

## **PROPOSAL 161**

### **5 AAC 85.055. Hunting seasons and bag limits for Dall sheep.**

Change sheep hunting in a portion of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to archery only as follows:

That area, identified on ANWR land status maps as GUA/ARC-04

**Resident: HT: One ram full curl or larger, by bow and arrow only.**

**Nonresident: HT: One ram full curl or larger every four years by bow and arrow only.**

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** We need to adopt archery only sheep hunting areas as a conservation management tool that will maintain hunting opportunity for all but will decrease harvest. This proposal, similar to several others here is proposing a region wide transition to archery only for sheep hunting in the interest of preserving hunting opportunity in the face of sheep population decline.

Throughout the state sheep populations are generally in decline. This has been the topic of constant discussion at the state and federal level of wildlife managers and has led to a recent closure in the federal lands west of the Sagavanirktok River. Further south, in Unit 19C, this decline has resulted in an emergency closure to nonresidents at the most recent Board of Game (BOG) meeting. Sheep are in decline and concern has been raised by biologists throughout the state that full-curl management (FCM) may not be sufficient. Closures and transition to draw hunts have been the primary tools utilized by ADF&G but this proposal encourages the BOG to consider using archery hunts as a conservation management tool. Both with sheep in Alaska (DS 140/141, 240/241) and many other species in the state and around North America, archery areas and/or seasons have consistently shown that management by archery creates the ideal situation of maintaining opportunity while decreasing harvest. It is a perfect solution that benefits the game population while having very little negative affect on hunters. It simply makes the hunting a little more difficult. Skilled and/or lucky hunters will still harvest rams but the overall take will be much smaller.

Aside from a very narrow portion of the Brooks Range within the Dalton Highway Corridor, Alaska does not have any areas or seasons for for sheep. In contrast, we have at least limited seasons and a few set aside areas for hunting almost every other big game species in the state. Similarly, in British Columbia and Alberta there are designated archery areas or seasons available to all hunters. Because of the nature of archery hunting and the time and stealth often required, it is less compatible with having rifle hunters in the area, especially when some rifle hunters are shooting at 500+ yards.

For well over a decade hundreds of bowhunters have stepped forward, representing potentially thousands more hunters, resident and non-resident, requesting archery sheep seasons but thus far the BOG and ADF&G have not been willing to provide opportunity. This proposal, of taking a specific area and transitioning it to archery-only for sheep will maintain opportunity for all hunters (they need only take bow instead of a rifle) but will answer the decades of request for such an area.

Despite biologists consistently telling us that sheep numbers, overall are in decline in much of the Brooks Range (and elsewhere in the state), the harvest numbers from the nonresident hunters in ANWR have shown no significant decrease. I will enclose numbers in supporting documentation but, for example, harvest statistics since 2012 show that guided hunters in ANWR had their highest harvest number ever in 2020, with the 3rd highest being 2021. With use of extensive aerial scouting hunters in these areas year

after year, have success rates above 80%. Similarly, based on ADF&G statistics resident hunters using airplanes in those same areas are also reporting success rates above 60-70% despite official and anecdotal reports that overall sheep are much more sparse than they've been in decades. It would be reasonable to conclude that the nature of this terrain and the ability to easily scout large areas by plane pre-season (and very difficult enforcement of in-season scouting) that sheep in these areas are extremely vulnerable to airplane utilizing rifle hunters.

For all of these reasons, we need to start thinking about way to maintain opportunity but decrease harvest. One of these ways is to make the hunting a little bit harder through the transition to archery only hunting. Archery only sheep hunts are the perfect solution. Anyone can buy and fairly quickly learn to use a bow and everyone who wants to hunt sheep will still have the same opportunity to be out there hunting and enjoying the pursuit of these amazing animals in amazing places. The hunting will just be a little more difficult and, resulting in fewer animals being killed every year.

**PROPOSED BY:** Paul Forward

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