

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
STAFF COMMENTS FOR PROPOSALS
WESTERN ARCTIC / WESTERN REGION PROPOSALS
ALASKA BOARD OF GAME MEETING
KOTZEBUE, ALASKA
JANUARY 26-29, 2024



The following staff comments were prepared by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game for use at the Alaska Board of Game meeting, January 26-29, 2024 in Kotzebue, Alaska, and are prepared to assist the public and board. The stated staff comments should be considered preliminary and subject to change, if or when new information becomes available. Final department positions will be formulated after review of written and oral testimony presented to the board.

PROPOSAL 1 – 5 AAC 85.055 Hunting seasons and bag limits for Dall sheep. Establish an archery-only registration hunt for Dall sheep in Unit 23 and 26A.

PROPOSED BY: Paul Forward

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal would create an archery-only registration hunt for Dall sheep in Units 23 and 26A east and west of the Etivluk River to include the DeLong and Schwatka mountains within 23 and 26A. The bag limit would be one ram with full-curl horn or larger, season dates would be August 10 – September 20, permits would only be available in person at license vendors, and harvest would have to be reported within 48 hours.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? The current Dall sheep hunting regulations can be found in 5 AAC 85.055 and in the 2023–2024 Alaska Hunting Regulations.

Opportunity for all residents and nonresidents in Units 23 and 26A (that portion west of the Etivluk River drainage) is currently closed.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding (C&T) for Dall Sheep in Unit 26A. Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) ranges are as follows:

- Units 23 and 26A west of the Etivluk River (DeLong Mountains): 0-9
- Units 23 and 26A east of the Etivluk River (Schwatka Mountains): 2-4
- GMUs 23, 24, 25A, and 26 (Brooks Range): 75-125

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If adopted, this proposal would create a resident only, archery-only registration hunt for sheep when the season first reopens with a bag limit of one full-curl ram or larger, with season dates of August 10 – September 20. Permits would only be available in person and successful hunters would be required to report within 48 hours of taking a sheep.

Having a bow hunting requirement would also require all hunters who wanted to participate in this hunt to have access to bow hunter education. Hunter education is not currently a requirement in Unit 26A. Many subsistence hunters do not bow hunt but instead use firearms as their main method of hunting.

BACKGROUND: Unit 26A and Unit 23 sheep are managed as a single population, so data and background listed throughout will be applicable to both areas, area specific information will be noted. Sheep hunts in this portion of the Brooks Range are managed cooperatively with the National Park Service (NPS) as most of the land in the area is federal public lands.

Sheep hunting in Unit 23 and in Unit 26A west of the Etivluk River was closed in 2014 by emergency order, and the general season hunt was closed in that portion of Unit 26A east of the Etivluk River excluding Gates of the Arctic National Park. In 2015, the Board of Game adopted regulations to continue the hunting season closures in Unit 23 and in Unit 26A west of the Etivluk River drainage due to conservation concerns over persistently low population numbers. The hunting season closure was and is broadly supported by local residents, who asked the

department for a full hunting season closure rather than exploring more restrictive hunt management under the Tier II system.

The department conducted Dall sheep abundance and composition surveys in collaboration with the NPS from 2016-2019. These abundance surveys conducted in the Baird (Deacy and Schertz 2021) and central De Long Mountains utilized a distance sampling methodology. The estimates from these surveys can be found in Tables 1 and 2. These surveys showed a similar dramatic decline in lab to ewe-like ratios in both the Baird and De Long Mountains. The NPS conducted surveys in 2015 in the Western Baird Mountains in Western Arctic Park Lands and Gates of the Arctic (Rattenbury 2015). These surveys showed similar declines and poor lamb recruitment in the Western Baird Mountains (Rattenbury 2014).

Table 1. Baird Mountain sheep minimum counts 2009-2014 and estimates 2017 and 2019.

| Year | Sheep Minimum Count & Estimated Abundance |
|------|---|
| 2009 | 823 |
| 2011 | 587 |
| 2014 | 309 |
| 2017 | 233 (95%CI:183-313) |
| 2019 | 174 (95%CI: 141-230) |

Table 2. De Long Mountains sheep minimum counts 2011-2018.

| Year | Sheep Minimum Count & Estimated Abundance |
|------|---|
| 2011 | 1436 |
| 2014 | 359 |
| 2017 | 434 95%CI: 359-540) |
| 2018 | 161 (95%CI: 110-236) |

There are three state general season hunts currently open in Unit 26A. They are: Unit 26A east of and including the Etivluk River drainage, excluding the Gates of the Arctic National Park; Unit

26A private lands within the Gates of the Arctic National Park; and Unit 26A remainder. There were also two registration hunts RS388 and RS389, and a drawing hunt (DS384) that correspond to each of the hunt areas listed above. There was an emergency order in 2014 to close RS388, RS389, and DS384 and the general season hunts in Unit 26A west of the Etivluk River drainage, excluding Gates of the Arctic National Park as well as the general season hunt in Unit 26A on private lands within Gates of the Arctic National Park

(Figure 1). Note RS388 and DS384 are the same hunt areas.



Figure 1. The Unit 26A and Unit 23 hunts that were closed in 2014 and 2015 along with their corresponding general season hunts. DS383 is the same hunt area as RS388.

In 2015 the Board of Game adopted a proposal to close RS389, RS387 and DS384 (same hunt area as RS388) and the general season hunts in Unit 26A west of the Etivluk River drainage, and in Unit 23 to allow the sheep population to recover after extensive declines were documented in 2014 and 2015 due to icing events that reduced the population by 50-80%.

From 2013-2017 an average of 0.8 sheep were harvested per year. Between 2018-2022 the sheep harvest of all state managed hunts combined in Unit 26A declined to an average of about 0.4 sheep per year. All the state hunts that are currently open have full curl bag limits except for the hunt that occurs on private lands within Gates of the Arctic National Park. This hunt has a bag limit of 3 sheep per year. The harvest from 2012-2016 is outlined in Table 3.

Table 3. Sheep harvest summary from 2012-2016 in units 23 and 26A.

| Year | Unit 23 | Unit 26A | Total Harvest |
|------|---------|----------|---------------|
| 2012 | 3 | 4 | 7 |
| 2013 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 2014 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 2015 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2016 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Dall sheep are managed using the conservative full-curl ram harvest management strategy. The full-curl strategy focuses harvest pressure on males-only and thereby a small segment of the population. Limiting harvest to males-only reduces the impact of harvest on the overall population because male survival rates have a drastically lower impact on population growth compared to female survival rates. Additionally, full-curl animals compose a very small proportion of most sheep populations. As a result, the number of animals that are legally available to hunters imposes a self-limit on overharvest of the population. Taken collectively, the full-curl harvest strategy limits harvest to only older-aged rams and is thus conservative.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department is **NEUTRAL** on the methods and means and allocative aspects of this proposal. While archery only sheep hunts have shown to contribute little to overall harvest when compared to unrestricted weapons hunts, the department is concerned about the hunting pressure and associated disturbance potentially compromising overwinter survival and/or reproductive success for some animals. Hunters could move animals out of productive habitat to escape terrain and compromise their ability to obtain sufficient body reserves for rut and overwinter survival. The board may wish to determine if the proposed changes will provide for a reasonable opportunity of success in harvesting sheep for subsistence uses.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs for the department.

PROPOSAL 2 – 5 AAC 85.025(21). Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou. Reduce the caribou bag limit across the range of the herd to four caribou per year, only one of which may be a cow.

PROPOSED BY: Western Arctic Herd Working Group

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? Adoption of this proposal would reduce the resident bag limit in Unit 21D Remainder, 22, 23, 24B Remainder, 24C, 24D and 26A to four caribou per year, no more than one cow may be taken.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? The current regulations for caribou within these units are as follows:

5 AAC 85.025. Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

| Units and Bag Limits | Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts) | Nonresident Open Season |
|-----------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
|-----------------------------|---|------------------------------------|

(17)
Unit 22(A), that portion north of the Golsovia River drainage

RESIDENT HUNTERS:
5 caribou per day, by registration permit only, up to 20 caribou total; as follows:
up to 5 bulls per day
up to 5 cows per day

July 1 - June 30
July 1 - Mar. 31

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:
1 bull

Aug. 1 - Sept. 30

Unit 22(B), that portion west of Golovnin Bay, and west of a line along the west bank of the Fish and Niukluk Rivers to the mouth of the Libby River, and excluding all portions of the Niukluk River drainage upstream from and including the Libby River drainage

RESIDENT HUNTERS:
5 caribou per day, by registration permit only, up to 20 caribou total; as follows:

up to 5 bulls per day Oct. 1 - Apr. 30

up to 5 cows per day Oct. 1 - Mar. 31

up to 5 caribou per day during the period May 1 - Sept. 30, a season may be announced by emergency order; however, cow caribou may not be taken April 1 - Aug 31 (Season to be announced by emergency order)

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:
1 bull; during the period Aug. 1 - Sept. 30, a season may be announced by emergency order

(Season to be announced by emergency order)

Remainder of Unit 22(B)

RESIDENT HUNTERS:
5 caribou per day, by registration permit only, up to 20 caribou total; as follows:

up to 5 bulls per day July 1 - June 30

up to 5 cows per day July 1 - Mar. 31

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:
1 bull;

Aug. 1 - Sept. 30

Unit 22(D), that portion in the Pilgrim River drainage

RESIDENT HUNTERS:
5 caribou per day, by registration permit only, up to 20 caribou total; as follows:

up to 5 bulls per day

Oct. 1 - Apr. 30

up to 5 cows per day

Oct. 1 - Mar. 31

up to 5 caribou per day;
during the period

(Season to be announced by
emergency order)

May 1 - Sept. 30, a season
may be announced by emer-
gency order; however, cow
caribou may not be taken
April 1 - Aug. 31

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bull; during the period
Aug. 1 - Sept. 30, a sea-
son may be announced by
emergency order

(Season to be an-
nounced by emergency
order)

Unit 22(D), that portion in
the Kuzitrin River drainage
(excluding the Pilgrim River
drainage) and the Agiapuk
River drainage, including
the tributaries

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

5 caribou per day, by reg-
istration permit only, up to
20 caribou total; as follows:

up to 5 bulls per day

July 1 - June 30

up to 5 cows per day

July 1 - Mar. 31

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bull

Aug. 1 - Sept. 30

Unit 22(E), that portion east
of and including the
Sanaguich River drainage

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

5 caribou per day, by reg-
istration permit only, up to
20 caribou total; as follows:

up to 5 bulls per day;

July 1 - June 30

up to 5 cows per day;

July 1 - Mar. 31

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bull

Aug. 1 - Sept. 30

Remainder of Unit 22

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

5 caribou per day; by registration permit only; cow caribou may not be taken Apr. 1 - Aug. 31; bull caribou may not be taken Oct. 15 - Jan. 31

(Season to be announced by emergency order)

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bull; during the period Aug. 1 - Sept. 30

(Season to be announced by emergency order)

(18)

Unit 23, that portion north of and including the Singoalik River drainage

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

5 caribou per day, by registration permit only, as follows:

up to 5 bulls per day
up to 5 cows per day

July 1 - June 30
July 15 - Apr. 30

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bull

Aug. 1 - Sept. 30

Remainder of Unit 23

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

5 caribou per day, by registration permit only, as follows:

up to 5 bulls per day

July 1 - June 30

up to 5 cows per day

Sept. 1 - Mar. 31

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bull

Aug. 1 - Sept. 30

...

(21)

Unit 26(A), that portion of the Colville River drainage upstream from the Anaktuvuk River, and drainages of the Chukchi Sea south and west of, and including the Utukok River drainage

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

5 caribou per day, by registration permit only, as follows:

up to 5 bulls per day

July 1 - Oct. 14

Feb. 1 - June 30

up to 5 cows per day

July 15 - Apr. 30

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bull

July 15 - Sept. 30

Remainder of Unit 26(A)

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

5 bulls per day, by registration permit only

July 1 - July 15

5 caribou per day, by registration permit only; however, no more than 3 cows per day; cows accompanied by calves may not be taken;

July 16 - Oct. 15

3 cows per day, by registration permit only

Oct. 16 - Dec. 31

5 caribou per day, by
registration permit only;
however, no more than
3 cows per day;

Jan. 1 - Mar. 15

5 bulls per day, by
registration permit only

Mar. 16 - June 30

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bull

July 15 - Sept. 30

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for caribou in Units 21D Remainder, 22, 23, 24B Remainder, 24C, 24D and 26A. As mentioned above, several caribou herds migrate across these units, and positive customary and traditional use findings have been found for each. Caribou harvests in these units are subject to the following Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) ranges:

Units 20(F), 21(B), 21(C), 21(D) and 24 (Galena Mountains Herd, Wolf Mountains Herd, Ray Mountains Herd): 150-200

Units 21,22,23,24, and 26 (Western Arctic Herd, Teshekpuk Lake Herd): 8,000-12,000

Units 25(A), 25(B), 25(D), 26(B), and 26(C) (Porcupine Herd): 1,250-1,550

Unit 26(B) (Central Arctic Herd): 250 – 450

The Western Arctic Caribou herd (WAH) has a positive intensive management finding, with a population objective of at least 200,000 caribou and a harvest objective of 12,000-20,000.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? This proposal would reduce the caribou bag limit for resident hunters in Units 21D, 22, 23, 24B Remainder, 24C, 24D and 26A to a total of 4 per year, only one of which may be a cow. Based on the most recent patterns of distribution for the WAH, reductions to harvest would likely impact hunters in units 23 and 26A with little effect on harvest in the remaining units in most years.

BACKGROUND: The WAH is currently experiencing a long-term decline which started in 2003 and has resulted in a population level decrease from approximately 490,000 in 2003 to 164,000 in 2022, which is below the population objective. While caribou populations are known to fluctuate naturally based on a variety of environmental factors, this decline is of significant concern due to the importance of caribou to various user groups. The home range of the WAH covers approximately 157,000 square miles and caribou are generally considered the primary terrestrial food source for many communities within that range (WACHWG 2022).

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game Subsistence Section has gathered information on caribou harvests in many communities within the WAH range during select years since the early 1980s. Local harvest and use levels can fluctuate by year depending on several factors, including a community’s access to the herd based on annual variations in migratory routes and timing and the availability of other subsistence resources to local households that year. However, the vast majority of households rely heavily on caribou to meet their wild food needs. In 2014, 89% of households in Anaktuvuk Pass used caribou, and animals were harvested by 40% of households. That year caribou made up 90% of all wild food harvests by edible weight for the community (Brown et al. 2014). In another example, in 2017 96% of households in Noatak used caribou, and 51% of households harvested caribou (Gonzalez et al. 2018). The differences in percentages of households harvesting caribou and households using caribou indicate that many families rely on caribou that are shared with them by others to meet their subsistence needs. Sharing caribou within and between communities across the region is a consistent use pattern seen across study years for communities within the WAH range. A reduction in bag limit will likely impact sharing patterns as heavy harvesting households will be more limited in their ability to harvest, and thus share, with non-harvesting households.

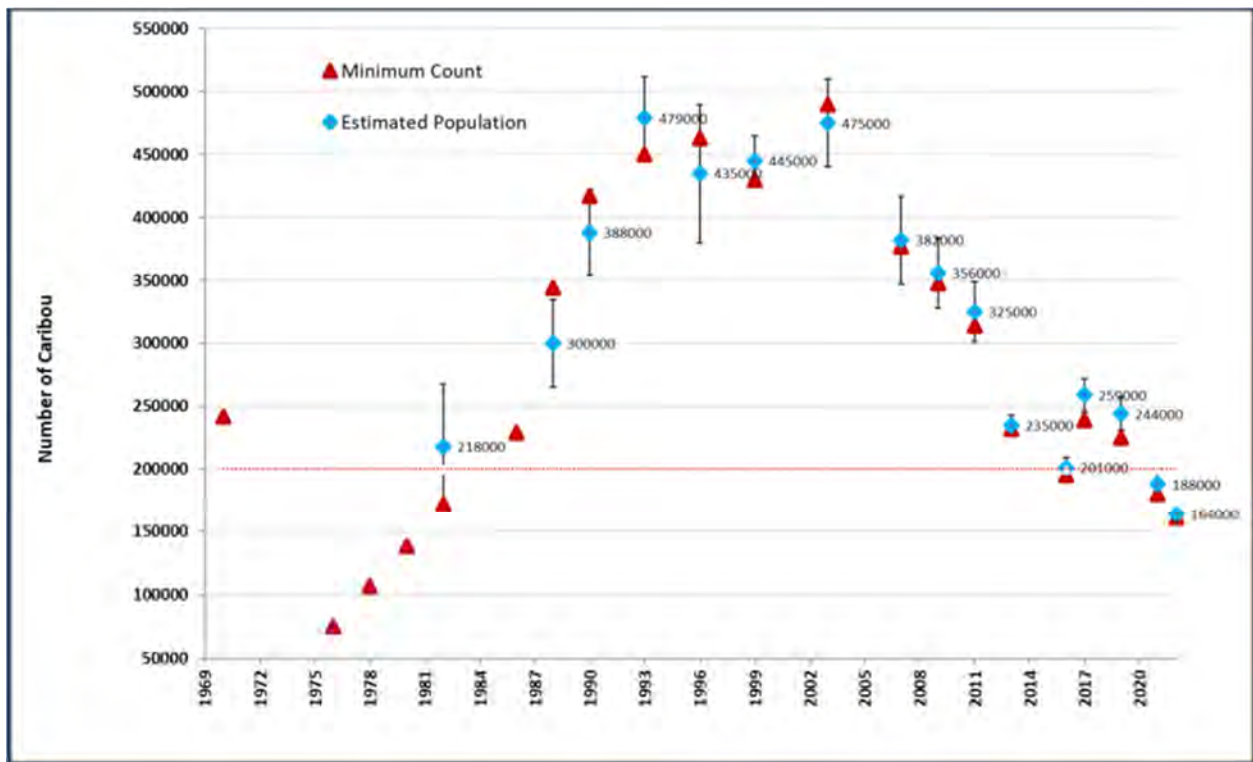


Figure 1. Western Arctic Caribou Herd population estimate 1970-2022. Minimum counts are indicated in red and estimated abundance is indicated with a blue diamond along with associated 95% confidence limits. Estimates are produced using an estimator described by Rivest et al (1998).

The importance of caribou conservation to local users was demonstrated by the Kotzebue Advisory Committee (AC) during a 2022 fall/winter meeting where they drafted a proposal to reduce the bag limit to 4 caribou per year, of which only 1 may be a cow and applied it to Unit 23 only. The Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group (WACHWG) followed suit a few weeks later during their December meeting drafting a similar proposal. The working group unanimously voted to use the same bag limit proposed by the Kotzebue AC but opted to include the entirety of the WAH range. The WACHWG is made up of various stakeholders including subsistence users from communities within the WAH range, hunters from outside the range of the herd, conservationists, hunting guides, reindeer herders and transporters. The combined proposals, (WSA22-05 and 06) coming from the NW Arctic and WI Subsistence Regional Advisory Committees show continued local support and understanding of the need for harvest reduction. The department recognizes and fully supports the readiness of these groups to reduce harvest and protect the WAH.

Harvest of the WAH is difficult to determine with limited harvest reporting across a wide geographic area. The department conservatively estimates that around 10% of the actual harvest is reported, recent attempts to increase reporting have included the establishment of registration hunts (RC800 and RC907) and outreach efforts focused on the need for harvest data. To fill in this data gap the department previously used a model to determine harvest by using subsistence

household surveys, and the local availability (distance, weather, etc.) to determine community harvest levels. This model has produced an average annual harvest of approximately 12,000 animals (Dau 2015). However, given changes to WAH distribution in recent years limiting access by local users, the department has concluded the model is too coarse to track short term change and the use of the model has been discontinued at this time. It is generally understood that harvest rates have decreased due to reduction in access, however the information is too limited to understand the rate of reduction.

The recommended harvest rate based on figures presented in Table 2 of the WACHWG management plan (2019) for the 2022 population of 164,000 animals is ~4.8% or 7,872 animals. This estimate of harvestable surplus is far below the long-term average harvest for this herd as well as the lower end of the ANS range for the WAH; continued efforts to understand actual harvest are ongoing. Between 2019-2023, ADF&G Subsistence and the Division of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) partnered with 8 different communities within units 22 and 23 to document caribou harvests and uses. Working with locally hired research assistants, staff conducted voluntary household surveys to document this information in each of 4 communities during alternating years, resulting in all communities being surveyed twice. Results of this study will be published by July 1, 2024. However, preliminary analyses indicate that in recent years Unit 22 communities have harvested fewer caribou than Unit 23 communities. This is likely because of less access to the herd. Harvests ranged from 13-365 caribou per community per year in Unit 22, and between 81-405 caribou per community year in Unit 23. While useful for understanding local harvests, this information cannot be used in place of annual harvest information for the entirety of the herd. As part of ongoing efforts to understand overall WAH harvests, ADF&G

Subsistence hosted an interagency round-table discussion in October 2023 to generate ideas for collaboration on documenting harvests across the WAH range using household surveys. Conversations defining those research partnerships are ongoing, but ideally by 2025, researchers will pilot a large-scale effort to conduct household caribou harvest surveys in a larger portion of communities across the range of the WAH.

In recent years, harvest may have exceeded the harvestable surplus of the population. Reducing this harvest, particularly cow harvest, is an important step to slowing population decline. Estimated cow mortality is an important population metric and has remained above the long-term average since 2018. The change to 5 caribou per day to 4 per year, only one of which may be a cow, represents a significant reduction in harvest with an emphasis on reducing cow harvest.

The WAH ranges into and currently occupies portions of Unit 26A, which is why that subunit is included in this proposal. Residents of Unit 26A have demonstrated a history of reliance on caribou as an important subsistence resource similar to those use patterns in Unit 23. While the WAH has been known to occur within most of Unit 26A they are generally found in the western and southern portions of that unit. The Teshekpuk (TCH) and Central Arctic (CAH) herds can be found mixed with members of the WAH in Unit 26A during a portion of the year, especially during the winter and spring months. In contrast to the WAH which is in decline, the TCH and CAH herd are currently stable and able to support the current level of harvest.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **SUPPORTS** this proposal for units 22 and 23 and recommends an amendment to retain the existing Unit 26A seasons and bag limits due to the stable populations of the other herds in Unit 26A. Many hunters in Unit 26A harvest caribou from the Teshekpuk Caribou herd and the Central Arctic herd and a modification is needed to address that difference.

The department also requests the board delay action on the regulations for units 21D, 24B, 24C and 24D until the Interior Region Board of Game Meeting scheduled for January 2024 in Fairbanks.

If adopted, the board may wish to consider whether reasonable opportunity for subsistence exists under the proposed regulatory structure as well as how the proposed regulations would impact the customary and traditional harvest and use patterns of many subsistence users for caribou.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs for the department.

PROPOSAL 3 – 5 AAC 85.025. Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou. Close nonresident caribou hunting in Units 21D Remainder, 22, 23, 24B Remainder, 24C, 24D, and 26A.

PROPOSED BY: Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group, Vern Cleveland, Chair (EG-F23-209)

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO?

Close the nonresident caribou season in Units 21D Remainder, 22, 23, 24B Remainder, 24C, 24D, and 26A. This would eliminate all nonresident hunting opportunities for caribou in the Units listed above.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

Unit 21D Remainder, 22, 23, 24B Remainder, 24C, 24D Nonresident caribou season:

1 Bull; August 1- September 30 Locking tag and harvest ticket required Unit 26A

Nonresident caribou season:

1 Bull; July 15-September 30

Locking tag and Harvest ticket required

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for caribou in Units 21D Remainder, 22, 23, 24B Remainder, 24C, 24D and 26A. As mentioned above, several caribou herds migrate across these units, and positive customary and traditional use findings have been found for each herd.

Caribou harvests in these units are subject to the following Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) ranges:

Units 20(F), 21(B), 21(C), 21(D) and 24 (Galena Mountains Herd, Wolf Mountains Herd, Ray Mountains Herd): 150-200

Units 21,22,23,24, and 26 (Western Arctic Herd, Teshekpuk Lake Herd): 8,000-12,000 Units 25(A), 25(B), 25(D), 26(B), and 26(C) (Porcupine Herd): 1,250-1,550

Unit 26(B) (Central Arctic Herd): 250 – 450

The Western Arctic Caribou herd (WAH) has a positive intensive management finding, with a population objective of at least 200,000 caribou and a harvest objective of 12,000-20,000.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If the proposal is adopted, it would close all nonresident hunting of caribou in Units 21D Remainder, 22, 23, 24B Remainder, 24C, 24D, and 26A. If adopted, this proposal may reduce WAH harvest as intended but could have the unintended consequence of limiting hunting opportunity in Units where the WAH is currently not found.

BACKGROUND: Caribou are a highly valued game animal utilized by various groups across the range of the WAH. The WAH ranges across Units 21D Remainder, 22, 23, 24B Remainder, 24C, 24D, and 26A. This herd is currently declining with a population of 164,000 during the 2022 census. An Intensive Management Population Level has been set for the WAH at 200,000. The Board of Game set a combined ANS range for the WAH and Teshekpuk Caribou herds in Units 21, 22, 23, 24 and 26 of 8,000-12,000 animals. The herd has been in decline since the early 2000s when it was close to 500,000. This herd has supported an estimated harvest of 12,000

caribou per year since 1996. However, given changes to WAH distribution in recent years that has limited access to the herd by local users, the department has concluded the model used to develop this estimate is too coarse to track short term change and the use of the model has been discontinued at this time. It is generally understood that harvest rates have decreased due to the reduction in access and abundance to the herd, however the data is too limited to understand the rate of reduction. The recommended harvest rate based on figures presented in Table 2 of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group (WACHWG) management plan (2019) for the 2022 population of 164,000 animals is ~4.8% or 7,872 animals, which is below the harvest objective and the lower end of the ANS for the WAH.

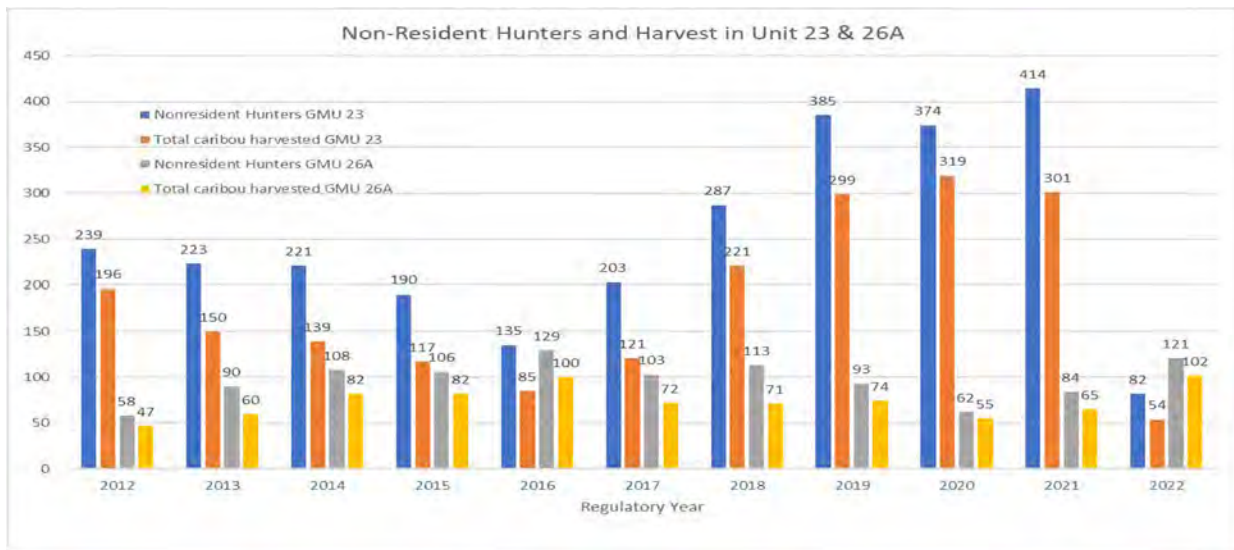


Table 1: Nonresident caribou hunter numbers shown in blue and gray and number of harvested caribou shown in orange and yellow from 2012-2022.

Since 1996 harvest estimates for the WAH indicate that local harvest accounts for approximately 95% of the total harvest with nonresident hunters taking the remaining 5%. Most of the nonresident harvest occurs in Units 23 and 26A. Federal land closures to hunting by Non-Federally Qualified Subsistence Users under WSA21-01 has reduced the area available for nonresident hunters in Unit 23. Annual nonresident harvest averaged 251 caribou and has been comprised of mostly bulls (97.91%), RY2012-2022. Bull:cow ratios remain well above the 30:100 goal set by the Western Arctic Herd Working Group. The limited number of bulls harvested by nonresidents is believed to be biologically insignificant.

Some resident hunters of WAH caribou indicate that competition with nonresident hunters impedes their ability to access the animals for subsistence, especially in a time of decline. Of specific concern is the presence of aircraft in early in the fall and the possible impacts on herd movements observed by area hunters.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department is **NEUTRAL** due to its allocative nature. Although there are reasons to reduce harvest of the WAH, the limited number of bulls harvested by nonresidents is believed to be biologically insignificant and the department is generally opposed to unnecessary reductions in hunting opportunity that is not biologically driven.

Considering the harvestable surplus and the ANS range, the board may wish to evaluate whether or not it can provide for all consumptive uses.

The department asks to defer the decision on Units 24B remainder, 24C, and 24D until the Interior & Eastern Arctic Region meeting in March 2024.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 4 - 5 AAC 85.025(21) Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou. Align caribou seasons and reduce the bag limit in Units 26A and 23.

PROPOSED BY: North Slope Advisory Committee

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal seeks to align caribou seasons in Unit 26A and Unit 23, and reduce the bag limit as follows:

Align caribou harvest and seasons with 26A remainder to reduce cow harvest in southern GMU26A and GMU 23 north of and including Singoalik River Drainage as follows:

Five caribou per day **3 of which may be cows, cows with calves may not be taken: July 16- Oct 15.**

Three cows per day, cows with calves may not be taken. Oct. 16-Dec 31

Five caribou per day **3 caribou may be cows, no calves may be taken Jan 1- March 15**

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

| Open to: | GMU | Bag Limit and Special Instructions | | Registration Permit/HT | Season |
|----------|--|------------------------------------|-------|------------------------|------------------|
| R | 23 Remainder | Five caribou per day | Bulls | RC907 | No closed season |
| | | | Cows | RC907 | Sept 1-March 31 |
| N | | One | Bull | HT | Aug 1-Sept 30 |
| R | Unit 23, that portion north of and including the Singoalik River drainage: | Five caribou per day | Bulls | RC907 | No closed season |
| | | | Cows | RC907 | July 15-April 30 |
| N | | One | Bull | HT | Aug 1-Sept 30 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|-------|-------|------------------------------------|
| R | 26A The Colville River drainage upstream from the Anaktuvuk | Five caribou per day by permit | Bulls | RC907 | July 1-Oct 14 Feb 1-June 30 |
| | | | Cows | RC907 | July 15-April 30 |
| N | River and drainages of the Chukchi Sea south and West of, and including the Utukok River drainage | One | Bull | HT | July 15-Sept 30 |
| R | 26A Remainder | Five Bulls per day | Bulls | RC907 | July 1-July 15 March 16-June 30 |
| R | 26A Remainder | Five Caribou per day, 3 of which can be cows, calves may not be taken | Cows | RC907 | July 16-Oct 15 |
| R | 26A Remainder | 3 Cows per day | Cows | RC907 | Oct 16-Dec 31 |
| N | 26A Remainder | One | Bull | HT | July 15-Sept 30 |

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for caribou in Units 21D Remainder, 22, 23, 24B Remainder, 24C, 24D and 26A. As mentioned above, several caribou herds migrate across these units, and positive customary and traditional use findings have been found for each. Caribou harvests in these units are subject to the following Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) ranges:

Units 20(F), 21(B), 21(C), 21(D) and 24 (Galena Mountains Herd, Wolf Mountains Herd, Ray Mountains Herd): 150-200

Units 21,22,23,24, and 26 (Western Arctic Herd, Teshekpuk Lake Herd): 8,000-12,000 Units

25(A), 25(B), 25(D), 26(B), and 26(C) (Porcupine Herd): 1,250-1,550

Unit 26(B) (Central Arctic Herd): 250 – 450

The Western Arctic Caribou herd (WAH) has a positive intensive management finding, with a population objective of at least 200,000 caribou and a harvest objective of 12,000-20,000.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? This proposal will reduce cow harvest opportunities from the current up to five per day to a maximum of three cows per day during July 16-October 15, October 16-December 31, and January 1-March 15. This may reduce some hunting pressure on cows in southern Unit 26A and Unit 23 north of and

including the Singoalik River drainage. Prohibiting the harvest of any bulls during October 16-December 31 may cause a loss of opportunity for residents who may want to harvest young bulls that may not yet be rutting. This could lead to a potential increase in cow harvest in the fall.

Proposed changes:

| Open to: | GMU | Bag Limit and Special Instructions | | Registration Permit/HT | Season |
|----------|---|---|-------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| R | 23 Remainder | Five caribou per day | Bulls | RC907 | No closed season |
| | | | Cows | RC907 | Sept 1-March 31 |
| N | | One | Bull | HT | Aug 1-Sept 30 |
| R | Unit 23, that portion north of and including the Singoalik River drainage: | Five caribou per day, only three may be cows, cows with calves may not be taken | Bulls | RC907 | No closed season |
| | | | Cows | RC907 | July 16-Oct 15 |
| R | | 3 cows per day, cows with calves may not be taken | Cows | RC907 | Oct 16-Dec 31 Jan 1-Mar 15 |
| N | | One | Bull | HT | Aug 1-Sept 30 |
| R | 26A The Colville River drainage upstream from the Anaktuvuk River and drainages of the Chukchi Sea south and West of, and including the Utukok River drainage | Five caribou per day, only three may be cows, cows with calves may not be taken. | Bulls | RC907 | July 1-Oct 14 Feb 1-June 30 |
| | | | Cows | RC907 | July 16-October 15 |
| R | | 3 cows per day, cows with calves may not be taken | Cows | RC907 | Oct 16-Dec 31 Jan 1-Mar 15 |
| N | | One | Bull | HT | July 15-Sept 30 |
| R | 26A Remainder | Five Bulls per day | Bulls | RC907 | July 1-July 15 March 16-June 30 |
| R | 26A Remainder | Five Caribou per day, 3 of which may be cows, calves, may not be taken | Cows | RC907 | July 16-Oct 15 |
| R | 26A Remainder | 3 Cows per day | Cows | RC907 | Oct 16-Dec 31 |

| | | | | | |
|---|------------------|-----|------|----|-----------------|
| N | 26A Remainder | One | Bull | HT | July 15-Sept 30 |
|---|------------------|-----|------|----|-----------------|

BACKGROUND: The ranges of three different caribou herds overlap in Unit 26A throughout the year: the Western Arctic herd, the Teshekpuk herd, and the Central Arctic herd. The Western Arctic Caribou herd population has been declining since 2003 from a peak population of 490,000 caribou to 164,000 in 2022. The Teshekpuk and Central Arctic Caribou herd populations are stable to increasing at 61,593 (95% CI 52,188-70,998) and 34,642 (95% CI: 32,419-36,866), respectively. Both populations are near historical peak numbers. There is geographical overlap annually among the herds within Unit 26A making it challenging to discern from which herd animals are being harvested. Caribou that are harvested by residents of Point Lay and Point Hope are almost exclusively from the WAH. Caribou that are harvested in Wainwright and Anaktuvuk Pass varies from year to year in proportion of WAH and TCH. Anaktuvuk Pass in recent years has had access to all three herds in the fall, winter, and spring. Wainwright may have access to WAH and TCH year-round in some years and only seasonal access either WAH or TCH in others.

The North Slope Borough (NSB) Wildlife Department has been working with North Slope communities to discuss options for reducing harvest from the Western Arctic Caribou Herd. The NSB visited communities in 2016 and 2017 to talk about caribou regulations at that time. The current regulations reflect community recommendations for 26A remainder. They submitted the same suggestions they had from the communities before in this proposal for Unit 23 north of the Singoalik and southern 26A. They have been talking with communities at several public meetings more recently. The first one was at Kiviq dance festival in 2022. They have since held public meetings in August 2023 in Anaktuvuk Pass and in September in Point Hope. They will continue to hold meetings to get any guidance towards amendments to this proposal prior to the Board of Game meeting.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: Given potential allocative implications, the department is **NEUTRAL** on this proposal. However, the department understands the need to address declining population numbers and the efforts by the NSB to reduce cow harvest particularly in communities that experience large influxes of WAH caribou.

If adopted, this proposal would reduce reasonable opportunity for caribou harvests by state qualified subsistence users through changes to the bag limit during certain time frames. As such, the Board may wish to determine whether reasonable opportunity is still provided.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs for the department.

PROPOSAL 5 – 5 AAC 85.025. Caribou hunting seasons and bag limits. Reduce the bag limit for caribou for RC907 resident hunters in Units 23 and 26A, and change the nonresident hunt to a registration permit with additional restrictions,

PROPOSED BY: Gary Colbath

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? The proposal would change the RC907 permit from five caribou per day to five caribou annually only one of which may be a cow for resident hunters. The proposal would also establish a registration permit for nonresident hunters in Units 23 & 26 with a quota to be determined by ADF&G but not less than 400 bulls.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

Unit 23

Resident Hunting Season

Five caribou per day, by registration permit only (RC907); however, calves may not be taken.

Bulls: no closed season

Cows: July 15 – Apr 30

(Sept 1 – Mar 31 in 23 Remainder)

Nonresident Hunting Season

One Bull Aug 1 – Sept 30

Unit 26A

Resident Hunting Season

Five caribou per day, by registration permit only (RC907); however, calves may not be taken.

Bulls: July 1 – Oct 14, Feb 1 – June 30

Cows: July 15 – Apr 30

Nonresident Hunting Season

One Bull July 15 – Sept 30

Unit 26 Remainder

Resident Hunting Season (RC907 permit)

Jan 1- Mar 15: Five caribou per day (three of which may be cows)

Mar 16 - July 15: Five bulls per day

July 16 - October 15: Five caribou per day (three of which may be cows; cows with calves may not be taken)

Oct 16 – Dec 31: Three cows per day

Nonresident Hunting Season

One Bull July 15 – Sept 30

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for caribou in Units 21D Remainder, 22, 23, 24B Remainder, 24C, 24D and 26A. Several caribou herds migrate across these units, and positive customary and traditional use findings have been found for each herd. The board adopted the following Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) ranges by herd:

Units 20(F), 21(B), 21(C), 21(D) and 24 (Galena Mountains Herd, Wolf Mountains Herd, Ray Mountains Herd): 150-200

Units 21,22,23,24, and 26 (Western Arctic Herd, Teshekpuk Lake Herd): 8,000-12,000

Units 25(A), 25(B), 25(D), 26(B), and 26(C) (Porcupine Herd): 1,250-1,550

Unit 26(B) (Central Arctic Herd): 250 – 450

The Western Arctic Caribou herd (WAH) has a positive intensive management finding, with a

population objective of at least 200,000 caribou and a harvest objective of 12,000-20,000.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If the proposal were adopted, it would reduce the bag limit for resident hunters in the RC907 permits in Units 23 and 26A and establish a nonresident registration permit with a quota to be determined by the department with a minimum of at least 400 bulls instead of the current harvest ticket. Effectively, the proposal would reduce subsistence opportunity while potentially increasing nonresident opportunity.

BACKGROUND: The Western Arctic Caribou Herd is currently experiencing a long-term decline which started in 2003 and has resulted in a population level decrease from approximately 490,000 in 2003 to 164,000 in 2022. While caribou populations are known to fluctuate naturally based on a variety of environmental factors, this decline is of significant concern due to the importance of caribou to various user groups. The home range of the WAH covers approximately 157,000 square miles and caribou are generally considered the primary terrestrial food source for many communities within that range (WACHWG 2022).

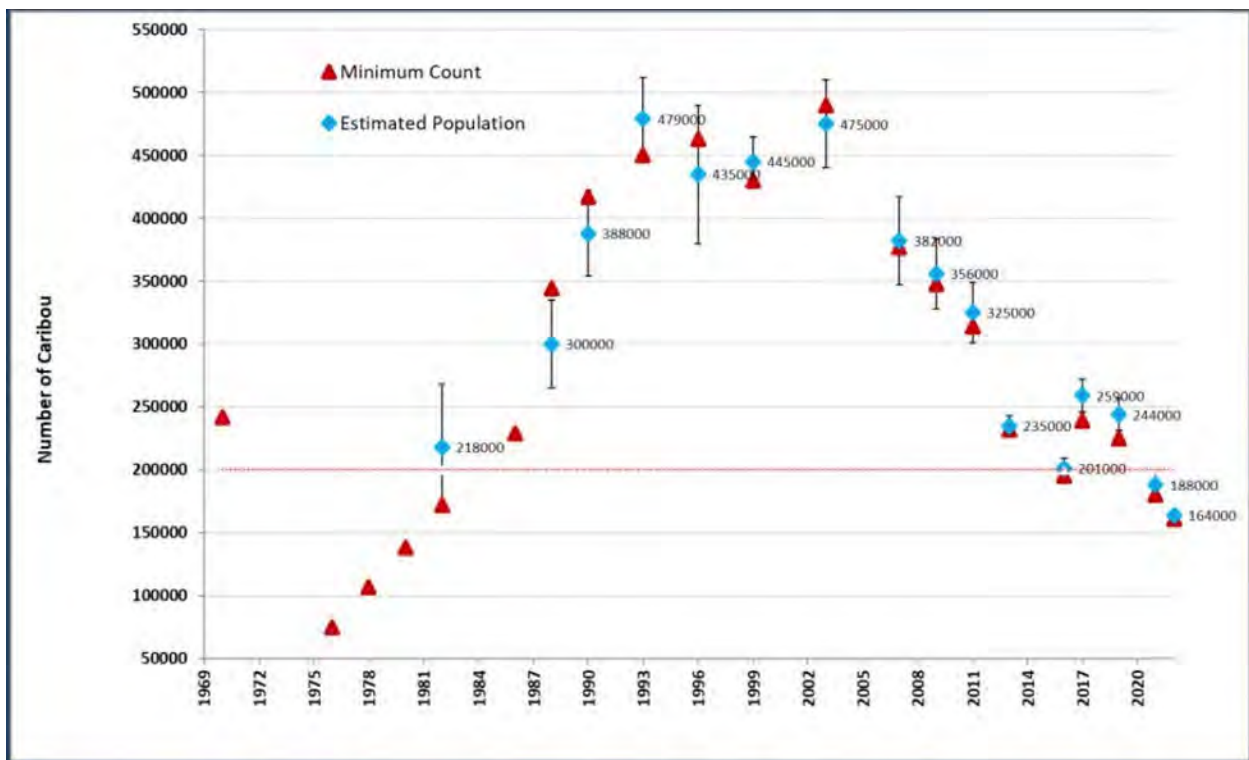


Figure 1. Western Arctic Caribou Herd population estimate 1970-2022. Minimum counts are indicated in red and estimated abundance is indicated with a blue diamond along with associated 95% confidence limits. Estimates are produced using an estimator described by Rivest et al (1998).

The importance of caribou conservation to local users was demonstrated by the Kotzebue Advisory Committee (AC) during a 2022 fall/winter meeting where they drafted a proposal to reduce the resident bag limit to 4 caribou per year, of which only 1 may be a cow and applied it

to Unit 23 only. The Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group (WACHWG) followed suit a few weeks later during their December meeting. Drafting a similar proposal, the working group unanimously voted to use the same bag limit proposed by the Kotzebue AC but opted to include the entirety of the WAH range. The WACHWG is made up of various stakeholders including subsistence users from communities within the WAH range, hunters from outside the range of the herd, conservationists, hunting guides, reindeer herders and transporters. The combined proposals, (WSA22-05 and 06) coming from the North West Arctic and Western Interior Subsistence Regional Advisory Committees show continued local support and understanding of the need for harvest reduction. The department recognizes and fully supports the readiness of these groups to reduce harvest and promote conservation of the WAH.

Harvest of the WAH is difficult to determine with limited harvest reporting across a wide geographic area. The department conservatively estimates that around 10% of the actual harvest is reported. Recent attempts to increase reporting have included the establishment of registration hunts (RC800 and RC907) and outreach efforts focused on the need for harvest data. To fill in this data gap the department previously used a model to determine harvest by using subsistence household surveys, and the local availability (distance, weather, etc.) to determine the harvest level locally. This model has produced an average annual harvest of approximately 12,000 animals (Dau 2015). However, given changes to WAH distribution in recent years limiting access to the herd by local users, the department has concluded the model is too coarse to track short term change and the use of the model has been discontinued at this time. It is generally understood that harvest rates have decreased due to reduction in access, however the information is too limited to understand the rate of reduction. The recommended harvest rate, based on figures presented in Table 2 of the WACHWG management plan (2019) for the 2022 population of 164,000 animals, is ~4.8% or 7,872 animals. This estimate of harvestable surplus is far below the long-term estimated average harvest for this herd and continued efforts to understand actual harvest are ongoing.

Reducing this harvest, particularly cow harvest, is an important step to slowing population decline. Estimated cow mortality is an important population metric and has remained above the long-term estimated average since 2018. The change from 5 caribou per day to 5 per year only one of which may be a cow represents a significant reduction in harvest with an emphasis on a reduction in cow harvest.

The nonresident harvest on the WAH has historically represented around 5% of total estimated harvest. Reporting of nonresident harvest of the WAH is nearly 100%. Most nonresident harvest occurring within Units 23 & 26A due to the current movements of the WAH. Federal land closures to hunting by Non-Federally Qualified Subsistence Users under WSA21-01 has reduced the area available for nonresident hunters in Unit 23. Annual nonresident harvest averaged 256 caribou of which 97.91% were bulls (2012-2022). Bull:cow ratios remain well above the 30:100 goal set by the Western Arctic Herd Working Group. Bull:cow ratios have

been above 38:100 since 2001 and the most recent survey resulted in 47:100 in 2021. The highest harvest of caribou by nonresidents since 2012 occurred in 2021 with a total harvest of 374 caribou. This level of harvest still falls below the quota of at least 400 bulls in the proposal.

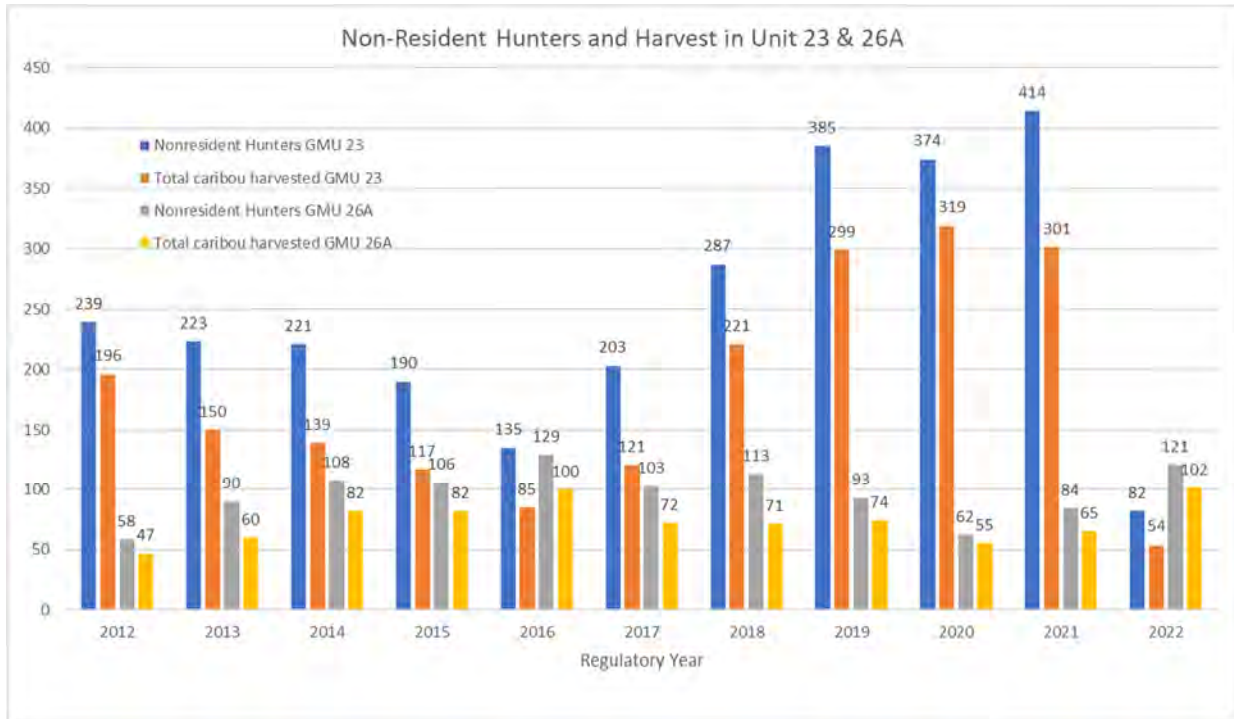


Figure 2: Nonresident hunters and harvest Unit 23 & 26A 2012-2022. The number of hunters in Unit 23 are shown in blue and in gray for Unit 26A. Total caribou harvest is shown in orange for Unit 23 and yellow for Unit 26A.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department is **NEUTRAL** regarding this proposal for units 22 and 23 and recommends an amendment to retain existing Unit 26A seasons and bag limits due to the stable populations of the other herds in Unit 26A. Because many hunters in Unit 26A harvest caribou from the Teshekpuk Caribou herd as well as the Central Arctic herd in Unit 26A, a modification is needed to address that difference.

Reducing harvest, especially cow harvest, is one variable that can be controlled to help manage the herd while the WAH is in decline. The nonresident quota of at least 400 bulls recommended by this proposal is unlikely to affect nonresident harvest. Nonresident harvest reporting in the region is very good and allows the department to monitor the harvest appropriately.

The change in bag limit for resident hunting from 5 caribou per day to 5 per year, where only one can be a cow, is a significant reduction to subsistence opportunity. If adopted, the board may wish to consider whether reasonable opportunity for subsistence would still be provided under the proposed regulatory structure. Specifically, the board may wish to consider how the proposed regulations would impact the customary and traditional harvest and use patterns for caribou of many subsistence users and whether nonsubsistence uses should still be provided at this level of conservation need.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 6 - 5AAC 85.025. Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou. Close the caribou season in Unit 18 (Mulchatna Herd) for five to ten years.

PROPOSED BY: Alissa Nadine Rogers

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal seeks to close hunting by creating a hunting moratorium on the Mulchatna Caribou herd (MCH) for five to ten years with a review every five years.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? Under 5 AAC 92.108, the Board of Game has identified the Mulchatna Caribou Herd (MCH) as important for providing high levels of harvest for human consumptive use and established an intensive management (IM) population objective of 30,000–80,000 caribou with a harvest objective of 2,400–8,000 caribou. There is also a positive customary and traditional use (C&T) finding for caribou in Units 9A, 9B, 17, 18, 19A, and 19B with an amount reasonably necessary for subsistence (ANS) for the Mulchatna herd across its range of 2,100–2,400 caribou.

Hunting of the MCH is administered through a resident-only registration caribou permit (RC503) across the full historic range which allows for up to 2 caribou by registration permit only August 1–March 15 (5 AAC 85.025). Nonresident opportunity has not been provided since 2008.

For the past three years, the department has issued an Emergency Order (EO) to close the season for caribou in Units 9A, 9B, 17, 18, 19A that portion south of the Kuskokwim River, and Unit 19B (Mulchatna herd).

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If adopted, this proposal would close the caribou season in Unit 18 for a minimum of five years by regulation. The department has closed the season by EO for all of the MCH range for the past three years. For several years before that, the season had been shortened due to conservation concerns. This proposal, if adopted as written, would not affect caribou hunting in Units 9A, 9B, 17, 19A, and 19B which would still have to be closed by EO as necessary.

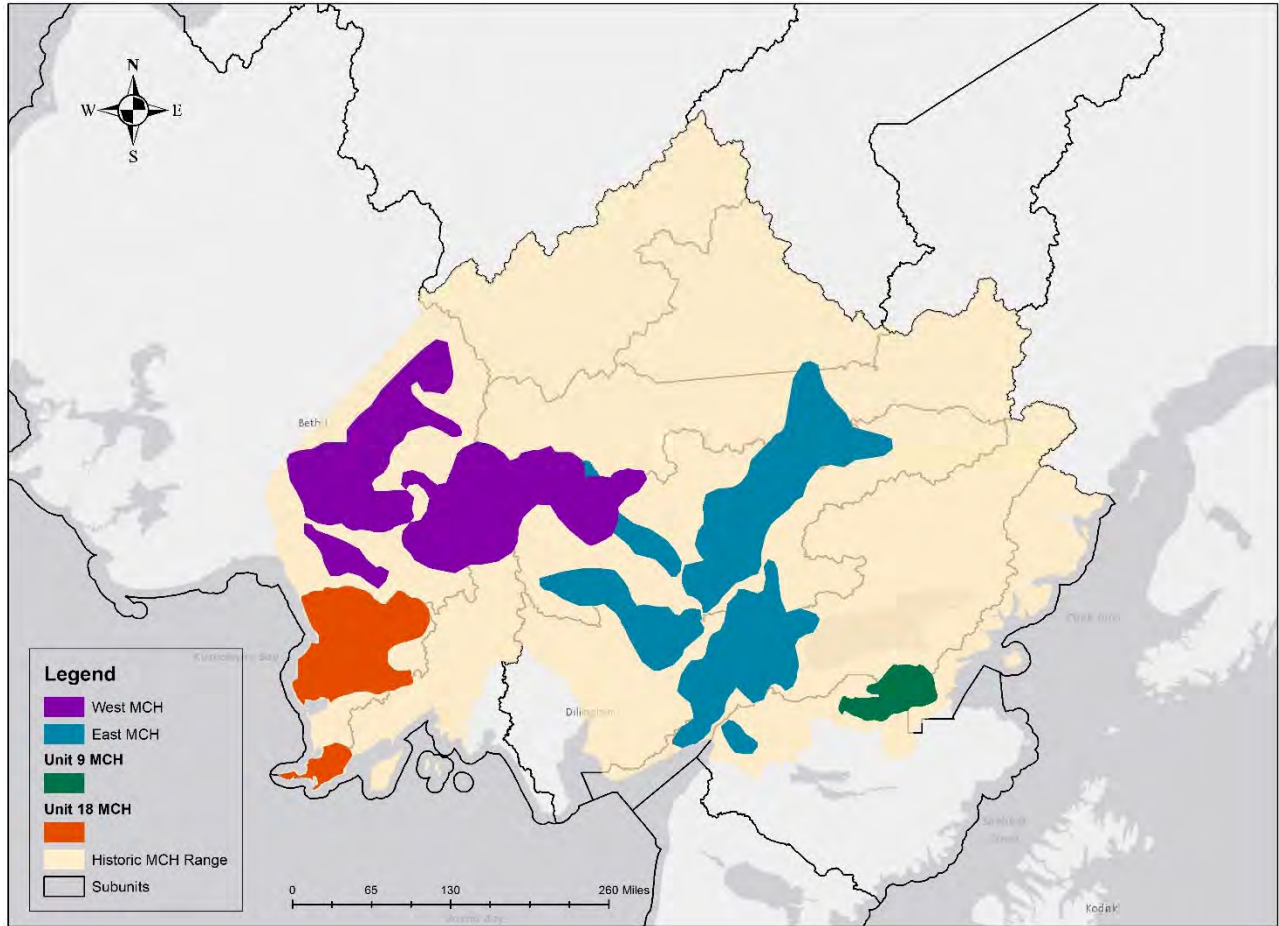


Figure 6-1. The historic range of the Mulchatna Caribou Herd in Units 9, 17, 18, and 19.

BACKGROUND: The population of the Mulchatna Caribou Herd has fluctuated widely in the last 50 years. The original population objective of 25,000 caribou was established in 1987 by the BOG and has been adjusted over time commensurate with population variability until the current objective of 30,000–80,000 animals was defined in 2008. At that time, the MCH was believed to number approximately 30,000 animals.

The population peaked at an estimated 200,000 caribou in 1996, and a low of 7,500 was documented in 1974. The averaged survey estimate during this period (1974-1996) was 58,512 animals but influenced heavily by the peak years in the late 1990s (Table 6-1; Figure 6-2). Since the updated intensive management objectives established in 2008, the lower population objective for the MCH has only been achieved twice—in 2008 and 2015. The current midpoint of the objective of 55,000 caribou has been achieved nine survey years out of 24 total estimates going back 46 years, with the most recent mid-point objective being met in 2004. Since 2004, the MCH has remained under the population objective with consistent estimates from 2019 through 2023 of 12,000–13,000 caribou with overlapping confidence intervals suggesting the last five years have remained relatively stable.

Table 6-1. Mulchatna caribou herd estimated population size, calendar years 1974–2023.

| Calendar Year | Preliminary Estimate ^a | Minimum Count ^b | Population |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|------------|
| 1974 | – | – | 14,238 |
| 1978 | – | – | 7,503 |
| 1981 | – | – | 20,618 |
| 1984 | – | – | 33,214 |
| 1985 | – | – | 43,000 |
| 1987 | – | – | 52,527 |
| 1989 | – | – | 70,000 |
| 1990 | – | – | 82,000 |
| 1991 | 60,851 | – | 90,000 |
| 1992 | 90,550 | 110,073 | 115,000 |
| 1994 | 150,000 | 168,351 | 180,000 |
| 1996 | 200,000 | 192,818 | 200,000 |
| 1999 | 160–180,000 | 147,012 | 175,000 |
| 2001 | – | 121,680 | 147,000 |
| 2004 | – | 77,303 | 85,000 |
| 2006 | – | 40,766 | 45,000 |
| 2008 | – | 20,545 | 30,000 |
| 2012 | – | 15,443 | 22,809 |
| 2013 | – | 12,660 | 18,308 |
| 2014 | – | – | 26,275 |
| 2015 | – | – | 30,736 |
| 2016 | – | 14,780 | 27,242 |
| 2017 | – | 13,350 | 13,350 |
| 2018 | – | 11,084 | 11,084 |
| 2019 | – | 9,294 | 13,448 |
| 2020 | – | 8,782 | 13,448 |
| 2021 | – | 9,933 | 12,837 |
| 2022 | – | 9,710 | 12,112 |
| 2023 | – | 10,144 | 12,507 |

^a Based on estimated herd sizes observed during the aerial census.

^b Data derived from photo-counts and observations during the aerial census.

^c Estimate based on observations during census/surveys and subjective estimates of the number of caribou in areas not surveyed.

– Indicates no data available.

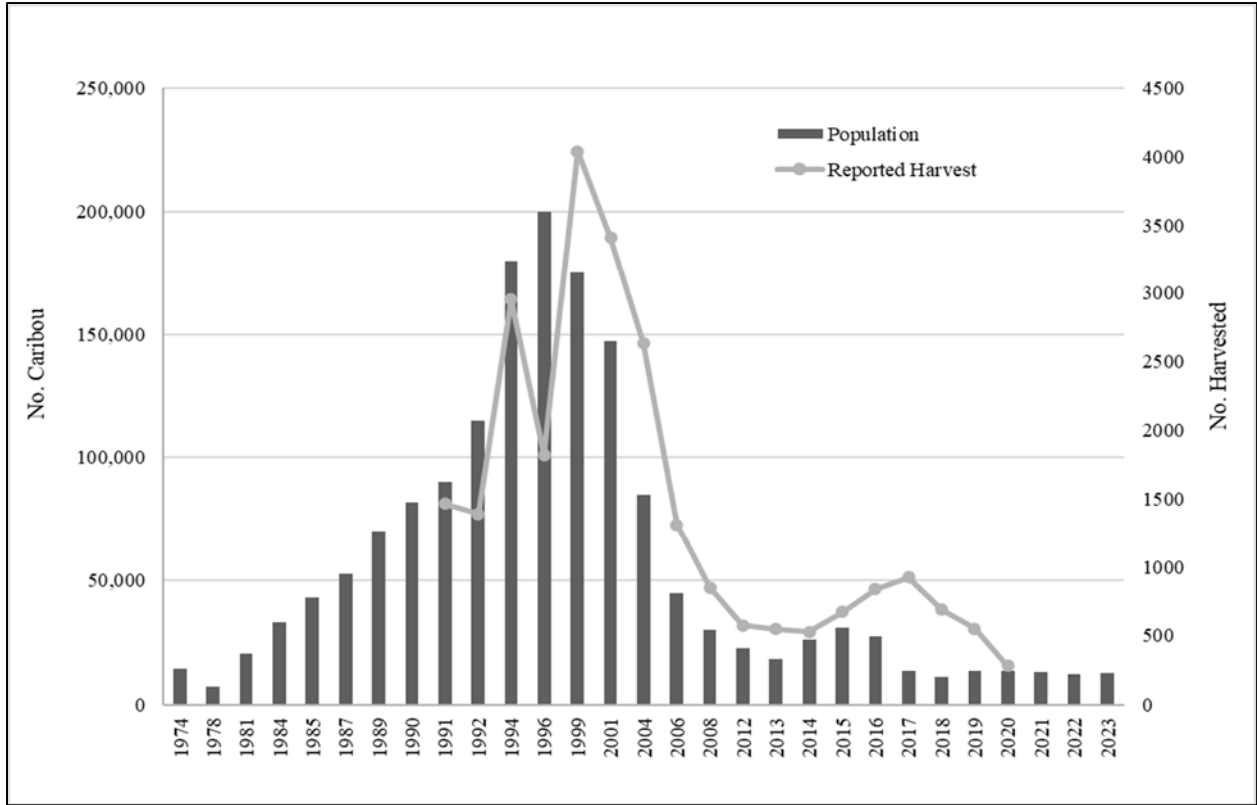


Figure 6-2. Mulchatna caribou herd population and harvest history, RY1974–2023.

There is an active intensive management program for the MCH focused on removing wolves and bears for the benefit of caribou. Efforts target removing wolves across the east MCH seasonal ranges in Units 9B, 17B, 17C, 18, and 19B, and removing brown and black bears and wolves in the western calving grounds.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **OPPOSES** this proposal. The department has closed hunting for the entire range of the MCH and will only open the hunt when a harvestable surplus is available. There are ongoing management and research projects focusing on increasing the herd’s size and better understanding herd dynamics that may be factors in the decline. Should the board wish to take up this proposal, the department recommends it be deferred to the Central/Southwest Region IV BOG meeting schedule for January 2025. The MCH hunt is managed by the Central/Southwest Region out of the Dillingham office, and the majority of the hunting occurs in that region.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs for the department.

PROPOSAL 7 – 5 AAC 85.045 Hunting season and bag limits for moose. Lengthen the season for moose in Unit 18 for moose hunt RM617.

PROPOSED BY: Native Village of Kwinhagak

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal would provide resident hunters with additional opportunity by extending the fall moose hunting season in a portion of Unit 18 by two weeks. If adopted, the hunting season would be open September 1 – October 15 rather than its current season of September 1 – September 30. This would create a season of 45 days. The bag limit would remain the same, at 1 antlered bull by registration permit only.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? The current resident moose season in the Unit 18 Quinhagak Hunt area is September 1–September 30 with a bag limit of 1 antlered bull, by registration permit (RM617). There is no nonresident opportunity for moose in the RM617 hunt area.

There is a positive customary and traditional finding for moose in Unit 18, and an amount reasonably necessary for subsistence of 200–400 moose (5 AAC 99.025(8)).

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? This proposal would provide 15 additional days of resident hunting opportunity in the RM617 Quinhagak moose hunt area.

BACKGROUND: The hunt was extended by Emergency Order during the 2021-2022 moose season due to poor weather during the hunt, and during the 2023-2024 season due to an unavailability of gasoline in the village. Reported harvest has remained below the harvest objective for the 4-year history of the hunt.

The department and the Togiak National Wildlife Refuge (TNWR) collaborate to complete moose population surveys and administer cooperative state and federal moose hunts in this portion of Unit 18. There is only one survey area in this portion of Unit 18 which includes all drainages flowing into Kuskokwim Bay south of the Eek River Drainage and north of and including the Carter Bay Drainage. Population surveys completed in 2013 and 2018 indicate the moose population has grown rapidly in the last decade. Minimum count surveys found 30 moose in 2013, 173 moose in 2018, 236 moose in 2020 and 275 in 2023.

The majority of the moose in the hunt area are located on US Fish and Wildlife Service administered Federal lands. This area is less accessible to boat borne hunters in the fall, especially when water levels are low. A longer fall season would allow more flexibility for hunters to take advantage of conditions for safe travel and would align season dates with the neighboring RM615 Zone 2 to the north. Because weather patterns are difficult to predict, hunter success has been variable, with 16 moose harvested in 2019, 12 in 2020, 7 in 2021 and 9 in 2022. To date, permit availability has been limited to the villages of Eek and Quinhagak.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **SUPPORTS** this proposal to provide greater hunting opportunity. The department also recommends this proposal be amended by modifying the bag limit from 1 antlered bull to 1 bull moose, excluding male calves to align moose bag limits

throughout the Unit 18.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal would not result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 8 – 5 AAC 85.045 Hunting season and bag limits for moose. Lengthen the season for moose in Unit 18 for moose hunt RM617.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal would provide resident hunters with additional opportunity by extending the fall moose hunting season in a portion of Unit 18 by two weeks. If adopted, the hunting season would be open September 1 – October 15 rather than its current season of September 1 – September 30. This would create a season of 45 days. The bag limit would remain the same, at 1 antlered bull by registration permit only.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? The current resident moose season in the Unit 18 Quinhagak Hunt area is September 1–September 30 with a bag limit of 1 antlered bull, by registration permit (RM617). There is no nonresident opportunity for moose in the RM617 hunt area.

There is a positive customary and traditional finding for moose in Unit 18, and an amount reasonably necessary for subsistence of 200–400 moose (5 AAC 99.025(8)).

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? This proposal would provide 15 additional days of resident hunting opportunity in the RM617 Quinhagak moose hunt area.

BACKGROUND: The hunt was extended by Emergency Order during the 2021-2022 moose season due to poor weather during the hunt, and during the 2023-2024 season due to an unavailability of gasoline in the village. Reported harvest has remained below the harvest objective for the 4-year history of the hunt.

The department and the Togiak National Wildlife Refuge (TNWR) collaborate to complete moose population surveys and administer cooperative state and federal moose hunts in this portion of Unit 18. There is only one survey area in this portion of Unit 18 which includes all drainages flowing into Kuskokwim Bay south of the Eek River Drainage and north of and including the Carter Bay Drainage. Population surveys completed in 2013 and 2018 indicate the moose population has grown rapidly in the last decade. Minimum count surveys found 30 moose in 2013, 173 moose in 2018, 236 moose in 2020 and 275 in 2023.

The majority of the moose in the hunt area are located on US Fish and Wildlife Service managed lands. This area is less accessible to boat borne hunters in the fall, especially when water levels are low. A longer fall season would allow more flexibility for hunters to take advantage of conditions for safe travel and would align season dates with the neighboring RM615 Zone 2 to the north. Because weather patterns are difficult to predict, hunter success has been variable, with 16 moose harvested in 2019, 12 in 2020, 7 in 2021 and 9 in 2022. To date, permit availability has been limited to the villages of Eek and Quinhagak.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department submitted and **SUPPORTS** this proposal to provide greater hunting opportunity. The department also recommends this proposal be amended by modifying the bag limit from 1 antlered bull to 1 bull moose, excluding male calves, to align moose bag limits throughout the Unit 18.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal would not result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 9 – 5 AAC 85.045(a)(16). Hunting seasons and bag limits for moose.

Increase the moose bag limit in the remainder of Unit 18.

Liberalize the bag limit for moose in Unit 18 remainder as follows:

**Resident Open Season
(Subsistence and
Units and Bag Limits**

General Hunts)

**Nonresident
Open Season**

(16)

...

Remainder of

Unit 18

RESIDENT

HUNTERS:

2 moose; of which
only 1 may be
Sept. 30. an antlered bull;

Aug. 1 –

a person may
not take a calf

or

a cow
accompanied
by a calf; or

2 antlerless moose; or

Oct. 1—

Nov. 30. 2 moose

Dec.

1—Apr. 30

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 antlered bull: or

Sept. 1—Sept. 30

1 antlerless moose

Dec. 1— Mar. 15

...

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal would create additional resident hunting opportunity by allowing 3 moose to be harvested by residents in Unit 18 annually.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? There are three state moose seasons in Unit 18 Remainder. The first is August 1–September 30 for two moose, only one of which may be an antlered bull, and a person may not take a calf, or a cow accompanied by a calf. The second is October 1–November 30 and the bag limit is 2 antlerless moose. The third is December 1–April 30 for two moose.

Effective in 2022, federal managers adopted a three moose bag limit for rural residents on federal lands during all three moose hunting seasons. There is a positive intensive management finding for moose in Unit 18, with a population objective of 1,000-2,000 and a harvest objective of 60-200.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for moose in Unit 18, and an amount reasonably necessary for subsistence of 200–400 moose (5 AAC 99.025(8)).

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? This proposal would increase resident opportunity on state-managed lands. This proposal would also simplify the regulations for the public by aligning state and federal regulations in the Unit 18 Remainder area.

BACKGROUND: The department and the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (YDNWR) collaborate to complete moose population surveys. There are three survey areas in the remainder portion of Unit 18. These three areas are described as the Paimiut survey area, including lands upstream of Marshall to the Unit 18 border; the Andrefsky survey area, including land around the Andrefsky River and Yukon River from Mountain Village to Marshall; and the Lowest Yukon survey area downstream of Mountain Village. The most recent survey information indicates the moose population in the Paimiut survey area may be stabilizing after decreasing from 5,597 to 3,793 moose from 2013-2018, and by 2021 had increased again to 4,786 in 2021. Moose populations in the Andrefsky and Lowest Yukon survey areas have increased from 2,748 to 6,852 (2012-2021) and 8,226 to 12,031 (2017-2021), respectively. Reported harvest has been stable at 600-800 moose in the last 10 years (Figure 9-1).

Within the areas near the Yukon River, the moose population is estimated at a minimum of 24,000 animals. Browse removal rates were estimated to be 31% within the hunt area in 2021. Calf to cow ratios are generally declining and spring short yearling weights downriver of Mountain Village averaged below 300lbs in 2021 and 2022. These indices suggest the moose population along the Lower Yukon River is experiencing nutritional stress.

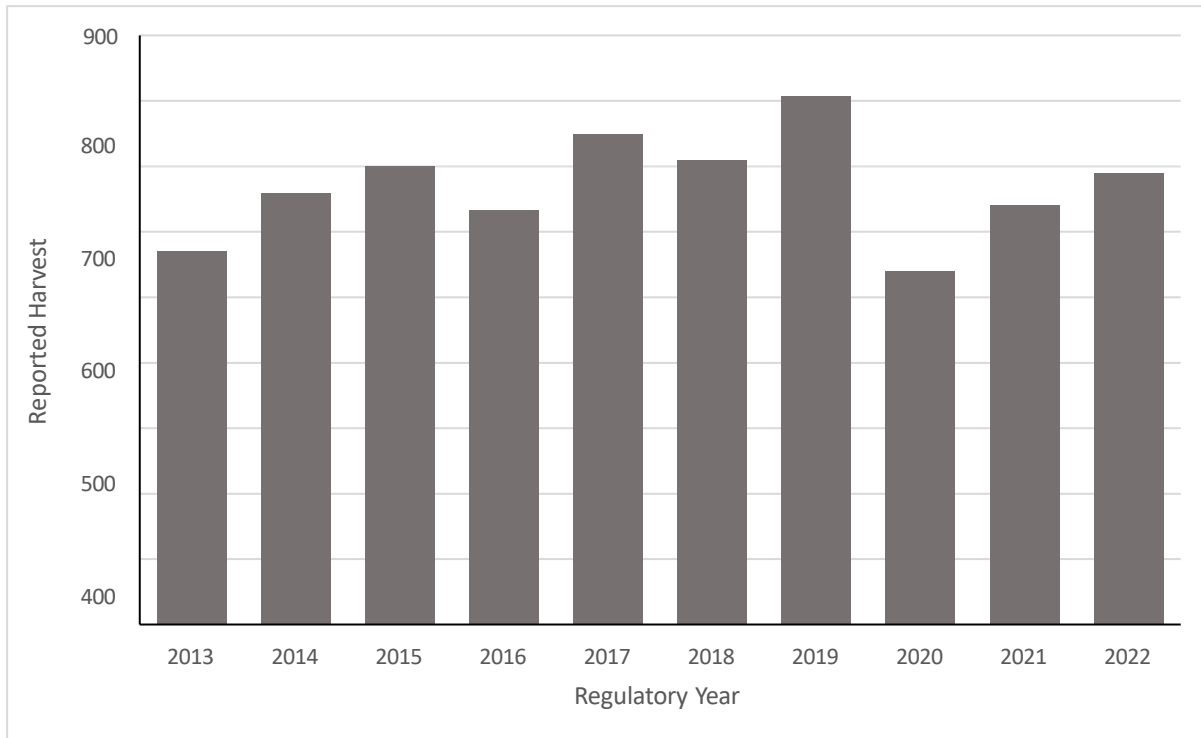


Figure 9-1. Reported harvest of moose in the Unit 18 Remainder hunt area 2009-2018.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department submitted and **SUPPORTS** this proposal to allow additional harvest opportunity because the additional harvest can be used to reduce the overall moose abundance which will improve nutritional indices. Adoption of the proposal will also simplifying the regulations.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal would not result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 10 – 5 AAC 85.045(a)(16) Hunting season and bag limits for moose.

Allow the take of antlerless moose by drawing permit in the RM625 hunt area in Unit 18 along the Kuskokwim River in Zone 1 and establish a new, “may be announced” winter season for antlered bulls by drawing permit in Zone 2 of the RM615 hunt area.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal would establish a drawing hunt for cow moose in Zone 1 of the RM615 moose hunt area along the Kuskokwim River in Unit 18, concurrent with the current fall season of September 1 to October 15th. This proposal would also establish a winter hunt in December and January for antlered bulls in Zone 2, to be opened if populations and conditions warrant it.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

5 AAC 85.045. Hunting seasons and bag limits for moose. (a) ...

| Resident Open Season (Subsistence and Units and Bag Limits | General Hunts) | Nonresident Open Season |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
|---|-----------------------|------------------------------------|

(16)

Unit 18, Kuskokwim Area, that
 Portion easterly of a line from
 The mouth of Ishkowik River
 As its entrance into
 Nunavakanukakslak Lake (60°
 59.41' N. latitude, 162° 22.14'
 W. longitude), continuing up-
 river along a line one-half mile
 South and east of, and parallel-
 ing a line along the southerly
 bank of the Johnson River to
 the confluence of the east bank
 of Crooked Creek, then con-
 tinuing upriver along the east
 bank of Crooked Creek to the
 outlet at Arhymot Lake, then
 following the south bank of
 Arhymot lake easterly to the
 Unit 18 border and north of
 And including the Eek River
 Drainage.

Sept. 1 – Oct. 15

No Open Season

No open Season

1 antlered bull by
 registration permit

There is a positive customary and traditional finding for moose in Unit 18, with an amount reasonably necessary for subsistence of 200–400 moose (5 AAC 99.025(8)).

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If adopted this proposal will create additional hunting opportunity by establishing two new hunts for moose along the Kuskokwim River. It would establish a drawing hunt for antlerless moose with season dates of September 1 – October 15, concurrent with the existing fall season in Zone 1 of the RM615 hunt area. It would also establish a winter season for antler bulls by draw permit in Zone 2 of the RM615 hunt area. The winter hunt for bulls would be a “may be announced” season open between December 1 – January 31, depending, upon how close the harvest was to the harvest objective during the fall season. This proposal, if adopted, may also slow the moose population growth in the is area in hopes of avoiding habitat degradation.

BACKGROUND: The RM615 hunt area is divided into two zones: Zone 1 and Zone 2. Approximately 1,400 permits get issued to hunters every year, with 1,100 people indicating they actively hunt during the season for both zones combined. Zone 1 land ownership primarily consists of private or tribal owned lands, though a small portion of the land within Zone 1 is federally owned. Zone 1 has easy access, and normally reaches harvest objectives for bulls in 7-9 days. The moose population in Zone 1 has increased from 70 moose in 2004, to 3,220 moose in 2020. Calf:cow ratios in fall composition surveys and harvest indicate that the population is continuing to grow. Winter browse surveys indicate that the population of moose in Zone 1 is approaching its upper limits for supporting healthy animals. The browse removal rates have increased from 16% removal in 2016 to 23% removal in 2019, indicating a significant rise in moose population in the area. It will soon be important to be able to harvest cows to level off the population at its current size to avoid moose overcrowding.

Zone 2 comprises the upper half of the five major drainages that all drain into the lower Kuskokwim (Tuluksak, Kisaralik, Kasigluk, Kwethluk and Eek Rivers). Land ownership primarily consists of federal lands with some state land and some privately owned lands. Access is more difficult, often requiring a jet boat or airplanes to access the hunt area. Zone 2 has a long season and is open September 1 - October 15. However, due to the area’s inaccessibility, Zone 2 has fallen short of the harvest objective in the last 10 years. In 2010, Zone 2 moose population was 345 moose and had increased to 781 by 2020. Browse surveys were completed once in 2019 and showed a removal rate of 15%. The Zone 2 moose population is believed to still be growing, though at a slower rate than Zone 1. Zone 2 moose are not yet facing any habitat concerns. An antlerless hunt is not recommended for Zone 2 currently because there is habitat for population growth. Having a limited winter season for antlered bulls will provide additional opportunity to harvest bulls in years when the harvest objective was not met in the fall season.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department submitted and **SUPPORTS** this proposal to provide additional hunting opportunity and to keep population numbers at levels the habitat can sustain.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal would not result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 11 - 5 AAC 85.045 Hunting season and bag limits for moose. Reauthorize the antlerless moose seasons in Unit 18.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal reauthorizes the resident and nonresident antlerless moose seasons in two areas of Unit 18: south of and including the Goodnews River drainage (RM621), and in the harvest ticket hunts in the remainder of Unit 18.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? Antlerless hunting during the winter seasons is allowed for resident hunters in the portion of Unit 18 that drains into Kuskokwim Bay south of the Carter Bay drainage in a “may be announced” season in January (RM621). The season timing and length depends on the winter travel conditions and how many moose are left from the fall quota.

Antlerless hunting during fall and winter seasons is allowed for resident hunters in the “Remainder of Unit 18.” There are three components to the antlerless seasons:

- 1) during August 1–September 30 the bag limit is 2 moose; however, only one antlered bull may be taken and taking calves or cows accompanied by calves is prohibited;
- 2) during October 1–November 30 the bag limit is 2 antlerless moose with no additional restrictions; and
- 3) during December 1–April 30 the bag limit is 2 moose with no additional restrictions.

There is a positive intensive management finding for moose in Unit 18, with a population objective of 1,000-2,000 and a harvest objective of 60-200 moose.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for moose in Unit 18, with an amount reasonably necessary for subsistence of 200–400 moose.

Antlerless moose hunting is also allowed for nonresident hunters in Unit 18 remainder. The current season for nonresidents is December 1- March 15 and the bag limit is one antlerless moose.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? The antlerless hunts in the areas south of the Carter Bay drainage and the remainder of Unit 18 would be reauthorized for RY2024 with existing seasons and bag limits.

BACKGROUND: Antlerless moose seasons must be reauthorized annually. Both hunt areas support a large moose population; the department estimates conservatively that there is a minimum population of 24,000 moose. In all areas surveyed, moose populations had twinning rates of 22-46% in 2022.

Harvests by residents in RY2022 (n = 412) are slightly lower than the previous 3-year average harvest (n = 453). In RY2022, the harvest ticket reports from the remainder of Unit 18 included 136 cows taken, along with the harvest of 276 bull moose. The combined harvest for the remainder of Unit 18 represented in this reauthorization is well within sustained yield, and the population trajectory has not been affected by antlerless harvests.

RY2017 was the first year for antlerless hunts for nonresidents. A total of 4 cow moose have been harvested by non-residents in Unit 18, 2 moose in 2020 and 2 moose in 2022. Nonresident harvest is anticipated to remain low during the antlerless season.

Five antlerless moose (3 cows and 2 bulls) have been reported harvested in the Goodnews hunt area since 2019.

Continuing antlerless moose harvest opportunity will benefit hunters and may also help slow the growth rate of the population.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department submitted and **SUPPORTS** this proposal to maintain antlerless hunts in areas where moose populations are increasing.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal is not expected to result in additional cost to the department.

PROPOSAL 12 - 5 AAC 92.085. Unlawful methods of taking game; exceptions. Add minimum caliber requirement of .243 or larger for moose hunts in Unit 18.

PROPOSED BY: Mike Glore

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal sets a minimum standard of centerfire .243 rifle cartridges for the taking of moose in Unit 18 and recommends statewide adoption.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

Big game may only be harvested with center-fire firearms, with a few exceptions, as noted in regulation:

The following methods and means of taking big game are prohibited in addition to the prohibitions in 5 AAC 92.080:

- (1) with the use of a firearm other than a shotgun, muzzleloader, or rifle or pistol using center firing cartridge, except that
 - (A) in units 23 and 26, swimming caribou may be taken with a firearm using rim fire cartridges:

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If adopted, moose hunters in Unit 18 would have stricter weapons requirements than for other big game

species. In addition, if adopted, Unit 18 would be the sole unit with a minimum caliber requirement in the state. The commonly used centerfire .223 caliber and any other smaller centerfire cartridges would not be legal for the taking of moose. Costs to the hunter may increase if hunters had to purchase new firearms.

BACKGROUND: The board has established standards for some weapons, and the department in turn educates hunters as to the pros and cons of legal weapons and calibers. Individual hunters make their own decisions about which legal caliber to use when harvesting game based on their capabilities.

Reducing wounding loss is a primary consideration for the taking of big game in all areas of the state. The board has considered similar proposals asking for caliber restrictions for all big game on unit-wide, regionwide, and statewide bases. Small caliber cartridges leave little room for error when it comes to shot placement for lethal results, so off-target shots may result in increased wounding loss. Alternatively, hunters favoring the use of small cartridges explain that when small calibers are used correctly, they can be effective in taking big game, including moose, and small calibers allow younger hunters a greater opportunity to hunt.

The board has deliberated this exact proposal numerous times and each time has failed to adopt the proposal and instead has encouraged the department to work with the public regarding hunter education and the importance of shot placement.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department is **NEUTRAL** on this proposal. The board has differentiated between big game and small game and set weapon-specific standards accordingly. Creating an additional level of weapons restrictions for individual big game species in individual units adds complexity to the regulations, and may cause some confusion and result in some cost to the public. If a minimum caliber is adopted the department recommends it be adopted for all big game species and be considered at the next statewide board meeting.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 13 – 5 AAC 85.065. Hunting seasons and bag limits for small game. Increase the bag limit and possession limit for ptarmigan in Unit 18.

PROPOSED BY: Brenda Lindsey

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? Increase the bag limit for ptarmigan in Unit 18 from 15 per day and 30 in possession to 50 per day and 100 in possession.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? The current ptarmigan hunting regulations can be found in 5 AAC 85.065 and in the 2023-24 *Alaska Hunting Regulations*.

Currently, the bag limit for ptarmigan in Unit 18 is 15 per day and 30 in possession.

The Board of Game has made a positive customary and traditional use finding for ptarmigan in

Unit 18. The amount reasonably necessary for subsistence is 3,000 to 23,000 ptarmigan (5 AAC 99.025(12)(C)).

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? Hunters would be able to harvest an additional 35 ptarmigan per day and have an additional 70 ptarmigan in possession; essentially returning the bag and possession limit to levels pre-2020.

BACKGROUND: Prior to 2012, the bag and possession limits for ptarmigan in Unit 18 were 20 per day and 40 in possession. In 2012, in response to a public proposal, the board adopted a bag limit of 50 ptarmigan per day and 100 in possession due to abundant ptarmigan in Unit 18. During the 2020 Western Arctic/Western Region Board of Game meeting the board adopted a proposal submitted by the department to reduce the bag and possession limit of ptarmigan from 50 per day and 100 in possession to 15 per day and 30 in possession. At the time the department recommended a reduction in bag and possession limit due to reports from local residents of Unit 18 that fewer ptarmigan were being observed and harvested since 2014. The department reported that cool and wet weather over consecutive years may have had a negative effect on chick survival and recruitment leading to lower abundance of ptarmigan in Unit 18. The reduction in bag and possession limits aligned federal and state regulations as the Federal Subsistence Board had reduced the bag and possession limit for ptarmigan in 2018 due to the same concerns of local residents. Reports from local department staff in Unit 18 from the past 2 years (2022 and 2023) are that ptarmigan abundance appears to be rebounding from the low numbers observed during 2014-2021.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The Department is **NEUTRAL** on this proposal. There is currently no biological concern regarding ptarmigan in Unit 18. The department encourages the board to consider local variations in abundance and the cyclical nature of upland game birds when considering changes to bag and possession limits.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal would not result in significant costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 14 – 5 AAC 085.050 hunting season and bag limits for musk oxen. Open a drawing or registration muskox hunt for residents in the remainder of Unit 18.

PROPOSED BY: Timothy Andrew

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal would establish a resident-only hunt for muskox in mainland portions of Unit 18, remainder. If the board creates a registration permit, the proponent asks for permits to be available in communities nearest the herd.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? 5 AAC 085.050

| Units and Bag Limits | Resident Open season | Nonresident Open Season |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Remainder of Unit 18 | No open season | No open season |

There is a negative customary and traditional use finding for muskoxen in unit 18.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If this proposal were adopted, additional opportunity for harvesting a muskox would be available to Alaska residents. If adopted this would be the first Unit 18 mainland muskox hunt established.

BACKGROUND: A small population of muskox inhabit the mainland of Unit 18. Currently there is no open season and no hunting for these animals. In 2019, a minimum count survey of Unit 18 mainland muskoxen observed 174 animals. Through observations, it would appear animals in this mainland Unit 18 population move around a lot and sometimes cover great distances, making it appear as though there are more muskox in the population than there really are. More information about their movement patterns and establishing knowledge of their core areas would be valuable before opening a hunt. In this regard, the department is seeking research funding to better understand and study this population. If funded, the project would deploy GPS collars on muskox cows within the southwest Alaska mainland population to monitor the movements of the animals. This data will then be used to determine individual and population home ranges, which in turn can be used to develop hunt structures and boundaries. Further, these collars will be used to help managers refine abundance survey methods over this large study area, allowing the managers to efficiently obtain more accurate levels of abundance.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department is **OPPOSED** to opening a hunt for muskoxen at this time because it has biological concerns for muskoxen in mainland Unit 18 at this time. The department has previously required a minimum of 200-250 muskoxen within a population before it has considered opening a hunt in any of the currently hunted muskox populations. In more recent years, that minimum requirement has been raised to 300 muskoxen in the small, slow-growing populations. Harvest rates for most muskox populations are set between 1 – 2% of the overall population estimate, resulting in only 3 – 6 muskoxen available for harvest once the minimum threshold of 300 animals has been reached. Furthermore, as a herd animal, muskoxen are susceptible to random, large mortality events that can abruptly change the trajectory of a population and/or remove all extra animals available for harvest at the current population level. Therefore, the department would like to delay opening a hunt for this population until there are a minimum of 300 animals.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal would not result in significant costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 15 - 5 AAC 85.050(a)(1). Hunting seasons and bag limits for muskox. 5 AAC 92.019. Taking of big game for certain religious ceremonies. Allow the subsistence take of muskox in a portion of Unit 18.

PROPOSED BY: David Carl

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? Under 5 AAC 85.050 it would open a muskox hunting season. Under 5 AAC 92.019(B) it would allow the take of muskox for ceremonial harvest on the mainland of unit 18.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

5 AAC 92.019. Taking of big game for certain religious ceremonies. (a) The hunting and taking of game species having a positive finding in 5 AAC 99.025, outside the seasons or bag limits established in 5 AAC 85, for use in this state as food in customary and traditional Alaska Native funerary or mortuary religious ceremonies within 12 months preceding the ceremony is authorized if consistent with sustained yield principles.

(b) The department shall publicize a list of game populations and areas, if any, for which the taking of game is inconsistent with sustained yield principles. It is the hunter's responsibility to contact the department to find out which game populations and areas are excluded from taking under this regulation.

5 AAC 85.050(a)(1). Hunting seasons and bag limits for muskox.

| Units and Bag Limits | Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts) | Nonresident Open Season |
|-----------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| (1) Remainder of Unit 18 | No open season | No open season |

There is a negative customary and traditional use (C&T) finding for muskoxen in Unit 18.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? A hunt would be established for muskoxen in unit 18 mainland. This proposal also requests to be able to take muskox in certain religious ceremonies.

BACKGROUND: The take of muskox in mainland Unit 18 has been inconsistent with sustained yield, and as a result they cannot currently be taken under 5 AAC 92.019.

A small population of muskox inhabit the mainland of Unit 18. Currently there is no open season and no hunting for these animals. In 2019, a minimum count survey of Unit 18 mainland muskox found 174 animals. The department would like to delay opening a hunt for this population until there are a minimum of 300 animals, as noted in the species management plan, which is consistent with other herds in Alaska.

Through observations it would appear animals in this population move around a lot and sometimes cover great distances making it appear that there are more animals than there really

are. More information about their movement patterns and establishing where their core areas would be valuable before opening a hunt. In this regard, the department is seeking research funding to better understand and study this population. If funded, the project would deploy GPS collars on muskox cows within the southwest Alaska mainland population to monitor the movements of the animals. This data will then be used to determine individual and population home ranges, which in turn can be used to develop hunt structures and boundaries. Further, these collars will be used to help managers refine abundance survey methods over this large study area, allowing the managers to obtain more accurate levels of abundance and save time and money.

In 1988, the board made a negative C&T finding for muskoxen in unit 18. At the meeting in 2014, the board again considered a C&T finding for muskoxen populations on Nunivak and Nelson islands. The board took no action at the request of the proponent, and so the negative finding in place for all of Unit 18 remained in regulation.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department is **OPPOSED** to opening a hunt for muskoxen at this time because it has biological concerns for muskoxen in mainland Unit 18. Once there are enough animals to allow harvest consistent with sustained yield, muskox in Unit 18 remainder will be removed from the list in 5 AAC 92.019(b), which will allow them to be taken for religious ceremonies. The department has previously required a minimum of 200-250 muskoxen within a population before it has considered opening a hunt in any of the currently hunted muskox populations. In more recent years, that minimum requirement has been raised to 300 muskoxen in the small, slow-growing populations. Harvest rates for most muskox populations are set between 1 – 2% of the overall population estimate, resulting in only 3 – 6 muskoxen available for harvest once the minimum threshold of 300 animals has been reached. Furthermore, as a herd animal, muskoxen are susceptible to random, large mortality events that can abruptly change the trajectory of a population and/or remove all extra animals available for harvest at the current population level. Therefore, the department would like to delay opening a hunt for this population until there are a minimum of 300 animals.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal would not result in significant costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 16 – 5 AAC 84.270(13) lengthen wolf trapping season in Unit 18. Lengthen the wolf trapping season by one month to end on April 30.

PROPOSED BY: Bethel Advisory Committee

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal would extend the wolf trapping season in Unit 18 to April 30 which would add 30 days to the season.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? 5 AAC 084.270(13)

| Units | Open Season | Bag Limit |
|-------|-----------------|-----------|
| 18 | Nov.10- March31 | No limit |

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for wolves, whether taken as big game or as furbearers, in Unit 18. The amount reasonably necessary for subsistence is 5 to 20 wolves (5 AAC 99.025 (11)).

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If adopted, this

proposal will provide additional wolf trapping opportunity. Extending the season to April 30, trapping regulations for wolves in Unit 18 would be consistent with those to the south in Unit 17, to the east in Unit 19, and to the north in Unit 21 and 22.

BACKGROUND: Most wolf harvest historically occurs in February and March in Unit 18. Winter conditions and snow accumulation are strongly correlated with wolf trapping success rates. Good snow conditions provide for easier travel allowing trappers to access much more of the unit. Harvest between years varies from 7 animals to 90 animals per regulatory year with an average of 43 animals per year for the last 20 years (2003-2022). Wolves are abundant and found throughout the unit. The department has no biological concerns if this proposal were to be adopted.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The Department **SUPPORTS** this proposal because it increases opportunity to harvest wolves and the department does not have a biological concern for the wolf population in Unit 18. Trappers in the area have expressed their desire to take advantage of good snow conditions and longer daylight hours in April to harvest wolves. Adoption of this proposal would also align the wolf trapping season in Unit 18 with the wolf hunting season in Unit 18, which closes on April 30.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal would not result in significant costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 17 – 5 AAC 85.020 hunting season and bag limits for brown bear.

Increase the Unit 18 brown bear bag limit to two bears.

PROPOSED BY: Mike Glore

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal would increase the bag limit from one brown bear every regulatory year to two brown bears every regulatory year in

Unit 18.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? 5 AAC 085.020

| Units and Bag Limits | Resident Open season | Nonresident Open Season |
|--|--|------------------------------------|
| 1 bear every regulatory year by registration permit | Sept. 1-June 30 (subsistence hunt only) | No open season. |
| 1 bear every regulatory year | Sept. 1- June 30 | Sept. 1- June 30 |

No resident locking tag is required. All bears harvested in the general hunt and all bears intended for sale must be sealed. Bears harvested in the subsistence registration hunt need only be sealed if removed from the unit.

5 AAC 92.200 allows for the skulls and hides with claws attached of brown bears harvested in areas where the bag limit is two bears per regulatory year to be sold under the conditions of a permit issued by the department.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for brown/grizzly bears in Unit 18, and an amount reasonably necessary for subsistence of 20 to 30 bears.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If adopted the

proposal will provide additional opportunity for harvesting a brown bear in Unit 18 and may result in a few more bears being harvested. Also, adoption of the proposal will make it legal to sell the skulls and hides with claws attached of brown bears taken in Unit 18. 5 AAC 92.200 allows for the sale of skulls and hides with claws attached of brown bears harvested in areas where the bag limit is two bears per regulatory year, under a permit issued by the department.

BACKGROUND: Brown bear harvest in Unit 18 for the last ten regulatory years (2012-2021) has averaged 20 bears per year. Brown bears can be found throughout the mainland of Unit 18 with higher densities in the mountains north of the Yukon River and south of the Kuskokwim River. Increasing the bag limit from 1 bear per regulatory year to two bears per regulatory year would increase the opportunity for hunters to harvest brown bears. Anywhere in the state of Alaska where the bag limit is two or more bears, the sale of hides automatically becomes legal.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **SUPPORTS** this proposal because it does not have any biological concerns for the brown bear population in Unit 18 and adoption of the proposal is not expected to result in a significant increase in harvest. Few Alaskan hunters take more than one bear a year and the current harvest is sustainable, especially considering cubs and sows with cubs may not be taken.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal would not result in significant costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 18 – 5 AAC 85.025 Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou. Expand the hunt area for caribou in 22A. Open the caribou season in a portion of Unit 22A in all Golsovia River drainages and north of the Klikitarik River for residents and nonresident hunters.

PROPOSED BY: Johnny Richardson

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal would modify the open hunt area for caribou in 22A, with no change to bag limit or season. The modified open area for caribou hunting would become “22A north of all Golsovia River drainages and north of the Klikitarik River.”

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? Current regulations allow caribou hunting by residents and nonresidents to hunt for caribou north of the Golsovia River Drainage. The resident season in 22A North of the Golsovia River Drainage is managed under registration permit RC800, the bag limit is 5 caribou per day, up to 20 total, cows can be taken from July 1 – March 31, and there is no closed season for bulls. The nonresident season is a general season harvest ticket hunt with season dates of August 1 – September 30, and a bag limit of one bull. In 22A Remainder, hunting for caribou by residents and nonresidents may be announced. If a season is announced, the bag limit for residents is 5 caribou per day by registration permit only, cows may be taken from September 1 – March 31, and bulls may be taken from February 1 – October 14. If a season is announced for nonresidents the hunt will be a general season harvest ticket hunt with a season of August 1 – September 30 and a bag limit of one bull.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for caribou in Units 21, 22, 23, 24 and 26 for the Western Arctic and Teshekpuk Lake herds with an Amount Necessary for Subsistence of 8000-12,000 caribou.

The Western Arctic caribou herd has a positive intensive management finding with a population objective of at least 200,000 caribou and a harvest objective of 12,000-20,000.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? This proposal would expand the boundary of the 22A open hunt area under both the RC800 caribou permit for residents and harvest ticket for nonresidents. Depending on the winter distribution of caribou in the Western Arctic Herd (WAH), it is possible that this regulatory change could increase harvest. The proposal would have no effect on seasons or bag limits.

BACKGROUND: The WAH is currently in decline, with the last estimate of abundance being 164,000 individuals in 2022. In response to sustained population decline since 2002, the board has incrementally adopted regulations to restrict WAH caribou harvest. Further, a resident

registration hunt RC800 was implemented in RY2016 to help gather more information on caribou harvests in Unit 22.

Currently, caribou hunting in that portion of “22A Remainder,” or that portion south of and including the Golsovia River drainage is managed as a “may be announced” season. This season was implemented in RY2015 at the request of the Southern Norton Sound Advisory Committee over concerns that an open caribou season in 22A Remainder could result in reindeer being mistakenly harvested during the open caribou season. Not all reindeer are ear-tagged in the local herd and the committee thought there might be accidental taking of reindeer as a result. There is some reindeer herding activity in Unit 22A. Currently there is one active Stebbins-St. Michael herd that is reported to graze as far east as the Klikitarik River.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **OPPOSES** expanding the open area for caribou hunting in 22A because it may increase the harvest of WAH in an already declining population. The department presently has the authority to open the closed area if there are concerns of overlap between caribou and reindeer.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 19 – 5 AAC 92.052. Discretionary permit hunt conditions and procedures. 5 AAC 92.151. Destruction of trophy value of game required in specific areas. Change the trophy destruction requirement for muskox taken under subsistence regulations in Unit 22.

PROPOSED BY: Southern Norton Sound Advisory Committee

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal would change the portion of the horn that is submitted to ADF&G for trophy destruction and would state: “The hunter must submit at least 5” of horn surrounding the eye socket to ADF&G.”

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? Currently all Tier II muskox hunts in Unit 22 require destruction of the trophy value. This consists of removing the horns within 2 inches of eye level at the kill site. Hunters must submit the distal (end) portion of the horns to ADF&G within 3 days of harvest. Board of Game Finding 97-117-BOG Findings of the Alaska Board of Game Regarding Customary and Traditional Use of Muskoxen on the Seward Peninsula states there has been no trophy use of horns or hides; however, cultural use of hides is documented.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? The proposal would result in no change to bag limits, seasons, or number of muskox harvested. Trophy destruction would continue to be required, and sections of the horns would still be submitted to ADF&G.

BACKGROUND: Muskox hunting on the Seward Peninsula began in 1995 and was guided by the Seward Peninsula Cooperative Muskox Management Plan and the Muskox Cooperators Group. This group was instrumental in developing recommendations for consideration by the Board of Game as well as guidelines the department still uses to administer muskox hunts on the Seward Peninsula cooperatively with federal hunt administrators. Objectives of the Seward Peninsula Cooperative Muskox Management Plan include providing for multiple uses of muskox and for harvest opportunity in a manner that allows for continued range expansion and growth of the population.

The board made a positive customary and traditional (C&T) use finding for muskox on the Seward Peninsula in 1997; this finding states that there has been no trophy use of horns or hide, although it does document historical use of hides but does not specifically mention use of horns. Recent anecdotal evidence shows subsistence users have used the horns for knife handles, handicrafts, and jewelry. Muskox trophy destruction has changed numerous times in the last 20 years as hunt structure and management strategies have shifted. Current trophy destruction regulations require all state muskox permit holders to submit horn tips from Seward Peninsula hunts to the department. Federal muskox permits on the Seward Peninsula do not require any trophy destruction. Horn tips are collected and stored for use by constituents that submit and get approved for a Cultural Education Permit. Only a small number of Cultural Education Permits have been issued over the years by the department.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department is **NEUTRAL** with regards to this proposal because there are no biological concerns. Many Unit 22 locals express their concerns and frustrations to staff regarding trophy value destruction, as this is taking away a valuable piece of the animal that could be used to keep cultural and generational knowledge alive. A portion of the horn will still be required to be submitted and the board must determine if this meets the intent of previous board findings.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 20 – 5 AAC 85.050. Hunting seasons and bag limits for muskox. Change the bag limit for Tier II muskox hunts in Unit 22 to “One muskox every two years”.

PROPOSED BY: Jacob Mannix

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? The adoption of this proposal would allow hunters to only harvest a muskox in Unit 22 every two years rather than every year.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? Muskox hunting in Unit 22 is currently managed under a Tier II system. The bag limit for hunts in Units 22A, 22B, 22D, and 22E is currently managed as an “Any Bull” bag limit, while the hunts in Unit 22C were changed using discretionary permit authority in RY23 to have an “Any Muskox” bag limit.

5 AAC 92.062 limits the number of Tier II muskox permits that can be issued per household to one. 5 AAC 92.062 also requires that Tier II subsistence hunting permits be issued to the highest ranking applicants, based upon the applicant's customary and direct dependence on the game population and based upon the ability of a subsistence user to obtain food if subsistence use is restricted or eliminated, as determined by scoring in 5 AAC 92.070.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for muskox in Unit 22 and in Unit 23 south and west of the Kobuk River drainage, with an amount Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence uses (ANS) of 100-150 animals, including 10-25 in Unit 22E (5 AAC 99.025(9)).

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If adopted, there would be no change in the harvest of muskox or season for muskox hunting. This proposal has the potential to create turnover in the current Tier II muskox permit allocations for Unit 22 and allow some individuals to hunt for muskox that normally would not receive a permit, as the current harvestable surplus means a small number of permits are available. This could provide opportunity to hunters that would not currently receive a Tier II permit.

BACKGROUND: The Seward Peninsula Muskox Population (SPMP) was reintroduced in 1970 and experienced dramatic growth until the population peaked at 2,903 muskoxen in 2010. The SPMP declined 12.5% annually between 2010–2012 and has remained stable since 2012. The last population survey was completed in 2021 and estimated 2,071 muskoxen (95% CI: 1689- 2562). Concerns regarding the role of mature bulls in affecting population growth and the potential overharvest of those bulls led to the current management strategy of maintaining a minimum of 40 mature bulls per 100 cows beginning in RY2012. The harvestable surplus of the SPMP has remained below the ANS of 100–150 muskoxen since the change in harvest rates; consequently, the muskox hunt has been managed as a Tier II hunt in most Unit 22 subunits since RY2012. The current harvestable surplus of muskoxen in the SPMP is approximately 60– 70 muskoxen. This pre-season harvest rate of 3.5% was implemented with the intent to increase the number of mature bulls in the population and achieve management objectives. The last composition survey completed in 2021 estimated 38 mature bulls:100 cows.

Throughout the Tier II muskox hunts administered in Unit 22 during RY12-RY22, an average of 41 state permits are issued annually with additional 8–12 permits issued through the federal system. Permit issuance varies with 1–11 permits available in each subunit annually. There is substantially more demand for Tier II permits than what is available; of the 300 muskox permits issued in Unit 22 during RY12-RY22, there were 3,777 applications received for an award rate of 8%.

The 300 awarded permits have gone to 124 households since RY12, indicating that 41% of the awarded permits have gone to single households multiple years, with some (4%, $n=5$) households receiving as many as 9 of the 11 years of available Tier II permits in Unit 22.

The department receives numerous comments each year from Nome residents and Norton Sound Advisory Committee members regarding Tier II permit issuance. They believe the current scoring system unnecessarily restricts permits to the same small pool of hunters that can claim the maximum number of years allowable and discriminates against other subsistence users.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department is **NEUTRAL** with regards to this proposal because it is allocative. Harvest would not increase if this proposal were adopted because a change to the bag limit would not change the number of permits issued annually. As written, permit holders that harvest a muskox under the proposed one muskox every two-year bag limit would not be able to harvest a muskox the following year in the Unit 22 Tier II hunts, however they would be eligible for a permit because this proposal does not address permit issuance. Nothing in the proposal would prevent a person from being awarded the Tier II hunt two years in a row, however it would prevent a person from harvesting a muskox two years in a row.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 21 –5 AAC 85.050. Hunting seasons and bag limits for muskox.

Establish season dates for the harvest of cow muskoxen in the TX095 and TX096 muskox hunts in Unit 22C.

PROPOSED BY: Jacob Mannix

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? If adopted, this proposal would restrict the cow muskox hunting season in Unit 22C to Aug 1 – Oct 31.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? The season for TX095 and TX096 is currently open during Aug 1 – March 15 with a bag limit of “One Muskox.”

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for muskox in Unit 22 and Unit 23, south and west of the Kobuk River drainage, with an amount reasonably necessary for subsistence uses (ANS) of 100-150, including 10-25 in Unit 22E.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? The proposal would restrict the TX095 and TX096 season for cow muskoxen to Aug 1 – Oct 31. This would direct cow muskoxen harvest in the late summer and early fall months (rut season) with the intent to discourage muskoxen from coming into Nome city limits. This proposal would not affect the number of muskox available for harvest.

BACKGROUND: Muskoxen have been frequenting areas in and around the City of Nome during the summer months since 2007. This relatively new presence of muskoxen around Nome has been controversial: tourists, wildlife photographers, and some locals have heralded this new distribution as a world-class muskox viewing opportunity, while others resent the presence of muskox and consider them dangerous and a nuisance. Balancing these contrasting views of

muskox from the public and forming appropriate management strategies has been a challenge for the department, and staff spend many hours in the summer months responding to nuisance muskox calls and educating the public on muskox safety.

Within Unit 22C, muskox hunting is managed under the TX095 “Inner Nome Area” and TX096 “Outer Nome Area” Tier II permit hunts that were implemented in RY2012 to focus harvest around the Nome area with the intent to discourage muskoxen from coming into city limits. Permit issuance for TX095 has ranged from 3-5 permits and TX096 permit issuance has ranged from 2-4 permits annually during RY2012-2022.

In RY2023, the number of permits available in the TX095 and TX096 hunts was increased to 30 permits (15 permits per hunt) and the bag limit changed to “One Muskox every year”. This discretionary permit authority change was implemented at the request of the Northern Norton Sound Advisory Committee and members of the public that wished to see additional muskox harvest around Nome. These changes were implemented with the intent to further reduce human and dog encounters with muskox.

Generally, limited harvest occurs during the months of August-December, as TX095 and TX096 permit holders prefer to take their muskox in the winter months of December-March when the post-rut meat and hide quality of bulls is improved. During RY2012-2022, only 4% ($n=2$) of the muskox harvest in Unit 22C occurred in the fall months of August-October. Data is still forthcoming for the current regulatory year, but since the liberalizations of RY2023, a total of 2 harvests occurred during the month of August and 2 have occurred in September.

Whether harvesting muskox near Nome in the fall months results in the herds of muskox moving away from city limits or not is not well understood. The limited data the department has collected since 2021 from GPS-collared cow muskox indicates muskox do not consistently vacate an area immediately following a harvest. However, additional data collection is ongoing that will improve our sample size and strength of analysis.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department is **NEUTRAL** on adjusting the season dates for the cow hunt in Unit 22C and currently has the discretionary authority to make the requested changes if the board wants to change the existing hunt opportunity. Changing the season dates for the harvest of cow muskox may improve public safety by reducing muskox conflicts in and around Nome, and there are no biological concerns if this proposal were to be adopted. The department manages the TX095 and TX096 on a quota system and would retain the ability to close or extend the season depending on whether the cow quota was met.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 22 – 5 AAC 92.085. Unlawful methods of taking big game; exceptions.
Establish a minimum caliber for moose hunting in Unit 22A and a portion of Unit 22B.

PROPOSED BY: Southern Norton Sound Advisory Committee

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal would set a minimum standard of centerfire .243 rifle cartridges for the taking of moose in Unit 22A and a portion of 22B, Koyuk and Inglutalik River drainages.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? Big game may only be harvested with center-fire firearms, with a few exceptions, as noted in regulation:

The following methods and means of taking big game are prohibited in addition to the prohibitions in 5 AAC 92.085:

- (1) with the use of a firearm other than a shotgun, muzzleloader, or rifle or pistol using center firing cartridge, except that
 - (A) in units 23 and 26, swimming caribou may be taken with a firearm using rim fire cartridges:

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If adopted, moose hunters in Unit 22A and a portion of Unit 22B, Koyuk and Inglutalik river drainages, would have more strict weapons requirements than for other big game species and compared to other units. The commonly used centerfire .223 caliber and any other smaller centerfire cartridges would not be legal for the taking of moose.

Costs to the hunter may increase, if hunters had to purchase new firearms, and availability of various calibers of ammunition is unknown.

BACKGROUND: The board has established standards for some weapons, and the department in turn educates hunters as to the pros and cons of legal weapons and calibers. The decision as to which legal caliber is used to harvest game is left to the individual hunters and their capabilities.

Reducing wounding loss is a primary consideration for the taking of big game in all areas of the state. The board has considered similar proposals asking for caliber restrictions for all big game on unit wide, regionwide, and statewide bases. Small caliber cartridges leave little room for error when it comes to shot placement for lethal results, so off-target shots are likely to result in wounding loss. Alternatively, those favoring the use of small cartridges explain that when small calibers are used correctly, they can be effective in taking big game, including moose, and small calibers allow younger hunters a greater opportunity to hunt. The proponent also considered proposing a regulation to require one person in a hunting party to possess a larger caliber rifle if there was a young hunter carrying a smaller caliber rifle.

The board has deliberated this topic numerous times and each time has failed to adopt the proposal and instead has encouraged the department to work with the public regarding hunter education and the importance of shot placement.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department is **NEUTRAL** on this proposal. The board has differentiated between big game and small game and set weapon-specific standards accordingly. Creating an additional level of weapons restrictions for individual big game species

in individual units adds complexity to the regulations, and may cause some confusion and cost for the public. Additionally, adding this weapons restriction for moose may restrict subsistence opportunity.

If the board chooses to adopt this proposal, it should consider if reasonable opportunity is still provided. If a minimum caliber is adopted the department recommends it be adopted for all big game species and be considered at the next statewide board meeting.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 23 – 5 AAC 99.025. Customary and traditional uses of game populations.

Revisit the Amount Reasonably Necessary for subsistence uses for moose in Unit 22.

PROPOSED BY: Kawerak, Inc, Melanie Bahnke President

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal asks the Board of Game to reconsider ANS findings for moose in Unit 22 and whether a reasonable opportunity is being provided to meet the existing ANS given the current regulatory structure and subsistence needs for moose in the area.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? Currently the moose hunting regulations for Unit 22 include the following hunt opportunities for residents and nonresidents:

5 AAC 85.045 – Unit 22A, that portion north of the Egavik drainage:

- August 1 – September 30
 - Residents – 1 bull
 - September 1 – September 20
 - Nonresidents – 1 bull with 50-inch antlers or antlers with 4 or more brow tines on one side

5 AAC 85.045 – Unit 22A, that portion in the Unalakleet River drainage and all drainages flowing into Norton Sound north of the Golsovia River drainage and south of and including the Egavik Creek drainage:

- September 1 – September 30
 - Residents – One bull by registration permit only; or
- December 1 – January 31 (Season to be announced)
 - Residents – 1 antlered bull by registration permit only; during the period Dec 1 – December 31, a season may be announced by emergency order.
- Nonresidents – no open

season 5 AAC 85.045 – Unit 22A,

Remainder:

- August 1 – September 30
 - Residents – One bull; or
- January 1 – January 31
 - Residents – 1 antlered bull
- September 1 – September 30
 - Nonresidents – 1 bull with 50-inch antlers or antlers with 4 or more brow tines on one side

5 AAC 85.045 – Unit 22B, East, that portion east of the Darby Mountains, and including the drainages of the Kwiniuk, Tubutulik, Koyuk and Inglutalik Rivers:

- August 1 – September 30
 - Residents – One bull, or;
- November 1 – December 31
 - Residents – 1 antlered bull
- November 1 – December 31
 - Nonresidents – 1 bull with 50-inch antlers or antlers with 4 or more brow tines on one side by drawing permit only; up to 10 permits may be issued

5 AAC 85.045 – Unit 22B, Remainder:

- September 1 – September 14
 - Residents – One bull by registration permit only; or
- January 1 – January 31
 - Residents – 1 antlered bull by registration permit only
- Nonresidents – no open

season 5 AAC 85.045 – Unit 22C:

- September 1 – September 14
 - Residents – One bull by registration permit only; or
- January 1 – January 31 (To be announced)
 - Residents – 1 antlered bull by registration permit only; during the period January 1 – January 31, a season may be announced by emergency order
- September 1 – September 14
 - Nonresidents – 1 bull with 50-inch antlers or antlers with 4 or more brow tines on one side by registration permit only

5 AAC 85.045 – Unit 22D, that portion within the Kougarok, Kuzitrin, and Pilgrim River

drainages

- September 1 – September 14
 - Residents – One bull by registration permit only; or
- January 1 – January 31 (To be announced)
 - Residents – 1 antlered bull by registration permit only; during the period January 1– January 31, a season may be announced by emergency order
- Nonresidents – No open season

5 AAC 85.045 – Unit 22D, Southwest, that portion west of the Tisuk River drainage, west of the west bank of the unnamed creek originating at the unit boundary opposite the headwaters of McAdam’s Creek to its confluence with Canyon Creek, and west of the west banks of Canyon Creek to its confluence with Tusuk Channel

- September 1 – September 14
 - Residents – One bull by registration permit only; or
- January 1 – January 31 (To be announced)
 - Residents – 1 antlered bull by registration permit only; during the period January 1 – January 31, a season may be announced by emergency order
- Nonresidents – No open

season 5 AAC 85.045 – Unit 22D,

remainder:

- August 10 – September 14; December 1 – January 31 (Season to be announced)
 - Residents – 1 bull by registration permit only; only antlered bull moose may be taken from December 1 – January 31
- Nonresidents – No open

season 5 AAC 85.045 – Unit 22E,

remainder:

- August 10 – September 14;
 - Residents – 1 bull; or
- January 1 – March 15
 - Residents – 1 antlered bull
- September 1 – September 14
 - Nonresidents – 1 bull with 50-inch antlers or antlers with 4 or more brow tines on one side by drawing permit only; up to 25 permits may be issued

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for moose in Unit 22 with an Amount

Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence of 250-300 moose.

The Board of Game has identified moose in Unit 22 as qualifying for intensive management due to their importance for providing high levels of harvest for human consumptive use (5 AAC 92.108). The population objective for Unit 22 is 5,100-6,800 animals with a harvest objective of 300-680 moose.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If the proposal were adopted, the Board of Game would review updated harvest and use information for moose in Unit 22 and evaluate whether the current ANS range reflects the harvest history of subsistence use, and as such, still provides reasonable opportunity for the subsistence harvest of moose. Depending on the board's decision, ANS numbers may be modified and further regulatory change may be discussed.

BACKGROUND: Moose population estimates in Unit 22 are obtained annually through aerial surveys using Adaptive Cluster Sampling (ACS) methodology. The moose population in Unit 22 is currently estimated to be 6,676 moose as of 2023 and is within the Intensive Management Population Objective of 5,100 – 6,800 moose set by the Board of Game in 2001. The harvest objective was set in 2001 at 300 - 680 moose and the harvestable surplus for moose in Unit 22 was last estimated to be 349 moose based on 2023 population estimates. The harvestable surplus is higher than the upper bound of the ANS for Unit 22.

Hunt structures in Unit 22 are managed as general seasons, registration permits, and draw permits with varying seasons, quotas, and bag limits depending on the population data for specific moose management units within Unit 22. Although significant public input has shaped the current hunt structure in Unit 22, some resident hunters have expressed concerns about hunting in portions of Unit 22, particularly in Unit 22C where the quota has been met and emergency orders issued to close the season within two days of opening since RY2012. Season closures by emergency orders result in extremely short seasons that challenge some hunters' opportunity to harvest a moose, especially in Unit 22C.

The proponent expresses concern that the current ANS does not reflect growth in the human population of Nome over the last 20 years and notes that "...local subsistence moose hunters are not being allotted a reasonable amount of time to harvest moose when quite often the moose hunt is closed the very next day after opening...". The ANS is one metric by which the board can determine whether reasonable opportunity is being provided in a subsistence hunt. Other factors, such as bag limits, methods and means, and season length, also speak to reasonable opportunity.

The long-term annual average harvest in all of Unit 22 from 2010 to 2022 is 190 moose (range 171 - 243) for residents and nonresidents combined. Resident-only harvest is 163 moose annually (range 130 - 211), while non-resident harvest is 22 moose annually (range 9 - 33).

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department is **NEUTRAL** on this proposal because it is allocative. The board may wish to consider whether the regulatory structure for moose hunting in GMU 22 provides reasonable opportunity to harvest for subsistence uses in all of Unit 22.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal would not result in additional costs for the department.

PROPOSAL 24 – 5 AAC 85.045. Hunting seasons and bag limits for moose. Modify the winter season for moose in Unit 22A.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? The proposal would remove the current requirement to announce the winter RM844 moose hunting season in Unit 22A.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

| Units and Bag Limits | Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts) | Nonresident Open Season |
|---|--|---|
| <p>(20)</p> <p>...</p> <p>Unit 22(A), that portion in the Unalakleet River drainage and all drainages flowing into Norton Sound north of the Golsovia River drainage and south of and including the Egavik Creek drainage</p> | <p>Sept. 1 – Sept. 30</p> <p>Dec. 1 – Jan. 31 (Season to be announced)</p> | <p>No open season</p> <p>No open season</p> |
| <p>1 bull by registration permit only; or</p> <p>1 antlered bull by registration permit only; during the period Dec. 1 – Dec. 31, a season may be announced by emergency order</p> | | |

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for moose in Unit 22 with an Amount Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence of 250-300 moose in all of Unit 22.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? Adoption of this proposal would give the department the flexibility to administer registration permit hunt RM844 during the full range of season dates in regulation without the need to announce the season by emergency order, potentially increasing harvest opportunity.

BACKGROUND: The moose hunting season was closed in the central portion of Unit 22A from 2005–2007 because of a long trend of declining moose numbers and low moose densities (0.05 moose mi²) in the area. In November 2007, the BOG adopted a 14-day registration hunt (RM841) which was open only to residents. Moose season extensions were requested by members of the public or the Southern Norton Sound Fish and Game Advisory Committee annually from RY2011–RY2015. In each case, the state season was extended by emergency order to close September 20. The BOG adopted a proposal in 2014 to establish the RM844 winter registration hunt in the central portion of 22A, with a season that may be announced, if additional moose are available, by emergency order.

Residents of Unalakleet and members of the Southern Norton Sound Advisory Committee (SNSAC) have expressed preference for the fall RM841 hunt over the winter RM844 hunt. The RM844 winter hunt season in 22A was opened by emergency order in RY2017 but had a reported hunter success rate of 0% (0 of 14 hunters). Despite department-issued emergency orders extending the RM844 season to Jan. 31, the harvest remained at 0 bulls. In RY2018, the season was extended to September 30 by emergency order for the fall RM841 hunt and resulted in the harvest quota successfully being reached for RY2018.

In the spring of 2021, the department completed an Adaptive Cluster Sampling (ACS) moose survey (a modified GSPE) in Unit 22A which resulted in a population estimate of 766 moose (90% CI: 643-888). These results indicate that the population is well above management objectives. The annual harvest quota for the fall RM841 moose hunt has increased over the years and season dates have been extended to meet harvest quotas. The current harvestable surplus for Unit 22A is 61 moose. The winter moose season, RM844, has been announced by Emergency Order since RY2020 if the quota is not reached during the fall hunt. However, participation in the winter RM844 hunt is low and report moose harvests ranges from 0-2 annually.

The Board of Game has identified moose in Unit 22 as qualifying for intensive management due to their importance for providing high levels of harvest for human consumptive use (5 AAC 92.108). The population objective for Unit 22 is 5,100-6,800 animals with a harvest objective of 300-680 moose.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department submitted and **SUPPORTS** this proposal as way to provide additional opportunity. There is no biological concern for moose in Unit 22A. Adoption of this proposal will allow the department to provide the full two months of hunting opportunity and eliminate the need to open the season by emergency order. Harvest will continue to be monitored and the hunt will be closed by emergency order if necessary.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the

department.

PROPOSAL 25 – 5 AAC 85.045. Hunting seasons and bag limits for moose. Close the nonresident moose hunting season in Unit 22C.

PROPOSED BY: Kawerak, Inc.

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? The proposal would close the nonresident season for moose in Unit 22C.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? Resident and non-resident hunters are eligible to participate in moose registration permit hunt RM840 within the Unit 22C hunt area. Hunting in this area is administered with a shared harvest quota for both resident and nonresident hunters. Following are the current regulations, as defined in 5 AAC 85.045(20):

| Units and Bag Limits | Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts) | Nonresident Open Season |
|---|---|----------------------------|
| Unit 22(C) | | |
| 1 bull by registration permit only; or | Sept. 1 – Sept. 14 | Sept. 1 – Sept. 14 |
| 1 antlered bull by registration permit only; during the period Jan. 1 – Jan. 31 a season may be announced by emergency order | Jan. 1 – Jan. 31 (Season to be announced) | No open season |

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for moose in Unit 22 with an ANS of 250–300 moose.

The Board of Game has identified moose in Unit 22 as qualifying for intensive management due to their importance for providing high levels of harvest for human consumptive use (5 AAC 92.108). The population objective for Unit 22 is 5,100-6,800 animals with a harvest objective of 300-680 moose.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? The proposal would eliminate the opportunity for nonresident hunters to harvest moose in Unit 22C. Adopting this proposal would have no biological effect on the local moose population because the hunt is managed under a permit and the season is closed by emergency order once the quota is met. Nonresident hunter participation is low in Unit 22C. Removing a component of the hunting pressure has the potential to result in a longer season, and would allocate the animals currently taken by nonresidents to residents.

BACKGROUND: The moose population in Unit 22C has historically persisted at or above the management objective of 450-525 moose. An Adaptive Cluster Sampling (ACS) moose survey completed in the Unit 22B and 22C survey area during 2021 estimated moose abundance in the area to be 1,415 moose (95% CI: 1129-1703), an increase since the last abundance survey in 2016 of 1,082 moose (95% CI:925-1212). The bull:cow ratio of the population was last estimated in 2021 at 31:100 and is above the management objective of 20:100.

The department has administered bull moose hunts in Unit 22C with annual harvest quotas since the implementation of registration permit RM840 in RY2004. Since the implementation of more conservative harvest guidelines in Unit 22C beginning in RY2013, the harvest quota has been met within the first 2 days of the fall season, with a 5-year average annual reported harvest of 18 moose.

RM840 is administered with separate harvest quotas for each of the three hunt areas in which it is administered: 22B West of the Darby Mountains (also known as 22B Remainder in regulation), 22C, and 22D (which includes 22D Kuzitrin and 22D Southwest). Of the three areas, Unit 22C is the only area where there is nonresident harvest opportunity. Harvest reports submitted to the department for RM840 indicate that, on average, 492 hunters actively participated in the hunt annually over the past 5 years (RY18-RY22). During this period, nonresident participants made up < 2% of the hunters, with an average of 2 nonresident hunters participating in the Unit 22C RM840 hunt annually compared with an average of 96 resident hunters. Nonresident harvest made up less than 1% of the total harvest, with a total of 2 moose taken by nonresident hunters out of 230 harvested moose in Unit 22C over the last 5 years.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department is **NEUTRAL** on the allocative nature of this proposal. There would be no biological effect on the moose population due to the resident and nonresident harvest being managed under a quota which has been met within 2 days of the season opening for over 10 years. However, given this chronically short season, the board may wish to evaluate whether the current hunt structure provides for reasonable opportunity for subsistence harvest. RM840 permits are currently available in-person only at vendors in Nome, Golovin, White Mountain, and Brevig Mission, and Teller during July 25 – August 25.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 26 – 5 AAC 85.045. Hunting seasons and bag limits for moose. Lengthen the nonresident moose hunting season in Unit 22E by 2 weeks to open on August 15.

PROPOSED BY: Justin Horton

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? The proposal would open the nonresident moose season 2 weeks earlier in 22E to open on August 15.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? The nonresident moose hunting opportunity in Unit 22E is currently administered as a drawing permit (DM855), with season dates of September 1–15, a bag limit of one bull with 50-inch antlers or antlers with four or more brow tines on at least one side, and a total of up to 25 permits may be issued.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for moose in Unit 22 with an Amount Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence of 250–300 moose.

The Board of Game has identified moose in Unit 22 as qualifying for intensive management due to their importance for providing high levels of harvest for human consumptive use (5 AAC 92.108). The population objective for Unit 22 is 5,100-6,800 animals with a harvest objective of 300-680 moose.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? The proposal would allow nonresident hunters to hunt moose in 22E beginning August 15. This proposal would not affect bag limits or the number of moose harvested by nonresidents, because harvest numbers are controlled through the number of permits issued. Allowing nonresidents to hunt moose in the area in August would also provide those nonresident hunters with the opportunity to potentially harvest brown bears or caribou in the area as well, most of which have typically moved on by the time the September moose hunt opens.

BACKGROUND: The moose population in the Unit 22D and 22E survey area is generally thought to have been stable over the past 10 years with the last population survey estimating the population to be 1,922 moose (95% CI: 1580-2263). This population estimate is below the management objective for the Unit 22D and Unit 22E area, but composition surveys completed in 2022 indicate the bull:cow ratios are at the management objective of 30B:100C.

The nonresident moose hunt in Unit 22E was managed with a quota under registration hunt RM855 during RY15-RY21, and in RY22 was changed to draw permit DM855 after additional hunting pressure from guided nonresident hunters in the area harvested the quota in a very short period of time, which made the hunt difficult to manage with questionable opportunity considering how short the hunt was, and the quota was exceeded in RY20. The nonresident harvest in Unit 22E has ranged from 7–13 moose (average 10 moose) since the registration permit was first implemented in RY15. After moose composition surveys completed in fall 2022 indicated a slight decline in bull:cow ratios in Unit 22E, the number of draw permits allocated in RY22 was 5 permits.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department is **NEUTRAL** on this proposal because the nonresident moose hunt in 22E is managed through a drawing permit and regulates the number of moose harvested through the number of permits issued so there would be no biological effect if this proposal were to be adopted. Brown bear hunting in the area is by drawing permit only, so a substantial increase in brown bear harvest by nonresident moose hunters is also not expected.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 27 – 5 AAC 85.020 Hunting seasons and bag limits for brown bear. Align the resident season for brown bears in Units 22C, 22D, and 22E with those in Unit 22B.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? Adoption of this proposal would increase the resident season in Unit 22C, 22D, and 22E by two weeks to end on June 30 instead of June 15.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

**Resident Open Season
(Subsistence and
Units and Bag Limits**

General Hunts)

**Nonresident
Open Season**

(20)

...

Unit
22(B)

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

2 bears every regulatory
year by registration
only) permit only; or

Aug. 1 - June 30
(Subsistence hunt

2 bears every regulatory
June 30 year

Aug. 1 -

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bear every regulatory
year by drawing
permit only; up to 27
permits may be issued
in
combination with Unit 22(C)

Aug. 1 - June 15

Unit 22(C)

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bear every regulatory
year by registration
permit only; or

Aug. 1 - Oct. 31

Apr. 1 - June 30 (Subsistence
hunt only)

1 bear every regulatory
year by registration permit
only

Aug. 1 - Oct. 31

Apr. 1 - June 30

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bear every regulatory

Aug. 1 - Oct. 31

year by drawing permit only; up to 27 permits may be issued in combination with Unit 22(B)

Apr. 1 - June 15

Remainder of Unit 22

RESIDENT HUNTERS:
2 bears every regulatory year by registration permit only; or

Aug. 1 - June 15
(Subsistence hunt only)

2 bears every regulatory year

Aug. 1 - June 15

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:
1 bear every regulatory year by drawing permit only; up to 21 permits may be issued

Aug. 1 - May 31

No resident locking tag is required. All bears harvested in the general hunt and all bears intended for sale must be sealed. Bears harvested in the subsistence registration hunt need only be sealed if removed from the unit.

5 AAC 92.200 allows for the skulls and hides with claws attached of brown bears harvested in areas where the bag limit is two bears per regulatory year to be sold under the conditions of a permit issued by the department.

The positive customary and traditional use finding for brown bears in Unit 22 is combined with Unit 21, with an Amount Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) of 20-25 animals.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? The proposal would align resident brown bear season dates among Unit 22B, 22C, 22D, and 22E and as a result would simplify hunting regulations for residents. Unit 22D and 22E would extend the end of the season by two weeks, from June 15 to June 30 and Unit 22C would remove the split season date. It is possible a few more bears may be harvested by extending the season in Units 22D and 22E. Unit 22C is managed under registration permit, RB670, with an announced harvest quota and season will be closed by emergency order when quota is reached.

BACKGROUND: In the past 20 years brown bear regulations across Unit 22 have been incrementally liberalized through extended seasons, increased nonresident permits, and

increased bag limits. Most recently in 2020, the Board extended the season in Units 22D and 22E from May 1 to June 15. This season extension created a mismatch of open season dates between adjacent units and caused unnecessary confusion for hunters.

Very little brown bear harvest has occurred since the Board adopted the proposal in 2020 to extend the open season for residents into the month of June in Units 22D and 22E. Sealing records indicate from RY2020 – RY2022 harvest in June ranges from 0-2 bears annually. Aligning the seasons is not likely to have any biological impact on the brown bear population. The management objective of having a 3-year mean annual reported harvest of at least 50% males has been achieved for the past 20 years.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department submitted and **SUPPORTS** this proposal to align season dates to alleviate confusion in the hunting regulations. There is no biological concern due to the very low harvest of brown bears occurring in June. Extending the season will also give residents the opportunity to harvest bears that would otherwise be taken in defense of life and property (DLP), which requires the hide and skull must be surrendered to the state. The department will also monitor any increase in harvest for potential conservation concerns.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 28 – 5 AAC 85.020. Hunting seasons and bag limits for brown bear. Change Unit 22D and 22E nonresident brown bear drawing permit, DB690, to general season.

PROPOSED BY: Justin Horton

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal would change the nonresident hunting opportunity from a drawing permit to a general season hunt.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? Current nonresident brown bear hunting under DB690, in Unit 22D and 22E, is 1 bear every regulatory year by draw permit only; up to 21 permits may be issued, Aug 1. – May 31. Units 22D and 22E are in the remainder of Unit 22, 21 permits may be issued, Aug 1. – May 31. Units 22D and 22E are in the remainder of Unit 22, complete regulations are below.

| | Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts) | Nonresident Open Season |
|-----------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| Units and Bag Limits | | |

(20)

...

Remainder of Unit 22 RESIDENT HUNTERS:

2 bears every regulatory year by registration only) permit only; or Aug. 1 - June 15 (Subsistence hunt

2 bears every regulatory June 15 year Aug. 1 -

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bear every regulatory year by drawing permit only; up to 21 permits may be issued Aug. 1 - May 31

No resident locking tag is required. All bears harvested in the general hunt and all bears intended for sale must be sealed. Bears harvested in the subsistence registration hunt need only be sealed if removed from the unit.

5 AAC 92.200 allows for the skulls and hides with claws attached of brown bears harvested in areas where the bag limit is two bears per regulatory year to be sold under the conditions of a permit issued by the department.

The positive customary and traditional use finding for brown bears in Unit 22 is combined with Unit 21, with an Amount Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) of 20-25 animals.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If this proposal were adopted there could be an increase in brown bear harvest in Unit 22D and 22E as brown bear harvest by nonresidents would no longer be regulated through the number of permits issued.

BACKGROUND: In the past 20 years brown bear regulations across Unit 22 have been incrementally liberalized through extended season, increased bag limits, and increased nonresident permits.

Nonresident brown bear hunting in Unit 22D and 22E is currently administered under draw permit DB690 with up to 21 permits available to be issued annually. DB690 has had incremental increases in the number of permits available. In regulatory year (RY)2000 the permits increased from 5 to 8, in RY2002 permits increased to 12, and in RY2016 the permits increased to 21. Since the last increase in permits in RY2016, the hunt has been undersubscribed 57% of the time and only during RY2016, RY2017, and RY2022 has the total number of permits been issued. DB690 has an average hunter participation of 61% and an average hunter success of 28% during

the last 10 regulatory years (RY2013-RY2022). Most brown bears taken under a DB690 permit are harvested in Unit 22E; 75% (range 0-10 bears) of the harvest comes from Unit 22E, with Unit 22D making up the remaining 25% (range 0-4 bears) during RY2013-RY2022.

The 5-year average combined resident and nonresident brown bear harvest in Unit 22E is 3 bears annually (range 0-5) which made up 4% of Unit 22 harvest, RY2018-RY2022. Sealing records indicate that the 5-year average brown bear harvest in Unit 22B made up 40%, Unit 22C made up 40%, and Unit 22D made up 17%. Nonresident harvest only makes up 14% (range 4-19) of the harvest within Unit 22, RY2018-RY2022. Sealing records indicate that cumulative harvest in Unit 22 has successfully met management objective of 50% sows or less, with a 5-year average of 42% sow harvest, RY2018-RY2022.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **OPPOSES** changing the hunt structure, as general season would make it challenging to regulate brown bear harvest within Unit 22D and 22E. If the board intends to increase nonresident hunting opportunity, the department recommends the additional opportunity be provided through a small incremental change to increase the number to nonresident brown bear hunters by increasing the number of permits available for DB690 from the current 21 permits available to up to 40 permits.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional cost to the department.

PROPOSAL 29 –5 AAC 85.020. Hunting seasons and bag limits for brown bear.

Increase the number of brown bear drawing permits available in Unit 22B for nonresident hunt DB685 to 40 permits or change DB685 to a registration permit.

PROPOSED BY: James Smith

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal provides two different options, the first of which is to increase the number of drawing permits for DB685 from 27 to 40. The second option is to separate Units 22B and 22C, and provide the hunting opportunity for Unit 22B through a registration permit only.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? The current nonresident brown bear hunting regulations within Units 22B and 22C is a drawing permit (DB685) with a bag limit of 1 bear every regulatory year; up to 27 permits may be issued in combination for Units 22B and 22C combined.

**Resident Open Season
(Subsistence and
Units and Bag Limits**

General Hunts)

**Nonresident
Open Season**

(20)

...

Unit
22(B)

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

2 bears every regulatory year by registration only) permit only; or

Aug. 1 - June 30
(Subsistence hunt

2 bears every regulatory June 30 year

Aug. 1 -

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bear every regulatory year by drawing permit only; up to 27 permits may be issued in combination with Unit 22(C)

Aug. 1 - June 15

Unit 22(C)

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bear every regulatory year by registration permit only; or

Aug. 1 - Oct. 31
Apr. 1 - June 30
(Subsistence hunt only)

1 bear every regulatory year by registration permit June 30 only

Aug. 1 - Oct. 31
Apr. 1 -

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bear every regulatory year by drawing permit only; up to 27 permits may be issued in combination with Unit 22(B)

Aug. 1 - Oct. 31
Apr. 1 - June 15

No resident locking tag is required. All bears harvested in the general hunt and all bears intended for sale must be sealed. Bears harvested in the subsistence registration hunt need only be sealed if removed from the unit.

5 AAC 92.200 allows for the skulls and hides with claws attached of brown bears harvested in areas

where the bag limit is two bears per regulatory year to be sold under the conditions of a permit issued by the department.

The positive customary and traditional use finding for brown bears in Unit 22 is combined with Unit 21, with an Amount Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) of 20-25 animals.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If the board increases the number of permits available for DB685 there could be an increase in brown bear harvest within Units 22B and 22C. If the board chooses to provide nonresident hunting opportunity in Unit 22B through a registration permit and not a drawing permit, additional harvest can be expected in Unit 22B only. If either option is adopted there would be no change to the already liberal resident opportunity, however nonresidents would have a more accessible opportunity to harvest brown bears in Unit 22B.

BACKGROUND: In the past 20 years brown bear regulations across Unit 22 have been incrementally liberalized through extended season, increased bag limits, and increased nonresident permits.

Nonresident brown bear hunting in Units 22B and 22C is currently administered under draw permit DB685 with up to 27 permits available to be issued annually. DB685 has historically been undersubscribed in the past ten years and only twice (RY15 and RY22) has the total number of permits been issued. DB685 has an average hunter participation of 74% and an average hunter success of 64% during the last 10 regulatory years (RY13-RY22).

The majority of hunters that participate in the DB685 hunt ultimately harvest their brown bear in Unit 22B. A limited number of brown bears are harvested under the DB685 permit in Unit 22C, with an average of 1 bear harvested (range 0-3) during RY13-RY22.

Sealing records indicate that the biological data of brown bears harvested by residents and nonresidents in Unit 22B are similar. Nonresident sealing records from brown bears that have been harvested in Units 22B and 22C during the last 10-year reporting period indicate an average sow skull size of 20.2 inches and a boar skull size of 22.8 inches and suggests that skull size has remained stable over the last ten years. Resident sealing records from brown bears that have been harvested out of GMU 22B indicate an average sow skull size of 20.2 inches and a boar skull size of 22.4 inches, from RY13-RY22 and data suggests that skull size has remained stable over the last ten years.

Sealing records also indicate the average number of brown bears harvested in Unit 22B is 26 brown bears, ranging from 14-39 bears sealed from RY13-RY22. Brown bear sow harvest makes up approximately 30% of the harvest for both residents and nonresidents over the last ten years, which is consistent with the management objective of 50% sow harvest or less. In RY 22 the department closed nonresident hunt DB684 and resident hunt RB670 by emergency order on

May 11, 2023 because the combined fall and spring reported harvest from Unit 22C was 25 bears, which exceeded historic harvest levels.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **SUPPORTS** additional opportunity for hunters to harvest bears in Unit 22B. If the board intends to allow for additional opportunity for nonresidents to take bears in Unit 22B, the department recommends it be done by allowing up to 40 permits to be issued for DB685. While a registration permit with established reporting requirements provides the department with the necessary tools to manage the Unit 22B bear harvest, the department prefers small incremental changes to brown bear hunts in order to assess additional effort and harvest should it occur.

Unit 22C is more accessible than 22B and as a result more harvest occurs there than in Unit 22B. The department expects future harvest to be at or near historic averages so additional harvest opportunity in Unit 22C would be counter to the management objectives. The department will continue to monitor the harvest and may close the Unit 22C portion of the hunt by emergency order if the harvest exceeds historic averages.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 30 – 5 AAC 84.270 (8). Trapping seasons and bag limits for furbearers.

Lengthen the trapping season for muskrat in Unit 26A.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? Adopting this proposal would extend the trapping season to year-round for muskrat in Unit 26A.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? The current trapping season for muskrat in Unit 26A is Nov 1-June 10th, with no bag limit.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for muskrat in all units with a harvestable portion across the state of Alaska. The amount reasonably necessary for subsistence (ANS) uses is 90 percent of the harvestable portion.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? This proposal would create more opportunities for North Slope residents to harvest muskrat year- round.

BACKGROUND: Muskrat distribution and numbers have grown over the last ten years on the North Slope. They have been observed as far north as Utgiagvik and throughout many of the drainages of the Colville River. Little is known about muskrat abundance since there are no surveys currently being conducted by the department.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department submitted and **SUPPORTS** this proposal to

create more opportunity for trapping muskrat year-round as they can be used for both furs and meat.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs for the department.

PROPOSAL 31 – 5 AAC 85.045(a)(24). Hunting seasons and bag limits for moose.
 Liberalize the bag limit and expand the hunt area for moose in Unit 26A.

PROPOSED BY: North Slope Advisory Committee

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? Adoption of this proposal would liberalize the moose bag limit to one moose in a portion of Unit 26A and expand the hunt area by redefining the eastern boundary of the hunt area to align with the federal hunt boundary. The eastern boundary would change from 156 degrees west longitude to that portion west of the eastern shore of Admiralty Bay where the Alaktak River enters, following the Alaktak River to 155°00' W longitude excluding the Colville River drainage. This change would open the hunting season in the portion of Unit 26A between the 155° and 156° longitude lines one month earlier and close it two weeks earlier. It will also change the bag limit in the area to one moose as opposed to one bull.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

| Resident Open Season (Subsistence and Units and Bag Limits | General Hunts) | Nonresident Open Season |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| (24) | | |
| ... | | |
| Unit 26(A), that portion west of 156° 00' W. longitude ex- cluding the Colville River drainage | | |
| 1 antlered bull | July 1 - Sept. 14 | No |
| open season. Remainder of Unit 26(A) | | |
| 1 bull | Aug. 1 - Sept. 30 | No open season. |

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for moose in Unit 26 with an Amount Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) of 21-48, including 15-30 in Unit 26A.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If adopted, this proposal would increase the hunt area for antlerless moose hunt and would remove the last two weeks of fall moose hunting opportunity in the portion of Unit 26A between the 155 and 156 degrees longitude and add the month of July to the season. Changing the hunt area will also mean it will encompass large numbers of cabins located in the Chipp River drainage. It would also provide a natural boundary reference in the regulation which could alleviate confusion for hunters. Specifically, the new regulation would read as follows:

| Units and Bag Limits | Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts) | Nonresident Open Season |
|---|---|------------------------------------|
| (24) | | |
| ... | | |
| Unit 26(A), that portion west of <u>the eastern shore of Admiralty Bay where the Alaktak River enters, following the Alaktak River to 155°00' W longitude excluding the Colville River drainage</u> | | |
| 1 <u>moose</u> | July 1 - Sept. 14 | No open season. |
| Remainder of Unit 26(A) | | |
| 1 bull | Aug. 1 - Sept. 30 | No open season. |

BACKGROUND: This regulation was in place for many years to provide hunters with some harvest opportunity for migratory moose that wandered west of their normal range in 26A. The current moose population in 26A is concentrated around the Colville River drainage. The population has grown from 294 moose in 2014 to 438 moose in 2021. The Colville River moose population has been as high as 1,535 moose in 1991 and has experienced period of sharp declines in 1999 and 2014 with minimal growth since (Figure 2). The Colville moose population is at the far northern end of moose range and is susceptible to malnutrition and disease in harsh winters (Carroll 2012).

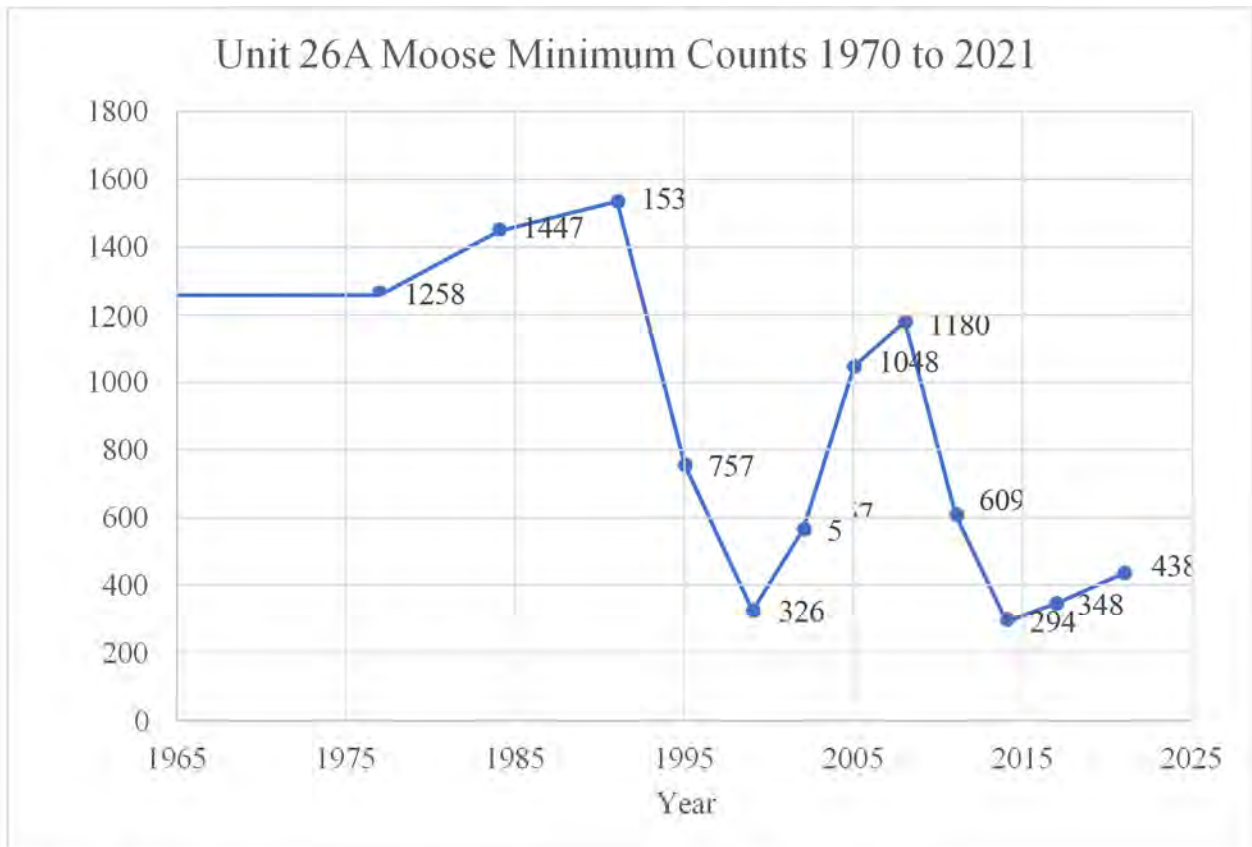


Figure 2. Colville River moose survey minimum counts from 1976-2021.

However, the western portion of 26A excluding the Colville River drainage is outside the core habitat area for moose and there are no regular surveys conducted in this portion of 26A because it is poor moose habitat. This hunt is meant to provide opportunity outside the primary moose habitat in 26A. Historically, the reported harvest for the entirety of 26A on average is two moose annually. The reported harvest, west of 156° longitude from 2012-2022 was four moose total, two of which were females. This proposed regulatory change is not expected to have a biologically significant impact on the moose population in 26A as it does not include the primary moose habitat in 26A.

The department has collected moose harvest and use information from communities that lie within the western portion of Unit 26A. Point Lay, Wainwright, Atqasuk and Utqiagvik have documented moose harvests through household surveys conducted at various times over the last several decades. Hunters in Point Lay, Wainwright and Atqasuk documented the harvest of between 0-4 moose in each community for each year they were surveyed. Utqiagvik residents reported harvesting between 12 (2014) and 53 (1988) moose for each year they were surveyed, some of which were harvested in eastern 26A south of Teshekpuk Lake and outside of the proposed new hunt area.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **SUPPORTS** expanding the hunt area to allow for antlerless moose to be taken in a larger portion of Unit 26A. The department also supports aligning the boundary with the federal hunt to reduce confusion for hunters. The

department is neutral on the change in seasons in the portion of Unit 26A between the 155- and 156-degrees longitude. There are no biological concerns associated with changing the eastern boundary of 26A or changing the bag limit to 1 moose.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs for the department.

PROPOSAL 32 - 5 AAC 92.540. Controlled use areas. Change the boundary of the Anaktuvuk Pass Controlled Use Area.

PROPOSED BY: North Slope Advisory Committee

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? If adopted, this proposal would expand the current boundaries of the Anaktuvuk Pass (AKP) Controlled Use Area (CUA) and allow the City of AKP, the Nunamiut Corporation and the Nagsragmiut tribe to set the dates that the CUA is in effect. The AKP CUA would be in effect from July 15 until the city of Anaktuvuk Pass, the Nunamiut Corporation, and the Naqsragsmiut tribe determine that the fall migration trail has been laid and the caribou are migrating through Anaktuvuk Pass.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? Currently, the AKP Controlled Use Area is defined as that portion of Unit 26A bounded by a line beginning at 153° 30' W. long. on the game management boundary between Units 24 and 26A, north along 153° 30' W. long. to 69° N. lat., east along 69° N. lat. to 152° 10' W. long., south along 152° 10' W. long. to 68° 30' N. lat., east along 68° 30' N. lat. to 150° 40' W. long., south along 150° 40' W. long. to the game management boundary between Units 24 and 26A, and westerly along the game management unit boundary to the point of origin at 153° 30' W. long. From Aug 15 - Oct 15, the area is closed to the use of aircraft for caribou hunting, including transportation of caribou hunters, their hunting gear, and/or parts of caribou. However, this does not apply to transportation of caribou hunters, their gear, or caribou parts by aircraft between publicly owned airports in the controlled use area.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for caribou in Unit 26. The combined ANS for Units 21, 22, 23, 24 and 26 for Western Arctic Herd and Teshekpuk Lake Herd caribou is 8,000-12,000 animals.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? Adoption of this proposal would increase the size the AKP Controlled Use Area from the black outlined area to the orange outlined area (Fig. 1). It would make any aircraft- based caribou, sheep, bear and furbearer hunting subject to emergency order opening in the CUA. It would give residents of AKP discretion when aerial based caribou hunting seasons can occur, aligning with the traditional hunting practice of letting the lead caribou pass and allowing migration routes to become established before aerial based hunting begins.

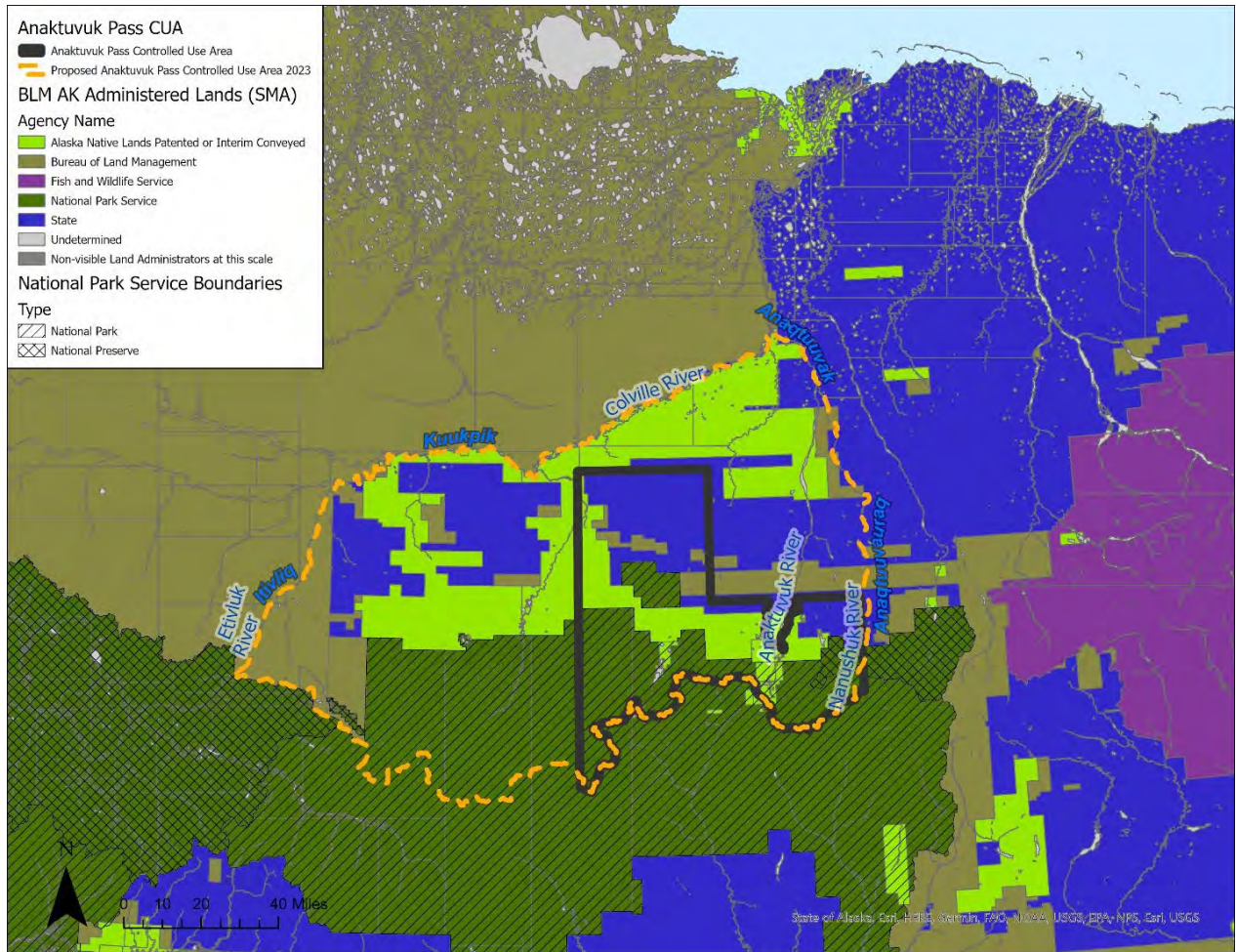


Figure 1. Anaktuvuk Pass Controlled use area. The current area is outlined in black, and the proposed controlled use area is outlined in dashed orange.

BACKGROUND: Caribou is a keystone, or primary, wild food resource for residents of Anaktuvuk Pass. According to household survey data from 13 different study years between 1990-2014 available on the community subsistence information system (CSIS), residents of Anaktuvuk Pass harvest between 210 -770 caribou each year. Data from the most recent harvest and use surveys in Anaktuvuk Pass indicate that in 2014 residents harvested an estimated 770 caribou, which contributed about 330 lbs. of edible weight per capita to local diets. Harvest success is dependent on the community’s access to the herd, and although hunters report harvesting many caribou in August, much of the annual harvest takes place during the winter and spring months when overland travel is improved by snow cover. In 2014, hunters reported taking 135 caribou in August, but the remaining 635 animals were harvested throughout the year in every month except June.

Three caribou herds utilize the CUA: the Western Arctic, Central Arctic, and Teshekpuk. The proportion and access to each of the herds changes seasonally and annually, often times dramatically. Anaktuvuk Pass residents have stated that 10 years ago they would have been able

to harvest large numbers of caribou in August as indicated by household surveys. However, in recent years, the migration of the Western Arctic and Teshekpuk caribou herds often has not reached Anaktuvuk Pass until October.

Studies and observations indicate the migrations are prone to variability but are generally trending to later in the year (Cameron et al. 2021).

The original AKP CUA was designed to address subsistence hunter concerns about aircraft use disrupting the caribou migration and therefore caribou hunting success of Anaktuvuk Pass hunters. The CUA was adopted by the BOG in November 2005 and closed the Anaktuvuk River drainage from Aug 15-Oct 15 to transport of caribou, hunters, hunting gear and caribou parts. It went into effect in regulatory year (RY) 06-07 and had a sunset date of July 1, 2008. A proposal was submitted by the North Slope Borough Fish and Game Management committee in 2007 to modify the boundary of the CUA to a 25-mile radius around Anaktuvuk Pass and that proposal was amended to the current CUA boundary (Figure 1) and adopted by the BOG. The CUA was made permanent, and the sunset period was eliminated. The CUA boundary has remained unchanged since 2008. There has been much discussion since then about remaining impacts of aircraft on the fall caribou migration. Residents indicate that aircraft presence in the area during the onset of the fall migration may deflect those animals that come through first. Letting the lead caribou pass is widely accepted traditional knowledge; the first caribou set the trail for those that follow and changes to their behavior have the potential to change the route and/or the timing of the migration. Anaktuvuk Pass residents are concerned about the caribou migration arriving later in the season after the bulls have rutted and the meat is less desirable. Bulls are generally the preferred animal to take in the fall time prior to the rut because they are larger, so they provide more meat per animal and are fatter than females. There are three registered guides that operate in the proposed CUA. One of the guides operates in two different areas. Most of the aircraft-based caribou harvest that occurs in the proposed CUA is either in the southwestern corner of the CUA on BLM lands or on the northeastern corner of the proposed CUA.

This proposal seeks to restrict all aircraft being utilized for hunting caribou, sheep, furbearers, and bears. Aircraft is used more commonly for caribou than any other animal in the CUA. There are an average of 60 hunters per year that utilize aircraft for hunting caribou in the proposed CUA. Table 1 summarizes the successful harvest of bears, furbearers, caribou and sheep from 2018-2022.

Table. 1. Harvest of Brown Bear, Wolves, Wolverines, Caribou, Sheep and lynx according to sealing records, RC907 permits, general season sheep and caribou harvest tickets 2018-2022 that utilized aircraft and were successful.

| Species | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Brown Bear | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

| | | | | | |
|-----------|----|----|----|----|----|
| Wolves | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Wolverine | | 0 | 0 | | 1 |
| Caribou | 54 | 47 | 18 | 32 | 34 |
| Sheep | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Lynx | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Residents of Anaktuvuk Pass have expressed that their main concern is that aircraft are disrupting caribou migration. Most caribou hunters utilizing aircraft took animals from three subunit 26A uniform coding units (UCUs): 1303, 901 and 801 (Fig. 2). Between 2018-2022, an average of 131 caribou hunters use aircraft to support their hunt in the proposed CUA; an average of 110 (84%) were successful (2018-2022).

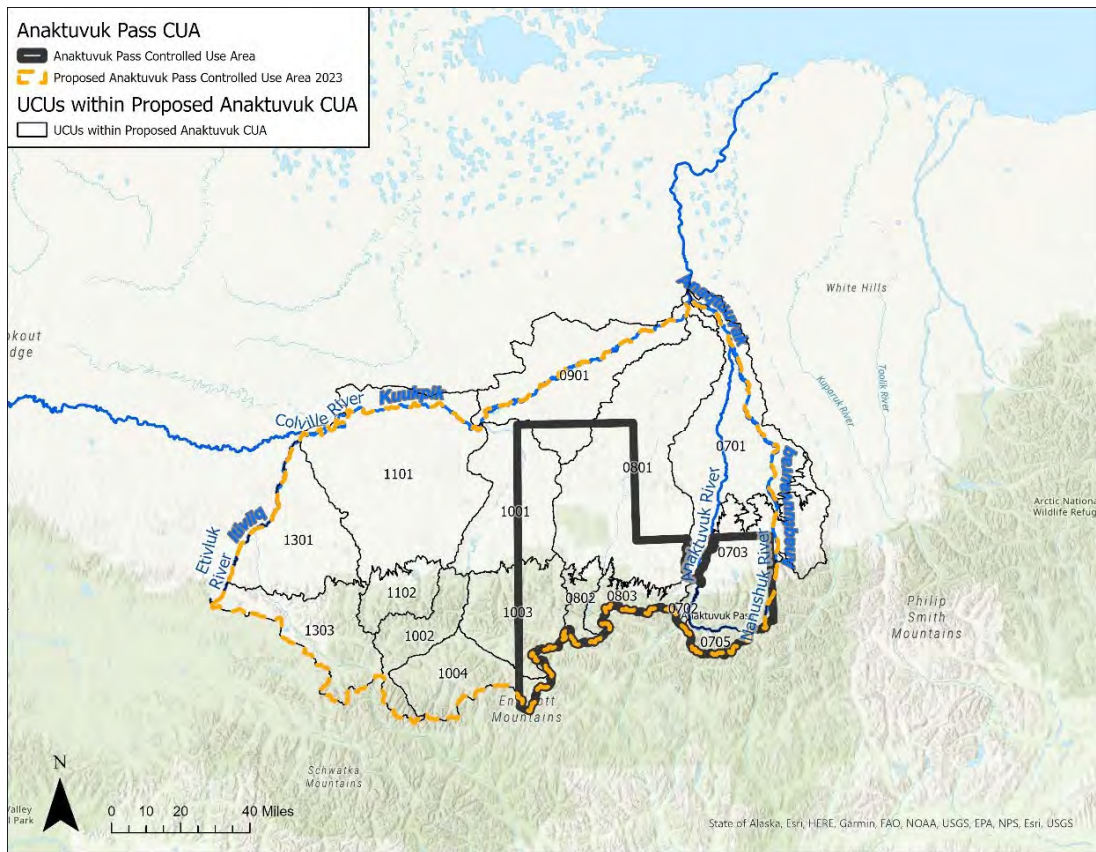


Figure 2. Subunit areas included in the proposed CUA.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The Board of Game does not have the authority to delegate the department’s management of the resource. The department is NEUTRAL on the allocative aspects of the proposal.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs for the department.

PROPOSAL 33 - 5 AAC 85.055. Hunting seasons and bag limits for Dall sheep. Reduce the Unit 26A sheep bag limit for residents.

PROPOSED BY: Spencer Pape, Seth Kroenke, Jeff Rost, and Jon Burrows

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal would reduce the Unit 26A sheep bag limit for residents to one ram with full-curl horn or larger every four regulatory years.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

| Units and Bag Limits | Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts) | Nonresident Open Season |
|---|---|----------------------------|
| Unit 26(A), that portion west of the Etivluk River drainage | | |
| RESIDENT HUNTERS: | | |
| 1 sheep by registration permit only; or | No open season. (Subsistence hunt only) | |
| 1 ram with full-curl horn or larger by drawing permit only, provided that the harvestable surplus is greater than 9 sheep. in combination with that portion of Unit 23 in the DeLong Mountains | No open season. | |
| NONRESIDENT HUNTERS: | | |
| 1 ram will full-curl horn or larger by drawing permit only, every 4 regulatory years, provided that the harvestable surplus is greater than 9 sheep in combination with that portion of Unit 23 in the DeLong Mountains | | No open season. |
| Unit 26(A), that portion east of and including the Etivluk River drainage, excluding Gates of the Arctic National Park | | |

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

3 sheep by registration permit only; or Aug. 1 - Apr. 30 (Subsistence hunt only)

1 ram with full-curl horn or larger, by youth hunt only; or Aug. 1 - Aug. 5

1 ram with full-curl horn or larger Aug. 10 - Sept. 20

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 ram with full-curl horn or larger, every 4 regulatory years, by youth hunt only; or Aug. 1 - Aug. 5

1 ram with full-curl horn or larger, every 4 regulatory years; Aug. 10 - Sept. 20

Unit 26(A), that portion within the Gates of the Arctic National Park

3 sheep Aug. 1 - Apr. 30 No open season.

...

Remainder of Units 26(A) and 26(B)

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 ram with full-curl horn or larger by youth hunt only; or Aug. 1 - Aug. 5

1 ram with full-curl horn or larger Aug. 10 - Sept. 20

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 ram with full-curl horn or larger, every 4 regulatory years, by youth hunt only; or Aug. 1 - Aug. 5

1 ram with full-curl horn or Aug. 10 - Sept. 20

larger, every 4 regulatory years

These is a positive customary and traditional use finding (C&T) for Dall Sheep for Unit 26A. Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) are as follows:

- Units 23 and 26A west of the Etuvluk River (DeLong Mountains): 0-9
- Units 23 and 26A east of the Etuvluk River (Schwatka Mountains): 2-4
- GMUs 23, 24, 25A, and 26 (Brooks Range): 75-125

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If adopted this proposal will reduce hunting opportunity in hunts with a bag limit greater than one full-curl ram by eliminating any sheep bag limits and restricting successful hunters to 1 ram every 4 years.

BACKGROUND: In 2014 all hunts in the Baird and De Long Mountains (RS388, RS389, DS384 and the general season harvest ticket hunts) were closed by emergency order (Figure 1).

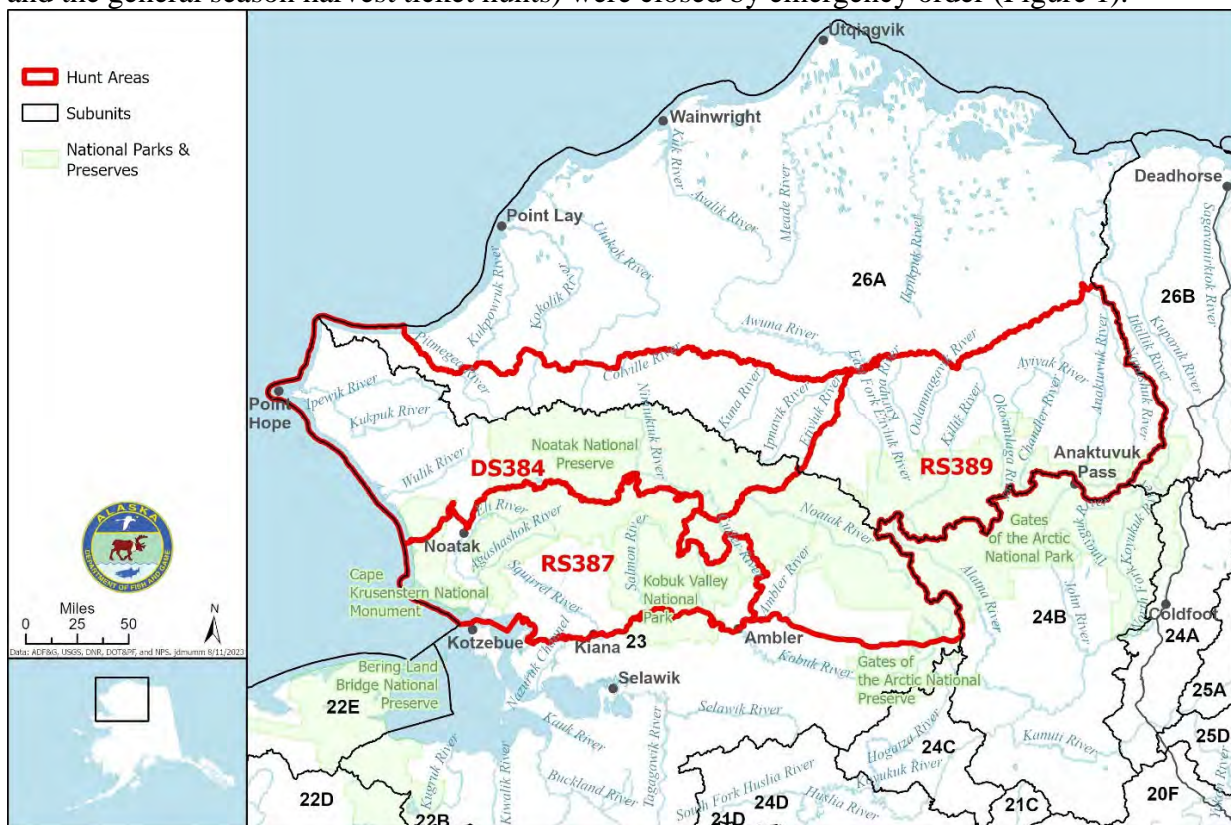


Figure 1. The Unit 26A and Unit 23 hunts that were closed in 2014 and 2015 along with their corresponding general season hunts. RS388 has the same hunt area as DS384.

In 2015 the Board of Game adopted a proposal to close RS389, RS387 and DS384 (RS388 same hunt area) and the corresponding general season hunts in units 26A and 23 to allow the sheep population to recover after extensive declines were documented in 2014 and 2015 due to icing

events that reduced the population by 50-80%. Between 2018-2022 the sheep harvest of all state managed hunts combined in Unit 26A averaged about 0.4 sheep per year. From 2013-2017 an average of 0.8 sheep were harvested per year. All the state jurisdiction hunts that are open have full-curl ram bag limits except for the hunt that occurs on private lands within the Gates of the Arctic National Park, which has a bag limit of 3 sheep per year.

Dall sheep in this area are managed using the conservative full-curl ram harvest management strategy. The full-curl strategy is conservative because it focuses harvest pressure on males only, and a small segment of the population. Limiting harvest to males-only reduces the impact of harvest on the overall population because male survival rates have a drastically lower impact on population growth compared to female survival rates. Finally, the full-curl strategy is extremely conservative because full-curl animals compose a very small proportion of most sheep populations. As a result, the number of animals that are legally available to hunters is a small proportion of the population and this imposes a self-limit on overharvest of the population.

Taken collectively, the full-curl harvest strategy limits harvest to only older-aged rams. Dall Sheep are harvested for subsistence uses in Unit 26 both by local residents from Anaktuvuk Pass and Kaktovik, as well by other Alaskans from across the state. The C&T worksheet for Dall Sheep in Unit 26 from 1987, describes annual harvest patterns that may be inconsistent with the proposed change limiting harvest to every four years. The worksheet notes that “sheep hunting is a community activity, where extended family groups often travel and hunt together.” Additionally, “sheep hunters harvest sheep in late fall (late October through late November) and in early spring (March) in conjunction with caribou and furbearer hunters. This seasonal round has been in effect for some time and is deeply engrained in local hunt planning.”

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department is **NEUTRAL** on this proposal. Adoption of the proposal will have little impact because hunters report harvesting less than one sheep per year annually in the area. Adoption of the proposal would change the bag limit from one sheep per year to one sheep every four years, which could potentially result in up to a 75% reduction in opportunity, and the board will need to determine if the change in bag limit will continue to provide for a reasonable opportunity of success in harvesting a sheep for subsistence purposes.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs for the department.

PROPOSAL 34 – 5 AAC 85.055. Hunting seasons and bag limits for Dall sheep. Create a resident only archery hunt for sheep in Unit 26A.

PROPOSED BY: Paul Forward

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal would create a resident only, archery registration hunt in 26A west of the Etivluk River. The bag limit would be one ram with full-curl horn or larger, season dates would be August 10 – September 20, permits would only be available in person at license vendors, and harvest would have to be reported within 48 hours.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? There is currently no open season west of the Etivluk in Unit 26A.

These is a positive customary and traditional use finding (C&T) for Dall Sheep in Unit 26A. Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) ranges are as follows:

- Units 23 and 26A west of the Etivluk River (DeLong Mountains): 0-9

- Units 23 and 26A east of the Etivluk River (Schwatka Mountains): 2-4

- GMUs 23, 24, 25A, and 26 (Brooks Range): 75-125

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If adopted, this proposal would create an archery-only, resident registration hunt for sheep when the season first reopens with a bag limit of one full-curl ram or larger, with season dates of August 10 – September 20. Permits would only be available in person and successful hunters would be required to report within 48 hours of taking a sheep.

Having a bow hunting requirement would also require all hunters that want to participate in this hunt to have access to bow hunter education. Hunter education is not currently a requirement in Unit 26A. Many subsistence hunters do not bow hunt but use firearms as their main method of hunting.

BACKGROUND: Unit 26A and Unit 23 sheep are managed as a single population. Data and background listed throughout will be applicable to both areas, and specific information will be noted.

Sheep hunting in Unit 23 and in Unit 26A west of the Etivluk River was closed in 2014 by emergency order, and the general season hunt was closed in that portion of Unit 26A east of the Etivluk River excluding Gates of the Arctic National Park. In 2015, the Board of Game adopted regulations to continue the hunting season closures in Unit 23 and in Unit 26A west of the Etivluk River drainage due to conservation concerns over persistently low population numbers. The hunting season closure was and is broadly supported by local residents, who asked the department for a full hunting season closure rather than exploring more restrictive hunt management under the Tier II system.

The department conducted Dall sheep abundance and composition surveys in collaboration with the NPS from 2016-2019. These abundance surveys conducted in the Baird (Deacy and Schertz 2021) and central De Long Mountains utilized a distance sampling methodology. The estimates from these surveys can be found in Tables 1 and 2. These surveys showed a similar dramatic decline in lab to ewe-like ratios in both the Baird and De Long Mountains. The NPS conducted surveys in 2015 in the Western Baird Mountains in Western Arctic Park Lands and Gates of the Arctic (Rattenbury 2015). These surveys showed similar declines and poor lamb recruitment in the Western Baird Mountains (Rattenbury 2014).

Table 1. Baird Mountain sheep minimum counts 2009-2014 and estimates 2017 and 2019.

| Year | Sheep Minimum Count & Estimated Abundance |
|------|---|
| 2009 | 823 |
| 2011 | 587 |
| 2014 | 309 |
| 2017 | 233 (95% CI: 183-313) |
| 2019 | 174 (95% CI: 141-230) |

Table 2. De Long mountains sheep minimum counts 2011-2018.

| Year | Estimate |
|------|-----------------------|
| 2011 | 1795 |
| 2014 | 359 |
| 2017 | 434 (95% CI: 359-540) |
| 2018 | 196 |

There are three state general season hunts currently open in Unit 26A. They are: Unit 26A east of and including the Etivluk River drainage, excluding the Gates of the Arctic National Park; Unit 26A private lands within the Gates of the Arctic National Park; and Unit 26A remainder. There were also two registration hunts RS388 and RS389, and a drawing hunt (DS384) that correspond to each of the hunt areas listed above. There was an emergency order in 2014 to close RS388, RS389, and DS384 and the general season hunts in Unit 26A west of the Etivluk River drainage, excluding Gates of the Arctic National Park as well as the general season hunt in Unit 26A on private lands within Gates of the Arctic National Park (Figure 1). Note RS388 and DS384 are the same hunt areas.

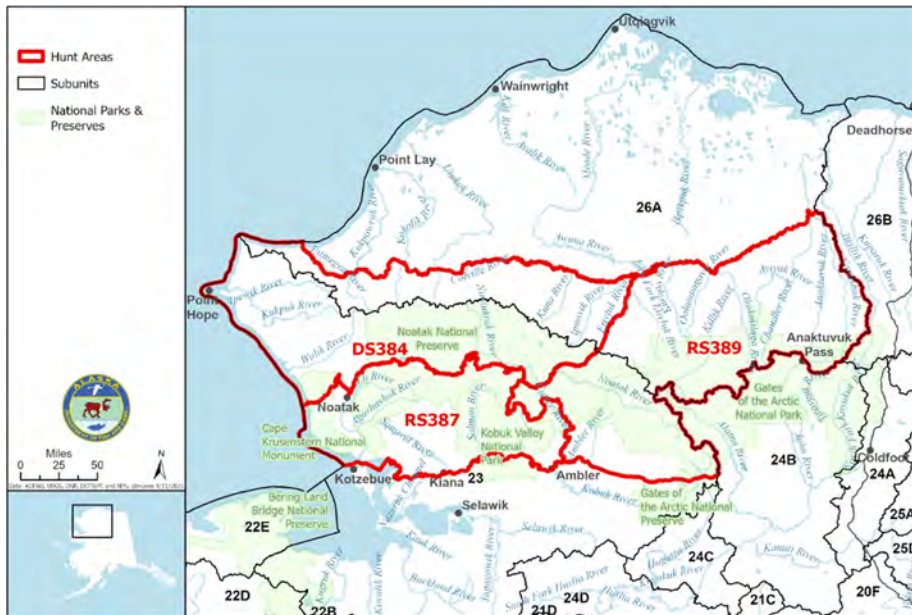


Figure 1. The Unit 26A and Unit 23 hunts that were closed in 2014 and 2015 along with their corresponding general season hunts. DS384 has the same hunt area as RS388.

In 2015 the Board of Game adopted a proposal to close RS389, RS387 and DS384 (same hunt area as RS388) and the general season hunts in Unit 26A west of the Etivluk River drainage, and in Unit 23 to allow the sheep population to recover after extensive declines were documented in 2014 and 2015 due to icing events that reduced the population by 50-80%.

From 2013-2017 an average of 0.8 sheep were harvested per year. Between 2018-2022 the sheep harvest of all state managed hunts combined in Unit 26A declined to an average of about 0.4 sheep per year. All the state hunts that are currently open have full curl bag limits except for the hunt that occurs on private lands within Gates of the Arctic National Park. This hunt has a bag limit of 3 sheep per year. The harvest from 2012-2016 is outlined in Table 3.

Table 3. Sheep harvest summary from 2012-2016 in units 23 and 26A.

| Year | Unit 23 | Unit 26A | Total Harvest |
|------|---------|----------|---------------|
| 2012 | 3 | 4 | 7 |
| 2013 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 2014 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 2015 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Dall sheep are managed using the conservative full-curl ram harvest management strategy. The full-curl strategy focuses harvest pressure on males-only and thereby a small segment of the population. Limiting harvest to males-only reduces the impact of harvest on the overall population because male survival rates have a drastically lower impact on population growth compared to female survival rates. Additionally, full-curl animals compose a very small proportion of most sheep populations. As a result, the number of animals that are legally available to hunters imposes a self-limit on overharvest of the population. Taken collectively, the full-curl harvest strategy limits harvest to only older-aged rams and is thus conservative.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department is **NEUTRAL** on the methods and means and allocative aspects of this proposal. While archery only sheep hunts have shown to contribute little to overall harvest when compared to unrestricted weapons hunts, the department is concerned about the hunting pressure and associated disturbance potentially compromising overwinter survival and/or reproductive success for some animals. Hunters could move animals out of productive habitat to escape terrain and compromise their ability to obtain sufficient body reserves for rut and overwinter survival. The board may wish to determine if the proposed changes will provide for a reasonable opportunity of success in harvesting sheep for subsistence uses.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs for the department.

PROPOSAL 35 – 5 AAC 85.050(3) Hunting seasons and bag limits for muskoxen. Change the Unit 26A and 26B Tier II permit hunt area boundaries.

PROPOSED BY: North Slope Advisory Committee

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? If adopted, this proposal would change the Unit 26A and 26B muskoxen hunt area boundary to match the federal muskox and moose hunt boundaries and expand the state TX109 and TX108 hunt areas.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

| <u>Unit and location</u> | <u>Resident open season (Subsistence and general hunts)</u> | <u>Nonresident open season</u> |
|--|--|---|
| Units 26A, that portion west of the Topagoruk River following 156° W. Long. South to the Unit 26A border | | |

| | | |
|--|--|----------------|
| 1 musk ox by Tier II subsistence permit (TX109) only; up to 15 permits may be issued | Aug. 1–Mar. 15 (Subsistence hunt only) | No open season |
|--|--|----------------|

Units 26A that portion east of the Topagoruk River following 156° W. Long. South to the Unit 26A border, and 26B that portion west of the Dalton Highway

| | | |
|--|--|----------------|
| 1 musk ox by Tier II subsistence permit (TX108) only; up to 20 musk oxen may be taken (<i>Permits were issued for east of longitude 153 and west of DHCMA</i>) | Aug. 1–Mar. 31 (Subsistence hunt only) | No open season |
|--|--|----------------|

Unit 26B, that portion east of the Dalton Highway

| | | |
|--|--|----------------|
| 1 musk ox by Tier I permit only (<i>Permits were issued east of the DHCMA</i>) | Season to be announced (Subsistence hunt only) | No open season |
|--|--|----------------|

or

| | | |
|--|------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1 bull by drawing permit only if the harvestable surplus is greater than 4 musk oxen; up to 5 musk oxen may be taken | Sept. 20–Oct. 10 Mar 10–Mar. 30 | No open season |
|--|------------------------------------|----------------|

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding (C&T) for muskoxen in Unit 23, that portion north and west of the Kobuk River drainage, and that portion of Unit 26A west of the Topagoruk River following 156°00' W longitude South to the Unit 26A border (the Cape Thompson population) with an Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) range of 18-22 animals.

There is a positive C&T finding for muskoxen in Unit 26A that portion east of the Topagoruk River following 156°00' W longitude South to the Unit 26A border, and Unit 26B, that portion west of the Dalton Highway Corridor with an ANS of 20 muskoxen.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? This proposal would align state and federal muskox hunt boundaries. It would also expand the two state hunt areas. The new language for each hunt area would be:

TX108 - Unit 26A East and 26B West, that portion from West of the Dalton Highway to the

eastern shore of Admiralty Bay where the Alaktak River enters, following the Alaktak River to 155°00' W longitude south to the Unit 26A border.

TX109 – Unit 26A, that portion west of the eastern shore of Admiralty Bay where the Alaktak River drains, following the Alaktak River to 155°00' W longitude south to the Units 26A border.

The federal boundary is as follows: Unit 26A, that portion west of the eastern shore of Admiralty Bay where the Alaktak River drains, following the Alaktak River to 155°00' W longitude south to the Units 26A border.

BACKGROUND: Muskoxen were reintroduced to the North Slope in 1969 and again in 1970. The population increased through the mid-1990s to a high of 500–650 muskoxen in Units 26B and 26C. The population then declined and by 2004 had fallen below the management objective of 300 muskoxen and the hunts were cancelled. Since 2004, the population has slowly grown, and by 2018 numbers were just above the 300 muskoxen management objective. Since 2018 the population has continued to slowly grow and there are now between 340 and 380 muskoxen.

Starting in regulatory year (RY) 23 hunting was reinstated following the 2004 hunt structure. This included 4 Tier II permits, 4 registration subsistence permits, and 4 drawing permits.

Muskoxen were also introduced to Unit 23 in 1970, and those animals are now referred to as the Cape Thompson population. Since then, the population has grown and expanded its range from the Cape Krusenstern core area in Unit 23 into Unit 26A with periodic sightings of muskoxen in Wainwright, Point Lay, and Atqasuk. The Cape Thompson muskoxen population within the Unit 23 core area grew approximately 8% annually between their reintroduction in 1970 through 1998. Population growth within the core area slowed to 2% annually between 1998–2005 (Dau 2005, Hughes 2015) and decreased annually between 2005–2018. The population wide estimate including both 26A and 23 has grown from 556 to 911 between 2016 and 2020, respectively. The 2020 Cape Thompson survey estimated 455 muskoxen in 26A with 95% CI (350-631).

In 2022, the BOG adopted a proposal to open the Western portion of 26A to a Tier II hunt TX109. Applications were accepted during the November/December 2022 application period and the first season of the TX109 was August 1, 2023–March 15, 2024. A federal muskoxen permit was established for hunting muskoxen in the summer of 2022 and there was an open season for six permits issued through a lottery system. One muskoxen was taken under the new federal permit during the 2022 season. In 2023, three permits were issued for TX109, and 3 permits were issued under the federal hunt which is administered by the Bureau of Land Management.

From 1998-2020, 22 muskoxen were harvested in western 26A. Those animals were taken as incidental or stranded animals under 5 AAC 92.046.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **SUPPORTS** this proposal to alleviate hunter confusion and to increase hunt area and opportunity by aligning state and federal hunt boundaries and there are no biological concerns associated with the boundary change. Adoption of the

proposal will cause hunt area boundaries to be misaligned with existing customary and traditional use determination areas in 5 AAC 99.025, and the department recommends the board amend the proposal to align those boundaries with the hunt area.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal would not result in additional costs for the department.

PROPOSAL 36 – 5 AAC 85.025(21) Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

Reduce the caribou bag limit for residents in Unit 23 from five caribou per day to four caribou total, only one of which may be a cow.

PROPOSED BY: Kotzebue Advisory Committee

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? If adopted, this proposal would reduce the resident bag limit in Unit 23 to four caribou per year, of which no more than one may be a cow.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? The current regulations for caribou within Unit 23 are as follows:

5 AAC 85.025. Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

| Units and Bag Limits | Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts) | Nonresident Open Season |
|-----------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
|-----------------------------|---|------------------------------------|

(18)

Unit 23, that portion north of and including the Singoalik River drainage

RESIDENT HUNTERS:
5 caribou per day, by registration permit only, as follows:

| | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| up to 5 bulls per day | July 1 - June 30 |
| up to 5 cows per day | July 15 - Apr. 30 |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| NONRESIDENT HUNTERS: 1 bull | Aug. 1 - Sept. 30 |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|

Remainder of Unit 23

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

5 caribou per day, by
registration permit only,
as follows:

| | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| up to 5 bulls per day | July 1 - June 30 |
| up to 5 cows per day | Sept. 1 - Mar. 31 |

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bull Aug. 1 - Sept. 30

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for caribou in Unit 23. Caribou harvests in this unit are subject to the following Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) ranges:

Units 21, 22, 23, 24, and 26 (Western Arctic Herd, Teshekpuk Lake Herd): ANS= 8,000-12,000

The Western Arctic Caribou herd (WAH) has a positive intensive management finding, with a population objective of at least 200,000 caribou and a harvest objective of 12,000-20,000.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? Based on the most recent patterns of distribution for the WAH, reductions to harvest would likely occur in Unit 23 overall. Opportunity to harvest caribou will still be provided while an attempt to reduce harvest, specifically female harvest, is appropriate due to declining abundance.

BACKGROUND: The WAH is currently experiencing a long-term decline which started in 2003 and has resulted in a population level decrease from approximately 490,000 in 2003 to 164,000 in 2022, which is below the population objective. While caribou populations are known to fluctuate naturally based on a variety of environmental factors, this decline is of significant concern due to the importance of caribou to various user groups. The home range of the WAH covers approximately 157,000 square miles and caribou are generally considered the primary terrestrial food source for many communities within that range (WACHWG 2022).

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game Subsistence Section has gathered information on caribou harvests in many communities within the WAH range during select years since the early 1980s. Local harvest and use levels can fluctuate by year depending on several factors, including a community's access to the herd based on annual variations in migratory routes and timing and the availability of other subsistence resources to local households that year. However, the vast majority of households rely heavily on caribou to meet their wild food needs. In 2014, 89% of households in Anaktuvuk Pass used caribou, and animals were harvested by 40% of households. That year caribou made up 90% of all wild food harvests by edible weight for the community (Brown et al. 2014). In another example, in 2017 96% of households in Noatak used caribou, and 51% of households harvested caribou (Gonzalez et al. 2018). The differences in percentages of households harvesting caribou and households using caribou indicate that many families rely on caribou that are shared with them by others to meet their

subsistence needs.

A reduction in bag limit will likely impact sharing patterns as heavy harvesting households will be more limited in their ability to harvest, and thus share, with non-harvesting households.

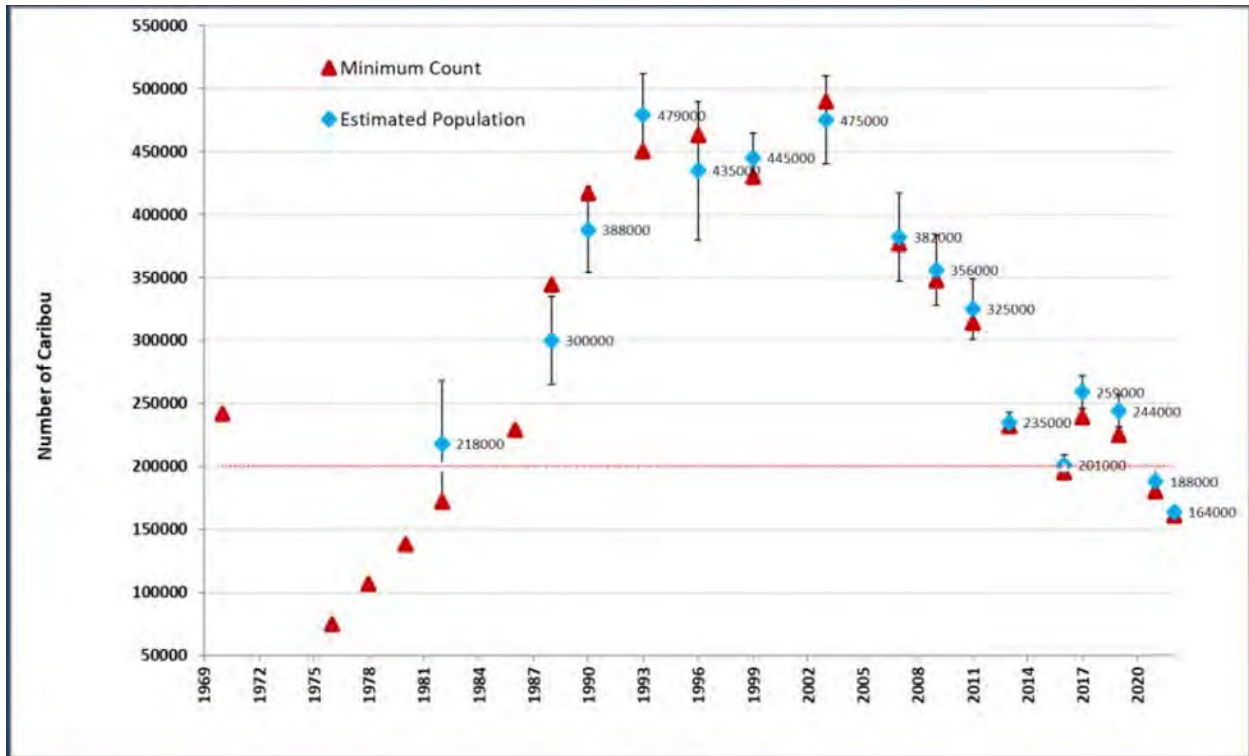


Figure 1. Western Arctic Caribou Herd population estimate 1970-2022. Minimum counts are indicated in red and estimated abundance is indicated with a blue diamond along with associated 95% confidence limits. Estimates are produced using an estimator described by Rivest et al (1998).

The importance of caribou conservation to local users was demonstrated by the Kotzebue Advisory Committee (AC) during a 2022 fall/winter meeting where they drafted a proposal to reduce the bag limit to 4 caribou per year, of which only 1 may be a cow and applied it to Unit 23 only. The Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group (WACHWG) followed suit a few weeks later during their December meeting drafting a similar proposal, the working group unanimously voted to use the same bag limit proposed by the Kotzebue AC but opted to include the entirety of the WAH range. The WACHWG is made up of various stakeholders including subsistence users from communities within the WAH range, hunters from outside the range of the herd, conservationists, hunting guides, reindeer herders and transporters. The combined proposals, (WSA22-05 and 06) coming from the NW Arctic and WI Subsistence Regional Advisory Committees show continued local support and understanding of the need for harvest reduction. The department recognizes and fully supports the readiness of these groups to reduce harvest to promote conservation of the WAH.

Harvest of the WAH is difficult to determine with limited harvest reporting across a wide geographic area. The department conservatively estimates that around 10% of the actual harvest is reported, recent attempts to increase reporting have included the establishment of

registration hunts (RC800 and RC907) and outreach efforts focused on the need for harvest data. To fill in this data gap the department previously used a model to determine harvest by using subsistence household surveys, and the local availability (distance, weather, etc.) to determine the harvest level locally. This model has produced an average annual harvest of approximately 12,000 animals (Dau 2015). However, given changes to WAH distribution in recent years limiting access by local users, the department has concluded the model is too coarse to track short term change and the use of the model has been discontinued at this time. It is generally understood that harvest rates have decreased due to reduction in access, however the information is too limited to understand the rate of reduction.

The recommended harvest rate based on figures presented in Table 2 of the WACHWG management plan (2019) for the 2022 population of 164,000 animals is ~4.8% or 7,872 animals. This estimate of harvestable surplus is far below the long-term average harvest for this herd as well as the lower end of the ANS range for the WAH; continued efforts to understand actual harvest are ongoing. Between 2019-2023, ADF&G Subsistence and the Division of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) partnered with 8 different communities within units 22 and 23 to document caribou harvests and uses. Working with locally hired research assistants, staff conducted voluntary household surveys to document this information in each of 4 communities during alternating years, resulting in all communities being surveyed twice. Results of this study will be published by July 1, 2024. However, preliminary analyses indicate that in recent years, Unit 22 communities have harvested fewer caribou than Unit 23 communities, in large part because of less access to the herd. Harvests ranged from 13-365 caribou per community per year in Unit 22, and between 81-405 caribou per community year in Unit 23. While useful for understanding local harvests, this information cannot be used in place of annual harvest information for the entirety of the herd. As part of ongoing efforts to understand overall WAH harvests, ADF&G Subsistence hosted an interagency round-table discussion in October 2023 to generate ideas for collaboration on documenting harvests across the WAH range using household surveys.

Conversations defining those research partnerships are ongoing, but ideally by 2025 researchers will pilot a large-scale effort to conduct household caribou harvest surveys in a larger portion of communities across the range of the WAH.

In recent years harvest may have exceeded the harvestable surplus of the population. Reducing this harvest, particularly cow harvest, is an important step to slowing population decline.

Estimated cow mortality is an important population metric and has remained above the long-term average since 2018. The change from 5 caribou per day to 4 per year only one of which may be a cow represents a significant reduction in harvest with an emphasis on reducing cow harvest.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **SUPPORTS** this proposal to reduce harvest due to the overall decline of the WAH. Reducing harvest, specifically cow harvest, is appropriate due to the current decline in abundance and our challenges is estimating actual harvest.

If adopted, the board will need to consider whether reasonable opportunity for subsistence

exists under the proposed regulatory structure. Specifically, the board may wish to consider whether nonsubsistence uses can still be provided and how the proposed regulations would impact the customary and traditional harvest and use patterns for caribou of many subsistence users.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs for the department.

PROPOSAL 37 – 5 AAC 85.025(21) Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

Reduce the caribou bag limit for residents in Unit 23 from five caribou per day to four caribou total, only one of which may be a cow.

PROPOSED BY: Northwest Arctic Regional Advisory Council

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? If adopted, this proposal would reduce the resident bag limit in Unit 23 to four caribou per year, of which no more than one may be a cow.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? The current regulations for caribou within unit 23 are as follows:

5 AAC 85.025. Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

**Resident Open Season
(Subsistence and
Units and Bag Limits**

General Hunts)

**Nonresident
Open Season**

(18)

Unit 23, that portion north
of and including the
Singoalik River drainage

RESIDENT HUNTERS:
5 caribou per day, by reg-
istration permit only, as
follows:

up to 5 bulls per day
up to 5 cows per day

July 1 - June 30
July 15 - Apr. 30

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bull

Aug. 1 - Sept. 30

Remainder of Unit 23

RESIDENT

HUNTERS:

5 caribou per day, by
registration permit
only, as follows:

up to 5 bulls per day
up to 5 cows per day

July 1 - June 30
Sept. 1 - Mar. 31

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 bull

Aug. 1 - Sept. 30

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for caribou in Unit 23. Caribou harvests in this unit are subject to the following Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) ranges:

Units 21,22,23,24, and 26 (Western Arctic Herd, Teshekpuk Lake Herd): ANS= 8,000- 12,000

The Western Arctic Caribou herd (WAH) has a positive intensive management finding, with a population objective of at least 200,000 caribou and a harvest objective of 12,000-20,000.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? Based on the most recent patterns of distribution for the WAH, reductions to harvest would likely occur in Unit 23 overall. Opportunity to harvest caribou will still be provided while efforts to reduce overall harvest, specifically cow caribou, is appropriate with declining abundance in the WAH.

BACKGROUND: The WAH is currently experiencing a long-term decline which started in 2003 and has resulted in a population level decrease from approximately 490,000 in 2003 to 164,000 in 2022, which is below the population objective. While caribou populations are known to fluctuate naturally based on a variety of environmental factors, this decline is of significant concern due to the importance of caribou to various user groups. The home range of the WAH covers approximately 157,000 square miles and caribou are generally considered the primary terrestrial food source for many communities within that range (WACHWG 2022).

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game Subsistence Section has gathered information on caribou harvests in many communities within the WAH range during select years since the early 1980s. Local harvest and use levels can fluctuate by year depending on several factors, including a community's access to the herd based on annual variations in migratory routes and timing and the availability of other subsistence resources to local households that year. However, the vast majority of households rely heavily on caribou to meet their wild food needs. In 2014, 89% of households in Anaktuvuk Pass used caribou, and animals were harvested by 40% of households. That year caribou made up 90% of all wild food harvests by edible weight for the community (Brown et al. 2014). In another example, in 2017 96% of households in Noatak used caribou, and 51% of households harvested caribou (Gonzalez et al. 2018). The differences in percentages of households harvesting caribou and households using caribou indicate that many families rely on caribou that are shared with them by others to meet their

subsistence needs. The sharing of caribou that occurs within communities and across the region is a pattern is consistently seen across study years for communities within the WAH range.

A reduction in bag limit will likely impact sharing patterns as heavy harvesting households will be more limited in their ability to harvest, and thus share, with non-harvesting households.

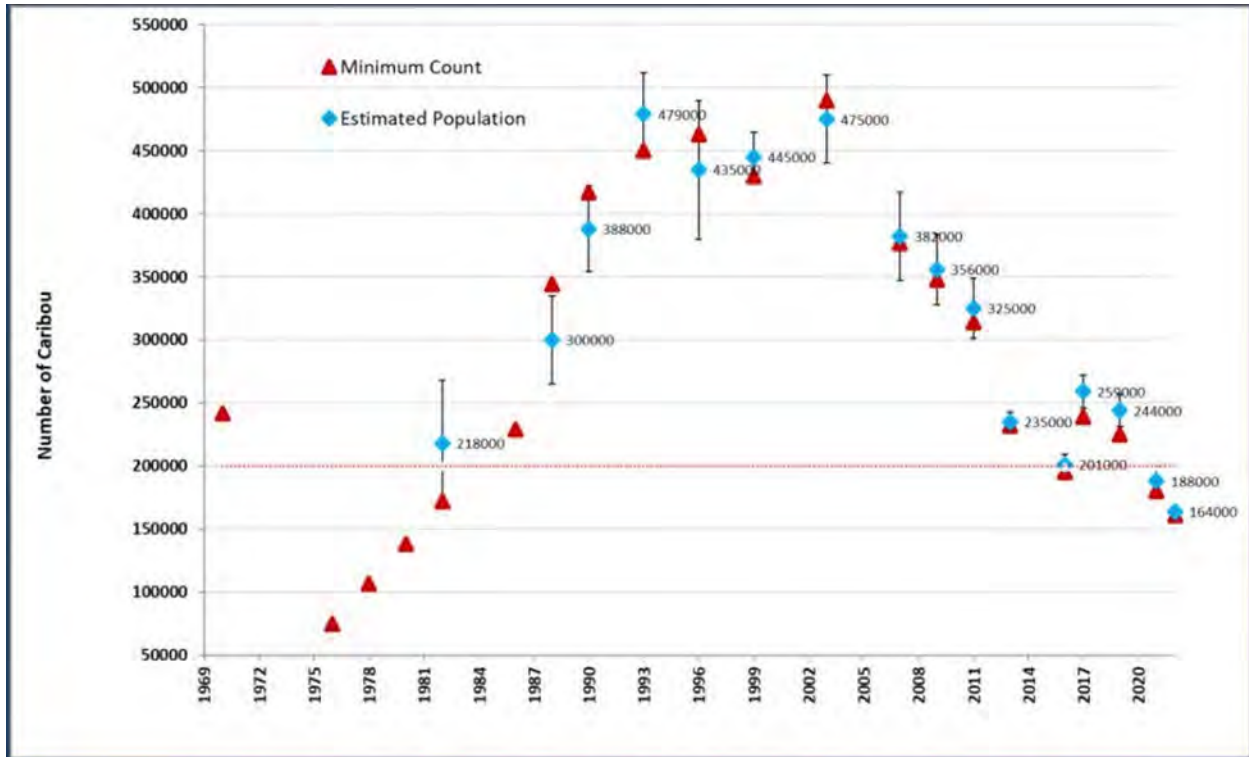


Figure 1. Western Arctic Caribou Herd population estimate 1970-2022. Minimum counts are indicated in red and estimated abundance is indicated with a blue diamond along with associated 95% confidence limits. Estimates are produced using an estimator described by Rivest et al (1998).

The importance of caribou conservation to local users was demonstrated by the Kotzebue Advisory Committee (AC) during a 2022 fall/winter meeting where they drafted a proposal to reduce the bag limit to 4 caribou per year, of which only 1 may be a cow and applied it to Unit 23 only. The Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group (WACHWG) followed suit a few weeks later during their December meeting drafting a similar proposal, the working group unanimously voted to use the same bag limit proposed by the Kotzebue AC but opted to include the entirety of the WAH range. The WACHWG is made up of various stakeholders including subsistence users from communities within the WAH range, hunters from outside the range of the herd, conservationists, hunting guides, reindeer herders and transporters. The combined proposals, (WSA22-05 and 06) coming from the NW Arctic and WI Subsistence Regional Advisory Committees show continued local support and understanding of the need for harvest reduction. The department recognizes and fully supports the readiness of these groups to reduce harvest and promote conservation of the WAH.

Harvest of the WAH is difficult to determine with limited harvest reporting across a wide

geographic area. The department conservatively estimates that around 10% of the actual harvest is reported, recent attempts to increase reporting have included the establishment of registration hunts (RC800 and RC907) and outreach efforts focused on the need for harvest data. To fill in this data gap the department previously used a model to determine harvest by using subsistence household surveys, and the local availability (distance, weather, etc.) to determine the harvest level locally. This model has produced an average annual harvest of approximately 12,000 animals (Dau 2015).

However, given changes to WAH distribution in recent years limiting access by local users, the department has concluded the model is too coarse to track short term change and the use of the model has been discontinued at this time. It is generally understood that harvest rates have decreased due to reduction in access, however the information is too limited to understand the rate of reduction.

The recommended harvest rate based on figures presented in Table 2 of the WACHWG management plan (2019) for the 2022 population of 164,000 animals is ~4.8% or 7,872 animals. This estimate of harvestable surplus is far below the long-term average harvest for this herd and below the lower end of the ANS range for the WAH; continued efforts to understand actual harvest are ongoing. Between 2019-2023, ADF&G Subsistence and the Division of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) partnered with 8 different communities within GMU 22 and GMU 23 to document caribou harvests and uses. Working with locally hired research assistants, staff conducted voluntary household surveys to document this information in each of 4 communities during alternating years, resulting in all communities being surveyed twice. Results of this study will be published by July 1, 2024. However, preliminary analyses indicate that in recent years, Unit 22 communities have harvested fewer caribou than Unit 23 communities, in large part because of less access to the herd. Harvests ranged from 13-365 caribou per community per year in Unit 22, and between 81-405 caribou per community year in Unit 23. While useful for understanding local harvests, this information cannot be used in place of annual harvest information for the entirety of the herd. As part of ongoing efforts to understand overall WAH harvests, ADF&G Subsistence hosted an interagency round-table discussion in October 2023 to generate ideas for collaboration on documenting harvests across the WAH range using household surveys. Conversations defining those research partnerships are ongoing, but ideally by 2025 researchers will pilot a large-scale effort to conduct household caribou harvest surveys in a larger portion of communities across the range of the WAH.

In recent years harvest may have exceeded the harvestable surplus of the population. Reducing this harvest, particularly cow harvest, is an important step to slowing population decline.

Estimated cow mortality is an important population metric and has remained above the long-term average since 2018. The change from 5 caribou per day to 4 per year only one of which may be a cow represents a significant reduction in harvest with an emphasis on reducing cow harvest.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **SUPPORTS** this proposal to reduce harvest due to the overall decline of the WAH. Reducing harvest, specifically cow harvest, is appropriate

due to the current decline in abundance and our challenges is estimating actual harvest.

If adopted, the board will need to consider whether reasonable opportunity for subsistence exists under the proposed regulatory structure. Specifically, the board may wish to consider whether nonsubsistence uses can still be provided and how the proposed regulations would impact the customary and traditional harvest and use patterns for caribou of many subsistence users.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs for the department.

PROPOSAL 38 – 5 AAC 85.025. Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou. Close all nonresident caribou hunting in Unit 23 as follows:

PROPOSED BY: Northwest Arctic Regional Advisory Council (NWARAC)

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? The proposal would close the nonresident caribou season in Unit 23.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

Nonresident Caribou season:

1 Bull; August 1- September 30

Locking tag and harvest ticket

required

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If the proposal were adopted, it would close all nonresident hunting of caribou in Unit 23.

BACKGROUND: Caribou are a highly valued game animal utilized by various groups in Unit 23. Caribou in Unit 23 primarily belong to the Western Arctic Herd (WAH). This herd is currently declining with a population of 164,000 during the 2022 census. An Intensive Management Population Level has been set for the WAH at 200,000. ANS for the WAH has been combined with the Teshekpuk Caribou Herd at 8,00-12,000. The herd has been in decline since the early 2000s when it was close to 500,000. This herd has supported an estimated harvest of 12,000 caribou per year since 1996. Harvest is believed to have declined within recent years as caribou become less available. The recommended harvest rate based on figures presented in Table 2 of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group (WACHWG) management plan (2019) for the 2022 population of 164,000 animals is ~4.8% or 7,872 animals. Harvest is likely to exceed harvestable surplus as the herd continues to decline.

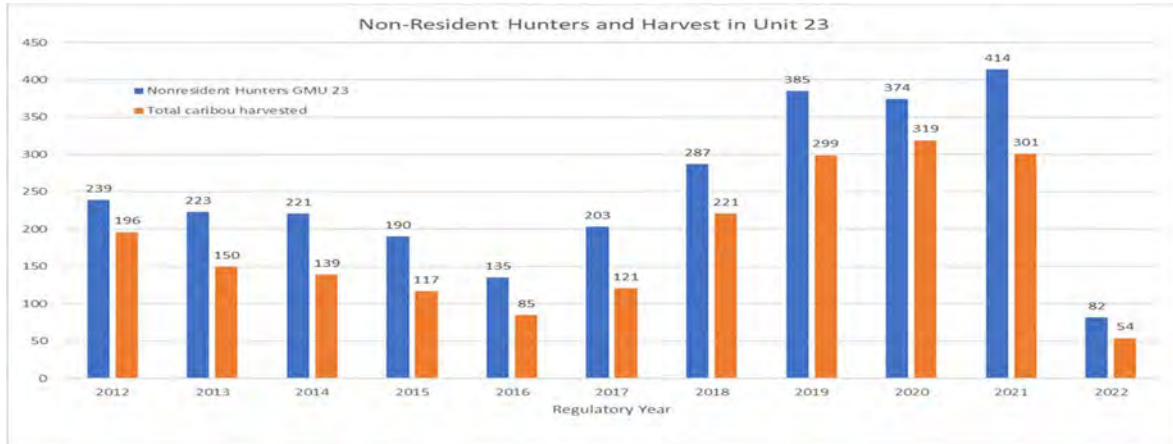


Table 1: Nonresident caribou hunter numbers shown in blue and number of harvested caribou shown in orange from 2012-2022.

Since 1996 harvest estimates for the Western Arctic Herd (WAH) indicate that local harvest accounts for approximately 95% of the total harvest with non-local/non-residents taking the remaining 5%. Federal land closures to hunting by Non-Federally Qualified Subsistence Users under WSA21-01 has reduced the area available for nonresident hunters. Annual nonresident harvest averaged 182 caribou, 97.82% of which were bulls (2012-2022). Bull:cow ratios remain well above the 30:100 goal set by the Western Arctic Herd Working Group.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department is **NEUTRAL** regarding this proposal because of its allocative nature. Although there are reasons to reduce harvest of the WAH, the limited number of bulls harvested by nonresidents is believed to be biologically insignificant, and the department is generally opposed to unnecessary reductions in opportunity. Considering the harvestable surplus and the ANS range, the board may wish to evaluate whether or not it can provide for all consumptive uses.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

PROPOSAL 39 – 5 AAC 85.020 (21). Hunting seasons and bag limits for brown bears. Lengthen the brown bear season for residents to no closed season.

PROPOSED BY: Northwest Arctic Regional Advisory Council (NWARAC)

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? The proposal would extend the Unit 23 resident brown bear subsistence and general hunt seasons by two months, from August 1 – May 31 to July 1 – June 30.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

| Unit and Bag Limits | Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts) | Nonresident Open Season |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Unit 23</i> | | |
| RESIDENT HUNTERS: 2 bears per regulatory year by registration permit; or | 1 Aug – 31 May (Subsistence hunt) | |
| 2 bears per regulatory year | 1 Aug – 31 May | |
| NONRESIDENT HUNTERS: 1 bear every regulatory year by drawing permit only; up to 68 permits may be issued; or | | Aug. 1 – Oct. 31 Apr. 15 – May 31 |
| 1 bear every regulatory year by registration permit only | | Aug. 10 – June 30 Apr. 15 – May 31 |

No resident locking tag is required. All bears harvested in the general hunt and all bears intended for sale must be sealed. Bears harvested in the subsistence registration hunt need only be sealed if removed from the unit.

5 AAC 92.200 allows for the skulls and hides with claws attached of brown bears harvested in areas where the bag limit is two bears per regulatory year to be sold under the conditions of a permit issued by the department.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for brown bears in Units 23, 24, and 26 with a combined Amount Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) of 25-35 animals.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If the proposal were adopted, it would provide additional resident harvest opportunity during the months of June and July; effectively, there would be no closed season.

BACKGROUND: Unit 23 brown bear hunting has been incrementally liberalized by the BOG over the years, primarily due to perceived increases in bear abundance, declines in ungulate abundance, and desires to minimize human-bear conflicts. In the early 1970s, the resident bag limit was 1 bear every 4 regulatory years. By regulatory year (RY) 1998, the resident season was extended from short fall and spring seasons to a single season running from September 1- May 31 and by RY00 the resident bag limit was changed to 1 bear every regulatory year. In 2002, the BOG increased the resident season an additional month to August 1- May 31, and allowed nonresident hunters a 1 bear every regulatory year bag limit. In RY17 the resident bag limit was increased to two bears per regulatory year and allowed for the sale of hide and skull; resident season length and bag limit have remained the same since.

The mean annual harvest of brown bears for RY13-RY22 was 54 bears (range: 36-84). Harvest has remained relatively consistent through time, despite increased harvest opportunity for both residents and nonresidents, with the previous 10-year annual average also being 54 bears (RY03-12, range: 33-76). On average, 69% of the 10-year annual harvest was comprised of males (RY13-22, range: 62%-78%) with the prior 10-year average being 72% male (RY03-12, range: 58%-82%). The proportion of males in the total Unit 23 harvest shows a relatively stable or slightly declining trend but has generally remained well above the management goal of 50%.

Quantitative population data for brown bears in the unit is minimal with the most recent density estimates from 2016 and 2017 of the upper and lower Noatak River subareas, respectively. The National Park Service, with assistance from the department, detected 100 bear groups in the lower Noatak subarea and produced an estimated bear density of 49.2 (95% CI: 40.0-61.6) independent bears/1000km²(386mi²). The Upper Noatak subarea survey detected 59 bear groups and estimated independent bear densities of 24.9 (95% CI: 19.4-32.6) per 1000km² (386mi²).

Without robust population estimates, it is difficult to conclude with certainty how brown bear abundance has trended through time and regulation change. However, available harvest data and public commentary lend support to a stable or generally increasing population and that present harvest levels continue to remain sustainable. Accessibility is limited in much of the unit and essentially provides vast areas of protected habitat which likely act as “source” areas for areas that are more heavily harvested. Restrictions remain in place on the harvest of cubs, and sows with cubs, and continue to protect that portion of the population.

Brown bears remain a source of conflict for local residents while at remote camps. A handful of bears are killed in Defense of Life and Property (DLP) instances during June and July when residents are typically out fishing or berry picking but the resident bear season is closed. Several individuals have expressed their frustration at having to salvage the hide and skull only to surrender it to the State, and that they would prefer to see a year-round resident season that would allow for legal harvest of bears during this time of increased subsistence activity.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **SUPPORTS** this proposal to increase opportunity because a substantial increase is not expected from the proposed season expansion and there is no conservation concern for the bear population in Unit 23. Extending the season will also give residents the opportunity to harvest bears that would otherwise be taken in DLP. The department will also monitor any increase in harvest for potential conservation concerns.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal is not expected to result in additional cost to the department.

PROPOSAL 40 – 5 AAC 85.020 (21). Hunting seasons and bag limits for brown bears.

Lengthen the brown bear season for residents to no closed season.

PROPOSED BY: Kotzebue Fish and Game Advisory Committee

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? The proposal would extend the Unit 23 resident brown bear subsistence and general hunt season by two months, from August 1 - May 31 to July

1 – June 30.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

| Unit and Bag Limits | Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts) | Nonresident Open Season |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| <hr/> <i>Unit 23</i> | | |
| RESIDENT HUNTERS: 2 bears per regulatory year by registration permit; or | 1 Aug – 31 May (Subsistence hunt) | |
| 2 bears per regulatory year | 1 Aug – 31 May | |
| NONRESIDENT HUNTERS: 1 bear every regulatory year by drawing permit only; up to 68 permits may be issued; or | | Aug. 1 – Oct. 31 Apr. 15 – May 31 |
| 1 bear every regulatory year by registration permit only | | Aug. 10 – June 30 |

| Unit and Bag Limits | Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts) | Nonresident Open Season |
|---------------------|--|-------------------------|
| | | Apr. 15 – May 31 |

No resident locking tag is required. All bears harvested in the general hunt and all bears intended for sale must be sealed. Bears harvested in the subsistence registration hunt need only be sealed if removed from the unit.

5 AAC 92.200 allows for the skulls and hides with claws attached of brown bears harvested in areas where the bag limit is two bears per regulatory year to be sold under the conditions of a permit issued by the department.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for brown bears in Units 23, 24, and 26 with a combined Amount Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) of 25-35 animals.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If the proposal were adopted, it would provide additional resident harvest opportunity during the

months of June and July, effectively, there would be no closed season.

BACKGROUND: Unit 23 brown bear hunting has been incrementally liberalized by the BOG over the years, primarily due to perceived increases in bear abundance, declines in ungulate abundance, and desires to minimize human-bear conflicts. In the early 1970s, the resident bag limit was 1 bear every 4 regulatory years. By regulatory year (RY) 1998, the resident season was extended from short fall and spring seasons to a single season running from September 1- May 31 and by RY00 the resident bag limit was changed to 1 bear every regulatory year. The 2002, the BOG increased the resident season an additional month to August 1- May 31, and allowed nonresident hunters a 1 bear every regulatory year bag limit. In RY17 the resident bag limit was increased to two bears per regulatory year and allowed for the sale of hide and skull; resident season length and bag limit have remained the same since. The mean annual harvest of brown bears for RY13-RY22 was 54 bears (range: 36-84). Harvest has remained relatively consistent through time, despite increased harvest opportunity for both resident and nonresidents, with the previous 10-year annual average also being 54 bears (RY03- 12, range: 33-76). On average, 69% of the 10-year annual harvest was comprised of males (RY13-22, range: 62%-78%) with the prior 10-year average being 72% male (RY03-12, range: 58%-82%). The proportion of males in the total Unit 23 harvest shows a relatively stable or slightly declining trend but has generally remained well above the management goal of 50%.

Quantitative population data for brown bears in the unit is minimal with the most recent density estimates from 2016 and 2017 of the upper and lower Noatak River subareas, respectively. The National Park Service, with assistance from the department, detected 100 bear groups in the lower Noatak subarea and produced an estimated bear density of 49.2 (95% CI: 40.0-61.6) independent bears/1000km²(386mi²). The Upper Noatak subarea survey detected 59 bear groups and estimated independent bear densities of 24.9 (95% CI: 19.4-32.6) per 1000km²(386mi²).

Without robust population estimates, it is difficult to conclude with certainty how brown bear abundance has trended through time and regulation change. However, available harvest data and public commentary lend support to a stable or generally increasing population and that present harvest levels continue to remain sustainable. Accessibility is limited in much of the unit and essentially provides vast areas of protected habitat which likely act as “source” areas for areas that are more heavily harvested. Restrictions remain in place on the harvest of cubs, and sows with cubs, and continue to protect that portion of the population.

Brown bears remain a source of conflict for local residents while at remote camps. A handful of bears are killed in Defense of Life and Property (DLP) during June and July when residents are typically out fishing or berry picking but the resident bear season is closed. Several individuals have expressed their frustration at having to salvage the hide and skull only to surrender it to the State, and that they would prefer to see a year-round resident season that would allow for legal harvest of bears during this time of increased subsistence activity.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **SUPPORTS** this proposal to increase opportunity because a substantial increase is not expected from the proposed season expansion and there is no conservation concern for the bear population in Unit 23. Extending the season

will also give residents the opportunity to harvest bears that would otherwise be taken in DLP. The department will also monitor any increase in harvest for potential conservation concerns.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional cost to the public or department.

PROPOSAL 41 – 5 AAC 85.020 (21). Hunting seasons and bag limits for brown bears.

Lengthen the brown bear season for residents to no closed season.

PROPOSED BY: John Chase

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? The proposal would extend the Unit 23 resident brown bear subsistence and general hunt season by two months, from August 1 – May 31 to July 1 – June 30.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

| Unit and Bag Limits | Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts) | Nonresident Open Season |
|--|--|-------------------------|
| <i>Unit 23</i> | | |
| RESIDENT HUNTERS: 2 bears per regulatory year by registration permit; or | 1 Aug – 31 May (Subsistence hunt) | |
| 2 bears per regulatory year | 1 Aug – 31 May | |

| Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Unit and Bag Limits | Hunts) | Nonresident Open Season |
|--|--------|-------------------------|
|--|--------|-------------------------|

NONRESIDENT
HUNTERS:

1 bear every regulatory year
by drawing permit only; up
to 68 permits may be issued;
or

Aug. 1 – Oct. 31
Apr. 15 – May 31

1 bear every regulatory year
by registration permit only

Aug. 10 – June 30
Apr. 15 – May 31

No resident locking tag is required. All bears harvested in the general hunt and all bears intended for sale must be sealed. Bears harvested in the subsistence registration hunt need only be sealed if removed from the unit.

5 AAC 92.200 allows for the skulls and hides with claws attached of brown bears harvested in areas where the bag limit is two bears per regulatory year to be sold under the conditions of a permit issued by the department.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for brown bears in Units 23, 24, and 26 with a combined Amount Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) of 25-35 animals.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If the proposal were adopted, it would provide additional resident harvest opportunity during the months of June and July, effectively, there would be no closed season.

BACKGROUND: Unit 23 brown bear hunting has been incrementally liberalized by the BOG over the years, primarily due to perceived increases in bear abundance, declines in ungulate abundance, and desires to minimize human-bear conflicts. In the early 1970s, the resident bag limit was 1 bear every 4 regulatory years. By regulatory year (RY) 1998, the resident season was extended from short fall and spring seasons to a single season running from September 1- May 31 and by RY00 the resident bag limit was changed to 1 bear every regulatory year. The 2002, the BOG increased the resident season an additional month to August 1- May 31, and allowed nonresident hunters a 1 bear every regulatory year bag limit. In RY17 the resident bag limit was increased to two bears per regulatory year and allowed for the sale of hide and skull; resident season length and bag limit have remained the same since.

The mean annual harvest of brown bears for RY13-RY22 was 54 bears (range: 36-84). Harvest has remained relatively consistent through time, despite increased harvest opportunity for both resident and nonresidents, with the previous 10-year annual average also being 54 bears (RY03-12, range: 33-76). On average, 69% of the 10-year annual harvest was comprised of males (RY13-22, range: 62%-78%) with the prior 10-year average being 72% male (RY03-12, range: 58%-82%). The proportion of males in the total Unit 23 harvest shows a relatively stable or slightly declining trend but has generally remained well above the management goal of 50%.

Quantitative population data for brown bears in the unit is minimal with the most recent density estimates from 2016 and 2017 of the upper and lower Noatak River subareas, respectively. The National Park Service, with assistance from ADFG, detected 100 bear groups in the lower Noatak subarea and produced an estimated bear density of 49.2 (95% CI: 40.0-61.6) independent bears/1000km²(386mi²). The Upper Noatak subarea survey detected 59 bear groups and estimated independent bear densities of 24.9 (95% CI: 19.4-32.6) per 1000km²(386mi²).

Without robust population estimates, it is difficult to conclude with certainty how brown bear abundance has trended through time and regulation change. However, available harvest data and public commentary lend support to a stable or generally increasing population and that present harvest levels continue to remain sustainable. Accessibility is limited in much of the unit and essentially provides vast areas of protected habitat which likely act as “source” areas for areas that are more heavily harvested. Restrictions remain in place on the harvest of cubs, and sows with cubs, and continue to protect that portion of the population.

Brown bears remain a source of conflict for local residents while at remote camps. A handful of bears are killed in Defense of Life and Property (DLP) during June and July when residents are typically out fishing or berry picking but the resident bear season is closed. Several individuals have expressed their frustration at having to salvage the hide and skull only to surrender it to the State, and that they would prefer to see a year-round resident season that would allow for legal harvest of bears during this time of increased subsistence activity.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **SUPPORTS** this proposal to increase opportunity because a substantial increase is not expected from the proposed season expansion and there is no conservation concern for the bear population in Unit 23. Extending the season will also give residents the opportunity to harvest bears that would otherwise be taken in DLP. The department will also monitor any increase in harvest for potential conservation concerns.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional cost to the public or department.

PROPOSAL 42 – 5 AAC 85.020 (21). Hunting seasons and bag limits for brown bear.

Consolidate the seven fall nonresident registration brown bear permits into a single permit and consolidate the seven spring nonresident registration brown bear permits into a single permit.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? If adopted, this proposal would consolidate the nonresident brown bear registration permits into a single, unit-wide fall registration permit and a single, unit-wide spring registration permit.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

| Unit and Bag Limits | Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts) | Nonresident Open Season |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Unit 23</i> | | |
| RESIDENT HUNTERS: 2 bears per regulatory year by registration permit; or | 1 Aug – 31 May (Subsistence hunt) 1 Aug – 31 May | |
| 2 bears per regulatory year | | |
| NONRESIDENT HUNTERS: 1 bear every regulatory year by drawing permit only; up to 68 permits may be issued; or | | Aug. 1 – Oct. 31 Apr. 15 – May 31 |
| 1 bear every regulatory year by registration permit only | | Aug. 10 – June 30 Apr. 15 – May 31 |

No resident locking tag is required. All bears harvested in the general hunt and all bears intended for sale must be sealed. Bears harvested in the subsistence registration hunt need only be sealed if removed from the unit.

5 AAC 92.200 allows for the skulls and hides with claws attached of brown bears harvested in areas where the bag limit is two bears per regulatory year to be sold under the conditions of a permit issued by the department.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for brown bears in Units 23, 24, and 26 with a combined Amount Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) of 25-35 animals.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? If the proposal were adopted, it would consolidate the seven fall and seven spring nonresident registration permits into two, unit-wide registration permits: one for the fall season and one for the spring season. Having just two nonresident registration permits will help simplify the hunt preparation and reporting process for hunters, guides, and department staff.

BACKGROUND: Unit 23 is divided into seven guide-use areas (GUAs) that encompass the entirety of the unit. These GUAs include both state and federally managed lands but exclude the two National Parks and the National Monument.

Prior to regulatory year (RY) 08, Unit 23 had two, unit-wide, nonresident drawing permits: DB781 for the fall season and DB791 for the spring season. At the 2007 Board of Game (BOG) meeting, a department proposal was adopted that sought to limit future concentration

of harvest in some of the higher use GUAs by creating seven separate draw hunts for both spring and fall. The BOG also approved an increase in the number of nonresident permits issued, from 58 to 68, so as not to reduce hunt opportunity during the hunt structure transition. The 14 separate drawing hunts were enacted beginning in RY08 and any undersubscribed permits were made available over the counter on a first-come, first-served basis in Kotzebue. This hunt structure remained in place until RY14 when the BOG adopted an amended proposal to add nonresident registration permits that followed the same GUAs, seasons, and bag limits as the drawing hunts. The registration permits were put in place to preserve hunt opportunity for nonresidents if draw permit holders did not hunt.

In RY17 and RY18, a majority of the nonresident drawing hunts went undersubscribed, in response, beginning in RY19, drawing permits were no longer issued and all nonresident bear harvest occurred under the registration hunt structure. The decline in nonresident participation likely correlates with the reduction or complete closure of nonresident caribou and moose hunting, which meant far less bear hunters have the opportunity to take a bear incidental to hunting for other species.

The average non-resident fall harvest between RY13–RY22 was 13 bears, up slightly from the previous ten-year average of 9 bears. Spring nonresident harvest averaged 2 bears per year for RY13-22, similar to the previous 10-year period's 3 bear average. Interest in the fall nonresident hunt has remained relatively constant over the last 10 years, but the spring nonresident hunts have seen a general decline in permit issuance through time. This decline is likely driven by a lack of licensed guides operating in the spring, and harvest under the nonresident permit has shifted towards hunters accompanied by resident relatives within second-degree of kindred.

While permit numbers and harvest quotas have not been limited under the registration permit, harvest data suggest that current harvest rates have remained sustainable. The mean annual harvest of brown bears for RY13-RY22 was 54 bears (range: 36-84) and has remained relatively consistent through time, despite increased harvest opportunity for both resident and nonresidents, with the previous 10-year annual average also being 54 bears (RY03-12, range: 33-76).

Nonresident hunters often do not know which of the 7 hunt areas they will be hunting and are advised by their guides to acquire permits for each area that the guide operates in. This allows the most flexibility for guides and hunters to work around weather and other field conditions but often leaves the hunter with multiple permits to acquire, carry in the field, and report on post-hunt. It is not unusual for a hunter to be unaware of which hunt area they ultimately got dropped in, or for them to fail to report on registration permits that were acquired but not hunted on. As permits for each area are not limited, transitioning to a unit-wide permit structure is not expected to affect harvest rates or the distribution of hunt pressure relative to the current structure.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department submitted and **SUPPORTS** this proposal to consolidate the hunts to simplify the hunting opportunity for nonresidents and to ease the administrative burden on the department. Modifying the hunt structure in this way is not

expected to result in additional harvest of animals. Harvest will be monitored to ensure the new hunt structure does not negatively impact the population.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

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.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal reauthorizes the resident brown bear big game tag fee exemption in Region V.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?

(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).

There is a positive C&T finding for brown bears in Unit 18, with an ANS of 20-30. There is also a positive C&T finding for brown bears in Units 21 and 22, with a combined ANS of 20-25. And there is a positive C&T finding for brown bears in Units 23, 24, and 26, with a combined ANS of 25-35.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? Resident hunters would not be required to purchase a resident locking tag for general season, drawing or registration permit brown bear hunts in Units 18, 22, 23 and 26A. Hunters participating in subsistence registration permit hunts would also not be required to purchase a brown bear

locking tag to harvest a bear, although possession of the subsistence registration permit would be required.

BACKGROUND: The Board of Game must reauthorize brown bear tag fee exemptions annually or the fee automatically becomes reinstated. Brown bear general season, drawing, and registration permit hunts have had the tag fees exempted in Unit 18 and 26A for 10 years, in Unit 22 for 20 years, and in Unit 23 for 15 years. Exemptions have been implemented to allow: 1) incremental increases in harvest; 2) additional opportunity for residents; and 3) harvest for a wide range of uses. Current harvest levels in each of the Units are appropriate based on sealing and anecdotal information. Previous exemptions of resident tag fees have not caused dramatic or unexpected increases in overall harvest.

In subsistence brown bear registration permit hunts, reauthorizations are needed for Unit 18, 22, 23 and 26A where requirements include: 1) a registration permit; 2) a tag fee exemption; 3) salvage of 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 the subsistence registration permit hunt area;

6) if sealing is required, the skin of the head and the front claws must be removed and retained by the department at the time of sealing. Continuing the tag fee exemption helps facilitate participation in the associated brown bear harvest programs maintained by the department for subsistence registration permit hunts. In all units, subsistence brown bear registration permit harvest rates are low and believed to be appropriate based on harvest reports; exempting the resident tag fee has not caused an increase in subsistence harvest.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department submitted and **SUPPORTS** this proposal. Brown bear numbers in the identified units are stable or increasing and the increased harvests that result from the tag fee exemption do not present a conservation concern.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.
