

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
STAFF COMMENTS FOR PROPOSALS 7, 8, 27-29, 32, 33, 35, 40-42, and 190
WESTERN ARCTIC / WESTERN REGION PROPOSALS
ALASKA BOARD OF GAME MEETING
KOTZEBUE, ALASKA
JANUARY 26-29, 2024



The following staff comments were prepared by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game for use at the Alaska Board of Game meeting, January 26-29, 2024 in Kotzebue, Alaska, and are prepared to assist the public and board. The stated staff comments should be considered preliminary and subject to change, if or when new information becomes available. Final department positions will be formulated after review of written and oral testimony presented to the board.

Proposal 7 – 5 AAC 85.045 Hunting season and bag limits for moose. Lengthen the season for moose in Unit 18 for moose hunt RM617.

PROPOSED BY: Native Village of Kwinhagak

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal would provide resident hunters with additional opportunity by extending the fall moose hunting season in a portion of Unit 18 by two weeks. If adopted, the hunting season would be open September 1 – October 15 rather than its current season of September 1 – September 30. This would create a season of 45 days. The bag limit would remain the same, at 1 antlered bull by registration permit only.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? The current resident moose season in the Unit 18 Quinhagak Hunt area is September 1–September 30 with a bag limit of 1 antlered bull, by registration permit (RM617). There is no nonresident opportunity for moose in the RM617 hunt area.

There is a positive customary and traditional finding for moose in Unit 18, and an amount reasonably necessary for subsistence of 200–400 moose (5 AAC 99.025(8)).

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? This proposal would provide 15 additional days of resident hunting opportunity in the RM617 Quinhagak moose hunt area.

BACKGROUND: The hunt was extended by Emergency Order during the 2021-2022 moose season due to poor weather during the hunt, and during the 2023-2024 season due to an unavailability of gasoline in the village. Reported harvest has remained below the harvest objective for the 4-year history of the hunt.

The department and the Togiak National Wildlife Refuge (TNWR) collaborate to complete moose population surveys and administer cooperative state and federal moose hunts in this portion of Unit 18. There is only one survey area in this portion of Unit 18 which includes all drainages flowing into Kuskokwim Bay south of the Eek River Drainage and north of and including the Carter Bay Drainage. Population surveys completed in 2013 and 2018 indicate the moose population has grown rapidly in the last decade. Minimum count surveys found 30 moose in 2013, 173 moose in 2018, 236 moose in 2020 and 275 in 2023.

The majority of the moose in the hunt area are located on US Fish and Wildlife Service administered Federal lands. This area is less accessible to boat borne hunters in the fall, especially when water levels are low. A longer fall season would allow more flexibility for hunters to take advantage of conditions for safe travel and would align season dates with the neighboring RM615 Zone 2 to the north. Because weather patterns are difficult to predict, hunter success has been variable, with 16 moose harvested in 2019, 12 in 2020, 7 in 2021 and 9 in 2022. To date, permit availability has been limited to the villages of Eek and Quinhagak.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **SUPPORTS** this proposal to provide greater hunting opportunity. The department also recommends this proposal be amended by modifying the bag limit from 1 antlered bull to 1 bull moose, excluding male calves to align moose bag limits throughout the Unit 18.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal would not result in additional costs to the department.

Proposal 8 – 5 AAC 85.045 Hunting season and bag limits for moose. Lengthen the season for moose in Unit 18 for moose hunt RM617.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal would provide resident hunters with additional opportunity by extending the fall moose hunting season in a portion of Unit 18 by two weeks. If adopted, the hunting season would be open September 1 – October 15 rather than its current season of September 1 – September 30. This would create a season of 45 days. The bag limit would remain the same, at 1 antlered bull by registration permit only.

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The department and the Togiak National Wildlife Refuge (TNWR) collaborate to complete moose population surveys and administer cooperative state and federal moose hunts in this portion of Unit 18. There is only one survey area in this portion of Unit 18 which includes all drainages flowing into Kuskokwim Bay south of the Eek River Drainage and north of and including the Carter Bay Drainage. Population surveys completed in 2013 and 2018 indicate the moose population has grown rapidly in the last decade. Minimum count surveys found 30 moose in 2013, 173 moose in 2018, 236 moose in 2020 and 275 in 2023.

The majority of the moose in the hunt area are located on US Fish and Wildlife Service managed lands. This area is less accessible to boat borne hunters in the fall, especially when water levels are low. A longer fall season would allow more flexibility for hunters to take advantage of conditions for safe travel and would align season dates with the neighboring RM615 Zone 2 to the north. Because weather patterns are difficult to predict, hunter success has been variable, with 16 moose harvested in 2019, 12 in 2020, 7 in 2021 and 9 in 2022. To date, permit availability has been limited to the villages of Eek and Quinhagak.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department submitted and **SUPPORTS** this proposal to provide greater hunting opportunity. The department also recommends this proposal be amended by modifying the bag limit from 1 antlered bull to 1 bull moose, excluding male calves, to align moose bag limits throughout the Unit 18.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal would not result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 27 – 5 AAC 85.020 Hunting seasons and bag limits for brown bear. Align the resident season for brown bears in Units 22C, 22D, and 22E with those in Unit 22B.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? Adoption of this proposal would increase the resident season in Unit 22C, 22D, and 22E by two weeks to end on June 30 instead of June 15.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

Units and Bag Limits	Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Nonresident Open Season
(20)		
...		
Unit 22(B)		
RESIDENT HUNTERS:		
2 bears every regulatory year by registration permit only; or	Aug. 1 - June 30 (Subsistence hunt only)	
2 bears every regulatory year	Aug. 1 - June 30	
NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:		
1 bear every regulatory year by drawing permit only; up to 27 permits may be issued in combination with Unit 22(C)		Aug. 1 - June 15
Unit 22(C)		

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bear every regulatory year by registration permit only; or
Aug. 1 - Oct. 31
Apr. 1 - June 30
(Subsistence hunt only)

1 bear every regulatory year by registration permit only
Aug. 1 - Oct. 31
Apr. 1 - June 30

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bear every regulatory year by drawing permit only; up to 27 permits may be issued in combination with Unit 22(B)
Aug. 1 - Oct. 31
Apr. 1 - June 15

Remainder of Unit 22

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

2 bears every regulatory year by registration permit only; or
Aug. 1 - June 15
(Subsistence hunt only)

2 bears every regulatory year
Aug. 1 - June 15

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bear every regulatory year by drawing permit only; up to 21 permits may be issued
Aug. 1 - May 31

No resident locking tag is required. All bears harvested in the general hunt and all bears intended for sale must be sealed. Bears harvested in the subsistence registration hunt need only be sealed if removed from the unit.

5 AAC 92.200 allows for the skulls and hides with claws attached of brown bears harvested in areas where the bag limit is two bears per regulatory year to be sold under the conditions of a permit issued by the department.

The positive customary and traditional use finding for brown bears in Unit 22 is combined with Unit 21, with an Amount Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) of 20-25 animals.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? The proposal would align resident brown bear season dates among Unit 22B, 22C, 22D, and 22E and as a result would simplify hunting regulations for residents. Unit 22D and 22E would extend the end of the season by two weeks, from June 15 to June 30 and Unit 22C would remove the split season date. It is possible a few more bears may be harvested by extending the season in Units 22D and 22E. Unit 22C is managed under registration permit, RB670, with an announced harvest quota and season will be closed by emergency order when quota is reached.

BACKGROUND: In the past 20 years brown bear regulations across Unit 22 have been incrementally liberalized through extended seasons, increased nonresident permits, and increased bag limits. Most recently in 2020, the Board extended the season in Units 22D and 22E from May 1 to June 15. This season extension created a mismatch of open season dates between adjacent units and caused unnecessary confusion for hunters.

Very little brown bear harvest has occurred since the Board adopted the proposal in 2020 to extend the open season for residents into the month of June in Units 22D and 22E. Sealing records indicate from RY2020 – RY2022 harvest in June ranges from 0-2 bears annually. Aligning the seasons is not likely to have any biological impact on the brown bear population. The management objective of having a 3-year mean annual reported harvest of at least 50% males has been achieved for the past 20 years.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department submitted and **SUPPORTS** this proposal to align season dates to alleviate confusion in the hunting regulations. There is no biological concern due to the very low harvest of brown bears occurring in June. Extending the season will also give residents the opportunity to harvest bears that would otherwise be taken in defense of life and property (DLP), which requires the hide and skull must be surrendered to the state. The department will also monitor any increase in harvest for potential conservation concerns.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 28 – 5 AAC 85.020. Hunting seasons and bag limits for brown bear. Change Unit 22D and 22E nonresident brown bear drawing permit, DB690, to general season.

PROPOSED BY: Justin Horton

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal would change the nonresident hunting opportunity from a drawing permit to a general season hunt.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? Current nonresident brown bear hunting under DB690, in Unit 22D and 22E, is 1 bear every regulatory year by draw permit only; up to

21 permits may be issued, Aug 1. – May 31. Units 22D and 22E are in the remainder of Unit 22, complete regulations are below.

Units and Bag Limits	Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Nonresident Open Season
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(20)

...

Remainder of Unit 22

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

2 bears every regulatory year by registration permit only; or

Aug. 1 - June 15
(Subsistence hunt only)

2 bears every regulatory year

Aug. 1 - June 15

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bear every regulatory year by drawing permit only; up to 21 permits may be issued

Aug. 1 - May 31

No resident locking tag is required. All bears harvested in the general hunt and all bears intended for sale must be sealed. Bears harvested in the subsistence registration hunt need only be sealed if removed from the unit.

5 AAC 92.200 allows for the skulls and hides with claws attached of brown bears harvested in areas where the bag limit is two bears per regulatory year to be sold under the conditions of a permit issued by the department.

The positive customary and traditional use finding for brown bears in Unit 22 is combined with Unit 21, with an Amount Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) of 20-25 animals.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If this proposal were adopted there could be an increase in brown bear harvest in Unit 22D and 22E as brown bear harvest by nonresidents would no longer be regulated through the number of permits issued.

BACKGROUND: In the past 20 years brown bear regulations across Unit 22 have been incrementally liberalized through extended season, increased bag limits, and increased nonresident permits.

Nonresident brown bear hunting in Unit 22D and 22E is currently administered under draw permit DB690 with up to 21 permits available to be issued annually. DB690 has had incremental increases in the number of permits available. In regulatory year (RY)2000 the permits increased from 5 to 8, in RY2002 permits increased to 12, and in RY2016 the permits increased to 21. Since the last increase in permits in RY2016, the hunt has been undersubscribed 57% of the time and only during RY2016, RY2017, and RY2022 has the total number of permits been issued. DB690 has an average hunter participation of 61% and an average hunter success of 28% during the last 10 regulatory years (RY2013-RY2022). Most brown bears taken under a DB690 permit are harvested in Unit 22E; 75% (range 0-10 bears) of the harvest comes from Unit 22E, with Unit 22D making up the remaining 25% (range 0-4 bears) during RY2013-RY2022.

The 5-year average combined resident and nonresident brown bear harvest in Unit 22E is 3 bears annually (range 0-5) which made up 4% of Unit 22 harvest, RY2018-RY2022. Sealing records indicate that the 5-year average brown bear harvest in Unit 22B made up 40%, Unit 22C made up 40%, and Unit 22D made up 17%. Nonresident harvest only makes up 14% (range 4-19) of the harvest within Unit 22, RY2018-RY2022. Sealing records indicate that cumulative harvest in Unit 22 has successfully met management objective of 50% sows or less, with a 5-year average of 42% sow harvest, RY2018-RY2022.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **OPPOSES** changing the hunt structure, as general season would make it challenging to regulate brown bear harvest within Unit 22D and 22E. If the board intends to increase nonresident hunting opportunity, the department recommends the additional opportunity be provided through a small incremental change to increase the number to nonresident brown bear hunters by increasing the number of permits available for DB690 from the current 21 permits available to up to 40 permits.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional cost to the department.

PROPOSAL 29 –5 AAC 85.020. Hunting seasons and bag limits for brown bear. Increase the number of brown bear drawing permits available in Unit 22B for nonresident hunt DB685 to 40 permits or change DB685 to a registration permit.

PROPOSED BY: James Smith

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal provides two different options, the first of which is to increase the number of drawing permits for DB685 from 27 to 40. The

second option is to separate Units 22B and 22C, and provide the hunting opportunity for Unit 22B through a registration permit only.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? The current nonresident brown bear hunting regulations within Units 22B and 22C is a drawing permit (DB685) with a bag limit of 1 bear every regulatory year; up to 27 permits may be issued in combination for Units 22B and 22C combined.

Units and Bag Limits	Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Nonresident Open Season
(20)		
...		
Unit 22(B)		
RESIDENT HUNTERS: 2 bears every regulatory year by registration permit only; or	Aug. 1 - June 30 (Subsistence hunt only)	
2 bears every regulatory year	Aug. 1 - June 30	
NONRESIDENT HUNTERS: 1 bear every regulatory year by drawing permit only; up to 27 permits may be issued in combination with Unit 22(C)		Aug. 1 - June 15
Unit 22(C)		
RESIDENT HUNTERS: 1 bear every regulatory year by registration permit only; or	Aug. 1 - Oct. 31 Apr. 1 - June 30 (Subsistence hunt only)	
1 bear every regulatory year by registration permit only	Aug. 1 - Oct. 31 Apr. 1 - June 30	
NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:		

1 bear every regulatory year by drawing permit only; up to 27 permits may be issued in combination with Unit 22(B)

Aug. 1 - Oct. 31
Apr. 1 - June 15

No resident locking tag is required. All bears harvested in the general hunt and all bears intended for sale must be sealed. Bears harvested in the subsistence registration hunt need only be sealed if removed from the unit.

5 AAC 92.200 allows for the skulls and hides with claws attached of brown bears harvested in areas where the bag limit is two bears per regulatory year to be sold under the conditions of a permit issued by the department.

The positive customary and traditional use finding for brown bears in Unit 22 is combined with Unit 21, with an Amount Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) of 20-25 animals.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If the board increases the number of permits available for DB685 there could be an increase in brown bear harvest within Units 22B and 22C. If the board chooses to provide nonresident hunting opportunity in Unit 22B through a registration permit and not a drawing permit, additional harvest can be expected in Unit 22B only. If either option is adopted there would be no change to the already liberal resident opportunity, however nonresidents would have a more accessible opportunity to harvest brown bears in Unit 22B.

BACKGROUND: In the past 20 years brown bear regulations across Unit 22 have been incrementally liberalized through extended season, increased bag limits, and increased nonresident permits.

Nonresident brown bear hunting in Units 22B and 22C is currently administered under draw permit DB685 with up to 27 permits available to be issued annually. DB685 has historically been undersubscribed in the past ten years and only twice (RY15 and RY22) has the total number of permits been issued. DB685 has an average hunter participation of 74% and an average hunter success of 64% during the last 10 regulatory years (RY13-RY22).

The majority of hunters that participate in the DB685 hunt ultimately harvest their brown bear in Unit 22B. A limited number of brown bears are harvested under the DB685 permit in Unit 22C, with an average of 1 bear harvested (range 0-3) during RY13-RY22.

Sealing records indicate that the biological data of brown bears harvested by residents and nonresidents in Unit 22B are similar. Nonresident sealing records from brown bears that have been harvested in Units 22B and 22C during the last 10-year reporting period indicate an average sow skull size of 20.2 inches and a boar skull size of 22.8 inches and suggests that skull size has remained stable over the last ten years. Resident sealing records from brown bears that have been

harvested out of GMU 22B indicate an average sow skull size of 20.2 inches and a boar skull size of 22.4 inches, from RY13-RY22 and data suggests that skull size has remained stable over the last ten years. Sealing records also indicate the average number of brown bears harvested in Unit 22B is 26 brown bears, ranging from 14-39 bears sealed from RY13-RY22. Brown bear sow harvest makes up approximately 30% of the harvest for both residents and nonresidents over the last ten years, which is consistent with the management objective of 50% sow harvest or less. In RY 22 the department closed nonresident hunt DB684 and resident hunt RB670 by emergency order on May 11, 2023 because the combined fall and spring reported harvest from Unit 22C was 25 bears, which exceeded historic harvest levels.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **SUPPORTS** additional opportunity for hunters to harvest bears in Unit 22B. If the board intends to allow for additional opportunity for nonresidents to take bears in Unit 22B, the department recommends it be done by allowing up to 40 permits to be issued for DB685. While a registration permit with established reporting requirements provides the department with the necessary tools to manage the Unit 22B bear harvest, the department prefers small incremental changes to brown bear hunts in order to assess additional effort and harvest should it occur.

Unit 22C is more accessible than 22B and as a result more harvest occurs there than in Unit 22B. The department expects future harvest to be at or near historic averages so additional harvest opportunity in Unit 22C would be counter to the management objectives. The department will continue to monitor the harvest and may close the Unit 22C portion of the hunt by emergency order if the harvest exceeds historic averages.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 32 - 5 AAC 92.540. Controlled use areas. Change the boundary of the Anaktuvuk Pass Controlled Use Area.

PROPOSED BY: North Slope Advisory Committee

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? If adopted, this proposal would expand the current boundaries of the Anaktuvuk Pass (AKP) Controlled Use Area (CUA) and allow the City of AKP, the Nunamiut Corporation and the Nagsragmiut tribe to set the dates that the CUA is in effect. The AKP CUA would be in effect from July 15 until the city of Anaktuvuk Pass, the Nunamiut Corporation, and the Naqsragsmiut tribe determine that the fall migration trail has been laid and the caribou are migrating through Anaktuvuk Pass.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? Currently, the AKP Controlled Use Area is defined as that portion of Unit 26A bounded by a line beginning at 153° 30' W. long.

on the game management boundary between Units 24 and 26A, north along 153° 30' W. long. to 69° N. lat., east along 69° N. lat. to 152° 10' W. long., south along 152° 10' W. long. to 68° 30' N. lat., east along 68° 30' N. lat. to 150° 40' W. long., south along 150° 40' W. long. to the game management boundary between Units 24 and 26A, and westerly along the game management unit boundary to the point of origin at 153° 30' W. long. From Aug 15 - Oct 15, the area is closed to the use of aircraft for caribou hunting, including transportation of caribou hunters, their hunting gear, and/or parts of caribou. However, this does not apply to transportation of caribou hunters, their gear, or caribou parts by aircraft between publicly owned airports in the controlled use area.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for caribou in Unit 26. The combined ANS for Units 21, 22, 23, 24 and 26 for Western Arctic Herd and Teshekpuk Lake Herd caribou is 8,000-12,000 animals.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE

ADOPTED? Adoption of this proposal would increase the size the AKP Controlled Use Area from the black outlined area to the orange outlined area (Fig. 1). It would make any aircraft-based caribou, sheep, bear and furbearer hunting subject to emergency order opening in the CUA. It would give residents of AKP discretion when aerial based caribou hunting seasons can occur, aligning with the traditional hunting practice of letting the lead caribou pass and allowing migration routes to become established before aerial based hunting begins.

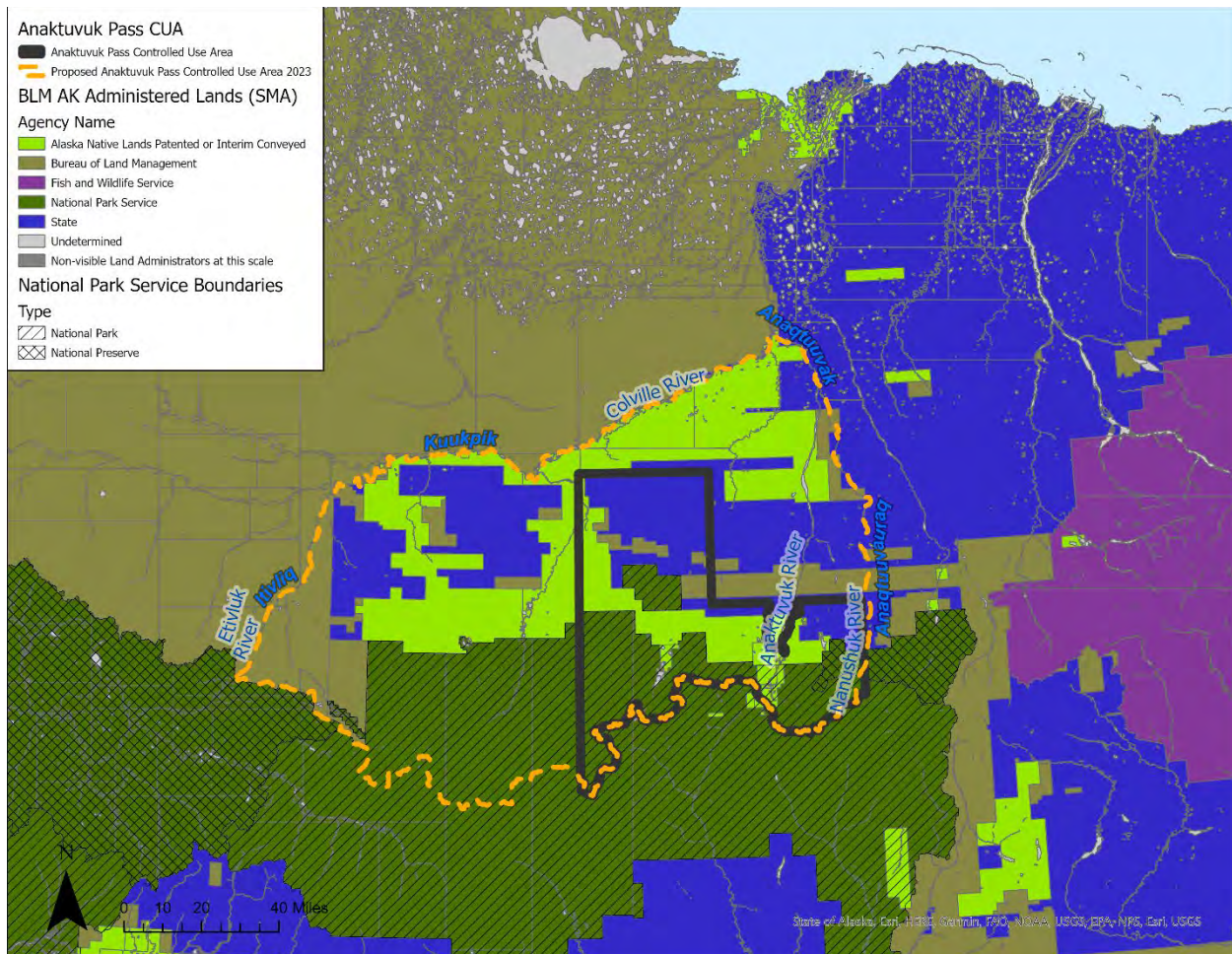


Figure 1. Anaktuvuk Pass Controlled use area. The current area is outlined in black, and the proposed controlled use area is outlined in dashed orange.

BACKGROUND: Caribou is a keystone, or primary, wild food resource for residents of Anaktuvuk Pass. According to household survey data from 13 different study years between 1990-2014 available on the community subsistence information system (CSIS), residents of Anaktuvuk Pass harvest between 210 -770 caribou each year. Data from the most recent harvest and use surveys in Anaktuvuk Pass indicate that in 2014 residents harvested an estimated 770 caribou, which contributed about 330 lbs. of edible weight per capita to local diets. Harvest success is dependent on the community’s access to the herd, and although hunters report harvesting many caribou in August, much of the annual harvest takes place during the winter and spring months when overland travel is improved by snow cover. In 2014, hunters reported taking 135 caribou in August, but the remaining 635 animals were harvested throughout the year in every month except June.

Three caribou herds utilize the CUA: the Western Arctic, Central Arctic, and Teshekpuk. The proportion and access to each of the herds changes seasonally and annually, often times

dramatically. Anaktuvuk Pass residents have stated that 10 years ago they would have been able to harvest large numbers of caribou in August as indicated by household surveys. However, in recent years, the migration of the Western Arctic and Teshekpuk caribou herds often has not reached Anaktuvuk Pass until October. Studies and observations indicate the migrations are prone to variability but are generally trending to later in the year (Cameron et al. 2021).

The original AKP CUA was designed to address subsistence hunter concerns about aircraft use disrupting the caribou migration and therefore caribou hunting success of Anaktuvuk Pass hunters. The CUA was adopted by the BOG in November 2005 and closed the Anaktuvuk River drainage from Aug 15-Oct 15 to transport of caribou, hunters, hunting gear and caribou parts. It went into effect in regulatory year (RY) 06-07 and had a sunset date of July 1, 2008. A proposal was submitted by the North Slope Borough Fish and Game Management committee in 2007 to modify the boundary of the CUA to a 25-mile radius around Anaktuvuk Pass and that proposal was amended to the current CUA boundary (Figure 1) and adopted by the BOG. The CUA was made permanent, and the sunset period was eliminated. The CUA boundary has remained unchanged since 2008. There has been much discussion since then about remaining impacts of aircraft on the fall caribou migration. Residents indicate that aircraft presence in the area during the onset of the fall migration may deflect those animals that come through first. Letting the lead caribou pass is widely accepted traditional knowledge; the first caribou set the trail for those that follow and changes to their behavior have the potential to change the route and/or the timing of the migration. Anaktuvuk Pass residents are concerned about the caribou migration arriving later in the season after the bulls have rutted and the meat is less desirable. Bulls are generally the preferred animal to take in the fall time prior to the rut because they are larger, so they provide more meat per animal and are fatter than females. There are three registered guides that operate in the proposed CUA. One of the guides operates in two different areas. Most of the aircraft-based caribou harvest that occurs in the proposed CUA is either in the southwestern corner of the CUA on BLM lands or on the northeastern corner of the proposed CUA.

This proposal seeks to restrict all aircraft being utilized for hunting caribou, sheep, furbearers, and bears. Aircraft is used more commonly for caribou than any other animal in the CUA. There are an average of 60 hunters per year that utilize aircraft for hunting caribou in the proposed CUA. Table 1 summarizes the successful harvest of bears, furbearers, caribou and sheep from 2018-2022.

Table. 1. Harvest of Brown Bear, Wolves, Wolverines, Caribou, Sheep and lynx according to sealing records, RC907 permits, general season sheep and caribou harvest tickets 2018-2022 that utilized aircraft and were successful.

Species	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Brown Bear	6	0	0	0	0
Wolves	2	0	0	1	0
Wolverine		0	0		1

Caribou	54	47	18	32	34
Sheep	0	0	0	0	2
Lynx	0	0	0	0	0

Residents of Anaktuvuk Pass have expressed that their main concern is that aircraft are disrupting caribou migration. Most caribou hunters utilizing aircraft took animals from three subunit 26A uniform coding units (UCUs): 1303, 901 and 801 (Fig. 2). Between 2018-2022, an average of 131 caribou hunters use aircraft to support their hunt in the proposed CUA; an average of 110 (84%) were successful (2018-2022).

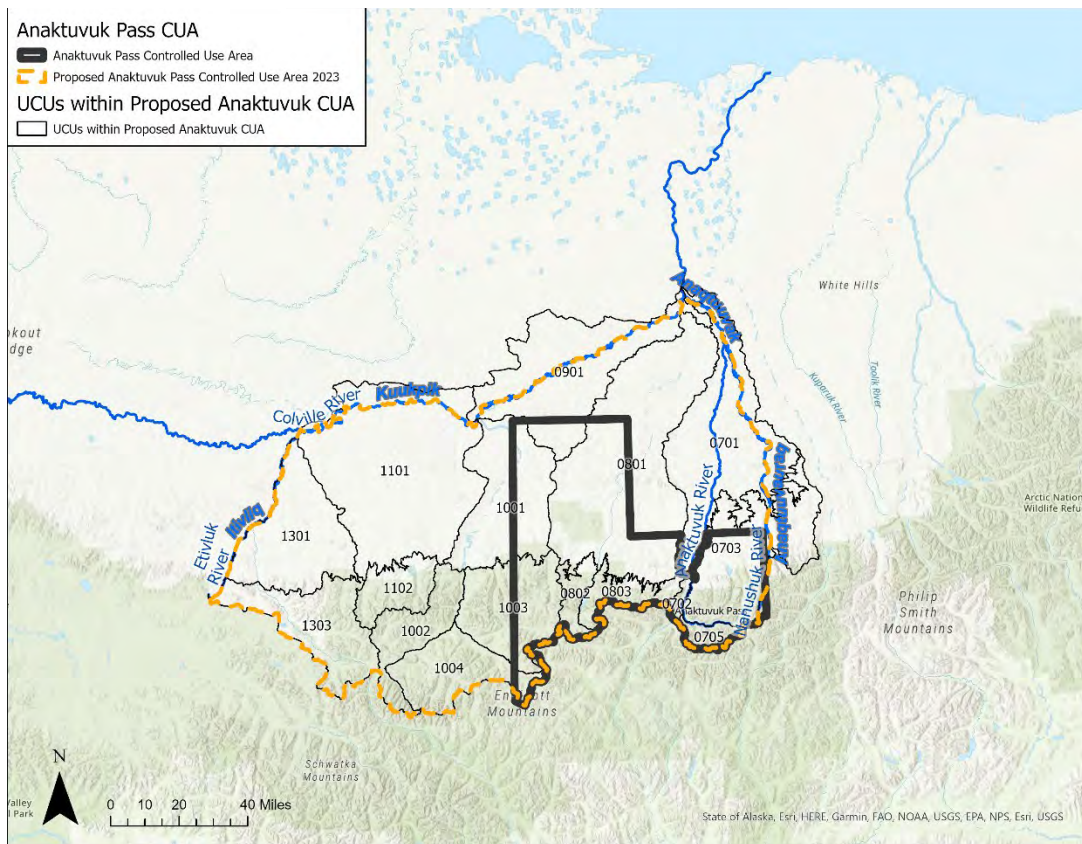


Figure 2. Subunit areas included in the proposed CUA.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The Board of Game does not have the authority to delegate the department’s management of the resource. The department is NEUTRAL on the allocative aspects of the proposal.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs for the department.

PROPOSAL 33 - 5 AAC 85.055. Hunting seasons and bag limits for Dall sheep. Reduce the Unit 26A sheep bag limit for residents.

PROPOSED BY: Spencer Pape, Seth Kroenke, Jeff Rost, and Jon Burrows

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal would reduce the Unit 26A sheep bag limit for residents to one ram with full-curl horn or larger every four regulatory years.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

Units and Bag Limits	Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Nonresident Open Season
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Unit 26(A), that portion west of the Etivluk River drainage

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 sheep by registration permit only; or

No open season.
(Subsistence hunt only)

1 ram with full-curl horn or larger by drawing permit only, provided that the harvestable surplus is greater than 9 sheep in combination with that portion of Unit 23 in the DeLong Mountains

No open season.

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 ram will full-curl horn or larger by drawing permit only, every 4 regulatory years, provided that the harvestable surplus is greater than 9 sheep in combination with that portion of Unit 23 in the DeLong Mountains

No open season.

Unit 26(A), that portion east of and including the Etivluk

River drainage, excluding
Gates of the Arctic National
Park

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

3 sheep by registration
permit only; or Aug. 1 - Apr. 30
(Subsistence hunt only)

1 ram with full-curl horn or
larger, by youth hunt only; or Aug. 1 - Aug. 5

1 ram with full-curl horn or
larger Aug. 10 - Sept. 20

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 ram with full-curl horn or
larger, every 4 regulatory
years, by youth hunt only; or Aug. 1 - Aug. 5

1 ram with full-curl horn or
larger, every 4 regulatory
years; Aug. 10 - Sept. 20

Unit 26(A), that portion within
the Gates of the Arctic Na-
tional Park

3 sheep Aug. 1 - Apr. 30 No open season.

...

Remainder of Units 26(A) and
26(B)

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 ram with full-curl horn or
larger by youth hunt only; or Aug. 1 - Aug. 5

1 ram with full-curl horn or
larger Aug. 10 - Sept. 20

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 ram with full-curl horn or larger, every 4 regulatory years, by youth hunt only; or

Aug. 1 - Aug. 5

1 ram with full-curl horn or larger, every 4 regulatory years

Aug. 10 - Sept. 20

These is a positive customary and traditional use finding (C&T) for Dall Sheep for Unit 26A. Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) are as follows:

- Units 23 and 26A west of the Etuvluk River (DeLong Mountains): 0-9

- Units 23 and 26A east of the Etuvluk River (Schwatka Mountains): 2-4

- GMUs 23, 24, 25A, and 26 (Brooks Range): 75-125

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE

ADOPTED? If adopted this proposal will reduce hunting opportunity in hunts with a bag limit greater than one full-curl ram by eliminating any sheep bag limits and restricting successful hunters to 1 ram every 4 years.

BACKGROUND: In 2014 all hunts in the Baird and De Long Mountains (RS388, RS389, DS384 and the general season harvest ticket hunts) were closed by emergency order (Figure 1).

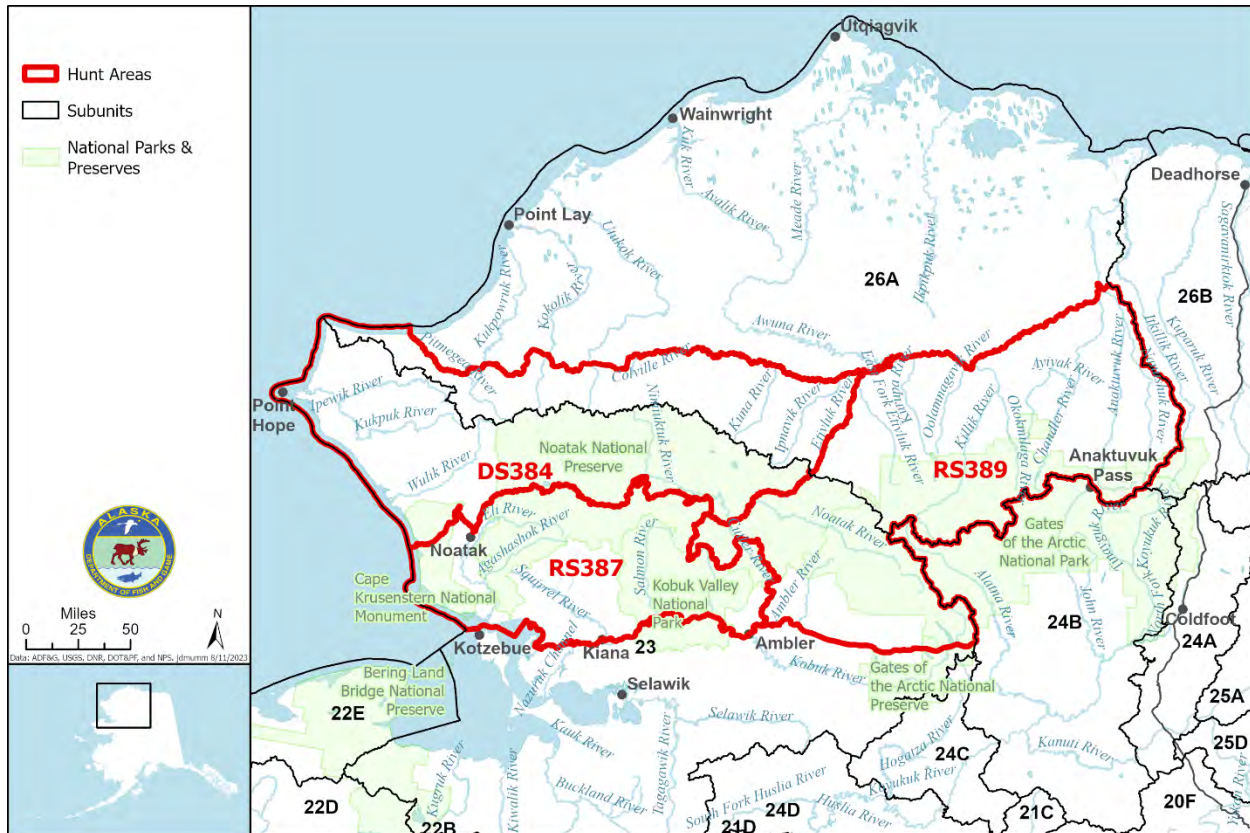


Figure 1. The Unit 26A and Unit 23 hunts that were closed in 2014 and 2015 along with their corresponding general season hunts. RS388 has the same hunt area as DS384.

In 2015 the Board of Game adopted a proposal to close RS389, RS387 and DS384 (RS388 same hunt area) and the corresponding general season hunts in units 26A and 23 to allow the sheep population to recover after extensive declines were documented in 2014 and 2015 due to icing events that reduced the population by 50-80%. Between 2018-2022 the sheep harvest of all state managed hunts combined in Unit 26A averaged about 0.4 sheep per year. From 2013-2017 an average of 0.8 sheep were harvested per year. All the state jurisdiction hunts that are open have full-curl ram bag limits except for the hunt that occurs on private lands within the Gates of the Arctic National Park, which has a bag limit of 3 sheep per year.

Dall sheep in this area are managed using the conservative full-curl ram harvest management strategy. The full-curl strategy is conservative because it focuses harvest pressure on males only, and a small segment of the population. Limiting harvest to males-only reduces the impact of harvest on the overall population because male survival rates have a drastically lower impact on population growth compared to female survival rates. Finally, the full-curl strategy is extremely conservative because full-curl animals compose a very small proportion of most sheep populations. As a result, the number of animals that are legally available to hunters is a small proportion of the population and this imposes a self-limit on overharvest of the population. Taken collectively, the full-curl harvest strategy limits harvest to only older-aged rams.

Dall Sheep are harvested for subsistence uses in Unit 26 both by local residents from Anaktuvuk Pass and Kaktovik, as well by other Alaskans from across the state. The C&T worksheet for Dall Sheep in Unit 26 from 1987, describes annual harvest patterns that may be inconsistent with the proposed change limiting harvest to every four years. The worksheet notes that “sheep hunting is a community activity, where extended family groups often travel and hunt together.” Additionally, “sheep hunters harvest sheep in late fall (late October through late November) and in early spring (March) in conjunction with caribou and furbearer hunters. This seasonal round has been in effect for some time and is deeply engrained in local hunt planning.”

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department is **NEUTRAL** on this proposal. Adoption of the proposal will have little impact because hunters report harvesting less than one sheep per year annually in the area. Adoption of the proposal would change the bag limit from one sheep per year to one sheep every four years, which could potentially result in up to a 75% reduction in opportunity, and the board will need to determine if the change in bag limit will continue to provide for a reasonable opportunity of success in harvesting a sheep for subsistence purposes.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs for the department.

PROPOSAL 35 – 5 AAC 85.050(3) Hunting seasons and bag limits for muskoxen. Change the Unit 26A and 26B Tier II permit hunt area boundaries.

PROPOSED BY: North Slope Advisory Committee

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? If adopted, this proposal would change the Unit 26A and 26B muskoxen hunt area boundary to match the federal muskox and moose hunt boundaries and expand the state TX109 and TX108 hunt areas.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

Unit and location	Resident open season (Subsistence and general hunts)	Nonresident open season
Units 26A, that portion west of the Topagoruk River following 156° W. Long. South to the Unit 26A border	Aug. 1–Mar. 15 (Subsistence hunt only)	No open season
1 musk ox by Tier II subsistence permit (TX109) only; up to 15 permits may be issued		
Units 26A that portion east of the Topagoruk River following 156° W. Long. South to the Unit 26A border, and 26B that portion west of the Dalton Highway	Aug. 1–Mar. 31 (Subsistence hunt only)	No open season
1 musk ox by Tier II subsistence permit (TX108) only; up to 20 musk oxen may be taken (<i>Permits were issued for east of longitude 153 and west of DHCMA</i>)		
Unit 26B, that portion east of the Dalton Highway	Season to be announced (Subsistence hunt only)	No open season
1 musk ox by Tier I permit only (<i>Permits were issued east of the DHCMA</i>)		
or		
1 bull by drawing permit only if the harvestable surplus is greater than 4 musk oxen; up to 5 musk oxen may be taken	Sept. 20–Oct. 10 Mar 10–Mar. 30	No open season

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding (C&T) for muskoxen in Unit 23, that portion north and west of the Kobuk River drainage, and that portion of Unit 26A west of the Topagoruk River following 156°00' W longitude South to the Unit 26A border (the Cape Thompson population) with an Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) range of 18-22 animals.

There is a positive C&T finding for muskoxen in Unit 26A that portion east of the Topagoruk River following 156°00' W longitude South to the Unit 26A border, and Unit 26B, that portion west of the Dalton Highway Corridor with an ANS of 20 muskoxen.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? This proposal would align state and federal muskox hunt boundaries. It would also expand the two state hunt areas. The new language for each hunt area would be:

TX108 - Unit 26A East and 26B West, that portion from West of the Dalton Highway to the eastern shore of Admiralty Bay where the Alaktak River enters, following the Alaktak River to 155°00' W longitude south to the Unit 26A border.

TX109 – Unit 26A, that portion west of the eastern shore of Admiralty Bay where the Alaktak River drains, following the Alaktak River to 155°00' W longitude south to the Units 26A border.

The federal boundary is as follows: Unit 26A, that portion west of the eastern shore of Admiralty Bay where the Alaktak River drains, following the Alaktak River to 155°00' W longitude south to the Units 26A border.

BACKGROUND: Muskoxen were reintroduced to the North Slope in 1969 and again in 1970. The population increased through the mid-1990s to a high of 500–650 muskoxen in Units 26B and 26C. The population then declined and by 2004 had fallen below the management objective of 300 muskoxen and the hunts were cancelled. Since 2004, the population has slowly grown, and by 2018 numbers were just above the 300 muskoxen management objective. Since 2018 the population has continued to slowly grow and there are now between 340 and 380 muskoxen. Starting in regulatory year (RY) 23 hunting was reinstated following the 2004 hunt structure. This included 4 Tier II permits, 4 registration subsistence permits, and 4 drawing permits.

Muskoxen were also introduced to Unit 23 in 1970, and those animals are now referred to as the Cape Thompson population. Since then, the population has grown and expanded its range from the Cape Krusenstern core area in Unit 23 into Unit 26A with periodic sightings of muskoxen in Wainwright, Point Lay, and Atkasuk. The Cape Thompson muskoxen population within the Unit 23 core area grew approximately 8% annually between their reintroduction in 1970 through 1998. Population growth within the core area slowed to 2% annually between 1998–2005 (Dau 2005, Hughes 2015) and decreased annually between 2005–2018. The population wide estimate including both 26A and 23 has grown from 556 to 911 between 2016 and 2020, respectively. The 2020 Cape Thompson survey estimated 455 muskoxen in 26A with 95% CI (350-631).

In 2022, the BOG adopted a proposal to open the Western portion of 26A to a Tier II hunt TX109. Applications were accepted during the November/December 2022 application period and the first season of the TX109 was August 1, 2023-March 15, 2024. A federal muskoxen permit was established for hunting muskoxen in the summer of 2022 and there was an open season for six permits issued through a lottery system. One muskoxen was taken under the new federal permit during the 2022 season. In 2023, three permits were issued for TX109, and 3 permits were issued under the federal hunt which is administered by the Bureau of Land Management.

From 1998-2020, 22 muskoxen were harvested in western 26A. Those animals were taken as incidental or stranded animals under 5 AAC 92.046.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **SUPPORTS** this proposal to alleviate hunter confusion and to increase hunt area and opportunity by aligning state and federal hunt boundaries and there are no biological concerns associated with the boundary change. Adoption of the proposal will cause hunt area boundaries to be misaligned with existing customary and traditional use determination areas in 5 AAC 99.025, and the department recommends the board amend the proposal to align those boundaries with the hunt area.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal would not result in additional costs for the department.

PROPOSAL 40 – 5 AAC 85.020 (21). Hunting seasons and bag limits for brown bears. Lengthen the brown bear season for residents to no closed season.

PROPOSED BY: Kotzebue Fish and Game Advisory Committee

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? The proposal would extend the Unit 23 resident brown bear subsistence and general hunt season by two months, from August 1 - May 31 to July 1 – June 30.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

Unit and Bag Limits	Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Nonresident Open Season
<i>Unit 23</i>		
RESIDENT HUNTERS:		
2 bears per regulatory year by registration permit; or	1 Aug – 31 May (Subsistence hunt)	
2 bears per regulatory year	1 Aug – 31 May	
NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:		
1 bear every regulatory year by drawing permit only; up to 68 permits may be issued; or		Aug. 1 – Oct. 31
1 bear every regulatory year by registration permit only		Apr. 15 – May 31
		Aug. 10 – June 30

Unit and Bag Limits	Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Nonresident Open Season
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Apr. 15 – May 31

No resident locking tag is required. All bears harvested in the general hunt and all bears intended for sale must be sealed. Bears harvested in the subsistence registration hunt need only be sealed if removed from the unit.

5 AAC 92.200 allows for the skulls and hides with claws attached of brown bears harvested in areas where the bag limit is two bears per regulatory year to be sold under the conditions of a permit issued by the department.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for brown bears in Unit 23, 24, and 26 with a combined Amount Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) of 25-35 animals.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If the proposal were adopted, it would provide additional resident harvest opportunity during the months of June and July, effectively, there would be no closed season.

BACKGROUND: Unit 23 brown bear hunting has been incrementally liberalized by the BOG over the years, primarily due to perceived increases in bear abundance, declines in ungulate abundance, and desires to minimize human-bear conflicts. In the early 1970s, the resident bag limit was 1 bear every 4 regulatory years. By regulatory year (RY) 1998, the resident season was extended from short fall and spring seasons to a single season running from September 1- May 31 and by RY00 the resident bag limit was changed to 1 bear every regulatory year. The 2002, the BOG increased the resident season an additional month to August 1- May 31, and allowed nonresident hunters a 1 bear every regulatory year bag limit. In RY17 the resident bag limit was increased to two bears per regulatory year and allowed for the sale of hide and skull; resident season length and bag limit have remained the same since.

The mean annual harvest of brown bears for RY13-RY22 was 54 bears (range: 36-84). Harvest has remained relatively consistent through time, despite increased harvest opportunity for both resident and nonresidents, with the previous 10-year annual average also being 54 bears (RY03-12, range: 33-76). On average, 69% of the 10-year annual harvest was comprised of males (RY13-22, range: 62%-78%) with the prior 10-year average being 72% male (RY03-12, range: 58%-82%). The proportion of males in the total Unit 23 harvest shows a relatively stable or slightly declining trend but has generally remained well above the management goal of 50%.

Quantitative population data for brown bears in the unit is minimal with the most recent density estimates from 2016 and 2017 of the upper and lower Noatak River subareas, respectively. The National Park Service, with assistance from the department, detected 100 bear groups in the lower Noatak subarea and produced an estimated bear density of 49.2 (95% CI: 40.0-61.6) independent bears/1000km²(386mi²). The Upper Noatak subarea survey detected 59 bear groups and estimated independent bear densities of 24.9 (95% CI: 19.4-32.6) per 1000km²(386mi²).

Without robust population estimates, it is difficult to conclude with certainty how brown bear abundance has trended through time and regulation change. However, available harvest data and public commentary lend support to a stable or generally increasing population and that present harvest levels continue to remain sustainable. Accessibility is limited in much of the unit and essentially provides vast areas of protected habitat which likely act as “source” areas for areas that are more heavily harvested. Restrictions remain in place on the harvest of cubs, and sows with cubs, and continue to protect that portion of the population.

Brown bears remain a source of conflict for local residents while at remote camps. A handful of bears are killed in Defense of Life and Property (DLP) during June and July when residents are typically out fishing or berry picking but the resident bear season is closed. Several individuals have expressed their frustration at having to salvage the hide and skull only to surrender it to the State, and that they would prefer to see a year-round resident season that would allow for legal harvest of bears during this time of increased subsistence activity.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **SUPPORTS** this proposal to increase opportunity because a substantial increase is not expected from the proposed season expansion and there is no conservation concern for the bear population in Unit 23. Extending the season will also give residents the opportunity to harvest bears that would otherwise be taken in DLP. The department will also monitor any increase in harvest for potential conservation concerns.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional cost to the public or department.

PROPOSAL 41 – 5 AAC 85.020 (21). Hunting seasons and bag limits for brown bears. Lengthen the brown bear season for residents to no closed season.

PROPOSED BY: John Chase

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? The proposal would extend the Unit 23 resident brown bear subsistence and general hunt season by two months, from August 1 – May 31 to July 1 – June 30.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

Unit and Bag Limits	Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Nonresident Open Season
<i>Unit 23</i>		
RESIDENT HUNTERS: 2 bears per regulatory year by registration permit; or	1 Aug – 31 May (Subsistence hunt)	
2 bears per regulatory year	1 Aug – 31 May	

Unit and Bag Limits	Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Nonresident Open Season
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**NONRESIDENT
HUNTERS:**

1 bear every regulatory year
by drawing permit only; up to
68 permits may be issued; or

1 bear every regulatory year
by registration permit only

Aug. 1 – Oct. 31
Apr. 15 – May 31

Aug. 10 – June 30
Apr. 15 – May 31

No resident locking tag is required. All bears harvested in the general hunt and all bears intended for sale must be sealed. Bears harvested in the subsistence registration hunt need only be sealed if removed from the unit.

5 AAC 92.200 allows for the skulls and hides with claws attached of brown bears harvested in areas where the bag limit is two bears per regulatory year to be sold under the conditions of a permit issued by the department.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for brown bears in Unit 23, 24, and 26 with a combined Amount Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) of 25-35 animals.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If the proposal were adopted, it would provide additional resident harvest opportunity during the months of June and July, effectively, there would be no closed season.

BACKGROUND: Unit 23 brown bear hunting has been incrementally liberalized by the BOG over the years, primarily due to perceived increases in bear abundance, declines in ungulate abundance, and desires to minimize human-bear conflicts. In the early 1970s, the resident bag limit was 1 bear every 4 regulatory years. By regulatory year (RY) 1998, the resident season was extended from short fall and spring seasons to a single season running from September 1- May 31 and by RY00 the resident bag limit was changed to 1 bear every regulatory year. The 2002, the BOG increased the resident season an additional month to August 1- May 31, and allowed nonresident hunters a 1 bear every regulatory year bag limit. In RY17 the resident bag limit was increased to two bears per regulatory year and allowed for the sale of hide and skull; resident season length and bag limit have remained the same since.

The mean annual harvest of brown bears for RY13-RY22 was 54 bears (range: 36-84). Harvest has remained relatively consistent through time, despite increased harvest opportunity for both resident and nonresidents, with the previous 10-year annual average also being 54 bears (RY03-

12, range: 33-76). On average, 69% of the 10-year annual harvest was comprised of males (RY13-22, range: 62%-78%) with the prior 10-year average being 72% male (RY03-12, range: 58%-82%). The proportion of males in the total Unit 23 harvest shows a relatively stable or slightly declining trend but has generally remained well above the management goal of 50%.

Quantitative population data for brown bears in the unit is minimal with the most recent density estimates from 2016 and 2017 of the upper and lower Noatak River subareas, respectively. The National Park Service, with assistance from ADFG, detected 100 bear groups in the lower Noatak subarea and produced an estimated bear density of 49.2 (95% CI: 40.0-61.6) independent bears/1000km²(386mi²). The Upper Noatak subarea survey detected 59 bear groups and estimated independent bear densities of 24.9 (95% CI: 19.4-32.6) per 1000km²(386mi²).

Without robust population estimates, it is difficult to conclude with certainty how brown bear abundance has trended through time and regulation change. However, available harvest data and public commentary lend support to a stable or generally increasing population and that present harvest levels continue to remain sustainable. Accessibility is limited in much of the unit and essentially provides vast areas of protected habitat which likely act as “source” areas for areas that are more heavily harvested. Restrictions remain in place on the harvest of cubs, and sows with cubs, and continue to protect that portion of the population.

Brown bears remain a source of conflict for local residents while at remote camps. A handful of bears are killed in Defense of Life and Property (DLP) during June and July when residents are typically out fishing or berry picking but the resident bear season is closed. Several individuals have expressed their frustration at having to salvage the hide and skull only to surrender it to the State, and that they would prefer to see a year-round resident season that would allow for legal harvest of bears during this time of increased subsistence activity.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **SUPPORTS** this proposal to increase opportunity because a substantial increase is not expected from the proposed season expansion and there is no conservation concern for the bear population in Unit 23. Extending the season will also give residents the opportunity to harvest bears that would otherwise be taken in DLP. The department will also monitor any increase in harvest for potential conservation concerns.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional cost to the public or department.

PROPOSAL 42 – 5 AAC 85.020 (21). Hunting seasons and bag limits for brown bear. Consolidate the seven fall nonresident registration brown bear permits into a single permit and consolidate the seven spring nonresident registration brown bear permits into a single permit.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? If adopted, this proposal would consolidate the nonresident brown bear registration permits into a single, unit-wide fall registration permit and a single, unit-wide spring registration permit.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

Unit and Bag Limits	Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Nonresident Open Season
<i>Unit 23</i>		
RESIDENT HUNTERS: 2 bears per regulatory year by registration permit; or 2 bears per regulatory year	1 Aug – 31 May (Subsistence hunt) 1 Aug – 31 May	Aug. 1 – Oct. 31 Apr. 15 – May 31
NONRESIDENT HUNTERS: 1 bear every regulatory year by drawing permit only; up to 68 permits may be issued; or		Aug. 1 – Oct. 31 Apr. 15 – May 31
1 bear every regulatory year by registration permit only		Aug. 10 – June 30 Apr. 15 – May 31

No resident locking tag is required. All bears harvested in the general hunt and all bears intended for sale must be sealed. Bears harvested in the subsistence registration hunt need only be sealed if removed from the unit.

5 AAC 92.200 allows for the skulls and hides with claws attached of brown bears harvested in areas where the bag limit is two bears per regulatory year to be sold under the conditions of a permit issued by the department.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for brown bears in Unit 23, 24, and 26 with a combined Amount Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) of 25-35 animals.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If the proposal were adopted, it would consolidate the seven fall and seven spring nonresident registration permits into two, unit-wide registration permits: one for the fall season and one for the spring season. Having just two nonresident registration permits will help simplify the hunt preparation and reporting process for hunters, guides, and department staff.

BACKGROUND: Unit 23 is divided into seven guide-use areas (GUAs) that encompass the entirety of the unit. These GUAs include both state and federally managed lands but exclude the two National Parks and the National Monument.

Prior to regulatory year (RY) 08, Unit 23 had two, unit-wide, nonresident drawing permits: DB781 for the fall season and DB791 for the spring season. At the 2007 Board of Game (BOG) meeting, a department proposal was adopted that sought to limit future concentration of harvest

in some of the higher use GUAs by creating seven separate draw hunts for both spring and fall. The BOG also approved an increase in the number of nonresident permits issued, from 58 to 68, so as not to reduce hunt opportunity during the hunt structure transition. The 14 separate drawing hunts were enacted beginning in RY08 and any undersubscribed permits were made available over the counter on a first-come, first-served basis in Kotzebue. This hunt structure remained in place until RY14 when the BOG adopted an amended proposal to add nonresident registration permits that followed the same GUAs, seasons, and bag limits as the drawing hunts. The registration permits were put in place to preserve hunt opportunity for nonresidents if draw permit holders did not hunt.

In RY17 and RY18, a majority of the nonresident drawing hunts went undersubscribed, in response, beginning in RY19, drawing permits were no longer issued and all nonresident bear harvest occurred under the registration hunt structure. The decline in nonresident participation likely correlates with the reduction or complete closure of nonresident caribou and moose hunting, which meant far less bear hunters have the opportunity to take a bear incidental to hunting for other species.

The average non-resident fall harvest between RY13–RY22 was 13 bears, up slightly from the previous ten-year average of 9 bears. Spring nonresident harvest averaged 2 bears per year for RY13-22, similar to the previous 10-year period's 3 bear average. Interest in the fall nonresident hunt has remained relatively constant over the last 10 years, but the spring nonresident hunts have seen a general decline in permit issuance through time. This decline is likely driven by a lack of licensed guides operating in the spring, and harvest under the nonresident permit has shifted towards hunters accompanied by resident relatives within second-degree of kindred.

While permit numbers and harvest quotas have not been limited under the registration permit, harvest data suggest that current harvest rates have remained sustainable. The mean annual harvest of brown bears for RY13-RY22 was 54 bears (range: 36-84) and has remained relatively consistent through time, despite increased harvest opportunity for both resident and nonresidents, with the previous 10-year annual average also being 54 bears (RY03-12, range: 33-76).

Nonresident hunters often do not know which of the 7 hunt areas they will be hunting and are advised by their guides to acquire permits for each area that the guide operates in. This allows the most flexibility for guides and hunters to work around weather and other field conditions but often leaves the hunter with multiple permits to acquire, carry in the field, and report on post-hunt. It is not unusual for a hunter to be unaware of which hunt area they ultimately got dropped in, or for them to fail to report on registration permits that were acquired but not hunted on. As permits for each area are not limited, transitioning to a unit-wide permit structure is not expected to affect harvest rates or the distribution of hunt pressure relative to the current structure.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department submitted and **SUPPORTS** this proposal to consolidate the hunts to simplify the hunting opportunity for nonresidents and to ease the administrative burden on the department. Modifying the hunt structure in this way is not expected to result in additional harvest of animals. Harvest will be monitored to ensure the new hunt structure does not negatively impact the population.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 190 – 5 AAC 92.015 **Brown bear tag fee exemptions.** Reauthorize the current resident tag fee exemptions for brown bear in Units 18, 22, 23 and 26A.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal reauthorizes the resident brown bear big game tag fee exemption in Region V.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

(a) A resident tag is not required for taking a brown bear in the following units:

- ...
- (4) Units... 26;
- ...
- (8) Unit 22;
- (9) Unit 23;
- ...
- (13) Unit 18;
- ...

(b) In addition to the units as specified in (a) of this section, if a hunter obtains a subsistence registration permit before hunting, that hunter is not required to obtain a resident tag to take a brown bear in the following units:

- ...
- (4) Unit 18;
- ...
- (7) Unit 22;
- (8) Unit 23;
- ...
- (10) Unit 26(A).

There is a positive C&T finding for brown bears in Unit 18, with an ANS of 20-30. There is also a positive C&T finding for brown bears in Units 21 and 22, with a combined ANS of 20-25. And there is a positive C&T finding for brown bears in Units 23, 24, and 26, with a combined ANS of 25-35.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? Resident hunters would not be required to purchase a resident locking tag for general season, drawing or registration permit brown bear hunts in Units 18, 22, 23 and 26A. Hunters participating in subsistence registration permit hunts would also not be required to purchase a brown bear locking tag to harvest a bear, although possession of the subsistence registration permit would be required.

BACKGROUND: The Board of Game must reauthorize brown bear tag fee exemptions annually or the fee automatically becomes reinstated. Brown bear general season, drawing, and registration permit hunts have had the tag fees exempted in Unit 18 and 26A for 10 years, in Unit 22 for 20 years, and in Unit 23 for 15 years. Exemptions have been implemented to allow: 1) incremental increases in harvest; 2) additional opportunity for residents; and 3) harvest for a wide range of uses. Current harvest levels in each of the Units are appropriate based on sealing and anecdotal information. Previous exemptions of resident tag fees have not caused dramatic or unexpected increases in overall harvest.

In subsistence brown bear registration permit hunts, reauthorizations are needed for Unit 18, 22, 23 and 26A where requirements include: 1) a registration permit; 2) a tag fee exemption; 3) salvage of meat for human consumption; 4) no use of aircraft in Units 22, 23 and 26A; 5) no sealing requirement unless hide and skull are removed from the subsistence registration permit hunt area; 6) if sealing is required, the skin of the head and the front claws must be removed and retained by the department at the time of sealing. Continuing the tag fee exemption helps facilitate participation in the associated brown bear harvest programs maintained by the department for subsistence registration permit hunts. In all units, subsistence brown bear registration permit harvest rates are low and believed to be appropriate based on harvest reports; exempting the resident tag fee has not caused an increase in subsistence harvest.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department submitted and **SUPPORTS** this proposal. Brown bear numbers in the identified units are stable or increasing and the increased harvests that result from the tag fee exemption do not present a conservation concern.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.
