

Proposal 86

5 AAC 92.XXX. New Regulation.

Add a new section to 5 AAC 92 regarding consideration of environmental change in game management decisions as follows:

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

Add a new section as follows

5 AAC 92 XXX Consideration of environmental change in game management decisions

When evaluating proposals and adopting regulations for Game Management Units 22, 23, 24, 25, and 26, the Board shall consider the best available scientific information regarding long term environmental change, including the role of anthropogenic climate change, and its effects on wildlife populations, habitat, and sustained yield.

The Board shall include in its findings a brief statement describing how these factors were considered.

In making decisions, the Board shall recognize that long term environmental change may alter habitat capacity and population dynamics such that some populations may not return to historical levels.

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

This regulatory cycle is focused on Arctic and northern Alaska, where the effects of environmental change are among the most pronounced in the state. However, the Board of Game is not explicitly required to consider long term environmental change, including the role of human caused climate change, when making wildlife management decisions in these regions.

A growing body of Alaska based research and Alaska Department of Fish and Game reporting demonstrates that long term environmental change is affecting game populations, particularly Dall sheep and caribou. Recent Board of Game materials document substantial and widespread declines in Dall sheep populations across multiple regions, including declines of approximately 40 to 70 percent in several mountain ranges.

Current research presented to the Board indicates that population trends are strongly influenced by environmental conditions affecting nutrition, pregnancy rates, and lamb survival. Changing weather patterns, including increased frequency of severe winter events, altered snow conditions, and habitat shifts such as shrub encroachment into alpine areas, are identified as key drivers.

Wildlife populations in Alaska have historically exhibited natural fluctuations, and climate variability has always been a factor in northern ecosystems. However, current data presented to the Board indicate a different pattern with more frequent and repeated environmental stressors occurring across multiple regions at the same time.

Similarly, while climate variability includes natural cycles, the scale, rate, and consistency of observed environmental changes in Arctic regions are not well explained by cyclical patterns alone. The available evidence indicates a shift in underlying baseline conditions, with population trajectories increasingly shaped by persistent environmental change rather than periodic variation.

Across northern Alaska and adjacent regions of Canada, some of the continent's largest remaining caribou herds and mountain sheep populations are experiencing synchronous declines, further suggesting broad scale environmental drivers.

In many areas, populations are likely to persist at lower densities rather than return to historical levels.

If the Board does not explicitly consider these factors, management decisions may continue to rely on assumptions of recovery based on cyclical patterns that may no longer apply, particularly in Arctic regions where these effects are magnified. This creates risk to sustained yield and long term hunting opportunity.

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

This proposal was developed independently, informed by publicly available Alaska Department of Fish and Game materials and current scientific literature on wildlife population dynamics in Alaska and northern North America.

PROPOSED BY: Paul Forward

(OI-F26-127)
