

Sitka Area – Unit 4

good number when you factor in all the other animals we can harvest and the opportunities we have to use proxies for old-timers who can't hunt for themselves anymore. I never have been worried about hunting seasons and bag limits for deer factor in all of our opportunities.

Even if this proposal has no effect on the federal subsistence program, it is still important to consider. Four deer per person is a good number. A family of four hunters can take 16 deer per year with this limit, a nice increase in bag limit for the residents of the Alaska outside of the area of Chignikof Island and the Pribilof Islands and the north of the Alaska Peninsula including the Aleutian Islands from which deer are harvested. If there is an opportunity to pass this proposal and keep the lands open to hunting like they always have, I urge you to act. I also urge you to act if this proposal is the issue, to the board to address and why. Deer as a game animal would have minimal impact on most sport hunters while reestablishing a clearer priority for federally qualified subsistence hunters. Returning the bag limit to the historically more common PROPOSED BY: Paul Johnson (EG-F22-089)

Background: In 2019, the Alaska Board of Game voted to increase the deer bag limit in Unit 4 from four to six deer, replacing a four deer bag limit that had been in place since 1992. While ADF&G data suggest the Unit 4 deer populations are healthy, and that there remain populations that satisfy what the Board of Game calls “amounts necessary for subsistence,” federally qualified hunters have noted that they are finding it more difficult to meet their subsistence needs. Title VIII of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act mandates that the Federal Subsistence Board ensure that “subsistence needs” are met. In the latest round of the Federal Subsistence Board process, federally qualified hunters have cited conflicts with non-federally qualified hunters, asking for broad closures of federal land to non-federally qualified hunters. To help avoid such drastic closures, advisory committees, advocacy groups, and individual Juneau hunters have volunteered to work with federally qualified hunters as well as the Federal Subsistence Board to reduce these conflicts and find compromises--this proposal represents part of that effort.

While reducing the bag limit will likely have minimal impact on the deer population or individual hunter harvests, it will encourage more conservative approaches while discouraging individuals from taking more than is needed, especially when deer populations are most vulnerable.

According to ADF&G data, from 1997-2019 the estimated average annual harvest in Unit 4 has been 5,725 deer. Harvest has remained fairly stable, with between 5,000-7,000 deer harvested annually. The exception being the severe winter of 2006/2007 when high harvest was followed by significant overwinter mortality of deer throughout Unit 4. This resulted in a precipitous decline in harvest from 7,900 deer in 2006 to 1,932 deer in 2007. Based on harvest and other indicators of deer abundance, managers believe the deer population had fully recovered by the 2013 season. Very few individual non-federally qualified hunters harvest a six deer limit in Unit 4; however, there are conditions when it is possible to take this many deer in a single day. These conditions typically coincide with deep snow, which forces the deer to the beach—that is, precisely when the deer are most vulnerable to overharvest and winterkill, as these data from the 2006/2007 winter suggest. Finally, as there is not much hunting effort in Unit 4 from hunters outside of Southeast Alaska, this change would impact almost exclusively residents of Juneau.

PROPOSED BY: Kevin Maier (EG-F22-081)

PROPOSAL 11

5 AAC 85.030. Hunting seasons and bag limits for deer.

good number when you factor in all the other animals we can harvest and the opportunities we have to use the big game. I can't take four deer when you factor in all of our opportunities. I never have been worried about "only" being able to take four deer when you factor in all of our opportunities.

General Season

Even if this proposal has no effect on the federal closures it is still important to consider. Four deer per person is a good number. A family of four hunters can take 16 deer per year with this limit, a nice amount of deer meat. If the feds decide to cut out Alaskans, well, then the only legal place to take deer will be below the tideline. All of this is a tragedy putting Alaskans against Alaskans when we have enough deer to go around. If there is an opportunity to pass this proposal and keep the lands open to hunting like they always have, I urge you to act. I also urge you to act if this proposal will help with the feds because there will be less country to hunt and a four deer limit worked for a long time.

Bag limit: four deer total (see details in season dates below)

Season dates:

Bucks: August 1 – September 14

Any deer: September 15 – December 31

Hunt requires harvest ticket

PROPOSED BY: Paul Johnson

(EG-F22-089)

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? I would like to address concerns with deer hunting harvests across Unit 4 by reducing the bag limit for both residents and nonresidents to four deer in Unit 4 Remainder. Until the last Southeast Region meeting in Petersburg, the bag limit for deer in Unit 4 was set at four. This bag limit was broadly accepted across the region and has provided enough meat for individuals and families for years, even decades. The four deer bag limit also was successful through population declines due to bad winters in the mid-2000s'. Unit 4 is special because of the quality of habitat and the lack of natural predators. The four deer bag limit is a success in how stable it has been over the years and well the deer have done.

Having lived in Southeast Alaska for almost 70 years, I remember many years where hunting has not been as good as it has been recently. I also remember times when hunting was pretty good, like it has been for the past few years. I have watched the habitat change over the years both for the better and worse. I've lived and worked with generations of biologists and different Boards of Game, I was just a kid in the early days of statehood. Through most of it all, the four deer bag limit was successful in taking care of the deer population and keeping my family with enough opportunity to eat well.

The recent proposals to close deer hunting to folks in Juneau, Ketchikan and the rest of the world in large parts portions of Unit 4 sadden and trouble me deeply. How did we get here when we have a healthy deer population? There have been times when we had more hunters in the field than now. It used to be in the old days boats were slower and hunters hiked more. Maybe some of the "crowding" we see has to do with how focused hunters have become on hunting the beach instead of climbing up in the muskeg. What I do know is that a four deer limit worked for a long time and I'm sure it will work again.

A four deer limit in Unit 4 Remainder is sustainable in good years and bad years and that is what matters most. This proposal will take us back to a tried-and-true bag limit for deer in Unit 4. On the allocation side, I hope my friends and neighbors across the region can come together and share the country with each other like we always have done. Folks in Juneau and Ketchikan enjoy deer meat too and a lot of those folks have kids who are learning to hunt. Why is it that adults are working to cut the country up for themselves and cut out the kids? There are many folks in Juneau and Ketchikan that grew up in areas that might be closed by the feds. As far as subsistence goes, southeast Alaska has an abundance of fish and game to this day. I think four deer per hunter is a

good number when you factor in all the other animals we can harvest and the opportunities we have to use proxies for old-timers who can't hunt for themselves anymore. I never have been worried about "only" being able to take four deer when you factor in all of our opportunities.

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