

PROPOSAL 1 – 5 AAC 85.020 (8). Hunting seasons and bag limits for brown bears.

Establish a single season brown bear hunt for resident and nonresident permittees of the 2020 spring registration hunt for Spring 2021 in Unit 9.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Board of Game

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? Establish a single-season hunt for brown bears in spring 2021 in Game Management Unit 9 for hunters denied the opportunity to hunt in 2020. This includes residents unable to travel to the Alaska Peninsula (AP) and nonresidents prohibited from traveling to Alaska due to Covid-19 health mandates.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? Regulations are one brown bear every four regulatory years, October 1–21 and May 10–31 in Unit 9A, September 20–October 21 and May 10–31 in Unit 9B, and October 7–21 and May 10–25 in Units 9C,D, and E. Biennial seasons are open every other year during odd years in the fall and even years in the spring which have been in effect since 1976. Residents and nonresidents have the same seasons and bag limits for registration hunts RB368, RB369, and RB370. Residents may also hunt bears near towns and villages of Unit 9 with a RB525 permit with no closed season and a one bear per year bag limit.

There is a negative customary and traditional use finding for brown bears in Units 9A, 9C, and 9D; a positive customary and traditional use finding in Unit 9B with an amount reasonably necessary for subsistence of 10–20; and a positive customary and traditional use finding in Unit 9E with an amount reasonably necessary for subsistence of 10–15.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? Allow brown bear hunting opportunity during spring 2021 that would normally remain closed to bear hunting in Unit 9, with the same season dates currently in regulation. The fall 2021 and spring 2022 seasons and future biennial hunts would occur as scheduled in regulation.

BACKGROUND: Due to current health mandates around the United States associated with COVID-19 both resident and nonresident brown bear hunters are unable to fully utilize spring 2020 (regulatory year 2019) hunting opportunities. In Unit 9 brown bear hunts are managed by registration permit. Fall hunts are offered only in odd numbered years (e.g., 2019), and spring hunts are offered only in even numbered years (e.g., 2020).

The brown bear management objectives in Unit 9 (Figure 1.1) are: 1) to maintain a high bear density with a sex and age structure that will sustain a harvest composed of 60% males, 2) with 50 males eight years of age (YOA) or older taken each biennial season. These objectives have been met every season since 1982. Biennial seasons are open every other year during odd years in the fall and even years in the spring and have been in effect since 1976. Residents and nonresidents have the same seasons and bag limits for registration permit hunts RB368, RB369, and RB370. Residents may also hunt bears near towns and villages of Unit 9 with a RB525

registration permit with no closed season and a one bear per year bag limit. Subsistence hunting is available in Units 9B and 9E under RB502, but permits are seldom issued.

Since 2011 when comprehensive registration hunts were initiated in Unit 9, spring resident hunters take an average of 37 bears (including 5.8 females) in Unit 9 under biennial hunts (Table 1-1). An additional average of 12 bears (5 females) are taken annually in near-village and



Figure 1.1. Game Management Unit 9 on the Alaska Peninsula in Southwest Alaska.

Table 1-1. Spring bear harvest by hunter residency in Unit 9, RY 2011–2018.

RY	SPRING NONRESIDENT				SPRING RESIDENT				SPRING TOTAL		
	Female	Male	Harvest	% Male	Female	Male	Harvest	% Male	Total Harvest	% Male	% Female
2011	36	160	196	81.6	9	30	39	76.9	235	80.9	19.1
2013	37	168	205	82.0	6	26	32	81.3	237	81.9	18.1
2015	29	197	226	87.2	6	42	48	87.5	274	87.2	12.8
2017	26	205	231	88.7	2	26	28	92.9	259	89.2	10.8
Average	32	182	214	85	5.8	31	36.8	84.4	251.3	85.0	15.0

subsistence hunts; however, most (76%) of this harvest occurs in the fall. These bears are harvested from a population of up to 8,000 brown bears on the Alaska Peninsula. Nonresident harvest data is provided in Table 1-1.

Female harvest is low in the spring (~15%) because cubs of the year are still alive and proximate to females, and sows with cubs are protected from harvest by regulation. Resident hunters are as proficient as guided hunters in selecting male bears for harvest (85%) in the spring. Therefore, harvest of lone females is not a factor of concern, particularly for a single, 2–3 week spring season. The department anticipates there will be fewer resident hunters than previous years. Based on the 2017 spring harvest, it is predicted that approximately 30–40 resident hunters will participate in the spring 2020 season with harvest of 15–20 bears. An additional 5 bears (0–2 females) is expected to be harvested in near-village and subsistence hunts in the spring. This one-time additional spring harvest will have little effect, if any, on the Unit 9 bear population.

The Unit 9 bear population is regulated by adult survival which is high. Research indicates that cub survival in Unit 9 shows no annual variation between alternating hunting years, and that cub survival and litter size is related to proximity of the bear population to carrying capacity and resulting density dependent effects. Because of long lives and low adult mortality, bear populations are intrinsically slow to change and, as a result, bears are amassed with our current biennial seasons. Adult males that are not harvested this spring will be older and larger next regulatory year.

Social factors will substantially reduce resident hunter participation in the spring 2020 season. Many resident hunters will need to catch up after virus isolation (i.e., finances, employment, family obligations), and hunting on the Alaska Peninsula is expensive. Nonresident family members who planned on hunting with resident hunters have cancelled or postponed. Travel restrictions may still be in place for resident hunters, who are mandated to avoid travelling to remote communities.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department is **NEUTRAL** on this proposal to open a spring bear season in 2021 in Unit 9 to benefit hunters who were denied the spring 2020 season by the coronavirus pandemic. Delayed harvest under this structure is compatible with sustained yield. If adopted, the department recommends providing this opportunity only in spring 2021 with current seasons and bag limits, and returning to the current hunt structure after spring 2021.

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