

# MEMORANDUM

## State of Alaska Department of Law

TO: Kristy Tibbles  
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Alaska Board of Game

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SUBJECT: March 2024  
Interior & Eastern Arctic Region  
Board of Game meeting

### GENERAL COMMENTS

**In general, ethics disclosures:** Before staff reports begin on any new agenda item, or, if preferred, at the very beginning of the meeting, Ethics Act disclosures and determinations must be made under AS 39.52.

**In general, record-making:** It is very important that Board members carefully explain and clearly summarize on the record the reasons for their actions and the grounds upon which the actions are based. The Alaska Supreme Court has stressed the importance of a clear record to facilitate the courts in determining that the Board's actions are within its authority and are reasonable. A clear record also assists the public in understanding the Board's rationale. If Board members summarize the reasons for their actions before they vote, it will help establish the necessary record.

In considering each proposal, and the specific requirements that apply in some cases, such as with the subsistence law, it is important that the Board thoroughly discuss and summarize on the record the basis and reasons for its actions. Consistency with past approaches is another important point for discussion. If a particular action does not appear to be consistent, Board members should discuss their reasons for a different approach.

The Alaska Administrative Procedure Act requires that State agencies, including the Board of Game, "[w]hen considering the factual, substantive, and other relevant matter, ... pay special attention to the cost to private persons of the proposed regulatory action." AS 44.62.210(a). This requirement to pay special attention to costs means, at a minimum, that the Board should address any information presented about costs, or explicitly state that no such information was presented, during deliberation of any proposal likely to be adopted. In our view, this requirement does not go so far as to mandate that the Board conduct an independent investigation of potential costs, nor does it require that cost factor into the Board's decision more than, for example, conservation concerns might. However,

it does require the Board to address and “pay special attention to” costs relevant to each regulation adopted.

**In general, written findings:** If any issue is already in court, or is controversial enough that you believe it might result in litigation, or if it is complex enough that findings may be useful to the public, the Department, or the Board in the future, it is important that the Board draft and adopt written findings explaining its decisions. From time to time, the Department of Law will recommend that written findings be adopted, in order to better defend the Board’s action. Such recommendations should be carefully considered, as a refusal to adopt findings, in these circumstances, could mean that the Board gets subjected to judicial oversight and second-guessing which might have been avoided. The Alaska Supreme Court has stressed the importance of an adequate decisional document, or written finding, to a determination that the Board has acted within its authority and rationally in adopting regulations, and has deferred to such findings in the past.

**In general, subsistence:** For each proposal the Board should consider whether it involves or affects identified subsistence uses of the game population or sub-population in question. If action on a proposal would affect a subsistence use, the Board must be sure that the regulations provide a reasonable opportunity for the subsistence uses, unless sustained yield would be jeopardized. If the Board has not previously done so, it should first determine whether the game population is subject to customary and traditional uses for subsistence and what amount of the harvestable portion, if any, is reasonably necessary for those uses. *See* 5 AAC 99.025 for current findings on customary and traditional uses and amounts reasonably necessary for subsistence uses. The current law requires that the Board have considered at least four issues in implementing the preference:

- (1) Identify game populations or portions of populations customarily and traditionally taken or used for subsistence; *see* 8 criteria at 5 AAC 99.010(b);
- (2) determine whether a portion of the game population may be harvested consistent with sustained yield;
- (3) determine the amount of the harvestable portion reasonably necessary for subsistence uses; and
- (4) adopt regulations to provide a reasonable opportunity for subsistence uses.

Reasonable opportunity is defined to mean “an opportunity, as determined by the appropriate board, that allows a subsistence user to participate in a subsistence hunt or fishery that provides a normally diligent participant with a reasonable expectation of success of taking of fish or game.” AS 16.05.258(f). It is not to be construed as a guarantee of success.

The amount of the harvestable portion of the game population that is reasonably necessary for subsistence uses will depend largely on the amount of the game population used for subsistence historically and the number of subsistence users expected to participate. This may require the Board to determine which users have been taking game for subsistence purposes, and which ones have not. Once the Board has determined the amount reasonably necessary for subsistence uses, the Board should by regulation provide an opportunity that allows the predicted number of normally diligent participants a reasonable expectation of success in taking the subject game. The Board may base its determination of reasonable opportunity on all relevant information including past subsistence harvest levels of the game population in the specific area and the bag limits, seasons, access provisions, and means and methods necessary to achieve those harvests, or on comparable information from similar areas.

If the harvestable portion of the game population is not sufficient to provide for subsistence uses and any other consumptive uses, the Board is required to eliminate non-subsistence uses in order to provide a reasonable opportunity for subsistence uses. If the harvestable portion of the game population is still not sufficient to provide a reasonable opportunity for all subsistence uses, the Board is required to eliminate non-subsistence consumptive uses and distinguish among the subsistence users based on the following Tier II criteria:

- (1) The customary and direct dependence on the game population by the subsistence user for human consumption as a mainstay of livelihood; and
- (2) the ability of the subsistence user to obtain food if subsistence use is restricted or eliminated. AS 16.05.258.

**In general, intensive management:** Under AS 16.05.255 (e), (f) and (g), the Board should assure itself that the steps outlined below have been followed when acting on proposals dealing with ungulate populations.

**First** - Determine whether the **ungulate** population is **important for high levels of human consumptive use**. The Board has already made many of these determinations. *See* 5 AAC 92.108. However, these past findings do not preclude new findings, especially if based on new information.

– If so, then subsequent intensive management analysis may be required.

– If not, then no further intensive management analysis is required.

**Second** - Is the ungulate population **depleted** or will the Board be **significantly reducing the taking** of the population? *See* 5AAC 92.106(5) for the Board's current definition of "significant" as it relates to intensive management.

The Board must determine whether depletion or reduction of productivity, or Board action, is likely to cause a significant reduction in harvest.

- If either is true, then subsequent intensive management analysis is required.
- If not, then further intensive management analysis is not required.

***Third*** - Is intensive management appropriate?

(a) If the population is depleted, has the Board found that consumptive use of the population is a preferred use? Note that the Legislature has already found that “providing for high levels of harvest for human consumption in accordance with the sustained yield principle is the highest and best use of identified big game prey populations in most areas of the State ...” In the rare cases where consumptive use is not a preferred use, then the Board need not adopt intensive management regulations.

(b) If consumptive uses are preferred, and the population is depleted or reduced in productivity so that the result may be a significant reduction in harvest, the Board must consider whether enhancement of abundance or productivity is feasibly achievable using recognized and prudent active management techniques. At this point, the Board will need information from the Department about available recognized management techniques, including feasibility. If enhancement is feasibly achievable, then the Board must adopt intensive management regulations.

(c) If the Board will be significantly reducing the taking of the population, then it must adopt, or schedule for adoption at its next meeting, regulations that provide for intensive management *unless*:

1. Intensive management would be:
  - A. Ineffective based on scientific information;
  - B. Inappropriate due to land ownership patterns; or
  - C. Against the best interests of subsistence users;

*Or*

2. The Board declares that a biological emergency exists and takes immediate action to protect and maintain the population and also schedules for adoption those regulations necessary to restore the population.

## Comments on Individual Proposals

**Proposal 46** would amend 5 AAC 85.055 to modify all sheep hunts in U12, 19, and 20 and allocate 20% of permits to nonresidents, with 10% of the nonresident permits to nonresidents with resident relatives within the second degree of kindred. To be clear, as written, the 2DK hunters would receive 10% of 20%, or 2% of the permits, not half.

**Proposals 53 and 54** seek to amend the ANS for moose in U19. The Board should keep in mind that the Alaska Supreme Court upheld a change in ANS where the ANS was not improperly manipulated to achieve a predetermined outcome. *Manning v. State*, 355 P.3d 530, 537 (Alaska 2015).

**Proposal 70** would amend 5 AAC 85.045, regarding moose hunting in U19E, to make 15 registration permits available in Bethel to residents who live on the Kuskokwim River. The Board cannot allocate permits to residents based on domicile, but can adopt a regulation if all Alaska residents are eligible to participate.

**Proposal 74** would amend 5 AAC 85.050 and .069 to require unique verification numbers for transporters to be supplied by nonresidents applying for DM837 unguided moose permits. The Board cannot regulate transporters. A licensed transporter has a license number but there is no regulation in place requiring licensed transporters to acquire UVCs. The Big Game Commercial Services Board has the authority to, by regulation, require UVCs for transporters.

**Proposal 81** addresses sheep hunting in U19C. The suggestion that board generated proposals may not be legal is incorrect.

**Proposals 85 and 86** would modify resident sheep hunting in U19C. If this proposal is adopted, the Board should address certain ambiguities. For example, would a 6 or 7 year old be a legal take but a hunter, by taking the animal, is agreeing not to hunt sheep for a few seasons? Would the restrictions on future hunting of sheep be statewide or just in U19C?

**Proposal 109** would amend 5 AAC 92.113 to allow wolves to be taken in U12 same-day-airborne (“SDA”) if 300 feet from the airplane. By statute, SDA hunting of wolves and wolverines is prohibited unless permitted under an active intensive management program. For such active programs, the Board adopted 5 AAC 92.039 for the department to issue permits when appropriate. This proposal may violate the statute to the extent it would authorize SDA hunting of wolves where there is no active IM program and the Board’s harvest and population objectives are met.

**Proposal 113** would close hunting near the Steese Highway. If adopted, the Board should specify distance from the highway and dates of the closure.

**Proposal 119** would amend the sheep bag limit in U12. If adopted, the Board should clarify if the sheep hunting restrictions would be statewide or limited to U12. To the extent this would impose a penalty on guides, the Board lacks authority.

**Proposal 120** would amend 5 AAC 85.020 to increase the brown bear bag limit for residents in a portion of U12 to 2 per regulatory year. The justification for the proposal is that brown bear is an important food source, but the Board adopted a negative customary and traditional use finding for brown bear in this area. Under current regulations, where the bag limit is 2 or more, skulls and hides may be sold. If the intent is to provide food, the Board may consider meat salvage requirements or destruction of trophy value.

**Proposal 127** would amend the youth hunt in U20D and restrict the hunt to resident youth. AS 16.05.255(i) allows nonresident youth to participate in a youth hunt if accompanied by a resident relative.

**Proposals 146 and 148** would amend 5 AAC 92.124 to adopt an intensive management program for moose, and to authorize predator control of wolves, in U24A and U25A. The Board adopted a negative IM finding for moose in U25A.

**Proposal 147** would amend 5 AAC 92.124 to allow SDA take of wolves in U24A and U25A. SDA would only be allowed under AS 16.05.783, and permits issued by the department under 5 AAC 92.039, if there is an active IM program and the Board's population and harvest objectives are not being met. In addition, the Board adopted a negative IM finding for moose in U25A.

**Proposal 166** would allow black and brown bears to be taken by bucket snaring. Brown bears are not furbearers as defined in regulation at 5 AAC 92.990(a)(32).