

ACR 13 – Decrease the IM moose population and harvest objectives in Unit 20A.

SUBMITTED BY: Alaska Department of Fish & Game

MEETING ACR SUBMITTED FOR: 2016 Statewide Regulations

CITE THE REGULATION THAT WILL BE CHANGED IF THIS ACR IS HEARD.

92.108(a)(18). Identified big game prey populations and objectives.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM YOU WOULD LIKE THE BOARD TO ADDRESS? STATE IN DETAIL THE NATURE OF THE CURRENT PROBLEM. At the February 2015 Board of Game (board) meeting in Wasilla, the board requested an updated Unit 20A Feasibility Assessment in 2016 and recommended that the Intensive Management (IM) population and harvest objectives for moose in Unit 20A be revisited at that time. The current IM population and harvest objectives are 12,000–15,000 and 900–1,100 moose, respectively.

WHAT SOLUTION DO YOU PREFER? We recommend the IM population objective in Unit 20A revert to 10,000–12,000 moose, the population objective prior to 2012.

The number of moose in Unit 20A was estimated at 17,768 ($\pm 13\%$ @ 90% Confidence Interval [CI]) in 2003. Research indicated this high-density moose population was experiencing density-dependent effects, including low productivity, relatively light calf weights, and high removal rates of winter forage. Beginning in regulatory year 2004–2005 (RY04), our objective was to reduce moose numbers to the population objective of 10,000–12,000 and stabilize the population at that level, unless indicators of moose condition showed signs of improvement at higher densities. The Unit 20A population was estimated at 12,193 ($\pm 13\%$ @ 90% CI) moose in 2012. However, at that lower population level we did not detect any improvements in the nutritional status of the moose population based on annual twinning rates.

In 2013, the Unit 20A population was estimated at 10,156 ($\pm 11\%$ @ 90% CI) moose, although we speculate that that estimate may have been biased low due to poor sightability. Unfortunately, we were unable to conduct a population estimate in 2014 due to the lack of sufficient snow. At this lower population level, we have detected only minor improvements in the nutritional status of the moose population (i.e., 5%–6% increases in 10-month old body mass). If nutritional status does not show further improvement, the department proposes to stabilize the population at 10,000–12,000 moose, while continuing to monitor nutritional status. Overall, our goal is to sustain the health and habitat of the moose population over the long term.

We also recommend lowering the harvest objective from 900–1,100 moose (~9% harvest rate) to 500–720 moose (5%–6% harvest rate). We observed a population decline during 2004–2008 with reported harvest rates of approximately 6%–7% of the population and predict population stability at reported harvest rates of 4%–6% (harvest rates of males at 4–5% and of females at

<2%). Additionally, during RY04–RY08 when reported harvests were roughly 900-1,100 moose annually, complaints from the public indicated that social thresholds may have been exceeded.

STATE IN DETAIL HOW THIS ACR MEETS THE CRITERIA STATED ABOVE.

a) for a conservation purpose or reason: At the February 2015 board meeting in Wasilla, the board requested that the IM population and harvest objectives for moose in Unit 20A be revisited in 2016. In 2012, the board increased the IM population objective from 10,000-12,000 to 12,000-15,000 based on a proposal submitted by the Fairbanks AC with support by the department as part of a compromise to continue antlerless moose hunts in Unit 20A at that time. Population, productivity and nutritional information indicate that 10,000-12,000 or a density of 2.0-2.5 moose per square mile is more in line with what the habitat can support at this time. Regarding the IM harvest objective, a harvest of 900-1,000 moose annually is not sustainable at current population levels and would require a large population increase, which is not recommended based on habitat concerns, in order to be sustainable.

b) to correct an error in regulation: N/A

c) to correct an effect on a hunt that was unforeseen when a regulation was adopted: N/A

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF THIS PROBLEM IS NOT SOLVED PRIOR TO THE REGULAR CYCLE? The board will be forced to consider implementing an IM plan that includes predator control.

STATE WHY YOUR ACR IS NOT PREDOMINANTLY ALLOCATIVE. Nutritional status and density of this moose population indicate that this is a biological issue, as stated in 3 and 4, above.

IF THIS REQUEST IS ALLOCATIVE, STATE THE NEW INFORMATION THAT COMPELS THE BOARD TO CONSIDER AN ALLOCATIVE PROPOSAL OUTSIDE OF THE REGULAR CYCLE. N/A

STATE YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE ISSUE THAT IS THE SUBJECT OF THIS ACR. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, hunt manager.

STATE WHETHER THIS ACR HAS BEEN CONSIDERED BEFORE, EITHER AS A PROPOSAL OR AS AN ACR, AND IF SO, DURING WHICH BOARD OF GAME MEETING. The proposed regulation has not been considered by the board previously.