

## **Topic: Moose populations, and harvest of cows with calves**

**From:** Kendra Zamzow, member, MSB Fish & Wildlife Commission

**To:** Chickaloon Community Council

**Date:** January 12, 2022

People in Chickaloon expressed concern about hunters taking calves and cows with calves, particularly after a cow with a calf was shot in the parking lot of the Chickaloon Post Office. People in Chickaloon and Sutton have also said there aren't any moose around any more, especially in the winter.

### **ADFG perspective**

The Palmer ADFG wildlife biologist (Tim Peltier) provided a presentation to the MSB Fish & Wildlife Commission on December 16, 2021, and I followed up with additional questions. I also corresponded with Heidi Hatcher, the wildlife biologist based out of Glennallen. The ADFG presentation is available at: <https://www.matsugov.us/docs/meetings/22203/00-20211216-FWC-Mtg-Handout.pdf>

### **Moose management**

- Bull to Cow ratio: ADFG likes to see at least 25 bulls per 100 cows to maintain population
- Calf to Cow ratio: provides information on whether enough calves are making it to fall
- Twinning surveys: generally if cows have a lot of twins it indicates there is good habitat
- Hunts for cows and calves can help reduce herd size; reducing these can help grow a herd
- Predators and traffic collisions (car, railroad) also reduce herd sizes

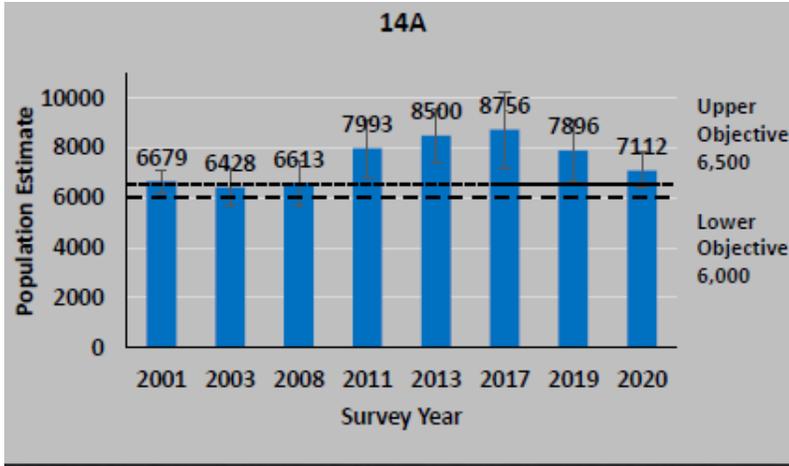
There are biological reasons why ADFG may want to allow hunts for calves or cows with calves.

- If a herd is too large for habitat to support them, the entire population could decline very quickly. The goal is to remove some animals and also reduce the reproductive capacity of the herd.
- Taking a cow without a calf could mean it is barren, and won't be as effective in reducing herd growth as removing a fertile cow.
- If a cow with a calf is taken, and the calf doesn't survive, then it reduces the herd more quickly. A lone calf is less likely to survive the winter, depending on size and age.
- Taking a lone calf is less effective in reducing the herd size, but will reduce the number of moose that may starve if the herd is too large.

### **Unit 14A**

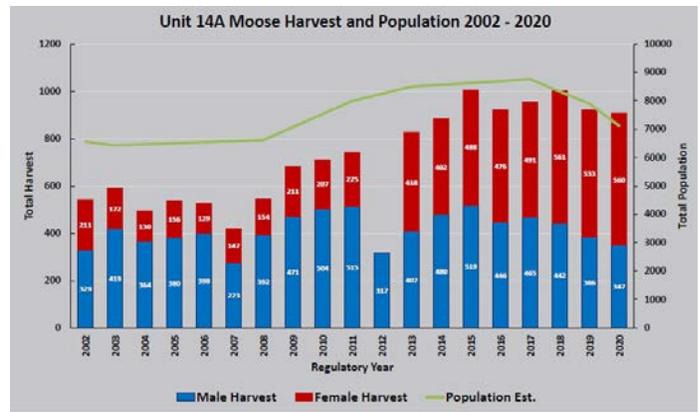
Our area is Game Management Unit 14A. The good information about this area is

- The moose population in Unit 14A has been higher than desired since 2011; moose populations are strong in all parts of Unit 14A, except higher up in the mountains
- The bull to cow ratio is good (28 bulls to 100 cows)
- The calf to cow ratio is good (35 calves to 100 cows)
- The habitat is good
- Winter hunts were added to spread out the hunting pressure
- About 390 moose are killed annually in traffic collisions in combined Unit 14A, 14B and 16A.



However

- The moose population has been declining since 2017. It's still more moose than ADFG would like to see, but if the trend continues it will be fewer moose than ADFG would like.
- The number of cows with twins declined in 2021 (from 21-27% of cows with twins from 2014 to 2020 to 15% in 2021).

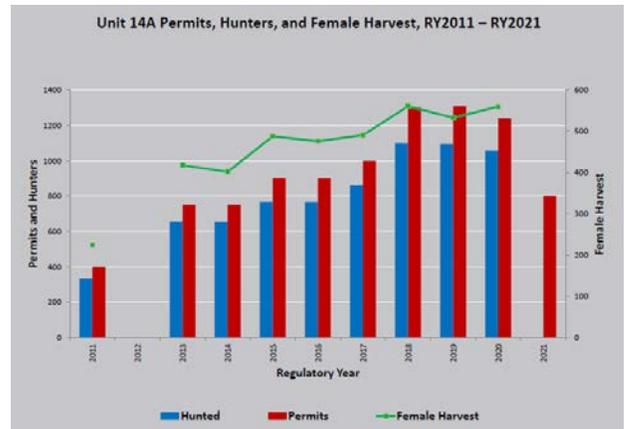


In response, ADFG reduced the number of permits from 1,300 to 800. They had over 52,000 people apply for the 800 permits. When a permit is provided, the letter they get **specifically encourages people to not take cows accompanied by calves.** Legally they are allowed to, but the Palmer ADFG office discourages it.

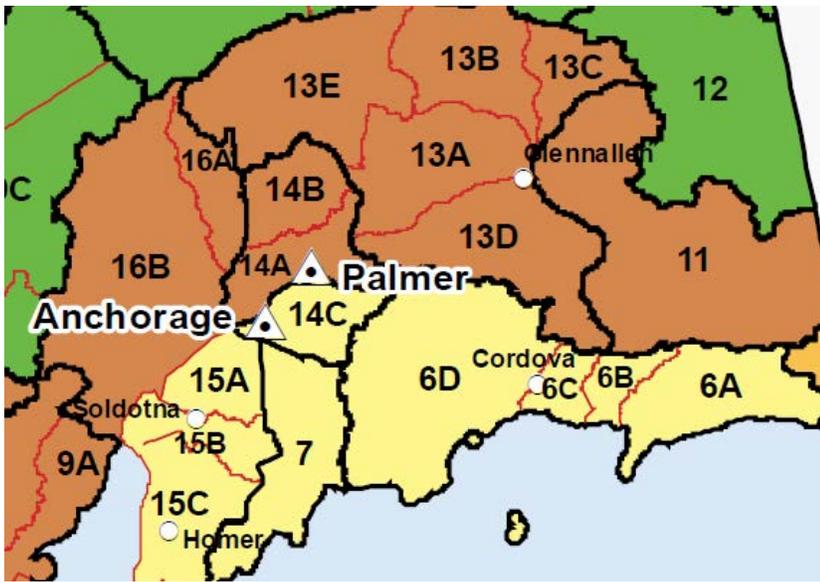
In 2021, Unit 14A antlerless moose hunt seasons were open August 25-September 25, November 1-30, and December 1-25.

### Cow moose harvest regulations

Of all the GMUs surrounding us, Unit 14A is the only one that allows calves and cow moose accompanied by calves to be hunted without restricting the hunts to certain locations or weapons.. I've put together a brief summary of the regulations below, and the regulation booklet is at



[https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/regulations/wildliferegulations/pdfs/regulations\\_complete.pdf](https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/regulations/wildliferegulations/pdfs/regulations_complete.pdf)



**Permitted cow hunts**

The information is from the 2021-2022 ADFG Hunting regulations booklet, except for Unit 13, which is based on personal communication with Heidi Hatcher, ADFG Wildlife Biologist in Glennallen.

- Unit 7: **One antlerless moose, including calf/cow with calf. Location restricted.**
- Unit 11: No antlerless hunts
- Unit 12: No antlerless hunts
- Unit 13A: Residents allowed one antlerless moose, cannot take calf or cow with calf
- Unit 13B: No antlerless hunts
- Unit 13C: No antlerless hunts; ADFG has submitted a proposal to start them.
- Unit 13D: No antlerless hunts
- Unit 13E: No antlerless hunts; ADFG has submitted a proposal to start them.
- Unit 14A: **Resident three antlerless hunts, including for calf or cow with calf. Location not restricted.**
- Unit 14B: No antlerless hunts
- Unit 14C: **Antlerless moose hunts, including calf/cow with calf, limited locations and weapons:**  
 JBER – antlerless moose with muzzle loader only  
 Anchorage – antlerless moose with shotgun or muzzle loader, November only  
 TwentyMile Drainage, Knik River, Peters Creek - One antlerless moose, no restriction on taking calf/cow with calf.
- Unit 15A: No antlerless hunts
- Unit 15B: No antlerless hunts except  
 Kalgin Island - “one moose” (bull, cow, or calf), 1 month hunt
- Unit 15C: One antlerless moose, cannot take calf or cow with calf  
 Option to open up a hunt for “one moose”
- Unit 16A: No antlerless hunts
- Unit 16B: No antlerless hunts

## **Moose population health in other units**

The areas nearest to Unit 14A are Unit 14B, 16A, and 16B. Units 14B, 16A, and the south and middle sections of 16B have low calf to cow ratios. Units 14B and 16A have also been below or at the ADFG population objective. These may be reasons why ADFG would not want to have calf or cow with calf hunts in Units 14B, 16A, and 16B. I don't have this type of information on other areas, except that Unit 13C and Unit 13E have herd sizes larger than they want, so ADFG has asked to be able to open up antlerless hunts.

## **Action by the MSB Fish & Wildlife Commission**

A member of the MSB Fish & Wildlife Commission had heard that the moose population was down substantially west of the Little Susitna River. Anecdotally, people in Sutton and Chickaloon have also noted lower moose populations than in the past. Member Andy Couch proposed a motion (available in the public Fish & Wildlife Commission packet for December 16,

<https://www.matsugov.us/boards/fishcommission>):

*That the FWC communicate to the Commissioner of Fish and Game, Director of Wildlife Conservation, and the Alaska Board of Game requesting the Department discontinue allowing Unit 14A area-wide antlerless moose permits (or at least greatly reduce the number of these specific permits) for the months of November and December, whenever a moose population in Unit 14A or the following adjoining Game Management Unit(s) (13A, 14B, 14C, 16A, 16B) are below moose population objective level.*

The motion passed after some changes, which will be available in the January Fish & Wildlife Commission packet. ADFG, who were at the meeting, said that they already manage populations in this way, but there wasn't a downside to having the Commission pass the motion, indicating their concern.

## **Proposed action by Community Council**

Does the Chickaloon Community Council have a proposed motion they would like to bring to the MSB Fish & Wildlife Commission?

Some points to consider are

- That Unit 14A is unique in allowing, although not encouraging, harvest of calves and cows with calves throughout the entire Unit.
- These harvests may be beneficial when a herd is too large, to prevent precipitous decline.
- These harvests may be considered inhumane when a calf is too small to make it through a winter.
- The herd in Unit 14A is declining, and ADFG has responded by reducing the number of permits.
- ADFG does not encourage hunting calves or cows with calves, but does not have data on how many cows with calves make up the total harvest of females.
- If the Commission passes a motion, it does not become regulation – that occurs through the Board of Game. However, a proposal may get more consideration by the BOG if passed by the Commission.
- The Commission has passed a motion regarding winter hunts.
- Eliminating calf and cow with calf hunts could result in more permits being issued, or longer seasons.