

PROPOSAL 43

5 AAC 85.045. Hunting seasons and bag limits for moose.

Establish an antlerless moose season in Unit 13A as follows:

Units and Bag Limits (11)	Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Nonresident Open Season
Unit 13 1 moose per regulatory year, only as follows: ...		
<u>1 antlerless moose by drawing permit only in Unit 13(A); up to 200 permits may be issued; a person may not take a calf or a cow accompanied by a calf; or</u>	<u>Oct. 1–Oct. 31 (General hunt only)</u>	<u>No open season</u>

....

WHAT IS THE ISSUE YOU WOULD LIKE THE BOARD TO ADDRESS AND WHY?

Unit 13 has an active intensive management program to benefit moose populations for human consumptive use. Managing a moose population for high levels of human consumptive use requires harvest of cow moose to utilize additional surplus moose on the landscape and prevent moose populations from exceeding the carrying capacity of the land. To maintain moose populations within their appropriate population and sex ratio objectives while also providing adequate opportunity to meet harvest objectives, antlerless moose hunts are an essential management tool to adjust the population trajectory through additional sustainable harvest opportunities. Unit 13A has a history of successful sustainable cow harvest incorporated into the harvest strategy with relatively high overall productivity and harvest rate for the population since 2012 (Table 43-1). This antlerless hunt opportunity was not reauthorized by local Advisory Committees in 2024 despite moose abundance being within objectives.

There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for moose in all of Unit 13, and an amount reasonably necessary for subsistence uses of 300–600 moose. After deliberating a Unit 13 proposal during the 2015 Board of Game meeting, submitted by the public to increase the number of cow permits issued annually, the board directed the department to issue enough permits to allow the harvest of up to one percent of the cow population when the moose population is above the midpoint of the population objective for the subunit. The hunt area for the antlerless hunt was

restricted to the western half of Unit 13A (west of Lake Louise Road), which maintains higher moose densities than the eastern half of Unit 13A.

Table 43-1. Antlerless moose permits and total harvest in Unit 13A, Regulatory Year (RY)12–24.

Regulatory Year	DM325 Permits	DM325 Harvest		Other Harvest ^a		Total Harvest	1% of Estimated Cows in 13A	Estimated Overall Harvest Rate
		Cows	Bulls	Cows	Bulls			
2012	10	4	0	3	230	237	29	5%
2013	10	2	0	1	260	263	30	6%
2014	10	4	3	0	255	262	27	6%
2015	10	7	0	1	333	341	30	7%
2016	10	5	0	3	311	319	28	7%
2017	10	6	2	4	318	330	23	7%
2018	10	7	0	0	246	253	28	6%
2019	10	8	2	0	271	281	27	7%
2020	20	16	0	1	272	289	25	7%
2021	25	22	0	1	264	287	32	7%
2022	25	19	1	3	235	258	24	6%
2023 ^c	20	14	0	5	148	167 ^b	27	4%
2024 ^d	20	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

^a Other harvest includes ceremonial harvest.

^b Moose hunter numbers declined with the closure of caribou seasons in Unit 13 and hunters reported unusually difficult hunting conditions, including stormy weather and late leaf drop.

^c Data has not been finalized for RY23.

^d Permits were announced for RY24 prior to Advisory Committee votes.

The current population objective for Unit 13A is 3,500–4,200 moose with a harvest objective of 210–420 moose, which represents a harvest rate of roughly 5.7%–9%. Moose abundance indices are derived from annual minimum trend counts, which can vary from year to year even when a population is stable (Figure 43-1). To address this variation the 3-year average moose abundance index is typically used to determine subunit status in relation to the midpoint of the population objectives (Figure 43-2). Moose abundance in 13A peaked near historic highs in 2013, 2015, and 2021 and has since declined to more reasonable and productive levels. A combination of intermittent wolf control and cow harvest has recently allowed the 13A moose population to stabilize at a more reasonable level within objectives. The goal is to maintain this stabilization and provide more moose in freezers, which requires cow harvest. Cow moose hunts should be implemented when a population is within objectives, with the goal of stabilizing the population before a population reaches or exceeds the higher objective because of density dependence concerns.

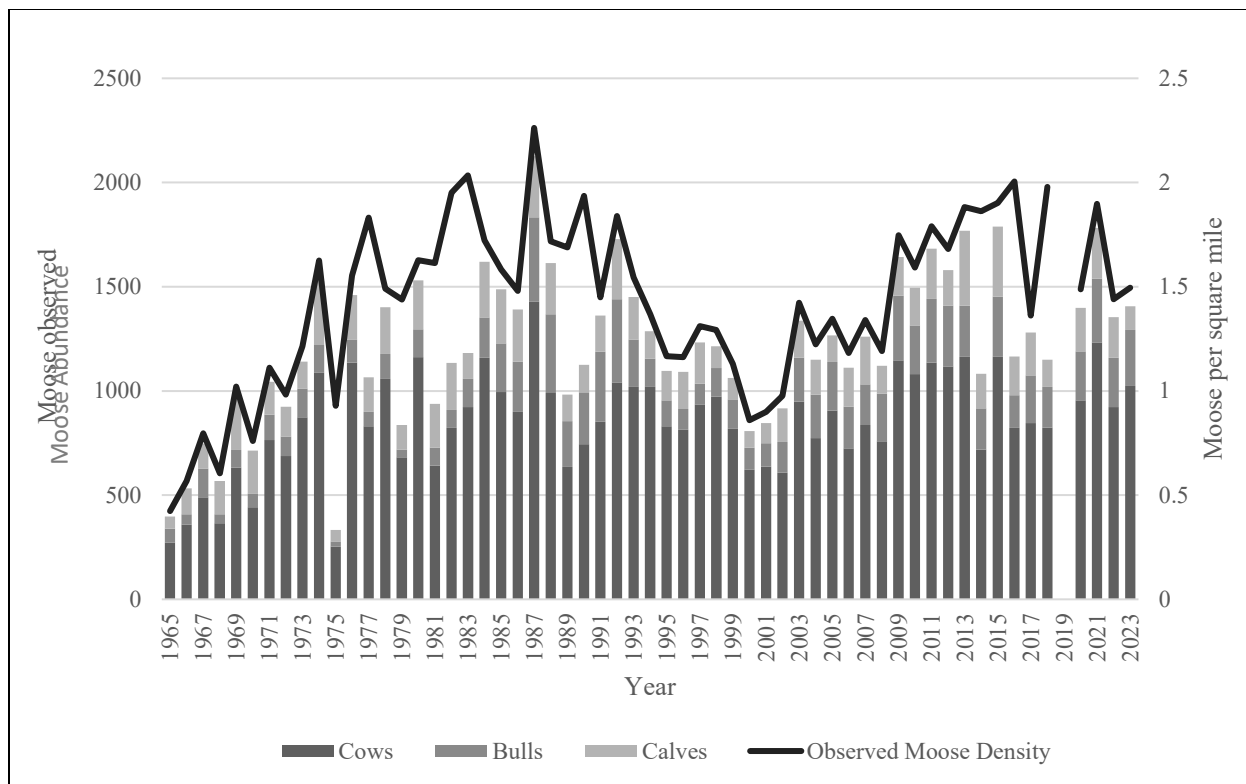


Figure 43-1. Moose minimum counts and observed density in western Unit 13A, RY1965–2023. In 1975, 1977, 1979, 1981–83, 1989–90, 2014, 2016, and 2018 only one out of two count areas were surveyed.

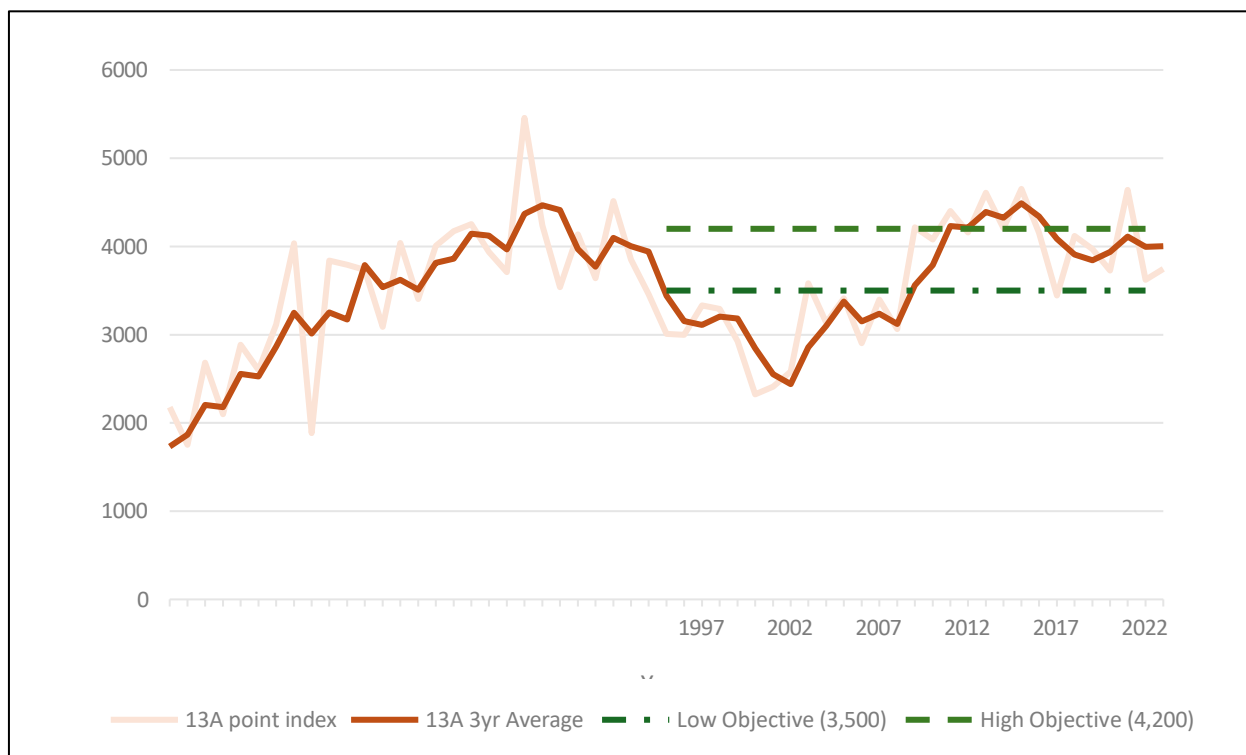


Figure 43-2. Moose population index in Unit 13A, RY1967–2023.

If antlerless moose hunting opportunities are not available in Unit 13A, the intensive management program and objectives will likely need to be reduced to maintain the moose population within a population size range that does not result in nutritional limitations for the moose and to achieve the harvest objectives recommended by the public, advisory committees, and the board.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

(HQ-F24-079)
