

PROPOSAL 159

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

Reauthorize the antlerless moose seasons in Unit 20A as follows:

Units and Bag Limits	Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Nonresident Open Season
(18) Unit 20(A), the Ferry Trail Management Area, Wood River Controlled Use Area, and the Yanert Controlled Use Area		
RESIDENT HUNTERS:		
...		
1 antlerless moose by drawing permit only; up to 2,000 permits may be issued in combination with the Remainder of Unit 20(A); a person may not take a cow accompanied by a calf; or	Aug. 15–Nov. 15 (General hunt only)	
1 antlerless moose by registration permit only; a person may not take a cow accompanied by a calf; or	Oct. 1–Last day of Feb.	
...		
1 moose by targeted permit only; by crossbow shotgun, or bow and arrow only; up to 100 permits may be issued	Season to be announced by emergency order (General hunt only)	
...		

Remainder of Unit 20(A)

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

...

1 antlerless moose by drawing permit only; up to 2,000 permits may be issued in combination with Unit 20(A), the Ferry Trail Management Area, Wood River Controlled Use Area, and the Yanert Controlled Use Area; a person may not take a cow accompanied by a calf; or

Aug. 15–Nov. 15
(General hunt only)

1 antlerless moose by registration permit only; a person may not take a cow accompanied by a calf; or

Aug. 25–last day of Feb.

...

1 moose by targeted permit only; by crossbow, shotgun, or bow and arrow only; up to 100 permits may be issued

Season to be announced by emergency order

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What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Antlerless moose hunting seasons must be reauthorized annually. Antlerless hunts are important for maintaining the moose population at levels that the habitat can support. Antlerless hunts also help regulate moose population growth, help to meet Intensive Management (IM) objectives for high levels of harvest, and provide subsistence hunters with a reasonable opportunity to pursue moose for subsistence uses without reducing bull-to-cow ratios.

If antlerless moose hunts are not reauthorized, the moose population could increase to levels beyond the ability of the habitat to support the moose population. Allowing the population to grow beyond what the habitat can support may require the population to be reduced dramatically

to avoid long term habitat damage. Opportunity to hunt a harvestable surplus of cow moose would be lost, and the ability to meet IM harvest objectives could be compromised. Subsistence hunters in the portion of Unit 20A outside the Fairbanks Nonsubsistence Area (part of the western Tanana Flats) may not have a reasonable opportunity to pursue moose for subsistence uses.

Reauthorizing antlerless moose hunts will allow hunting opportunity and harvest to increase and allow the Department of Fish and Game to manage the moose populations at an optimum level. The additional harvest will help meet IM harvest objectives without reducing bull-to-cow ratios. Meat and subsistence hunters will benefit from the opportunity to harvest cow moose. Moose populations will benefit by maintaining moose densities at a level compatible with their habitat. Motorists and residents may benefit from reduced moose–vehicle collisions and moose–human conflicts.

The current objective is to maintain moose numbers within the IM population objective of 10,000–15,000 moose, while monitoring indicators of moose and habitat condition for positive density-dependent responses. The Unit 20A population was estimated at between 9,240–12,800 moose (90% confidence interval) in November 2022. There is an estimated 5,040 mi² of moose habitat in Unit 20A which equates to a moose density of between 1.8 and 2.5 moose/mi². The median of this estimate falls within the IM population objective. The department will continue to monitor Unit 20A twinning rates and short yearling weights as indices for nutritional condition of the moose population. The department has seen a slow and steady increase in both twinning rates (16%) and short yearling weights (400lbs) and are nearing the thresholds of 20% twinning rates and 400lb short yearling weights. This indicates that the nutritional condition of these moose is improving. However, the department does not want the population to further increase until we reach the thresholds of both 20% twinning rate and 400lb short yearlings. As the department continues to monitor Unit 20A twinning rates and short yearling weights, it may recommend fewer antlerless hunts in the future if these two thresholds are surpassed. The Unit 20A population is currently at the low end of the IM population objective and recovering from the difficult winter of 2021/2022. The department wants to survey the Unit 20A population in November of 2024 and evaluate the population and how it is recovering after the difficult winter. No antlerless hunts have been conducted since that winter and a cautious approach on when antlerless harvest is again appropriate is being taken. If the department detects the population is again growing in Unit 20A and is within IM population objectives then a modest harvest rate may be available for hunters. A harvest rate of 1% of the population has been shown to stabilize the moose population at its current level. Antlerless harvest would be by drawing permits for a majority of Unit 20A and a registration permit outside the Fairbanks non-subsistence area in northwest Unit 20A near Nenana. The harvest objective will be based on the most recent survey results. The antlerless harvest will target the highest density portions of Unit 20A. The Department did not issue antlerless moose permits in 2022 because of a severe 2021/2022 winter and the anticipated high mortality, or in 2023 and 2024 because a population estimate was not completed until after the drawing permit application period. The next possible time to hunt antlerless moose would be in the fall of 2026.

The number of moose in Unit 20A was estimated at 17,768 (3.5 moose/mi²) in 2003. Research indicated this high-density moose population was experiencing density-dependent effects, including low productivity, relatively light calf weights, and high removal rates of winter forage.

The objective beginning in regulatory year 2004–2005 (RY04) was to reduce moose numbers to the population objective of 10,000–12,000 moose (1.5–1.8 moose/mi²) unless indicators of moose condition showed signs of improvement at higher densities. In 2016, the Board of Game adopted the IM population objective of 10,000–15,000 moose and the 2022 population estimate is within the IM objective.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F24-051)

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