

## **PROPOSAL 142**

### **5 AAC 85.055. Hunting seasons and bag limits for Dall sheep.**

Change sheep hunting in portions of Units 24A and 25A to archery only as follows:

In Units 24A and 25A, in the vicinity of the Dalton Highway Corridor Management Area (DHCMA), on the east side of the road, all sheep hunting is by bow and arrow only within 15 miles of the Dalton Highway for one ram, full-curl or larger.

Or, put another way:

In Units 24A and 25A, all areas within 15 miles of the Dalton Highway is open to sheep hunting by bow and arrow only for one ram, full curl or larger.

Upon manager discretion, the season could either revert back to the previous 8/10-9/20 or update to the new 8/10-10/5 for the DHCMA.

All other existing regulations for this area would remain unchanged by this proposal.

### **What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?**

**The purpose of this proposal is maintain hunting opportunity along the Dalton Highway while significantly decreasing the harvest in an area with recent sheep population concerns that resulted in a temporary emergency closure.**

In July of 2022 the Federal Subsistence Board approved WSA22-02 which put a two-year closure for sheep hunting in part of the Dalton Highway Corridor Management Area (DHCMA). The explanation given was that “although sheep numbers across the entire Brooks Range may be generally stable, declines in sheep populations along the DHCMA are a substantial concern for rural Alaska subsistence users. These subsistence users depend on efficiency of harvest, close to where they live, regarding the local sheep population. The local rural Alaska residents are especially concerned with the population status of sheep within the DHCMA.” Furthermore, as in some other areas of Alaska, biologists have begun to question (and potentially study) whether full-curl management (FCM) is an adequate strategy to conserve sheep populations, especially those within relatively easy reach from places like the Dalton Highway.

Those who have spent extensive time hunting in the DHCMA are aware that within the relatively narrow five mile corridor there are only few isolated areas that hold sheep and there are even fewer areas in which bands of rams typically reside. The success rate of archery hunters for sheep in this portion of the DHCMA is close to zero sheep per year by bow for much of the past decade. Groups of sheep that live near the five mile boundary are often hunted by those using rifles who have easy access given the narrow band of bowhunting terrain separating them from the highway. Because archery hunters kill less than one sheep per year in the DHCMA, if there is decline in the area related to hunting, it is very likely due to that fact that the Dalton Highway allows easy access to the sheep who live just five miles off the road to the much more efficient use of rifles for sheep hunting.

One solution to this issue that would **maintain opportunity while essentially cutting the non-subsistence harvest to almost zero**, would be to expand the archery only corridor in Units 24 and 25A for Dall sheep to 15 miles. This would provide a large enough area of respite from rifle use that rams of all ages would have much higher survival rates. This would also decrease the amount of airplane hunters

using planes to find (during preseason scouting or illegally during the season) and harvest sheep close to the road where subsistence users also rely on them. Creating an enlarged archery only area would have **zero negative impact in overall hunting opportunity** because anyone who wants to hunt via general season harvest tag would still be able to. They would just have to accept a little more challenge by taking a bow instead of a rifle. Skilled and/or lucky hunters would still occasionally kill a ram but the harvest within 15 miles of the road would be greatly decreased as would the impact on local subsistence users.

**If this were to be passed a proposal would then be submitted by this author to the Federal Subsistence Board asking to rescind the closure due to the change in regulation. With the prospect of essentially zero rams being killed within 15 miles of the highway by non-subsistence users, this may prove a tenable option.**

On Precedent:

There is precedent in Alaska demonstrating that archery only sheep hunting has a very low impact on sheep populations while providing excellent opportunity for hunters. In the two existing archery draw hunts in Alaska, DS140 and DS 141, which are easily accessible by road system near anchorage and have an established ATV trail within a couple of miles of much of the hunting area, there are still abundant sheep and mature rams in the area. Of the 64 resident hunters who receive that tag each year, on average one to three sheep have been killed in total in recent years and those are *any ram hunts*. This precedent demonstrates that archery hunts provide great opportunity for hunters but have little to no affect on animal populations. Based on this precedent in Unit 14C, we can expect that the proposed hunt in Units 24 and 25 hunt would have essentially zero adverse effect on sheep populations while increasing hunter opportunity.

On Opportunity:

In the past there has been some resistance to transitioning existing rifle hunts into archery hunts because of the perception of some that this somehow decreases opportunity. It is, however, well established throughout the United States and in Alaska that all hunters are capable of taking advantage of archery hunts by the simple means of purchasing and layering to shoot a bow. Currently, it's possible to buy an effective hunting bow for less than the cost of most rifles and to learn to shoot accurately in a matter of weeks.

\*\*\*Limiting the expansion of the corridor like this in just Units 24A and 25A for sheep hunting would not create any issues for other rifle hunting opportunities outside of the five mile corridor.

**PROPOSED BY:** Paul Forward

(EG-F23-325)

\*\*\*\*\*