

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

**REVISED** STAFF COMMENTS

ARCTIC AND WESTERN REGION REGULATORY **PROPOSAL 19**

ALASKA BOARD OF GAME MEETING  
KOTZEBUE, ALASKA

JANUARY 10-13, 2014



The following staff comments were prepared by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game for use at the Alaska Board of Game meeting, January 10-13, 2014 in Kotzebue, Alaska, and are prepared to assist the public and board. The stated staff comments should be considered preliminary and subject to change, if or when new information becomes available. Final department positions will be formulated after review of written and oral testimony presented to the board.

**PROPOSAL 19 - 5 AAC 85.057. Hunting seasons and bag limits for wolverine.** *Note: In the proposal book this proposal is listed under: 5 AAC 85.060 Hunting seasons and bag limits for fur animals.*

**PROPOSED BY:** Virgil Umphenour.

**WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO?** This proposal would extend the wolverine hunting season in Unit 22 by adding 30 days in April. The new season would be Sept. 1-Apr. 30.

**WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?** The current wolverine regulations are:

<u>Units and Bag Limits</u>	<u>Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)</u>	<u>Nonresident Open Season</u>
Units 6 - 10, 12, 15, 16(B), 17, and 19 – 26		
1 wolverine	Sept. 1 - Mar. 31 (General hunt only)	Sept. 1 - Mar. 31

**WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED?** If adopted, this proposal would lengthen the Unit 22 wolverine hunting season 30 days by extending the season to April 30. The season dates in April overlap with the denning period for female wolverines. In years with good snow conditions, denning areas may be easily reached by snowmachine, potentially allowing increased disturbance or take of denning females. The susceptibility of wolverines, both male and female, to harvest during the denning period combined with an increase in hunting opportunity will likely result in a higher annual reported harvest of wolverines in Unit 22.

If adopted, this proposal would extend the ending date for the hunting season later than the ending date for the trapping season, which is currently April 15, and would result in the latest ending date for wolverine hunting in the state.

**BACKGROUND:** Based on hunter/trapper harvests, miscellaneous observations, and trapper questionnaires, wolverines are considered common, with stable populations throughout Unit 22. Since the department does not have population numbers or abundance estimates, it uses harvest information to assess population status. Increased hunter harvest would be considered additive to natural mortality and its impact on the Unit 22 population could be significant if females with dependent young are taken at high rates.

Wolverine harvests in Unit 22 are primarily the result of trapper effort and opportunistic harvest by hunters. Reporting is achieved through the completion of fur sealing certificates, although household surveys have documented additional take of wolverine resulting from local harvest patterns and home tanning practices or uses of pelts.

During RY2003–RY2012, the total reported harvest from Unit 22 was 391 wolverines, with an average annual reported harvest of 39. Sex of the reported harvest was 61% male, 32% female, and 7% unknown sex. Method of take in the reported harvest was 65% by trapping or snares, 30% by shooting; and 5% by unknown harvest methods. On average, 12 wolverines per year are harvested by ground shooting. Since ground-shooting can be reported by trappers, only a portion of the harvest by “shooting” is attributable to hunter harvest.

Wolverine have a low reproductive output: female wolverines do not reach sexual maturity until 1.5 years of age, and then produce their first litter at 2 years of age. Most litter sizes are 2-3 kits, although litters can range from 1-5 kits. Average life expectancy is 4-5 years but some animals have been documented reaching 13 years of age. Depending on the diversity and abundance of food or prey, wolverines may not produce their first litter at age 2, or they may skip years between litters.

The denning period for wolverines begins with the birth of kits in February and early March and extends until late May. Hunting during this time may negatively affect wolverine populations. Reproductive females are vulnerable to harvest during the denning period because they travel extensively to obtain food while attempting to meet the energetic demands of lactation. Harvesting reproductive females during the denning period can negatively affect recruitment. High rates of disturbance during the denning period may also lead to increased mortality of kits. When den sites are disturbed females often relocate kits to a secondary site or abandon their dens.

Hunting in April would likely increase the annual harvest of wolverines due to: 1) a pattern of increased use of snowmachines for recreation and hunting in April, 2) increased opportunistic harvest while hunting other big game species, and 3) increased access to potential wolverine denning areas via snowmachines, especially in years with good snow conditions for spring travel. This increased opportunity coincides with wolverine vulnerability to harvest during late winter as they seasonally increase their daily movements, particularly reproductive females supporting kits in dens.

**DEPARTMENT COMMENTS:** The department is **OPPOSED** to this proposal. Lengthening of the wolverine hunting season to April 30 will likely increase harvest, including potential take and disturbance to denning females. This should be avoided to protect the species at vulnerable times in their life-cycle. Without reliable population estimates or better estimates of future harvests, the department recommends no changes to the wolverine hunting season.

**REVISED DEPARTMENT COMMENTS:** The department is **NEUTRAL** on this proposal. Although the hunter harvest is anticipated to be low, we do have concerns with the potential disturbance and take of wolverine during the denning period which is a vulnerable time in their life-cycle.

**COST ANALYSIS:** Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to private parties. Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.

CO Re  
SUBS no  
DWC all