

PROPOSAL 167

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

Reduce the bag limit for bufflehead in Unit 15C as follows:

4 Bufflehead per day, 8 in possession.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? A bag limit reduction on bufflehead is needed to ensure hunt opportunities now and in the future. The Homer Fish and Game Advisory Committee voted unanimously to sponsor this proposal at its April 2022 meeting, and they have submitted the same proposal. I am submitting this to add supporting information.

Residents and hunters are noticing increased sea duck hunting pressure in Kachemak Bay. In 2021, we saw a disturbing spike in harvest, and we learned that the addition of a few more guides means significantly increased harvest.

Kachemak Bay is one of the easiest place to access sea ducks in Alaska. Since bufflehead prefer protected bays and coves that are particularly easy to access, they are among the most threatened species of sea ducks.

Depressed populations of sea ducks do not recover quickly. They are known to have a high degree of site fidelity, which means that if an area’s population is depressed, birds from other areas are unlikely to boost the population. Also, according to the Sea Duck Joint Venture, they have lower reproductive and chick survival rates than other ducks.

The proposal is supported by two consecutive years of community sea duck surveys in Kachemak Bay—a local effort of over 30 people motivated by concern of over-harvest and lack of data. Our data suggests that the number of sea ducks in Kachemak Bay are limited and that populations do not bounce back after significant harvest occurs.

For the most part sea ducks are targeted for trophies—this proposal is designed to allow for trophies, meat harvest, incidental take, and traditional tribal harvest.

Populations of sea ducks in Kachemak Bay declined significantly in the 1990s’, and according to ADF&G surveys and community science surveys, they have not yet recovered.

Kachemak Bay is an ADF&G Critical Habitat Area, whose legislative purpose is “to protect and preserve habitat” and the Kachemak Bay Management Plan says that “priority should be given to encouraging rehabilitation of depleted indigenous fish and wildlife populations.”

Bag limits for migratory waterfowl are set on the level of the Pacific Flyway, but Alaska can set more restrictive limits, as happened when the Board of Game set special bag limit restrictions on eiders, harlequin, and Long-tailed ducks in Kachemak Bay in 1999.

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