

PROPOSAL 23

5 AAC 85.030. Hunting seasons and bag limits for deer.

Increase the nonresident bag limit for deer in Unit 4 as follows:

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

Increase nonresident bag limit for Unit 4 Remainder (outside the area of Chichagof Island east of Port Frederick and north of Tenakee Inlet including all drainages in Tenakee Inlet) from two bucks to four deer.

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

Prior to statehood, the Unit 4 Remainder bag limit was four deer until it was raised to six deer at the January 2019 Board of Game (board) meeting in Petersburg. The six deer bag limit was sustainable and provided opportunity for both residents and nonresidents.

At the January 2023 board meeting in Ketchikan, the board considered public proposals to reduce the Unit 4 Remainder bag limit from six deer back to four deer. These proposals were submitted as a good faith effort to deter concurrent federal proposals aimed at closing large areas of Unit 4 to non-federally qualified hunters. After rejecting these proposals, the board brought them up for reconsideration and passed an amended proposal to reduce the Unit 4 Remainder bag limit for nonresidents from six deer to two bucks. The Federal Subsistence Board subsequently passed regulations restricting non-federally qualified hunters in parts of Unit 4 from hunting from November 1 through 10.

Deer populations in Unit 4 are currently robust and at the highest densities anywhere in Alaska. After more than a decade of consecutive mild to moderate winters, populations are likely near or exceeding what the severe winter carrying capacity is in many areas. Winter mortality transects and spring body condition surveys indicate that annual overwinter survival has been excellent for several consecutive years. Observed deer abundance during those surveys was excellent.

Interest in hunting deer in Unit 4 by nonresidents is low. Unit 4 is difficult to access. Few roads and limited marine and air taxi operators make Do-It-Yourself hunts difficult without local connections (i.e., friends/family). Nonresident hunters are more likely to consider locations such as Kodiak or Prince of Wales Island because of the prevalence of higher trophy quality animals there compared to Unit 4.

During the ten seasons preceding the January 2023 nonresident bag limit change (RY2013-RY2022), an average of 209 nonresident hunters harvested 150 deer annually in Unit 4. This represents 6.2% of the hunters and 2.7% of the annual harvest in Unit 4. Despite the higher four- and six-deer bag limits in effect during those years, an average of only four nonresident hunters took more than two deer annually, with three nonresidents harvesting three deer, and one nonresident harvesting four deer. Therefore, the average reduction in nonresident deer harvest in Unit 4 resulting from the 2023 bag limit reduction has amounted to only five deer annually.

Unit 4 deer populations are high and stable to increasing. Nonresident hunting pressure is very low. Although the majority of nonresident hunters in Unit 4 take up to two deer, based on abundance estimates, additional opportunity remains available for the small handful of nonresident hunters who would choose to take additional deer.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

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