Alaska Department of Fish and Game Comments

Wildlife Proposal WP26-08

This proposal would reduce the federal hunting season for Sitka black-tail deer (deer) season in Game Management Unit (GMU) 2 from July 24–January 31 to July 24–December 31.

Position

The Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) **SUPPORTS** this proposal to reduce hunter burden when attempting to distinguish between a buck and doe after antlers have dropped in the month of January. This would also align the season ending dates between state and federal regulations reducing the burden of determining season dates on different land ownerships, including below the mean high tide.

Background

Deer harvest during the month of January has been low from regulatory year (RY) 2016–RY2024. Harvest averaged 8 deer per year with a range from 0–32. Low harvest results in part from declining hunter participation. The average number of hunters in January during the same time was 8 with a range of 3–25. Hunters seem to be generally uninterested in harvesting deer during the late season. This could be for many reasons, but most hunters harvest their deer in the early part of the season in July and August and during the rut in November. It may be that most hunters fulfill their venison needs before the January season.

Shortening the season by one month would reduce a federally qualified user's (FQU) deer hunting opportunity but would align the end of the federal season with the end of the state deer hunting season. During the winter deer are commonly found on tidelands, which are owned by the state and closed to deer hunting after the state season closes on December 31. Male deer generally drop their antlers in January making it difficult to distinguish between bucks and does. Federally qualified users in GMU 2 may harvest only one doe per year, so hunters who have already harvested a doe must take caution when determining sex in January. There are two goals for this proposal: reduce illegal take of deer on state land during federal deer seasons and simplify regulations to reduce confusion about land management status for hunters.

East Prince of Wales Advisory Committee previously proposed in 2020 (WP20-06) to remove the January season during the Federal Subsistence Board (FSB) meeting but was opposed by the Office of Subsistence Management and was passed by the FSB.

Impact on Federally Qualified Users

Shortening the season by one month would reduce a federally qualified user's (FQU) deer hunting opportunity though few hunters take advantage of this opportunity so impacts would be minimal. Aligning season dates between state and federal regulations eliminates the burden for FQUs to understand the distinction where state tidelands end and federally owned uplands begin which could result in illegal harvest deer in closed areas/seasons.

Impact on Other Users

If adopted there would be little to no impact on other users as non-federally qualified users season ends December 31.

Opportunity Provided by State

State customary and traditional use findings: The Alaska Board of Game (BOG) has made positive customary and traditional use findings for deer in Unit 2.

Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence: Alaska state law requires the BOG to determine the amount of the harvestable portion of a game population that is reasonably necessary for customary and traditional uses. This is an ANS. The BOG does this by reviewing extensive harvest data from all Alaskans, collected either by ADF&G or from other sources.

ANS provides the BOG with guidelines on typical numbers of animals harvested for customary and traditional uses under normal conditions. Hunting regulations can be re-examined if harvests for customary and traditional uses consistently fall below ANS. This may be for many reasons: hunting regulations, changes in animal abundance or distribution, or changes in human use patterns, just to name a few.

The ANS for deer in Unit 2 is 1500–1600 animals. The season and bag limit for Unit 2 is:

		Open Season (GD000)	
Unit/Area	Bag Limit	Resident[a]	Nonresident
2	*4 bucks*	*Aug. 1–Dec. 31* (*Harvest ticket*)	*Aug. 1–Dec. 31* (*Harvest ticket*)

[a] Subsistence and General Hunts.

Conservation Issues

There are no conservation issues associated with this proposal.

Enforcement Issues

Adoption of this proposal may alleviate some confusion over land ownership and hunting regulations between state and federal entities. It may also make deer selection by sex easier since more male deer retain their antlers during December.