

PROPOSAL 58

5 AAC 92.123. Intensive Management Plans VII.

Authorize a Unit 19A predation control program as follows:

(a) **Plans established.** Intensive management plans for the following areas are established in this section:

(3) Unit 19(A) Predation Control Area;

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(b) Unit 19(A) Predation Control Area: the Unit 19(A) Predation Control Area is established and consists of those portions of the Kuskokwim River drainage within Unit 19(A), encompassing approximately 5,703 square miles; this predation control program does not apply within National Park Service or National Wildlife Refuge lands unless approved by the federal agencies; notwithstanding any other provision in this title, and based on the following information contained in this section, the commissioner or the commissioner's designee may conduct a wolf population reduction or a wolf population regulation program in Unit 19(A) to benefit moose:

(1) the following Wolf Predation Control Focus Area is established in the Unit 19(A) Predation Control Area; the area does not delineate a moose, or wolf population and is not intended to distinguish animals within the area from populations in Unit 19(A); the purpose is to focus wolf control in a relatively small area where moose numbers can be better estimated, where moose are accessible to hunters, and where harvest can be closely monitored;

(A) the Wolf Predation Control Focus Area (WCFA) encompasses approximately 2,380 square miles within all Unit 19(A) drainages of the Kuskokwim River downstream of the Holokuk River; wolf control will be conducted only within the WCFA; the department has the discretion to adjust the area's size and shape to include up to approximately 3,000 square miles of Unit 19(A);

(2) this program is designed to increase moose numbers and harvest in the WCFA by reducing predation on moose and is expected to make a contribution toward achieving the intensive management (IM) objectives in Unit 19(A);

(3) moose and wolf, objectives are as follows:

(A) the IM population objective established by the board for Unit 19(A) is X,XXX-X,XXX moose; the IM moose harvest objective for Unit 19(A) is XXX-XXX moose annually;

(B) the density objective for moose in the WCFA is 1.0 moose per square mile (corrected for sightability) during late winter surveys; the annual moose harvest objective for the WCFA is 100 moose;

(C) the wolf control population objective in the WCFA is to reduce wolf numbers by at least 60–80 percent; the pre-control estimate within the WCFA is 35 wolves; the pre-

control wolf population in Unit 19(A) is estimated at 85; only removing wolves from the WCFA will ensure that wolves persist in Unit 19(A);

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

(A) the Unit 19(A) IM moose population objective has been met; the Unit 19(A) IM harvest objective has not been achieved;

(B) the WCFA objective for moose density has been met but moose harvest has not been achieved;

(C) predation by wolves is an important cause of the failure to achieve moose population and harvest objectives;

(D) a reduction of wolf predation within the WCFA can reasonably be expected to make progress towards achieving the Unit 19(A) IM objectives;

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

(F) reducing predation is likely to be effective given land ownership patterns;

(5) authorized methods and means are as follows:

(A) hunting and trapping of wolves by the public in Unit 19(A) during the term of this program may occur as provided in the hunting and trapping regulations set out elsewhere in this title, including use of motorized vehicles;

(B) notwithstanding any other provisions in this title, the commissioner may allow department employees to conduct aerial, land and shoot, or ground-based lethal removal of wolves using state-owned, privately-owned, or chartered equipment, including helicopters, under AS 16.05.783;

(C) notwithstanding any other provisions in this title, the commissioner may issue public aerial shooting permits or public land and shoot permits using fixed-wing aircraft as a method of wolf removal under AS 16.05.783;

(6) time frame is as follows:

(A) through June 30, 2030, the commissioner may authorize removal of wolves in Unit 19(A);

(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;

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

(A) when the moose density and harvest objectives specified in this subsection are achieved within the WCFA;

(B) when any measure consistent with signs of nutritional stress in the moose population are identified.

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What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The Board accepted Proposal 205 at the March 2020 Region III meeting. This proposal was submitted by the Central Kuskokwim Advisory Committee and requested an Intensive Management (IM) program in Unit 19A. The proposal had no detail other than a request for predator removals, and the Board requested the department submit a proposal at the next regularly scheduled meeting. This area had an active IM program for wolves from 2004 until 2009, however it was discontinued because of a lack of success removing wolves. Reasons for the lack of success primarily included land status which was a mix of private and federal lands, and poor snow conditions. Reliable snow conditions are still a challenge and there are still substantial federal lands. However, access to private lands has been granted by the local corporation which is the primary landowner. Population objectives are currently being met, but the goal of this plan would be to improve harvest and work towards meeting the IM harvest objectives.

This proposal will authorize the program for a six-year period from July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2030. It includes options for aerial wolf control conducted by public permittees and the department. Additional details will also be made available for public review in a separate IM operational plan prior to the board meeting.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

(HQ-F23-062)
