

ACR #4 – Open a resident only general season hunt for sheep in Unit 19C.

SUBMITTED BY: Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committee

CITE THE REGULATION THAT WILL BE CHANGED IF THIS ACR IS HEARD.

5 AAC 85.055. Seasons and bag limits for Dall sheep.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM YOU WOULD LIKE THE BOARD TO ADDRESS? STATE IN DETAIL THE NATURE OF THE CURRENT PROBLEM.

At the March, 2025, Statewide Board of Game Meeting, when the board was deliberating Proposal 190 that would shut down resident sheep hunting opportunity in Unit 19C for the 2025 fall season and in 2026 put resident and nonresident sheep hunters on a draw permit system, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (Department) told the board that there was a harvestable surplus of sheep in Unit 19C for residents under a general season hunt, and that they had no conservation concerns over continued resident general sheep hunting opportunity in the unit, even though the sheep population was in decline.

The board had already closed Unit 19C in 2023 to all nonresident sheep hunting opportunity due to conservation concerns that arose after the board allowed unlimited nonresident sheep hunting opportunity that resulted in nonresident guided hunters taking 90 percent of the sheep harvest in 2022 from the declining sheep population.

At that time, and previously, the board stated that the problem was “too many guides” in the unit, not their allowance of unlimited sheep hunting opportunity for nonresidents who are required to hire a guide. Whether the problem was too many guides, or too many nonresident sheep hunters, the board’s conservation concerns related to what they believed was an overharvest of sheep in Unit 19C by nonresident guided hunters. Resident sheep hunters never posed a sheep conservation concern.

The board’s decision in 2025 to shut down the resident sheep season in 19C, and make it a draw hunt for both residents and nonresidents starting in 2026, had a caveat that general sheep hunting opportunity in 19C for residents and nonresidents would only be allowed in the future if there were limits on guides via a Guide Concession Program (GCP) the legislature authorized during the 2025 session, which could be implemented as a test program in a unit of the board’s choosing.

Why are resident sheep hunters bearing the burden of this closure and subsequent draw hunts when the Department says there are no sheep conservation concerns with continued resident general sheep hunting opportunity, and the board has determined that the problem was too many guides? Why is resident general sheep hunting opportunity in the future dependent on limiting guides? What the board is really alluding is that if guides are not limited in 19C there will continue to be an overharvest of sheep from a declining sheep population by nonresident guided hunters.

The only sheep hunters in Unit 19C that need to be on a draw permit system before guides are limited are nonresidents.

Unit 19C Guide Concession Program & Timeline

The board passed a proposal in March of 2025 that would implement a GCP in Unit 19C, however, the Department of Law stated that the way the board adopted that proposal was not legal, and a new proposal must come forth in 2026 to designate Unit 19C as the first area where a test GCP will be implemented.

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) needs to hire additional staff to administer the GCP, but there are several hurdles that must first be overcome before DNR can even begin hiring staff and drafting the initial GCP in coordination with the Big Game Commercial Services Board, the Board of Game, and the Department. Realistically, we are likely looking at a minimum of three to four years before the program would be in place and implemented.

WHAT SOLUTION DO YOU PREFER?

A general sheep season for residents in Unit 19C should again be allowed. There is a harvestable surplus of rams in Unit 19C for a general season resident sheep hunt according to the Department, which poses no sheep conservation concerns at this time.

STATE IN DETAIL HOW THIS ACR MEETS THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:

A biologically allowable resource harvest (resident general season sheep hunt) would be precluded by delayed regulatory action and such delay would be significantly burdensome because the resource would be unavailable in the future under a general season hunt.

- 1) To correct an error in regulation.**
- 2) To correct an effect of a regulation that was unforeseen when a regulation was adopted.**
- 3) Does the request identify a biological concern for the population or a threat to meeting objectives for the population?**

No

- 4) Does the request identify an unforeseen, unexpected event or effect that would otherwise restrict or reduce a reasonable opportunity for customary and traditional wildlife uses, as defined in AS 16.05.258(f)?**

No

- 5) Does the request identify an unforeseen, unexpected resource situation where a biologically allowable resource harvest would be precluded by delayed regulatory action and such delay would be significantly burdensome because the resource would be unavailable in the future?**

Yes

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF THIS PROBLEM IS NOT SOLVED PRIOR TO THE REGULAR CYCLE?

Resident sheep hunters will be denied general season sheep hunting opportunity for a sheep population with a harvestable surplus.

With only 20 permits available for residents, it's likely only half of the draw permit winners will even participate. This restricted opportunity precludes residents from harvesting a ram from a population with a harvestable surplus.

STATE WHY YOUR ACR IS NOT PREDOMINANTLY ALLOCATIVE.

IF THIS REQUEST IS ALLOCATIVE, STATE THE NEW INFORMATION THAT COMPELS THE BOARD TO CONSIDER AN ALLOCATIVE PROPOSAL OUTSIDE OF THE REGULAR CYCLE.

STATE YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE ISSUE THAT IS THE SUBJECT OF THIS ACR.

The Fairbanks Fish & Game Advisory Committee represents local constituents and provides a state-sanctioned forum for the public to make recommendations on fish and wildlife management decisions.

STATE WHETHER THIS ACR HAS BEEN CONSIDERED BEFORE, EITHER AS A PROPOSAL OR AS AN ACR, AND IF SO, DURING WHICH BOARD OF GAME MEETING.

This ACR has not been considered before.