

Note: Emperor geese harvest regulations apply to Units 9, 10 and 17 for the Central/Southwest Region; 18, 22 and 23 for the Western Arctic/Western Region; and Unit 8 for the Southcentral Region. The Board of Game is scheduled to address only the Central/Southwest Region units at this meeting.

PROPOSAL 33

5 AAC 85.065. Hunting seasons and bag limits for small game.

Allocate 50% of the permits for harvesting Emperor geese in Units 9, 10, and 17 to nonresidents as follows:

We propose that 50% of all allotted Emperor goose permits go to nonresident hunters. This would be 500 nonresident permits when Emperor goose counts are high enough for regular seasons. If counts dipped to restrictive seasons, then the nonresident quota would drop to 250 permits. This should result in no Alaska residents being left out, since Alaska residents have shown decreased interest in this hunt and their total harvest in 2019 was 122 Emperors statewide.

We propose continuing the current drawing process for nonresidents as it generates income for ADF&G. The current process allows for a nonresident with an Alaska hunting license to apply up to six times (\$5 per try up to \$30) to be drawn for a nonresident Emperor permit. We believe that by having individuals spend \$60 on a nonresident small game license and an additional \$30 on the drawing it will keep individuals out of the drawing that really have no interest or financial capacity to travel to Alaska.

Proposed breakdown of available permits:

Regular season:

AK Residents: 500 permits // nonresidents: 500 permits

Restrictive season:

AK Residents: 250 permits // nonresidents: 250 permits

NOTE: Alaska resident sport harvest was less than 129 birds each year from 2017-2019 with lower harvest reported each consecutive year.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The recovery of the Emperor goose is a success story in modern wildlife management. The Alaska population of this goose crashed in the mid-1980's, prompting a hunting closure that lasted thirty years. The three-year estimated population average from 2014 to 2016 rose above the population threshold set in 2016 by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to reestablish a hunting season for Emperor Geese in Alaska. USFWS oversees migratory bird management and develops frameworks for states to set harvest regulations to establish hunting seasons, rules, and limits. Given the potentially fragile nature of the population's recovery, USFWS rightfully set a conservative 1,000 bird quota for a sport hunting season starting in fall 2017, on a trial basis, to be reevaluated after three years.

The State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and the Alaska Board of Game established a resident sport hunting season for fall/winter 2017 with seven zones, each zone having its own quota. The total of these zones equaled the 1,000 bird quota under regular USFWS harvest quotas based off of the population index. The total quota would be reduced to 500 if the previous

year's population index fell within the moderate harvest prescription. A game management unit (GMU) will close after shooting hours on the last day of the season, or by Emergency Order when the GMU quota is met. The Emperor Goose hunt was set up as a registration hunt and the limit has been one bird per person per season for the entire state. Also established in 2017 was an application for nonresidents to apply for a drawing to hunt Emperors during the fall/winter 2018 season. In 2017, all of the 1,000 bird quota was allotted to Alaska residents; for fall/winter 2018 and 2019 seasons, the number allotted to non-residents was 25 of the total 1,000 quota.

Statewide, harvest for fall and winter sport-hunted Emperor geese was 129 for 2017 (Alaska residents only), 150 for 2018, and 147 for 2019. For 2018 and 2019, those numbers are a sum of the resident and nonresident sport harvested Emperor geese. Sport hunters have only harvested 12.9% to 15% of the allocated quota over the three years of sport hunting. Harvest has declined steadily over these first three years as interest from Alaska residents appears to be on the decline. Alaska resident harvest was: 129 (2017), 125 (2018), 122 (2019).

There is no evidence to support any expectation resident sport harvest of Emperor geese will increase. Alaska has only 6,500 licensed waterfowl hunters in the entire state. Current estimates put the number of active waterfowl hunters in the lower 48 states at about 1.2 million.

The number of annual Emperor permits available to Alaskan resident waterfowl hunters (975) vs nonresidents (25) is drastically different from actual demand and interest in hunting Emperor geese. Roughly 400 nonresidents applied in November 2019 for the 25 nonresident permits for the 2020 fall/winter Emperor hunt. We believe the number of interested non-resident hunters is much higher, but many do not apply due to the poor odds of being drawn. Because Emperor goose hunting was closed for thirty years, most active nonresident hunters have never had the opportunity to hunt them. If the current regulations stay in effect, most non-resident hunters will never get an opportunity to hunt this migratory species.

We understand that the ADF&G were rightfully cautious when restarting the Emperor goose hunt for a three-year trial. We have learned that most Alaskan hunters are simply not that interested in hunting Emperors and that the demand for this species is largely from non-resident hunters. These nonresidents would be extremely grateful to harvest just one Emperor goose in their life and would spend a large sum to accomplish this. Emperors' habitat borders rural communities that could put vital tourism dollars to good use to support their local economies. Larger municipalities' airports, hotels, restaurants, taxis, retail stores, and more would also see increased business from September through January as non-residents would spend time in Anchorage and elsewhere before and after their hunts in rural communities.

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