

PROPOSAL 20

5 AAC 85.030. Hunting seasons and bag limit for deer.

Change the bag limit for deer on Douglas Island in Unit 1C as follows:

Units and bag limits	Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Nonresident Open Season
(1)		
Unit 1 (C), that portion including [DOUGLAS,] Lincoln, Shelter, and Sullivan Islands	Aug. 1—Dec. 31	Aug. 1—Dec. 31
4 deer; however, only bucks may be taken before Sept. 15		
<u>Unit 1(C), Douglas Island</u>	<u>Aug. 1—Dec. 31</u>	<u>Aug. 1—Dec. 31</u>

4 deer total, only one of which may be a doe, and only bucks may be taken before Sept. 15

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Douglas Island offers the greatest road-accessible opportunity to hunt deer in the Juneau area and harvest from the island usually accounts for over 70% of deer harvested in Unit 1C. In recent years, hunters have expressed concern over the return of wolves to Douglas Island and a perceived increase in effort required to harvest deer. During regulatory years (RY) 2012–2016, deer harvest on Douglas Island ranged from 192 to 272 and averaged 245 deer per year, slightly below the ten-year average of 258 (RY2007–2016). Hunter success ranged from a low of 21% in 2014 to a high of 30% in 2015 with an average of 26%, which was similar to the ten-year average of 27%. The days of hunting effort required to harvest a deer ranged from 6.8 days in RY2015 to 10.7 days in 2014 (average 8.7 day).

Following a decade of absence or use by only individual wolves, a breeding pack is thought to have occupied the Douglas Island in 2013. At about 77 square miles Douglas Island is smaller than wolf pack territories documented elsewhere in Southeast Alaska (average. ~125 square miles), suggesting that Douglas Island is part of a pack territory and that pack members likely move between the island and mainland. The number of wolves using Douglas Island is unknown. During RY2016, the Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) closed the wolf hunting and trapping seasons on Douglas Island following harvest of three wolves in accordance with the Douglas Island Management Area (5 AAC 92.530(23)). Despite considerable effort, during the RY2017 hunting and trapping seasons only one wolf has been harvested on Douglas Island.

In addition to harvest statistics, ADF&G monitors the Douglas Island deer population using annual spring pellet group surveys. Because pellet survey results can be influenced by snow fall patterns, pellet persistence, deer distribution, and timing of leaf-out, they are only considered reliable indicators of substantial ($\geq 30\%$) changes in the population. Deer pellet group counts on Douglas Island have been below the ten-year average since 2013. From RY2008–2017, pellet group counts averaged 1.37 groups/plot on the north side of Douglas Island and 1.59 groups/plot on the west side of Douglas Island. In RY 2014, pellet group counts declined by 47% on north Douglas Island and 36% on the west side compared to 2013. Pellet group counts fell to a ten-year low in RY2016 when 0.77 groups/plot were observed on northern Douglas Island and 1.01 groups/plot were found on the west side of Douglas Island. Although the number of pellet groups/plot increased slightly from 2016 to 2017, pellet group counts during 2017 remained 37% lower on north Douglas Island and 52% lower on the west side of Douglas Island compared to counts in 2013.

Winters with little snow can result in low pellet group counts because deer remain dispersed, rather than concentrating in low elevation wintering habitat. From 2014 through 2016, winters were mild to very mild with little snow. Lower pellet group counts in recent years are consistent with anecdotal reports that deer numbers have declined but could also result from deer remaining dispersed during mild winters.

Because the Douglas Island deer population is important to Juneau hunters, wolves are again using the island, a new pioneer road has increased access for hunters, and there is some uncertainty over the current status of the population, ADF&G believes more conservative harvest management is warranted. Current regulations allow harvest of four deer including does. Rather than reducing the overall bag limit, we propose keeping the bag limit at four deer, but limiting hunters to harvest of one doe. Historically, 30–40% of the deer harvested from Douglas Island have been does. Until more is known about the status of the Douglas Island deer population, we believe this modest change will still allow ample harvest opportunity while conserving does for reproduction.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F18-040)
