

WP16-48



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**Federal Subsistence Hunting and Trapping Regulations Proposal
January 2015**

Federal Subsistence Board
Office of Subsistence Management
Attn: Theo Matuskowitz
1011 E. Tudor Rd., MS-121
Anchorage, AK 99503

RE: FWS-R7-SM-2014-0062

Proposal Submitted By: Alex Whiting – Environmental Specialist
Native Village of Kotzebue - P.O. Box 296 - Kotzebue, Alaska 99752
(907) 442-5303 direct - (907) 442-2162 fax - alex.whiting@qira.org

The Native Village of Kotzebue, the federally-recognized tribal government serving the Kotzebue area, proposes a change to the:

Unit 23 / Hunting – Special Provisions

- A snowmachine may be used to position a hunter to select individual caribou for harvest provided that the animals are not shot from a moving snowmachine.

Proposed new regulation – modify language of special provision found in 50 CFR 100.26 (n) unit regulations (23) Unit 23. (iv) (E) to read:

- A snowmachine may be used to position a caribou, wolf, or wolverine, for harvest, provided that the animals are not shot from a moving snowmachine.

This proposed regulation change would be consistent with the State of Alaska Game Regulation that went into effect as of July 1, 2014 on State managed lands:

“5 AAC 92.080 (4) (B) (i) in Units 18, 22, 23, and 26A, a snowmachine may be used to position a caribou, wolf, or wolverine, for harvest, and caribou, wolves and wolverines may be shot from a stationary snowmachine.”

There was widespread support for this State regulation by the Fish and Game Advisory Committees representing the Seward Peninsula, Northwest Arctic, and North Slope communities. In addition, formal support was provided by Kawerak, the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group and the Tribal governments of Kotzebue, Kiana, Kivalina, Noatak, Point Hope, Selawik, Noorvik, Buckland, and Deering.

Based on the rationale for the change provided to the Board of Game during the comment period, changes were made to allow for pursuit of fleeing caribou, wolves and wolverines to be clearly elucidated in the regulations. However, this regulatory change only applies to State managed lands and without similar changes to the Federal regulations, local people hunting these species with snowmachines on Federal public lands will continue to live with the threat of prosecution for hunting in this manner. Adopting the proposed Federal regulation would allow for consistency across unmarked state/federal boundaries in Unit 23, which in many cases are immediately adjacent to one another, avoiding confusion by hunters on the ground and unintentional regulation violations.

Using a snowmachine to pursue caribou, wolves, and wolverines, is by and large the only practical way to hunt them during the winter in GMU 23, in particular in areas with very little surface relief for miles and miles, which much of western GMU 23 is composed of. These animals are generally either first spotted way outside of shooting range, or after the hunter has been following fresh tracks in the snow for some distance, and since the hearing and vision of these species is especially acute, they are almost always well aware of the hunters presence and have begun fleeing before the hunter can get within shooting range. It is only in very rare circumstances where an exception occurs and people cannot reliably feed their families and provide fur for cultural, economic, and utilitarian purposes, based wholly on luck and chance occurrences.

Harvesting these animals using snowmachines in the manner proposed, is an integral part of the local traditions and way of life for many. Because of this widespread use, acceptance, and virtual non-enforcement, it was only after a recent high profile case which involved enforcing the prohibition against pursuing a wolverine by snowmachine near Kivalina, that many local hunters were even aware such a prohibition existed.

It should be noted that federal law already accommodates the use of both boats and snowmachines under power to pursue marine mammals to position them for harvest in exactly the manner being proposed in this regulation change (e.g. the traditional and well documented beluga **drives**). While the legal authorities governing the harvest for marine and terrestrial animals may be different, the differing allowable methods have arguably more to do with a sporting legacy heavily influencing terrestrial hunting regulations than anything else. For the people living in the region and subsisting off of the wildlife resources, there is no ethical or morale distinction made between the harvest of marine and terrestrial resources, or the methods used to do so, as long as it is done in a non-wasteful manner. This is not only borne out in the local cultural record going back generations, but also demonstrated in the resolutions, comments, and broad community support referred to above during the recent BOG regulation change process. Imposing western cultural values (i.e. fair chase) as a substitute for traditional cultural values is at the heart of the issue being discussed.

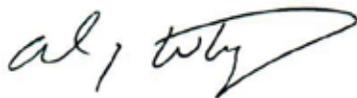
One of the ethical issues related to the proposal, where there is likely some cross cultural understanding, is in regards to the notion that animals should be killed in a non-wasteful manner, with the least amount of pain and suffering. The use of a snowmachine to get within range of fleeing caribou, wolves, and wolverines, allows for precise shot placement (back of the head shot) which kills the animal instantly and minimizes unnecessary suffering, waste of meat, and fur. This is the cleanest, least wasteful, most humane method of killing an animal with a rifle (e.g. beef ranchers dispatch cattle with head shots and not in the shoulder) and when possible is the preferred customary shot placement in the region for these reasons.

Allowing for the pursuit of these species with a snowmachine across the entire GMU 23 will also benefit wildlife enforcement officers by eliminating complicated in the field land status determinations on the borderlands and by getting rid of two sets of opposing rules for the same hunter on the same hunt. As detailed in the comments and testimony submitted to the State, it is the belief by both the supporters of the regulation change and the wildlife managers consulted, that since this widespread common practice has been occurring all along (albeit outside of the regulatory structure), that there would not be a notable affect to wildlife populations and other users if it was an allowable method in the federal subsistence wildlife regulations. That is, the same people that currently hunt in this manner would continue to do so (only without the threat of prosecution), and for those that hunt under the western sporting ethic, this should not change their behavior either.

By satisfactorily addressing a longstanding conflict between regulatory prohibitions and common local practices, integrity will be increased in the federal management system, demonstrating to local people that the system is responsive to their needs and cultural perspectives, increasing the likelihood that future federal management strategies and goals that require the cooperation of the local people will more likely succeed.

It is hard to overstate the justness of allowing people to support their families without forcing them to break the law to do so.

Thank you for your consideration.



Alex Whiting
Environmental Specialist

3. **Why should this regulation change be made?**

Dates for taking of Cows: No taking of all females from April 1-June 30; no harvesting of cows with calves starting July 1-October 10

Female cows should carry to full-term to ensure that no interference or harassment takes place during gestation and that they are protected during that crucial first year to increase calf survival rates. Great care should be taken in the protection of cows, as calves separated from the mother often do not survive. The Council believes the ability to harvest a cow without a calf after July 1 provides an opportunity to harvest meat while engaging in other subsistence activities such as berry picking.

Prohibition on the taking of calves

We are intent on protecting calves and their survival is especially crucial during this decline.

Close taking of bulls: October 10-Jan. 31; open Feb. 1

Caribou meat is not ideal after the first of October, once the bulls go into rut. Taking a bull caribou once it has gone into rut should be considered wanton waste, as the meat is not salvageable as food. At that point, the only purpose it serves is a trophy. Those large bulls should not be taken simply for trophy antlers when the resource is in such high decline.

Reduction of take from 15 to 5 per day

The Council believes measures must be taken to protect the resource for future sustainability. Caribou is a vital resource for the Northwest Arctic region and conservation efforts must be put into place for all users to ensure our future generations are able to harvest our main resource which is central to our physical, spiritual, and cultural well-being.

WP16-50

2016-2018 Federal Subsistence Wildlife Proposal

Name: Northwest Arctic Subsistence RAC

Organization: _____

Address: 1011 E. Tudor Rd. MS 121 Anchorage 99503 _____

Phone: 907-786-3885 _____ Fax: 907- _____

E-mail: _____

Submit proposals by
March 25, 2015

► **By mail or hand delivery**
Federal Subsistence Board
Office of Subsistence Management
Attn: Theo Matuskowitz
1011 E. Tudor Rd., MS-121
Anchorage, AK 99503

► **At any Federal Subsistence
Regional Advisory Council meeting**

► **On the Web at**
<http://www.regulations.gov>

Questions?
Call: (800) 478-1456 or (907) 786-3888

This proposal suggests a change to (check all that apply):

- Harvest season
- Method and means of harvest
- Muskox
- Customary and traditional use determination

1. **What regulation do you wish to change?**

Closure Location: Unit 23 – Cape Krusenstern National Monument (CAKR) - Muskox

Current Federal Regulation

Unit 23 - Muskox

*Unit 23 - Cape Krusenstern National Monument – 1 Aug. 1 – Mar. 15
is closed to the taking of muskoxen by Federal registration permit (FX2303).
Annual harvest quotas and any needed closures will
be announced by the Superintendent of Western
Arctic National Parklands. Cape Krusenstern
National Monument is closed to the taking of
muskoxen, except by resident zone community
members with permanent residence within the
Monument or the immediate adjacent Napaktuktuk
Mountain area, south of latitude 67°05'N and west
of longitude 162°30'W hunting under these
regulations.*

Closure Dates: Aug. 1 – Mar. 15.

2. **How should the new regulation read?**

Unit 23 - Muskox

Unit 23 - Cape Krusenstern National Monument – 1 Aug. 1 – Mar. 15

bull by Federal registration permit (FX2303). Annual harvest quotas and any needed closures will be announced by the Superintendent of Western Arctic National Parklands. Cape Krusenstern National Monument is closed to the taking of muskoxen, except by resident zone community members with permanent residence within the Monument or the immediate adjacent Napaktuktuk Mountain area, south of latitude 67°05'N and west of longitude 162°30'W hunting under these regulations.

Closure Dates: Aug. 1 – Mar. 15.

3. Why should this regulation change be made?

This proposed change expands the pool of Federally qualified users while maintaining the closure to non-Federally qualified users until a sustainable population exists.

WP16-51

2016-2018 Federal Subsistence Wildlife Proposal

Name: Northwest Arctic Subsistence RAC

Organization: _____

Address: 1011 E. Tudor Rd. MS 121 Anchorage 99503 _____

Phone: 907-786-3885 _____ Fax: 907- _____

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This proposal suggests a change to (check all that apply):

- X Harvest season
- Method and means of harvest
- Customary and traditional use determination

Muskox

1. What regulation do you wish to change?

Unit 23 – Muskox

Current Federal Regulation

Unit 23 - Muskox

<i>Unit 23 Remainder</i>	<i>No Federal Open Season</i>
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2. How should the new regulation read?

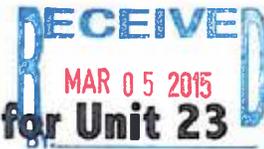
Unit 23 - Muskox

<i>Unit 23—that portion north and west of Kobuk River Drainage—1 bull by Federal Registration Permit.</i>	<i>Aug. 1 – Mar. 15</i>
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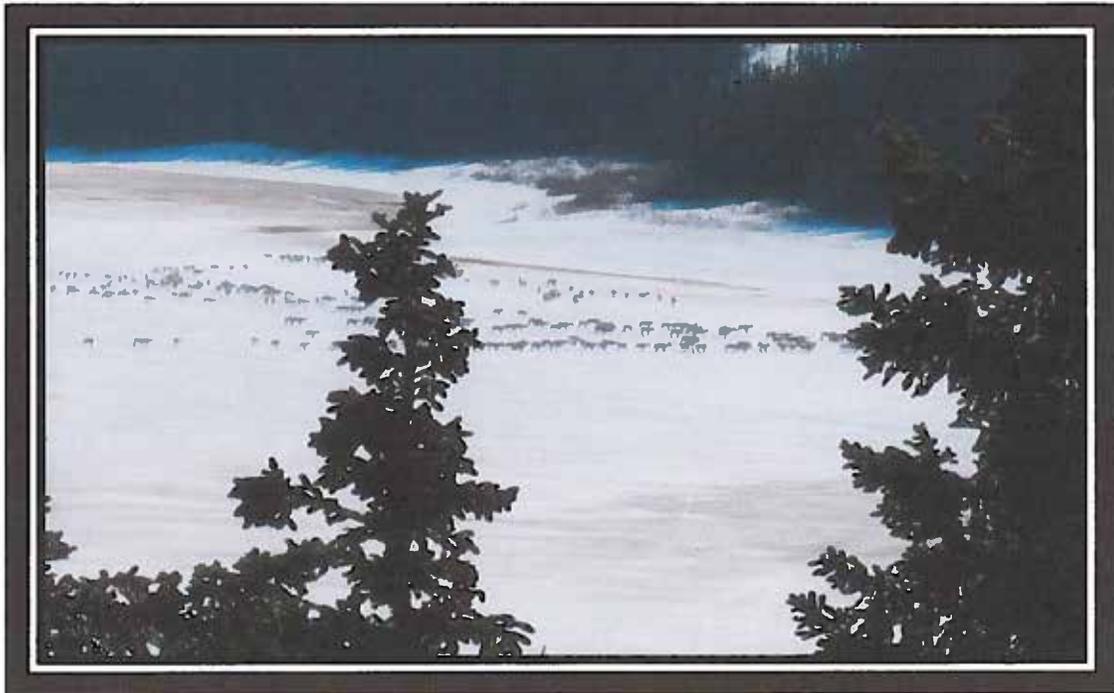
3. Why should this regulation change be made?

To improve management and simplify regulations to parallel with State regulation, and to provide for a Federal opportunity on Federal public lands where none currently exists.

WP16-52



Federal Caribou Regulation Proposal for Unit 23



Name: Glenn A. Miller

Date: 02/23/2015

Organization: Upper and Lower Kobuk Advisory Committee

Address: PO Box 133, Kiana, Alaska 99749

Phone: 1-907-475-2173

E-Mail: glennemma2@hotmail.com

Proposal Objective: Reduce Caribou Hunting Bag Limit In Unit 23 From 15 Caribou Per Day To 7 Caribou Per Day.

Current Regulation: 50 CFR 100.26 (n) (23) (iv)

<p>CARIBOU Unit 23-Residents of Units 21D(West of Koyukuk and Yukon rivers), Galena 22, 23,24(including residents of Wiseman , but not other residents of the Dalton Highway Corridor Management Area) and 26A.</p>	<p>15 caribou Per Day; however, cow caribou may not be taken May 16-June 30</p>	<p>July 1-June 30</p>
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<p>CARIBOU Unit 23 – Residents of Units 21D(West of Koyukuk and Yukon rivers), Galena 22,23,24(including residents of Wiseman ,but not other residents of the Dalton Highway Corridor Management Area) and 26 A.</p>	<p>7 caribou per day ; however , cow caribou may not be taken May 16-June 30</p>	<p>July1-June 30</p>
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**Proposal Change To Federal Caribou Regulation For Unit 23:
 50 CFR 100.26 (n) (23) (iv)**

Rationale: With the understanding of a declining caribou herd due to a confluence of factors that are both within our control and not, (i.e.) predator population problems,

members of the Upper and Lower Kobuk Fish and Game Advisory Committees with the continued advice and shared data from our Regional Biologist Mr. Jim Dau realize that we must be pro-active with solutions to improve the sustainability of our most important natural resource of the Inupiaq People of the Northwest Arctic Region, Caribou!

Thus, the Advisory Committees of the Upper and Lower Kobuk is proposing to limit the number of caribou per day in unit 23 from 15 to 7 in order to improve population numbers and avoid a potential crisis in the Northwest Arctic Caribou herd that is of utmost importance to the survival of the people of our region.

Outcome: With a reduction in Federal Caribou Harvest during season and closer alignment with the State Caribou Regulation in Unit 23, we believe that this reduction in allowable caribou harvest at the Federal level will translate over time to an increase and stabilization in the caribou population of the Northwest Arctic Caribou herd.

In Closing: With significant declines in caribou numbers within the Northwest Arctic Caribou Herd due to predator impact, changing weather conditions, and other variables it is important that we work together at the local, state, and federal levels to create sustainability of this important natural resource that is critical to the survival of the Inupiat people as an indigenous subsistence food source in our region of the Northwest Arctic of Alaska.

WP16-53

Wildlife Regulatory Proposal Change Request for 2016-2018 to close the Federal sheep seasons for the hunt areas of the Baird Mountains and DeLong Mountains in GMU 23 and adjust the harvest limits.

Name: Kenneth L. Adkisson

Organization: Western Arctic National Parklands

Address: Bering: Land Bridge National Preserve
 PO Box 220
 Nome, AK 99762

Telephone Number: (907) 443-6104

Proposed Change: Revise the harvest limits and close the Federal seasons for sheep in the Baird Mountains and DeLong Mountains hunt areas of GMU 23.

Existing Regulation:

Unit 23 – Sheep 50 CFR 100 .26(n)(23)(iv)

Customary & Traditional Use Determination	Harvest Limits	Open Season
<p>• Residents of Unit 23 north of the Arctic Circle and Point Lay.</p> <p><i>Federal permits for the Baird Mountains and DeLong Mountains sheep hunts are available from the local Federal land manager listed in the directory at the end of this book.</i></p>	<p>Unit 23 south of Rabbit Creek, Kyak Creek and the Noatak River, and west of the Cutler and Redstone Rivers (Baird Mountains) — 1 sheep by Federal registration permit (FS2301). The total allowable harvest of sheep is 21, of which 15 may be rams and 6 may be ewes</p> <p><i>Federal public lands are closed to the harvest of sheep except by Federally qualified subsistence users.</i></p> <p>Unit 23 north of Rabbit Creek, Kyak Creek and the Noatak River, and west of the Aniuk River (DeLong Mountains) — 1 sheep by Federal registration permit (FS2304). The total allowable harvest of sheep for the DeLong Mountains is 8, of which 5 may be rams and 3 may be ewes.</p>	<p>Aug. 10 - Apr 30</p> <p><i>If the allowable harvest levels are reached before the regular season closing date, the Superintendent of the Western Arctic National Parklands will announce an early closure.</i></p> <p>Aug. 10 – Apr. 30</p> <p><i>If the allowable harvest levels are reached before the regular season closing date, the Superintendent of the Western Arctic National Parklands will announce an early closure.</i></p>

2016–2018 Wildlife Proposals

Northwest Arctic

Proposed Regulation:

Customary & Traditional Use Determination	Harvest Limits	Open Season
<p>• Residents of Unit 23 north of the Arctic Circle and Point Lay.</p> <p><i>Federal permits for the Baird Mountains and DeLong Mountains sheep hunts are available from the local Federal land manager listed in the directory at the end of this book.</i></p>	<p>Unit 23 south of Rabbit Creek, Kiyak [KYAK] Creek and the Noatak River, and west of the Cutler and Redstone Rivers (Baird Mountains) — 1 sheep by Federal registration permit (FS2301). Harvest quotas will be announced annually by the Superintendent of Western Arctic National Parklands. [THE TOTAL ALLOWABLE HARVEST OF SHEEP IS 21, OF WHICH 15 MAY BE RAMS AND 6 MAY BE EWES]</p> <p><i>Federal public lands are closed to the harvest of sheep except by Federally qualified subsistence users.</i></p> <p>Unit 23 north of Rabbit Creek, Kiyak [KYAK] Creek and the Noatak River, and west of the Aniuk River (DeLong Mountains) — 1 sheep by Federal registration permit (FS2304). Harvest quotas will be announced annually by the Superintendent of Western Arctic National Parklands. [THE TOTAL ALLOWABLE HARVEST OF SHEEP FOR THE DELONG MOUNTAINS IS 8, OF WHICH 5 MAY BE RAMS AND 3 MAY BE EWES.]</p>	<p><u>No Open Federal Season</u></p> <p>[AUG. 10 – APR. 30]</p> <p>[IF THE ALLOWABLE HARVEST LEVELS ARE REACHED BEFORE THE REGULAR SEASON CLOSING DATE, THE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE WESTERN ARCTIC NATIONAL PARKLANDS WILL ANNOUNCE AN EARLY CLOSURE.]</p> <p><u>No Open Federal Season</u></p> <p>[AUG. 10 – APR. 30]</p> <p>[IF THE ALLOWABLE HARVEST LEVELS ARE REACHED BEFORE THE REGULAR SEASON CLOSING DATE, THE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE WESTERN ARCTIC NATIONAL PARKLANDS WILL ANNOUNCE AN EARLY CLOSURE.]</p>

Why is the change necessary? These changes are necessary for the following reasons: 1) they respond to conservation concerns for sheep in GMU2s 23 and 26A west of the Etivluk River; 2) they reduce hunter confusion across differing

management authorities by better aligning Federal and State regulations; and 3) they better reflect the biological situation while providing flexibility for incrementally increasing harvest opportunity as the sheep population recovers.

Conservation Concerns:

Severe weather and snow conditions in the last few winters combined with other factors have resulted in high levels of natural mortality and rapid declines of sheep populations in the DeLong Mountains, Baird Mountains, and likely the Schwatka Mountains. Populations are currently very low, thus there is a high potential for overharvest and delayed recovery of the populations in those hunt areas if hunting continues with 'any sheep' harvest limits. Preliminary estimates of the sheep population from surveys in 2014 suggest a decline of about 50% from the survey in 2011 in the Baird Mountains; (40% decline in adult sheep); about an 82% decline in the DeLong Mountains (77% decline in adult sheep); and while the Schwatka mountains were not surveyed, the Itkillik Preserve of Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve to the east was surveyed and a declining population was detected (about 60% down in 2014 from the 2009-2012 average). The recent decline in the Baird Mountains and DeLong Mountains affected all age classes and rams and ewes. Lamb recruitment in the Baird Mountains in the 2014 survey was the lowest on record with the lambs to "ewe-like" sheep ratio dropping from 23:100 in 2011 down to 2:100. The decline in 2014 recruitment was even lower than the 7:100 ratio following the 1990 mortality event. The De Long Mountains lambs to "ewe-like" sheep ratio dropped from 38:100 (95% CI 27-53:100) in 2011 down to 4:100 (95% CI 0-7:100) in 2014. The significant declines in abundance, for all age-classes and in lamb recruitment in 2014 resulted in closing both the State and Federal seasons in August 2014 by Emergency Order and Special Action respectively. In March of 2015 the Alaska Board of Game adopted new regulations closing all State sheep hunting seasons in GMU 23. This proposal is intended to provide an opportunity for the sheep population to recover.

Reduce Regulatory Confusion:

In March of 2015, the Alaska Board of Game adopted new regulations closing all state general season and registration subsistence hunts for sheep in GMU 23. Unless, the Federal regulations are changed accordingly, this will result in a significant difference in State and Federal regulations that will contribute to hunter confusion as well as likely require a series of Federal Special Actions in order to prevent an overharvest of sheep. Dual management is a reality in GMU 23 and total allowable harvest quotas are often shared between the State and Federal systems. While GMU 23 contains large blocks of Federal public lands, there are also significant areas of State managed lands as well including some private lands within some of the conservation system units.

Increase Management Flexibility:

Closing the season indefinitely is the best regulatory response to the significant decline in sheep numbers as well as other weak population parameters such as recruitment. When the sheep population has sufficiently recovered to support a harvest, the season can be reopened. Adjusting the individual harvest limit to 1 sheep and allowing the NPS Superintendent to annually announce total allowable harvest quotas will provide flexibility to adjust sex composition of the harvest as well as overall harvest level in response to population dynamics. These changes will also help with hunt management coordination with the State system.

Additional information:

National Park Service staff plan on monitoring the Western Baird Mountains hunt area annually and using it as an index for the other adjacent hunt areas. The National Park Service also plans to increase its biological survey efforts in the adjacent hunt areas depending on the availability of funding.

2016–2018 Wildlife Proposals

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WP16-54

Federal Subsistence Wildlife Regulatory Proposal Change Request for 2016-2018 – to partition the sheep hunt area in GMU 23 Remainder (Schwotka Mountains) into two hunt areas and adjust season and harvest limits to respond to the significant decline in the sheep population

Name: Kenneth L. Adkisson

Organization: Western Arctic National Parklands

Address: Bering Land Bridge National Preserve
PO Box 220
Nome, AK 99762

Telephone Number: (907) 443-6104

Proposed Changes: Split the Sheep hunt area within GMU 23 currently designated as “Unit 23 Remainder (Schwotka Mountains)” into two areas by establishing a new hunt area identified as “Unit 23 Remainder (Schwotka Mountains) - that portion within Gates of the Arctic National Park”; and revising the harvest limits and seasons.

Existing Regulation:

Unit 23 – Sheep 50 CFR 100 .26(n)(23)(iv)

Customary & Traditional Use Determination	Harvest Limits	Open Season
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents of Unit 23 north of the Arctic Circle and Point Lay. <p><i>Federal permits for the Baird Mountains and Delong Mountains sheep hunts are available from the local Federal land manager listed in the directory at the end of this book.</i></p>	Unit 23 remainder (Schwotka Mountains)—1 ram with ¾ curl horn or larger	Aug, 10 – Sept. 20
	Unit 23 remainder (Schwotka Mountains)—1 Sheep	Oct. 1 - Apr. 30

Proposed regulation:

Unit 23 Sheep

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents of Unit 23 north of the Arctic Circle and Point Lay. <p><i>Federal permits for the Baird Mountains and Delong Mountains sheep hunts are available from the local Federal land manager listed in the directory at the end of this book.</i></p>	Unit 23 remainder (Schwotka Mountains), <u>that portion within Gates of the Arctic National Park</u> —1 ram with ¾ curl horn or larger	Aug, 10 – Sept. 20
	Unit 23 remainder (Schwotka Mountains), <u>that portion within Gates of the Arctic National Park</u> —1 Sheep	Oct. 1 - Apr. 30
	<u>Unit 23 remainder (Schwotka Mountains) except for that portion within Gates of the Arctic National Park – 1 Sheep by Federal permit. Annual harvest quotas will be announced by the Superintendent of Western Arctic National Parklands.</u>	<u>No Open Federal Season</u>

Why is the change necessary? These changes are necessary for the following reasons: 1) they respond to conservation concerns for sheep in GMU 23 Remainder; 2) they improve Federal management by addressing the complex biological and jurisdictional situation in the Schwatka Mountains hunt area.

Conservation Concerns:

Severe weather and snow conditions in the last few winters combined with other factors have resulted in high levels of natural mortality and rapid declines of sheep populations in the DeLong Mountains, Baird Mountains, and likely the Schwatka Mountains. Sheep populations are currently very low, and thus there is a high potential for overharvest and delayed recovery of the populations in the Baird Mountains, DeLong Mountains, and a portion of the Schwatka Mountains if hunting continues with 'any sheep' bag limits. Preliminary estimates of the sheep population from surveys in 2014 suggest a decline of about 50% from the survey in 2011 in the Baird Mountains (40% decline in adult sheep); about an 82% decline in the DeLong Mountains (77% decline in adult sheep); and while the Schwatka Mountains were not surveyed, the Itkillik Preserve of Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve to the east was surveyed and a declining population was detected (about 60% down in 2014 from the 2009-2012 average). The recent decline in the Baird and De Long Mountains affected all age classes and both rams and ewes. Lamb recruitment in the Baird Mountains in the 2014 survey was the lowest on record with the lambs to "ewe-like" sheep ratio dropping from 23:100 in 2011 down to 2:100. The decline in 2014 recruitment was even lower than the 7:100 ratio following the 1990 mortality event. The DeLong Mountains lambs to "ewe-like" sheep ratio dropped from 38:100 (95%CI 27-53:100) in 2011 down to 4:100 (95% CI 0-7:100) in 2014. The significant declines in abundance for all age-classes and in lamb recruitment in 2014 resulted in closing both the State and Federal seasons in August 2014 by Emergency Order and Special Action, respectively. In March of 2015, the Alaska Board of Game adopted new regulations closing all of the state sheep seasons in GMU 23. Closing the season and adjusting the harvest limit in the Noatak National Preserve portion of Unit 23 Remainder is intended to aid in the recovery of the sheep population.

Schwatka Mountains Hunt Area Management:

The Schwatka Mountains hunt area poses a unique set of management challenges for federal managers. Biologists tend to view the sheep in the overall region as comprised of three relatively distinct geographical groupings: 1) in the DeLong Mountains in Units 23 and 26A in the area west of Howard Pass north of the Noatak River and Kiyak Creek including the Wulik Peaks; 2) in the Baird Mountains in Unit 23 in the area south and east of the Noatak River and west of the Cutler and Redstone rivers; and 3) in the Schwatka Mountains in Units 23 (the area east of Howard Pass and the Cutler and Redstone rivers). Managers tend to believe that exchanges of sheep between these three populations are likely minimal resulting in separate management strategies for each area. The same biologists generally regard the sheep in the Schwatka Mountains as more aligned with sheep in the Central Brooks Range than with those in the Baird Mountains and DeLong Mountains hunt areas. In terms of managing the Schwatka Mountains hunt area, there currently appears to be overlapping management interests between Regions 3 and 5 on the State side, and Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve and Western Arctic National Parklands on the federal side. This proposal would address the federal side clarifying management responsibility. It would also better align management with potential hunting pressure on the sheep. The only sheep hunting currently allowed within the Gates of the Arctic National Park portion of Unit 23 Remainder is limited to residents of the communities of Ambler, Shungnak, and Kobuk; thus potential harvests in that hunt area will likely remain low. By contrast, the Noatak National Preserve portion of Unit 23 Remainder has a much larger pool of potentially eligible hunters under federal subsistence regulations – all the residents in Unit 23 north of the arctic circle and the residents of Point Lay in GMU 26A. This also includes the regional hub community of Kotzebue. Given the potential demand for sheep hunting in the Noatak National Preserve portion of Unit 23 Remainder (Schwatka Mountains) hunt area under an open season or more liberal harvest limit scenarios when the adjacent hunt areas of the DeLong Mountains and Baird Mountains hunt areas are closed or under more restrictive harvest limits could result in excessive hunting pressure put on the sheep in the Noatak National Preserve portion of Unit 23 Remainder. This proposal addresses that concern by aligning management of the Noatak National Preserve portion of Unit 23 Remainder with the management of the adjacent Baird Mountains and DeLong Mountains hunt areas. Overall, this proposal will enhance Federal coordination of management decision making with that of the ADF&G.

Additional information:

National Park Service staff plan on monitoring the Western Baird Mountains hunt area annually and using it as an index for the other adjacent hunt areas, coordinating survey efforts with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. The National Park

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Service also plans to increase its biological survey efforts in the adjacent hunt areas depending on the availability of funding and interagency resources for cooperative, interagency surveys.