

Draft Charge Statement for the Board of Game Unit 19C Sheep Committee

The sheep hunting season in GMU 19C has for many years been open to resident and non-resident hunters on a harvest ticket system which has allowed any hunter the opportunity to harvest one full curl ram each year. Non-resident hunters are required to contract with a licensed guide before hunting sheep. Much of GMU is state land, there are currently no restrictions on the number of guides who can operate on this state land.

Over the past several years, populations of Dall Sheep have fallen dramatically statewide. Population declines are primarily attributed to environmental factors, mostly winter weather events. The Department of Fish and Game believes that the “Full Curl” management strategy prevents overharvest and does not attribute sheep declines to hunting.

In 2022, the total harvest of Dall Sheep in GMU 19C was 30, with 27 taken by guided non-residents and 3 taken by Alaska resident hunters. The total numbers and the proportions of sheep taken by non-residents and resident hunters has changed dramatically over the past several years. In March 2023, the Board of Game voted to close GMU 19C to non-resident sheep hunters. While the Board chose to close non-resident hunting in GMU 19C, this is not considered by many as a viable long-term solution.

The Board of Game is charged with allocating game resources between beneficial uses for the maximum benefit of the people of Alaska. Dall Sheep have a high value to residents for consumption as well as trophy hunting, and as one of the two major “must be guided” game species they provide a large portion of the \$100 million revenue to the guiding industry. In addition, the sales of licenses and tags to non-residents provide significant portion of the funding for game management statewide.

The Committee is charged with bringing together a group consisting of members of the Committee, representatives of the Department of Fish and Game, landowners (potentially DNR), advisory committee representatives, resident hunters, and representatives of the guiding industry to develop a “Management Plan” for Dall Sheep in GMU 19. This plan should ensure that the BOG and ADF&G have appropriate tools to maintain access for all user groups to hunting opportunities for sheep in GMU 19C. The plan should be flexible enough to maintain user opportunity and maximum benefit over a wide range of sheep populations. The group is expected to develop regulatory and/or policy proposals and report to the BOG at its meeting in March 2024. The group may also consider whether there is a need for specific legislation to implement the plan.

While the group will be chaired by a member of the BOG, it is expected that a professional facilitator be hired to help bring the diverse interests together and ensure that the group bring forth a viable product.

Prepared by Committee member, Jerry Burnett