

Tom O'Connor

Oral Comments for Nushagak AC

2015 Central/Southwest BOG

Hello Board Members My Name is Tom O'Connor. I hold one of the Dillingham seats on the Nushagak AC. I have been appointed by our Chairman Frank Woods to represent the AC at this meeting, as he won't be able to attend until Sunday due to a conflicting obligation. Our AC comments are listed under **AC 009**.

I'd like to start by saying that we took no action on proposals that we perceived as having no impact on our area.

The first proposal that I would like to comment on is **proposal 47, to extend the caribou season in unit 17 to March 31st**. This is a proposal that our AC authored. We were encouraged by our Nushagak River Village AC Members to come up with a proposal that would get them some extra hunting time for Caribou in the spring, particularly on years of very low harvest. They say the Caribou are closer to the villages in later March, and travel conditions often improve in late March as well. We talked it over with our then conservation biologist Jim Woolington. It was his suggestion to request a change in the codified regulation from the end date of March 15th, to a new end date of March 31st. He suggested we change only the Codified regulation, and leave the published regulation as is with the closed date of March 15th. With the Codified end date set for March 31st. He then could extend the hunt by emergency order. This would remove the requirement for a season extension request which is a slow and involved process. We have since been encouraged to amend our proposal by our new Wildlife Biologist Neil Barton. He thought it better to request a change in both the codified and the published regulation, so the season would just plain be open until March 31st. He would then use his EO authority to close the season early if a reasonable level of harvest had been achieved, and the potential for an over harvest situation seemed likely. In short, it would give the area biologist the ability to manage the hunt with a little more flexibility.

The next proposal we considered is **Proposal 48 to extend the resident Caribou season in Units 9B and 17B**. We unanimously support this proposal with the amended closure date of March 31st, to align it with the proposed closure date for unit 17, and the end of the month.

Proposal 49 to extend the winter moose season by one month in Unit 17A, restrict the taking of males to antlered bulls, and reauthorize the antlerless hunt. We support this proposal unanimously and think it is a good balance of conservation, and opportunity.

Proposal 50, to change the locations for obtaining nonresident moose registration permits for hunting in Unit 17. The Nushagak AC is unanimously opposed to this proposal. We think permit outlets should remain as they are now in the regional ADF&G office for the GMU, where hunters can get correct and timely answers to their questions.

Proposal 51, to extend the season dates for the winter moose in Units 17B and 17C, with options for early closures. This is another proposal we authored. The issue is that we had a very low winter moose harvest last year with only 18 moose taken in Unit 17 B & C. The main reason for this was thought to be terrible travel conditions during the season, which has happened several times in recent years. As with proposal 47 we sought to gain flexibility by changing the close date for the winter moose season in 17 B & C. Once again we were advised by our Biologist, Jim Woolington, that we might request a change in the Codified regulation. So, we proposed to change the winter moose season close date in codified regulation to end on January 31st in sub units 17 B & C. The idea as with our caribou proposal was to change it in the codified regulation and leave it as it was in the published regulation as is with a closed date of December 31st. This would have given our biologist the ability to open extended hunting days by emergency order up to January 31st, eliminating the need for him to go through the season extension request procedure. This would give him a timely means for extending the season if conditions were such that he thought it was warranted. Once again we were encouraged to amend our proposal by our new biologist Neil Barton. He suggested we amend both the Codified and the Published regulation to remain open until January 31st. He would then close the season by Emergency Order when he had reached a reasonable level of harvest, and the potential for an over harvest situation seemed likely. Again, it would give the area biologist the ability to manage the hunt with a little more flexibility.

Proposal 52 to adjust the nonresident closed area in Togiak National Wildlife Refuge in Unit 17A, and extend the season. The Nushagak AC unanimously opposes this proposal. We like the moose management plan for 17A. We want to recognize the amount of effort that went into the development of this plan, and don't want to make changes so soon.

Proposal 53, to allow the use of bait and lures along rivers for taking brown bear in Unit 17. The Nushagak AC is unanimously opposed to this proposal which would allow a moose carcass to be moved, and set up as bait for Brown Bear. We think this is unnecessary, and are concerned that it will open up the possibility of a carcass being invented in some way. In general we are opposed to the baiting of brown bears in Unit 17.

Proposal 54 to allow the sale of brown bear hides and skulls in unit 17 by resident hunters. The Nushagak AC authored this proposal. The issue is that we have lots of bears along the area's rivers. They are competing with village residents for the areas moose and caribou. They are also causing a lot of property damage as well as other safety concerns. In the past we have attempted to remedy this by increasing bag limits and eliminating tagging requirements. There is just one big problem with these strategies. The problem is this; what does a local resident hunter do with a dead brown bear? Most residents have no desire or resources to take one brown bear as a trophy, not to mention more than one bear. The average resident doesn't care to have a brown bear rug, or have any space or money for one. Even if they wait to deal with a bear until the moment they feel that they have to kill it to protect their property there is NOTHING to do with it after it is dead. We feel this should be changed. We think that allowing resident hunters the ability to sell bear hides and skulls would go a long way towards fixing this problem. We think one potential solution would be to allow hunters to sell their hides at the annual fur auction. Please try to put yourselves in the shoes of the village residents. What do I do with this dead bear?

Proposal 55, to remove the bag limit and salvage requirements for harvesting beaver with a fire arm during the trapping season in unit 17, and allow the harvest with bow and arrow. The Nushagak AC authored this proposal because there are lots of beaver, and low harvest numbers in Unit 17. We also wanted to remove the mandate for human consumption of shot beaver. We added a bow hunting provision for those who prefer it, or have lost the right to use a firearm. This proposal brought the beaver trappers out of the woodwork, so after much discussion we amended the proposal, changing the start date to December 1st, and the end date to April 14th. We also made sure to clearly state that hides must be sealed. We support the amended proposal 9-1.

Proposal 57 Modify the trapping season dates and bag limit for beaver in Unit 17, and prohibit the taking of beaver with firearm. This proposal was a tough one for us, it was proposed by one of our AC Members, Chris Car, who lives at Portage Creek on the lower main stem of the Nushagak River. Chris was reporting a significant drop in the beaver population on the river in that area. We in general agreed that there seemed to be a lot less beaver on the Nushagak River. Some contribute it to flooding, or possible disease, and others to skiff trapping. The reason we opposed this proposal is because there are oodles of beaver everywhere else in the unit, in particular there are swamp beaver on every pond across the area. Ultimately we voted 8-2 not to support this proposal in light of our beaver slayer proposal #55 which we had authored and voted to support with a 9-1 vote.

Proposal 125 Hunting Season and Bag Limits For Moose. One of the reason we opposed this proposal is that 7 days after the general season moose are well into the rut. We question the sensibility of perusing moose without a fire arm backup, and the legality of perusing one with one. What would come first in the case of a charging bull? Would it be the backup bullet, or the arrow? What would be the consequences if the bullet came first? What's to stop someone from shooting first and sticking later? We think it's a bad idea to open this can of worms.

Proposal 126 To Reauthorize the bear tag exemption. The Nushagak AC Unanimously supported this proposal.

Proposal 130 Allow same day airborne hunting of wolves and Coyotes. It was a mixed bag for us, and we voted 6-4 to support this.

Proposal 133, to remover the Felt Sole wader restriction. The Nushagak AC was unanimously opposed to this.

Proposal 134, to require certification for big game hunters using crossbows. The Nushagak AC is unanimously opposed. One concern is how people from the rural villages would get certified. Some residents of Unit 17 with Felony convictions use crossbows because they are restricted from using firearms.

Proposal 135, to add five days to all resident hunting seasons and allocate 75% of the drawing permits to residents for the Central/Southwest region. The Nushagak AC is opposed to lengthening the fall moose hunting season. Our fall seasons have been carefully set because of the rut.

Thanks
Tom