

PROPOSAL 219

5AAC 92.121. Intensive Management Plan V.

Modify the Unit 13 predation control program as follows:

5 AAC 92.121. Intensive Management Plan V (b) is amended as follows:

(b) **Unit 13 Predation Control Area**. the Unit 13 Predation Control Area is established and consists of all lands within Units 13(A), 13(B), 13(C), **13(D)**, and that portion of Unit 13(E) east of the Alaska Railroad, except National Park Service and other federal lands where same-day-airborne take of wildlife is not allowed, encompassing approximately **21,066** [15,413] square miles;

(1) This is a continuing control program that was first authorized by the board in 2000 for wolf control; it is currently designed to increase moose numbers and harvest by reducing predation on moose by wolves, **thereby improving recruitment rates**, and is expected to make a contribution to achieving the intensive management (IM) objectives in Unit 13;

(2) Moose and wolf objectives are as follows:

(A) Moose IM objectives for Units 13(A), 13(B), 13(C), **13(D)**, and 13(E) as established in 5 AAC 92.108 are 3,500–4,200, 5,300–6,300, 2,000–3,000, **1,200–1,900**, and 5,000–6,000 moose respectively; [THESE OBJECTIVES ARE BELOW THE MAXIMUM MOOSE NUMBERS ESTIMATED IN THESE AREAS BETWEEN 1987 AND 1989 AND ARE LIKELY ATTAINABLE GIVEN THE HISTORY OF PRODUCTIVITY AND SURVIVAL PATTERNS IN THIS AREA; THE BULL-TO-COW OBJECTIVE IS 25:100 FOR UNIT 13;]

(B) The moose harvest objectives for Units 13(A), 13(B), 13(C), **13(D)**, and 13(E) as established in 5 AAC 92.108 are 210–420, 310–620, 155–350, **75–190**, and 300 - 600 moose respectively; [WITH THE HARVEST OF BULLS AND COWS, THE CURRENT HARVEST OBJECTIVES CAN BE MET IN UNIT 13(A) AND ARE LIKELY ATTAINABLE IN UNITS 13(B) GIVEN THE HISTORY OF HARVEST PATTERNS IN THIS AREAS; THE HARVEST OBJECTIVES FOR UNIT 13(E) MAY NOT BE ATTAINABLE AND WILL BE RE-EVALUATED;]

(C) The department adopted 135–165 wolves as the late winter **minimum** abundance [OBJECTIVE] **for Unit 13**. Maintaining this **minimum** population size will allow for sustained yield of wolves and will ensure that wolves persist in the control area;

(3) Board findings concerning populations and human use are as follows:

(A) Moose harvest has been consistently below IM objectives in Units 13(B), 13(C), and 13(E);

(B) predation by wolves is an important cause of the failure to achieve population and harvest objectives;

(C) a reduction in wolf predation in Unit 13 can reasonably be expected to make progress toward achieving the Unit 13(A), 13(B), 13(C), **13(D)**, and 13(E) IM objectives for moose;

(D) reducing predation is likely to be effective and feasible using recognized and prudent active management techniques and based on scientific information;

(F) reducing predation is likely to be effective given land ownership patterns, and

(F) reducing predation is in the best interest of subsistence users; Unit 13 has long been an important subsistence hunting area for local area residents and much of the state's population in Anchorage, the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, as well as Fairbanks and other communities around the state; it is recognized under the state's intensive management law as an area where moose are to be managed for high levels of human consumptive use.

(4) Authorized methods and means are as follows:

(A) hunting and trapping of wolves by the public in the Unit 13 Predation Control Area during the term of the program will occur as provided in the hunting and trapping regulations set out elsewhere in this title, including the use of motorized vehicles;

(B) notwithstanding any other provisions in this title, the commissioner may issue public aerial permits or public land and shoot permits as a method for wolf removal under AS 16.05.783;

(5) Time frame is as follows:

(A) through **July 1, 2031** [JULY 1, 2027], the commissioner may authorize the removal of wolves in the Unit 13 Predation Control Area;

(B) annually, the department shall, to the extent practicable, provide to the board a report of program activities conducted during the preceding 12 months, including implementation activities, the status of moose and wolf populations, and recommendations for changes, if necessary, to achieve the objectives of the plan;

(6) The commissioner will review, modify or suspend program activities as follows:

(A) when the mid-point of the IM population and harvest objectives for the moose population are achieved;

(B) when wolf inventories or accumulated information from permittees indicate the need to avoid reducing wolf numbers below the management objective of 135 wolves specified in this subsection;

(C) if after 3 years, the harvest of wolves is not sufficient to make progress towards the intensive management population objectives for wolves;

(D) predation control activities may be suspended:

- (i) if after 3 years, there is no detectable increase in the total number of moose in the control area;
- (ii) if after three years, any measure **such as estimates of rump fat, short-yearling mass, and twining rates,** consistent with significant levels of nutritional stress in the moose population are identified;
- (iii) when the moose population and harvest objectives within Unit 13 predation control area have been met.

(c) Habitat Enhancement. The department may plan and execute habitat enhancement projects in areas identified for improvement based on evidence at the landscape or population level through prescribed burns, wildfire, or mechanical means to increase the potential carrying capacity across the range in Unit 13.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Unit 13D was excluded from the original Unit 13 Predation Control Area to provide a refugia for wolves and ensure that wolves remained to contribute to repopulation into adjacent subunits. Since the inception of the Unit 13 predation control program, moose abundance in all other subunits has rebounded except for Unit 13D which has a declining moose population that would benefit from wolf reduction before the population reaches a low-density-dynamic-equilibrium mediated by predation. As the Unit 13 Predation Control Area continues to be used as an effective adaptive management tool it may be necessary to keep some subunits closed to aerial wolf removal due to high moose abundance in those areas. This may require that more than 165 wolves remain in Unit 13 in some years. To provide for maximum effectiveness and adaptive application, the minimum of 135 wolves in the spring should remain in the plan, but a maximum number of wolves annually is no longer necessary. In addition, in areas where moose abundance has increased but antlerless hunts are not available to adjust population trajectory and bull:cow ratios or take advantage of increased harvest opportunities; aerial wolf removal should be suspended until such time as the moose population is reduced below the midpoint of the objective.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F21-042)
