

PROPOSAL 190

5 AAC 92.015. Brown bear tag fee exemptions.

Reauthorize the current resident tag fee exemptions for brown bear in Units 18, 22, 23 and 26A as follows:

(a) A resident tag is not required for taking a brown bear in the following units:

- ...
- (4) Units... 26;
- ...
- (8) Unit 22;
- (9) Unit 23;
- ...
- (13) Unit 18;
- ...

(b) In addition to the units as specified in (a) of this section, if a hunter obtains a subsistence registration permit before hunting, that hunter is not required to obtain a resident tag to take a brown bear in the following units:

- ...
- (4) Unit 18;
- ...
- (7) Unit 22;
- (8) Unit 23;
- ...
- (10) Unit 26(A).

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The Board of Game must reauthorize brown bear tag fee exemptions annually or the fee automatically becomes reinstated. The department recommends continuing resident tag fee exemptions for the general season and subsistence season hunts in Region V (Units 18, 22, 23, and 26A).

General Season Hunts: Reauthorizations are needed for: Unit 18, where the tag fee has been exempted for 10 years; Unit 22, where the tag fee has been exempted for 20 years; Unit 23, where the tag fee has been exempted for 15 years; and Unit 26A, where the tag fee has been exempted for 10 years. Tag fee exemptions are desired to allow: 1) incremental increase in annual harvest; 2) opportunistic harvest by resident hunters; and 3) harvest by a wide range of users.

General season brown bear harvest rates are within sustained yield limits and previous exemptions of the resident tag fee have not caused dramatic or unexpected increases in overall harvest. In Units 18 and 26A, tag exemptions were authorized for RY2012 and harvest has remained within sustained yield and continues to be similar to the preceding ten-year period. In Unit 22, the 18-year tag-free period for residents has had an average annual harvest of 50 brown bears (range 41–63 bears). In Unit 23, general harvests have been increasing slowly since 1961 primarily in response to increases in human population rather than regulatory changes, although annual harvests vary due to weather and hunting conditions. Harvest data for Unit 23 show no trend in the sex ratio, age or size of bears harvested under all types of hunts.

Subsistence Season Hunts: Reauthorizations are needed for Units 18, 22, 23, and 26A where brown bear subsistence hunt requirements include: 1) registration permit, 2) tag fee exemption, 3) salvaging meat for human consumption, 4) no use of aircraft in Units 22, 23 and 26A, 5) no sealing requirement unless hide and skull are removed from subsistence hunt area, and 6) if sealing is required, the skin of the head and front claws must be removed and retained by ADFG at the time of sealing. Continuing the tag fee exemption helps facilitate participation in the associated brown bear harvest programs maintained by ADFG for subsistence hunts.

In all units, subsistence brown bear harvest rates are low and well within sustained yield limits and exempting the resident tag fee has not caused an increase in subsistence harvest. In Unit 18, we estimate zero to three bears are taken annually in subsistence hunts. In Unit 22, subsistence harvest by permit is quite low, averaging less than one bear per year (less than 1% of the total brown bear harvest). In Unit 23, subsistence permit harvest is less than five bears annually since 1992 (less than 10% of the total brown bear harvest). In Unit 26A, between zero and five bears are taken annually by subsistence hunters.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F23-068)

Note: Proposal 209 was accepted by the Board of Game as an Agenda Change Request for consideration at the Western Arctic/Western Region meeting scheduled for January 2024.

PROPOSAL 209

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

Establish a target hunt for musk ox in Unit 23 as follows:

Unit 23, Sheshalik Spit, 1 muskox bull by targeted permit only during the months of May through October.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The agenda change request submitted by the Native Village of Kotzebue and the Kotzebue Elders Council provided the following information:

We would like the Board of Game to create a targeted (hotspot) hunt for problem bull muskox at the traditional camping site of the Sisualik Peninsula during the months of June through October. The Peninsula is entirely composed of Native Allotments and ANCSA land. The petitioner (the Native Village of Kotzebue) has been working with ADF&G and the Western Arctic Parklands on addressing problem muskox and safety issues created by them, since at least 2008. The Kotzebue Elders Council has also been calling for a more active approach to address the ongoing safety issue since that time. Various approaches have been tried over the years, from electric fencing across the Peninsula, to using aircraft to drive muskox herds from the Peninsula back to the mainland away from the camps. Everything tried has only had limited results that are temporary in nature. In most cases, the campers themselves have had to resort to using their own ATV's to drive them muskox away from the camps. On occasion, valuable sled dogs have been injured, cemeteries have been molested, funerals have been disrupted, Elders and children have been kept in their camps unable to go out for the bathroom and water, and general disruption of subsistence activities due to the presence of menacing muskox. Defense of Life and Property kills have occurred. After the Public Safety Officer was killed in Nome, the issue has finally come to a head and a more proactive approach is being requested.

The Tribe and the Kotzebue Elders met with ADF&G Commissioner to discuss the issue, when he suggested looking at the targeted (Hotspot) hunt as one tool to try. Unfortunately, the meeting occurred the second week of May 2023, a week after the proposal deadline for the January 2024 Board of Game meeting. Instead of continuing to wait until another proposal opportunity in regular order occurs, the Tribe believes that this long-standing issue needs to be addressed in a timelier manner and thus decided to submit a proposal through the ACR process. Also the Board of Game plans to meet in Kotzebue in January which would facilitate more informed discussions surrounding the issue and proposal. While mixed sex/age groups of muskox regularly occur on the Peninsula, the bulls, especially the old bulls kicked out of the herd, and the bulls jacked up on testosterone during the breeding season, are the most dangerous of the animals and are the ones that have caused the dog injuries and were the target of DLP (defense of life and property) situations, so these are the animals we are requesting a targeted hunt for during the season of June through October, when they are normally present and causing safety and conflict issues. Create a list of willing hotspot hunters who can respond within 24 hours of a muskox bull safety issue being called in to the Department.

If this problem is not solved prior to the regular cycle, it will lead to more delay, after years of inaction by the state to address a real safety issue.

It is predominantly a safety issue, although also allocative in nature.

The new information is the existence of a targeted (hotspot) hunt solution to address this long-standing muskox conflict, that the Tribe and Elders Council, was only recently made aware of by the ADF&G Commissioner when discussing possible solutions with him in May 2023.

The Native Village of Kotzebue manages Native allotments on behalf of property owners in concert with the US Bureau of Indian Affairs, and it is these properties and the safety issues created by the presence of muskox and the use and enjoyment by their owners, that is at the core of this issue.

This ACR has not been considered before as the Tribe has only recently been made aware of a targeted (hotspot) hunt possibility.

PROPOSED BY: Native Village of Kotzebue and the Kotzebue Elders Council (HQ-F23-ACR4)
