

PROPOSAL 34

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

Open an archery-only registration permit hunt in portions of Unit 26A for residents only when it is determined sheep hunting can be allowed in those area as follows:

Unit 26A west of the Etivluk River (could also include Unit 26A east of Etivluk River for consistency and to decrease harvest in that area).

Residents only: RS*** One ram, full curl or larger by bow and arrow only. Season: August 10-September 20

Hunters must register for this hunt (in person at license vendors) and report successful harvest within 48 hours.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? If and only if, it is determined the sheep population in Units 23 and 26A can again support hunting, the area should be open to hunting by bow and arrow only. Bow and arrow hunting is an important conservation management tool that provides hunting opportunity while minimizing harvest.

In August of 2014, an emergency order was placed on Unit 23 and 26A (west of the Etivluk River) to close all sheep hunting because of a marked decrease in the sheep population. Sheep population data for this area is not currently publicly available but if the biologists determine that this area can support a limited amount of hunting at any point in the future it would make the most sense to open it as an archery only hunt. Creating an archery hunt would reintroduce hunting opportunity of all hunters.

Archery only hunting does not adversely affect opportunity in any way. It simply requires that hunters use a shorter range weapon. This will make the hunt a little more difficult but will maintain the experience of the hunt. Skilled and/or lucky hunters will still harvest rams but the overall impact on the population will be much lower than that of a rifle hunt.

Going forward, with sheep numbers across the state in general decline and agreement at recent state and national wild sheep conservation meetings that this problem is unlikely to improve in the future (climate change related weather events) we, as hunters, must accept that alternative management options such as temporary hunt closures or draw hunts may become increasingly necessary. Archery hunts provide an appealing alternative because they do not limit opportunity but do limit the harvest. Archery hunts have been used as management tools around the world for this reason and it's time that we consider this option more broadly in Alaska. If or when the sheep population in Units 23 and 26A has recovered enough to support some minimal amount of hunting it should be a registration archery only hunt.

This should be a registration hunt so that ADF&G can monitor the harvest and shut down the hunt if harvest reaches a biological threshold determined by ADF&G.

Of note, in the past there has been some resistance to transitioning existing rifle hunts into archery hunts because of the perception of some that this somehow decreases opportunity. It is, however, well established throughout the United States and in Alaska that all hunters are capable of taking advantage of archery hunts by the simple means of purchasing and learning to shoot a bow. Currently it's possible to

buy an effective hunting bow for less than the cost of most rifles and to learn to shoot accurately in a matter of weeks.

PROPOSED BY: Paul Forward

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