

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

**REVISED** STAFF COMMENTS

ARCTIC AND WESTERN REGION REGULATORY **PROPOSAL 18**

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 18 – 5 AAC 85.056. Hunting seasons and bag limits for wolf.** *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 extends the wolf hunting season in Unit 22 by 31 days. The new season would be Aug. 1- May 31.

**WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?** The regulations in Unit 22 are:

5 AAC 85.056. Hunting seasons and bag limits for wolf.

<u>Units and Bag Limits</u>	<u>Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)</u>	<u>Nonresident Open Season</u>
Units 22 and 23	Aug. 1 - Apr. 30	Aug. 1 - Apr. 30

**WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED?** Wolf hunting would be extended an additional 31 days in the spring.

**BACKGROUND:** The department does not have a Unit 22 wolf population estimate. However, anecdotal reports from the public and big game aerial surveys suggest wolf numbers have increased during recent years and wolves are now seen in all areas of the Seward Peninsula, including the Nome road system.

Wolf harvests in Unit 22 are primarily the result of trapper effort and opportunistic harvest by hunters. Hunters take wolves while they are in pursuit of other big game or while recreating. Reporting is achieved through the completion of fur sealing certificates, although household surveys have documented additional take of wolves resulting from local harvest patterns and home tanning practices or uses of pelts.

Sealing certificates from RY1995-RY2012 show 82% (n=575) of the wolves are taken by firearm, 10% (n=70) by trapping, and 8% (n=58) by other or unknown methods. Since ground-shooting can be reported by trappers, only a portion of the harvest by “firearm” is attributable to hunter harvest. Data indicate 68% (n=475) of the reported wolf harvest is between February through April. March has the highest harvest (n=204) likely because of longer daylight hours and favorable snow travel conditions that make it easier to hunt.

Extending the hunting season into May will overlap with the reproductive period of wolves. Females attend to pups in dens in May. Maternal females are probably not as vulnerable to hunting because they are closely tied to dens, but they are dependent on pack members to provide food for them and their pups. These factors suggest that harvests of pack members or denning females will likely impact pup survival. Additionally, most wolves spend substantial time near dens in May making them vulnerable to harvest if dens are discovered by hunters. Extended seasons are not recommended because the department anticipates that hunting in May will result in higher harvests and an increased likelihood of orphaned pups. Most wolf hunting seasons statewide, outside of areas with intensive management programs, end on April 30 due to increased vulnerability during the denning period.

**DEPARTMENT COMMENTS:** The department is **OPPOSED** to extending the wolf hunting season from April 30 to May 31 in Unit 22. Potential take of wolves during the denning period should be avoided to protect the species at vulnerable times in their life-cycle.

**REVISED DEPARTMENT COMMENTS:** The department is **NEUTRAL** on this proposal. Based on experience in other areas, this additional opportunity will be sustainable.

**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.

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