

## **PROPOSAL 86**

### **5 AAC 92.010. Harvest tickets and reports.**

Require mandatory harvest reporting of sea ducks as follows:

I propose a mandatory harvest reporting of sea ducks in Alaska.

ADF&G should monitor changes in sea duck harvest through a regulation requiring sea duck harvest reporting. New management language could include:

- Required possession a paper or electronic harvest record card for sea ducks.
- After taking a sea duck into possession, required recording of all information on the harvest record card or through a mobile application.
- Consequences for not reporting

Language could be modeled on the State of Washington’s management approach through Wash. Admin. Code § 220-416-060 - 2023-2024, which reads: “Hunters must physically possess a special 2023-2024 paper or electronic hunting authorization and harvest record card for sea ducks when hunting scoter, long-tailed duck, and goldeneye in Western Washington. Immediately after taking a sea duck into possession, hunters must record all required information on the harvest record card. Hunters required to physically possess a paper harvest record card must enter all required information in ink. Hunters required to physically possess an electronic harvest record card must enter all required information through the licensing mobile application.”

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Accurate sea duck harvest numbers are needed to assure hunt opportunities now and in the future. Alaska’s current migratory bird harvest reporting system, known as HIP, uses randomized voluntary reporting and provides only slim and spotty information. As a result, Alaska has never adjusted bag limits on the basis of HIP reporting, according to ADF&G managers.

Alaska does not currently require sea duck harvest reporting, since sea ducks are classified as small game. Harvest reporting isn’t typically required for small game, because, in general, these species are evolved to recover quickly from big drops in population. But sea ducks are special and they do not recover quickly, which means there are long-term negative effects of over-harvest. According to the Sea Duck Joint Venture, populations are slow to recover for the following reasons:

1. Sea ducks are known to have a remarkable degree of site fidelity—around 5 miles or so—which means that if an area’s population is depressed, birds from other areas will not boost recovery.
2. In general, sea ducks do not breed until they are 2 or 3 or so years old, which is late in comparison darling ducks.
3. They lay only one clutch of eggs per year, in contrast with the 2 or 3 for many dabbling ducks.
4. They have significantly lower chick survival rates than other ducks.

Sea duck populations across the United States have fallen 30% since 1970, and they remain in decline, according to the U.S. Committee of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative’s “2022 State of Birds Report”. On the bright side, the report notes that efforts at conservation have

been shown to be effective. This proposal is supported by three consecutive years of Kachemak Bay Community Science Sea Duck Surveys—a local annual effort of 10 boats and over 30 people. This survey effort started in 2020/21, because residents and hunters in Kachemak Bay noticed a significant increase to sea duck hunting pressure, as a result of the arrival of a few more guides. Local birders began monitoring populations to create a population index. Our population index does not aim to estimate total number of birds in Kachemak Bay, but by focusing on a few areas with dense sea duck populations, we are able to see population trends—an approach used by ADF&G managers across many species in Alaska. Our data shows that populations have not bounced back after a significant harvest. Fish and Game has historically monitored sea duck populations in Kachemak Bay, but they have not surveyed in Kachemak Bay since several years before community science surveys began, so our data is the only record of this trend.

**Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee?** This proposal was submitted at the 2022 the Southcentral BOG meeting with support from the Homer AC. At that time, the Board of Game recommended that it be resubmitted as a statewide proposal.

**PROPOSED BY:** Penelope Haas

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