

## **PROPOSAL 173**

### **5 AAC 85.045(18). Hunting seasons and bag limits for moose.**

Reauthorize the antlerless moose seasons in Unit 20A as follows:

<b>Units and Bag Limits</b>	<b>Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)</b>	<b>Nonresident Open Season</b>
(18)		
Unit 20(A), the Ferry Trail Management Area, Wood River Controlled Use Area, and the Yanert Controlled Use Area		
RESIDENT HUNTERS:		
...		
1 antlerless moose by drawing permit only; up to 2,000 permits may be issued in combination with the Remainder of Unit 20(A); a person may not take a cow accompanied by a calf; or	Aug. 15–Nov. 15	
1 antlerless moose by registration permit only; a person may not take a cow accompanied by a calf; or	Oct. 1–Feb. 28	
...		
1 moose by targeted permit only; by crossbow shotgun, or bow and arrow only; up to 100 permits may be issued	Season to be announced by emergency order	
...		
Remainder of Unit 20(A)		

## RESIDENT HUNTERS:

...

1 antlerless moose by drawing permit only; up to 2,000 permits may be issued in combination with Unit 20(A), the Ferry Trail Management Area, Wood River Controlled Use Area, and the Yanert Controlled Use Area; a person may not take a cow accompanied by a calf; or

Aug. 15–Nov. 15

1 antlerless moose by registration permit only; a person may not take a cow accompanied by a calf; or

Aug. 25–last day of Feb.

...

1 moose by targeted permit only; by crossbow, shotgun, or bow and arrow only; up to 100 permits may be issued

Season to be announced by emergency order

...

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Antlerless moose hunting seasons must be reauthorized annually. Antlerless hunts are important for maintaining the moose population at levels that the habitat can support. Antlerless hunts also help regulate moose population growth, help to meet Intensive Management (IM) objectives for high levels of harvest, and provide subsistence hunters with a reasonable opportunity to pursue moose for subsistence uses without reducing bull:cow ratios.

If antlerless moose hunts are not reauthorized, the moose population could increase to levels beyond the ability of the habitat to support the moose population. Allowing the population to grow beyond what the habitat can support may require the population to be reduced dramatically to avoid long term habitat damage. Opportunity to hunt a harvestable surplus of cow moose would be lost, and the ability to meet IM harvest objectives could be compromised. Subsistence hunters in the portion of Unit 20A outside the Fairbanks Nonsubsistence Area (part of the western Tanana Flats) may not have a reasonable opportunity to pursue moose for subsistence uses.

Reauthorizing antlerless moose hunts will allow hunting opportunity and harvest to increase and allow

the Department of Fish and Game to manage the moose populations at an optimum level. The additional harvest will help in meeting IM harvest objectives without reducing bull:cow ratios. Meat and subsistence hunters will benefit from the opportunity to harvest cow moose. Moose populations will benefit by maintaining moose densities at a level compatible with their habitat. Motorists and residents may benefit from reduced moose–vehicle collisions and moose–human conflicts.

The current objective is to maintain moose numbers within the IM population objective of 10,000–15,000 moose, while monitoring indicators of moose and habitat condition for positive density-dependent responses. The Unit 20A population was estimated at between 9,240–12,800 moose (90% confidence interval) in November 2022. There is an estimated 5,040 mi<sup>2</sup> of moose habitat in Unit 20A which equates to a moose density of between 1.8 and 2.5 moose/mi<sup>2</sup>. The median of this estimate falls within the IM population objective. The department will continue to monitor Unit 20A twinning rates and short yearling weights as indices of nutritional condition for this moose population. The department has observed a slow and consistent increase in both twinning rates (16%) and short yearling weights (400lbs) and are nearing the nutritional thresholds of 20% twinning rates and 400lb short yearlings. This indicates that the nutritional condition of this population is improving. However, the department does not want the population to further increase until we observe both 20% twinning rate and 400lb short yearlings weight thresholds. The department will continue to monitor Unit 20A twinning rates and short yearling weights and may recommend fewer antlerless hunts in the future if these two thresholds are surpassed. However, at the current density of moose, the intention is to harvest antlerless moose at a rate of 1% of the population (92-128 antlerless moose) which has been shown to stabilize the moose population at its current level. Antlerless harvest will occur by drawing permit for a majority of Unit 20A and by registration permit outside the Fairbanks non-subsistence area in northwest Unit 20A near Nenana. The harvest objective will be based on the most recent survey results. The antlerless harvest will target the highest density portions of Unit 20A. The department did not issue antlerless moose permits in 2022 because of the severe winter that occurred in 2021/2022 and the anticipated increased mortality. Antlerless moose permits in 2023 were not issued because a population estimate was not completed until after the drawing permit application period ended. The next possible antlerless moose hunt would occur in the fall of 2025.

**PROPOSED BY:** Alaska Department of Fish and Game

(HQ-F23-042)

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