

WP24-32 Executive Summary

General Description	Wildlife Proposal WP24-32 requests extending the Federal marten trapping season in Units 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, and 25 from Nov. 1–Feb. 28 to Nov. 1–Mar. 15. <i>Submitted by: Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council.</i>
Proposed Regulation	<p style="text-align: center;">Unit 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25–Marten</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Marten: No limit</i> <i>Nov.1–Feb. 28–Mar. 15</i></p>
OSM Conclusion	Support Proposal WP24-32.
Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council Recommendation	Oppose.
Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council Recommendation	<p><u>Winter 2024:</u> Support with modification to extend the season in Units 20E and 25B only.</p> <p><u>Fall 2023:</u> Support.</p>
Interagency Staff Committee Comments	The Interagency Staff Committee found the staff analysis to be a thorough and accurate evaluation of the proposal and that it provides sufficient basis for the Regional Advisory Council recommendation and Federal Subsistence Board action on the proposal.
ADF&G Comments	No position.
Written Public Comments	None

STAFF ANALYSIS
WP24-32

ISSUES

Wildlife Proposal WP24-32, submitted by the Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Eastern Interior Council), requests extending the Federal marten trapping season in Units 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, and 25 from Nov. 1–Feb. 28 to Nov. 1–Mar. 15.

DISCUSSION

The proponent states changing the closing date of the season will account for changes in climate. Fall temperatures and snowfall have been more variable in recent years making it more difficult to access trapping areas early in the season. This proposal will also allow trappers to take advantage of colder spring temperatures at the end of the season when it is feasible to access traplines. In Units 12 and 20E this proposal will align the marten season closing date with the lynx season closing date. In Units 24A and 25 it will further extend marten season into lynx season and allow users to harvest both furbearers at the same time. Many users target both animals while trapping and this season extension will possibly allow for the harvest of more marten.

Existing Federal Regulation

Units 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25–Marten

Marten: No limit

Nov.1–Feb. 28

Proposed Federal Regulation

Unit 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25–Marten

Marten: No limit

*Nov.1–~~Feb. 28~~–
Mar. 15*

Existing State Regulation

Units 12, 19–21, 24, and 25–Marten

Marten: No limit

Nov. 1– Feb. 28

Extent of Federal Public Lands/Waters

Unit 12 is comprised of 60% Federal public lands and consists of 48% National Park Service (NPS), 11% U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and 1% Bureau of Land Management (BLM) managed lands.

Unit 19 is comprised of 20% Federal public lands and consists of 15% BLM, 4% NPS and 1% USFWS managed lands.

Unit 20 is comprised of 21% Federal public lands and consist of 15% NPS and 6% BLM managed lands.

Unit 21 is comprised of 48% Federal public lands and consist of 27% USFWS and 21% BLM managed lands.

Unit 24 is comprised of 65% Federal public lands and consists of 22% NPS, 22% USFWS and 21% BLM managed lands.

Unit 25 is comprised of 72% Federal public lands and consists of 56% USFWS, 14% BLM and 2% NPS managed lands.

Customary and Traditional Use Determinations

All rural residents have a customary and traditional use determination (C&T) for marten in Units 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, and 25.

Regulatory History

Federal regulations were adopted from State regulations in 1990. The Federal and State marten seasons and harvest limits in these units have not changed since 1990.

In 1993, Proposal P93-51 requested to shorten the marten season by changing the closing date from Feb. 28 to Jan. 31 in Unit 21 to protect the female portion of the population. This proposal was opposed by the Federal Subsistence Board on the consensus agenda due to the marten population being healthy and expanding. The State season for marten would still have continued until February 28, making the proposal unenforceable. The mink season would also occur concurrently, and there would have been a chance of incidental take of marten.

Current Events

The Eastern Interior Council submitted a similar proposal, Proposal 50, to the Alaska Board of Game to maintain regulatory alignment were this proposal to be adopted. The Eagle Fish and Game Advisory Committee also submitted Proposal 124, to extend the marten trapping season until March 15 under State regulations in Units 20E and 25B only. Both proposals will be decided upon during the March 2024 Board of Game meeting.

Biological Background

In North America, marten range from Alaska to the southern Sierra Nevada mountains and to New Mexico (Powell et al. 2003). They mostly inhabit mixed age conifer forests with structural diversity at ground level and abundant overhead cover (Powell et al. 2003). Both sexes reach sexual maturity by age one, although effective breeding may not occur before age two. Alaska marten give birth in April or early May to an average three young (Shepherd and Melchior 1994). Breeding occurs shortly after parturition; however, implantation is delayed. Juvenile marten disperse from their rearing territory by fall.

Marten populations fluctuate greatly in response to food availability, habitat conditions, and trapping pressure (Powell et al. 2003, Shepherd and Melchior 1994), although methods and means to evaluate the population size, composition, and habitat for marten do not exist in Alaska (Nelson 2021). Marten are subject to high natural mortality rates, particularly through predation by raptors, larger carnivores and other marten (Hodgman et al. 1997, Bull and Heater 2001). They are also easily trapped, which can lead to overharvest (Powell et al. 2003, USFS 2008). Trapping seasons in Alaska are set to reduce the chance of overharvest (Shepherd and Melchior 1994).

According to the 2021 Alaska Trapper Report (Bogle 2022) marten abundance is believed to be stable. Harvested marten are not sealed or recorded, so there are no firm indices about their abundance, only replies to the Alaska Trapper Questionnaire. In 2021, the relative abundance index of marten in these units was described as “scarce” with no change in the trend over the previous season. Trappers responding to the questionnaire from 2014 to 2019, considered marten “common” with no change in trend. However, there appears to be no conservation concern regarding marten as trapping regulations have not changed since 1990 and the State and Federal harvest limit is ‘no limit’.

Harvest History

Marten harvest data are collected annually through the voluntary Alaska Trapper Questionnaire mailed to everyone who purchases a trapping license and occasionally through community subsistence harvest surveys conducted by the ADF&G Division of Subsistence. Although the response rate to the Alaska Trapper Questionnaire is typically low (the 2021 response rate was 9%), results of the questionnaire show marten are one of the most important and consistently targeted species by trappers in these units (Bogle 2022).

The number of marten voluntarily reported harvested has fluctuated greatly since 2011 and appears to be a function of trapper numbers/effort, marten abundance, and fur prices (**Figure 1**). Responses to the Alaska Trapper Questionnaire indicate that marten availability has remained consistent with the effort from trappers (Bogle 2022) and harvest appears to be occurring at sustainable levels (Stout & Longson 2021). Since the response rate to the questionnaire is low, actual marten harvest may be quite higher than reported harvest.

ADF&G community subsistence survey data provides an estimated harvest of marten by community per year, but only for years when the surveys were conducted. These surveys are conducted

sporadically and are not consistent enough to establish trends, but they do show variability from community to community and an overall decrease in harvest (Table 1, ADF&G 2023). This may be attributable to fewer users trapping or fewer people responding to the surveys.

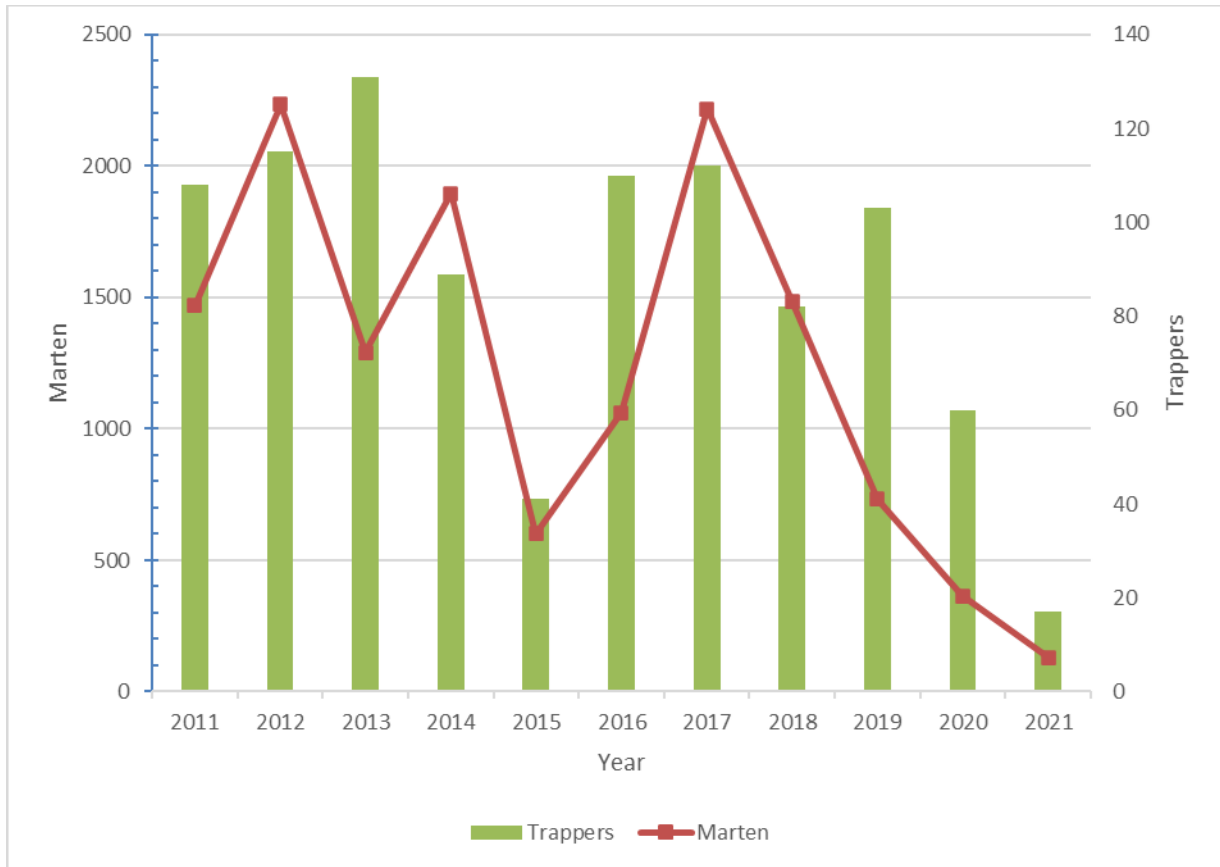


Figure 1. Number of marten reported harvested in Units 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, and 25 as reported in ADF&G Trapper Questionnaire 2011–2021. Number of trappers responding to questionnaire shown (ADF&G 2023).

Table 1. Estimated community harvest of marten for select communities. (ADF&G 2023)

Community	Year	Estimated Harvest
Allakaket/Alatna	1982	1,195
Allakaket/Alatna	1983	1,037
Allakaket/Alatna	1984	875
Allakaket/Alatna	2011	66
Dot Lake	1987	83
Dot Lake	2004	1
Dot Lake	2011	0
Minto	1984	299
Minto	2004	28
Minto	2012	20
Northway	1987	676
Northway	2004	486
Northway	2014	244
Tok	1987	2,273
Tok	2004	476
Tok	2011	695

Other Alternatives Considered

One alternative considered was to extend the marten season in some, but not all units. Some units are easily road accessible, which could increase trapping pressure, especially on pregnant females. However, little Federal land is immediately adjacent to roads in these units and this season extension would only apply to Federally qualified subsistence users whose trapping efforts are dispersed across a large area.

Additionally, marten fur quality may decline by March in some units where temperatures warm earlier in the spring. However, federally qualified subsistence users are reported to self-regulate their trapping efforts if pelt quality decreases to an unusable level.

Effects of the Proposal

If this proposal is adopted, the marten season will be extended by two weeks and allow federally qualified subsistence users increased opportunity to harvest marten, especially since most are still trapping lynx. Some trappers opine that fur condition is not as prime in March as it is earlier in the season and is worth less on the market. This may deter people from trapping at this time were the season to be extended. At this time, with no current harvest limit in place, there does not appear to be a conservation concern, and impact to the resource is expected to be minimal.

However, milder temperatures and more daylight in March may allow an increase in trapping effort and harvest as travel conditions would be safer and allow people greater access to areas farther from the roads. This may be a concern as trappers have reported more females than males get trapped in the late winter. Since this is the breeding portion of the population that is close to parturition, this would be considered additive mortality. However, there currently is no evidence that this would occur in the

interior region of Alaska, but if it did, it may lead to a conservation concern. During review of this analysis, agency staff noted that most trappers self-limit their efforts when they start to catch more females than males, which may alleviate this concern.

Adopting this proposal may lead to regulatory confusion by misaligning Federal and State marten season dates depending on the BOG's actions on State proposals 50 and 124.

OSM CONCLUSION

Support Proposal WP24-32.

Justification

The marten population in these units shows no indication of a change. Harvest is reported to be occurring at a sustainable level and trends in concert with effort by trappers. Increased participation in a lengthened season would be moderated by other factors such as cost of fuel, fur prices, fur condition, and marten availability, all of which contribute to trapper effort. Trappers are noted to self-regulate harvest of marten when populations are perceived as low. Therefore, extending the season is not expected to have an impact on the current population by itself but would be one factor in the decision process by trappers on whether or not they participate in an extended season.

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SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS

Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

Oppose WP24-32. The Council members are concerned that within the Western Interior region, marten fur is not good at that time of the year and that more females end up being trapped as well. The population is stable but low, and Council members feel the population couldn't withstand any additional harvest. Additionally, if the fur is not worth using or selling, then there should not be the opportunity offered, even if trappers have been known to self-limit their efforts.

Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

Winter 2024

Support WP24-32 **with Council modification** to only extend the marten season in Units 20E and 25B. The Eastern Interior Council chose to reconsider this proposal after hearing the concerns posed by the Western Interior Council about extending the season within the Western Interior Region. The Council recognized that the original proposal applied to a large area and that portions of that area may have different climactic conditions and trapping pressure. The Council decided to narrow their request to units that the proponent had initially intended for the proposal: Units 20E and 25B. These two units are some of the coldest and most sparsely populated regions of the state. There is very little trapping pressure and marten fur quality remains good through mid-March. A season extension of two weeks in these two units would have very limited impacts to marten and not result in conservation concerns.

The modified regulations should read:

Units 20E, 25B–Marten

Marten: No limit

Nov.1–Mar. 15

Units 12, 19, 20 remainder, 21, 24, 25 remainder–Marten

Marten: No limit

Nov.1–Feb. 28

Fall 2023

Support WP24-32. The Council noted that there are not currently any known conservation concerns for marten. This proposal will align the season end dates for marten and lynx in some units, making regulations less confusing for trappers. It will also allow 2 weeks of additional subsistence harvest opportunity. In recent years, local trappers have reported difficulty getting out to trap in November at

the start of the trapping season due to warmer fall weather and unsafe overland travel conditions, meaning that their trapping season has regularly been shortened by a month.

The Council discussed the potential of harvesting more pregnant females if the season were extended but agreed that because vast areas of the Eastern Interior region are very remote with little trapping pressure or access there would not be resulting conservation concerns. However, the Council also noted that there are other areas within the scope of the proposal which are more readily road accessible, and that these areas might see more of an effect from a season extension. There was additional discussion about fur quality during mid-March and the temperature variations in different parts of the region covered by the proposal. The Council noted that in Unit 12 temperatures can be warmer than other parts of the region and fur quality not worth harvesting in March. However, the Council felt that trappers will be self-limiting when it comes to ending their season because they will know fur conditions in their localized areas and stop trapping when fur quality decreases since it is not worth harvesting furs that cannot be used or sold. The Council agreed that overall weather patterns across the region have been staying colder later into the spring and that in many areas fur quality remains good in mid-March. They noted this is especially the case for the Yukon Flats, other portions of the Yukon River corridor, as well as Units 20E and 25B which are some of the coldest locations in the State. The Council felt that supporting this proposal would help adapt regulations to changing environmental conditions.

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME COMMENTS

No comment.