

PROPOSAL 69

5 AAC 85.035. Hunting seasons and bag limits for elk.

Exclude Kodiak Island from the hunt area for elk in Unit 8 Remainder as follows:

Modify the definition of elk area “Unit 8 Remainder” to remove Kodiak Island and include only the areas on Afognak Island.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Closing Kodiak Island from elk hunting may give Roosevelt elk a chance to populate the area. Roosevelt elk have successfully populated Afognak (and Raspberry) Island since 1929. Some Roosevelt elk have occasionally been able to swim to Kodiak Island, but were hunted and killed after. If the season was closed on Kodiak Island indefinitely, it would allow elk that migrate to grow into a huntable population.

A huntable population could increase revenues to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game as well as guides by attracting more hunters. Elk are some of the most highly desirable species to hunt in the United States.

Elk on Kodiak Island could increase food security for the island in two ways. First, having elk on the island simply increases physical access to food. One elk can often yield over 400 lbs. of meat, nearly the weight of a butchered moose. Secondly, it would increase the economic access to food on Kodiak, where meat is expensive to purchase. Any resident of Kodiak Island could benefit from a significant meat source, but more specifically, residents of the town of Kodiak have limited subsistence food sources on the road system. Often the subsistence users with the greatest need have few economic resources. In Kodiak, in most years, residents need expensive vehicles to get off the road system (either ATVs or a seaworthy vessel) to gather large volumes of fish or meat. The two subsistence meat sources that can fill a freezer on the road system are the Buskin and Pasagshak rivers’ sockeye run, and they often have a run too weak for subsistence fishing. Elk would likely populate near the road system due to the large amount grazing areas nearby. This would allow the subsistence users with limited economic resources to simply walk or drive a highway vehicle to start hunting a freezer filling source of food. The other villages on Kodiak could also benefit from another large food resource.

If elk were to swim to Kodiak Island, as has been reported in the past, the state would not have to expend any resources transplanting animals.

If animals from the same archipelago were to migrate, there would be no concerns of disease. It would also keep the unique and valuable genetics of Afognak elk – the nation’s largest elk.

There have been reports of Rocky Mountain elk escaping from the ranch on Narrow Cape on Kodiak. It is possible that the Rocky Mountain elk could risk the genetic makeup of the Afognak Roosevelt elk with cross breeding. The risk exists today because some Roosevelt elk have been reported on Kodiak. One suggestion that can be included with this proposal is to have an open season elk hunt within a certain radius of Narrow Cape – with reporting requirements. If no elk are killed within a certain number of years, the open season could be reevaluated. Another suggestion is to have the state regulate animals that have a risk of being an invasive species or breeding with wild animals.

The US Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) has historically shown they are adverse to the introduction of new species in wildlife refuges. The USFWS could manage the elk on the Kodiak Island Wildlife Refuge as they see fit. However, a large part of Kodiak is not on the refuge and can be managed through a pro-hunting and pro-resource management style as the Board of Game and Alaska residents see best for themselves.

Elk would likely thrive on Kodiak Island, because of the extensive graze and habitat. The deer on Kodiak would have few shared resources with the elk. Elk are grazers, and feed on grasses and sedges. Deer are browsers and consume a different diet. Mountain goats also have little overlap in their diet compared to elk.

There are many advantages to elk populating Kodiak Island, including increased revenue for the state, food security, and more hunting opportunity. All with no startup costs and utilizing mostly unused grazing vegetation on the island.

PROPOSED BY: Chris Sibrel

(EG-F22-045)
