

PROPOSAL 96

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 for a full-curl horn of a male (ram) Dall sheep as follows:

- (A) 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
- (B) 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.
- (C) [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? Statewide Dall sheep populations are far below historical carrying capacities. Rain on snow events in the winter, late springs, and other changing weather patterns have continued to decimate multiple cohorts of Dall sheep statewide.

Many ram groups do not contain animals with full-curl horns or horns that are broomed on both sides. 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 which results in the take of sublegal rams. The loss of any animal that is sublegal in a population that is declining statewide is of critical concern to the sustainability of the Dall sheep population's recovery.

Sheep can be difficult to age, and it is not always a cut and dry process even in settings outside of the field, such as when the animal is taken to an ADF&G office to be sealed by department staff and law enforcement officers that have seen hundreds of horns.

The percentage of rams have genetics that will make it so they will not achieve full curl in their lifetime appear to be low. Another viable option for the take of a legal sheep is take one with broomed horns, which is an easier feat then counting annuli rings through a scope. Having the aging option is unnecessary and is detrimental to the recovery of sheep population. If there is a situation where a fully mature sheep is taken in the field that somehow does not meet the full curl or broomed criteria, law enforcement officers can use their discretion on issuing citations during the sealing process.

As sheep populations rebound, this change in regulation can always be reexamined and reversed if it is deemed that the removal of the age criteria has been too unfavorable to sheep hunters.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee? This was not developed with others, although the Eastern Interior Alaska Regional Advisory Council and the Koyukuk River Fish and Game Advisory Committee were aware of its submission.

PROPOSED BY: Western Interior Regional Advisory Council (HQ-F24-021)
