

PROPOSAL 108

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

Change all or some of the general season sheep hunts in Units 7 and 15 to archery only hunts as follows:

What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say?

Unit 7 Remainder: **One ram** with full-curl horn or larger by **Bow and Arrow** *only

AND/OR

Unit 15* Remainder: **One ram** with full-curl horn or larger by **Bow and Arrow*** only

*This could also be done for any particular subunit of Unit 15

*Certified Bowhunters only

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

For many years the general season Unit 7 and 15 Remainder sheep harvest was around 20 rams per year but due to permanent and ever worsening habitat changes, the harvest, particularly in Unit 7 has been in the very low single digits. The Kenai sheep population is obviously in decline. Accordingly, hunter interest has generally dropped off as well with few hunters going into the Kenai Mountains each year because they know the chance of finding a legal ram there is quite low especially considering that some of the areas are relatively close to population centers and that rams will often be killed shortly after reaching legal status. Throughout the state various management strategies have been implemented when populations are in decline. In Unit 14 to the north, almost all sheep hunting has been reduced to draw permit only. In Unit 19C we've seen an array of closures proposed and passed in recent years. Sadly, it appears that more such regulation might be on the horizon for other parts of the state and the Kenai sheep population is likely to be one of those areas.

This proposal offers a novel strategy that could both revitalize interest in hunting these areas, maintaining the same hunter opportunity we have now while further reducing actual harvest through the utilization of a weapons restricted hunt. There is strong precedent for this in British Columbia and Alberta where registration/OTC archery only sheep hunts have proven very popular and sustainable. There is a growing interest in the challenge of archery hunting for sheep and I believe strongly that transitioning the sheep hunting in Units 7 and 15 remainder HT hunts to archery only there will be a revival in sheep hunting interest in these areas. After a few years of this management style it's likely that some mature rams who would not have survived a rifle season will grow older and larger, thereby even further increasing the interest and opportunity in this area.

There is essentially no downside to this proposal for sheep hunters because, unlike a draw hunt or a closure, everyone can still hunt every season. They just have to accept a little more challenge in the actual stalk once a legal ram is found (and it's likely that after a few years of this strategy there will be more legal rams on that landscape!)

Those who may claim that this hunt caters to a special interest group of bowhunters are simply wrong. Essentially any person physically capable of sheep hunting can easily learn to shoot a

modern bow in just a little more time than it takes to become proficient with a hunting rifle. (For those with medical issues that prevent use of archery equipment the ADF&G regulations already contains provisions allowing them to hunt with alternative means.) No one would be excluded from this hunt and I believe ultimately it will garner attention from around the world as a place to pursue mature rams with archery equipment.

With an already greatly waning interest in hunting this area (single digit hunters have pursued the HT remainder hunt in Unit 15 remainder in recent years and the numbers hunting in Unit 7 remainder has decreased from well over a hundred 20 years ago to the 20's or 30's per year now) creating an exciting new hunt that fosters more mature ram and the challenge of a fair chase archery hunt could revitalize interest in the area during a time when sheep hunting is generally in decline while at the same time reducing the actual harvest. This is a win-win for everyone, especially the sheep.

Based on current surveys, Board of Game discretion and ADF&G input this could be implemented for all of the Units 7 and 15 remainder HT areas or it could be targeted at just one unit or subunit as a proof of concept.

In short, we should change all or some of the harvest ticket hunts in Units 7 and 15 to archery only to increase opportunity/enthusiasm while simultaneously decreasing actual harvest/population impact.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee?

No

PROPOSED BY: Paul Forward

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