

PROPOSAL 18

5AAC 85.020. Hunting seasons and bag limits for brown bear.

Shorten the spring and fall brown bear hunting seasons in Unit 9C for residents and nonresidents, and convert to drawing permits hunts as follows:

Unit 9C: Restore brown bear hunting season to October 7-21 (from October 1-21) and May 10- 25 (from May 10-31), and establish 1 bear every four years *by drawing permit only*.

ISSUE: The current regulation for Unit 9C establishes an October 1 to October 21 (odd years only) and May 10 - May 31 (even year only) season for brown bear hunting. Part of Unit 9C includes Katmai National Preserve and the Funnel, Moraine, and Battle Creek drainages. While hunting is permitted within national preserves under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980, the act also directed that the National Park Service provide for "high concentrations of brown/grizzly bears and their denning areas" in Katmai National Park and Preserve. Bear viewing guides in this area have reported a decline in the number of bears, most notably trophy class mature males, observed by their clients.

While there may be multiple factors causing the viewable number of bears to decline, we don't know for sure the full range of the causes. Recent population data and harvest analysis has not been provided by the National Park Service or ADF&G to support the extended hunting season in Unit 9C, Uniform Coding Units (UCU) 702 and 703.

My concern is the high probability that too many Katmai Preserve bears are being harvested to meet the congressional mandate in ANILCA of providing for "high concentrations" of brown bears. In addition, the impact of this harvest on the age distribution, as well as the overall populations numbers, is at odds with the National Park Organic Act and with direction in Chapter Four of the National Park Management Policies that, in part, directs the Park Service to "strive to understand, maintain, restore and protect the inherent integrity of the natural resources...". To support a sustainable bear harvest in Unit 9C that also meets the Park Service mandate, a reliable study needs to be done on bear populations, including age classes.

The National Park Service and the State of Alaska need to collaborate to determine what level of harvest can occur in Katmai Preserve and still meet the federal mandate of "high concentrations" of brown bears. Once a harvest level is determined, we request that the department adopt a draw hunt to ensure that only a sustainable harvest is taken each year.

Will the quality of the resources harvested or the products produced be improved? It improves the quality of the bear viewing resource by reducing the overharvest of brown bears. This will also, eventually, improve the quality of the hunting in this area as only a few bears will be harvested each year and those bears will undoubtedly be trophy sized.

Who is likely to benefit? The bear population will increase, particularly large mature males. The National Park Service will benefit from being able to meet its congressional mandate. The State of Alaska will benefit by being seen as partnering with the federal government on how to sustain a hunt in an area with a specific population directive from Congress. Those hunters that are eventually allowed back into this area will benefit from trophy size bears. Visitors and residents alike will benefit by the return to historic brown bear population numbers giving unsurpassed brown bear viewing experiences found nowhere else in the world. The opportunity to view bears

will continue to be an economic benefit to gateway communities on the Kenai Peninsula, Anchorage, and Kodiak.

Who is likely to suffer? A small number of hunters will not be able to hunt bears in this area. There is some economic loss from air transport and guide services.

Other solutions considered? Restore hunting season to October 7-21 and May 10-25, and establish drawing permit for that portion of Unit 9C in Katmai Preserve; namely, UCU 702 and UCU 703.

What will happen if nothing is done? There will continue to be harvested levels of brown bears that conflict with the National Park Organic Act and other federal laws, including the mandate found in ANILCA to provide for "high concentrations" of brown bears. Not only will this continued violation of federal law exacerbate state/federal tensions over jurisdiction, but continued hunting without reliable population data will contribute to the depletion of brown bears in Katmai National Park and Preserve. Observations by bear viewing operators in the immediate area in Katmai Preserve have recently noted a decline in number of large mature male bears.

At risk here is one of the world's premier brown bear viewing areas. Because of the lack of vegetation, this area provides a unique opportunity to observe brown bears in their natural habitat. These bears become habituated to human observation and the result is bear viewing unlike anywhere else in the world. This is exemplified by the volume of people that utilize bear viewing guides each summer and pay significant money to observe these bears. The close proximity of these bears to Alaska's major population centers have created a unique bear viewing opportunity that provides jobs and a good source of income to bear viewing guides living on the Kenai Peninsula, King Salmon, and Kodiak.

A study by the University of Alaska Fairbanks - The Economic Contributions of Bear Viewing in Southcentral Alaska, stated that bear viewing related service providers (air/boat taxis, guides, lodging) reported \$34.5 million in sales in 2017 and that bear viewing service providers paid approximately \$10 million in direct wages and benefits and hired 371 employees in 2017. Direct spending by service providers and households contributes approximately \$19 million in value added to the regional economy. This sustainable economic activity is at risk, as well as the educational and inspirational opportunities provided by this unique bear viewing experience.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee? No Advisory Committee or others were involved.

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