

PROPOSAL 223

5 AAC 92.122 Intensive Management Plan VI.

Reauthorize the Unit 16 Intensive Management Plan as follows:

5 AAC 92.122. Intensive Management Plan VI. (b) is amended as follows:

...

- (b) **Unit 16 Predation Control Area:** the Unit 16 Predation Control Area is established, which is focused primarily on mainland Unit 16(B), and consists of all lands within the [MAINLAND PORTION OF] Unit 16(B) and that portion of Unit 16(A) west of a line beginning at the confluence of the Yentna and Susitna rivers, then northerly along the western bank of the Susitna River to the confluence with the Deshka River, then northerly to 61° 48.80' n. Lat., 150° 21.77' w. Long., then west to 62° 01.47' n. Lat., 150° 24.06' w. Long., then north to the northern end of Trapper Lake at 62° 01.47' n. Lat., 150° 16.67' w. Long., then west to 62° 01.47' n. Lat., 150° 24.06' w. Long., then north to 62° 09.65' n. Lat., 150° 24.06' w. Long., then west to the southwestern end of Amber Lake at 62° 09.65' n. Lat., 150° 33.42' w. Long., then north to 62° 18.03' n. Lat., 150° 33.42' w. Long., then west to 62° 18.03' n. Lat., 150° 51.04' w. Long., then north to 62° 27.97' n. Lat., 150° 51.04' w. Long., then west to the Denali National Park boundary at 62° 27.97' n. Lat., 151° 09.22' w. Long., encompassing approximately 11,105 square miles; notwithstanding any other provision in this title, and based on the following information contained in this section, the commissioner or the commissioner's designee may conduct a wolf and black bear and brown bear population reduction or wolf and black bear and brown bear population regulation program in the Unit 16 Predation Control Area.

(1) [THIS IS A CONTINUING CONTROL PROGRAM THAT WAS FIRST AUTHORIZED BY THE BOARD IN 2004 FOR WOLF CONTROL AND WAS MODIFIED BY THE BOARD TO AUTHORIZE BLACK BEAR CONTROL IN 2007 AND BROWN BEAR CONTROL IN 2011;] **This program** [IT] is currently designed to increase moose numbers and harvest by reducing predation on moose and is expected to contribute [MAKE A CONTRIBUTION] to achieving the intensive management (IM) objectives in Unit 16.

(2) Moose, wolf, black bear, and brown bear objectives are as follows:

- (A) Moose IM objectives [AS] established [BY THE BOARD FOR] **in 5 AAC 92.108 for** Unit 16(B) are 6,500–7,500 moose with a sustainable annual harvest of 310–600 moose. This population is composed of subpopulations that reside within in the unit; however, a subpopulation from the flanks of Mount Yenlo and in the upper Lake Creek drainage mixes in winter with moose from Unit 16(a) in the Kahiltna River drainage, and a subpopulation from the flanks of Mount Susitna and the drainages of Alexander Creek and lower Yentna River winters with moose from Units 14(a), 14(b), and 16(a) in the lower Yentna and Susitna rivers.

- (B) the wolf control objective is to reduce the population to 35–55 wolves in [THE MAINLAND PORTION OF] Unit 16(B);
- (C) the black bear control objective is to reduce the population to 700 black bears in [THE MAINLAND PORTION OF] Unit 16(B);
- (D) the brown bear control objective is to reduce the population to a minimum of 375 brown bears in [THE MAINLAND PORTION OF] Unit 16(B);

(3) Board findings concerning populations and humans use are as follows:

- (A) **repealed;**[THE POPULATION OBJECTIVES FOR MOOSE IN MAINLAND UNIT 16(B) ARE NOT BEING MET, LARGELY DUE TO HIGH PREDATOR NUMBERS AND THE INABILITY OF THE MOOSE POPULATION TO RECOVER GIVEN THE HIGH PREDATION RATES;]
- (B) predation by wolves and bears is an important cause of the failure to achieve moose population and harvest objectives;
- (C) a reduction in wolf and bear predation in [THE MAINLAND PORTION OF] Unit 16(B) and portions of Unit 16(A) can reasonably be expected to make progress towards achieving the Unit 16(B) intensive management objectives for moose;
- (D) reducing predation is likely to be effective and feasible using recognized and prudent active management techniques and based on scientific information;
- (E) reducing predation is likely to be effective given land ownership patterns.

(4) Authorized methods and means are as follows:

- (A) hunting and trapping of wolves by the public in the Unit 16 Predation Control Area during the term of the program will occur as provided in the hunting and trapping regulations set out elsewhere in this title, including use of motorized vehicles **as provided in 5 AAC 92.080.**
- (B) notwithstanding any other provisions in this title, the commissioner may issue public aerial shooting permits or public land and shoot permits as a method of wolf removal under AS 16.05.783;
- (C) hunting of black and brown bears by the public in the Unit 16 Predation Control Area during the term of the program will occur as provided in the hunting regulations set out elsewhere in this title;
- (D) the commissioner may issue public bear control permits to reduce the black bear and brown bear populations within the Unit 16 Predation Control Area by the following methods and means:
 - (i) legal animal is any black bear, including sows and cubs, and any brown bear, except sows with cubs of the year and cubs of the year;
 - (ii) no bag limit;
 - (iii) same-day-airborne taking of [BLACK] bears if the permittee is at least 300 feet from the airplane;

(iv) same-day-airborne taking of bears if the permittee is at least 300 feet from the aircraft, including the use of any type of aircraft, such as fixed-wing aircraft or helicopter, to access bear baiting stations from April 15 through October 15, except that helicopters may not be used from August 5 through September 25;

(v) April 15 through October 15 baiting season for bears; up to four bear bait stations per permittee;

[(VI) SAME-DAY-AIRBORNE TAKING OF BEARS IF THE PERMITTEE IS AT LEAST 300 FEET FROM THE AIRCRAFT, INCLUDING THE USE OF ANY TYPE OF AIRCRAFT, SUCH AS FIXED-WING AIRCRAFT AND HELICOPTER, FROM APRIL 15 THROUGH OCTOBER 15, EXCEPT THAT A HELICOPTER MAY NOT BE USED FROM AUGUST 5 THROUGH SEPTEMBER 25; A HELICOPTER MAY BE USED ONLY TO TRANSPORT RESIDENT PERMITTEES, GEAR, AND HARVESTED BEARS AND PARTS OF BEARS DIRECTLY TO AND FROM A FOOT-SNARING CAMP; UP TO 10 HELICOPTER PERMITS MAY BE ISSUED TO HELICOPTER PILOTS; HELICOPTER PERMITS MAY BE ISSUED AT THE DISCRETION OF THE DEPARTMENT AND A PERMITTEE MUST ATTEND A DEPARTMENT-APPROVED ORIENTATION COURSE;

(VII) TAKING OF BEARS BY FOOT-SNARING BY PERMIT ONLY FROM APRIL 15 THROUGH OCTOBER 15; PERMITTEES MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY ANOTHER PERSON, AGE 18 OR OLDER, WHEN CONDUCTING FOOT-SNARING ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELD; FOOT-SNARING PERMITS WILL BE ISSUED AT THE DISCRETION OF THE DEPARTMENT BASED ON PREVIOUS TRAPPING EXPERIENCE, ABILITY TO HELP TRAIN OTHER PARTICIPANTS, AND LENGTH OF TIME AVAILABLE FOR PARTICIPATION IN A SNARING PROGRAM; A SELECTED FOOT-SNARING PERMITTEE MUST SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETE A DEPARTMENT-APPROVED TRAINING PROGRAM, MUST BE A RESIDENT 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER, AND REPORT ALL ANIMALS TAKEN BY THE PERMITTEE TO THE DEPARTMENT WITHIN 48 HOURS OF TAKING;

(VIII) FOOT SNARES MAY ONLY BE PLACED ON THE GROUND DIRECTLY UNDER THE BUCKET SNARE, OR IN BUCKETS, AND MUST BE CHECKED BY THE PERMITTEE AT LEAST ONCE EACH DAY;

(IX) ALL BROWN BEARS THAT ARE CUBS OF THE YEAR OR A SOW ACCOMPANIED BY CUBS OF THE YEAR INCIDENTALLY SNARED MUST BE IMMEDIATELY REPORTED TO THE DEPARTMENT; IF PRACTICABLE, AN INCIDENTALLY SNARED BROWN BEAR WILL BE RELEASED BY DEPARTMENT STAFF; HIDES AND SKULLS OF INCIDENTALLY SNARED BROWN BEARS ARE THE PROPERTY OF THE STATE AND MUST BE SALVAGED AND DELIVERED TO THE DEPARTMENT;]

(5) Time frame is as follows:

- (A) through July 1, 2031, the commissioner may authorize the removal of wolves, black bears, and brown bears in the Unit 16 Predation Control Area.
 - (B) annually, the department shall, to the extent practicable, provide to the board an annual report of program activities conducted during the preceding 12 months, including implementation activities, the status of moose, wolf, and bear populations, and recommendations for changes, if necessary, to achieve the objectives of the plan.
- (6) The commissioner will review, modify, or suspend program activities as follows:
- (A) when the mid-point of intensive management objectives for the moose population are achieved;
 - (B) when wolf population surveys or accumulated information from permittees indicate the need to avoid reducing wolf numbers below the midpoint of the intensive management objective of 35–55 wolves specified in this subsection;
 - (C) when black bear population inventories or accumulated information from permittees indicate the need to avoid reducing black bear numbers below the management objective of 700 black bears specified in this subsection;
 - (D) when brown bear population inventories or accumulated information from permittees indicate the need to avoid reducing brown bear numbers below the management objective of 375 brown bears specified in this subsection;
 - (E) if after 3 years if the harvest of predators is not sufficient to make progress towards the intensive management population objectives for wolves, black bears or brown bears; the program may be temporarily suspended for one or more of the predator species;
 - (F) Predator control activities may be terminated:
 - (i) if the moose population can be maintained at the midpoint of the IM population objectives, and moose harvest objectives have been met;
 - (ii) if after 3 years, there is no detectable increase in the total number of moose in the assessment area;

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The Board of Game has designated Unit 16 as important for providing high levels of human consumptive use and established objectives for population size and annual sustained harvest of moose consistent with multiple-use and principles of sound conservation and management of habitat and all wildlife species in the area.

The Intensive Management Plan for Moose in Unit 16 was suspended during RY17 and expired on July 1, 2021. The moose population was within the population objectives as of RY11 and was over 7,400 as of RY17. As of 2021, the population is estimated to be 8,485. The moose harvest

objective of 310 – 600 was first achieved in RY15 and has remained within objectives. Management of the herd may require adjusting bull-to-cow ratios during or after periods of recovery as well as to correct the trajectory of the population. The wolf population was reduced from a pre-control estimate of 175–180 wolves to 28–39 wolves in Unit 16B in RY15. As of spring 2021, the wolf estimate for all of Unit 16 is 106–111 with a minimum count of 67–68 wolves in Unit 16B. Despite increased harvests of brown and black bears initially in the control program, harvest returned to pre-control levels after several years and it is believed that the control program did not affect the bear population estimate of 3,200–3,800 black bear and 625–1,250 brown bears.

To comply with Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) protocol for intensive management plans, ADF&G is introducing new regulatory language for the intensive management plan for the Unit 16 predation control area. This proposal incorporates guidance the Board of Game (board) gave to ADF&G after the board reviewed the intensive management plan for the Unit 16 predation control area during the February 2015 Central/Southwest Region meeting. ADF&G recommends that foot snaring be removed from this plan. Foot snaring is labor intensive for both the public and staff, and did not prove to be an effective method of removing bears in Unit 16.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F21-043)
