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Happy Holidays!

## Unit 19C Sheep Working Group Formation More Board of Game Shenanigans

To recap on Unit 19C sheep issues, RHAK has been submitting proposals to the Board of Game (board) since our formation to limit nonresident sheep hunters in Unit 19C in the western Alaska range who were consistently taking 70-80% of the sheep harvest of a declining sheep population. We expressed sheep conservation concerns and fears that residents would lose general sheep hunting opportunity, just like happened in the Chugach, but the board voted down our proposals every cycle. In 2022, nonresident sheep hunters took 90% of the sheep harvest in Unit 19C from an even lower sheep population, and suddenly the board had sheep conservation concerns and submitted their own board-generated proposal to close all sheep hunting in Unit 19C for five years for everyone. Aaargh!

RHAK's pushback and involvement at the Soldotna Southcentral meeting last March is the only reason the board amended and passed their proposal to **not include** residents in the closure. Residents can still hunt sheep under a general season harvest ticket. Nonresidents cannot hunt sheep in Unit 19C for five years. It was a split 4-3 vote by the board that divided board members and greatly upset the guide industry, and now the board is in the process of forming a new Sheep Working Group (SWG) to supposedly address sheep population declines in Unit 19C and how those sheep will be managed in the future.

RHAK opposed the formation of a new SWG because the state already spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on the prior SWG and sheep hunter survey in 2016, the consensus outcome being that nonresident sheep hunters should be limited, and residents should

have a clear sheep hunting priority. The board obviously did not agree with that result as they did nothing after the last SWG to institute changes that reflected those consensus recommendations. Which is why we are at the point we are now, with the board voting to spend more money that ADF&G does not have on something we've already addressed in detail ad-infinitum. Beyond that, if any sheep "management" changes are needed, those recommendations should come from Department managers and biologists.

Since the board was dead set on forming this new SWG, we requested that a RHAK representative be on the group. The board SWG subcommittee met on November 17, 2023, via teleconference and decided that there would be 9 – 14 members on the group, but there would be no organization representatives allowed. Members of the public and organizations will be allowed to provide testimony to the group.

Here is the list of representatives the board subcommittee decided will be voting members on the group (no specific people chosen yet) that will make recommendations on a new 19C Sheep Management plan:

- a guide who operates in Unit 19C
- a transporter who operates in Unit 19C
- a winter Unit 19C subsistence hunter
- a fall Unit 19C resident hunter
- a non-consumptive user such as eco-tour business
- a CIRI Native Corporation Landowner Representative
- a McGrath F&G Advisory Committee member
- a Fairbanks F&G Advisory Committee member
- an Anchorage F&G Advisory Committee member
- a Mat-Su F&G Advisory Committee member

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The board subcommittee left open the option to add more members reflecting interests they may have left out. The group will also include the three members of the Board of Game who set this whole thing up: board chairman Jerry Burnett, board member Jake Fletcher (guide), and board member Stosh Hoffman (former guide). Those three board members will comprise a voting bloc of nearly 25% of the group if they also are voting members.

To say we are skeptical of where this is heading is an understatement. Especially after reading the Alaska Professional Hunters Association proposal #91 before the board next March that says the guide industry supports whatever management plan recommendations come before the board, to include allocations, seasons, and bag limits. That proposal, like all others, was submitted by the May 1st, 2023 deadline, well before there was any word that the board was forming a new SWG to make management plan recommendations.

## **Board of Game Calendar & Update**

### **REGION V WESTERN ARCTIC/WESTERN MEETING – KOTZEBUE JANUARY 26-29, 2024**

<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=gameboard.meetinginfo&date=01-26-2024&meeting=kotzebue>

RHAK will be at the Western Arctic/Western Board of Game meeting in Kotzebue in January 2024 and will be supporting a reduction in bag limit for Western Arctic Caribou herd proposed by the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group due to declines in the herd. The proposal asks to move from a 5 caribou per day bag limit to 4 caribou per year, only one of which may be a cow. RHAK has consistently addressed the continued high bag limit and the allowance to take cows while the herd was rapidly declining. This is a significant step for the Working Group to take to reduce the bag limit that we believe is the right thing to do at this time with the caribou population well below 200,000 animals.

### **REGION III INTERIOR/EASTERN ARCTIC MEETING – FAIRBANKS MARCH 15-22, 2024**

<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=gameboard.meetinginfo&date=03-15-2024&meeting=fairbanks>

RHAK has 8 proposals before the Board of Game at the March 2024 Interior/Eastern Arctic meeting addressing the need to prioritize resident hunting opportunities and put food in our freezers. The future of sheep hunting in the interior will also be on the agenda, and we are doing everything we can to ensure our sheep are managed sustainably with an emphasis on preserving our resident sheep hunting opportunities.

We will have more detailed information early next year on these and other proposals and how to comment. You can read all the RHAK proposals at <https://www.residenthuntersofalaska.org/proposals>

## **Federal Subsistence Board Update**

The Federal Subsistence Board will meet in April 2024 to hear testimony and deliberate on the 2024 – 2026 wildlife proposals. Those proposals can be found here:

### **PART 1**

<https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/pages-from-wildlife-proposal-book-2024-2026-part-i-wp24-01-wp24-18.pdf>

### **PART 2**

<https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/pages-from-wildlife-proposal-book-2024-2026-reduced-file-size-part-ii-wp24-19-wp24-38.pdf>

RHAK testified at the Southeast Alaska Regional Subsistence Advisory Council meeting in October 2023 in opposition to wildlife proposals 24-04, 24-05, and 24-06 to close portions of federal lands on Admiralty and Chichagof Islands to deer hunting by non-federally qualified users from Nov 1 – 15. These are all similar proposals to the ones previously heard that were absent any real evidence that subsistence needs were not being met and were voted down by the board. As we expressed previously, the deer population in these areas is abundant and competition alone between local and non-local hunters on federal lands is not a valid reason under ANILCA to restrict non-federally qualified hunters. You can read our comments on these and other federal wildlife proposals before the board next April on RHAK's Federal Subsistence Board webpage at <https://www.residenthuntersofalaska.org/fsb>.

# Draw Hunt Application Period **Closing Soon!**

If you want to put in for any draw hunts for the 2024/2025 seasons but haven't done it yet, this is a reminder that the draw hunt application period closes on December 15th. Download the 2024/2025 Draw Supplement here:

[https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/applications/web/nocache/license/huntlicense/pdfs/2024-2025\\_draw\\_supplement.pdf](https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/applications/web/nocache/license/huntlicense/pdfs/2024-2025_draw_supplement.pdf)

## RHAK 2024 Banquets – Save The Dates

**The 2nd Annual Fairbanks Fundraising Banquet  
will be Saturday, February 24, 2024**

at the Birch Hill Recreation Center

**Our Annual Anchorage Fundraising Banquet  
will be Saturday, March 23, 2024**

at the Egan Center

Our banquet websites to order tables and tickets will be live mid-December. Dinner, fantastic prizes, wall of guns, cash bar... come join us in support of a great cause!

## RHAK 2023 Yukon River Float Trip Report **Eagle to Circle July 9-16**

RHAK Members Mark Richards, Jeff Pentek, and George Thompson, along with his two sons, Finn & Zephyr, enjoyed a week floating the Yukon River last July on the 1st ever RHAK float trip! The crew left Eagle on July 9th in two canoes and one raft for the 160-mile float to Circle. A big thank you to RHAK members Dwayne & Heidi Cooper and Jen Carlson for doing the driving and shuttling of vehicles on both ends! *(All pictures by George Thompson unless otherwise noted)*



### DAY 1 – CLEAR & HOT, CALM

The crew could not have picked a nicer 1st day of the trip, and after loading up and saying their goodbyes they headed out on the Yukon. Twelve miles downstream from Eagle and signifying the entrance to Yukon Charley Rivers National Preserve, is Calico Bluff, with its thrust and folded layers of limestone and shale a timeline of the upper-Yukon's geologic history. The crew stopped for lunch at the mouth of the Tatonduk River (known as Sheep Creek by the locals), about 30 miles downstream from Eagle, glassing the limestone crags of the Ogilvie Mountains for white spots. The first camp was on a sandbar island just below Trout Creek, with zero mosquitoes in the open in the 89-degree heat. There was a lot of swimming in the Yukon to cool off, and George and the boys had a wild mud fight that night!



*Organizing and loading gear at the Eagle boat launch (Heidi Cooper)*



*Jeff oaring past Eagle Bluff*



*George & Mark floating past Calico Bluff*

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**DAY 2**  
**CLEAR & HOT, CALM**

The crew stopped to check out the Nation River bluff cabin maintained by the Park Service, where George put an entry in the logbook, then floated another 30 miles to the mouth of the Kandik River to spend a couple nights and do some fishing.



*Ogilvie Mountains from mouth of "Sheep Creek"*



*Zephyr (sitting) & Finn at first camp in the setting sun*



*Finn lining canoe up the Kandik*

**DAY 3**  
**MOSTLY CLEAR & HOT, CALM**

Mark showed George and the boys how to line a canoe, the four of them lining up the Kandik a mile and a half, where they explored some beaver sloughs. Back at camp it was more fun and games playing cards and telling



*Enjoying day 2 on the Yukon*



*Paddling through the beaver sloughs*

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stories and jumping in the river occasionally to cool off. That night a big windstorm came in from downriver, bringing high clouds and some much-appreciated cooler temps (in the 70s).

**DAY 4 – CLOUDY, WARM & WINDY**

A short 18 miles to Slaven’s Cabin at the mouth of Coal Creek, the NPS headquarters within the Preserve. Strong upriver winds slowed progress, especially for Jeff in the raft. Drizzling rain just before reaching Slaven’s.

**DAY 5 – OVERCAST, COOL, CALM**

It rained off and on all night and the crew had a warming fire in the NPS public use cabin they’d spent the night in. George and the boys had never been to the restored gold dredge up Coal Creek and hiked the mile out the trail to check it out. It is one of the nicest dredge restorations in the state, bringing back to life the gold rush days of the upper-Yukon country.

After leaving Slaven’s, the river narrows and goes through some cool hoodoo rock formations.

The crew stopped to check out the Smith public-use cabin near Tacoma Bluff, 40 miles from Circle, and were saddened to see that breakup had flooded the high bank, floated the two-story cabin and dropped it several yards away from its foundation skewed 90 degrees from its original position. It was in rough shape but surprisingly still intact. Camp that night was a few miles downstream on an island.



*Finn with pike at Kandik camp*



*Jeff snaps a pic of the canoe crew (Jeff Pentek)*



*Finn with hoodoos in the background*



*A chilly Zephyr (left) and Finn (right) at the Coal Creek Dredge*



*The crew at Slaven’s. From left to right: George, Zephyr, Finn, Mark, Jeff*



*Last camp near Circle, 6-mile Bluff in background*



*Finn, Mark, & Zephyr playing cards in camp*

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### **DAY 6 – MOSTLY CLOUDY, BREEZY, COOL**

The plan was to camp close to Circle that night and get there early the next day for the pickup. More hoodoo country that became more rounded hills closer to Circle. The last camp was just upriver from 6-mile Bluff, seven miles out of Circle, on a big gravel island where the crew set up a rain shelter in preparation for what the weather seemed to have in store. It was a fun last night with cards and cribbage and the last campfire!

### **DAY 7 – OVERCAST, DRIZZLING, COOL, CALM**

The rain shelter proved handy the last morning! After breakfast the crew donned their rain gear for the last few miles of the float.



*Jeff, Mark, & Zephyr - last campfire*



*Mark cooking breakfast out of the rain on top of his custom chuckbox*



*Jeff in the rain near Circle on the last day of the float*

### **COMMENTS ON THE TRIP FROM THE CREW:**

**MARK** – *This was like going home to me, heading down the Yukon again into the country I spent most of my life in, raising a family out in the bush, hunting, fishing, and trapping. The sound of the silty Yukon against the canoe, like the hissing of a slow leak in a tire, was like a remembered smell. Every bend in the river was a memory. To top it off, great company and great stories, what a blast! The only downside was Finn & Zephyr continually beating me at cribbage and hearts! Let's do it again!*

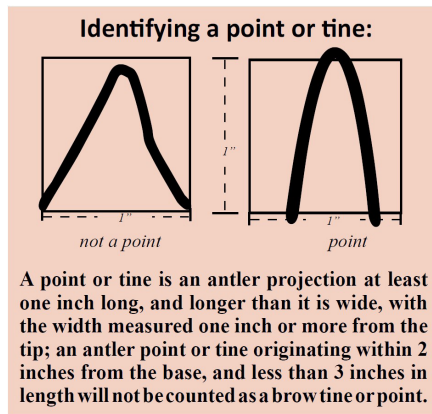
**JEFF** – *Big water makes the raft seem small. Haven't been on the Yukon since '04 and never above the Charley. A well-deserved reputation for scenery. Good company, weather from too hot to light drizzle. Even the wind didn't try too hard to push me upstream. I could have easily spent another week on the river, perhaps next year?*

**GEORGE** – *The 2023 Eagle to Circle float trip was awesome. The scenery was amazing and the weather was excellent for all but 1 day of the 7 day trip. We had Jeff transporting all of our heavy items in his raft and the float trip chef made excellent food for breakfast and dinner. The extra bonus was the detailed first hand stories from Mark about the people traveling and living on that part of the Yukon River. We can't wait for the next one.*

**FINN & ZEPHYR** – *This summer we were fortunate to have the opportunity to go on a RHAK Yukon River float trip. It was an amazing experience where we learned many survival tricks from Mark Richards. Maybe the coolest new skill we learned was how to line a canoe up a river. The highlight of the entire trip was without a doubt the many stories that Mark told from his time living and travelling on the Yukon River. The trip was amazing and we wouldn't trade it for the world.*

# Is This Moose Legal?

RHAK Member Jack Harrison sent in this photo from a hunt with friends this fall of a moose in an area with a 50"/3 brow tines or spike/fork regulation. They called it in to within 75 yards and it was a tough decision on whether there were 3 brow tines. It appears they made the right call in deciding not to shoot!



From page 30 of the 2023-2024 Alaska Hunting Regulations publication



## RHAK MEMBERSHIP PRICE CHANGE

Due to increased costs, we have raised the Basic membership annual dues. Basic membership is now \$45/year, up \$10. If you are on auto-renew, the price will stay at \$35 until your card expires.

## GIVE A GIFT MEMBERSHIP!

A RHAK membership is a great Christmas gift and way to educate friends and family and get them more up to speed on what is going on and what we are doing to help ensure we have future hunting opportunities. You can sign them up at <https://www.residenthuntersofalaska.org/support> and they will get our updates and newsletters.

## MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL NOTICES ARE GOING OUT PLEASE RENEW IF YOU GET A NOTICE

Membership renewal is quick and easy at <https://www.residenthuntersofalaska.org/join-renew>. If you want to check your membership status or renew over the phone, please contact Mark Richards at 371-7436 or [info@residenthuntersofalaska.org](mailto:info@residenthuntersofalaska.org).

## SHARE YOUR HUNTING & GATHERING ADVENTURES

Email pictures to share on our website and newsletter to [info@residenthuntersofalaska.org](mailto:info@residenthuntersofalaska.org).

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## Getting **More Involved** In Wildlife Management Issues

We previously sent out this information to all members but wanted to also get it out there via our newsletter.

### **FISH & GAME ADVISORY COMMITTEES**

Local Fish & Game Advisory Committees are meeting again and are a great way to become more informed on fish and wildlife management issues and share your concerns. There are 84 Advisory Committees (ACs) across six regions of the state. ACs typically meet once per month from October - March. The public is encouraged to attend. Area biologists and wildlife troopers typically attend AC meetings and give reports. Anyone who lives in the area is eligible to run for a seat on their local AC; terms are 3 years. RHAK has members on several ACs and we encourage you to consider running for a seat and have more sway in decisions that affect you and your family! To see when your local AC meets, click here and scroll down <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=process.advisory>.

### **VISIT YOUR LOCAL F&G OFFICE**

ADF&G biologists are happy to answer questions and provide more information. Want to know how a wildlife population is doing where you hunt, what recent harvests were, and more? Here's a link to Division of Wildlife Conservation staff: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=divisions.wcstaff>. It's best to call or email to make an appointment, but often you can walk into your local F&G office and speak with area biologists. They always appreciate hearing what you saw in the field and are happy to answer questions.

### **ATTEND BOARD OF GAME MEETINGS IN YOUR REGION**

Your individual voice as a resident hunter is vitally important when it comes to decisions made by the Board of Game. When RHAK has proposals before the board on issues like sheep hunting and limiting nonresident sheep hunters, the guides come out in force and dominate individual testimony. Yes, RHAK always has a representative there to testify collectively for our membership, but it always helps to have more individual resident hunter voices chime in! Here's a link to the Board of Game website where you can see when meetings are, view proposals, and find out how to comment: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=gameboard.main>. We will be sharing more specific proposal information as meetings get closer.

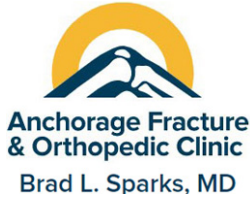
### **TALK TO YOUR LEGISLATORS**

RHAK invests time in meeting and speaking with legislators and lobbying for the rights of resident hunters. But again, more voices always help. We currently have five guides on the seven-member Board of Game, which is unprecedented and clearly favors commercial interests over those of resident hunters. We are trying to change that. Drop your senator or representative a respectful note, or call, and let them know that you are a constituent and do not support what is going on with the Board of Game, that you want them to support board members who represent the interests of resident hunters. If you don't know who your state senator or representative is, you can type in your address at the bottom right of the page on this link to find out: <https://akleg.gov/index.php>.

You can speak with your legislators at your local Legislative Information Office (LIO) when they are not in session, or reach them in Juneau during session. Here is a contact list for LIOs across the state: <https://akleg.gov/lios.php>. You can call and ask to speak to the offices of your legislators. Here is a phone contact list of legislative offices in Juneau during session: <https://akleg.gov/docs/akleg-legislator-contact-list-whos-who.php>. That list also shows the format for emailing your legislators. For representatives it is: Rep.FirstName.LastName@akleg.gov. For senators it is: Sen.FirstName.LastName@akleg.gov.



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## GOLD SPONSORS



RHAK needs your support to prioritize and enhance our resident hunting opportunities and to protect and conserve our wildlife resources for future generations of Alaskans. Contact Mark Richards for information on sponsorship levels and please support our sponsors!