

WP26-08 Executive Summary

General Description	Wildlife Proposal WP26-08 requests eliminating the January season for deer in Unit 2. <i>Submitted by: East Prince of Wales Fish and Game Advisory Committee</i>
Proposed Regulation	<p>Unit 2 – Deer</p> <p><i>5 deer; however, no more than one may be a female deer. Female deer may be taken only during the period Oct. 15–Jan. Dec. 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.</i></p> <p><i>Federal public lands on Prince of Wales Island, excluding the southeast portion (land south of the West Arm of Cholmondeley Sound draining into Cholmondeley Sound or draining eastward into Clarence Strait), are closed to hunting of deer from Aug. 1 - Aug. 15, except by Federally qualified subsistence users hunting under these regulations.</i></p> <p><i>Non-federally qualified users may only harvest up to 2 male deer on Federal public lands in Unit 2.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Jul. 24 — Jan. 31 Dec. 31</p>
OSM Preliminary Conclusion	Oppose WP26-08
Southeast Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council Recommendation	
Interagency Staff Committee Comments	
ADF&G Comments	
Written Public Comments	<p>1 Support</p> <p>Please see the Written Public Comments on Wildlife Proposals and Closure Reviews section of the meeting book or www.doi.gov/subsistence/wildlife/public_comments for full comments.</p>

DRAFT WILDLIFE ANALYSIS WP26-08

ISSUE

Wildlife Proposal WP26-08, submitted by the East Prince of Wales Fish and Game Advisory Committee (East POW AC), requests eliminating the January season for deer in Unit 2.

Proponent Statement

The East POW AC notes that deer populations in Unit 2 appear to be declining, and that the declining deer population threatens continued subsistence and cultural use of deer in the area. Unit 2 deer need stronger conservation measures as they are pressured by poaching, high hunter access, predation, and lack of suitable foraging habitat due to second growth timber stands. Shortening the deer season can conserve the Unit 2 deer population, and the month of January is a logical choice. Deer harvest in January is minimal, and unintentional harvest of a doe is more likely after antlers have dropped. Deer harvest in January is minimal due to challenging weather conditions and skittish deer. Unintentional harvest of does or fawns is more likely after antlers have dropped, which limits reproduction and can reduce deer populations.

Current Federal Regulations

Unit 2 - Deer

5 deer; however, no more than one may be a female deer. Female deer Jul. 24 – Jan. 31 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.

Federal public lands on Prince of Wales Island, excluding the southeast portion (land south of the West Arm of Cholmondeley Sound draining into Cholmondeley Sound or draining eastward into Clarence Strait), are closed to hunting of deer from Aug. 1 - Aug. 15, except by Federally qualified subsistence users hunting under these regulations.

Non-federally qualified users may only harvest up to 2 male deer on Federal public lands in Unit 2.

Proposed Federal Regulations

Unit 2 – Deer

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Jul. 24 — ~~Jan. 31~~
Dec. 31

Federal public lands on Prince of Wales Island, excluding the southeast portion (land south of the West Arm of Cholmondeley Sound draining into Cholmondeley Sound or draining eastward into Clarence Strait), are closed to hunting of deer from Aug. 1 - Aug. 15, except by Federally qualified subsistence users hunting under these regulations.

Non-federally qualified users may only harvest up to 2 male deer on Federal public lands in Unit 2.

Current State Regulations

Unit 2 - Deer

Residents and Nonresidents: 4 Bucks HT Aug. 1 – Dec. 31

Same-day airborne hunting of deer allowed. Harvest tickets must be validated in sequential order, and unused tickets must be carried when you hunt. In all hunts limited to one sex, evidence of sex must remain naturally attached to the meat or antlers must remain naturally attached to the entire carcass, with or without viscera.

Extent of Federal Public Lands

Unit 2 is made up of approximately 78% Federal public lands, all of which are U.S. Forest Service (USFS) managed lands except for that portion of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge located on Forrester Island (<0.1%).

Customary and Traditional Use Determination

Rural residents of units 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 Have a customary and traditional use determination for Deer in unit 2.

Regulatory History

Please see the staff analysis of WP26-03/-04/-05 for a comprehensive regulatory history for deer in Unit 2.

Hunting regulations have permitted the harvest of deer in Unit 2 since 1925. During this period, season closing dates have varied between November and December, with December 31 being the common closing date since 1988.

The current January season for Unit 2 deer began in 2016, with the adoption of Wildlife Proposal WP16-01, proposed by the Craig Tribal Association. This proposal extended the end of the deer hunting season from December 31 to January 31. The proposal was supported by the Southeast Regional Advisory Council (Southeast Council), who noted that it was a traditional activity to harvest a deer when needed, and that extending the season would not significantly increase the harvest of female deer.

In 2020, the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) rejected Wildlife Proposal WP20-06, submitted by the East POW AC, to reduce the season ending date to December 31. This proposal was opposed by the Council, who felt that reducing the length of the season by a month would put more pressure on rural users to harvest deer, and that deer could be stored outside in winter months for long periods of time by users without access to electricity and freezers.

In February 2025, the Board adopted proposal NDP25-01, changing Ketchikan to a rural status community. Ketchikan residents officially became rural, federally qualified subsistence users (FQSUs) with a customary and traditional use determination for deer in Unit 2 upon the publication of the new Federal subsistence regulations in the Federal Register in July 2025.

Current Events

Please see the staff analysis for WP26-03/-04/-05 for a full description of current events related to Unit 2 deer, including summaries of the public hearing, Tribal consultation, Board decision on recent special action requests regarding Unit 2 deer (WSA25-01/-03 and WSA25-02), and recently submitted requests for reconsideration on the Ketchikan rural determination (NDP25-01).

Biological Background

Please see staff analysis of WP26-03/-04/-05 for general biological information on deer in Unit 2.

Cultural Knowledge and Traditional Practices

In their deliberations on Wildlife Proposal WP16-01, most members of the Southeast Council supported extending the Unit 2 deer hunting season for FQSUs through January 31. Office of Subsistence Management (OSM) staff opposed creating a January season due to concerns that it might lead to a substantial increase in the harvest of does, as does are typically in better physical condition than bucks in January (SERAC 2015). However, Southeast Council members noted that there was no

conservation concern for the Unit 2 deer population at the time, and even though January was not typically ideal for deer hunting, this extra time would allow some subsistence users to harvest a deer if they really needed one (SERAC 2015). As one Council member explained (SERAC 2015: 124):

In the past, I've been very concerned about the overharvest of does. And I guess the question in my mind is would this proposal [WP16-01] significantly increase that [doe harvest]? I don't think it's clear that it would. So, I'm going to favor on the side that it probably won't cause a significant increase in the take of does... In the past, I've also kind of gone on record as saying that I am in favor of lengthening the deer seasons, where possible. I know I live in a community where a lot of people don't have freezers. And it's very very hard to run a freezer when you don't have electricity. And lengthening the season just allows people to have fresh meat for a little longer in the year without having to can it up.

Similarly, another Southeast Council member explained that the reported Unit 2 doe harvest was small, it was a traditional practice to harvest an animal when needed, and extending the season might allow some subsistence users to avoid or offset unsuccessful hunts during periods of greater hunting competition (SERAC 2015: 116 & 125):

There's a lot of competition during the rut, when it's the best time to hunt. So, if some of the rural users are finding they're not being able to be as efficient [hunting during the rut], they'll still have ample opportunity. And [during January] it would be closed to the non-rural hunters, so there would be less competition. I wouldn't expect that the harvest would go up much really. The doe take is very small, and it's there because it's a customary and traditional use...

Because of the compression of hunters during the peak season, this would just give somebody that really needs one [a deer] additional time in January should they need it. I mean the deer are not in the best condition [in January], but that's a personal preference. So, if they want to take one then, you know, when I was growing up, if we saw a deer and were hungry for one, we didn't care what time of year it was... If we were hungry, we went and got something to eat.

The Klawock Cooperative Association and Organized Village of Kasaan also submitted comments in support of WP16-01, noting that it would help subsistence users on POW meet their needs for deer.

Harvest History

Please see the staff analysis for WP26-03/-04/-05 for more general information on harvest history of deer in Unit 2.

The current January season for Unit 2 deer began in 2016, with the adoption of Proposal WP16-01. Based on data from 2016 to 2023 harvest reports for Unit 2 deer, less than 1% of all deer harvests have occurred in January (**Table 1**). An average of about 7 deer have been harvested in January each year from 2016 to 2023, and roughly 8% of the total doe harvest has occurred in January during this period (average of 4 does harvested each January) (**Table 2**). Doe harvest accounted for an increased proportion of the total harvest in December (16%) and January (50%) when compared to other months

when the doe season is open (**Table 3**). However, December and January are also the two months when the fewest deer are typically harvested in Unit 2 each year (**Table 1**).

Still, reported harvest should be considered a minimum estimate due to an unknown amount of under-reporting. Unit 2 is believed to have one of the highest rates of unreported and illegal harvest in the region (Hasbrouck 2023). The amount of unreported and illegal harvest has been estimated to be approximately equal to the reported total harvest (~2,621 deer per year on average from 1997-2024 (Churchwell 2014)). This means that the actual average deer harvest in Unit 2 may have been closer to 5,242 deer per year from 1997-2024, and that the amount of harvest taking place during January each year is also likely higher than what can be estimated from reported harvest data (see Person 2010). However, even if accounting for these suggested rates of unreported harvest, the actual average amount of harvest taking place during January might be closer to 14 deer each year, of which 8 are does.

In summary, it appears that minimal deer harvest takes place in January, and that FQSUs' ability to hunt deer in January is useful in times of necessity or opportunistic encounters, but it is not a preferred hunting time due to the typically poor condition of deer and the severity of January weather.

Table 1. Estimated harvest of deer in Unit 2 by month, 2016-2023. Data from Churchwell 2024.

Year	January	July/ August	September	October	November	December	Total
2016	26	715	326	642	1627	168	3534
2017	12	537	208	312	1247	99	2432
2018	11	394	162	269	1165	73	2091
2019	0	469	157	252	1014	66	1964
2020	0	464	127	196	1013	42	1846
2021	3	423	100	233	978	87	1824
2022	5	368	120	227	927	44	1692
2023	3	400	139	136	886	37	1603
Average	7	471	167	283	1107	77	2204
Percent	0.3%	21%	8%	13%	50%	3.5%	

Table 2. Estimated harvest of does in Unit 2 by month, 2016-2023. Data from Churchwell 2024.

Year	January	October	November	December	Total
2016	11	19	35	17	82
2017	5	20	33	21	79
2018	6	15	26	13	60
2019	0	7	32	8	46
2020	0	14	21	8	43
2021	0	3	23	8	34
2022	3	6	20	8	38
2023	3	6	16	7	32
Average	4	11	26	11	52
Percent	8%	21%	50%	21%	

Table 3. Percent of Monthly Unit 2 deer harvest consisting of does, 2016-2023. Data from Churchwell 2024.

Year	January	October	November	December
2016	42%	3%	2%	10%
2017	42%	6%	3%	21%
2018	55%	6%	2%	18%
2019	-	3%	3%	12%
2020	-	7%	2%	19%
2021	0%	1%	2%	9%
2022	60%	3%	2%	18%
2023	100%	4%	2%	19%
Average	50%	4%	2%	16%

Discussion and Effects

If adopted, this proposal would reduce the Unit 2 Federal deer hunting season by one month, resulting in lost subsistence harvest opportunity. The impact of adopting this proposal is contingent upon Board actions on other proposals, which will determine which FQSUs might potentially be affected by a January closure as well as if the doe hunt will be eliminated. WP26-04 and WP26-05 request an §804 subsistence user prioritization, which may impact which FQSUs from Units 1-5 remain eligible to harvest deer in Unit 2 for the foreseeable future. If either WP26-04 or WP26-05 are adopted, deer harvest during the January season in Unit 2 could be further reduced. Similarly, if Proposals WP26-06/-07 are adopted, the doe hunt would be eliminated, addressing some of the proponent's concerns over unintentional doe harvest in January. However, this would also make legal harvest in January much more challenging for users who would need to differentiate sex after antlers have dropped.

This proposal would potentially have more effect in the event that both Proposals WP26-04 and WP26-05 are rejected and all FQSUs remain eligible to hunt deer in Unit 2. In that case, the elimination of the

January season may slightly reduce the impacts of the addition of a large number of FQSUs from Ketchikan on the Unit 2 deer population. Following the implementation of a 2 buck harvest limit for NFQUs in 2018, an average of 324 Ketchikan residents hunted in Unit 2 each year, harvesting about 289 deer per year (Churchwell 2024, 2025). However, the number of Ketchikan hunters and harvests is likely to increase since they are now eligible to hunt under less restrictive Federal regulations. Before the harvest limit restrictions for NFQUs were implemented in 2018, an average of 631 Ketchikan hunters harvested about 783 deer per year from Unit 2. If the January season remains open for all FQSUs it is unknown what level of harvest will take place in January by the newly eligible Ketchikan residents as they have not participated in the January harvest season under federal subsistence regulations in Unit 2 before. However, it is likely that Ketchikan residents will follow the harvest patterns of other FQSUs and concentrate harvest efforts in July/August and/or November, when hunting is most productive.

FQSUs' ability to hunt deer in January appears to be useful in times of necessity or opportunistic encounters, but it is not a preferred hunting period due to the typically poor condition of deer and the severity of January weather. The January hunting period has accounted for less than 1% of the overall yearly deer harvest in Unit 2 since its inception in 2016 (**Table 1**). Therefore, it seems unlikely that hunters from outside Unit 2 would travel to Unit 2 to hunt deer in January.

The proponent of the proposal acknowledges that deer harvest in January is minimal but is concerned that unintentional harvest of a doe is more likely after antlers have dropped. While the proportion of does in the total January deer harvest is much higher than other months, reported harvest shows that the lowest percentage of overall Unit 2 doe harvest (6.7%) occurred in January, with most doe harvest (49.6%) occurring during the peak hunting month of November, when bucks still have antlers. The relatively high percentage of does in the January harvest may be the result of unintentional harvest of does after bucks have lost their antlers, as noted by the proponent, or harvesters taking does to fill their subsistence needs at the end of the season.

The January season does not appear to contribute significantly to overall deer or doe harvest and eliminating the season is unlikely to have significant effects on the total deer population. However, while past harvest reports show very little harvest in January, the loss of a month of harvest opportunity may be significant for subsistence users continuing to harvest deer for the winter. It may also have the effect of slightly increasing competition between users during the remaining season.

OSM PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

Oppose Proposal WP26-08

Justification

The intent of the proposal is to eliminate the January deer season in Unit 2 in an effort to address the declining deer population and to reduce the unintentional harvest of a does that, according to the proponent, threaten continued subsistence and cultural use of deer in the area. The increase in the number of FQSUs, after the Board's finding on Ketchikan's rural status, is likely to increase the

number of deer harvested in Unit 2. However, harvest records show that deer harvest in January is minimal (**Table 1**). Therefore, the elimination of the January season is not likely to significantly benefit the Unit 2 deer population, but it would eliminate a subsistence harvest opportunity that may be critical for some local FQSUs to meet their harvest needs during a time when the Unit 2 deer harvest is closed to NFQUs. FQSUs' ability to hunt deer in January appears to be most useful in times of necessity or opportunistic encounters, but it is not a preferred hunting period due to the typically poor condition of deer and the severity of January weather. Therefore, it is unlikely that many FQSUs residing outside of Unit 2 will travel to Unit 2 to hunt deer in January.

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WRITTEN PUBLIC COMMENTS

Andy Deering

Please see the Written Public Comments on Wildlife Proposals and Closure Reviews section of the meeting book or www.doi.gov/subsistence/wildlife/public_comments for full comments.