

WP26–16 Executive Summary

General Description	Wildlife Proposal WP26-16 requests to increase the possession limit and to extend the season dates for beaver hunting in Unit 6. <i>Submitted by the Southcentral Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council.</i>
Proposed Regulation	<p style="text-align: center;">Unit 6—Beaver Hunting</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Beaver: 1 beaver per day, ± 3 in possession</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>May 1–Oct. 31.</i> <i>July 1–June 30</i></p>
OSM Preliminary Conclusion	Support Proposal WP26-16
Southcentral Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council Recommendation	
Interagency Staff Committee Comments	
ADF&G Comments	
Written Public Comments	None.

Draft Wildlife Analysis WP26-16

ISSUE

Wildlife Proposal WP26-16, submitted by the Southcentral Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Council), requests to increase the possession limit and to extend the season dates for beaver hunting in Unit 6. Specifically, WP26-16 requests to increase the daily possession limit from one beaver to three beaver and to extend the season dates from May 1—Oct. 31 to July 1—June 30.

Proponent Statement

The proponent states this change would align Federal hunting regulations more with traditional subsistence practices, which are opportunistic in nature. This would allow subsistence users to target larger beaver, rather than the indiscriminate harvest that occurs with trapping beaver.

Current Federal Regulations

Unit 6—Beaver Hunting

Beaver: 1 beaver per day, 1 in possession

May 1—Oct. 31.

Unit 6—Beaver Trapping

Beaver: No limit

Dec. 1—Apr. 30

Proposed Federal Regulations

Unit 6—Beaver Hunting

Beaver: 1 beaver per day, ~~1~~ 3 in possession

~~May 1—Oct. 31.~~

July 1—June 30

Current State Regulations

Unit 6–Beaver Hunting

Unit 6

no open season

Unit 6–Beaver Trapping

Beaver: No limit

Nov. 10–Apr. 30

Extent of Federal Public Lands

Unit 6 is comprised of approximately 75% Federal public lands that consist of 54% U.S. Forest Service (USFS), 15% Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and 7% National Park Service (NPS) managed lands.

Customary and Traditional Use Determination

The Federal Subsistence Board (Board) has not made a customary and traditional use determination for beaver in Unit 6. Therefore, all rural residents have a customary and traditional use determination for beaver in Unit 6.

Regulatory History

In October 1999, at their Arctic/ Western Region meeting, the Alaska Board of Game (BOG) adopted as amended Proposal 1, which reclassified beaver as a game animal and established hunting seasons in Units 18, 22, 23, and 26A. Then, in January of 2000 at their Statewide Cycle B meeting, the BOG reclassified beaver as a fur animal, which allowed them to be harvested with a State hunting license. The established State hunting seasons for beaver excluded Unit 6, which has remained unchanged since this time.

In 2000, the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) adopted Proposal P00-026, which aligned Federal beaver trapping regulations with State regulations by increasing the harvest limit from 20 beaver per season to ‘no limit’ and extending the season from Dec. 1–Mar. 31 to Dec. 1–Apr. 30. This proposal was adopted as part of the consensus agenda. The Board felt there would be no additional harvest from adopting this proposal, as most users already trapped under State regulations in the unit.

Also, in 2000 the Board adopted proposal P00-023, which established a beaver hunting season in Unit 6 with season dates of May1–Oct. 31, a harvest limit of one beaver per day, and a possession limit of one beaver. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) commented that since the State did not have a beaver hunting season in Unit 6, that the regulation would only apply to Federal public

lands. The Board felt establishment of a hunting season would not adversely impact the existing beaver population while providing an additional subsistence opportunity for local users. Federal regulations for beaver hunting in Unit 6 have remained the same since.

In 2001, the BOG adopted Proposal 1 to change the Unit 6 beaver trapping season opening date from Dec. 1 to Nov. 10. ADF&G reported the beaver population could support additional harvest. The BOG agreed that a November 10 opening would align the beaver and land otter seasons in Units 5, 6, and 7 (BOG 2001). State regulations for beaver in Unit 6 have not changed since.

Federal and State beaver trapping regulations in Unit 6 both have harvest limits of 'no limit.' The Federal trapping season is Dec. 1-Apr. 30. The State trapping season is Nov. 10-Apr. 30.

Biological Background and Harvest History

Beaver are abundant in Units 6A, 6B, and 6C where there is an abundance of suitable habitat. Beaver density is lower in Unit 6D, where less habitat is available. Biological data for beaver in Unit 6 are extremely sparse as beaver are not surveyed outside of incidental observations that occur during moose surveys and observational reports from trappers. Since there is no statistical monitoring of beaver in Unit 6, population size and trends are unknown (Westing 2020). According to responses to the annual trapper questionnaires, which are voluntary and have a low reporting rate, beaver are scarce in Region II, which includes Units 6, 7, 8, 14C, and 15, from 2015-2023 with no change in population trend, except in 2018 when beaver were reported as common in Region II (Bogle 2025, 2023, 2022, 2021a, 2021b; Spivey 2020, 2019; Parr 2017, 2016).

Beaver are required to be sealed in Unit 6 under State and Federal regulations. Harvest data is collected through sealing records and assessed to understand the impact of harvest on the abundance of furbearers. Sealing of beaver hides dates back to 1927 when harvest was reported as very high (700 beaver in 1938) (Westing 2020). Trapping pressure declined starting in the 1940s with an annual average of 62 beaver harvested. Beaver harvest generally correlates with the number of successful participants. From 2002-2023, total beaver harvest from Unit 6 averaged 60 beaver/year, ranging from 24-116 beaver/year (**Table 1**). From 2002-2011, beaver harvest generally declined in correlation with declining numbers of successful participants. Since then, beaver harvest has fluctuated widely year-to-year, averaging 55 beaver/year along with fluctuating numbers of successful participants each year (**Table 1**, Westing 2020, 2025 pers. comm.). Overall, beaver harvest appears to be occurring at sustainable levels in Unit 6 (Westing 2020).

Traps are the most common method of take, accounting for 92% of reported beaver harvest in Unit 6 (**Table 1**). Most beaver reported as shot were killed under nuisance permits for airport or highway maintenance purposes. Most years, zero beaver were reported as shot in Unit 6. In recent years (2019-2023), only 0-2 beaver were shot each year (**Table 1**, Westing 2025, pers. comm.). Unit 6C receives the most harvest pressure of the Unit 6 subunits (57%-92% annually from 2012-2016), and residents of Unit 6 accounted for almost all of the beaver harvest. Peak beaver harvest generally occurs in November but can vary depending on winter conditions (Westing 2020).

Table 1. Harvest and method of take for beaver sealed in Unit 6, Southcentral Alaska, RY02–RY23 (Westing 2025, pers. comm.).

Regulatory year	Total harvest	Successful participants	Method of take		
			Shot	Trapped	Unknown
2002	116	17	10	106	0
2003	83	13	7	76	0
2004	109	15	8	99	2
2005	98	12	17	81	0
2006	49	10	17	32	0
2007	55	9	1	51	3
2008	46	6	9	37	0
2009	57	5	3	54	0
2010	31	6	0	31	0
2011	24	4	0	24	0
2012	38	8	0	38	0
2013	64	12	0	62	2
2014	42	9	0	42	0
2015	81	9	0	81	0
2016	37	9	0	37	0
2017	31	6	0	31	0
2018	65	10	0	65	0
2019	40	9	2	38	0
2020	83	14	0	83	0
2021	27	8	0	26	1
2022	91	12	1	88	2
2023	62	11	0	62	0
Average	60.4	9.7	3.4	56.5	0.5

Alternative(s) Considered

One alternative considered was to extend the Federal beaver trapping season in Unit 6 from Dec. 1–Apr. 30 to Nov. 10–Apr. 30 to align with the current State trapping season and provide additional subsistence opportunity under Federal regulations. However, this alternative is outside the scope of the proposal.

Discussion and Effects

If Proposal WP26-16 is adopted, federally qualified subsistence users may have up to three beaver in their possession at any time in Unit 6, and the hunting season for beaver in Unit 6 will be extended to year-round. This will allow subsistence users to harvest beaver opportunistically under a hunting license when they encounter them while participating in other subsistence activities on Federal public

lands in Unit 6. Increasing the possession limit will allow for users to harvest additional beaver if they are in the field for multiple days and unable to process their harvest immediately for long term storage.

No impact to the beaver population is expected from this proposal. Users may already harvest an unlimited number of beaver using a firearm under a trapping license Nov. 10–Apr. 30 under State regulations in Unit 6. Additionally, users may already harvest one beaver per day on Federal public lands in Unit 6 under a hunting license during the summer and early fall when the State and Federal trapping seasons are closed. Furthermore, very few beaver are harvested via firearm in Unit 6, and few trappers report harvesting beaver each year. Therefore, minimal increases to harvest are expected from this proposed regulatory change. Users would be able to shoot beaver Nov. 1-9, could possess three beaver at a time, which may benefit users on remote, multi-day trips, and could harvest beaver under a hunting license only, year-round.

OSM PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

Support Proposal WP26-16

Justification

This proposal increases subsistence opportunity and there are no conservation concerns for beaver in Unit 6. Establishing a year-round hunting season for beaver aligns more with traditional methods of subsistence harvest. This will allow federally qualified subsistence users to harvest a beaver if the opportunity presents itself while they are participating in other subsistence activities.

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