



- RHAK Opinion Survey Results
- Current Legislation of Interest
- Board of Game Meetings & Results
- Loss of Kodiak Brown Bear Permits When Sows are Taken
- Learn to Judge a Boar vs a Sow
- ADF&G Presentation on Dall's Sheep
- Anchorage Banquet Committee Volunteers Wanted!
- Federal Review of Subsistence Management in Alaska



RHAK Opinion Survey on Hunting & Game Management

RHAK commissioned Dittman Research – a well-respected Alaska pollster – to do an opinion survey on Alaskan's views on hunting and game management in the state. We have long believed that the majority of Alaskans agreed with a resident hunting priority and the survey results are the proof we hope will help convince legislators that changes are needed. The survey was funded with a donation by RHAK vice-President Bob Cassell.

From the press release: **Fairbanks – February 8, 2026** – A newly released opinion survey on Hunting and Game Management in Alaska indicates broad public support for a resident hunting priority. The findings highlight a widely shared belief that state wildlife resources should first serve the residents who contribute directly to conservation funding and local economies. According to the survey, a clear majority of respondents agreed that resident hunters should receive a preference when it comes to tags and access to limited hunting opportunities.

Key Findings Include:

- **Connection to hunting and wild game is widespread:** 65% say hunting and wild game are important to their household.
- **Resident priority dominates views on hunting policy and access:** 95% say residents should have priority

over nonresidents for hunting opportunities. 88% say residents should receive nearly all or most permits in lottery drawing hunts.

- **Strong support for raising nonresident license and tag fees:** 85% support setting Alaska's nonresident big game tag fees more in line with other western states.

"These survey results show that current Alaska policies that allow unlimited nonresident hunting opportunities and don't give a clear preference to residents for limited draw tags needs to change," says Mark Richards, Executive Director for Resident Hunters of Alaska. "Alaska is the only western state that doesn't place strict limits on nonresident hunting opportunities and doesn't give resident hunters a clear preference for restricted draw tags. The wildlife resources of the state belong to Alaskans. We want to share our state with nonresident hunters, but there needs to be fair limits, and nonresident tag fees need to be in line with what other states charge."

The survey results and methodology can be found on residenthuntersofalaska.org via the "About Us" link on the menu bar.



Current Legislation of Interest in Juneau

HB 93 - An Act changing the residency requirements for hunting, trapping, and sport fishing privileges; and providing for an effective date.

Passed the House on a 27-12 vote with 1 excused and is now moving through the Senate.

HB 93 would tie residency requirements for hunting, fishing, and trapping to whether an individual is eligible to receive an Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD).

RHAK has received more comments from our members on this bill than any other, from those in support and those opposed. As we told the legislature in our recent letter, *“we find ourselves in a catch-22. We want to support keeping nonresidents from hunting or fishing under a resident license, but the way we would now define who is a resident or nonresident is going to hurt real Alaskans who don't fall under the PFD exemptions. That includes some of our members. For these reasons, we **oppose** HB 93 as written. There must be a better, simpler way of defining who is and isn't a resident of the state that won't disenfranchise so many.”*

SB 216 - An Act relating to the transfer of big game hunting permits; and providing for an effective date.

This is the Governor's bill and would allow hunters who win a draw permit to transfer that permit to another person (resident to resident, or nonresident to nonresident) for monetary gain.

RHAK **strongly opposes** this bill and perhaps our comments on it were too nice: *“To suggest that coveted hunting draw permits should be able to be transferred to another hunter for monetary gain is completely contrary to the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation and highly unethical.”*

To say we are disappointed in our own Governor for putting this bill forward is a gross understatement. SB 216 had one hearing in Senate Resources and has not moved out of that committee. We don't expect it to move forward.

HB 33 - An Act relating to participation in matters before the Board of Fisheries and the Board of Game by the members of the respective boards; and providing for an effective date.

Passed the House 28-12 and is moving through the Senate.

HB 33 would change how the Boards of Fisheries and Game deal with members who have a conflict of interest on a specific proposal. For example, if there is a proposal that would have economic impacts on a Board of Game member who is a guide that guides in that area, or if there is a proposal that would have economic impacts on a Board of Fisheries member who is a commercial fisherman in that area, those board members have a conflict of interest. Currently, if a board member has a conflict, that member must recuse him or herself from deliberating on the proposal and may not vote on the proposal.

HB 33 would allow board members with a conflict to remain at the table during deliberations on those proposals but still prohibit them from voting on those proposals. RHAK **supports** HB 33 for the reasons stated in our letter: *“There are many instances, particularly on the Board of Fisheries, when the most knowledgeable board member on a specific proposal before the board must declare a conflict of interest, because he or she or a family member has a financial interest in the outcome of a proposal. Under the current system, that member then cannot even deliberate on that proposal. It is important that we allow a member of either board who declares a conflict of interest, who may have intimate knowledge regarding a proposal, to at least participate in deliberations over that proposal. It is equally important, however, that a member with a declared conflict of interest on a particular proposal is not allowed to vote on that proposal.”*

Southeast Region Board of Game Report

(Units 1-5) January 23-27, 2026

By Mark Richards



The 2026 Southeast Region Board of Game meeting was held in Wrangell and there were 70 proposals before the board ranging from changes to brown bear seasons and deer bag limits, nanny goat penalties, nonresident draw-permit allocations, and more. The board passed only 17 of the 70 proposals.

One of the more interesting things I heard at the meeting was the Department position that the Unit 4 Brown Bear Management Strategy (BBMS) – that came about as the result of recommendations from the Unit 4 Brown Bear Management Planning Team workgroup in 2000 – was nearly akin to the bible as the holy book of how bears should be managed in the region and we should not make any changes to the book.

The problem with that position is that the BBMS is over 20 years old and there have been many changes

since then in tourism, guide operations, and brown bear population densities. Part of the BBMS incorporates avoiding conflicts with wildlife viewing and tour operations. Seasons are set based on what works best to separate bear hunters from tour operations, rather than what works best for hunters and keeping the bear population at appropriate levels. Even though there has been an increase in bear populations, and there are no conservation concerns with increasing resident brown bear seasons, the Department encouraged the board not to make any changes that may differ from the 26-year-old BBMS and conflict with current tourist seasons and operations. We've gotten to the point where having some extended bear seasons when there are tour boats around is deemed a bad thing because it may negatively impact tourists who see hunters, hear gunshots, or see a brown bear taken on shore. The board voted down all the proposals to extend the brown bear seasons in Unit 4.

A summary of actions on all the Southeast proposals:

<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/regulations/regprocess/gameboard/pdfs/2025-2026/se/soa-final.pdf>

Southcentral Region Board of Game Report

(Units 6, 7, 8, 14C, 15) March 20-25, 2026

By Mark Richards



The Board of Game held their Southcentral Region 2026 meeting in Kodiak. There were 170 proposals before the board on a wide range of issues, from bag limit and season changes, trapping setbacks, penalties on the taking of nanny goats and sow brown bears, motorized vehicle restrictions, and more. However, most of the proposals (over four dozen, all submitted by the same person!) were about placing limits on nonresident draw permit allocations, asking to limit nonresident hunters to “up-to” 20% of draw permits or “up-to” 10% of draw permits for various species. Of those 170 proposals, 26 passed.

A summary of actions on all the Southcentral proposals:

<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/regulations/regprocess/gameboard/pdfs/2025-2026/sc/soa-final.pdf>

ADF&G Dall's Sheep Presentation

There was a fantastic special presentation by Department sheep research biologists Dr. Tom Lohuis and Dr. Brad Wendling on the status of our Dall sheep populations and the research they are conducting. Read more about their presentation on page 7.

Draw Hunt Allocation Proposals

The reason for all the allocation proposals is that Alaska is the only western state that doesn't give a clear draw-hunt priority to residents for most draw hunts. Our draw-hunt system is equally open to both residents and nonresidents to apply for the same pool of permits. The only reason residents typically win most of the permits under that system is because residents submit more applications than nonresidents. But since it's a random draw, there are times when nonresidents win much more than 20% of the permits in any given year. To make matters worse, with Alaska (unlike other western states) so wide open to nonresident draw-hunt opportunities, hunt bookers and other entities are now flooding the draw permit application pools with thousands of nonresident applicants, making their chances of winning a permit under our system much higher. It's become a booming business whereby a nonresident hunter pays to have his or her application(s) submitted by a "License Application Service."

Part of my RHAK testimony centered on these allocation proposals and how they again showed this was a problem that needed to be addressed, and that if the board didn't fix it then RHAK was going to get legislation introduced to give residents a clear priority for draw permits. A draw hunt means there are not enough animals for everyone to have the opportunity to hunt. Allowing nonresidents an equal chance at winning those permits is simply wrong.

The first few allocation proposals (86-88) were asking for an "up-to" 10% allocation of permits to nonresident hunters for the Unit 7 and 15 caribou hunts (DC 001, DC 608, &

DC 618) and the board took each up individually. The Department presented information on each hunt with charts like this one, which is for the DC 001 hunt:

Regulatory Year	Resident	Nonresident	Total
2015	24	1	25
2016	25	0	25
2017	23	2	25
2018	24	1	25
2019	20	5	25
2020	25	0	25
2021	20	5	25
2022	24	1	25
2023	22	3	25
2024	15	0	15

As you can see from the chart above about the DC 001 caribou draw hunt, in 2019 and 2021 nonresidents won 5 of 25 permits, which is 20% of the total permits. This being a caribou hunt, we felt that 20% of the permits going to nonresidents was too high. And the board was likely to agree, but the Department averaged out the percentage of permits nonresidents won over a ten-year period in the next slide, saying that: ***"During RY15-24, nonresidents averaged 13% of permits, and a high of 20%."***

The board decided that this "average" percentage of permits won by nonresidents over the past ten years was the data they would use – instead of any individual year – and that 13% on average of these permits going to nonresidents was not out of line according to their nonresident allocation policy. They did take up proposals 86-88 individually, and since each of those hunts had the same type of ten-year average nonresident draw permit allocation, they voted them all down.

The board's decision to use 10-year averages of the percentage of draw permits won by nonresidents would result in the board taking no action on most of the allocation proposals. If the average was that much less than 20% the board took no action, even if the nonresident allocation was 30-40 percent in any given year. So, only the proposals with the most egregious nonresident allocation averages were considered, and on those the board set an interesting precedent.

continued on page 5

20% Nonresident Allocation for “trophy” animals 10% Nonresident Allocation for meat animals

Proposal 212 asked the board to limit the Raspberry Island DE 702 nonresident elk draw permit allocation to “up-to” 10% of the total permits. The average 10-year nonresident allocation percentage for that hunt was 18%, but there was one year nonresidents won over 40% of the permits. So, the board decided to take that proposal up and decided that meat animals like elk which are important for feeding Alaskans should have a guaranteed 90% draw hunt allocation for residents and a guaranteed 10% allocation (no “up-to” language) to nonresidents, but if less than 10 permits are available, there will be no nonresident allocation. The board voted 5-2 to support Proposal 212.

Proposal 231 asked to limit the nonresident draw permit allocation to 10% for the Kodiak goat hunts DG 471, 472, 473, 474, 476, 478, & 470. The average 10-year nonresident allocation percentage for all of those hunts combined was 21%. Guides who guided for goat in these areas strongly supported this proposal because they didn’t expect all the clients they signed a guide-client agreement with to win permits and they didn’t have an operation that could handle that many clients every year. They asked for a 20% nonresident allocation with

another 3-5% of permits going to nonresident second-degree-of-kindred (2DK) hunters coming out of the resident pool of tags. And they also asked that the board limit the number of nonresident applicants that could apply for each individual draw hunt.

The board amended and unanimously passed Proposal 231 to guarantee a 20% nonresident allocation for these goat draw hunts, saying goats were a “trophy” species and economically important to the guide industry and the state. 3% of those nonresident tags would go to nonresident 2DK hunters and come out of the nonresident pool of tags. In addition, the board limited the number of applicants per guide to the number of nonresident permits available for each draw hunt.

The board continually brought up their nonresident allocation policy (which doesn’t at all prioritize resident hunting opportunity) and mentioned it needed to be revised with this new type of precedent on the allocation of draw permits to nonresidents for meat and trophy animals. RHAK will be pursuing legislation next year to get a more strict resident draw-hunt priority into statute.

Loss of Resident Kodiak Brown Bear Permits due to Sow Penalty

At the 2023 Southcentral BOG meeting, the board instituted a sow penalty on both resident and nonresident Kodiak brown bear hunters in hunt areas 8-16 on the southwest portion of the island. If a resident takes a sow in these areas, a resident permit for that area is removed from the drawing pool in subsequent years. Same with a nonresident guided hunter, except the permit is removed from the nonresident pool.

Since this regulation went into effect in 2024, resident Kodiak brown bear hunters have harvested 17 sows in these areas, leading to a loss of 17 resident permits. During the same span, nonresidents harvested 1 sow, with a loss of 1 permit.

While RHAK certainly supports bear conservation measures, we opposed imposing this sow penalty on residents because there is no real incentive for a resident who wins what is essentially a once-in-a-lifetime tag to not take a sow when there is no penalty on that hunter. We predicted we’d end up with a significant loss of permits.

RHAK proposal 236 asked the board to rescind the sow penalty on residents but keep it in place for nonresident guided hunters. In the early 1990s biologists had the same conservation concerns for the brown bears on the southwest portion of the island and from regulatory years 1994 – 2006 the board imposed a sow penalty

continued from page 5

on nonresident guided hunters in these areas. The board rescinded that sow penalty in 2007 after the bear population rebounded. It was widely believed to have been successful in bringing the bear population back within management objectives. RHAK asked the board to return to that same management strategy for nonresident hunters that worked so well, but the board voted our proposal down 0-7.

The sow penalty on residents and nonresidents remains in place. We want to be clear that the board's

decision and the expected continued loss of resident permits will no doubt be good for the bears. It's just that we don't believe a sow penalty on residents is the fairest way to do it.

ISSUES WITH CURRENT REGULATION AND SOW PENALTY ON RESIDENT HUNTERS

- DB 208-216 and DB 238-246 draw permits have on average a 5% chance of drawing
- These permits are essentially a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for residents
- Sow harvest is **legal** and permit winners want to harvest a bear
- No real disincentive to not take a sow when no penalty on the hunter
- 17 resident permits lost since regulation went into effect RY 24
- Loss of resident permits will continue if sows remain legal to harvest, even with education efforts to differentiate between sows and boars

BOTTOM LINE: Residents (unlike guides) do not have a monetary incentive to not take sows in these areas. Residents will continue to lose substantial number of permits for these areas if this regulation continues.

Kodiak Brown Bear Hunters

Know How to Identify a Boar vs a Sow Draw Hunts DB 208-216 & DB 238-246 Sow Penalty

We encourage all bear hunters to learn to identify a boar vs a sow regardless of if the area they hunt imposes penalties on the taking of sows. If you happen to apply for and win a Kodiak brown bear permit for the areas with a sow penalty, it's even more important to learn how to identify a boar vs a sow so future hunters don't lose opportunity. Here is a link to "Take a Closer Look," a 12-minute video from the ADF&G website that may be helpful:

<https://vimeo.com/39072827>

The longer version that includes the quizzes at the end is here: <https://vimeo.com/30511231>

There is also a pdf field guide on judging bears here:

https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/species/speciesinfo/brownbear/pdfs/brown_bear_identifying_males_females_in_field.pdf

Renew Your Membership | Send Us Your Photos

Membership renewal is quick and easy at residenthuntersofalaska.org or by contacting Mark Richards at 371-7436 or email info@residenthuntersofalaska.org.

If you'd like to share your hunting adventures for our website, Facebook page, and/or newsletter, please email them to Mark.

ADF&G Presentation – Report on Dall’s Sheep

Department sheep research biologists Tom Lohuis and Brad Wendling gave a special presentation on the status of Dall’s sheep in Alaska and their ongoing research. Dall sheep are in decline across all of North America and the declines are happening in both hunted and unhunted

populations. Weather is the main factor contributing to the declines, specifically a warming arctic and more consistent unusually bad winters. Habitat change, avalanches, and predation also play a role, especially in terms of recovery of a population when in decline.



From presentation slides 1 and 82

2025 Minimum Count Comparison

	Total Adults	Ewe Like	Lambs	Sub Full Curl	Full Curl	Lambs: 100 Ewes
Brooks Treatment	412	260	47	135	17 (11%)	18
Gates	202	133	32	57	12 (17%)	24
Denali	637	365	142	172	117 (40%)	39
20A	884	606	233	258	20 (7%)	38

What role hunting plays, and more specifically the selective harvest of mature rams, is a part of what Brad Wendling’s research on hunted and unhunted sheep populations in the Brooks and Alaska Ranges hopes to better understand. As far as selective harvest, note above, the red box in the slide, “2025 Minimum Count Comparison” from Brad’s presentation on minimum counts of sheep in unhunted and hunted populations in the Brooks and Alaska Ranges. 40% of the counted sheep in Denali NP were full-curl rams, whereas only 7% in Unit 20A were full-curl. While the other population metrics (like lamb:ewe ratio) are very similar, the much larger percentage of mature rams in the unhunted population of Denali brings up a lot of questions.

In conclusion, the slides, “What do we know for sure?” from their presentation states where we’re at. Unless we get some really good winters and good recruitment, sheep populations are likely to persist at lower levels.

Tom and Brad’s presentation was excellent and if sheep are of interest to you, we highly recommend you take a look at their report:

What do we know for sure?

- Climate and weather are primary drivers of sheep numbers and population trajectories; large scale declines and recoveries have happened in the past.
- Current declines are continent-wide; managers in BC, Yukon, NWT report declines of similar magnitude.
- FC harvest is conservative and not driving population declines.
- Previous hunt closures and/or drawing hunts have not resulted in population recovery (Brooks Range GMU 23, Chugach GMU 13D).
- Current research suggests population trajectories similar between hunted and unhunted areas in Brooks and Alaska ranges.
- Lamb production statewide 2020-2025 indicates low numbers of rams available for harvest through at least 2028-2033.
- Populations likely to persist at lower levels.
- Predator communities and impacts on sheep populations vary between mountain ranges and between years.
- Multiple predator species utilize sheep, secondary effects possible due to predator interactions. Any discussion of predator removal should incorporate a robust pre-treatment dataset.
- Sheep hunters are crazy.

Text from presentation slides 87–88

https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/regulations/regprocess/gameboard/pdfs/2025-2026/sc/rc_4_tab_1.3.pdf

Anchorage Banquet Volunteers Wanted!

We are looking for volunteers for a new Anchorage Banquet committee to help with the Anchorage banquet. The committee will meet in late October and then twice a month in November and December. Tentative 2027 Anchorage Banquet date is February 13th. The main focus of the committee will be to help solicit donations from various businesses for banquet prizes. RHAK Board member Tony Henry will help facilitate. The Anchorage banquet had a downturn this year and we want to make it as big and better than it was in the past. This is our primary fundraiser and we could use your help!



Fairbanks banquet committee

Please contact Mark Richards at (907) 371-7436 or info@residenthuntersofalaska.org or Tony Henry at (907) 317-6924 if you would like to help. Committee meetings usually include a meal and it's a great way to make new friends and help RHAK at the same time.

Program Review – Subsistence Management for Public Lands in Alaska

“Title VIII of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA) requires a subsistence priority for rural Alaska residents on federal public lands in Alaska, currently administered jointly by Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture (the Secretaries). The Office of the Senior Advisor to the Secretary of the Interior for Alaska Affairs and the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture are conducting a targeted review of the Federal Subsistence Management Program (Program) with joint recommendations for action to ensure the Program effectively and efficiently meets the needs of Alaska residents and the Secretaries’ obligations under ANILCA. The focus of this review is on recent regulatory and organizational changes to the Program, along with discrete areas of interest.”

There were over 1,000 public comments on the federal review of the subsistence management program in Alaska. Most all the comments were in support of keeping things the same, including the addition of more public members to the Federal Subsistence Board (FSB). RHAK also sent in comments. Some key points from our comments are as follows.

Read our entire comments here:

https://www.residenthuntersofalaska.org/_files/ugd/038ca3_f2730dfec42143b3a5685e573596af13.pdf

Support for a Subsistence Priority within ANILCA

We recognize the importance rural communities place on our wildlife resources for nutritional, cultural, and spiritual needs. Subsistence and the subsistence economy is a way of life for many, beyond just food security, and we want that lifestyle to continue. We support a rural subsistence priority when it is necessary to restrict taking to ensure the continued viability of a wildlife population or the continuation of subsistence uses of such populations, as outlined in ANILCA.

Regarding this review of the federal subsistence management program, while we support a rural subsistence priority as stated above, we do believe some changes to the federal subsistence management program are warranted so that federal management is more in line with the intent and language of ANILCA.

Current System of Dual State & Federal Management

The dual management system we currently operate under, the differing state and federal hunting regulations, is a

continued on page 9

continued from page 8

poor way to effectively manage our wildlife resources because the federal and state management priorities are sometimes in conflict and the state's role in wildlife management has been diminished by the federal system.

Dual Management Continues to Divide Alaskans

One way in particular dual management divides us is how offensive it is to Alaskans who are not federally qualified subsistence hunters that they are considered by the Federal Subsistence Board (FSB) to be the exact same as someone who lives Outside our state or in another country. This has been a huge mistake all along, as sometimes it is the out-of-state nonresident hunters who play a big role in crowding and conflicts and game harvests. The FSB process needs to be able to distinguish and differentiate between Alaska residents and nonresidents.

Role of the Alaska Department of Fish & Game in the Federal Subsistence Management Program

It was never the intent of ANILCA to supersede the state's management authority of our fish and wildlife, yet that is where we find ourselves today. Federal managers are instituting special hunting seasons for federally qualified users with higher bag limits than the state allows for game populations in significant

decline (i.e. Fortymile caribou herd). The FSB is continuing to allow doe and cow harvests for deer and caribou populations in decline, while restricting non-federally qualified hunters over concerns for sustainability (i.e. Unit 2 deer and Western Arctic Caribou Herd). The FSB and federal land managers are making hunting and allocation decisions without collaboration or participation from the Department that aren't at times in the best interests of our wildlife resources and contradictory to state management, which is well outside the scope of what ANILCA allows. The Department should have a more participatory role in the FSB process, and the decisions federal land managers are making. Consultation with the Department should be mandatory for the Office of Subsistence Management before they make any decisions on federal proposals or special actions.

Federal Policies Prohibiting Predator Management

It continues to surprise us that the role of the federal government to ensure the continued viability of a wildlife population and the continuation of subsistence uses on federal lands does not include predator management when predators are deemed to be a significant factor in game population declines. Predator management is one of the few things we can do to help boost a wildlife population in decline. To not allow it when the goal is to ensure subsistence needs are being met is another aspect of how federal management is at odds with state management.

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