

Proposal to Change Federal Subsistence Taking of Wildlife Regulations

Requestor: East Prince of Wales Fish and Game Advisory Committee
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50 CFR 100.26(n)(2)

Harvest limits:

Deer:

[5 MALE DEER]

~~5 deer; however, no more than one may be a female deer. Female deer may be taken only during the period Oct. 15 Jan. 31. Harvest ticket number five must be used when recording the harvest of a female deer but may be used for recording the harvest of a male deer. Harvest tickets must be used in order except when recording a female deer on tag number five~~

We wish to change the harvest limit from 5 deer with no more than one being a female deer, to 5 male deer.

Deer populations on the Prince of Wales Island in Unit 2 are declining. Dense second growth timber stands provide poor deer foraging habitat. Wolves and bear prey on deer extensively. Poaching is widespread, and Alaska state troopers regularly apprehend poachers spotlighting deer. Evidence is mounting that these pressures are taking a toll on deer.

Subsistence user statements and hunter effort data capture the decline of deer in GMU 2. In a joint Forest Service and Alaska Department of Fish and Game meeting in Thorne Bay on October 24th, 2024, multiple members of the public commented that they were seeing less deer than in years prior. Lifelong island residents stated that they were seeing fewer and fewer deer when hunting. Recent trends in harvest data support these statements. According to the ADF+G, Unit 2 hunters harvested 1.44 deer per hunter in 2014, and only 1.0 deer per hunter in 2023. Similarly, Unit 2 hunters in 2014 hunted an average of 3.55 days to harvest a deer,

whereas 2023 hunters needed 5.22 days of effort to harvest a deer. These public comments and harvest data present strong evidence that deer populations are decreasing, and that further conservation measures are warranted.

Closing the subsistence doe harvest in Unit 2 will conserve the population. One buck can impregnate multiple does, and removing a buck from the population changes reproductive rates negligibly. In contrast, removing one doe not only removes the individual, but the doe's potential offspring. In this way, doe harvest creates an outsized impact on the deer population. The deer resource is also expected to come under greater pressure in the near future. On February 5th, 2025, the Federal Subsistence Board voted to grant the Ketchikan area rural status, which vastly increases the amount of federally qualified subsistence users in the vicinity of Unit 2. This increased pressure combined with observed deer declines necessitates closing the Unit 2 doe season. Proactive conservation now can ensure the health of the Unit 2 deer herd for future generations of subsistence users.