

**FEDERAL WILDLIFE CLOSURE REVIEW
WCR12-31**

Current Location: Units 26B remainder and 26C—Moose

Current Federal Regulations

Units 26B, remainder and 26C—1 moose by Federal registration permit by residents of Kaktovik only. The harvest quota is 3 moose (2 antlered bulls and 1 of either sex,) provided that no more than 2 antlered bulls may be harvested from Unit 26C and cows may not be harvested from Unit 26C. You may not take a cow accompanied by a calf in Unit 26B. Only 3 Federal registration permits will be issued. Federal public lands are closed to the taking of moose except by a Kaktovik resident holding a Federal registration permit and hunting under these regulations.

July 1–Mar. 31

Closure Dates: July 1–Mar. 31

Current State Regulations

Unit 26B—Moose

<i>Unit 26B, excluding the Canning River drainage</i>	Resident Hunters: one bull by permit (DM996); <i>OR one bull during Feb. 15 – April 15, up to a 14-day season may be announced by emergency order</i>	<i>Sept. 1–Sept. 14</i> <i>May be announced</i>
<i>Unit 26B remainder</i>	Nonresident hunters:	<i>No open season</i> <i>No open season</i>

Unit 26C—Moose

<i>Unit 26C, that portion in the drainages of Firth River and Mancha Creek and the upper Kongakut River; upstream from and including Drain Creek*</i>	Resident Hunters: 1 bull by drawing permit only; up to 30 permits may be issued;	<i>Sept. 1–Sept. 25</i>
<i>Unit 26C remainder</i>	Nonresident hunters: 1 bull with 50-inch antlers or antlers with 4 or more brow tines on at least one side; by drawing permit only; up to 30 permits may be issued;	<i>Sept. 1–Sept. 25</i> <i>No open season</i>

***Note:** Although a moose season in a portion of Unit 26C was established under State regulations by action of the Alaska Board of Game at their March 2–11, 2012 meeting; the hunt area is

entirely on Federal public land and currently Federal lands are closed to the harvest of moose, except by Federally qualified subsistence users.

Regulatory Year Initiated: 2004

Regulatory History

Prior to 1996, Federal and State seasons allowed for the harvest of moose in Units 26B and 26C. Moose seasons were then closed in 1996 under State and Federal regulations in Units 26B and 26C, but remained open in Unit 26A. The seasons were closed due to low population of moose following declines in the early 1990s (Lenart 2010).

The closure was temporarily lifted in 2003, when the Board approved Special Action WSA03-04 a modification to allow residents of Kaktovik to harvest one moose in Units 26B and 26C for their Thanksgiving Feast and one moose for their Christmas Feast; however, only one moose could be harvested in Unit 26C. No moose were harvested by Kaktovik residents, as caribou were readily available that year (OSM 2003).

The closure to moose harvest in Units 26B and 26C was lifted to residents of Kaktovik in 2004 when the Federal Subsistence Board adopted a modification of WP04-86b (FSB 2004). Proposal WP04-86b, requested a harvest quota of five moose for Unit 26C, however the Federal Subsistence Board adopted the proposal with modification to establish a harvest quota of three moose with specific conditions related to locations of the harvests. The OSM staff analysis included an ANILCA Section 804 analysis because the proposal requested a prioritization of resources among Federally qualified subsistence users, which included all rural residents of Unit 26, Point Hope, Anaktuvuk Pass. The North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council chair felt that the Board's modified harvest limit of two antlered bulls and one of either sex for Unit 26C would be acceptable.

Proposals WP06-67a and WP06-67b requested that residents of Unit 25A be added to the cultural and traditional use determination for the Firth and Kongakut River drainages of Unit 26C and set a harvest limit of two moose per drainage. The proposals were rejected by the Board as consensus agenda items (FSB 2006).

The closed area was modified in 2007 when the Board adopted a modification of Proposal WP07-63 (FSB 2007). The closure to Federal public lands to non-Federally qualified users was lifted in the portion of Unit 26B outside of the Canning River drainage due to increasing moose populations in that portion of the unit. The closure remained in place for all Federal public lands in Unit 26C and areas within the Canning River drainage in Unit 26B, except for residents of Kaktovik.

WP08-54 requested a modification of the moose harvest quota and season for Kaktovik residents in Unit 26C and the closure in the Canning River drainage of Unit 26B be lifted. The Board adopted the proposal with an amendment to keep the closure in place, except for residents of Kaktovik, but changed the harvest quota from 3 moose (2 bulls and 1 of either sex) to 3 moose (2 antlered bulls and 1 of either sex) (FSB 2008). Changing the harvest limit to antlered bulls protected cow from being harvested later in the season when bulls have shed their antlers. In addition, the restriction of cow harvest in Unit 26C remained in place.

In March 2012, the Alaska Board of Game adopted Proposal 174A to open a State moose season in a portion of Unit 26C; however, the affected area consists of Federal public lands that are closed to the harvest of moose, except by Federally qualified subsistence users. Thus, the State season is contingent on

the Federal Subsistence Board lifting the closure to Federal public lands in the portion of Unit 26C in the Firth River and Mancha Creek drainages and the Upper Kongakut River drainage.

Closure Last Reviewed: 2010 — WCR10-1.

Justification for Original Closure (Section 815(3) Criteria):

Section §815(3) of ANILCA states:

Nothing in this title shall be construed as – (3) authorizing a restriction on the taking of fish and wildlife for nonsubsistence uses on the public lands (other than national parks and monuments) unless necessary for the conservation of healthy populations of fish and wildlife, for the reasons set forth in 816, to continue subsistence uses of such populations, or pursuant to other applicable law;

The combination of low moose numbers and low recruitment were direct indicators of a continuing conservation concern. The analysis for Proposal WP04-86b also considered ANILCA Section 804 issues (restricting subsistence use by implementing a priority of a limited resource such as moose) limiting the moose season, with a small quota, to only the residents of Kaktovik.

Council Recommendation for the Original Closure:

The North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council supported Proposal WP04-86b as submitted by the City of Kaktovik to allow only residents of Kaktovik to harvest moose because of the limited availability of moose within Unit 26C.

State Recommendation for the Original Closure:

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game did not support Proposal WP04-86b due to conservation concerns regarding the Unit 26C moose population and the requested harvest quota of 5 moose. However, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game did support a harvest of up to two moose in Unit 26C.

Biological Background

The State has set management goals for moose in Units 26B and 26C, including to maintain viable populations throughout their historic range in the region, provide sustained moose harvest opportunity, and to provide opportunity for moose photography and viewing (Lenart 2010). In addition, management objectives have been set for each unit (Lenart 2010):

- Unit 26B, maintain a population of at least 300 moose with short yearlings (10 to 11 month old calves) comprising at least 15% (3-year average) of the population.
- Unit 26C, maintain a population of at least 300 moose with short yearlings comprising at least 15% (3-year average) of the population.
- Maintain bull:cow ratios of at least 35 bulls:100 cows when hunting seasons are open.

Moose abundance has not been estimated in the entirety of Units 26B and 26C, but smaller scale surveys have been conducted in moose concentration areas to assess population trends. However, trend surveys account for a large percentage of the moose in areas as habitat is limited in the region (Lenart 2010).

The moose population in the eastern portion of Unit 26B, including the Canning River, rebounded from low levels in 1998–2000 to 335 observed individuals in 2005 (**Figure 1**). Harvest were very limited in

Unit 26B due to closures to all harvest under State and Federal regulations in 1996, until a limited season for Kaktovik residents opened under Federal regulations in 2004. The moose harvest closure on Federal public lands in Unit 26B was lifted in 2007, except for the Canning River drainage which remained open only to Kaktovik residents. The moose population in eastern Unit 26B appears to have declined following high counts in 2005–2008 (**Figure 1**). The composition of short yearlings ranged from 15% to 18% (3-year average) of observed moose in 2005–2008, but subsequently declined to 11% short yearlings in 2009.

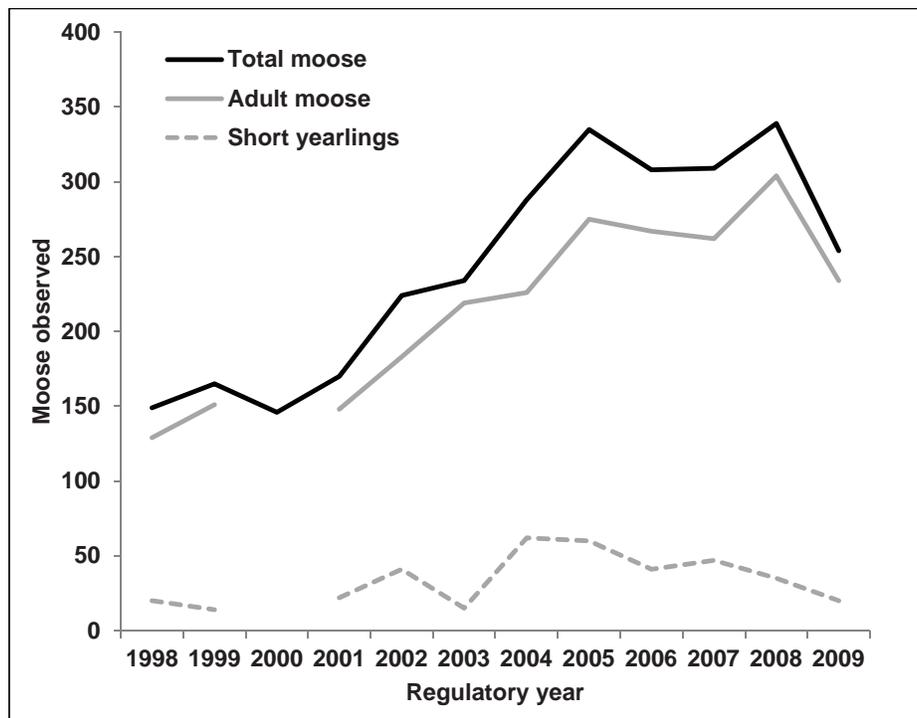


Figure 1. Aerial composition survey counts of moose in Unit 26B, east of the Sagavanirktok River and including the Canning River. Surveys were conducted in regulatory years 1998/1999 to 2009/2010 and moose presented as adults or short yearlings (11 months old) (Lenart 2010).

The Central portion of Unit 26C was surveyed biyearly by Arctic National Wildlife Refuge staff between 2003 and 2011 (Wald 2011). The surveys were conducted in April to assess population trends, but moose were not classified by age or sex, so no composition data is available. The trend counts suggest the population was relatively stable in this portion of Unit 26C between 2003 and 2011 (**Figure 2**).

The portion of Unit 26C that includes the Firth River, Mancha Creek, and upper Kongakut River drainages was sporadically surveyed between 1991 and 2011 (**Table 1**). Based on the limited survey data, the moose population in this portion of Unit 26C has fluctuated, with the most recent survey suggesting the moose population may have recovered from lower numbers in 2000 and 2002. However, the 2011 survey was associated with an expanded modified survey area and a different survey intensity, which limits the ability to make direct comparisons with previous surveys (Caikoski 2011, unpublished data). All surveys in the area have indicated a high bull to cow ratio (70–118 bulls:100 cows) (**Table 1**).

Moose in the Firth, Coleen, Sheenjek, and upper Kongakut River drainages of the eastern Brooks Range (Units 25A and 26C) are known to be migratory (Mauer 1998; Cooley 2013, pers. comm.). The moose

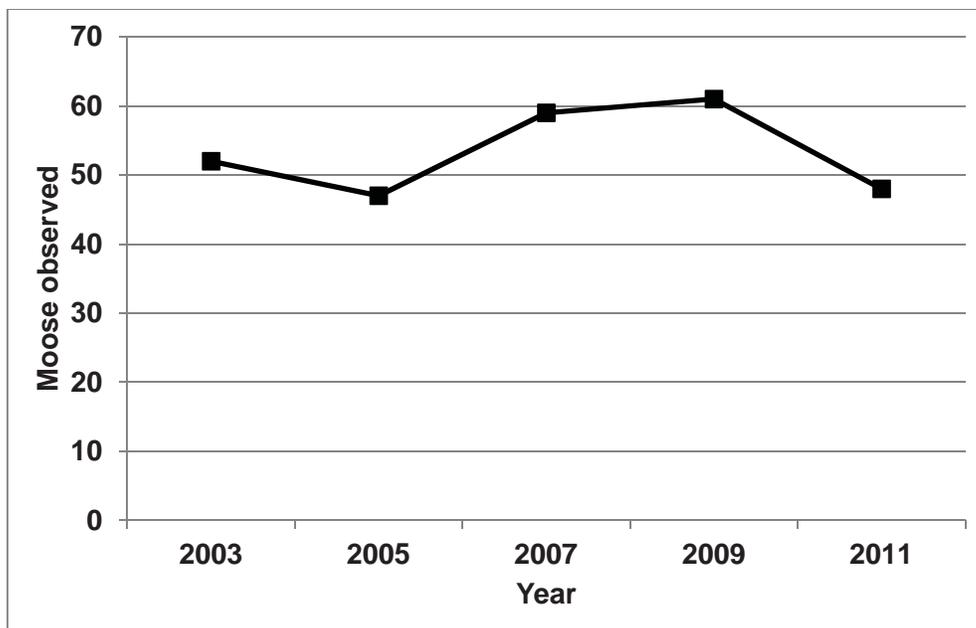


Figure 2. Moose observed during aerial surveys of trend count areas, conducted biyearly, in the Central portion of Unit 26C, 2003–2011 (Wald 2011).

Table 1. Moose observed during aerial population composition surveys conducted in the Firth River, Mancha Creek, and upper Kongakut River drainages of Unit 26C (Caikoski 2011, unpublished data).

Year	Moose observed				Ratio (per 100 cows)	
	Cows	Calves	Bulls	Total	Calves	Bulls
1991 ^a	167	63	176	406	38	105
2000 ^a	62	22	73	157	35	118
2002 ^a	96	23	108	227	24	113
2011 ^b	169	52	118	339	31	70

^a Survey conducted by the USFWS (Buchholt 2002).

^b Survey conducted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and differed from previous surveys in regard to search time, search area, and moose classification protocol.

calve and summer in the Old Crow Flats of the Yukon Territory of Canada and then move into the Brooks Range drainages to rut and winter. Mauer (1998) found that most moose in the study migrated from winter ranges in the Firth (96%), Kongakut (86%), and Coleen (75%) River drainages, but fewer (43%) moose migrated from the Sheenjek River drainage. Most moose in the study began moving from Old Crow Flats to wintering areas during August and early September, and moved out of winter range in late March and April (Mauer 1998).

An additional study was conducted in the area in 2007–2009 that used satellite collars to track individual moose movements at finer temporal and spatial scales (Cooley 2013, pers. comm.). Data analysis is not

complete, but preliminary results corroborate the seasonal movements identified by Mauer (1998). The more detailed movement data also provides insight to the amount of time spent in each drainage during winter. According to the limited number of marked individuals, after arriving at a drainage and rutting, moose did not move much (Cooley 2013, pers. comm.). Knowledge about seasonal residency in drainages will be important for interpretation of past surveys and planning of future surveys.

Harvest History

Moose harvest on the affected Federal public lands in Units 26B and 26C has been limited to residents of Kaktovik since 2004, with up to three permits have been issued annually and a harvest quota of 3 moose (2 bulls in Unit 26C and 1 moose in Unit 26B). Since 2004, 9 bull moose have been reportedly harvested, with an average of 1 moose harvested per year (**Table 2**).

Table 2. Federal registration permits issued and used by residents of Kaktovik to harvest moose in Units 26B and 26C (OSM 2013, Twitchell 2013, pers. comm.). Federal public lands in the area are closed to the harvest of moose, except by residents of Kaktovik. Up to three permits are issued annually.

Year	Permits issued	Permits used	Harvest
2004/2005	3	1	1
2005/2006	3	2	2
2006/2007	3	2	2
2007/2008	3	- ^a	- ^a
2008/2009	3	2	1
2009/2010	3	2	- ^a
2010/2011	2	1	1
2011/2012	3	2	0
2012/2013	3	2	2

^a Data not available for the report.

OSM Preliminary Recommendation:

- maintain status quo**
- initiate proposal to modify or eliminate the closure**
- other recommendation**

Justification

Low moose numbers in Unit 26B remainder and Unit 26C continue to be a conservation concern and additional moose harvest beyond the harvest by Kaktovik residents may not be sustainable. The harvest quota is limited to only three moose and Kaktovik residents continue to utilize moose for subsistence

purposes. Survey results in the Firth River, Mancha Creek, and upper Kongakut River drainages indicate the population may be growing. However, interpreting the status of a population with, essentially, a single data point is questionable, especially given differences in survey conditions, sporadic survey history, and the migratory behavior of moose in the area. Therefore, Federal public lands in Unit 26B remainder and Unit 26C should remain closed to non-Federally qualified users for the conservation of a healthy population and to allow the continuation of subsistence uses under Section 804 of ANILCA. In addition, maintaining the status quo does not violate the prohibition of ANILCA Section 815(3).

The necessity of the closure to Federal public lands in the affected area will be reassessed in three years, per the Federal Subsistence Board review process, or sooner if additional survey data suggest the closure should be lifted.

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