

PROPOSAL 4

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

Establish general season, archery only sheep hunts in Units 9, 11, 13, 14A, and 14B as follows:

Units 9, 11, 13, 14A, 14B (or limited to a specific combination of areas if managers see fit),

HT sheep areas only: 1 ram with full curl horn or larger by bow and arrow only,

HT, August 6 - August 9. (Or July 21-31 if an earlier date is preferred)

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? For many years hunters in Alaska have requested an opportunity to hunt for sheep with archery equipment but there still remains no season or area (aside from the highly sought after DS140/141 draw tags) during which hunters can pursue sheep with a bow and arrow without the pressure and danger associated with hunting during the general rifle season. The author of this proposal has personally been shot at while stalking by rifle hunters who weren't aware of his presence and other anecdotes exist of hunters finding themselves near sheep that others are shooting from far away. The increased popularity of long-range shooting for mountain animals has increased this hazard. (A recent ADF&G survey study on goat harvest in Southeast Alaska showed that about 23% of shots were over 300 yards and some were out to 600!)

In addition, there is an ever-increasing population of hunters who are interested in pursuing sheep with a bow and arrow but who did not feel that there is adequate opportunity to do so without competing directly with rifle hunters especially in "walk-in" areas but also in areas where most hunter fly.

Currently there is a four-day gap between the youth season and the general season in most areas. In the past some opposition to sheep season proposals raised concerns that it would interfere with the youth season, but this would remove that concern because it takes place after the youth season is over. There have also been concerns about archery hunters displacing sheep but many studies from sheep biologists in Canada and Alaska have shown that rams do not move far from their established areas in the pre-rut period even when disturbed. In the worst case the rams spooked by bow hunters might move a few miles but often they just go into nearby escape terrain where they are safe from bowhunters. I have witnessed this behavior many times when bowhunting sheep in multiple mountain ranges of Alaska and even after spooking them, they almost always remain in sight or are easily relocated in an adjacent area. The displacement of sheep by bowhunters in an early season is simply not a legitimate concern and any skilled mountain hunter will attest to being able to easily relocate sheep that were recently disturbed by a hunter.

The success rates of archery hunting for sheep are also very low so the effect on harvest will be essentially negligible but the increased opportunity will be greatly appreciated by all sheep hunters who are willing to accept some added challenge.

Further concerns have been raised in the past in regard to an early sheep season because it would allow for aerial scouting during season because of the scouting being allowed up to August 10. Please see the other proposal by this author which hopes to establish the "no aerial scouting" period to start on August 1 instead of August 10.

Also, as a matter of precedent, ADF&G has added early archery moose seasons to some of the areas up for proposals this year, including Units 14A and 14B. This has worked well and I'm not aware of any complaints that early season archery moose hunters have had any adverse effects on rifle hunters using the same areas later in the season.

If interference with other hunters was a significant concern, another option could be to move this hunt to July 20th (or some other date at the pleasure of the board), ending by August 1, so as not to interfere (as concerns were raised in the past) with the youth season and to still allow a small period before the general rifle season.

It is also important to note that archery seasons and areas have become very popular and well accepted throughout north America but currently, aside from draw hunts and a very small area in the Dalton Highway Corridor, there is no archery season or area for those wishing to pursue sheep with bow and arrow. Having bow hunted for many years in Alaska, I can attest that having a season, even just a few days, would provide a great amount of enjoyment and adventure for many hunters with essentially zero negative impact on other hunters or the sheep population.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee? I have discussed this idea with several biologists at ADF&G and all of them felt that this proposal would have no adverse effect on our declining sheep population but would increase hunting opportunity,

PROPOSED BY: Paul Forward

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