

Proposal 218

5 AAC 84.270. Furbearer trapping.

Change season and bag limits for Furbearer Trapping in 20A and B as follows:

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

Proposal to reduce harvest of beaver and improve management of beaver populations:

Change to Alaska Administrative Code:

Article 7 -Seasons and Bag Limits, 5 AAC 84.270 Furbearer Trapping: Unit 20 (A) change from "no closed season, no limit" to "November 1 - April 30, no limit." Remainder of Unit 20 (B) change from "September 25 - May 31 no limit" to "November 1-April 30, no limit."

Suggestions for improved management of beaver populations:

1. The harvest period needs to be shortened to eliminate the open water seasons which extend from when the rivers start moving until May 31 and from September 25 through October 31. Beavers mate during the months of February and March. The gestation period is 105-107 days and kits are born after breakup. (Ref. #1). Harvesting during the spring open water season reduces the number of dominant females and corresponding new born kits. It is the most vulnerable time for beaver groups and colonies, since beavers only produce one litter per year. Harvesting beaver should not be allowed during this period of time. The fall open water season should be eliminated, as long as necessary to allow the beaver populations to increase back to normal levels
2. Each major drainage in 20B should be treated differently for management purposes, since each have different habitats and access points for the public. River drainages with large amounts of aspen, birch and willow are better habit for beavers than areas dominated by climax forests, and harvest pressure is a function of accessibility.
3. Regulations should promote the taking of beaver while their hides are prime, ie when both the under fur and guard hairs are at their maximum length and density. Nonprime furs have under-developed underfur and guard hairs and the leather is reddish to black, due to root hair production of melanin. Grade IV and V pelts are almost useless (Ref. 2). Beaver molt their furs annually and trappers report the shedding of fur within 10 days of break-up. Fur management regulations normally are designed to permit trapping when the fur is prime, across species.
4. Beaver surveys should be conducted regularly in late fall to count the active beaver houses for each of the major drainages in 20B: the Saleha, Chena and Chatanika rivers. Beaver populations could then be estimated and harvest quotas determined, for use in establishing open seasons and methods of harvest.
5. Use of fire arms to harvest beaver should not be permitted as a means for harvest, except to kill nuisance beaver. To the extent open water seasons exist, trapping should be allowed only with underwater traps and snares, as written in the current regulations in 20 B (Ref 3)

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

An over harvest of beaver has occurred in unit 20 B due to the open water (non -ice) harvesting by various users, including non-fur takers who use the carcasses for bait. The current non-ice season for 20B is from April 15 through May 31, and September 25 through October 31. Trapping beaver on non-ice waters allows use of more efficient methods for accessing and harvesting beaver than fur-takers using under ice methods. This has resulted in reduction in beaver populations with fewer live houses (those with fall-time caches) and live houses with smaller caches.

User groups have been recently promoting non-prime fur harvesting of beaver. Trappers have been using above water conibears and leg hold sets and firearms. 5AAC 92-095(a)(10) prohibits use of firearms in 20B and requires below water-line traps and snares during the open water (non-ice) season.

Also, use of beaver carcasses for bear baiting and dog food has increased the non-fur demand, adding to the open water season harvest. Since 2022 firearms have been used, as the Board is aware, due to an error printed in the trapping regulations booklets distributed to the public. According to several experienced hunters that have used firearms to dispatch beaver, retrieval success is often 50 percent, resulting in waste of game.

I have been trapping beaver on the Chatanika River for the last 25 years and have kept records for a ten mile stretch of the river. In 2001-2002, there were 12 beaver houses with live caches in the lower stretch of the line. The upper portion of the line had 6. Over 270 beavers were harvested from that stretch of river since 2001. Our harvest for the 2026 season was 1 beaver, and there were six trappable houses.

Most of this decrease has occurred since 2022, which coincides with firearms beginning to be used, and an increase in user group promotion of open water harvesting. I became aware of firearm use on beaver in early September of 2024. We encountered a hunter setting up an ambush on a beaver house and the hunter asked us if we were aware that it was legal to shoot beaver for bear bait. The date was September 3, three weeks before the open water season. This was also the first year we noticed a significant decrease in the number of live houses. We went to see Fish and Game to report our observations and they said they encountered a boater in possession of 12 beaver the last of May near the Olnes campground. These beaver were taken for the carcasses.

My records of fall beaver caches and beaver harvest for the Chatanika River may be the only records for this area, since there is no beaver biologist employed at ADFG - Fairbanks.

Individuals that have trapped 20A for the last 25 years have indicated that the last time they were able to get to their line, no caches were visible on any of the beaver lodges in the area.

I have a cabin on the Saleha river, and in 2010 there were 10 beaver houses visible within a 2 mile distance from our cabin. Today there are 2. Whereas in the past, beavers were seen swimming all up and down the river. There were "lumber yards near caches", and "bones" littered the gravel bars. Today all of the above are noticeably missing.

Ref #1: "Wild Furbearer Management and Conservation in North America", (WFMC), Ch. 25., pg 285.

Ref #2: WFMC, Ch. 53., pg. 720 & 726.

Ref #3: Alaska Administrative Code 5AAC 92.095 "The following methods and means of taking furbearers under a trapping license are prohibited: (10): taking beaver in Units 11, 13 and 16 from September 25 through November 9; in the remainder of 20 (B) and in Unit 20(0) from September 25 through October 31 and from April 16 through May 31; and in Units 7 and 15 from October 15 through November 9 and from April 1 through April 30, except with underwater traps or snares."

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

PROPOSED BY: Garry Hutchison

(OI-F26-136)
