

To: Greg Encelewski, Southcentral Regional Advisory Council Chair
Subject: **Chugach National Forest update for Southcentral Regional Advisory Council; Winter 2026**

Staff

Sam Carroll – Forest Resources & Planning Staff Officer; Anchorage

Andrew Sanders – Forest Subsistence Biologist; Cordova

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Vacant –Kenai Peninsula Zone Subsistence Biologist; Moose Pass

Steve Namitz – District Ranger, In-season manager; Cordova

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Andy Morse – Chugach NF Law Enforcement Officer, Cordova

Adam Dermish - Chugach NF Law Enforcement Officer, Moose Pass

Special actions

SRD-2025-WSA-01 (ESA) and SRD-2025-WSA-02 (TSA) which restricted the harvest of caribou in Unit 7 to bulls only were enacted by Seward District Ranger Ruth D’Amico. A public hearing was held on December 2nd, 2025.

Cost Share with Alaska Department of Fish and Game

The Chugach National Forest Subsistence Program is continuing to support wildlife in Units 6 and 7 through a cost share agreement with ADF&G. This continues ongoing cooperative monitoring projects, including aerial surveys for goats, sheep, moose, and caribou; PWS deer pellet surveys, and camera monitoring of deer on Hawkins Island.

Cost Share with Chugach Regional Resources Commission (CRRC)

The Chugach National Forest Subsistence Program continues to work with CRRC to perform surveys for fish and wildlife populations important to subsistence users in CRRC member communities within the exterior boundaries of the CNF (Chenega, Tatitlek, and Cordova) through an ANILCA cost share agreement. CRRC was able to fly a moose survey of Kings Bay under good conditions on January 22nd, 2026. They observed 1 bull, 3 calves, and 5 unknown antlerless adults as well as 4 additional separate fresh sets of tracks making an estimated total of 13 animals. The CNF Subsistence Program is continuing to work with CRRC and ADF&G to gather more data on moose in Kings Bay.

Prince William Sound Zone

6C Moose

A public open house was held on the evening of August 20th to answer questions, and issue permits to moose hunters who are not available during normal business hours.

FM0601 (Bulls)

- Season: September 1 - December 31

Year	Applications	Issued	Hunted	Harvest	Did Not Report
2020	836	40	29	26	11
2021	1006	35	33	27	2
2022	762	30	28	25	1
2023	851	24	24	22	0
2024	841	24	24	24	0
2025	819	24	24	23	0

FM0603 (Antlerless)

- Season: September 1 – October 31

Year	Applications	Issued	Hunted	Harvest	Did Not Report
2020	822	42	39	39	3
2021	991	35	32	30	0
2022	735	32	29	29	3
2023	834	20	20	19	0
2024	823	20	20	18	0
2025	813	20	19	18	1

Native Village of Eyak Memorial and Sobriety Day Moose Harvest (FM0607, no season)

- 1/1 moose harvested

Deer

- Season: August 1 - January 31. In Unit 6, 5 deer may be taken, but only 1 can be harvested in January. Does may be taken between October 1 and January 31.

Winter conditions in 2024-2025 were warm and mild, with little snow. Pellet surveys in the spring suggested that the PWS deer population suffered low-moderate winter mortality and are at low-moderate density levels. 2025 Pellet counts may have over-estimated winter mortality due to the warm and wet conditions which do not preserve pellets well. Winter 2025-2026 has been very cold and clear, with little snow. Late spring conditions will determine the timing of pellet counts. We have also deployed all 18 game cameras on Hawkins Island as part of a pilot project in collaboration with ADF&G using cameras to determine more quantitative estimates of deer density and winter survival. We will gather camera data over the summer and begin analyzing during the winter of 2026-2027.

No ceremonial deer permits were issued to Native Village of Chenega or Tatitlek IRA Council in 2025

Black Bear

- Season: September 1 – June 30. 1 Bear.

Work has continued with ADF&G on the cooperative Prince William Sound Black Bear project. ADF&G and the Forest Service are currently analyzing data and completing reports. Tissue samples have been analyzed for stable isotope content to determine each bear's food sources. Preliminary analyses did not find any significant clustering of bear diets.

Unit 6D Mountain Goat (FG0604):

- Season: Aug.20 – Feb. 28
- 2 permits issued, 0 harvested
 - In 2024, 2 permits were issued and 1 goat was harvested.

Salmon

- Freshwaters of the Chugach NF, outside the Copper River (FFPW01)
 - 143 permits issued in 2025
 - ### Coho*
 - ### Sockeye*
 - In 2024 110 permits were issued
 - 249 Coho were harvested
 - 99 Sockeye were harvested
- Lower Copper River Dipnet Fishery (FFPW05)
 - 146 permits issued in 2024
 - See NPS agency report for harvest data
 - In 2024 88 permits were issued
 - See NPS agency report for harvest data

*unable to report FFPW01 as of 24/2/2026 due to technical issues with database.

Kenai Peninsula Zone

Two community meetings were hosted by the CNF from in August to issue hunting permits in person to residents of Cooper Landing, Moose Pass, and Hope.

- August 7th – Hunting permit meeting at Bear Creek Lodge in Hope.
- August 8th – Hunting permit meeting Kenai Lake Work Center in Moose Pass.

Normally 6 meetings are held each year: 1 fish permit event and 1 hunt permit event in each community but were not able to hold all 6 in 2025 due to loss of staff. In 2026 we are planning to hold a hunt permit event in each community, but no fish permit events. I do not expect to be able to hold fish permit meetings until we are able to fill the Subsistence vacancy in Moose Pass. There is currently a freeze on most hiring including this position.

Unit 7 Moose Registration Hunt (FM0004)

- Season: Aug. 20 – Sept.25

Year	Issued	Hunted	Harvest	Did Not Report
2020	45	20	1	10
2021	54	24	1	1
2022*	98	49	0	2
2023	82	46	7	0
2024	78	39	4	1
2025	68	37	3	8

*2022 was the first year Moose Pass residents received C & T for Moose in Unit 7

Unit 7 Caribou Registration Hunt (FC0702)

- Season: Aug.10 – Dec. 31

Year	Issued	Hunted	Harvest	Did Not Report
2020	41	13	0	11
2021	42	15	0	1
2022*	74	23	1	2
2023	54	19	0	1
2024	42	13	0	5
2025	43	4	0	12

Unit 7 Mt Goat Drawing Hunt (DG0703)

- Season: Aug.10 – Nov.14
- 3 permits drawn (DG338-Crescent, DG339-Grant Lake, DG334-Mills Creek)
- 2 permits hunted
- No harvest

Unit 7 Dall Sheep Drawing Hunt (DS0704)

- Season: Aug. 10 – Sept.20
- 1 permit drawn (Unit 7, excluding Cooper Landing Closed Area)
- 1 permit hunted
- No harvest

Monitoring and Collaboration

The Dall sheep population on the Kenai Peninsula has declined by approximately 70% since the late 1990's (2023 BOG meeting) and similar trends have been observed in other regions of Alaska. Research suggests winter habitat may be a limiting factor, but drivers of sheep trends are poorly understood. The Chugach National Forest subsistence program initiated a small-scale lamb monitoring project within the Crescent Lake subunit (DS156). Recruitment of lambs is an important indicator of overall health of a population. The purpose of this project is to track recruitment within one of two State Drawing Hunt

areas within the Chugach NF, and to supplement tri-annual aerial minimum count data conducted by ADF&G. Spring 2024 was our pilot year. Surveys were conducted once per week and focused on a known lambing area. A total of two lambs were consistently observed during the last 4 weeks of the seven-week study period between May 15 – July 2. Highest count was 29 sheep including 2 lambs. The ratio of lambs to ewe-like sheep was very low, 13.3%. In 2025 the highest count was only 21, down from 2024. However, the highest number of lambs observed increased to 3, and the lamb:ewe ratio improved to 25%. We will need a few more years of data to begin identifying trends in this sub-population. Unfortunately, the vacancy in the Moose Pass Subsistence Biologist position threatens to prevent us from completing these surveys.

The Chugach National Forest collaborated with the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge in July 2024 to provide field support for a KWR led study examining Dall sheep response to natural wildfire. The study area includes the Mystery Hills and Round Mountain area that burned during the 2019 Swan Lake fire. The goal is to understand if fire disturbance can enhance Dall sheep habitat. We continued this partnership in 2025 by collecting another year of data and surveying more remote sites within the burned area. We plan to continue this work in 2025 and are considering including Crescent Lake as an unburned control area and deploying GPS and video collars on sheep in the Round Mountain / Mystery Hills area.