

# Delta Area Proposals – Unit 20D

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## PROPOSAL 91

### **5 AAC 85.065. Hunting seasons and bag limits for small game.**

Reduce the bag and possession limits for grouse in a portion of Unit 20D as follows:

The Hunting Regulations Booklet would read:

**Unit 20D**, that portion lying west of the east bank of the Johnson River and south of the north bank of the Tanana River:

**Five per day, fifteen in possession, provided that not more than ten in possession may be ruffed grouse or sharp-tailed grouse.....**Aug 25 - Mar 31  
**By falconry only, five per day, ten in possession, provided that not more than two per day and two in possession may be ruffed grouse or sharp-tailed grouse.....**Aug 10 - Aug 24

Change 5 AAC 85.065 to read:

Unit 20D, that portion lying west of the east bank of the Johnson River and south of the north bank of the Tanana River

**5** [10] per day, of which not more than 2 may be **ruffed grouse or** sharp-tailed grouse, by falconry only; 10 in possession, of which not more than 2 may be **ruffed grouse or** sharp-tailed grouse, by falconry only

Aug. 10 - Aug. 24      Aug. 10 - Aug. 24

**5** [15] per day, **15 in possession**, of which not more than **10** [5] may be **ruffed grouse or** sharp-tailed grouse [30 IN POSSESSION, OF WHICH NOT MORE THAN 10 MAY BE SHARP-TAILED GROUSE;] however, a season may be announced by emergency order during which the bag limit is less than **5** [15] grouse per day, **15** [30] in possession, and less than **10** [5] **ruffed grouse or** sharp-tailed grouse [PER DAY, 10] in possession

Aug. 25 - Mar. 31      Aug. 25 - Mar. 31

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Grouse hunting opportunity and harvest allocation in Unit 20D. Grouse populations, while naturally cyclic, are notoriously slow to recover from greater than normal population declines caused by weather, habitat loss, and over harvest. Unit 20D enjoys a reputation as the epicenter of quality grouse hunting in Alaska, due to huntable populations of all three species of grouse found in interior Alaska, and a road and trail network that provides easy access to large areas of prime grouse habitat. That reputation, buoyed by outdoor TV show coverage, articles in hunting periodicals, and books on grouse hunting in Alaska, draws many hunters from around the state, as well as nonresidents. Hunters from

Alaskan urban centers and nonresidents far outnumber local hunters and are more likely to continue to harvest birds up to the limit, even when populations are noticeably down. This is natural since they have invested time and money to get to Unit 20D and want to maximize their return. Because of the consistently increasing pressure from these hunters, local hunters often choose to forego hunting and harvesting grouse when populations are down.

In addition, with the increasing number of hunters, more each year come earlier in the season to try and beat other hunters and take advantage of higher grouse numbers early on, before grouse numbers have been substantially reduced. This has resulted in a disproportionate share of available grouse being harvested during the first two weeks of the fall season, leaving few grouse for hunters choosing to wait until the later part of the fall season (mid-September and later) when grouse are more mature, cooler/dryer conditions are available for working dogs, and hunters can enjoy a more traditional mid to late fall upland hunting experience. Another factor contributing to the high early pressure is the “two-fer” opportunity that allows hunters to get in a week of grouse hunting in August, then switch to hunting waterfowl and/or moose - two other hunting opportunities for which the area is well-known, and which draw non-local hunters.

To more equitably allocate the pre-season grouse population to hunters throughout the fall season, harvest during the early part of the season needs to be reduced by lowering the daily bag and possession limits. This will more equally allocate the portion of the grouse population available for harvest annually to all grouse hunters regardless of when they decide to hunt in the fall. Thus, rather than incentivizing grouse hunters to concentrate their efforts earlier and earlier, they can have similar harvest opportunities longer in the season. As the trend toward high pressure early in the season increases, and the accessible areas become crowded, the quality of the hunting experience is degraded.

A daily bag limit that matches species limits also removes potential for accidentally exceeding a species limit. A very common grouse hunting technique, especially for hunters without dogs, is to shoot sitting grouse from the ground or from trees. Especially with a rim fire rifle, it is possible to harvest all or most of the birds in a flock, since they often don't spook and fly at the shot, or go very far when they do. These hunters are more likely to shoot birds before the species is identified, as identification is more difficult when the tail is not readily visible prior to the decision to shoot. In these situations, with a daily limit of 15, it is easily possible that a hunter could exceed a species-specific limit of five birds without even realizing it.

The Delta Advisory Committee originally conceived a proposal to limit ruffed grouse to five per day, to match the current sharp-tailed grouse limit, and leave the total daily bag (15) and possession (30) limits unchanged. We decided to modify that into a five bird per day total limit to increase opportunity, maintain sustainable harvest levels for all species, simplify the regulation, and to reduce the complexity of shoot/don't shoot decisions in the field.

In addition to helping stabilize populations of our various grouse to normal cyclic variations, the five-bird daily limit will maximize opportunity for all hunters throughout the season and eliminate the possibility of accidentally exceeding a species specific limit. While this proposal reduces the daily bag limit by two thirds, it only reduces the possession limit by one half, to reduce the overall impact of the new bag limit on hunters who have limited time in the area.

**PROPOSED BY:** Delta Fish & Game Advisory Committee (EG-F19-067)  
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*Note: The Americans with Disabilities Act requires the State of Alaska to make reasonable modifications when the modifications are necessary to avoid discrimination on the basis of disability, unless the modification would fundamentally alter the nature of the program or activity.*

**PROPOSAL 92**

**5 AAC 92.104. Authorization for methods and means disability exemptions.**

Allow methods and means disability exemptions within the Delta Controlled Use Area as follows:

(f) The department will not deny applicants who are otherwise qualified under (a) and (b) of this section, an exemption to participate in hunt RC835 within the Delta Controlled Use Area based on a determination that motorized access on the last two days of the hunt provides meaningful access.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Specifically allow methods and means disability exemptions in the Delta Controlled Use Area (DCUA) for registration caribou hunt RC835 for hunters who are permanently wheelchair bound or similarly disabled.

The Delta Advisory Committee disagrees with the Department of Fish and Game’s current position that allowing motorized vehicles on the last two days of this hunt provides meaningful access. These two days are not guaranteed as this is a registration hunt and may be closed prior if harvest goals are met. These two days represent less than 12% of the total season for this hunt. A person applying for this exemption may not have the time or ability for short notice. The “last two days” are unlikely to allow for a quality hunt, as there is extreme competition and overcrowding in a concentrated area during this time. The Delta AC request the department review the current statistics within DCUA with regards to current and past applicants/awardees of this application before considering the condemnation of ALL applicants.

**PROPOSED BY:** The Delta Fish & Game Advisory Committee (EG-F19-109)  
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**PROPOSAL 93**

**5 AAC 92.044 Permit for hunting bear with the use of bait or scent lures.**

Expand the area in Unit 20D where brown bears can be taken over bait as follows:

In units 7, 11, 12, 13, 14A, 14B, 15, 16, 18, 19A, 19D, 20A, 20B, 20C, 20D north of the Tanana River **and between the Gerstle River and the Robertson River on the South side of the Tanana River,** 20E, 20F, 21C, 21D, 23, 24C, 24D, and 25D brown/grizzly bears may be taken at bear bait stations. Hunters must comply with seasons, bag limits, salvage, and sealing requirements for brown/grizzly bears (registration permits and locking-tags may be required in some areas, contact ADF&G for details)

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Currently in Unit 20D south of the Tanana River you are only allowed to take black bear over bait. The remainder of Unit 20D

and the areas that border Unit 20D allow the take of grizzly bears over a registered bait. The grizzly population in the portion of Unit 20D not open to the take of grizzly bears over bait appears to be high. The numbers of grizzly bears on active baits sites in this area far outnumber any black bear. There is not a valid management reason to not allow the take of grizzly bears over bait in this area. The population of people in this area is far less than other areas of the state that already allow the baiting of grizzly bears. A registration hunt for grizzly bear over bait is one option (if the population of grizzly is of concern) and has been a success in places like the Kenai Peninsula, however, since the area is already is a general hunt without a quota a registration hunt is probably not necessary. Another option is the entire area south of the Tanana River could be opened to the baiting of grizzly bears, this is a viable option but does include both Delta Junction and Ft. Greeley. If nothing is changed there will be practically no affective management of grizzly bears in the southern portion of Unit 20D.

**PROPOSED BY:** Ryan Johnson (EG-F19-074)  
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**PROPOSAL 94**

**5 AAC 85.045(18). Hunting seasons and bag limits for moose.**

Reauthorize the antlerless moose hunting seasons in Unit 20D as follows:

<b>Units and Bag Limits</b>	<b>Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)</b>	<b>Nonresident Open Season</b>
(18)		

...

Unit 20(D), that portion lying west of the west bank of the Johnson River and south of the north bank of the Tanana River, except the Delta Junction Management Area and the Bison Range **Controlled Use Area** [YOUTH HUNT MANAGEMENT AREA]

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

...

1 antlerless moose by drawing permit only; up to 1,000 permits may be issued in combination with that portion in the Delta Junction Management Area; a person may not take a calf or a cow accompanied by a calf; or Oct. 10–Nov. 25

1 antlerless moose by registration permit only; a person may not take a calf or a cow accompanied by a calf Oct. 10–Nov. 25

...

Unit 20(D), that portion within the Bison Range Controlled Use Area

...

1 antlerless moose, per lifetime of a hunter, by youth hunt drawing permit only; up to 10 permits may be issued; a person may not take a calf or a cow accompanied by a calf; Sept. 1–Sept. 30 Sept. 1–Sept. 30

Unit 20(D), that portion within the Delta Junction Management Area

**RESIDENT HUNTERS:**

1 moose every four regulatory years by drawing permit only, a person may not take a calf or a cow accompanied by a calf; or Sept. 1–Sept. 15

...

1 antlerless moose by drawing permit only; up to 1,000 permits may be issued in combination with that portion lying west of the west bank of the Johnson River and south of the north bank of the Tanana River; a person may not take a calf or a cow accompanied by a calf; or Oct. 10–Nov. 25

1 antlerless moose by registration permit only; a person may not take a calf or a cow accompanied by a calf Oct. 10–Nov. 25

**NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:**

1 moose every four regulatory years by drawing permit only, a person may not take a calf or a cow accompanied by a calf; or Sept. 1–Sept. 15

...

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Antlerless moose hunts must be reauthorized annually. The objectives of the Unit 20D antlerless moose hunts are to 1) stabilize population growth of this high-density moose population; 2) address concerns about range degradation, reduced nutritional condition, and reduced reproductive success; 3) make progress toward meeting the Unit 20D intensive management (IM) harvest objective of 500–700 moose; and 4) provide youth and disabled veteran hunting opportunity. These objectives are being met.

If antlerless moose hunts are not reauthorized, the moose population could quickly increase to levels beyond the ability of the habitat to support the moose population. Opportunity to hunt a harvestable surplus of cow moose would be lost, and the ability to meet IM harvest objectives could be compromised. Additionally, the population may need to be reduced dramatically when new data are available and analyzed.

Antlerless moose hunts are offered in southwest Unit 20D, which has the highest moose density in the unit. This area has great potential for population growth due to an abundance of high-quality moose habitat created from extensive land clearing for agricultural use and multiple wildfires over the past 30 years. Total moose harvest in all of Unit 20D averaged 280 moose (an average of 263 bulls and 16 antlerless moose) during regulatory years 2016 and 2017.

Antlerless hunting opportunity is limited at present because this small opportunity helps to maintain the moose population within the ability of habitat to support the population. The largest antlerless harvest (n=113) that occurred recently in Unit 20D was in 2009 when antlerless hunts

were newly authorized. The southwest Unit 20D population estimate (approximately 4,000–4,500 moose, with a sightability correction factor applied) and bull harvest in southwestern Unit 20D (226–282) have been stable since 2011. The 2017 population estimate for southwest Unit 20D was 4,553 moose (corrected for sightability) with a density of 3.4 moose per square mile, 40 calves:100 cows and 22 bulls:100 cows.

Antlerless harvest will likely be needed to maintain the population at the optimal density and will help make progress toward the IM harvest objective of 500–700 moose without reducing bull:cow ratios below the management objectives. The population trend and harvest rate suggest the low, consistent antlerless harvest provided by the drawing permit hunts in Unit 20D, in conjunction with other mortality factors (including ceremonial harvest, vehicle collision, accidents, and predation), is an appropriate rate of antlerless moose mortality that contributes to stability in the southwest Unit 20D moose population.

The Department of Fish and Game will continue to evaluate antlerless moose hunts and their effect on moose density and population growth. Future antlerless moose hunts will be implemented as needed based on evaluation of three indices of density-dependent moose nutritional conditions in relation to changes in moose density: biomass removal of current annual growth on winter browse, proportion of females with twin calves, and late-winter calf weights.

Additional drawing or registration permits will be issued only if more harvest is needed in specific areas to maintain optimal moose densities.

**PROPOSED BY:** Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F19-176)  
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