



Federal Subsistence Board News Release



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Bureau of Land Management
National Park Service
Bureau of Indian Affairs

Forest Service

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Changes in Federal Sheep Hunting Regulations in Units 24A and 26B

Frequently asked questions on closure of Federal public lands to
Dall sheep hunting by all users.

On July 26, 2022, the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) approved Temporary Wildlife Special Action WSA22-02 to close Federal public lands in Unit 24A and a portion of Unit 26B to sheep hunting by all users for the 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 wildlife regulatory years. This fact sheet answers common questions and concerns about the closure.

1. Exactly where does the Federal closure apply?

The closure applies to all Federal public lands located within Units 24A and 26B, west of the Sagavanirktok River. This is mostly Bureau of Land Management (BLM) managed lands within the Dalton Highway Corridor Management Area (DHCMA), but does include other BLM lands outside of the DHCMA, and portions of Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve and Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The hatched area in the map at the end of this factsheet depicts the Federal public lands closed to sheep hunting.

2. What activities are prohibited within the closure areas?

Federally qualified subsistence users and those hunting under State regulations (all user groups) may not hunt or harvest sheep within these closure areas. However, anyone hunting under State regulations may still travel through, camp, and hunt/trap for other species on Federal public lands within the closure area. The closure area also remains open to all other activities such as hiking, boating, wildlife viewing, etc.

3. Who is eligible to hunt sheep on Federal public lands in Unit 24A and 26B?

As of July 26, 2022, no person is eligible to hunt sheep on Federal public lands in the closure area for the duration of the closure.

4. How long will these closures be in effect?

These closures are effective year-round for the 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 harvest seasons. Specifically, the closure will be effective from July 26, 2022 to June 30, 2024. As required by policy the Board will review this closure to determine whether it is still necessary and when a closure is no longer needed, the Board will reopen the affected Federal public lands and waters *as soon as practicable*.

5. Why did the Board enact this closure?

Similar to Emergency Orders issued by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the Federal Subsistence Management Program has authority to enact in-season, out-of-cycle, temporary regulation changes through the Special Action process. The Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

submitted a request to close Federal public lands in Unit 24A and a portion of Unit 26B to the harvest of sheep by all users for the 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 wildlife regulatory years. The Board acted on the request at a public meeting held on July 26, 2022.

The Board stated that serious declines in Dall sheep populations within the DHCMA of Units 24A and 26B, warrant closure of hunting for the species to all users. This is consistent with ANILCA Section 816(b), which allows for closure of Federal public lands to the harvest of fish and wildlife “for reasons of public safety, administration, or to assure the continued viability of a particular fish or wildlife population.” Recent surveys show declines in legal rams, ewes, and lambs within the DHCMA, most likely the result of severe weather events, including extended winters and rain on snow events.

Although sheep numbers across the entire Brooks Range may be generally stable, declines in sheep populations along the DHCMA are a substantial concern for rural Alaska subsistence users. These subsistence users depend on efficiency of harvest, close to where they live, regarding the local sheep population. The local rural Alaska residents are especially concerned with the population status of sheep within the DHCMA. During a public hearing, and public forums offered at Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils, local rural Alaskans expressed their trepidations and alarm over the future of this sheep population and recommended that this area be closed to all user groups, including themselves as Federally qualified subsistence users. They expressed their view that this closure would allow for the recovery of sheep populations in their area.

Even though most of the Dall sheep harvest in Units 24A and 26B is by non-Federally qualified users, the available biological data and the Traditional Ecological Knowledge of rural Alaska users living in the area, indicate that any additional harvest, including by Federally qualified subsistence users, is unsustainable and a closure to all users is justified. Finally, this closure is also consistent with the recommendations of the Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (the proponent for WSA22-02) and the North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council.

6. Who should I contact if I have further questions about this closure?

Please contact the Office of Subsistence Management at (907) 786-3888, (800) 478-1456 or subsistence@fws.gov.

Additional information on the Federal Subsistence Management Program may be found on the web at www.doi.gov/subsistence or by visiting www.facebook.com/subsistencealaska.

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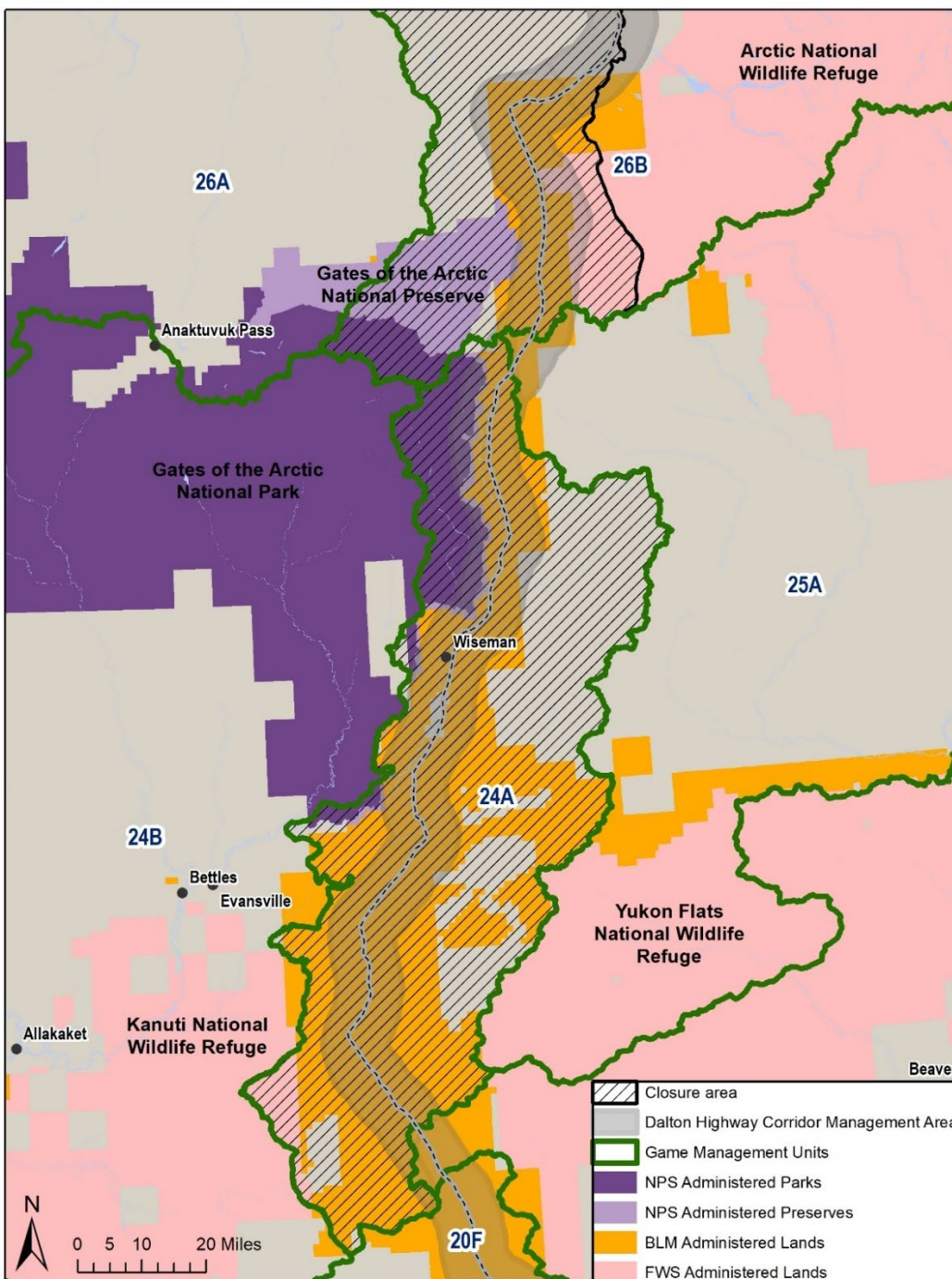


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Map showing extent of the temporary Federal public lands closure to hunting for Dall sheep by all users in Units 24A and 26B. No Federal lands occur in northern Unit 26B, west of the Sagavanirktok River. This map depicts all Federal lands within the closure area.

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