

<b>WP26-63 Executive Summary</b>	
<b>General Description</b>	Wildlife Proposal WP26-63 requests to combine two muskox hunt areas and associated permit requirements in Unit 22D. <i>Submitted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.</i>
<b>Proposed Regulation</b>	<p><b>Unit 22D—Muskox</b></p> <p><i>Unit 22D, that portion west of the Tisuk River drainage and Canyon Creek—1 bull by Federal drawing permit or State permit. Federal public lands are closed to the harvest of musk ox except by residents of Nome and Teller hunting under these regulations</i> <span style="float: right;"><i>Sep. 1–Mar. 15.</i></span></p> <p><i>Unit 22D, that portion within the Kuzitrin River drainages—1 bull by Federal drawing permit or State permit. Federal public lands are closed to the taking of musk ox except for residents of Council, Golovin, White Mountain, Nome, Teller, and Brevig Mission hunting under these regulations</i> <span style="float: right;"><i>Aug. 1–Mar. 15.</i></span></p> <p><i>Unit 22D, remainder - 1 bull by Federal drawing permit or State permit.</i> <span style="float: right;"><i>Aug. 1–Mar. 15.</i></span></p> <p><b>Federal public lands within the Kuzitrin River drainages are closed to the taking of musk ox except for residents of Council, Golovin, White Mountain, Nome, Teller, and Brevig Mission hunting under these regulations.</b></p> <p><b>Federal public lands in Unit 22D, remainder excluding that portion within the Kuzitrin River drainages are closed to the taking of musk ox except by residents of Elim, White Mountain, Nome, Teller, and Brevig Mission hunting under these regulations</b></p>
<b>OSM Conclusion</b>	<b>Oppose Proposal WP26-63</b>
<b>Seward Peninsula Subsistence Regional Advisory Council Recommendation</b>	<b>Oppose</b>
<b>Interagency Staff Committee Comments</b>	The Interagency Staff Committee found the analysis to be a thorough and accurate evaluation of the proposal and that it provides sufficient basis for the Regional Advisory Council recommendation and the Federal Subsistence Board action on this proposal.

<b>WP26-63 Executive Summary</b>	
<b>ADF&amp;G Comments</b>	<b>Support</b>
<b>Written Public Comments</b>	<b>None.</b>

## Wildlife Analysis WP26-63

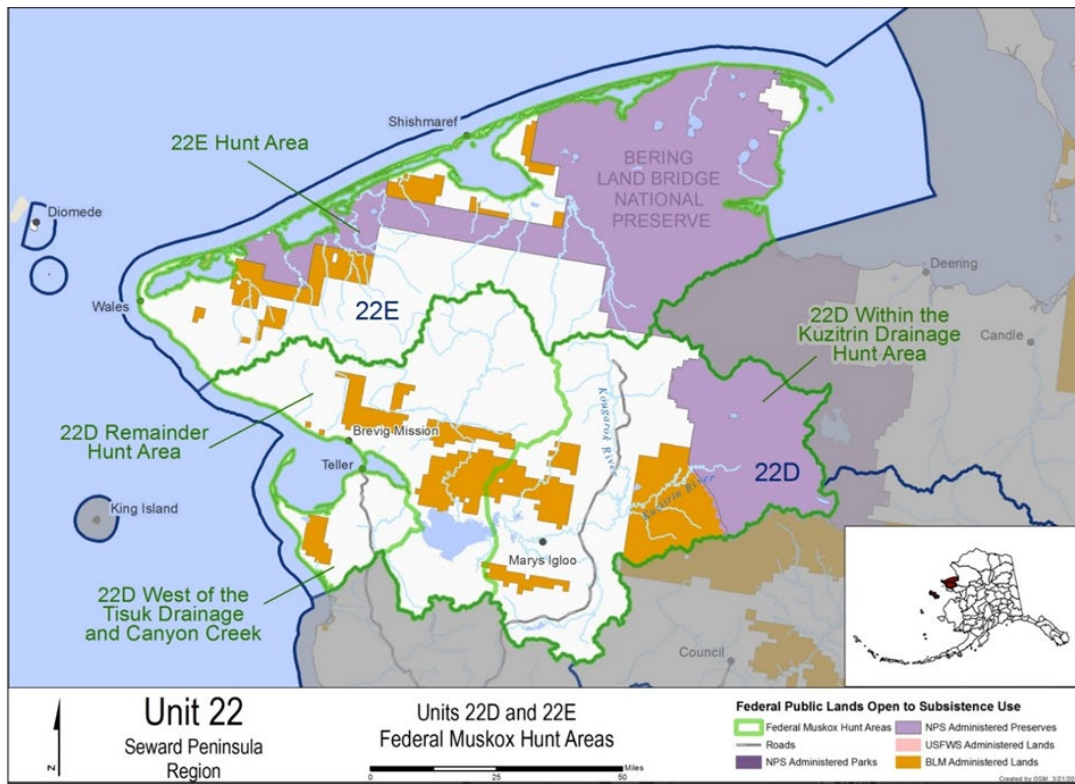
### ISSUE

Wildlife Proposal WP26-63, submitted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), requests to combine two muskox hunt areas and associated permit requirements in Unit 22D.

Specifically, the proposal requests combining Unit 22D, that portion within the Kuzitrin river drainage (Unit 22D Kuzitrin) and Unit 22D, remainder into one hunt area as well as consolidating the associated permits (FX2206 and FX2208) into one permit for the combined hunt area (**Map 1**).

### Proponent Statement

The proponent states there is no biological reason to have these areas separated, as collared muskoxen have been documented moving between the two areas. They also state combining these hunt areas will create consistency between Federal and State regulations, helping users to better understand and adhere to regulations. ADF&G plans to submit a proposal to the Alaska Board of Game (BOG) during the 2026 Region 5 cycle to change the season opening date in Unit 22D Kuzitrin to Aug. 1 under State regulations. The proponent further states this proposal would not impact the muskox population as State and Federal managers cooperatively manage harvest through permit issuance.



**Map 1.** Muskox hunt areas in Units 22D and 22E.

## Current Federal Regulations

### Unit 22D—Muskox

*Unit 22D, that portion west of the Tisuk River drainage and Canyon Creek—1 bull by Federal drawing permit or State permit. Federal public lands are closed to the harvest of musk ox except by residents of Nome and Teller hunting under these regulations* Sep. 1–Mar. 15.

*Unit 22D, that portion within the Kuzitrin River drainages - 1 bull by Federal permit or State permit. Federal public lands are closed to the taking of musk ox except for residents of Council, Golovin, White Mountain, Nome, Teller, and Brevig Mission hunting under these regulations* Aug. 1–Mar. 15.

*Unit 22D, remainder - 1 bull by Federal permit or State permit. Federal public lands are closed to the taking of musk ox except by residents of Elim, White Mountain, Nome, Teller, and Brevig Mission hunting under these regulations* Aug. 1–Mar. 15.

## Proposed Federal Regulations

### Unit 22D—Muskox

*Unit 22D, that portion west of the Tisuk River drainage and Canyon Creek—1 bull by Federal drawing permit or State permit. Federal public lands are closed to the harvest of musk ox except by residents of Nome and Teller hunting under these regulations* Sep. 1–Mar. 15.

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*Unit 22D, remainder - 1 bull by Federal drawing permit or State permit.* Aug. 1–Mar. 15.

***Federal public lands within the Kuzitrin River drainages are closed to the taking of musk ox except for residents of Council, Golovin, White Mountain, Nome, Teller, and Brevig Mission hunting under these regulations.***

***Federal public lands in Unit 22D, remainder excluding that portion within the Kuzitrin River drainages are closed to the taking of musk ox except by residents of Elim, White Mountain, Nome, Teller, and Brevig Mission hunting under these regulations***

**Current State Regulations**

**Unit 22D–Muskox**

<i>22D that portion west of the Tisuk River drainage, west of the west bank of the unnamed creek originating at the unit boundary opposite the headwaters of McAdam Creek and west of the west bank of Canyon Creek to its confluence with Tuksuk Channel</i>	<i>One bull by permit.</i>	<i>TX103</i>	<i>Jan 1–Mar 15</i>
<i>22D Kuzitrin River drainage (Includes Kougarok and Pilgrim rivers)</i>	<i>One bull by permit</i>	<i>TX102</i>	<i>Jan 1–Mar 15</i>
<i>22D remainder</i>	<i>One bull by permit</i>	<i>TX102</i>	<i>Aug 1–Mar 15</i>

**Extent of Federal Public Lands**

Unit 22D is comprised of approximately 24% Federal public lands that consist of 13% Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and 11% National Park Service (NPS) managed lands.

Unit 22D Kuzitrin is comprised of approximately 46% Federal public lands, consisting of 28% NPS and 18% BLM managed lands.

Unit 22D remainder is comprised of approximately 15% Federal public lands, all of which are BLM managed lands.

### **Customary and Traditional Use Determination**

Rural residents of Units 22B, 22C, 22D (excluding St. Lawrence Island), and 22E have a customary and traditional use determination (C&T) for muskox in Unit 22D.

### **Regulatory History**

Please see Regulatory History section of WP26-64.

### **Current Events**

Proposal WP26-01 requests to move authority to manage Federal hunts currently delegated to Federal in-season managers through Delegation of Authority Letters (DALs) into unit-specific regulations for many hunts across Alaska and to rescind the associated DALs. The delegated authority to the BLM Anchorage Field Office manager and the NPS Bering Land Bridge National Preserve Superintendent for in-season management of Unit 22 muskoxen is included in this proposal.

Proposed language from WP26-01 regarding the management of the Unit 22D Kuzitrin muskox hunt: *“The Bering Land Bridge National Preserve superintendent after coordination with ADF&G, OSM, the BLM Anchorage Field Office, and the Chair of the affected Council(s) is authorized within the regulatory parameters set by the Board, to close the season, determine annual harvest quotas, the number of permits to be issued, and the method of permit allocation between State and Federal permits.”*

Proposed language from WP26-01 regarding the management of the Unit 22D remainder muskox hunt: *“The Anchorage Field Office manager after coordination with ADF&G, OSM, the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, and the Chair of the affected Council(s) is authorized within the regulatory parameters set by the Board, to close the season, determine annual harvest quotas, the number of permits to be issued, and the method of permit allocation between State and Federal permits.”*

### **Biological Background**

Please see Biological Background section of WP26-64.

### **Cultural Knowledge and Traditional Practices**

Please see Cultural Knowledge and Traditional Practices section of WP26-64

### **Harvest History**

Please see Harvest History section of WP26-64.

## Discussion and Effects

If this proposal is adopted, two muskox hunt areas and permits in Unit 22D would be collapsed into one hunt area with a single permit. Combining these two hunt areas would reduce the administrative burden of managing these two hunts, as currently both the BLM and the NPS manage each permit separately. Combining into one hunt area will eliminate the delegated authority for one of the land management agencies to administer the hunt. Reporting and tracking harvest will also be simpler, as there would only be one permit on which to report. However, permit requirements are an administrative change, not a regulatory one.

However, the reason there are two permits is because there are currently §804 restrictions in place, limiting the communities eligible to participate in each of these muskox hunts. Council and Golovin are only eligible to hunt in Unit 22D Kuzitrin (FX2206), while Elim is only eligible to hunt in Unit 22D remainder (FX2208). White Mountain, Nome, Teller, and Brevig Mission are eligible to hunt in both of these areas.

While State Tier II permits are also valid to hunt muskox under Federal regulations in these areas, State permit holders still must be federally qualified subsistence users to hunt on Federal public lands in accordance with the existing §804 restrictions. The Federal draw permit is intended to provide additional opportunity to federally qualified subsistence users who did not receive a State Tier II permit. Administering a draw permit for a singular hunt area where only some communities are eligible for part of that hunt area presents logistical and law enforcement challenges.

Adopting this proposal may also increase alignment between 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.” While State hunt areas in Unit 22D are currently separated into Unit 22D Kuzitrin and Unit 22D remainder, similar to the existing Federal hunt areas and the Unit 22D Kuzitrin season is shorter, ADF&G anticipates submitting a proposal to extend the Unit 22D Kuzitrin season to open August 1. Both hunt areas are administered under the same Tier II permit under State regulations.

Conservation concerns for these hunts would be mitigated by the limitation on the number of draw permits issued, which could be adjusted annually in response to the status of the muskox population. Due to the small size of the muskox population and susceptibility to over hunting, this population is closely managed by quotas and permit numbers. Since the demand for muskoxen is greater than the harvestable surplus, a drawing permit is still recommended so that harvest is limited, and the threat of overharvest minimized. The Federal manager will need to work closely with the State to monitor harvest under both State and Federal hunts if this proposal is adopted.

## **OSM CONCLUSION**

**Oppose** Proposal WP26-63

### **Justification**

The permit changes requested are administrative in nature, and combining hunt areas is not appropriate due to the differing §804 restrictions. Administering a single draw permit for communities that are not eligible to hunt the entire hunt area is logistically challenging and may create inequities in permit distribution and law enforcement concerns.

## SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

### Seward Peninsula Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

**Oppose.** Combining these areas would limit opportunity for federally qualified subsistence users. There is no conservation concern with how tightly managed the harvest is.

## INTERAGENCY STAFF COMMITTEE COMMENT

The Interagency Staff Committee found the analysis to be a thorough and accurate evaluation of the proposal and that it provides sufficient basis for the Regional Advisory Council recommendation and the Federal Subsistence Board action on this proposal.

## ALASKA DEPARTEMENT OF FISH AND GAME COMMENT

### **Wildlife Proposal WP26-63**

This proposal would consolidate Game Management Unit (GMU) 22D American (FX2208) and 22D Kuzitrin (FX2206) into a single hunt area and permit for muskox hunting in GMU 22D by federal permit.

### **Position**

The Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) **SUPPORTS** this proposal. There is no biological reason to manage these two hunt areas separately and collared muskoxen have been documented moving between the two areas.

### **Background**

ADF&G began fitting muskoxen with GPS collars in 2021. That data indicates cow muskoxen move throughout Unit 22D, often back and forth between management units. This data suggests that GMU 22D Kuzitrin and GMU 22D American hunt areas are arbitrary. Given that muskoxen are sometimes scarce in either management area between years, combining the areas will increase opportunity and hunter success by allowing hunters to hunt muskoxen in the combined area rather than being restricted to one of the two management areas. This will also reduce unnecessary regulatory complexity.

### **Impact on Federally Qualified Users**

If adopted the federal hunting regulations will be easier to understand by merging these two areas.

### **Impact on Other Users**

If adopted, there would be no impact on resident Alaskans hunting muskox under state regulations.

**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 muskoxen in GMU 22 and 23, that portion south and west of the Kobuk River drainage.

**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 Muskoxen in this area is 100-150 animals. The season and bag limit for GMU 22D is:

<u>Unit/Area</u>	<u>Bag Limit</u>	<u>Open Season (Permit/Hunt #)</u>	
		<u>Resident<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>Nonresident</u>
<i>22D SW</i>	<i>One bull</i>	<i>Jan 1 – March 15 (TX103)</i>	<i>No open season</i>
<i>22D Kuzitrin</i>	<i>One bull</i>	<i>Jan 1 – March 15 (TX102)</i>	<i>No open season</i>
<i>22D Remainder</i>	<i>One bull</i>	<i>Aug 1 – March 15 (TX102)</i>	<i>No open season</i>
		<i>(Permit type)</i>	<i>(Permit type)</i>

<sup>a</sup> Subsistence and General Hunts.

**Conservation Issues**

There are no conservation concerns associated with the passage of this proposal. As mentioned above, muskoxen have been documented moving between the two areas.

**Enforcement Issues**

Any enforcement issues associated with hunters using the wrong permit for either area should be alleviated with the passage of this proposal.