hunt). Concerns of nonlocal competition in the draw (which is lawful) have merit, but we don’t think a big factor with other “any bull” hunt opportunities elsewhere around the road system offering enticement to traveling hunters.

Additional prime moose harvest opportunity can be safely implemented in Unit 15C by adopting this proposal adding up to 200 “any antlered bull” draw permits to the existing harvest structure. This will bring the harvest up closer to objective, bring down the bull:cow ratio, help the overall health of the herd and put an additional hundred thousand pounds of meat in Alaskans’ freezers. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this proposal.

PROPOSED BY: Homer Fish and Game Advisory Committee (EG-F18-044)
