

PROPOSAL 108

5 AAC 92.113. Intensive Management Plans III.

Reactivate wolf control in a portion of Units 12, 20D, and 20E to benefit moose as follows:

Re-implement same day airborne (SDA) wolf control within the portion of Unit 12, within the upper Mansfield Creek drainage, the portion of Unit 20D within the upper Sand Creek, upper Billy Creek and upper Healy River drainages, and the portion of Unit 20E within the Fortymile River Drainage excluding the portions of the North Fork upstream of its confluence with the Middle Fork, the Mainstem downstream of the confluence of the North and South Forks, the Walker Fork and the East Fork of the Dennison. This is an approximate area that is currently being discussed and refined with ADF&G to manage moose primarily within the Tok West and Taylor Corridor moose survey areas.

Allow SDA shooting from private fixed wing aircraft, retrieval of wolves with private rotorcraft and placement of wolf traps and snares with private rotorcraft. In addition, the department may remove wolves using helicopters if necessary to supplement private efforts to meet wolf removal objectives.

Current moose densities in southern Unit 20E offer adequate hunter opportunity and are below the carrying capacity of the habitat. Rather than trying to continue to increase the population to a higher level closer to carrying capacity, we recommend ADF&G manage for a level of wolf removal adequate to maintain this productive population near current levels, the bull:cow ratios above objectives, and moose hunter numbers, harvest and success rates near current levels.

We recommend using moose density thresholds to determine when to turn wolf control on and off, and when to harvest cows, to maintain the moose population near current levels (~1.0 – 1.4 moose/sq. mile). For example, if the moose population falls below 1.0 moose/sq mile in 2 consecutive annual fall moose surveys in the Taylor Corridor moose survey area, the department would activate wolf control (private and possibly department) for several years to reduce wolves in the proposed control area and allow the moose population to rebound. If the moose density increases and exceeds 1.2 moose/sq mile in the Taylor Corridor moose survey area for two consecutive years, suspend wolf control and continue to monitor the moose population in subsequent years. As long as the moose population remains above 1.0 moose/sq. mile keep wolf control suspended. And if the moose population continues to increase and exceeds 1.4 moose/sq mile in the Taylor Corridor moose survey area for two consecutive years, consider issuing a small number of cow moose permits to maintain the moose population between 1.0 – 1.4 moose/sq. mile and keep the bull:cow ratio within objectives. Antlerless moose permits can be issued under Unit 20E antlerless moose regulations adopted by the Board of Game in spring of 2022.

We worked with the department to identify this proposed control area, so wolf removal from this area will not interfere with their wolf study in western Unit 20E, within the Fortymile Caribou calving range or have an effect on the population trend of the Fortymile Caribou Herd, which is currently in decline. This proposal is specifically intended to be used for Intensive Management for moose.

In addition, as part of a holistic moose management program, we recommend ADF&G work with Tok forestry to allow wildland fires to spread and develop and implement prescribed fires in southern Unit 20E and northern Unit 12 where possible and implement a regular program to crush or roller chop ~200 acres each winter in road or trail accessible portions of this area that burned in 2004 and 2005 to maintain moose habitat.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Following the suspension of wolf control to benefit Fortymile Caribou under the Upper Yukon–Tanana Predation Control Program (UYTPCP) in RY2018, we have concerns about being able to maintain moose numbers at an adequate level, in the southeast portion of the UYTPCP area (southern Unit 20E and northern Unit 12), to continue to meet bull:cow ratio objectives, maintain the moose population at current levels and maintain current harvest levels and success rates in this area. Wolf control was conducted in this area under the UYTPCP for 14 years (January 1, 2005 – April 30, 2018) and resulted in substantial progress toward Intensive Management (IM) moose population and harvest objectives and increased success rate among moose hunters in this IM area. Without continued wolf control in this heavily hunted area, we believe the wolf predation on moose will increase and the moose population size and bull:cow ratios will fall below objectives, requiring ADF&G to implement more restrictive moose hunting regulations in the future.

Based on ADF&G staff reports of data collected on moose in the Tok West and Taylor Corridor moose survey areas (that are mostly within the proposed IM area) the calf:cow ratios have declined and the moose population trend has stabilized, or may be starting to decline slightly, since the suspension of the wolf control program in the UYTPCP area in spring of 2018. In addition, the bull:cow ratio has declined and approached the minimum management objective in recent years with increased hunter numbers.

It has taken a lot of years for this moose population to increase to current levels and we don't want to lose the progress made since the early 2000s.

In 2014, when the department removed moose from the existing UYTPCP we were told by department staff that it would be easy to put moose back into the control program if needed in the future. With the substantial increase in hunter use of this area in recent years, bull:cow ratios have declined to levels near the minimum bull:cow ratio objective. Wolf control is needed in this area to maintain the moose population near the current size to ensure the bull:cow ratio remains above the minimum objective to avert the need for additional moose harvest restrictions. More restrictive harvest regulations would result in reduced harvest levels and reverse the progress we have made toward the IM moose population and harvest objectives from the recent wolf control program in this important Intensive Management area.

PROPOSED BY: Upper Tanana/Fortymile Fish and Game Advisory Committee (EG-F23-227)
