

## **Copper Basin Community Subsistence Hunt history, impacts of changes, and potential tools**

Submitted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game

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### **Key Points**

- For community subsistence hunts (CSHs) in general, if growing participation threatens sustained yield, a Tier II hunt may be necessary.
- Since at least the 1980s, providing an “any bull” bag limit and an early season opening in August have been key elements in the Alaska Board of Game’s (board’s) provision of reasonable subsistence hunting opportunities for moose in GMU 13.
  - Allowing for an “any bull” bag limit in the Copper Basin CSH for moose conforms with the customary and traditional (C&T), community-based use pattern acknowledged in findings made by the board (#2006-170-BOG), enhances hunter success and efficiency, provides a preferred animal desired by subsistence users, and supports sharing within the community.
  - An early season opening for Copper Basin CSH subsistence moose hunting reduces crowding, provides a reasonable opportunity for a successful hunt, and allows hunting during the traditional season.
- A number of issues concerning Copper Basin CSHs brought before the board by the public can be addressed through smaller adjustments to the overall hunt structure. Other issues require other solutions.

### **Key Concepts in the Formulation of Copper Basin Community Subsistence Hunts**

- No distinction between subsistence hunting and other hunting was made in regulation until 1984: at that time an earlier subsistence opening of August 25 was established. Season of August 25-Sept. 20 was in effect through 1989.
  - The CSH hunts, and by default, the early season has a very long history of being tied directly to providing reasonable opportunity; it is currently consistent with the board’s 2006 C&T findings, and is supported by litigation.
- Antler restrictions did not apply to subsistence hunters 1982-1989.
  - The “any bull” option within subsistence hunting opportunities in GMU 13 was implemented to support efficient subsistence hunting and a reasonable opportunity for success (unless there are conservation concerns) for subsistence hunting of the “any bull” subpopulation.
  - Hunters without access to off-highway vehicles (OHVs) generally hunt using highway vehicles along the road system, so they are limited to harvesting moose that become available inside the road corridors. “Any bull” opportunities therefore provide these hunters with a greater chance of encountering a legally-harvestable moose for consumptive purposes.

- After the 1989 *McDowell* decision, the “any bull” opportunity for subsistence hunting was provided through a Tier II hunt. This hunt was the subject of litigation (the “Kluti Kaah case”). The “any bull” option within the Copper Basin CSH was retained to continue to provide this opportunity.
- According to its findings (#2006-170-BOG), prior to the Copper Basin CSH establishment, the board was concerned that the hunting patterns in GMU 13 no longer met the board’s intent when the Tier II subsistence regulations were originally established.
  - Testimony of some Alaskans indicated they no longer participated in the state’s subsistence program in GMU 13 because they could not obtain Tier II permits.
  - The board recognized that many of the traditions associated with a subsistence way of life were being lost.
- The Copper Basin CSH was part of the board’s long-term goal to design a system to provide opportunities for subsistence uses in such a manner that permits could be obtained year to year by those willing to hunt in accordance with the C&T patterns of a community-based hunt.
  - The reliability of available hunting opportunities is critical to the subsistence way of life.

## **Impacts of Major Changes Discussed for the Copper Basin Community Subsistence Hunt for Moose**

- In regards to reducing the Copper Basin CSH season, or eliminating the early fall season for the Copper Basin CSH, or changing the “any bull” provisions in the Copper Basin CSH, during this 2013 meeting, the board has heard testimony from some Alaskans that Copper Basin CSH hunters feel they do not have a reasonable opportunity for subsistence.
- The goal of maximizing hunter participation through antler restrictions does not address local communities’ concerns that their hunting success is being overwhelmed through competition and crowding.
  - Copper Basin CSH season length should be long enough to provide for traditional uses to occur: teaching youth, sharing, use of traditional areas, putting up meat, and allowing the minimum amount of time needed to kill an animal. Traditional seasons and past season length are one appropriate guide for determining reasonable opportunity.

## **Potential Tools**

- Placing additional restrictions on subsistence hunting through reduced seasons and bag limits may not be necessary if clear and enforced hunt conditions tied to the Copper Basin CSH C&T pattern (including multi-year commitments) are in place.
- Allocating “any bull” permits and/or quotas to Copper Basin CSH groups, perhaps with a “[X] number per group” or “[X] number per every [X] number of households in a group” may decrease hunting pressure.
- Allocating some or all of the available “any bulls” to a winter hunt may decrease pressure.
- Increasing the Copper Basin CSH “any bull” allocation from 70 to 100 would increase hunter opportunity for all CSH groups (although with an increase of participants in the Copper Basin CSH hunt, this may not provide an increased opportunity for those currently in the Copper Basin CSH program).