

PROPOSAL 40

5 AAC 85.020. Hunting seasons and bag limits for brown bear.

Require a registration permit for brown bear hunting in Unit 22C as follows.

5 AAC 85.020. Hunting seasons and bag limits for brown bear. (a) ...

Units and Bag Limits	Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Nonresident Open Season
(20)		
Unit 22(C)		
RESIDENT HUNTERS:	Aug. 1 – Oct. 31	
1 bear every regulatory year by registration permit; or	Apr. 1 – May 31 (subsistence hunt only)	
1 bear every regulatory year	Aug. 1 – Oct. 31	
<u>by registration permit</u>	Apr. 1 – May 31	
NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:		Aug. 1 – Oct. 31
1 bear every regulatory year by drawing permit only; up to 27 permits may be issued in combination with Unit 22(B)		Apr. 1 – May 31

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Regulatory changes implemented by the Board of Game in 2017 further liberalized brown bear hunting regulations in Unit 22C. The Department of Fish and Game (department) proposes the Board of Game establish a registration permit for all residents hunting brown bear in Unit 22C in order to evaluate and monitor hunting activity and if necessary, take management action to limit brown bear harvest in Unit 22C.

Unit 22 brown bear regulations were liberalized during the 1997, 1999 and 2001 Western/Arctic Board of Game meetings. A series of changes were made during this time to season dates, tag fee requirements and bag limits. These changes were not universally applied. During the period RY2002-RY2011, brown bear hunting in Unit 22C was managed with a bag limit of one brown bear every four regulatory years and seasons dates of August 1 – October 31 (fall) and May 10-May 31 (spring). The average annual reported harvest of brown bears in Unit 22C was 16 bears per year during this time period.

Brown bear hunting regulations in Unit 22C were liberalized during the 2011 Board of Game meeting when the spring season was extended from May 10-May 31 to May 1-May 31 and again during the 2014 meeting when the bag limit changed from one brown bear every four regulatory years to one brown bear every regulatory year. In years after these regulatory changes went into effect, the average annual reported harvest of brown bears in Unit 22C increased 43% from 16 bears per year RY2002-2011 to 23 bears per year RY2012-RY2016.

In 2017, the Board of Game again liberalized brown bear regulations in Unit 22C by extending the spring season from May 1-May 31 to April 1-May 31. Bear hunters throughout Unit 22 primarily use snowmachines to access bears during the spring season. Extending the Unit 22C brown bear season into April provides bear hunters the opportunity to pursue brown bears during a period of time when travel conditions are generally more reliable and better. These regulatory changes took effect in RY2017. Sealing records indicate that adequate travel conditions persisted in Unit 22C throughout the spring season. The total reported harvest of bears taken in Unit 22C during RY2017 was 38 bears, 76% of which were harvested during the spring season. This is the highest reported harvest of brown bears ever recorded for Unit 22C.

The department considered changes to Unit 22C brown bear season dates and bag limits as a way to limit the effects of recent regulatory changes on Unit 22C brown bear harvest. However, the department lacks the information necessary to recommend small incremental changes to regulations that would provide meaningful data and information without significantly restricting opportunity. A registration permit would provide the department the means to collect data and information to maintain harvest at the levels previously observed 2012-2017 until the department has a chance to evaluate the status of the Seward Peninsula brown bear population and the effects of increased harvest. The department is planning to participate in a brown bear abundance survey in cooperation with the National Park Service using mark re-sight methods in the spring of 2020.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F19-157)
