

**ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME**  
**STAFF COMMENTS FOR PROPOSALS 4, 9-14, 16-19, 21, 22, 24, 30, 31, and 39**  
**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.

Proposals 1-3

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**PROPOSAL 4- 5AAC 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 River and drainages of	Five caribou per day by permit	Bulls	RC907	July 1-Oct 14 Feb 1-June 30
			Cows	RC907	July 15-April 30
N		One	Bull	HT	July 15-Sept 30

	the Chukchi Sea south and West of, and including the Utukok River drainage				
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
N			Cows	RC907	Sept 1-March 31
R	Unit 23, that portion north of and including the Singoalik River drainage:	Five caribou per day, <b>only three may be cows, cows with calves may not be taken</b>	Bulls	RC907	No closed season
R			Cows	RC907	<b>July 16-Oct 15</b>
R			<b>3 cows per day, cows with calves may not be taken</b>	Cows	RC907
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, <b>only three may be cows, cows with calves may not be taken.</b>	Bulls	RC907	July 1-Oct 14 Feb 1-June 30
R			Cows	RC907	<b>July 16-October 15</b>
R			<b>3 cows per day, cows with calves may not be taken</b>	Cows	RC907
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
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**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.

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Proposals 5-8

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**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:

<b>Units and Bag Limits</b>	<b>Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)</b>	<b>Nonresident Open Season</b>
(16)		
...		
Remainder of Unit 18		
RESIDENT HUNTERS:		
2 moose; of which only 1 may be an antlered bull; a person may not take a calf or a cow accompanied by a calf; or	Aug. 1 – Sept. 30.	
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.

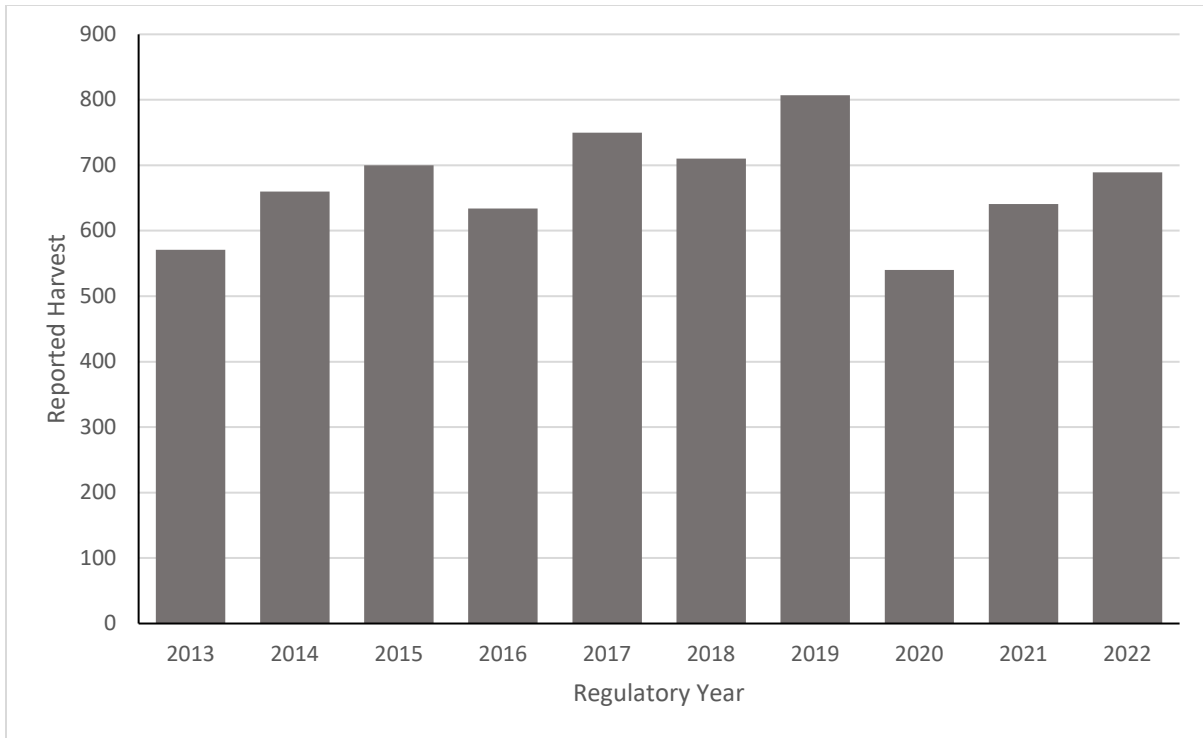


Figure 9-1. Reported harvest of moose in the Unit 18 Remainder hunt area 2009-2018.

**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.

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**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) ...**

Units and Bag Limits	Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Nonresident Open Season
(16)		
<p>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 upriver along a line one-half mile South and east of, and paralleling a line along the southerly bank of the Johnson River to the confluence of the east bank of Crooked Creek, then continuing 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.</p>	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.

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**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.

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**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.

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**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.

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**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

<b>Units and Bag Limits</b>	<b>Resident Open season</b>	<b>Nonresident Open Season</b>
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.

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Proposal 15

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**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.

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**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	Sept. 1-June 30	No open season.



year by registration permit	(subsistence hunt only)	
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.

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**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.

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**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.

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Proposal 20

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**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.

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**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.

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Proposal 23

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**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?**

<b>Units and Bag Limits</b>	<b>Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)</b>	<b>Nonresident Open Season</b>
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(20)

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Unit 22(A), that portion in the Unalakeet River drainage and all drainages flowing into Norton Sound north of the Golsovia

River drainage and south of and including the Egavik Creek drainage

1 bull by registration permit only; or	Sept. 1 – Sept. 30	No open season
1 antlered bull by registration permit only; during the period Dec. 1 – Dec. 31, a season may be announced by emergency order	Dec. 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 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 mi<sup>2</sup>) 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.

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Proposals 25-29

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**PROPOSAL 30 - 5AAC 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 10<sup>th</sup>, 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.

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**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?**

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

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:

<b>Units and Bag Limits</b>	<b>Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)</b>	<b>Nonresident Open Season</b>
(24)		
...		
Unit 26(A), that portion west of <b><u>the eastern shore of Admiralty Bay where the Alaktak River enters, following the Alaktak River to 155°00' W longitude</u></b> excluding the Colville River drainage		
1 <b><u>moose</u></b>	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).

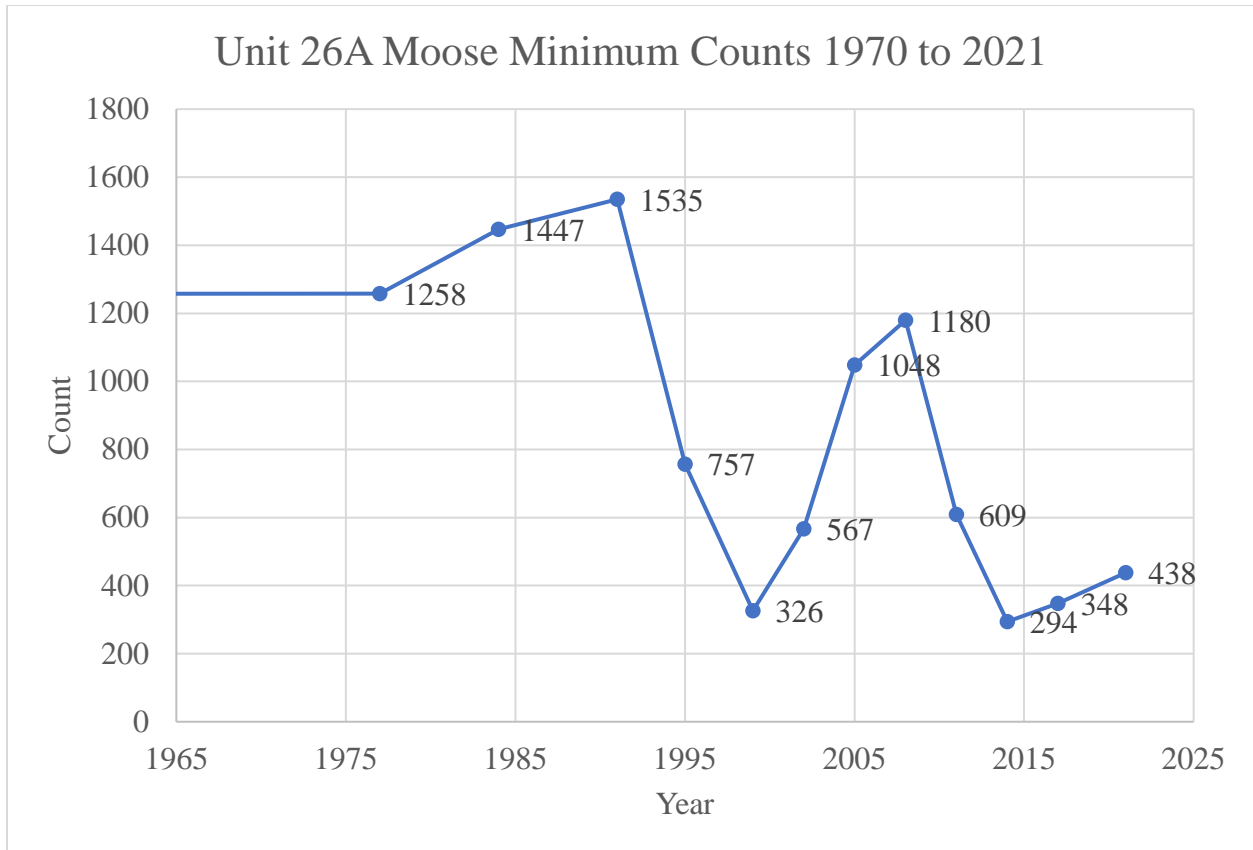


Figure 2. Colville River moose survey minimum counts from 1976-2021.

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.

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**Proposals 32-38**

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**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?**

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

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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 Unit 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/1000km<sup>2</sup>(386mi<sup>2</sup>). The Upper Noatak subarea survey detected 59 bear groups and estimated independent bear densities of 24.9 (95% CI: 19.4-32.6) per 1000km<sup>2</sup> (386mi<sup>2</sup>).

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.

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**Proposals 40-42, and Proposal 209, establishing a hot spot muskox hunt in Unit 23 (ACR4).**