

Regionwide and Multiple and Multiple Units

Proposal 82

5 AAC 92.08. Unlawful methods of taking game; exceptions.

Allow the use of cellular cameras for the taking of black bear and brown bear over bait in GMUs 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26B, and 26C during applicable seasons for non-commercial users as follows:

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

5 AAC 92.080 - [Effective until 7/1/2025] Unlawful methods of taking game; exceptions

7 (H) any camera or other sensory device that can send messages through wireless communication; **except that cameras that can send messages through wireless communication may be used by non-commercial bear baiters in GMUs 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, 26B and 26C at legal bear bait stations during the applicable black and/or grizzly bear seasons**

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

Allow the use of cellular cameras for the taking black bear and brown bear over bait in its GMUs 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26B, and 26C during applicable seasons for non - commercial users. This allows an easily enforceable regulation for law enforcement with concise purpose of use and time when these cameras can be used.

Currently hunters are not allowed to use any camera or other sensory device that can send messages through wireless communication. This includes cellular game cameras over bear bait. These were prohibited with the assumption that this would give an unfair advantage to hunters, yet despite when the hunter gets a photo, he would still have to travel to hunt his bait station often requiring hours of travel that is not feasible in a reasonable amount of time, or the day of the picture was taken. In the name of safety, a hunter with young children could have the knowledge that a bear was on the bait and approach with extreme caution. In these units, hunters are allowed to hunt bears same day airborne provided they are 300 feet from a plane.

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

Yes, this proposal was developed by the Delta Fish & Game Advisory Committee.

PROPOSED BY: Delta Fish & Game Advisory Committee

(OI-F26-153)

Proposal 83

5 AAC 92.08. Unlawful methods of taking game; exceptions.

In all of unit 20 cellular cameras maybe used during bear baiting seasons. Cameras must be within a 100 yds of bait as follows:

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

In all of unit 20 cellular cameras maybe used during bear baiting seasons. Cameras must be within a 100 yds of bait.

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

The current prohibition in 5 AAC 92.080(7)(H) bans any “camera or other sensory device that can send messages through wireless communication.” This prevents the use of stationary cellular trail cameras at registered bear bait stations in Unit 20. Bear baiting is already a legal, selective management tool (not traditional “fair chase”), yet hunters are forced to make repeated, often unnecessary physical checks of bait sites. This results in hundreds of dollars in wasted fuel.

If nothing changes, baiters will continue burning unnecessary fuel (Interior Alaska gasoline currently averages \$3.34/gallon in Fairbanks and up to \$6+ in rural areas) on multiple weekly trips per station. Youth and less-mobile hunters will be discouraged because real-time viewing from home is impossible. Cellular cameras can allow hunters to notify AWT of possible poaching or site tampering without having to encounter the perpetrator. Cellular cameras change none of the biological outcomes: bag limits remain three black bears per year (no closed season) and one brown/grizzly bear per year (with subunit-specific seasons and permits), bait stations stay registered, and bears continue to come and go as they please.

Facts supporting adoption:

- Alaska’s statewide black bear population is stable at approximately 100,000 animals. In GMU 20D (a representative subunit), the population is healthy and stable with an estimated 750 adult bears; average annual harvest is only 37 bears (66% male, just 25% taken over bait), well within sustainable objectives (≤ 15 south and ≤ 35 north of the Tanana River). Similar low, sustainable harvest occurs across Unit 20.
- In the vast majority of U.S. states where cellular cameras are fully legal, there is no evidence of increased overharvest or population declines—harvest remains controlled by bag limits and seasons, exactly as it would in Unit 20.
- Cameras provide real safety and efficiency benefits without any downside: they notify hunters only when activity occurs, reducing total trips, habitat disturbance, and the ability to prosecute hunter harassment or poaching.

Other solutions (more frequent physical checks or non-cellular cameras) were rejected because they do not deliver real-time data, cost savings, or safety improvements. Cellular cameras cannot

kill animals or exceed bag limits—they simply let hunters (and their kids at home) watch in real time.

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-F26-161)

Proposal 84

5 AAC 85.XXX. Seasons and bag limits for cougars/mountain lion

Establish an open hunting and trapping season for cougars in the Northern Region, Units 12, 19-21, 24, 25, 26B and 26C as follows:

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

Establish an open season for cougars in the Northern Region, Units 12, 19-21, 24, 25, 26B and 26C. Hunting season: No closed season

Trapping season: November 1 to April 30

You may not trap cougars with a steal trap or snare smaller than 3/32 inch in diameter during April Limit: No limit

Salvage Requirements: Skull and hide.

Sealing Requirements: Skull and hide will be presented for sealing within 10 days of kill.

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

Alaska's struggling ungulate population do not need new and potentially growing source of predation. Establishing seasons so that cougars can be legally taken would allow people to harvest cougars and provide valuable data to the ADF&G on the presence and distribution of cougars in the interior region.

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-F26-166)

Proposal 85

5 AAC 92.015(a)(4). Brown bear tag fee exemptions.

Reauthorize the resident brown bear tag fee exemptions for the Interior and Northeast Alaska (Region 3) as follows:

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

5AAC 92.015(a)(4). Brown bear tag fee exemptions.

Reauthorize the resident brown bear tag fee exemptions for the Interior and Northeast Alaska (Region 3) as follows:

(a) A resident tag is not required for taking a brown bear in the following units:

(4) Units 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26(B), and 26(C)

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

The Board of Game must annually reauthorize all resident brown bear tag fee exemptions. The Board of Game put resident brown bear tag fees in place statewide during the mid-1970s to discourage incidental harvest, elevate the status of brown bears to trophies, and to provide revenue. Today, populations in the aforementioned units are abundant, and brown bears continue to be highly regarded as trophies. Across the region, season dates and bag limits effectively regulate harvest in areas where interest is high.

Eliminating all resident brown bear tag fees throughout Region 3 simplifies regulations, increases resident hunter opportunity, and is not likely to cause declines in these brown bear populations. This reauthorization would assist with the department objective of managing Region 3 brown bear populations for hunter opportunity and would continue to allow hunters to take brown bears opportunistically. Reauthorizing these tag fee exemptions would allow residents who are unable to purchase the \$25 tag before hunting, due to lack of vendors or economic reasons, to legally harvest brown bears. During regulatory years 2014–2024, approximately 20% of brown bears harvested by resident hunters in Region 3 were taken incidentally to other activities, compared to 8% statewide.

Human-caused mortality of brown bears in most areas of Region 3 is quite low and is assumed to be less than 6% of the population, which is a rate that is sustainable under most ecological circumstances. Where harvests are elevated (i.e., Units 20A, 20B, 20D, and portions of 26B), brown bear populations are managed through changes in seasons and bag limits. The presence or absence of tag fees does not appear to have a significant influence on harvest in these areas.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

(HQ-F26-020)

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)

**Amendments may be required to remain consistent with statutory authority.*

Proposal 87

5 AAC 85.025. Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

Amend 5 AAC 85.025 to add a population-based closure for the Western Arctic Caribou Herd as follows:

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

Amend 5 AAC 85.025 to add a population-based closure for the Western Arctic Caribou Herd to read:

Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, when the Western Arctic Caribou Herd population has declined to 75,000 animals or fewer, the hunting season for caribou from the Western Arctic Herd shall be closed in Units 22, 23, 24B remainder, 24C, 24D, 26A. The season shall remain closed until the department determines that the population exceeds 100,000 animals and that a harvestable surplus exists.

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

The Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) was once the largest caribou herd in Alaska, but over the past two decades it has declined by nearly 70 percent. Without significant management intervention, the herd is expected to continue to decline. A July 2025 photo census estimated the herd at 121,000 caribou, representing an approximately 20 percent decrease since 2023.

At its annual meeting, the WACH Working Group assigned the herd a management status of “Critical, Declining,” based on the current population estimate of below 130,000 and an adult cow survival rate of less than 80 percent. Although specific management actions and harvest recommendations are associated with this status, the Working Group is proposing a hunting closure to reflect the severity of the continued population decline and support long-term recovery.

The Board of Game should establish a temporary closure of the hunting season for caribou from the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) in Units 22, 23, 24B remainder, 24C, 24D, 26A, if the herd population declines below 75,000. The season should remain closed until the WACH population exceeds 100,000.

Establishing a precautionary regulatory closure in response to the continued decline of the WACH would help prevent further reductions at critically low population levels and support the long-term sustainability of the herd.

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

This proposal was developed by the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group. The Working Group consists of Alaska Native subsistence users from communities within the range of the herd, other Alaskan hunters, guides, transporters, conservationists, and reindeer herders. Since its formation in 1997, the Working Group has submitted numerous advisory recommendations to government agencies, regulatory boards, and other bodies to support decisions that will ensure the long-term conservation of the WACH.

PROPOSED BY: Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group (OI-F26-119)

** Amendments may be required to remain consistent with statutory authority.*

Proposal 88

5 AAC 92.104. Authorization for methods and means disability exemptions.

Allow Crossbow Use in Archery-Only Hunts and Areas for Qualifying Purple Heart Veterans with Physical Challenges and Alaskan Seniors Age 62 or over as follows:

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

Amend **5 AAC 92.104 (Authorization for methods and means disability exemptions)** by adding a new subsection for automatic authorization, and make conforming changes to 5 AAC 92.085 and 5 AAC 92.530 as needed.

Proposed new language (to insert as subsection (f) or similar):

“(f) Notwithstanding other provisions of this chapter, the department shall issue a methods and means exemption authorizing the use of a crossbow in any hunt or area restricted to bow and arrow only—including the Dalton Highway Corridor Management Area under 5 AAC 92.530(7)—to an applicant who:

- (1) is an Alaska resident Purple Heart recipient and provides documentation of physical challenges (e.g., wheelchair confinement, prosthetics, or a VA-certified service-connected
- (2) disability that prevents effective use of a conventional bow); or is an Alaska resident 62 years of age or older;

and who possesses a valid ADF&G-approved crossbow education certification card. The exemption shall be issued upon one-time submission of proof of eligibility (Purple Heart/VA documentation for veterans; proof of age and residency for seniors) and shall remain valid for the life of the hunter (or five years, renewable). No physician statement is required for those meeting the above criteria. The crossbow must meet all requirements in 5 AAC 92.085(15). The department may include reasonable conditions for safety and fair chase.”

This applies **statewide**, explicitly including the DHCMA north of the Yukon River along the Trans-Alaska Pipeline corridor.

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

Current regulations prohibit crossbows in any hunt or area restricted to “bow and arrow only” (5 AAC 92.085). This includes premium archery-only hunts statewide and specific management areas such as:

- **The Dalton Highway Corridor Management Area (DHCMA)** (5 AAC 92.530(7)): Portions of Units 20 and 24–26 extending five miles from each side of the Dalton Highway (Trans-Alaska Pipeline corridor), from the Yukon River north to the Arctic Ocean. In this corridor, big game may be taken by bow and arrow only (firearms are prohibited for big game hunting within the corridor).

While disabled hunters can seek individual **Methods and Means Disability Exemptions** (5 AAC 92.104), the process is burdensome for recurring use. Purple Heart veterans confined to wheelchairs, using prosthetics, or with other service-related physical challenges often cannot effectively draw or hold a conventional bow. Alaskan seniors age 62+ face similar age-related limitations but are not automatically eligible.

These restrictions limit access for deserving Alaskans in archery-only opportunities statewide **and specifically exclude them from the DHCMA north of the Yukon River**—a unique, remote area along the pipeline corridor that offers important hunting access via the Dalton Highway. Opening

this corridor (and all archery areas) to qualifying crossbow users honors veterans' service, supports senior participation, promotes hunter retention, and maintains fair chase and conservation goals without affecting bag limits, seasons, or wildlife populations.

Why is this proposal necessary? (Rationale and benefits)

- **Equity and access:** Provides meaningful opportunity for Purple Heart veterans and seniors in archery-only hunts **and the DHCMA**, where conventional bow use may be physically impossible.
- **Targeted and limited impact:** Only a small number of qualifying hunters; crossbows must still meet strict standards (100 lb draw, etc.) and certification requirements. No change to seasons, bag limits, or overall harvest.
- **Administrative efficiency:** One-time approval vs. repeated per-hunt exemptions.
- **Precedent and fairness:** Builds on existing disabled veteran free licenses and senior programs. The DHCMA was established for access and wildlife protection—allowing crossbows for these groups aligns with that intent while removing unnecessary barriers.
- **Other solutions considered:** None. The current exemption process is too cumbersome for statewide and corridor use by clearly defined groups.

Supporting information (attach if desired):

- Your Purple Heart documentation or personal story.
- Letters from veterans' groups, senior organizations, or local Advisory Committees.
- Current ADF&G crossbow and exemption forms.

This updated proposal ensures Purple Heart veterans with physical challenges and seniors 62+ can hunt ethically with crossbows in archery-only areas **throughout Alaska, including the important Dalton Highway/Trans-Alaska Pipeline corridor north of the Yukon River.**

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

PROPOSED BY: Daniel McDowell, The Last Frontiersman

(OI-F26-027)
