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<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=gameboard.proposalbook>

Proposal 193

5 AAC 92.540. Controlled Use Areas.

Shorten the season dates for motorized restrictions in the Wood River CUA as follows:

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

We proposed to shorten the season dates for motorized restrictions in the Wood River CUA Wood River Controlled Use Area: Unit 20A bounded on the north by the south side of the Rex Trail beginning at its intersection with the east bank of the Totatlanika River, then easterly along the Rex Trail to Gold King airstrip, then from Gold King airstrip along the trail's extension along the north side of Japan Hills to the Wood River; bounded on the east by the east bank of the Wood River, including the Wood River drainage upstream from and including the Snow Mountain Gulch Creek drainage; bounded on the south by the divide separating the Yanert River drainage from the drainages of the Healy Creek, Moody Creek, Montana Creek, and the Wood River; and bounded on the west by the east bank of the Nenana River from the divide separating the drainage of the Yanert River and Montana Creek north to Healy Creek, then easterly along the south bank of Healy Creek to the north fork of Healy Creek, then along the north fork of Healy Creek to its headwaters, then along a straight line to the headwaters of Dexter Creek, then along the east bank of Dexter Creek to the Totatlanika River, and then down the east bank of the Totatlanika River to the Rex Trail. The area is closed to the use of any motorized vehicle, except aircraft for big game hunting including the transportation of any big game hunters, their hunting gear, and/or parts of big game, **Aug 5 - Aug 25**; *however, this does not prohibit motorized access via, or transportation of game on, the Parks Highway or the transportation into the area of game meat that has been processed for human consumption.*

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

The issue is the overly restrictive motorized vehicle closure in the Wood River Controlled Use Area (WRCUA) in GMU 20A, which severely limits affordable resident access despite abundant game populations.

History of the WRCUA: This area was established decades ago as a tool to control ground-based access and prevent potential conflicts with guides during the fall season. The current rule (5 AAC 92.540) prohibits all motorized vehicles except aircraft from August 1–September 30 (with exceptions for the Parks Highway and processed meat). While the original intent was sustainable management, the aircraft-only exception has created de facto exclusivity for commercial air transporters and guides.

Current conditions and supporting data: The moose population in all of Unit 20A is extremely healthy and at one of the highest densities in North America. Recent geospatial population estimates (GSPE) and ADF&G surveys show stable numbers (e.g., eastern 20A estimates in the 2,700–4,000+ range in recent years), bull:cow ratios of 28:100 (2022), and calf:cow ratios of

33:100. Populations remained robust even after the tough 2021–2022 winter, with normal adult mortality. Caribou are also thriving and managed conservatively via the DC827 drawing hunt, which has high success rates among participants. Predator populations (wolves and bears) remain healthy and balanced.

Despite this abundance, participation is low due to access barriers. The DC827 caribou hunt has historically low entry rates because hunters cannot reach the area affordably without aircraft. This year alone, 34 cow moose hunts went undersubscribed largely because of access fears. General-season moose success rates hover at 22–26% (hundreds of hunters), while drawing hunts reach 41%—but many more Alaskans could hunt if ground access were allowed outside peak season. Antlerless permit uptake remains low (e.g., 2021: only 112 of 260 permits hunted, 41 cows harvested).

All safety nets remain firmly in place: strict antler restrictions (50-inch, 4 brow tines, or spike-fork), drawing permits that cap additional harvest, limited cow tags, and ongoing intensive-management monitoring. These ensure any increased access will stay well within sustainable levels.

Economic reality and lack of opportunity: The aircraft-only rule forces residents to rely on expensive air transporters. Typical costs run \$3,795 base per hunter for a moose drop camp plus \$1,200–\$1,500 for meat haul (total often \$4,000–\$6,000+ per person). This is prohibitive for most resident families, especially for cow hunts or caribou. Affordable ground access via the Rex Trail, Parks Highway, or existing trails (using personal ATVs, boats, or vehicles) would open real opportunity without commercial dependency.

The restrictions effectively prioritize guide exclusivity over resident needs. This is unfair to Alaskans, violates the principle of maximum sustained yield, and contradicts the Alaska Constitution’s mandate for sustained yield benefiting residents.

What happens if nothing changes? Resident participation stays artificially low, harvestable surplus goes unused (undersubscribed permits), and the area continues to function as a private playground for well-funded air-based hunters. Other solutions (e.g., past boundary adjustments proposed in 2023–2024 Board cycles) were

considered but rejected because they do not directly address the temporal restriction that creates the affordability barrier.

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

Yes, the Fairbanks AC developed this proposal.

PROPOSED BY: Fairbanks Fish & Game Advisory Committee (OI-F26-169)
