

5 AAC 92. ___ () is amended by adding a new paragraph to read:

() Units 12, 20(D), and 20(E) Predation Control Focus Area. The Units 12, 20(D) and 20(E) Predation Control Area is established and consists of all lands within Unit 12, encompassed by the area north of a line beginning at 63° 33.09 N. lat. and 143° 16.20 W. long., westerly to 63° 30.27 N. lat. and 143° 44.50 W. long.; Unit 20D, encompassed by the area northeast of a line beginning at 63° 40.0 N. lat. and 143° 37.40 W. long. to 64° 04.20 N. lat. and 144° 28.00 then northeasterly to 64° 14.30 N. lat. and 143° 49.00 W. long.; Unit 20E, encompassed by the Fortymile River drainage upstream of the confluences of the North Fork Fortymile River and South Fork Fortymile River, excluding the Walker Fork Fortymile River drainage, the East Fork Fortymile River drainage, and the North Fork Fortymile River drainage upstream from its confluence with the Middle Fork Fortymile River; this predation control program does not apply to any National Park Service or National Wildlife Refuge lands unless approved by the federal agencies; state and private lands are approximately 3,187 square miles; this area does not delineate a moose, wolf or bear population and is not intended to distinguish animals within the focus area from populations in Unit 12, 20D or 20E; the purpose is to focus wolf control on a relatively small area where moose numbers can be better estimated, where moose are accessible to hunters, and where harvest can be closely monitored.

(1) this is a predator control program and habitat enhancement program designed to increase moose abundance and harvest by reducing predation on moose by wolves and improving habitat. It is expected to contribute to achieving the intensive management (IM) objectives in the predation control focus area;

(2) moose and wolf objectives are as follows:

(A) moose IM population objectives for Units 12, 20(D) and 20(E) as established in 5 AAC 92.108 are 4,000-6,000, 8,000-10,000 and 8,000-10,000 moose, respectively. These objectives are within the range of historic population estimates.

(B) The moose population program objective within a 2,241 square mile Taylor Corridor Survey Area (TCSA) is 2,240 – 3,140 observable moose (1.0-1.4 moose per square mile) during late autumn surveys. These densities have been observed in recent years. This survey area overlaps the predation control focus area and allows monitoring of moose abundance consistent with earlier surveys.

(C) The wolf removal objective is to reduce wolves within the control area to the extent possible. The department has determined that wolves can be removed from public and private lands within the control area to the extent possible without affecting the sustainability of the wolf population in Units 12, 20(D) and 20(E) because the 4,757 square mile control area is approximately 2, 10 and 38 percent of Units 12, 20(D), and 20(E) respectively and does not include all lands that the wolf population occupies; The wolf objective for Unit 12 is to maintain a population of at least 100 wolves; for Unit 20D it is to maintain a population of at least 15 wolves and for Unit 20E it is to maintain a population of 60 wolves. These objectives can be confirmed outside the wolf control area using a minimum count or intensive aerial survey.

(3) findings concerning populations and human use are as follows:

(A) wolf predation is likely a factor in the failure to achieve moose population objectives

(B) a reduction in wolf predation in Units 12, 20(D), and 20(E) may make progress toward achieving the Units 12, 20(D), and 20(E) IM harvest objectives for moose;

(C) reducing wolf predation is likely to be effective and feasible using recognized and prudent active management techniques and based on scientific information;

(D) reducing wolf numbers is likely to be effective given land ownership patterns and past participation by the public, or if conducted by department personnel;

(4) If moose density in the TCSA declines to fewer than 1.0 moose per square mile for two consecutive surveys and the three-year average of moose twinning rates are above 20%, then authorized methods and means are as follows:

(A) hunting and trapping of wolves by the public in the Units 12, 20(D), and 20(E) Predation Control Area during the term of the program will occur as provided in the hunting and trapping regulations set out elsewhere in this title, including the use of motorized vehicles;

(B) notwithstanding any other provisions in this title, the commissioner may issue public aerial shooting permits or public land and shoot permits as a method for wolf removal under AS 16.05.783;

(C) department personnel will be allowed to conduct aerial wolf removal using aircraft under AS 16.05.783.

(5) time frame is as follows:

(A) through June 30, 2030, the commissioner may authorize the removal of wolves in the Units 12, 20(D), and 20(E) Predation Control Area;

(B) annually the department shall, to the extent practicable, provide to the board a report of program activities conducted during the preceding 12 months, including implementation activities, the status of the moose and wolf populations, and recommendations for changes, if necessary to achieve the objectives of the plan.

(6) the commissioner will review, modify, or suspend program activities as follows:

(A) when a density of 1.2 moose per square mile has been observed for two consecutive surveys within the TCSA;

(B) if, after three years, the harvest of wolves is not sufficient to make progress towards the IM population objectives for wolves;

(C) wolf predation control activities may be suspended:

(i) if, after three years following a survey in the TCSA with a density of 1.2 moose per square mile, there is no increase in the total harvest of moose in the control area;

(ii) if, after three years, any measure such as twinning rates and short-yearling mass, consistent with significant levels of nutritional stress in the moose population is identified;

(iii) when the moose population and harvest objectives within Units 12, 20(D), and 20(E) have been met; or

(iv) if the moose population exceeds a density of 1.2 moose per square mile for two consecutive TCSA surveys;

(v) in a regulatory year if the wolf objective is met in a subunit containing the predation control focus area.

(7) The department may plan and execute habitat enhancement projects in areas identified for improvement based on evidence at the landscape or population level through prescribed burns, wildfire, or mechanical means. Habitat enhancement is intended to increase the potential moose carrying capacity in the Units 12, 20(D), and 20(E) Predation Control Area.