

## WP26-67 Executive Summary

<b>General Description</b>	Wildlife Proposal WP26-67, requests to extend the trapping season for muskrat to year-round in Unit 23 to match State regulations. <i>Submitted by: Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council</i>
<b>Proposed Regulation</b>	<b>Proposed Federal Regulations</b>  <b>Unit 23– Muskrat Trapping</b>  <i>Unit 23— No limit.</i>  <i>Nov. 1–June. <u>10</u></i> <i><u>No closed season.</u></i>
<b>OSM Preliminary Conclusion</b>	<b>Support</b>
<b>Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council Recommendation</b>	
<b>North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council Recommendation</b>	
<b>Interagency Staff Committee Comments</b>	
<b>ADF&amp;G Comments</b>	
<b>Written Public Comments</b>	<b>None</b>

## **Draft Wildlife Analysis WP26-67**

### **ISSUE**

Wildlife Proposal WP26-67, submitted by the Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Council), requests to extend the trapping season for muskrat to year-round in Unit 23 to match State regulations.

### **Proponent Statement**

The proponent states that aligning the Federal muskrat season to match the State season will help reduce confusion and increase opportunity. Trappers have indicated an increased muskrat population in Unit 23.

While not explicit in their submitted proposal, the proponent (Chair of the Council) clarified that they wish to align Federal and State trapping seasons, but do not want the methods and means restrictions occurring in State regulations from June 11-Oct. 31 to apply to their proposed Federal regulations.

### **Current Federal Regulations**

#### **Unit 23– Muskrat Trapping**

*Unit 23— No limit.*

*Nov. 1-June. 10*

### **Proposed Federal Regulations**

#### **Unit 23– Muskrat Trapping**

*Unit 23— No limit.*

~~*Nov. 1-June. 10*~~  
***No closed season.***

### **Current State Regulations**

**Note:** There are no hunting regulations for muskrats under State regulations.

#### **Unit 23– Muskrat Trapping**

*Unit 23    No limit*

*In Unit 23 from June 11 – Oct 31, taking muskrat by any  
means other than a firearm is prohibited.*

*No closed season*

## **Relevant Federal Regulations**

### **Unit 23– Muskrat Hunting**

*Unit 23— No limit.*

*July 1 – June 30*

## **Extent of Federal Public Lands**

Unit 23 is comprised of approximately 69% Federal public lands that consist of 42% National Park Service (NPS) managed lands, 18% Bureau of Land Management (BLM) managed lands and, 9% U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) managed lands.

## **Customary and Traditional Use Determination**

The Federal Subsistence Board has not made a customary and traditional use determination for muskrat in Unit 23. Therefore, all rural residents of Alaska may harvest muskrats in this unit.

*Under the guidelines of Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), National Park Service regulations identify qualified local rural subsistence users in National Parks and National Monuments by: (1) identifying Resident Zone Communities that include a significant concentration of people who have customarily and traditionally used subsistence resources on park lands; and (2) identifying and issuing subsistence use (13.440) permits to individuals residing outside of the Resident Zone Communities who have a personal or family history of subsistence use within the park or monument.*

The resident zone communities for Kobuk Valley National Park (KOVA) and Cape Krusenstern National Monument (CAKR) include all NANA Regional Corporation communities (all Unit 23 communities except Point Hope).

## **Regulatory History**

Federal subsistence trapping regulations for muskrats in Unit 23 have not changed since 1990, when the Federal subsistence management program began. At that time, the current regulation was adopted from State regulation.

In November 2003, the Alaska Board of Game (BOG) adopted Proposal 22 as amended to extend the muskrat trapping season in Unit 23 to the current season of year-round, effective July 1, 2004 (BOG 2003). The amendment was to restrict the take of muskrats from June 11 – Oct. 31 to firearms only. Several State Fish and Game Advisory Committees (ACs) submitted the proposal to allow people to harvest muskrats for food during the summer months, and because there were no conservation concerns (BOG 2003).

## Biological Background

Population dynamics of muskrats in Unit 23 are not well documented. Muskrats (*Ondatra zibethicus*) occur throughout Unit 23, but there is no quantitative information regarding their abundance, population trends or harvest levels (Westing 2013). The highest populations of muskrat are in the broad floodplains and deltas of major rivers and in marshy areas dotted with small lakes (ADF&G 2025).

From 2013/14 to 2020/21, muskrat relative abundance in Region V, which includes Units 18, 22, 23 and 26A, was reported as scarce with the exception of 2017/18 when muskrats were reported as common. In 2021/22 muskrats were reported as not present, while in 2022/23 and 2023/24, muskrat relative abundance for Region V was notated as common (Parr 2016, 2017, 2018; Spivey 2019; Bogle 2021a, 2021b, 2022, 2023, 2025). However, the number of trappers reporting was low, ranging from 4-30 each year across the entire region.

## Harvest History

Spring muskrat hunting used to be an important subsistence activity in Unit 23. Although a few families still practice spring muskrat hunting, harvests are believed to be low compared to years prior to 1970 (Westing 2013).

Harvest of muskrats is not well documented for Unit 23. Sealing is not required for Unit 23 and the only information attained is through voluntary trapper questionnaires and subsistence surveys. Unit 23 is part of the State's Region V, which includes Units 18, 22, 23 and 26A. From 2013/14 to 2023/24, only one muskrat was voluntarily reported harvested in Unit 23 in 2019 (Bogle 2025). As a whole, Region V receives less than 10% participation in the trapper questionnaires each year with most years only receiving 2-3% participation.

Data from the most recent subsistence surveys for each Unit 23 community (**Table 1**) show that muskrat harvest varies widely between communities. The estimated total number of muskrats harvested by a community ranged from 1 muskrat in Noatak in 2007 to 298 muskrats in Noorvik in 2012; on average, communities harvested an estimated 60 muskrats per study year (ADF&G 2025b, **Table 1**).

**Table 1.** Four measures of muskrat use by residents of Unit 23 during the most recent year in which they were surveyed, 1992—2021 (ADF&G 2025b).

<b>Community</b>	<b>Survey Year</b>	<b>% HH Using</b>	<b>% HH Attempting to Harvest</b>	<b>% HH Harvesting</b>	<b>Estimated Total Number Harvested by Community</b>
<b>Ambler</b>	2012	9%	9%	9%	36
<b>Buckland</b>	2018	3%	1%	1%	7
<b>Deering</b>	2013	3%	3%	3%	11
<b>Kiana</b>	2021	5%	5%	5%	44
<b>Kivalina</b>	1992	3%	5%	3%	3
<b>Kobuk</b>	2012	13%	10%	10%	8
<b>Kotzebue</b>	2014	1%	1%	1%	19
<b>Noatak</b>	2007	1%	2%	1%	1
<b>Noorvik</b>	2012	22%	20%	19%	298
<b>Selawik</b>	2011	13%	11%	11%	203
<b>Shungnak</b>	2012	15%	7%	7%	26
<b>Average</b>		<b>8%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>60</b>

### **Alternative(s) Considered**

An alternative considered is to add the restriction of take by firearms only from Jun. 11-Oct. 31 to match the State regulation. Trapping is an indiscriminate harvest method, which could result in harvest of juvenile muskrats during the summer, whereas shooting allows for targeting of specific individuals. However, the proponent clarified that the intent of this proposal is for an unlimited, no closed trapping season for muskrats in Unit 23. This alternative was not further considered because it would not meet the proponent’s intent and would restrict subsistence opportunity.

Another alternative considered was to exclude CAKR and KOVA from the season extension. These areas are closed to anyone hunting or trapping under State regulations. Excluding these areas from the season extension could provide refugia and would represent a conservative approach as the status of the Unit 23 muskrat population and their harvest is essentially unknown. These areas appear to contain excellent habitat for muskrat. This alternative would result in Federal regulations remaining more restrictive than State regulations.

### **Discussion and Effects**

If this proposal is adopted, the muskrat trapping season in Unit 23 would be extended to year-round. This would increase subsistence opportunity by allowing federally qualified subsistence users to harvest muskrats using traps year-round, including from June 11 to October 31 on all Federal lands in Unit 23 under Federal regulations. Currently the use of traps for the harvest of muskrats is not allowed under Federal or State regulations from June 11 to October 31. Opportunity for year-round harvest of

muskrats using firearms or bow and arrow would continue on all Federal lands in Unit 23 under Federal hunting regulations, and most Federal lands (excluding KOVA and CAKR) under State trapping regulations.

Impacts to the muskrat population are unknown, but expected to be minimal as few users will likely trap muskrats during the summer. However, while users can target specific individuals for harvest when using firearms, traps are an indiscriminate harvest method. Trapping during the summer may lead to an increase of juveniles being harvested during the normal breeding and offspring rearing times (Fronstin 2025, pers. comm.). While harvest pressure is assumed to be low unit-wide, muskrat populations are localized with relatively small home ranges, suggesting impacts would also be localized depending on harvest pressure in specific areas.

The hide or meat of muskrat must be salvaged under Federal regulations, and any harvest during the summer would likely be for meat as hides are in poor condition. As caribou populations have declined, federally qualified subsistence users may turn to alternative resources to meet their needs. Therefore, allowing for increased muskrat harvest during the summer may contribute to food security.

Adopting this proposal would align State and Federal season dates for muskrat trapping in Unit 23 to year-round. However, as State trapping regulations only allow muskrat harvest by firearm from June 11-Oct. 31, adopting this proposal may increase regulatory complexity and confusion by misaligning the allowable methods and means under State and Federal regulations.

## **OSM PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION**

### **Support Proposal WP26-67**

#### **Justification**

Adopting this proposal would provide federally qualified subsistence users with additional harvest opportunities under Federal regulations, which may be increasingly important now due to declines in other subsistence resources. While there are no conservation concerns for muskrats unit-wide, localized impacts due to increased trapping pressure in certain areas may occur.

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