

Sitka Area – Unit 4

PROPOSAL 19

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

Extend the resident hunting season for brown bear in Unit 4 to May 31 as follows:

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

5 AAC 85.020(3) Hunting Season and Bag Limits for Brown Bear

(3) Unit 4, Remainder - Resident Hunters: Sept 15. – Dec. 31, Mar 15 - [MAY 20] **May 31**

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

In all other spring hunt codes pertaining to Southeast Alaska brown bear opportunities season dates coincide with a May 31 closure. The Admiralty Island and inside drainages of Baranof and Chichagof Islands hunt (RB089) closes on May 20 for both residents and nonresidents. This area is highly popular for both residents hunters and guided nonresidents. This proposal would leave the hunt open for residents only through May 31. Considering the hunt is a registration permit the department already has the ability to close the season if quotas have been met. Because of the guided nonresident effort in this area residents seemingly have to give up 11 days of opportunity during what is often the best weather of the year for shore-based access.

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

Developed myself through discussions with other local hunters wishing to have late spring opportunity for this hunt.

PROPOSED BY: Kaleb Baird

(OI-F25-030)

PROPOSAL 20

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

Extend the season for the RB088 brown bear registration hunt from May 20 to May 31, to align the season for all of Lisianski Inlet 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?

(Outside Drainages) from Point Lucan, outside of the Port Althorp closed area, following the ridge of the Althorp Peninsula along the common boundary of GUA 04-15, the area includes Chichagof Island south and west of a line that follows the island's crest to coordinates (57.82701, -135.86404), then to (57.79173, -135.99264), continuing south and west along the island crest to Point Nismeni (57°34' N. lat., 135°25' W. long), and then to the entrance of Gut Bay (56°44' N. lat., 134°38' W. long). This includes Yakobi Island, Kruzof Island, and other adjacent islands, as well as the drainages into Gut Bay.

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

Request: Adjust RB088 boundary to open all of Lisianski Inlet, extending the season from May 20 to May 31.

Justification:

Clarity and Safety: Simplifies hunt boundaries, reducing confusion. Allows hunters to use both sides of the inlet during foul weather, improving safety when open seas limit access in the final 11 days of brown bear season.

Bear Viewing: Port Althorp remains closed to hunting under the Brown Bear Management Strategy, allowing bear-viewing tourism uninterrupted access. This aligns with the USFS Shoreline II BMP agreements.

Harvest Impact: Unit 4 brown bear harvest has been ~40 bears below objective for a decade. Adding 16 NM of shoreline will not significantly effect overall harvest but does provide flexibility and safety for hunters.

Summary: This minor change enhances safety and clarity without impacting conservation concerns or viewing tourism.

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

PROPOSED BY: Zach Decker

(OI-F25-033)

PROPOSAL 21

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

Extend the season for the RB088 brown bear hunt in Unit 4, to align the season for all of Northeast Chichagof Island as follows:

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

Recommended Solution and Draft Regulatory Language:

Regulation RB088 to include Northeast Chichagof by adjusting the boundary description to incorporate the specified coordinates and geographic references. The proposed regulation would read:

Proposed Regulation RB088:

(Outside drainages) Chichagof Island from East Point (57.80' N lat., 134.94' W long.) following the common GUA line of 04-11 to 58.02' N lat., 135.96' W long., to 57.96' N lat., 136.09' W long., following GUA line 04-15, including Yakobi and other adjacent islands; Baranof Island south and west of a line which follows the crest of the island from Nismeni Point (57°34' N lat., 135.25' W long.) to the entrance of Gut Bay (56°44' N lat., 134.38' W long.), including the drainages into Gut Bay, Kruzof Island, and other adjacent islands.

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

Expand the open area under Regulation RB088 to include Northeast Chichagof, till May 31. This area has a high brown bear population, as evidenced by a high Defense of Life and Property (DLP) reports over the past 10 years, indicating significant bear activity. Including Northeast Chichagof in RB088 would align the regulation with the area’s bear management needs, support City of Hoonah’s refuse waste management efforts to reduce bear human conflicts, and ensure consistency with ADF&G Brown Bear Management and US Forest Service land management practices. While still supporting Bear viewing tourism on Private land and the USFS roads system that is closed to Brown Bear hunting under regulation during these additional 11 days.

The Rationale:

By expanding the bear hunting area for hunt RB088 in Unit 4 to include Northeast Chichagof, defined by precise coordinates and Guide Use Area lines, while keeping existing regulations for Baranof, Kruzof, and adjacent islands intact, the revision extends the hunting period in the area by 11 days, from May 20 to May 31, to enhance bear management.

Key points supporting this change:

Unit 4 brown bear harvest has remained stable at approximately 40 bears under the established harvest guidelines annually for over a decade.

Harvest guidelines, set in the early 2000s and adjusted in 2018 per the Unit 4 Brown Bear Management Strategy (BBMS), target a sustainable 4% harvest rate with no more than 1.5% sow harvest which has proven effective.

Under the BBMS, Outfitter Guides have successfully reduced the number of contracting guides to 20, as mandated. Efforts by guided hunters have effectively decreased the overall nonresident sow harvest, demonstrating that additional hunting opportunities can be offered without jeopardizing or adversely affecting the core bear population.

The revision aims to balance expanded hunting opportunities with sustainable population management, supported by long-term harvest data and effective science base conservation strategies.

Support for Bear Viewing Tourism:

The proposal ensures that bear viewing on private land and USFS roads already closed to hunting remains unaffected, as RB088 would only apply to designated hunting areas and maintain existing closures. The Unit 4 Brown Bear Management Strategy acknowledges growing tourism demand and recommends identifying and managing specific non hunting bear viewing sites (Port Althorp, Pack Creek). By limiting hunting to areas away from tourism hotspots and enforcing motorized vehicle restrictions, the expansion aligns with ADF&G and USFS efforts to balance hunting and non-consumptive uses like wildlife viewing.

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

PROPOSED BY: Alisha Rosenbruch-Decker

(OI-F25-058)

PROPOSAL 22

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

Lengthen the hunting season for brown bear 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?

Unit 4 Brown / Grizzly Bear, Open Season: **September 1st** [September 15th] - December 31st.

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

Proposal to amend brown / grizzly bear season regulation in Unit 4.

This change has several positive effects on the resource and management.

The adjacent Unit 5 season is already September 1st - December 31st, this change will align the seasons.

Unit 4 is 40 bears below allocation for many years, a clear indication that the resource is both healthy and under harvested, supporting a change to a September 1st opening.

This will lead to less sow harvest. One of the primary indicators of lack of harvest opportunity is the harvesting of sows. Without enough opportunity to harvest mature boars, hunters not wanting to go home empty handed will harvest a sow, but when given more opportunity they are more selective.

Due to climate change, also known as global warming, the animals themselves and their food resources grow and behave differently. There are many more berries earlier in the year. Salmon runs are different. Bears in this unit tend to arrive and depart the streams much earlier than in the past.

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

I have coordinated with many others, all of whom have extensive field time, harvest, and care / concern for the management of brown bears in Unit 4. Additionally, I submitted this proposal via email to the local fish and game advisory committee.

PROPOSED BY: David Summers

(OI-F25-235)

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 (HQ-F25-030)

PROPOSAL 24

5 AAC 92.540(1)(A). Controlled use areas.

Modify the Northeast Chichogof Controlled Use Area in Unit 4, to exclude drainages near Tenakee Inlet as follows as follows:

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

Exclude drainages running south into the north shore of Tenakee Inlet from the Northeast Chichogof Controlled Use Area (NCCUA). This area is geographically separated from more northerly areas of the NCCUA by a range of mountains (drainage divide) which runs parallel to the north shore of Tenakee Inlet.

ADF&G deer tagging data shows there is minimal movement of deer between the north shore of Tenakee and areas north of the mountains (drainage divide). Consequently, harvest on the north shore of Tenakee would have no impact on hunting north of the divide, and vice versa. Because of this and the lack of deer conservation issues in Tenakee, the north shore of Tenakee should be excluded from the NCCUA. This would also provide increased hunting opportunity on the north shore of Tenakee Inlet when heavy north or easterly winds prevent crossing the inlet.

Drainages flowing north from the drainage divide would remain in the NCCUA and drainages running south from the divide into Tenakee Inlet would be subject to standard hunting regulations for Unit 4.

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

Drainages draining into the north shore of Tenakee Inlet are included (unnecessarily) in the Northeast Chichagof Controlled Use Area (NCCUA) and subject to conservative deer hunting regulations designed to address conservation and access issues associated with the extensive Hoonah road system. These regulations apply to non federally qualified deer hunters on the NCCUA. Areas draining into the north shore of Tenakee Inlet should be excluded from the NCCUA, it has none of the access/roadside issues of Hoonah and deer harvest in Tenakee has no impact on more northerly areas of the NCCUA.

The NCCUA was established to address conservation and access issues associated with the Hoonah road system which covers the northern and mid sections of the NCCUA. The road system is also connected to the Ak Marine Highways Ferry landing in Hoonah. Tenakee is not attached to the Hoonah road system and has no road issues or conservation concerns for deer.

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

PROPOSED BY: Michael Bethers

(HQ-F25-009)

PROPOSAL 25

5 AAC 92.510(a)(6)(A) Areas closed to hunting.

Clarify the northern and southern boundaries of the Sitka Road System Closed Area 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?

5 AAC 92.510. Areas closed to hunting. (a) The following areas are closed to hunting as specified:

(6) Unit 4:

(A) in the Sitka area, a strip one-fourth mile wide on each side of all state highways **between the east side of the Sawmill Creek bridge and the Katlian Bay Road gate** is closed to the taking of big game.

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

There has been some ambiguity regarding the exact boundaries of the Sitka Road System Closed Area. In 2024, a portion of the Katlian Bay Road was opened to the public. The Katlian Bay Road extends the northern end of the Sitka road system past Halibut Point Road. It is not the intent of the department to extend the closed area to include the new Katlian Bay Road. On the south end of the road system (Sawmill Creek Road), the state highway actually extends to Herring Cove, approximately 1.5 miles past the closed area depicted on maps produced by the department. Popular mapping apps depict Herring Cove as the southern boundary of the closed area. The department is taking advantage of the current board cycle to clarify the boundaries match the intent of safety concerns associated with the Sitka Road System Closed Area. This proposed definition does not change the closed area, it clarifies the northern and southern boundaries of the existing closed area.

Unit 4 Sitka Road System Closed Area



PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

(HQ-F25-031)
