

PROPOSAL 88

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

Change all sheep hunting in Unit 19C to archery only, and require future nonresident sheep hunting in Unit 19C to be by bow and arrow only as follows:

This proposal would transition all sheep hunting in Unit 19C to **by bow and arrow only**.

Resident: One ram with full-curl horn or larger **by bow and arrow only**.

Nonresident (when/if moratorium ends): One ram with full-curl horn or larger every four regulatory years **by bow and arrow only**.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The purpose of this proposal is to maintain hunting opportunity for resident and nonresident hunters (when/if the moratorium is removed) while decreasing harvest in the Unit 19C sheep population that has felt a dramatic population decrease in recent years. The goal of this proposal is to transition Unit 19C general season sheep hunting to archery only.

Justification:

As our state sheep population continues to decline or remains low, archery can be a very valuable management tool that will maintain opportunity while reducing harvest impact.

During the 2022/2023 Board of Game meeting in Soldotna, a five year moratorium on nonresident hunters (Proposal 204) was passed because of significant concern that the sheep population was decreasing beyond sustainable limits despite Full Curl Management (FCM). While this five year moratorium will likely substantially decrease harvest, it will also decrease opportunity for nonresident hunters. Going forward, an alternative would be to change Unit 19C to archery only. This will likely have an even more dramatic effect on sheep harvest (archery hunt success rates for sheep are generally much lower). This will have zero adverse affect on opportunity because anyone who wants to hunt sheep in that area, including nonresidents will still be able to hunt. They will just have to use a bow instead of a rifle.

Of note, the success rate for nonresident hunting in these areas has been as high as 80% over the past five years and is consistently over 40% for resident hunters. These are extremely high success rates, higher than those for many other species in many parts of the state. Transitioning this area to archery hunting would allow for true fair chase hunting with decreased success rates but will maintain opportunity for *anyone* who wants to hunt it (they would just use a bow now). Skilled hunters who know how to pursue and stalk sheep will still kill rams but the overall take will be reduced due the increased difficulty.

***Regarding 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 learning to shoot a bow. Those who wish to sheep hunt in Unit 19C who are not already among the thousands of Alaskans who enjoy bowhunting, can easily obtain equipment and proficiency. 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. This change will not adversely affect any hunters opportunity, it will just make the hunt a little more challenging and thereby decrease total harvest.

***Precedent: There are examples, both in and outside Alaska of the success of archery only sheep areas. In In Alaska, DS140/141 and DS240/241, which are bowhunting only draw hunts for any ram in an easily accessible area, the success rate over a ten-year period was about 2–3 rams per year for almost 70 tags awarded each year, and only a small fraction of the rams that were killed in these hunts would be considered legal in a full curl only area. Specifically, in the Eklutna area, where almost 70 hunters per year are allowed to bow hunt for any ram in an easily accessible area, there is still a steady population of mature rams despite all the hunting pressure. This is an example of how archery hunting allows for tremendous amounts of hunting opportunity with minimal impact on the animal population.

Similarly, there are very popular and well accepted hunts in Canada including the Canmore “Bow Zone” and the Todagin Mountain area of British Columbia. Both are over the counter archery sheep hunts that have proven popular with hunters and very affective in expanding hunter opportunity while having minimal harvest affect.

PROPOSED BY: Paul Forward

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