

PROPOSAL 62

5 AAC 92.123. Intensive Management Plans VII.

Establish an Intensive Management program for Unit 19C as follows:

Establishment of a Predator Management Program for Unit 19C.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

Establish a Predator Management Program for Unit 19C.

Unit 19C moose, sheep and caribou populations have long been managed to support important hunting opportunities for subsistence, resident and nonresident hunters.

Furthermore, the outstanding diversified wildlife habitats within Unit 19C region has for centuries been utilized for subsistence living by the Upper Kuskokwim People.

Professional guiding within Unit 19C has for many decades supported substantial local economy with family-owned professional guide services, employment, revenue for locally owned business and very important and significant game meat sharing within the Upper Kuskokwim region.

Prior to the late the 1980's and early 1990's ballot initiatives that took away Alaska's viable wolf control initiatives, moose, sheep and caribou populations thrived within this region. The ADF&G Upper Kuskokwim Advisory Committee process was vibrant with meetings so full that they could not hold another participant.

Numerous locally owned air services were active. There were active professional guide residents from every town or village within the Upper Kuskokwim Region working within Unit 19C. Economy and revenue from hunting related activity fueled many locally owned and operated businesses.

The amount of customary and traditional harvest, sharing of professional guide service donated game meat and utilization of wildlife harvest from Unit 19C was high.

The wolf population within Unit 19C was healthy with no endangerment concerns prior to the ballot initiatives.

The doctrines of sustained yield, maximum benefit and abundance were all being utilized successfully.

The post ballot initiative era has resulted in greatly reduced ungulate populations. Moose, sheep and caribou have never returned to even a medium density compared to what they were prior to the ballot initiatives.

Important species of willows, sedges, grasses and lichens are healthy within this region. Although some change is occurring, healthy, unutilized ungulate habitat is commonplace.

The results of this conservation failure have been greatly felt not just by the wildlife populations, but also by all of the people who depended, or are dependent upon prudent stewardship of these treasured wildlife resources.

Current wolf population within Unit 19C is very high. In recent years numerous packs have been observed with one numbering over fourteen animals, and another, yet different pack, of eight in the same general area, along with numerous pairs and individual animals. These sightings, although from primarily the same limited region of Unit 19C of which I am familiar, compare to the sightings which I know are valid from the much broader extent of Unit 19C.

We love our wolves; we just do not love them in mass quantities.

When ungulate numbers are held at low density equilibriums primarily by wolf populations, and have hard winters on top of the challenge of living with high wolf numbers, the challenge to survive is compounded.

Additionally, when the wolf numbers are high, moose, and especially Dall's sheep populations, have to try to survive year around within "protective habitats" instead of bountiful flora bearing habitats.

The combination of these significant stress factors carries a strong detriment to overall ungulate health.

Success of the Unit 19D East Predator Control Program initially included black, grizzly and brown bear objectives. However, the long-term success has been quantified by maintaining the focus on wolves.

My recommendation for the best interest of Unit 19C ungulate populations is to work with ADF&G to establish a carrying capacity of wolves for Unit 19C, then with Board of Game assistance, establish a predator management program that works to reduce and then maintain that number of wolves for a ten-year period, subject to an annual review and adjustment of wolf numbers by ADF&G.

Upon completion of the ten-year plan, it should come up for review and renewal.

It is significant to note that when important ungulate numbers are held at low density within healthy habitats by predation, and human interests begin fighting for what's left of declining resources, the results are a conservation tragedy. We need to be better stewards than this.

PROPOSED BY: Taiga Resources Conservation

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