

Alaska Department of Fish and Game Comments

Wildlife Proposal WP26-75

This proposal would close moose hunting in Game Management Unit (GMU) 25D Remainder to non-federally qualified users (NFQU).

Position

The Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) **OPPOSES** this proposal. There is no biological reason to restrict hunters, the harvest remains far below the harvestable surplus for the area and federally qualified users (FQU) already have a much longer hunting season on federal public land.

ANILCA §1314(a) explicitly states: "Nothing in this Act is intended to enlarge or diminish the responsibility and authority of the State of Alaska for management of fish and wildlife on the public lands except as may be provided in Title VIII..." Title VIII provides only a narrow exception allowing the Secretary to restrict State-authorized harvest when necessary to meet the needs of federally qualified rural residents. Section 802(2) establishes the policy that "nonwasteful subsistence uses of fish and wildlife and other renewable resources shall be the priority consumptive use of all such resources on the public lands of Alaska **when it is necessary to restrict taking in order to assure the continued viability of a fish or wildlife population or the continuation of subsistence uses of such population...**" [emphasis added]. Section 804 reiterates this policy and establishes criteria to implement a priority when the above conditions are met. It does not authorize wholesale replacement of State management. Per §815(3) of ANILCA, "...restriction on nonsubsistence uses are only authorized when necessary for the conservation of healthy wildlife populations or to continue subsistence uses."

Executive Order 15153, Sec. 3(b)(xxii) directs the Department of the Interior to conduct meaningful consultation with State fish and wildlife agencies prior to enacting land management plans or regulations affecting hunting and fishing opportunities on public lands. This directive was reinforced by Secretarial Order 3447, which calls for removing unnecessary barriers to hunting and fishing, expanding access where compatible, improving coordination with State agencies, and ensuring transparent review of any proposed restrictions.

Background

The remainder of GMU 25D is about 11,110 mi² and has remained at a very low but stable moose population according to surveys conducted in 2004 (0.26 moose/mi²), 2005 (0.34 moose/mi²), 2006 (0.27 moose/mi²), 2007 (0.20 moose/mi²), and 2015 (0.34 moose/mi², Caikoski 2024). No surveys have been conducted since 2015 because of persistent, poor survey conditions. When extrapolating the moose density from the survey area to the rest of GMU 25D Remainder the moose population is estimated between 2,200 and 3,800 moose. Harvestable surplus for this area is calculated at 5% bulls only and is between 110 and 190 moose. The long-term average reported harvest for 25D remainder is 27 moose and the average number of hunters is 78. Therefore, the harvest is far below the harvestable surplus and there is no biological reason to restrict hunters.

The current season lengths for FQUs currently far exceeds what is available under state regulations allowing FQUs a larger opportunity outside of state regulations. During the fall, FQUs can hunt on federal public land from 25 August to 15 October (52 days) while non-federally qualified users (NFQU) and FQUs can hunt on all lands from 10–20 September (11 days). During the winter, FQUs can hunt 1–20 December (20 days) on federal public land and all users can hunt 18–28 February (11 days) on all lands. Overall, FQU can hunt 83 days/year while NFQU can hunt 22 days.

Impact on Federally Qualified Users

If adopted, FQUs would receive exclusive use of federal public land during the 11 days of the state fall season.

Impact on Other Users

If adopted, NFQUs will only be able to hunt on state and private lands during the two seasons that are offered under state regulations.

Opportunity Provided by State

State customary and traditional use findings: The Alaska Board of Game (BOG) has made a positive customary and traditional use findings for moose in Unit 25D East.

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 moose in Unit 25D East is 150–250 moose. The season and bag limit for GMU 25D East is:

<u>Unit/Area</u>	<u>Bag Limit</u>	<u>Open Season (Harvest ticket)</u>	
		<u>Resident^a</u>	<u>Nonresident</u>
<i>25D East</i>	<i>1 Bull</i>	<i>September 10–20 February 18–28</i>	<i>September 10–20</i>

^a Subsistence and General Hunts.

Conservation Issues

With the current population level and with the current harvest level there is no conservation concern.

Enforcement Issues

If adopted, the closure will cause confusion for NFQUs if education and outreach is not conducted and that will exacerbate enforcement issues.