

Proposal 63A

5 AAC 92.123. Intensive Management Plans VII. (c) is entirely deleted and replaced by the following:

...

(2) Unit 19(D)-East Predation Control Area:

...

(c) Unit 19(D)-East Predation Control Area: the Unit 19(D) East Predation Control Area is established and consists of those portions of the Kuskokwim River drainage within Unit 19(D) upstream from the Selatna River drainage and the Black River drainage, encompassing approximately 8,513 square miles; this predation control program does not apply to any National Park Service or National Wildlife Refuge lands unless approved by the federal agencies; notwithstanding any other provisions 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 a black bear and a brown bear population reduction or a wolf and black bear and brown bear population regulation program in Unit 19(D)-East to benefit moose:

(1) the following Wolf and Bear Predation Control Focus Areas are established in the Unit 19(D)-East Predation Control Area; the areas do not delineate a moose, wolf, or bear population and are not intended to distinguish animals within the zones from populations in Unit 19(D)-East; the purpose is to focus wolf and bear control in a relatively small area where moose numbers can be better estimated, where moose are accessible to hunters, and where harvest can be closely monitored;

(A) the Wolf Predation Control Focus Area (WCFA) encompasses approximately 4,500 square miles within that portion of Unit 19(D) upstream of, but not including, the Black River drainage and upstream of and including the Little Selatna River drainage and downstream of, but not including, Fourth of July Creek, Soda Creek, Slow Fork, and Tonzona River drainages, surrounding the villages of McGrath, Takotna, Medfra and Nikolai; wolf control will be conducted only within the WCFA; the department will have the discretion to adjust its size and shape to include up to approximately 5,100 square miles of Unit 19(D)-East;

(B) the Black Bear and Brown Bear Predation Control Focus Area (BCFA) encompasses approximately 528 square miles consisting of those portions of the Kuskokwim River drainage starting northwest of McGrath at 63° 04.00' N. lat., 155° 50.00' W. long., then east to 63° 04.00' N. lat., 154° 50.00' W. long., then south to 62° 54.00' N. lat., 154° 50.00' W. long., then west to 62° 54.00' N. lat., 155° 25.00' W. long., then south to 62° 50.00' N. lat., 155° 25.00' W. long., then west to 62° 50.00' N. lat., 155° 30.00' W. long., then south to 62° 48.00' N. lat., 155° 30.00' W. long., then west to 62° 48.00' N. lat., 155° 35.00' W. long., then south to 62° 42.00' N. lat., 155° 35.00' W. long., then west to 62° 42.00' N. lat., 155° 55.00' W. long., then north to 62° 50.00' N. lat., 155° 55.00'

W. long., then east to 62° 50.00' N. lat., 155° 50.00' W. long., then north to the point of beginning at 63° 04.00' N. lat., 155° 50.00' W. long., surrounding the village of McGrath; bear control will be conducted only within the BCFA; the department will have the discretion to adjust its size and shape up to approximately 680 square miles of Unit 19(D)-East; the BCFA is within the WCFA;

(2) this is a continuing control program that was first authorized by the board in 1995; wolf control began in winter 2003–2004 and bear control began with nonlethal removal of bears in the BCFA during May 2003 and 2004; the control program is currently designed to increase moose numbers and harvest in the WCFA and BCFA by reducing predation on moose and is expected to make a contribution to achieving the intensive management (IM) objectives in Unit 19(D)-East;

(3) moose, wolf, black bear, and brown bear objectives are as follows:

(A) moose IM objectives established by the board for Unit 19(D)-East are for a population of 6,000–8,000 and an annual harvest of 400–600 ;

(B) the moose density objective for the BCFA is 2.0 per square mile (corrected for sightability) in fall surveys; the moose harvest objective for the WCFA is 180 moose;

(C) the post-control wolf population control objective for Unit 19(D)-East is 40 wolves remaining; the pre-control wolf population in Unit 19(D)-East was estimated in February 2001 at 198 wolves; a minimum population of 40 wolves is approximately an 80 percent reduction for the pre-control population and will ensure that wolves persist in the plan area;

(D) the wolf control objective in the WCFA is to reduce wolf numbers to the lowest level possible; the pre-control estimate within the WCFA in 2001 was 68;

(E) the black bear control objective in the BCFA is to reduce black bear numbers to the lowest level possible; the pre-control black bear population in Unit 19(D)-East was estimated at 1,700; the pre-control estimate within the BCFA was approximately 130; because the BCFA is a relatively small geographic area, removing black bears from within it will have only a minor effect on the black bear population in Unit 19(D)-East;

(F) the brown bear control objective in the BCFA is to reduce brown bear numbers to the lowest level possible; the pre-control brown bear population in Unit 19(D)-East was 128; the pre-control estimate within the BCFA was 9;

because the BCFA is a relatively small geographic area, removing brown bears from within it will have only a minor effect on the brown bear population in Unit 19(D)-East;

(4) board findings concerning populations and human use are as follows:

(A) the Unit 19(D)-East moose population and harvest objectives have not been achieved;

(B) the BCFA objectives for moose density and moose harvest have not been achieved;

(C) predation by wolves and bears is an important cause of the failure to achieve population and harvest objectives;

(D) a reduction of wolf and bear predation within the WCFA and BCFA can reasonably be expected to make progress towards achieving the Unit 19(D)-East intensive management objectives;

(E) reducing predation is likely to be effective and feasible using recognized and prudent active management techniques and based on scientific information;

(F) reducing predation is likely to be effective given land ownership patterns;

(5) authorized methods and means are as follows:

(A) hunting and trapping of wolves and hunting of black bears and brown bears by the public in Unit 19(D)-East during the term of this program may occur as provided in the hunting and trapping regulations set out elsewhere in this title, including use of motorized vehicles;

(B) notwithstanding any other provisions in this title, the commissioner may allow department employees to conduct aerial, land and shoot, or ground based lethal removal of wolves and black bears and brown bears using state owned, privately owned, or chartered equipment, including helicopters, under AS 16.05.783;

(C) notwithstanding any other provisions in this title, the commissioner may issue public aerial shooting permits or public land and shoot permits using fixed-wing aircraft as a method of wolf removal under AS 16.05.783;

(6) time frame is as follows:

(A) through June 30, 2020, the commissioner may authorize removal of wolves and black and brown bears in Unit 19(D)-East;

(B) annually, the department shall, to the extent practicable, provide to the board a report of program activities conducted during the preceding 12 months, including implementation activities, the status of the moose, wolf, and bear populations, and recommendations for changes, if necessary to achieve the objectives of the plan;

(7) the commissioner will review, modify or suspend program activities as follows:

(A) when the wolf surveys or accumulated information from department personnel, hunters, trappers, and permittees indicate the need to avoid reducing wolf numbers in Unit 19(D)-East below the control objective of 40 wolves specified in this subsection;

(B) when the moose density and harvest objectives within the BCFA specified in this subsection are achieved.