

PROPOSAL 156

5 AAC 85.045(a)(3). Hunting seasons and bag limits for moose.

Reauthorize the antlerless moose hunt in Unit 5A, Nunatak Bench as follows.

| Units and Bag Limits | Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts) | Nonresident Open Season |
|---|---|------------------------------------|
| (3) | | |
| Unit 5(A), that portion south of Wrangell - Saint Elias National Park, north and east of Russell and Nunatak Fjords, and east of the east side of East Nunatak Glacier to the Canadian Border (Nunatak Bench) | Nov. 15 - Feb. 15 | Nov. 15 - Feb. 15 |
| 1 moose by registration permit only; up to 5 moose may be taken | | |

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What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The Nunatak Bench (Unit 5A) hunt area is managed as a separate population because it is generally isolated from other moose populations by fjords and glaciers. The area is subject to severe winters and has low capability to support moose relative to other moose habitat in Unit 5A. The purposes of this hunt are to provide opportunity as the population allows and to maintain the number of moose within a level the limited habitat can support. This hunt opens after other moose hunts in the unit have closed, and it is a popular alternative for hunters who were unsuccessful during those hunts. Because much of the open season for this hunt takes place after bulls have dropped their antlers, either sex may be harvested.

The Nunatak Bench strategic moose management plan calls for a post-hunt population of no more than 50 moose. During an aerial survey in 2001 52 moose were seen. From 2005 through 2012 only 11 – 14 moose with one or two calves were seen during surveys. The decline in moose numbers following the 2001 survey may be related to the 68-foot rise of Russel Fiord flooding and damaging habitat when it was blocked by the surging Hubbard Glacier during 2003. Due to poor weather and the remoteness of the location this area was not surveyed again until December 2015 when a total of 14 moose (three bulls, two cows, three calves, and six unknown) were seen. A

series of severe winters from 2006 through 2012 may have inhibited recovery of the population. Anecdotal reports from hunters indicate that wolves in the area may also be inhibiting recovery of this small population. Once again we were not able to survey this area during the 2018-19 winter due to poor survey conditions throughout the winter.

From 1997 through 2004 an average of 12 either sex permits were issued annually with an average of 4 people hunting each year. During that period a total of 15 moose (nine bulls, six cows) were harvested for an average of about two moose per year. No permits have been issued and no moose have been harvested in this area since 2004.

The Department of Fish and Game (department) believes it is important to retain the ability to implement an antlerless hunt in this area to prevent habitat damage should the population increase. The department will continue to monitor this population as conditions allow, but we do not plan to issue hunt permits until the population reaches at least 25 moose.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F19-163)
