

Proposal 104 was deferred by the Board of Game from the March 2024 Interior and Eastern Arctic Region meeting. It was previously published as Proposal 78.

PROPOSAL 104

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

Reauthorize nonresident Dall sheep hunting in Unit 19C as follows:

5 AAC 85.055. Unit 19C Sheep

Nonresident hunters. One ram with full curl horn or larger every four regulatory years.

Harvest ticket. August 10 - September 20 [No open season]

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Reauthorize nonresident Dall sheep hunting in Unit 19C.

Dall sheep populations have shown a cyclical pattern since record keeping began in the 1920s. Per the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) website, “Sheep numbers typically fluctuate irregularly in response to a number of environmental factors. Sheep populations tend to increase during periods of mild weather. Then, sudden population declines may occur as a result of unusually deep snow, summer drought, or other severe weather events. Low birth rates, predation (primarily by wolves, coyotes, and golden eagles) and a difficult environment tend to keep Dall sheep population growth rates lower than many other big game species. However, their adaptation to the alpine environment seems to serve them well.” This cyclical pattern is well documented in the 2022 Board of Game (BOG) Dall’s Sheep Informational Meeting Presentation that was presented by ADF&G. In 1945, 1992 and 2022 were all noticeable downturns in overall sheep populations. In retrospect, an abundance of sheep were observed in 1930, 1968, 2003 and 2018. The department opposes a closure of Dall sheep hunting but remains neutral as to who gets to hunt Dall sheep based on historical trends in Dall sheep populations and the states full curl eight-year-old regulation.

The board adopted the full curl regulation in 1992 and is one of the most conservative approaches to Dall sheep management. The harvesting of full curl, eight plus year old rams is just a small fraction of the overall population and the empirical evidence has shown to have no detrimental effects on the overall population. This regulation has allowed the department to have a longer hunting season and provides ample opportunity for all to hunt a full curl ram. Full curl regulation has been the best management tool for 30 years now. Department studies have shown that once a ram surpasses 8 years old, its chances of survival greatly diminish within the wild with very few rams surpassing 12 years of age. Full curl, eight plus year old rams makeup less than 5% of the overall sheep population. The harvest of this age class of rams has no effect on the overall sheep population. Furthermore, harvesting these older rams gives the younger adults, which are in their prime, protection from injury during the rutting season. The full curl eight plus year old ram resource will go unutilized when hunter participation is limited and or restricted. Since the start of the decline, Unit 19C has seen a significant decline in Dall sheep hunter participation. In 2018, Unit 19C saw a record number of participants at 212 hunters. The following five years saw a steady decline with the 2022 season having 81 hunters go to the field. That is a 62% decline in sheep hunters in a five year period. Why? The short answer is self-regulation. ADF&G

records of hunter participation show that during low levels of a game population, less hunters go to the field. Unit 19C Dall sheep hunter participation shows this exact trend. As the sheep population declined and overall success rates decreased, sheep hunters turned their attention and focused their efforts in other areas of the state. A quick search on the ADF&G website indicates that other mountain ranges have seen an increase in sheep hunters since 2018. On the flip side, the five year period leading up to 2018 saw a steady increase in Dall sheep hunter participation due to good numbers of sheep and higher than normal success rates. Hunter participation will rise and fall right along with the rise and fall of Dall sheep populations. The department estimated 40 harvestable rams in Unit 19C for the 2022 season and records show that 27 residents participated in the hunt. Again, the Dall sheep resource will go unutilized by limiting nonresident participation.

If nothing is changed, a harvestable number of rams will go unutilized in Unit 19C. Other units will see a noticeable increase in Dall sheep hunter participation. Not only in guided nonresident hunters but also in second degree of kindred hunters and youth hunters. Thus, creating more pressure on the Dall sheep resource in those units. On a side note, any Alaska businesses that are related to nonresident sheep hunting will suffer.

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