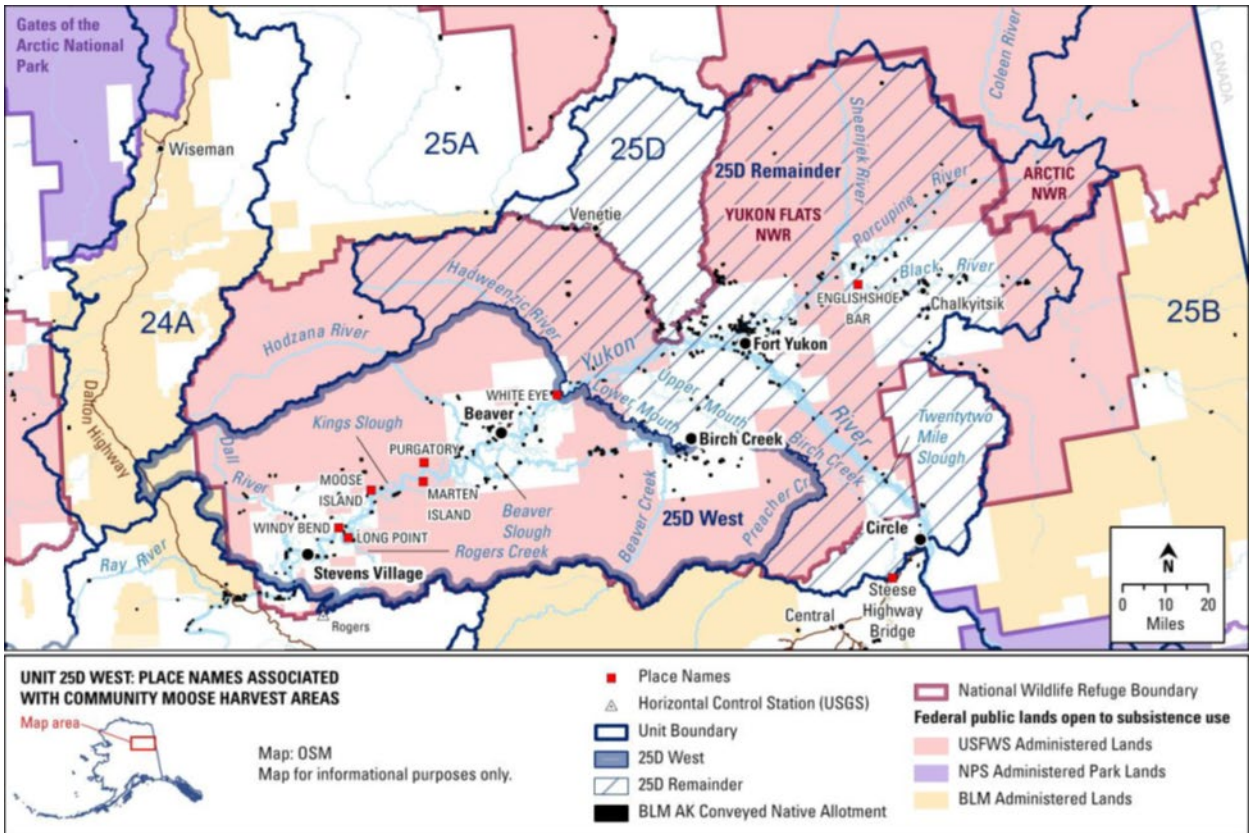


WP26-75 Executive Summary	
General Description	Proposal WP26-75, requests to close moose hunting in Unit 25D remainder to non-federally qualified users. <i>Submitted by the Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council.</i>
Proposed Regulation	<p>Proposed Federal Regulations</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Unit 25– Moose</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Unit 25D, remainder—1 antlered moose</i> <i>Aug. 25-Oct. 15. Dec. 1-20</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Federal public lands are closed to moose hunting except by federally qualified subsistence users hunting under these regulations.</i></p>
OSM Preliminary Conclusion	Oppose
OSM Conclusion	Neutral on Proposal WP26-75 as modified by OSM to close moose hunting by non-federally qualified users from Sep. 10-20 within the targeted closure area of Unit 25D remainder, consisting of a 10-mile corridor (5 miles either side) along the Yukon River and 5-mile corridors (2.5 miles either side) along Birch Creek (including Upper and Lower Mouths), the Sheenjek River to river mile 60, the Porcupine River, Black River, and Chandalar River.
Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council Recommendation	Fall 2025: Support Winter 2026: Support as modified by OSM
Interagency Staff Committee Comments	Please see full comment at the end of this analysis
ADF&G Comments	Oppose
Written Public Comments	None

Wildlife Analysis WP26-75

ISSUE

Proposal WP26-75, submitted by the Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Council), requests to close moose hunting in Unit 25D remainder to non-federally qualified users (Map 1).



Map 1. Unit 25D remainder and Unit 25D west moose hunt areas.

Proponent Statement

The proponent states that the moose density in this area is very sparse, and there are conservation concerns for moose. No aerial surveys for moose have been done in Unit 25D remainder since 2015. The proponent also notes that there are concerns about the ability of federally qualified subsistence users to meet their needs for moose due to the low numbers and competition with non-federally qualified users. The proponent wants to ensure that the moose population can remain at a sustainable level for harvest by federally qualified subsistence users. The closure in neighboring Unit 25D west

has been working well for local residents, and the proponent feels replicating this in Unit 25D remainder would also help residents of that portion of the unit to be more likely to meet their subsistence needs.

Current Federal Regulations

Unit 25– Moose

Unit 25D, remainder—1 antlered moose.

*Aug. 25-Oct. 15.
Dec. 1-20*

Proposed Federal Regulations

Unit 25– Moose

Unit 25D, remainder—1 antlered moose

*Aug. 25-Oct. 15.
Dec. 1-20*

Federal public lands are closed to moose hunting except by federally qualified subsistence users hunting under these regulations.

Current State Regulations

Unit 25D– Moose

<i>Unit 25D remainder</i>	<i>Residents:—1 bull OR</i>	<i>HT</i>	<i>Sep. 10 – Sep.20</i>
	<i>1 bull OR</i>	<i>HT</i>	<i>Feb. 18 – Feb. 28</i>
	<i>1 bull by permit OR</i>	<i>CM001</i>	<i>Sep. 10 – Sep.20</i>
	<i>1 bull by permit</i>	<i>CM001</i>	<i>Feb. 18 – Feb. 28</i>
	<i>Nonresidents— 1 bull with 50-inch antlers or antlers with 4 or more brow tines on at least one side</i>	<i>HT</i>	<i>Sep. 10 – Sep.20</i>

Extent of Federal Public Lands

Unit 25D is comprised of approximately 63% Federal public lands and consists of 62% U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) managed lands, and 1% Bureau of Land Management (BLM) managed lands.

Customary and Traditional Use Determination

Residents of the remainder of Unit 25 have a customary and traditional use determination for moose in Unit 25D remainder.

Regulatory History

In the early 1980s, the Alaska Board of Game (BOG) divided Unit 25D into Unit 25D West and Unit 25D remainder to allow use of regulatory schemes that reflected the difference status of the moose populations (permits are required in Unit 25D west due to low moose density and relatively high demand for moose by local residents, while harvest tickets are required in Unit 25D remainder) (Caikoski 2014).

In 1990, the Federal moose season for Unit 25D remainder ran from Aug. 25 – Sep. 25 and Dec. 1 – Dec. 10 with a harvest limit of one bull.

In 1991, the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) adopted Proposal P91-74 to extend the winter season in Unit 25D remainder 10 days to Dec. 20 to provide greater harvest opportunity, particularly to accommodate inclement weather in December.

In 1993, the Board adopted Proposal P93-61 to modify the harvest limit in Unit 25D remainder to one antlered moose.

In 1995, the Board adopted Proposal P95-52, allowing the take of moose and caribou in Unit 25 from a snowmachine or motorboat. This was done to alleviate unnecessary restrictions on federally qualified subsistence users in Unit 25 as this provision was already allowed in other units across the State.

In 2000, the BOG established a community harvest permit program for the Chalkyitsik Community Harvest Area (CM001), which includes Unit 25D remainder and Unit 25B remainder (Caikoski 2014).

In 2010, the Board adopted Proposal WP10-93 with modification to extend the closing date of the fall moose season in Unit 25D remainder from Sep. 25 to Oct. 1 to provide additional harvest opportunity. The modification only extended the fall season six days. This was consistent with the proponent's request to provide for some additional harvest opportunity, while addressing conservation and meat spoilage concerns of starting the fall season in early August.

In 2012, the Board adopted Proposal WP12-63, which required edible meat to be left on the bones of caribou and moose harvested in Unit 25 until removed from the field and/or processed for human consumption. This was done to reduce meat spoilage.

In 2024, the Board adopted Proposal WP24-33 extending the fall moose season in Units 25B, 25C, and 25D remainder to close October 15. In Unit 25D remainder, this extended the season by 14 days. The Board stated that this extension of the season increases opportunity for federally qualified subsistence users during a time when they don't have to compete with non-federally qualified users hunting under State regulations and it may help to address concerns about proper meat care and the potential for spoilage due to warmer weather earlier in the season. OSM cited minimal conservation concerns for the season extension due to the bulls-only harvest limit, high bull:cow ratios and relatively low reported local harvest and harvest pressure after the State seasons close.

Biological Background

State management objectives for moose in Unit 25D are to maintain a minimum of 40 bulls:100 cows in the post-hunt population, and a population of 10,000-15,000 moose (Caikoski 2024). Moose densities have been historically low across Unit 25D. During the 1980s and 1990s, when the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and USFWS began conducting regular surveys, moose densities ranged from a low of 0.1 moose/mi² in 1984 to a high of 0.64 moose/mi² in 1989 (Caikoski 2014). Between 1999 and 2007, moose densities in Unit 25D remainder averaged 0.25 moose/mi² (range: 0.18-0.34 moose/mi², **Table 1**). No population or composition surveys were completed in 2011 or 2012 due to poor survey conditions (Caikoski 2014). In 2015, moose density in Unit 25D remainder was estimated at 0.34 moose/mi² (Bertram 2017, pers. comm.).

Between 1999 and 2015, fall bull:cow ratios in Unit 25D remainder averaged 64 bulls:100 cows (range: 35-95 bulls:100 cows), meeting management objectives (40 bulls:100 cows) in all years except 2015 (**Table 2**, Caikoski 2014; Bertram 2017, pers. comm.). Fall calf:cow ratios of < 20 calves:100 cows, 20-40 calves:100 cows, and > 40 calves:100 cows may indicate declining, stable, and growing moose populations, respectively (Stout 2010, 2012). Between 1999 and 2007, fall calf:cow ratios in Unit 25D remainder averaged 48 calves:100 cows (range: 37-59 calves:100 cows), suggesting a stable or growing moose population (**Table 2**, Caikoski 2014). In 2015, fall calf:cow ratios were extremely high at 80 calves:100 cows (Bertram 2017, pers. comm.). However, Caikoski (2014) cautions that interpretation of demographic trends may be confounded by variations in survey areas and small sample sizes.

Habitat is not considered a limiting factor. Unit 25 as a whole, contains excellent moose habitat that is maintained by wildfires (Caikoski 2014). Predation by wolves and bears; however, appears to be limiting the Unit 25 moose population (Caikoski 2014). Lake et al. (2013) investigated wolf kill rates of moose in Unit 25D. They found that wolf kill rates approximated those in areas with higher moose densities, suggesting that wolf predation is contributing to persistent low moose densities (Lake et al. 2013). Similarly, Bertram and Vivion (2002) found that while calf production is high in Unit 25D, only 20% of radio collared calves survived their first year. Predation of neonates (< 1 month old calves) by black and brown bears was the primary source (84%) of mortality. High predation rates combined with illegal cow harvest and low predator harvest may act in concert to maintain low moose densities in Unit 25D (Bertram and Vivion 2002; Caikoski 2014).

Table 1. Bull:cow, calf:cow and moose density for Unit 25D remainder (Caikoski 2014; Bertram 2017, pers. comm.).

Year	Bulls:100 cows	Calves:100 cows	Density (moose/mi ²)
1999	57	59	0.28
2000	79	49	0.25
2001	95	43	0.18
2004	43	51	0.26
2005	80	58	0.34
2006	60	37	0.27
2007	64	39	0.20
2015	35	80	0.34
Average	64	52	0.27

Cultural Knowledge and Traditional Practices

The subsistence moose harvest in Unit 25D has been discussed and debated for a long time. This is because Yukon Flats moose is one of the lowest density populations in North America (USFWS 2025). Council members have described factors that limit their ability to harvest enough moose which prompts them to propose Federal harvest restrictions. Primary are observations of less moose to harvest coupled with increasing competition from outside hunters who seem to have highly sophisticated equipment; a warming climate which affects the type and amount of willow browse available to moose, and appears to lead to increased numbers of predators; and development projects that damage habitat, pollute, and attract new people and more competition for moose (EIRAC 2025a: 41-46, 48-50). Most important, however, is the intricate system of Yukon Flats Tribal Governance land use boundaries in Unit 25D that specify who harvests moose and where. It appears that the current customary and traditional use determinations for Unit 25D moose reflect Tribal Governance boundaries. And, because Fort Yukon is a recent, hub community with residents that have moved there from other Yukon Flats villages, it seems to be viewed differently than the other Yukon Flats communities in the Tribal Governance system (Stevens Village Council 1999, 1991 and Caulfield 1983). All of these considerations are critical because moose are central to the subsistence harvest of the residents of Yukon Flats. The Athabaskan peoples of the Eastern Interior region have a long history of harvesting moose for subsistence. Indigenous and Traditional knowledge of moose and moose hunting is detailed and central to the culture of Yukon Flats Athabascans (ADF&G 1992, Nelson et al. 1978, Nelson 1973). The communal harvest and sharing of moose is the defining characteristic of these subsistence economies (ADF&G 1992, Sumida 1990, 1989, 1988, Sumida and Alexander 1985). Euro-Americans who reside in the Yukon Flats also depend heavily on moose as a subsistence staple.

Restricted access to Unit 25D moose began under State management in 1983 when the Board of Game created Unit 25D west and enacted a registration hunt in response to "...local, advisory committee, and Department of Fish and Game concerns about the sparse numbers of moose in the area (Sumida and

Alexander 1985: 1). When the Federal Subsistence Management Program began in 1990, the State regulations were adopted. Those regulations remain in place today, forty-two years later:

- 1.) The communities of Stevens Village, Birch Creek and Beaver and others living within Unit 25D west have a customary and traditional use determination for moose in Unit 25D west.
- 2.) The communities within Unit 25D remainder: Arctic Village, Venetie, Fort Yukon, Chalkyitsik, Central, and Circle have a customary and traditional use determination for moose in Unit 25D remainder.

The current proposal, WP26-75 is the most recent, but not the first, attempt by Fort Yukon to enhance their ability to harvest moose in Unit 25D. In 1993, two residents of Fort Yukon voiced opposition to their exclusion from the C&T determination for moose in Unit 25D west:

I know and have relatives that harvest moose in that area. Those people live in Fort Yukon and outside this area Unit 25D west. Subsistence users that harvest from Fort Yukon should not be made outlaws. People [from]outside use [permission] to be made by the village council in the area (OSM 1993).

Similar comments were voiced at a public meeting held in Fort Yukon in 1993:

[Speaker] [I] Would like moose permits issued to Beaver, Birch Creek, and Stevens Village to be transferable to residents of Fort Yukon. Some residents of Fort Yukon have relatives in these villages and have traditionally hunted moose in Unit 25D west where there is a C&T determination. [I] would like to see people who use and/or own land (not necessarily primary resident) in the area be included for permits [in Unit 25D west] (OSM 1993).

In 2002, Yukon Flats communities and ADF&G partnered to address the Unit 25D moose shortage. The result was the Yukon Flats Cooperative Moose Management Plan (ADF&G et al. 2002). Among many proposed approaches to moose management was the suggestion of a Federal subsistence and/or State Tier II permit to establish a moose hunt in Unit 25D remainder/east similar to the system used in Unit 25D west. Ultimately it was rejected due to concerns about regulatory complication and potentially low reporting rates (ADF&G et al. 2002: 29-30).

During the previous wildlife proposal cycle in 2024, the Council submitted WP 24-34 which requested that the Board add Fort Yukon and Circle to the list of communities with a C&T determination for moose in Unit 25 D west. This proposal was withdrawn during the March 2007 Council meeting due to objections from the Council of Athabaskan Tribal Governments, Native Village of Stevens, Dinyee Village Corporation, the Birch Creek Tribal Council and individuals (OSM 2024: 47-55). The reasons for the opposition were low numbers of moose, increased competition from non-local hunters and primarily, the system of Tribal Governance that specifies hunting areas for Yukon Flats communities (OSM 2024: 20-61).

Early ADF&G Division of Subsistence technical papers and land planning documents from Stevens Village Council provided history and descriptions of Yukon Flats Tribal Governance. Information in these documents indicates that Tribal boundaries are the origin of the current C&T determinations for moose in Unit 25D.

As noted above, the communities with a C&T determination for moose in Unit 25D remainder include: Arctic Village, Venetie, Fort Yukon, Chalkyitsik and Circle. Except for Circle, the Division of Subsistence described the hunting areas of these communities in 1983 (See **map 1**). *(A map from a 2017 ADF&G Division of Subsistence study shows that Circle residents hunt for moose on Birch Creek although the map does not indicate if this part of Birch Creek is within the boundary of Unit 25D west. (Trainor et al. 2020a: 103).*

Fort Yukon hunters often travel by boat in search of moose in particularly good areas along the Yukon River downstream as far as White Eye or the lower mouth of Birch Creek, up Birch Creek or up the Yukon towards Twenty-two mile near Circle. Others travel up the Porcupine River or its tributaries, such as the lower portion of the Sheenjek, Coleen or Black rivers to harvest moose (Caulfield 1983: 156).

...[an] observation derived from the data is that relatively little overlap occurs in the areas used, with the possible exception of Fort Yukon. Arctic Village residents report the use of the East Fork of the Chandalar River extending downriver as far as Big Rock Mountain and Brown Grass Lake. South of this general area, Venetie residents engage in hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering activities. Similarly, the Black River above...Englishshoe Bar is generally used by Chalkyitsik residents. Downriver from that vicinity, Fort Yukon residents are the primary users. Residents articulate their awareness of these generalized use areas Chalkyitsik's area, for example, is referred to as the "Black River Country". Similarly, Arctic Village's area of use is often referred to as "the Chandalar country" (Caulfield 1983:189).

Fort Yukon residents reported using areas which were also utilized by residents of other communities. For example, Fort Yukon residents reported hunting moose on Birch Creek from its mouth at the Yukon River upstream to the Steese Highway Bridge crossing, an area typically used by Birch Creek residents (Caulfield 1983: 190). Opponents of WP24-34 stated that the original draft analysis of the proposal to add Fort Yukon and Circle to the C&T determination for moose in Unit 25D west did not acknowledge traditional Tribal Governance and worldview (EIRAC 2023: 252).

Because of this omission, Randy Mayo, President of the Dinyee Corporation and former Chief of Stevens Village, shared two documents prepared by the Stevens Village Tribal Council and gave OSM permission to review and cite them. These are the 1999 Stevens Village Land Use Plan, Ethnogeography of Ancestral Lands and Integrated Resource Management Plan, and the 1991 Comprehensive Land Use Plan for the Traditional Lands of Stevens Village. Both documents describe the boundaries of Stevens Village's "ancestral lands" and aspects of the tribal governance that shapes the boundaries which applies to other communities. The Division of Subsistence technical papers and the Stevens Village

Land Use Plans describe community-specific hunting area boundaries, negotiated by Yukon Flats leaders which are known by residents. In general, these sources say that residents of specific communities hunt within an area immediately around their home community:

The local band organization defined both linguistic community and a subsistence use area with well known boundaries. A band's territory was ordinarily closed to other groups, unless permission was granted for use. In many cases, long-term arrangements existed between adjacent bands that permitted exploitation of a resource in an area other than one's own if that resource was lacking in a person's home area (Stevens Village Council 1991: 3).

Although a number of traditional settlements diminished due to disease, traditional boundaries were maintained (Stevens Village Council 1991: 4).

For generations, tribal members also invited neighboring tribes, usually a family from another village to spend the year among them. By invitation, the visitors were allowed to share all resources on the traditional lands of Stevens Village. Local historians clearly remember residents of Tanana, Fort Yukon, Birch Creek and others coming to live among them to trap muskrats, hunt moose etc, until the 1950s. Traditionally the people of Stevens Village shared their land resources, but everyone, meaning the local native people, maintained the same lifestyle (Stevens Village Council 1991: 36).

Ethnolinguistic analysis of the indigenous place names throughout the Yukon Flats show the consistency of the community boundaries and the governance that determines them (Stevens Village Council 1999, 1991; Caulfield 1983). The indigenous place name analyses are the result of collaborative work among many people including Athabascan linguistic scholars; Koyukon and Gwich'in speakers and scholars, including Chief Kilbourne George of Stevens Village; Eliza Jones, Koyukon Athabascan linguist and scholar; Clarence Alexander, former Grand Chief of the Gwich'in of Alaska who co-founded the Council of Athabascan Tribal Governments and co-authored the *Gwich'in Dictionary* with his wife, Virginia E. Alexander; and Dr. James Kari, linguist and Professor Emeritus with the Alaska Native Language Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, whose research specialty is the Dene/Athabascan languages of Alaska (Stevens Village Council 1999 and Caulfield 1983: 201):

At this time [1999], the Stevens Village Ancestral lands are set off in space somewhat from potentially overlapping band territories of other former Athabascan bands. At the turn of the 20th century there would have been overlapping land use areas and territorial knowledge in all directions from Stevens Village.

The collated set of [place] names constitutes a cognitive map or mental map that is rule-governed and well suited for memorization. The Stevens Village names conform to the general rules of the Northern Athabascan place naming: a few core grammatical patterns (in particular the binomial naming pattern specific + generic); an economical clustering of names around salient features; concrete analyzable names which range

between the functional and the metaphysical; and very few of personal names in Athabaskan place names. The Stevens Village cognitive map is a typical names network and territorial expanse for an Alaskan Athabaskan community that has maintained its population and land use activities. (I estimate that an average land use area for a single Athabaskan band was 3,000 to 4000 sq miles.) (Kari in Stevens Village 1999: 85).

In 1983, this phenomenon, that place names correlate with discrete, defined community land use areas, was also documented in Division of Subsistence Technical Paper No. 16, Subsistence Land Use in Upper Yukon Porcupine Communities, Alaska DINJII NATS'AA NAN KAK ADAGWAANDAIL, a study of subsistence land use patterns in Arctic Village, Birch Creek, Chalkyitsik, Fort Yukon, and Venetie (Caulfield 1983):

First, it is evident that residents of the five study communities have made, and continue to make, extensive use of the Upper Yukon-Porcupine region for the harvest of wild resources. Wild resources in the region are known to be widely dispersed or only seasonally abundant. Land use patterns reflect this fact and, consequently, extensive areas are utilized to obtain necessary resources. Certain resources ...require more intensive site-specific land use within the larger area of use. Data pertaining to the distributions of Native-named places known to community residents also mirror reported areas of use quite closely, providing evidence that traditional land use areas persist. Areas mapped by residents of the study communities largely fall within those areas utilized by 19th century Gwich'in bands at the time of their first contact with Euroamericans. These bands were traditionally centered in the drainages of major rivers. Contemporary land use data suggests that this pattern has continued to the present day... Documentation of Native-named places for each community provides evidence of this fidelity with respect to land use areas. Thus, while residence patterns in these areas may have changed over time, from seasonally-mobile use to community-based sedentism, the general areas utilized appear consistent with those used in the past (Caulfield 1983: 187).

When Division of Subsistence researchers conducted field work in Yukon Flats communities in the early 1980's, residents taught them about "customary law", or tribal governance of land and resources. Researchers documented their understanding of "customary law" and observed that "Self limiting principles appear to be guidelines for appropriate behavior enforced through social pressure by community and tribal councils and local residents themselves" (Caulfield 1983: 192, 205-206, 209).

Researchers noted that "relatively discreet use areas exist for each community with only limited overlap," and "The first element of customary law in the region is that each community appears to have a prescribed area of use which, though not totally exclusive in nature, places limits upon the use of the land by non-community residents...relatively little overlap occurs" (Caulfield 1983: 192, 205-206).

However, these sources also indicate that there are exceptions and nuance to these boundaries. In at least two Division of Subsistence technical papers, the community of Fort Yukon is described as an exception to the general practice of hunting only near one's home community (Caulfield 1983: 206; Van Lanen et al 2012: 36). A variety of reasons are cited for this difference, and they include the fact that Fort Yukon is a hub community and some of the residents are from nearby villages, it is the largest community in the Yukon Flats, and local hunting areas may be crowded resulting in high hunting pressure (Caulfield 1983: 190-191).

The following anecdote may illustrate the nuance of the Fort Yukon exception and how the discreet use areas are still observed:

One Fort Yukon resident whose outboard motor broke down on the Yukon River while moose hunting in the fall had to resort to floating downriver to the village of Beaver which is located outside of Fort Yukon's area of use. He reported that those who met him on the beach in Beaver gave him a cool reception until he made it clear that he was not hunting in their use area but that his boat had simply broken down (Caulfield 1983: 189).

A later, 2012 Division of Subsistence report on the Yukon Flats cited Caulfield's observation that residents of Fort Yukon, unlike other Yukon Flats communities, do not limit their hunting areas to the area immediately around their community. This report, Technical Paper 377, was a collaborative research effort that included the Division of Subsistence, Council of Athabaskan Tribal Governments and the Beaver Traditional Council. This report described possibilities similar to those described in 1983 as to why Fort Yukon is different. The 2012 report states that, "In spite of ... overlapping hunt areas, no conflict between Fort Yukon moose hunters and hunters from other communities was reported. The area communities are composed of closely tied kin relations and friends who share hunting locations cordially" (Van Lanen et al. 2012: 36).

Boundaries are dynamic. Those listed here represent a snapshot in time and reflect the limitations of researchers; they are not static.

Harvest History

Moose harvest in Unit 25D remainder primarily occurs by harvest ticket under State and Federal regulation. As harvest tickets do not have a strict reporting requirement and can be used for general season hunts across the state, reported harvested should be considered the minimum.

The average annual reported harvest in Unit 25D remainder from 2015-2024 was 27 moose. The total number of reported hunters during the same time period averaged 80/year with 74 being residents (**Figure 1**; Nelson 2025). Most of the reported moose harvest in Unit 25D remainder occurs during the 2nd and 3rd weeks of September (Caikoski 2014, 2018, 2024). However, as the State season closes Sep. 20, any harvest reported during the last week of September is by federally qualified subsistence users

(i.e. Unit 25 residents except residents of Unit 25D west). Since 2024, federally qualified subsistence users may also harvest moose during the first two weeks of October.

Household surveys of all Unit 25D communities in 2008-2010 showed that the vast majority of moose harvest by local hunters occurs in September (~90%) with no harvest documented in October (CATG 2011; Van Lanen et al. 2012). Boats are the primary transport method used by moose hunters in Unit 25D remainder (Caikoski 2014).

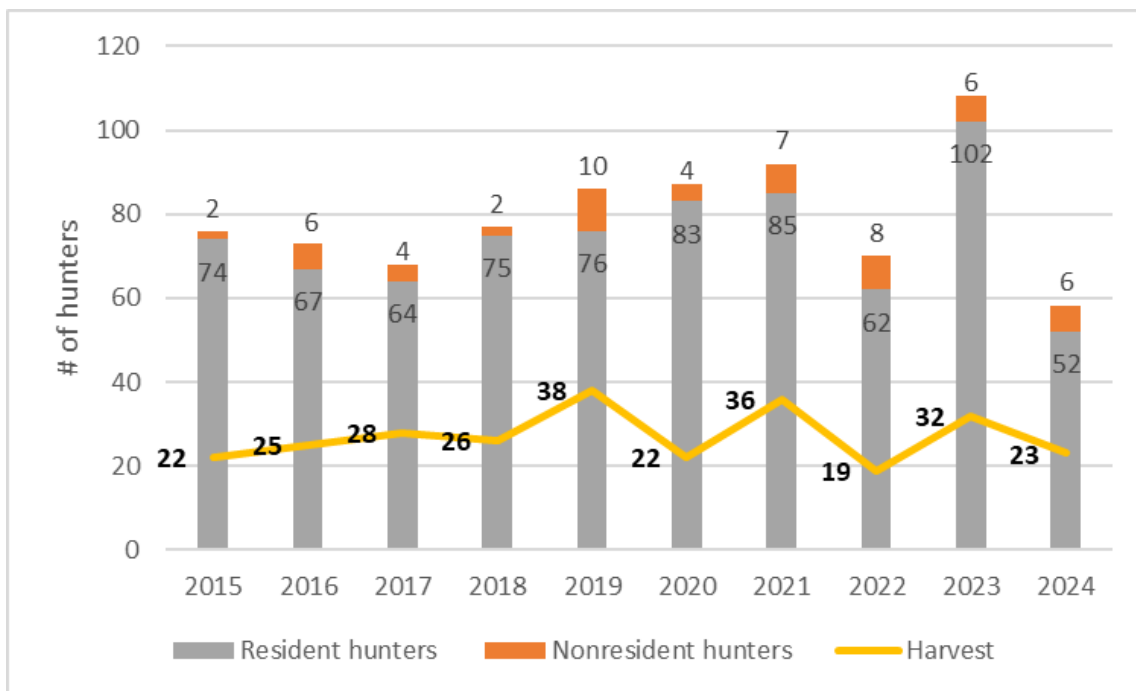


Figure 1 Reported moose harvest and number of hunters in Unit 25D remainder (Nelson 2025).

Alternative(s) Considered

One alternative considered was to establish a winter moose season of Feb. 18-28 to align with State regulations. Currently, Federal regulations have a December moose season, while State regulations have a February moose season in Unit 25D remainder. Establishing a February season under Federal regulations would provide additional opportunity for federally qualified subsistence users and would reduce regulatory complexity by aligning State and Federal winter seasons. However, this modification is outside the scope of the proposal.

Discussion and Effects

If Wildlife Proposal WP26-75 is adopted, Federal public lands in Unit 25D remainder will be closed to the harvest of moose by non-federally qualified users and all users that live outside Unit 25D remainder. Only federally qualified subsistence users, those with a customary and traditional use determination for moose in Unit 25D remainder, would be able to harvest moose on Federal public lands in Unit 25D remainder. This would decrease competition between user groups and could provide

more opportunity for federally qualified subsistence users to harvest moose in Unit 25D remainder, possibly enhancing the chances of successful hunts.

However, information on the number of moose harvested by federally qualified subsistence users vs. non-federally qualified user in Unit 25D remainder is currently unknown. While the majority of moose harvest in Unit 25D remainder occurs by Alaska residents, OSM is unaware how many of these are by rural vs. non-rural hunters. Additionally, non-federally qualified users would still be able to harvest moose on non-Federal lands in Unit 25D remainder, which notably, occur around most of the villages in the area (**Map 1**). Therefore, closure of Federal lands may worsen any existing user conflicts or competition issues by concentrating non-federally qualified subsistence users on the non-Federal lands close to villages. Furthermore, adoption of WP26-75 would close Federal lands during the State's February moose hunt. As there is no corresponding February hunt under Federal regulations, this would reduce opportunity for federally qualified subsistence users to harvest a moose from Federal public land during February.

Federally qualified subsistence users already have an additional 3.5 weeks of hunting opportunity in late September and early October when State seasons have closed. Federally qualified subsistence users also have 10 days of additional opportunity in December when State seasons are closed. They also have an additional 2 weeks of hunting opportunity in late August and early September before State seasons open, although as detailed in a previous OSM analysis for WP24-33, this early season opportunity is not very meaningful due to warmer falls, delayed rut, and concerns about meat spoilage.

Impacts to the moose population and conservation concerns are uncertain due to lack of data. The most recent biological data is now 10 years old.

OSM PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

Oppose Proposal WP26-75

Justification

This proposal may provide increased opportunity for federally qualified subsistence users by reducing competition with non-federally qualified users for the entirety of the moose season. The Unit 25D remainder moose season was recently extended to close October 15 with the adoption of Proposal WP24-33 in 2024 to account for shifting weather patterns and delayed cooler weather conditions. The Federal fall moose season is currently 51 days, and federally qualified users only compete with non-federally qualified users during the open State season during 11 of those days from Sep. 10 – Sep. 20. There has not been enough time since the October season extension to fully understand the impact it will have on the moose population and the ability of users to meet their subsistence needs in Unit 25D remainder.

Per §815(3) of ANILCA, restrictions on nonsubsistence uses is only authorized if necessary for the conservation of healthy populations or to continue subsistence uses of such populations. At this time, closure to non-federally qualified users does not appear to be necessary for the conservation of healthy

moose populations or for the continuation of subsistence uses in Unit 25D remainder per §815(3) of ANILCA. There are no apparent indications of conservation concerns for the Unit 25D remainder moose population as well as no clear evidence that non-federally qualified users are negatively impacting it.

Additionally, federally qualified subsistence users already have a federal priority for moose in Unit 25D remainder through a substantially longer fall season as well as a December season. Adoption of WP26-75 may concentrate non-federally qualified users on non-Federal lands around communities during the State's September and February hunts. It would also reduce opportunity for federally qualified subsistence users to hunt Federal public land in February under State regulations.

ANALYSIS ADDENDUM

Alternative(s) Considered

Another alternative considered after the fall 2025 Eastern Interior Council meeting was to establish a targeted closure along river corridors during the fall hunt (**Map 2**). Specifically, a 10-mile corridor (5 miles either side) along the Yukon River and 5-mile corridors (2.5 miles either side) along Birch Creek (including Upper and Lower Mouths), the Sheenjek River to river mile 60, the Porcupine River, Black River, and Chandalar River from Sep. 10-20.

During the Eastern Interior Council meeting, additional information was provided, which highlighted user conflicts along river corridors during the fall. Boating along major rivers is the primary method local subsistence users use to hunt and access moose in Unit 25D remainder. This is also where crowding, displacement, and disruption of subsistence hunts by non-federally qualified users is reported to occur. Council members, State and Federal agency staff, Tribal representatives, and public testifiers all acknowledged user conflicts are a concern for moose hunting in Unit 25D remainder. However, people disagreed on how these user conflicts are best addressed (EIRAC 2025b).

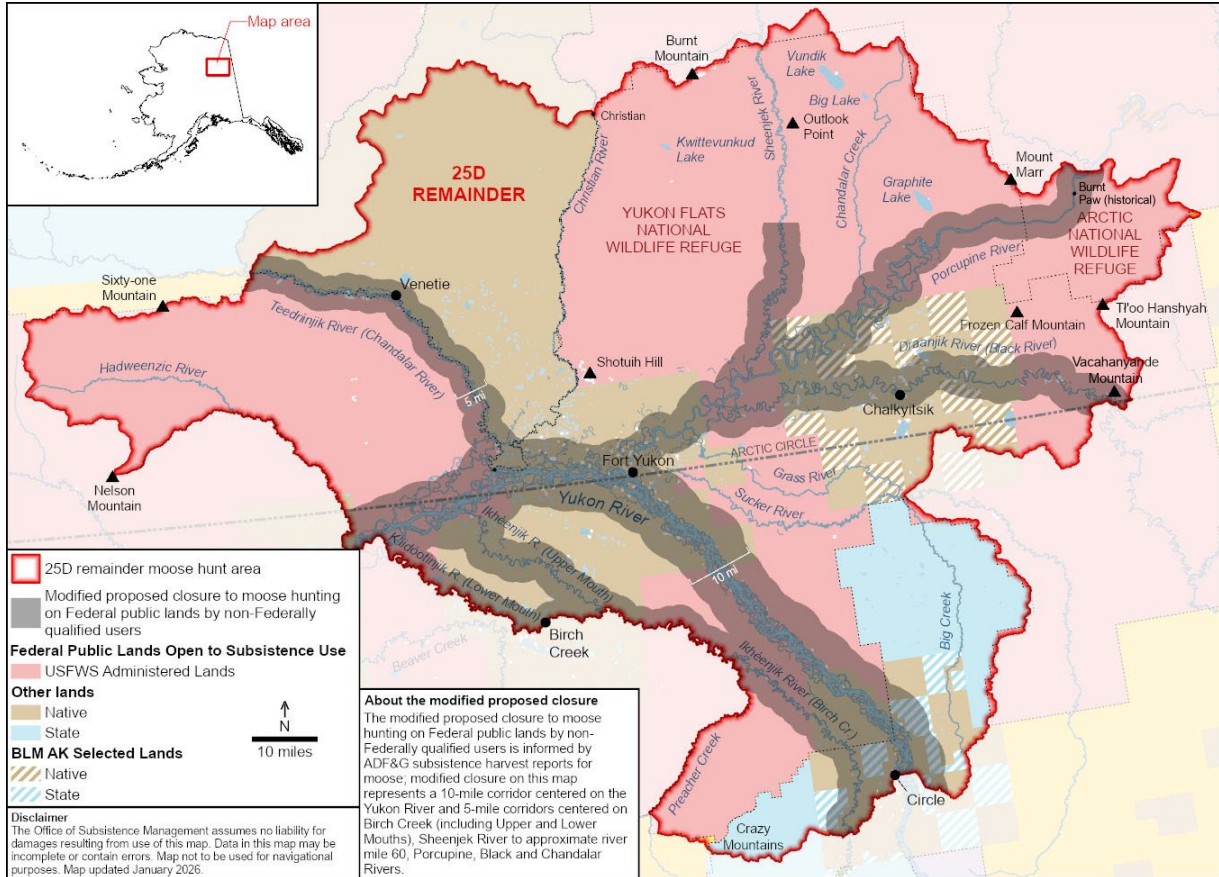
During the fall Council meeting, the ADF&G area biologist presented information detailing hunter numbers by residency, which showed roughly 50% of the reported moose hunters in Unit 25D remainder from 2004-2024 were non-federally qualified users. He emphasized that reported harvest is well below the estimated harvestable surplus. He also stated that very little reported harvest occurs during the winter hunts, perhaps a couple moose total over the past 20 years. Finally, he noted that this closure would also preclude family members who have moved to non-rural areas from returning home to moose hunt on Federal public lands. Yukon Flats NWR staff relayed complaints they have heard from local users over non-local hunters setting up camps, blocking trailheads, and hunting right along river corridors. They cautioned that closing Federal public lands could concentrate all non-local hunters to the areas of highest conflict since lands below the mean high water mark are State lands (EIRAC 2025b).

Council members also stated that, despite how it looks on paper, the longer Federal season does not provide much priority. During the early season, it is too warm and moose are not moving around much, and if one hunts during the late season, the moose that were readily available have already been taken during the State season. This is corroborated by harvest data indicating the majority of reported harvests occur during the open State hunt (EIRAC 2025b).

According to biological surveys, the Unit 25D moose population has been a low-density, stable population since at least 2000. A conservative 5% harvest rate of bulls-only suggests reported harvest is well below extrapolated estimates of the harvestable surplus, although unreported harvest is unknown. While these data do not indicate a conservation concern for moose unit-wide in Unit 25D remainder, and the harvestable surplus is very unlikely being achieved, localized depletion along river corridors may occur due to concentrated harvest pressure. Additionally, Council members expressed concerns over 10-year-old survey data (as the most recent survey occurred in 2015), local knowledge indicating fewer moose, and increasing hunter numbers without corresponding increases in reported moose harvests (EIRAC 2025b).

Two public comments received during the Council meeting explained the consequences this closure would have on their families, food security, and livelihoods. These individuals primarily hunt and access Federal public lands in the very northern portions of Unit 25D remainder, which are seldom used by local federally qualified subsistence users (EIRAC 2025b). The Council of Athabascan Tribal Governments (CATG) also submitted a resolution in support of the closure, which stated that, “This proposal would close Federal moose hunting in part of Unit 25D to people who do not live in rural Alaska. It would reserve that moose hunt for local communities, due to high competition and concerns that outside pressure is hurting subsistence access.” The Chair of CATG also commented during the meeting that there is incredible conservation concern for the Unit 25D moose population because of its chronic low density and lack of recent biological survey data. She opined that if there’s a well under-subscribed harvestable surplus, then local people would be successfully harvesting moose. The Community of Central also submitted a written comment indicating ten community members supported the proposal, while two opposed it (EIRAC 2025b).

One Council member opposed the proposal, in part, because “there’s going to be areas that locals don’t get to.” Another Council member supported the proposal, but stated his desire for “trying to come up with methodologies to spread the harvest out and get more hunters off the river systems . . . where the issue is.” Several Council members felt touched by some of the public comments and expressed reluctance in impacting their livelihoods and food security. This alternative attempts to address those concerns.



Map 2. OSM alternative targeted closure area of Unit 25D remainder (Trainor et. al. 2020; Van Lanen et. al. 2012).

OSM CONCLUSION

Neutral on Proposal WP26-75 as **modified by OSM** to close moose hunting by non-federally qualified users from Sep. 10-20 within the targeted closure area of Unit 25D remainder, consisting of a 10-mile corridor (5 miles either side) along the Yukon River and 5-mile corridors (2.5 miles either side) along Birch Creek (including Upper and Lower Mouths), the Sheenjek River to river mile 60, the Porcupine River, Black River, and Chandalar River (**Map 2**).

The draft regulations read:

Unit 25– Moose

Unit 25D, remainder—1 antlered moose

*Aug. 25-Oct. 15.
Dec. 1-20*

Federal public lands within a 10-mile corridor (5 miles either side) along the Yukon River and 5-mile corridors (2.5 miles either side)

along Birch Creek (including Upper and Lower Mouths), the Sheenjek River to river mile 60, the Porcupine River, Black River, and Chandalar River are closed to moose hunting from Sep. 10-20, except by federally qualified subsistence users hunting under these regulations.

Justification

User conflicts in Unit 25D remainder are well acknowledged, but disagreements persist in how best to address them. This modification would provide increased opportunity for federally qualified subsistence users by reducing competition with non-federally qualified users for the entirety of the fall moose season in the areas most hunted by local subsistence users and where most of the user conflicts occur. This targeted closure addresses concerns expressed by the Council and would not negatively affect the two individuals who commented during the Council's fall meeting. It also prevents the unnecessary closure of all Federal public land in Unit 25D remainder since, as previously stated, the areas most necessary for the continuation of subsistence uses are along the rivers where local residents access moose by boat during the fall. Very little moose harvest occurs during the winter hunts, and a year-round closure reduces opportunity for federally qualified subsistence users to hunt Federal public land in February under State regulations.

However, this alternative may still not alleviate all user conflicts and could even worsen them. While almost all lands along major rivers in Unit 25D remainder are either Federal or Native owned lands, non-federally qualified users could still harvest moose on gravel bars below the mean high water mark as these are State-managed lands. Without the Federal lands to hunt, non-federally qualified users may become even more concentrated along the rivers themselves, exacerbating conflicts.

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SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS

Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

Fall 2025

The Council voted to **support** WP26-75 which they submitted. The Council noted there are conservation concerns for moose in the unit. They expressed concern over the lack of recent biological data, noting that the last moose population count was conducted in 2015. There has been an increase in the number of hunters in the unit but no corresponding increase in reported harvested, suggesting the moose population is not doing well. The Council noted that local knowledge also points to lower moose numbers and harvest success. Due to the lack of biological information, paired with stressors of climate change, development, and increased hunting pressure - the Council feels that this area must be managed conservatively to help protect this low-density moose population and protect subsistence uses.

They noted that user conflict and high harvest pressure along the Yukon River system is a major problem, and that this proposal may also help reduce that. Local communities have experienced extreme difficulties harvesting moose in recent years and have no other means to feed their families, especially since salmon fishing is closed. This further affects their food security, which is already exacerbated by the Yukon River salmon collapse and the high cost or absence of store-bought food. The potential of transferring hunter pressure upriver into Units 25B/25C is not a concern due to the extremely low harvest pressure there by subsistence users. The Council also noted that the existing longer season for federally qualified subsistence users is not much of a priority despite how it appears on paper because all the readily available moose are taken during the State season, so there are rarely any moose accessible after the State hunt closes. Additionally, the Council noted that the Council of Athabascan Tribal Governments submitted a resolution in support of this proposal.

Winter 2026

The Council voted to **support** WP26-75 **as modified by OSM**. The Council felt that closing corridors along rivers instead of the entire sub-unit focuses action in the areas with the greatest, long-standing issues. There is much higher harvest pressure along the rivers than in the remote parts of the sub-unit that are only accessible by aircraft. The corridor modification maintains opportunity for non-federally qualified users to hunt in the more remote parts of the sub-unit, while alleviating pressure and conflict along river corridors where local subsistence users hunt.

However, the Council is very concerned about reports of air taxis/transporters dropping off hunters who may not be prepared for the conditions of a remote hunt or how to properly take care of a moose without resulting in wanton waste. They noted that there needs to be more accountability for air taxis and oversight of drop-off hunters, along with increased hunter education and ethics outreach. Limited law enforcement in the area is another great concern, especially given local reports of aircraft covering their tail numbers. The Council further noted that hunter displacement as a result of the closure corridors will need to be monitored so that any impacts can be assessed.

During the discussion of the modification, the Council re-emphasized the need for the closure due to conservation concerns and high harvest pressure. They pointed out that the lack of recent biological data requires a greater reliance on local knowledge for information on how the moose population is doing. This area has always had a low density moose population, and local residents have testified that they are having continued difficulty meeting their subsistence needs due to low moose abundance as well as user conflicts (crowding, interference, and harvest by non-federally qualified users). Some action is needed to increase opportunity for federally qualified users to meet their needs.

The Council discussed the importance of regular population surveys and partnering with local people in survey efforts. They requested improved outreach so that both local and nonlocal hunters are better aware of proposals and regulation changes.

INTERAGENCY STAFF COMMITTEE COMMENT

The Federal Subsistence Board (Board) will need to consider a few key sections of ANILCA before taking action on proposals requesting closures and closure reviews: Those sections of Title VIII pertaining to Council Deference and the limitations to closures or restrictions of subsistence and nonsubsistence uses on federal public lands.

ANILCA Section 815(3) clarifies that “nothing in this title shall be construed as...authorizing a restriction on the taking of fish and wildlife for nonsubsistence uses on public lands unless necessary for the conservation of healthy populations of fish and wildlife, for the reasons set for the in 816, to continue subsistence uses of such populations, or pursuant to other applicable law.”

ANILCA Section 816(b) allows for closure or restriction of Federal public lands to subsistence uses of fish and wildlife for “for reasons of public safety, administration, or to assure the continued viability of a particular fish or wildlife population.”

ANILCA Section 805(c) the Board must consider the recommendations of the Councils “concerning the taking of fish and wildlife” on public lands in their regions and may choose not to follow such a recommendation only if it is not supported by substantial evidence, violates recognized principles of fish and wildlife conservation, or would be detrimental to the satisfaction of subsistence needs.

These three sections speak to the heart of Board authority and require a careful balance between the federal priority, the continuation of subsistence uses, the necessary conservation of subsistence fish and wildlife, and unnecessary restrictions. In the case of WP26-75, the ISC recognizes that there is user conflict in Unit 25D remainder, but addressing the issue is complicated. If corridors are closed to nonfederally qualified users, it may concentrate those users on gravel bars which are under state jurisdiction along rivers below high mean water mark.

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.