

PROPOSAL 21

5 AAC 85.050. Hunting seasons and bag limits for muskoxen.

Establish season dates for the harvest of cow muskox in the TX095 and TX096 Tier II hunts in Unit 22C, beginning August 1st and ending October 31st as follows.

"R 22C that portion...and the Snake river" One Bull ... TX095 Aug 1- Mar 15

One Cow ... TX095 May be Announced Aug 1- Oct 31

"R 22C that portion... to the Safety bridge" One Bull ... TX096 Aug 1- Mar 15

One Cow ... TX096 May Be Announced Aug 1- Oct 31

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Traditional harvest of muskox takes place during the winter and spring months from approximately December through the end of season on March 15th. Selection of this timeframe for optimal harvest can be attributed to several reasons, primarily the quality of meat post-rut, quality of the hide mid-winter, and ease of access and transportation of meat by snowmobile. Harvest outside of this timeframe has become very uncommon since residents of the Seward Peninsula have learned over the years that the prolonged rutting season of muskox has a significant effect on meat quality and the valuable qiviut in the hide is prime later in the winter. However, growing concern over human- muskox encounters over the years, followed by the recent human fatality caused by a muskox has spurred discussion of increased hunting to attempt to disperse or decrease the number of muskox present in certain areas.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game has recently changed the bag limit for the TX095 and TX096 hunts to include the harvest of cow muskox. This was largely, if not solely, due to the recent muskox caused human fatality, a response to the following public outcry, and an effort to dissuade or disperse muskox herds from the near Nome areas. However, this may have little to no effect if the increased harvest is not targeted to a specific date range when muskox would normally not see any hunting pressure.

The current season dates allow for the harvest of muskox beginning August 1st, and ending March 15th, but as stated previously, the vast majority of the harvest occurs in the mid to late winter months. There is little reason for this harvest pattern to change and over the last number of years harvest during the mid and late winter months has not proven successful in deterring muskox presence from the near Nome areas.

If season dates were to be established for the harvest of cow muskox for the early part of the season it may be enough of a deterrent during the rut to move animals away from areas where human-muskox encounters are more likely to be problematic. Establishing season dates would ensure that consistent hunting pressure is applied in the relatively small areas of the inner and outer Nome areas and may educate muskox faster. Additionally, cow muskox are not known to undergo the strong physiological changes that male muskox go through during the rut and the meat will still be of good quality, although the qiviut will be poor or non-existent.

Finally, establishing season dates for the cow muskox hunt does not compel the department to hold a cow muskox season. Under the current regulatory structure there may, or may not be, cows available for harvest. This proposal, if adopted would only set the window of time during which a cow muskox may be harvested if there is any allowable harvest.

PROPOSED BY: Jacob Mannix

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