

PROPOSAL 80

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

Reopen sheep hunting in Unit 19C to nonresidents as follows:

What solution do you recommend?

Reauthorize nonresident Dall sheep hunting in Unit 19C as follows:

5 AAC 85.055. Unit 19C Sheep

Nonresident hunters. One ram with full curl horn or larger every four regulatory years. Harvest ticket. **August 10 - September 20** [No open season]

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Reauthorize nonresident Dall sheep hunting in Unit 19C.

Dall sheep populations have a cyclical pattern observed since the 1920s when record keeping began.

I quote, from Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) website, “Sheep numbers typically fluctuate irregularly in response to a number of environmental factors. Sheep populations tend to increase during periods of mild weather. Then, sudden population declines may occur as a result of unusually deep snow, summer drought, or other severe weather events. Low birth rates, predation (primarily by wolves, coyotes, and golden eagles) and a difficult environment tend to keep Dall sheep population growth rates lower than many other big game species. However, their adaptation to the alpine environment seems to serve them well.”

The cyclical pattern has been documented in the 2022 Board of Game (BOG) Dall Sheep Informational Meeting Presentation presented by ADF&G. In 1945, 1992 and 2022 displayed noticeable downturns in overall sheep populations. While an abundance of sheep were observed in 1930, 1968, 2003 and 2018. Primarily due to weather events.

The board adopted the full curl regulation in 1992. This is one of the most conservative approaches to Dall sheep management. Limiting harvest to full curl, eight plus year old rams, which are a small percentage of the overall sheep population has been proven to have no detrimental effects on population. Even compared to National Parks in Unit 19C where hunting is not allowed. Full curl regulation has been the standard management tool for 30 years protecting our sheep herds from overharvest while allowing all users opportunity to hunt.

Department studies show once a ram is more than eight years, chances of survival are much lower. Very few rams survive beyond 12 years. Full curl, eight plus year old rams’ constitute less than 5% of the total sheep population. The harvesting these older rams eight years + has shown no negative impacts on sheep populations. Taking older rams out of the herd gives the younger sheep less risk of injury during the rutting season and less grazing competition. Resulting in better chance of breeding age rams surviving a difficult winter.

Unit 19C recently has seen a large decline in hunter participation.

During the 2018 season, Unit19C saw a record number of 212 hunters. The following five years saw a steady decline with the 2022 season having 81 hunters go to the field. In a 5-year period there was a 62% decline in sheep hunters. Hunters tend to self-regulate as game populations cycle leading to fewer hunters. ADF&G records of hunter participation show when game populations are low, fewer hunters hunt that area. Dall sheep hunter participation in Unit 19C represents these trends. The sheep population declined, success rates were lower, sheep hunters moved to other areas. ADF&G website indicates other units with sheep populations have increased in hunter participation since 2018. In Unit 19C the five year period leading up to 2018 there was an increase in Dall sheep hunters due to good numbers of sheep and above historical success rates. These trends show hunter participation follows the cyclic nature of Dall sheep populations. An ADF&G estimated 40 harvestable rams in Unit19C for the 2022 season, 27 residents participated in the hunt. By closing the nonresident season the Board of Game went against ADF&G opposing the proposal to close the season for five years. This shuts out an entire user group. Following the data this will move sheep hunters to other areas of the state while there is an opportunity for harvestable rams in Unit 19C.

If nothing is changed:

Other units will see a noticeable increase in Dall sheep hunter participation many of which are showing the same decline due to winter events as Unit 19C. From guided nonresident hunters, second degree of kindred hunters and youth hunters. Thus, creating more pressure on the Dall sheep resource in those units. Creating additional competition amongst user groups in these areas. All while harvestable mature rams will be available the to hunt is lost for three (yes 3) user groups.

Alaska businesses that are related to nonresident sheep hunting will suffer:

1. Loss of revenue
2. Loss of jobs
3. Loss of license monies and associated Pittman-Robertson match funds
4. Land use permit monies
5. Potential business closures by commercial operators

All from an adopted proposal unsupported by our professional biologists at the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

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