

PROPOSAL 40

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

Allow the take of deleterious exotic wildlife in the Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge as follows:

Amend the closures and restrictions section to the following:

*“(a) Unit 1: The Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge, as described in AS 16.20.034, is closed to hunting, except for waterfowl including snipe and crane during established seasons, **and deleterious exotic wildlife, as defined in 5 AAC 92.990, there is no closed season, except by approved methods for taking migratory game birds or air rifles with nontoxic pellets must be used;** a person may not use any off-road or all-terrain vehicle, motorcycle, or other motorized vehicle, except a boat within the refuge; a hunter for waterfowl **or deleterious exotic wildlife** on the Mendenhall State Game Refuge must have successfully completed a certified hunter education course, except a hunter who is under 10 years of age must be accompanied by an adult, or must have successfully completed a certified hunter education course; before hunting in the refuge, **except for deleterious exotic wildlife,** a person must register for a permit annually with the department and demonstrate an understanding of informational materials provided at the time of registration; the permit is valid for all or specific waterfowl hunting zones **and deleterious exotic wildlife** within the Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge, subject to closure at the discretion of the department; a person convicted of a hunting violation within the Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge is not eligible to register for a permit to hunt in the refuge the following year; a hunter on the refuge shall present in the field, upon request, proof of registration; the first two days of the established waterfowl season is open to youth hunters ages 10 to 17 only, and both the child and accompanying adult must register with the department.”*

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Deleterious exotic wildlife are a serious ecological issue across our nation and the world. These species are almost as destructive as man’s effects on the environment. When the Mendenhall Refuge was created in the early 1990s’, it wasn’t contemplated that Juneau would be impacted by deleterious exotic wildlife (DEW) and specific protections were not written into the founding documents. I believe this was an honest oversight, but it needs to be corrected. Since then, several deleterious species have arrived in Juneau, specifically the European Starling. While waterfowl hunting, I routinely see flocks of these invaders. Under the current refuge regulations, Starlings may not be legally taken, even during waterfowl season. Other Alaskan refuges have properly allowed for the removal of deleterious exotic wildlife, so the Mendenhall Refuge should allow it as well.

Some people may worry that allowing the removal of DEW will negatively impact the refuge, due to increased hunting pressure. I disagree with this concern. The current refuge rules and use policies have been in place for almost 15 years and the negative interactions between hunters and other user groups have drastically subsided. I contend that the requirement that all hunters are permitted under the current rules will provide the same high level of competency and respect for other users. The impacts will only be felt by these most uninvited invaders and not the Juneau residents who love and frequent the refuge.

My proposal has two allowable methods of taking deleterious exotic wildlife. 1. By approved waterfowl hunting methods (shotgun, bow/arrow, and falconry) and 2. Air rifles with non-toxic pellets. I included air rifles as an approved method to provide a quiet, precise, and non-toxic method for surgical removal of DEW. I realize that allowing the use of a rifle in the refuge may

sound dangerous to some people, but it is not. Remember, all hunters will have passed hunters safety (or are supervised by an adult who has) and they are responsible to know what directions are safe to shoot. I will remind the Board of Game that each spring, many Juneau residents head into the hills, behind their homes and around the refuge with .22 rifles looking for spruce grouse. This annual activity does not create safety issues. I'll also remind the Board of Game that federal and state laws for waterfowl hunting are well understood by Juneau hunters and the risk to misuse on the refuge are non-existent.

I've researched the City and Borough of Juneau's code (42.20.050 Discharging firearms) in the refuge and the only limitation is that shotguns are exempt from the 1/4 mile from a road rule while in the refuge. By city code, pellet rifles could only be fired if more than 1/4 mile from a road, and I don't think this is a problem. The sand islands on the refuge are the main target locations for DEW, so I don't see a need to change the city code at this time.

I ask the Board of Game to consider several points:

Please keep the reference to all deleterious exotic wildlife, as defined in 5 AAC 92.990, so that any new species added to the statute in the future can be assimilated accordingly. Carving out one or two species, such as saying "only starlings can be hunted on the refuge," is not a useful management tool. Who knows what new invader will arrive in the future and the sooner an invading species can be eradicated, the better.

Secondly, allowing the use of air rifles is a low-risk addition to the regulations to combat this important issue. Starlings (and all deleterious exotic wildlife) must be eradicated and air rifles are a low impact, highly effective tool to be used by permitted Juneau hunters.

Alternative Amendment: If the Board of Game must modify my request, I ask that at the very least, that the regulations be changed to allow the taking of all deleterious exotic wildlife during established waterfowl seasons with approved methods for waterfowl. At the very least, we should be able to remove DEW when we're already out on the refuge hunting waterfowl.

Below are just a few references to the damage caused by the European Starling and why they must be eradicated from the refuge.

In the 2004 document "**HOTSPOTS Bird Survey of the Mendenhall Wetlands,**" the local authors noted the presence of the European Starling and multiple bird species, such as the Mountain Bluebird, who are often directly displaced by the Starling. Starlings are incredibly aggressive, and it has been well documented that they devastate native bird populations as they displace fellow cavity-nesting birds.

<https://www.naturebob.com/sites/default/files/Hotspot%20report.pdf>

USDA Document on Starling Damages:

www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/reports/Wildlife%20Damage%20Management%20Technical%20Series/European-Starlings-WDM-Technical-Series.pdf

European Starlings: A review of an Invasive Species with Far-reaching Impacts:

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nwrcinvasive/24/>

PROPOSED BY: Erich Schaal

(EG-F22-116)
