



Department of Fish and Game

DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
Headquarters

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An Agenda Change Request (ACR 1) has been submitted by the North Slope Fish and Game Management Committee to the Alaska Board of Game requesting to change 5 AAC 85.050(a)(3) Hunting seasons and bag limit for muskox. The proponent is asking the board to open a muskox hunt in eastern GMU 26A and 26B with season dates of August 1—March 15, and a quota of 5 muskoxen.

With respect to the board’s Agenda Change Request (ACR) acceptance criteria (5 AAC 92.005):

- A. The department is unaware of any error in regulation.
- B. The department is unaware of any effects of regulations that were unforeseen when the regulation was adopted.
- C. The department is unaware of a biological concern that is caused by existing regulations.
- D. The department is unaware of any unforeseen or unexpected events that would otherwise restrict or reduce a reasonable opportunity for customary and traditional wildlife uses as defined in AS 16.05.258(f).
- E. The department is unaware of any unexpected resource situation that would cause a biologically allowable resource harvest to be precluded by delayed regulatory action. There is some allowable harvest available in the Unit 26B muskox population (1-3 bulls); this harvest would likely be delayed rather than precluded by a one-year delay in regulatory action.

The season has been closed since regulatory year 2006 due to a lack of harvestable surplus. The following regulations remain in codified:

Unit and location	Resident open season	Nonresident open season
Units 26A and 26B, that portion west of the Dalton Highway	Aug. 1–Mar. 31 (Subsistence hunt only)	No open season
1 muskox by Tier II subsistence permit only; up to 20 muskoxen may be taken <i>(Permits were issued for east of longitude 153 and west of DHCMA)</i>		

Unit and location	Resident open season	Nonresident open season
Unit 26B, that portion east of the Dalton Highway		
1 muskox by Tier I permit only <i>(Permits were issued east of the DHCMA)</i>	Season to be announced (Subsistence hunt only)	No open season
Or		
1 bull by drawing permit only if the harvestable surplus is greater than 4 muskoxen; up to 5 muskoxen may be taken	Sept. 20–Oct. 10 Mar 10–Mar. 30	

Unit 26B has a positive C&T finding for muskoxen and an established Amounts Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) of 20 muskoxen west of the DHCMA, and 4 muskoxen east of the DHCMA.

During the March 2020 BOG meeting, proposal 77 requested to open a resident permit hunt for muskox in Unit 26B as follows: Reauthorize registration or drawing muskox permits to residents only for Unit 26B.

The board did not adopt proposal 77. During deliberations, the board discussed that the Eastern North Slope muskox population had barely reached the minimum population objective of 300 muskoxen ≥ 1 -year-old and the trend was unknown. In 2018 and 2019, the population was 285 and 297 muskoxen, respectively. Prior to 2018, the muskox population was approximately 200 muskoxen for the previous 10 years. The last time the hunt was held (2005), the population had dropped below 200 animals, after averaging over 450 for the previous 15 years.

In 2007, ADF&G initiated a research project to determine causes of mortality on muskoxen in Unit 26B because the population had declined from approximately 300 muskoxen in 2003 to 200 muskoxen during 2004–2006. ADF&G research staff determined that brown bear predation on adult and calf muskoxen was the most common cause of mortality during 2007–2011. To reduce brown bear predation on muskoxen, the Alaska Board of Game extended brown bear hunting seasons and eliminated permit requirements in a portion of Unit 26B by Emergency Order for RY10 and RY11 brown bear hunting seasons.

To continue the effort to reduce brown bear predation on muskoxen and allow the muskox population to grow, the board approved the *Unit 26B Muskox Recovery Plan* (5 AAC 92.126) in January 2012. This plan included use of department-authorized personnel to lethally remove brown bears identified as threatening or killing muskoxen in Unit 26B, as outlined in the *Operational Plan for Unit 26B Muskox Recovery 2012–2018*,

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=intensivemanagement.unit26b#anchor>. In addition, brown bear hunting regulations were modified spring 2012 to align with the Unit 26B Muskox Recovery Plan.

Authorization to lethally remove brown bears identified as threatening or killing muskoxen in Unit 26B ended 30 June 2018.

Since the March 2020 BOG meeting, the department observed 298 and 319 muskoxen in April 2020 and 2021, respectively; suggesting that the population is stable or slowly increasing, and still close to the minimum population objective

The next regularly scheduled board meeting for Unit 26B regulations is in spring of 2024. If the board accepts this ACR, the department recommends the proposal come before the board at its March 2022 statewide meeting in Fairbanks to allow for more public input. If the board passes a proposal utilizing the existing Tier II structure, the earliest regulatory year a hunt could be opened is RY23 to allow for the Tier II application period in winter 2022.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ryan Scott".

Ryan Scott
Assistant Director
Division of Wildlife Conservation