

Proposal to Change Federal Subsistence Taking of Wildlife Regulations

Requestor: East Prince of Wales Fish and Game Advisory Committee
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50 CFR 100.26(n)(2)

Deer:

[JULY 24TH – DEC. 31.]

~~Open Season July 24th—Jan. 31.~~

We wish to shorten the Unit 2 subsistence deer season to July 24th to December 31st each year.

Unit 2 deer need stronger conservation measures. Unit 2 deer populations are pressured by poaching, high hunter access, predation, and a lack of suitable foraging habitat due to second growth timber stands. In ADF+G and Forest Service public meetings, residents of Prince of Wales Island in Unit 2 have repeatedly stated that local deer populations are declining. In 2024, members of the public expressed concern that they are seeing less deer than in years prior. Declining deer populations threaten the continued subsistence and cultural practices of the area. Both CFR 100.24 and 5 AAC 99.025 found that deer are a traditionally taken subsistence species in Unit 2, and the ADF+G stated that 1,599 registered hunters pursued deer in Unit 2 in 2023. The deer population problem needs to be addressed to ensure these hunters can access their subsistence resources in the future.

Shortening the subsistence deer season can conserve the Unit 2 deer population. When looking at periods to close, the month of January is a logical choice. According to the ADF+G, a majority of Unit 2 deer taken by hunters are harvested in August, October, and November. In contrast, January deer harvest is minimal. Challenging weather conditions and skittish deer limit hunter engagement. Additionally, January hunts increase the chances of doe / offspring mortality. Sitka blacktail deer begin to drop their antlers in January each year. Once

antlers have dropped, positively identifying a buck becomes more difficult, and the chance of unintentional doe harvest increases. Subsistence hunters have also shared stories of harvesting January does with developing fetal deer still inside. Harvesting a doe with fawns is not only undesirable, but limits the reproduction rate of the deer population.

Closing the January deer hunting season can conserve the Unit 2 deer herd. Hunter engagement in January is limited, and unintentional harvest of does or fawns can reduce deer populations. In order to conserve this resource for the future, the January season needs to be closed.