

## WP26-69 Executive Summary

<b>General Description</b>	Wildlife Proposal WP26-69 requests to extend the trapping season for mink and weasel to close April 15 in Unit 23. <i>Submitted by: Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council</i>
<b>Proposed Regulation</b>	<p><b>Proposed Federal Regulations</b></p> <p><b>Unit 23— Mink and Weasel</b></p> <p><i>Unit 23— No limit.</i></p> <p><i>Nov. 1- <del>Jan. 31</del> Apr. 15.</i></p>
<b>OSM Preliminary Conclusion</b>	<b>Support</b> Proposal WP26-69 with <b>modification</b> to exclude Cape Krusenstern National Monument and Kobuk Valley National Park.
<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  
WP26-69**

**ISSUE**

Wildlife Proposal WP26-69, submitted by the Northwest Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Council), requests to extend the trapping season for mink and weasel to close April 15 in Unit 23.

**Proponent Statement**

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

**Current Federal Regulations**

**Unit 23— Mink and Weasel**

*Unit 23— No limit.*

*Nov. 1-Jan. 31.*

**Proposed Federal Regulations**

**Unit 23— Mink and Weasel**

*Unit 23— No limit.*

*Nov. 1- ~~Jan. 31~~ Apr. 15.*

**Current State Regulations**

**Unit 23— Mink and Weasel**

*Unit 23*

*Both residents and nonresidents—No limit    Nov 1 - Apr 15*

## **Extent of Federal Public Lands**

Unit 23 is comprised of approximately 69% Federal public lands that consist of 43% National Park Service (NPS) managed lands, 17% Bureau of Land Management (BLM) managed lands 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 mink and weasel in Unit 23. Therefore, all rural residents of Alaska may harvest these species 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 regulations for mink and weasel in Unit 23 have not been changed since 1990, when the Federal management of subsistence fish and wildlife resources on Federal public lands began. At that time, the current regulation was adopted from State regulation.

At their November 2003 meeting, the Alaska Board of Game (BOG) adopted Proposal 21, extending the trapping season for mink and weasel in Unit 23 to close April 15, effective for the 2004/05 regulatory year. Several State Fish and Game Advisory Committees (ACs) in conjunction with ADF&G submitted the proposal to simplify regulations by aligning the closing date for the mink/weasel trapping season with the closing date for most other furbearers in Unit 23. The proponents stated few people specifically trap mink or weasel in Unit 23, but this season extension prevents incidental take when targeting other species (BOG 2003).

## **Biological Background**

Population dynamics of mink and weasel in Unit 23 are not well documented. The American mink (*Neovison vison*) is found in close association with water, preferring saltwater beaches, riparian habits of lakeshores, marshes, and stream banks found throughout most of Alaska (ADF&G 2025a). Mink occur throughout Unit 23 but little is known about their abundance or population trend. Mink numbers fluctuate locally, making it difficult to monitor their population trends. Snow and spruce forests in the

upper Kobuk drainage are generally suitable for mink, while the hard-packed snow conditions in the remainder of Unit 23 may limit the distribution of mink (Westing 2013). CAKR also provides good mink habitat (Fronstin 2025, pers. comm.). From 2013/14 to 2023/24, according to voluntary trapper questionnaires, mink was report as common with no change in population trends in Region V, which includes Units 18, 22, 23, and 26A (Parr 2016, 2017, 2018; Spivey 2019; Bogle 2021a, 2021b, 2022, 2023, 2025).

Two species of weasels can be found in forested, brushy, and open country in Alaska. The short-tailed weasel or ermine (*Mustela erminea*) as well as the least weasel (*Mustela rixosa*) are found throughout most of Alaska (ADF&G 2025b). However, weasels were not included in the most recent ADF&G furbearer management report for Unit 23 or indicated to occur there (Westing 2013). According to voluntary trapper reports, ermine were reported as common with no change in population trends in Region V from 2013/14 to 2023/24 (Parr 2016, 2017, 2018; Spivey 2019; Bogle 2021a, 2021b, 2022, 2023, 2025).

Weasel territory size can vary significantly, ranging from 20-300 acres, with 20-40 acres being more typical. Males and females live in separate territories, except during spring mating season. While weasels are generally resilient to high mortality, they can be locally extirpated. Weasel distribution may favor CAKR (Fronstin 2025, pers. comm.).

## **Harvest History**

Harvest of mink and weasels is not well documented for Unit 23. Sealing is not required in Unit 23 and the only harvest information available is from the voluntary trapper questionnaires. As a whole, Region V, which includes Unit 23, receives less than 10% participation in the trapper questionnaires. There were no responses to the questionnaires for Unit 23 in recent years (Bogle 2025).

## **Alternatives Considered**

One 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 mink and weasel population and their harvest is essentially unknown. These areas appear to contain excellent habitat for mink and weasel. This alternative would result in Federal regulations remaining more restrictive than State regulations.

## **Discussion and Effects**

If this proposal is adopted, the mink and weasel trapping season in Unit 23 would be extended to April 15<sup>th</sup>. This would increase opportunity for federally qualified subsistence users under Federal regulations, although users may already trap on most Federal lands until April 15 under State regulations. However, this proposal would allow users to trap until April 15 in KOVA and CAKR, which are closed to anyone trapping under State regulations. No impacts to the mink or weasel populations are expected as users can already trap until April 15<sup>th</sup> on most Federal lands in Unit 23

under the State regulations. While undocumented, harvest pressure on mink and weasel populations throughout Unit 23 is also likely low.

Adopting this proposal would also decrease regulatory complexity and confusion by aligning State and Federal regulations as directed by Executive Order 14153 3(b)(xxii) to “ensure to the greatest extent possible that hunting and fishing opportunities on Federal lands are consistent with similar opportunities on State lands.”

## **OSM PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION**

**Support** Proposal WP26-69 **with modification** to exclude Cape Krusenstern National Monument and Kobuk Valley National Park.

The draft regulations read:

### **Unit 23– Mink and Weasel**

*Unit 23, within Cape Krusenstern National Monument and Kobuk Valley National Park— No limit.* Nov. 1- Jan. 31

*Unit 23 remainder—No limit* Nov. 1 – Apr. 15

## **Justification**

This proposal increases opportunity for federally qualified subsistence users and there are no conservation concerns as users are already able to trap until April 15 on most Federal public lands in Unit 23 under State regulations. Additionally, Federal and State regulations for mink and weasel trapping in Unit 23 would be aligned, reducing regulatory complexity.

State regulations do not apply on National parklands, including CAKR and KOVA in Unit 23. Excluded NPS managed lands would retain the current Federal regulations as a conservative approach to providing refugia to Unit 23 mink and weasel populations as their population status and harvest is unknown.

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