

PROPOSAL 95

5 AAC 92.990(30). Definitions.

Repeal the age criteria for full-curl horn rams as follows:

The proposed regulatory change would repeal the age criteria #3, for a full-curl horn of a male (ram) Dall sheep as follows:

1. The tip of at least one horn has grown through 360 degrees of a circle described by the outer surface of the horn, as viewed from the side, or
2. Both horn tips are broken; broken means the lamb tip is completely absent; horn tips that are chipped or cracked are not broken if any portion of the lamb tip is present; characteristics of the lamb tip include:
 - (i) a length of less than four inches,
 - (ii) the inside surface of the lamb tip is distinctly concave when compared to the remainder of the horn, and
 - (iii) the lamb tip is the section of a horn that is grown during the first six months of a sheep's life and is the section of horn distal of the first annulus, which is the swelling of the horn that forms during the first winter of life.
3. (THE SHEEP IS AT LEAST EIGHT YEARS OF AGE AS DETERMINED BY HORN GROWTH ANNULI)

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Repeal criteria #3 for harvest of Dall Sheep statewide. Current definition of full curl harvest by hunters attempting to count annuli rings has led to misidentification of sub-legal sheep being taken.

Statewide Dall sheep populations are far below historical carrying capacities. Rain on snow events, combined with a late spring in 2012/13, as well as similar conditions in subsequent winters, have decimated multiple cohorts of Dall sheep in most populations statewide.

Many ram groups currently do not have full-curl, or both horns broken horns. Dall sheep hunters that do not see these rams then rely on aging a sheep in the field at a distance. This method can easily lead to miscounting the annuli and result in the take of sublegal young rams. This loss of the very few young recruiting breeding rams is of critical concern to the sustainability of the Dall sheep population's recovery to carrying capacity.

Most hunters and even professional biologists can mistakenly miscount annuli rings on 3/4 and 7/8 curl rams on the mountainside. Many hunters cannot age the sheep when in hand, which can be documented with the high numbers of young rams being seized by the department at sealing. Some sub legal rams are abandoned and not documented as a loss.

Very few rams will not eventually become legal under the full curl definition criteria #1 and #2, by either achieving a full curl, or by breaking off both horn tips if left to mature, so having the aging option is unnecessary and detrimental. At this time, few rams are the true full curl definition

1. and 2. due to hunting or environmental related mortality prior to maturity being reached. It is imperative to retain all recruitment rams to maturity during this unprecedented time.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee? I am the chairman of the Koyukuk River Advisory Committee. I have discussed the issue with the committee, Regional Councils, and many sheep hunters I encounter. I have discussed the issue with ADF&G staff, and other land management staff.

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