

PROPOSAL 52

5 AAC 85.055. Hunting seasons and bag limits for Dall sheep.

Change the nonresident general season sheep hunts in Units 20 Remainder and 19C to drawing permit hunts as follows:

Put all nonresident sheep hunters on draw permits for Units 20 Remainder and 19C, with a limited allocation of up to 50 permits for each hunt.

Unit 20 Remainder

Nonresidents

August 10 – September 20

One ram with full-curl horn or larger every four regulatory years **by permit**

Unit 19C

Nonresidents

August 10 – September 20

One ram with full-curl horn or larger every four regulatory years **by permit**

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

Unlimited Nonresident Sheep Hunting Opportunity in Units 20 Remainder and 19C.

Unit 20 Remainder and Unit 19C general season sheep hunts place no limits on nonresident opportunity and consistently the nonresident sheep harvests in Unit 20 Remainder and 19C are at or near 60 – 80 percent respectively.

In 2017, the last year data is available at the time of this writing, nonresidents harvested 58 percent of the sheep in Unit 20 Remainder and 78 percent of the sheep in Unit 19C.

Resident hunters have been putting in proposals to limit nonresident sheep hunting opportunity in these areas, or to provide an earlier resident-only season, for over a decade, expressing that unlimited nonresident opportunity has led to a decrease in sheep populations, conflicts and crowding afield that negatively affect hunt quality, access issues, and lower resident success rates.

Ironically, the Board of Game has not disagreed with most of those complaints. In fact, the current Chairman of the board told the legislature in 2013: “Another area the Board of Game is looking at, and I’m sure this is going to come up fairly soon, we’ve got a meeting in Fairbanks 2014 in the spring, and this is south of Fairbanks, 20A, there’s currently about 15 guides registered for this area. And from what I hear from other guides – I’m not a guide – but what I hear from other guides around the state is that the area can probably support about a third of that number and have some really quality hunting, so that’s another area we’re going to have to deal with, And here’s something else that I’m really concerned about. Is that, there’s a difference in having guides competing with guides, that’s one issue, but the way I look at it as a BOG member, and a real state’s rights sort of guy, is that this really puts a lot of competition on residents. Because guides are well equipped, they have large camps, wall tents, a string of horses, aircraft, they’re set up, I mean this is their business. For your average hunter that goes in there for a long weekend or a week or whatever, those guys, those residents have a tough time dealing and getting game in places where you have a lot of guide competition.”

For over a decade, the Board of Game has implied that the problem is not too many nonresident

sheep hunters (who are required to hire a guide), rather the problem is too many guides on state lands, and the Chairman's testimony above was in support of a proposed program to limit guides on state lands. That program failed to get approval in the legislature and there is currently no funding to implement it outside legislative approval. It's time for the board to use their authority to limit nonresident sheep hunters who are required to hire a guide.

We'd also point out that this same problem was brought up in 2008 by resident hunters regarding the unlimited nonresident sheep hunting opportunity in the Chugach Unit 13D and 14A hunts. The vast majority of the legal ram harvest was going to nonresident guided hunters. Residents had conservation and other concerns and were told by the Department of Fish and Game that the full-curl harvest regime was sustainable no matter how many legal rams were taken out of a population

each year. Don't worry, your general season opportunities will not go to draw only under this allocation scheme.

But then the department did have conservation concerns, and instead of first restricting nonresident hunters as the public had asked for, the board put all hunters on draw permits only which significantly reduced resident hunting opportunities, and to this day the Chugach hunts are still draw only for residents.

The department continues to say there are no conservation concerns for the Unit 20 Remainder and 19C sheep populations, but there is no doubt overall that the sheep population over time in these areas has declined. The current department data shows stable sheep populations at much lower levels than in the past.

The board wants to manage the Unit 20 Remainder and 19C sheep hunts for maximum opportunity, but that should not mean maximum opportunity for nonresidents. There has to be some limits, even if/when the department has no conservation concerns. Resident hunters should have a clear priority opportunity to hunt sheep, but the way it is now resident sheep hunters find themselves having to go around guides and their clients in the field, instead of the other way around, and having to compete with too many nonresident guided hunters for access and opportunities to harvest a sheep.

We want to ensure that the same thing that happened in the Chugach does not happen in the Interior, that before any restrictions are placed on residents that nonresidents are limited/restricted first.

The board recognizes these issues and it's time to stop kicking the can down the road hoping for some solution other than limiting nonresident sheep hunters.

PROPOSED BY: Resident Hunters of Alaska (EG-F19-132)
