

Alaska Department of Fish and Game Comments

Wildlife Proposal WP26-09

This proposal would change the start date for the wolf trapping season in Game Management Unit (GMU) 2, delaying it from November 15 to December 15.

Position

The Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) **OPPOSES** this proposal. At the recent Alaska Board of Game (BOG) Southeast Region meeting, the BOG voted down a similar proposal (Proposal 49) unanimously and therefore the passage of WP26-09 would bring state and federal regulations out of alignment.

Background

During the 2019 meeting, the BOG aligned the GMU 2 state wolf trapping season with the federal season. This changed the start date of the trapping season from Dec. 1 to Nov. 15. This alignment alleviated trappers' frustrations over different start dates on different land ownerships (federal and non-federal). At the same meeting, the BOG endorsed the department's new management strategy which changed from a harvest quota to a season length-based strategy.

This adaptive approach to management allows ADF&G to alter the season length based on the most recent information available for wolves in Unit 2. From 2019 to present, ADF&G altered the trapping season based on the most recent population estimate, catch rate, and other factors to allow for the sustainable harvest of wolves. The hunting and trapping seasons are closed at the same time with an emergency order which is posted before the start of the trapping season. This allows trappers to plan for the trapping season. The trapping season length varied from 62 days in regulatory year (RY) 2019 to 21 days in RY2020 and from RY2021–RY2024, the trapping season spanned 31 days. Catch rates from RY2019–RY2024 averaged 2.4 wolves per day which is factored into the season length determination. The population estimate is also taken into account for the determination of the season length and varied between RY2019–RY2023 from 238 to 386 wolves (Figure 1). The highest harvest was 164 wolves in RY2019, after which ADF&G used their adaptive management strategy and decreased the season length following RY2019. From RY2021–RY2024 harvest stabilized, ranging from 62 to 74 wolves.

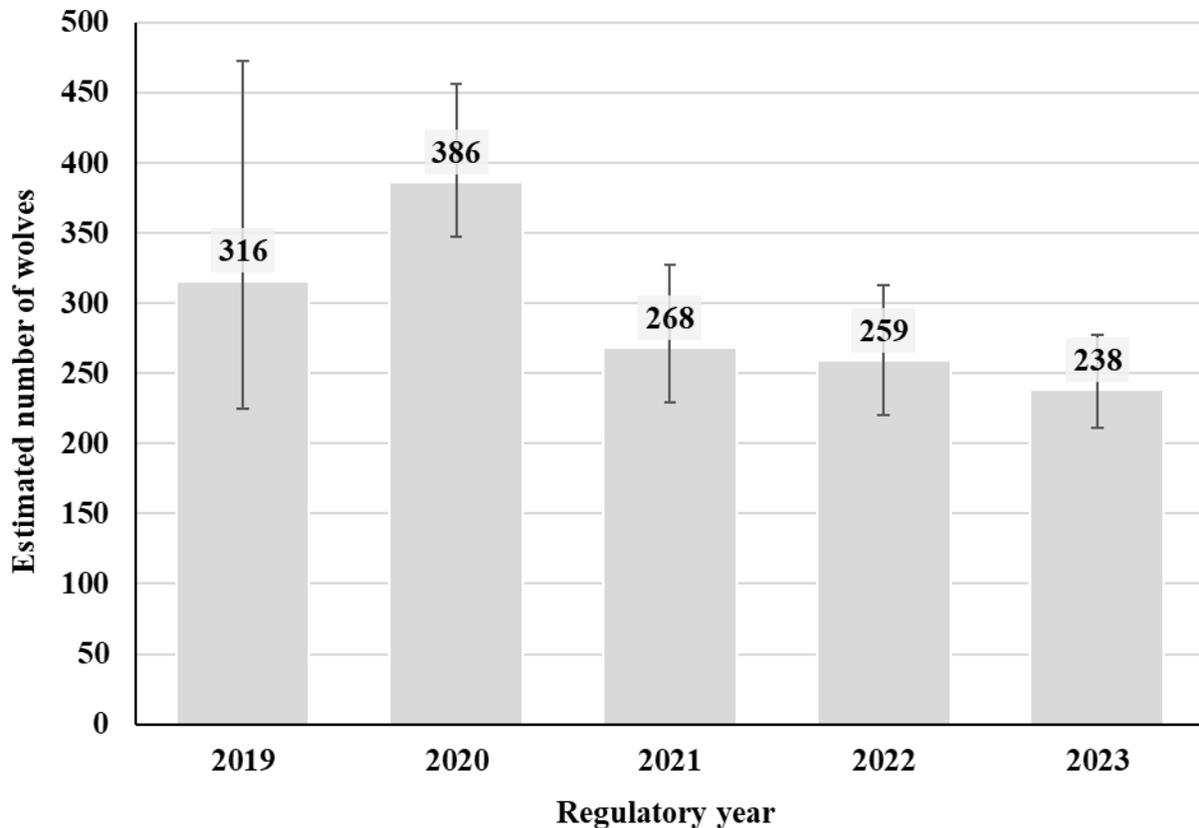


Figure 1.-Game Management Unit 2 wolf population estimates and associated 95% confidence intervals from regulatory year 2019 to 2023.

Impact on Federally Qualified Users

If adopted, the trapping season would open later which may change several trappers approach to trapping. Later in the season, temperatures may be lower which increases the frequency of freezing and thawing. When traps are frozen, they do not trigger allowing wolves to investigate a set without consequence. This may lower catch rates for some trappers, though trappers have mentioned to ADF&G that there are methods to avoid frozen traps. Boat based trappers that commonly set tidal sets may be most impacted.

Impact on Other Users

If adopted the new starting date would not affect other users. The starting date for non-federally qualified users will remain November 15, unless amended by the BOG.

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 wolves in Unit 2.

Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence: Alaska state law requires the Board of Game 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 BOG has not established an ANS for wolves in Unit 2.

Trapping regulations:

<u>Unit/Area</u>	<u>Bag Limit</u>	<u>Open Season</u>	
		<u>Resident</u>	<u>Nonresident</u>
2	<i>no limit</i>	<i>Nov. 15–Mar. 31</i>	<i>Nov. 15–Mar. 31</i>

Conservation Issues

This proposal is not likely to cause conservation issues with the wolf population in GMU 2.

Enforcement Issues

If season dates differed between federal and state seasons on federal and non-federal lands this could cause confusion among trappers and issues for law enforcement.