

**Division of Wildlife Conservation**  
**Doug Vincent-Lang, Acting Director**  
Headquarters  
PO Box 115526  
Juneau, AK 99811-5526



**Alaska Department of Fish and Game**  
**Cora Campbell, Commissioner**  
PO Box 115526  
Juneau, AK 99811-5526  
[www.adfg.alaska.gov](http://www.adfg.alaska.gov)

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**CONTACT: Cathie Harms 907-459-7231**

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### **Bear Control Program Approved on Middle Kuskokwim River**

(Juneau) – The Board of Game voted unanimously to take steps to increase the moose population in the middle Kuskokwim River area by establishing a bear control program.

The approved bear predation control area is located in some of the best moose habitat along the middle Kuskokwim River, which previously supported high levels of harvest for hunters throughout the Kuskokwim drainage and elsewhere.

“The moose population is very low, and local people depend on moose meat. About half of the unit is closed to moose hunting, and the other half is open only to very limited Tier II hunting,” said Board Chairman Cliff Judkins. “This program will allow moose numbers to rebound much faster than they can now.”

Suitable habitat is available to support a larger moose population. Predation has been identified as a leading factor limiting moose production.

A wolf control program has been in effect since 2004 in Unit 19A, and the wolf population has been reduced to a low, sustainable level by qualified members of the public, but bear predation on moose calves in spring and summer is likely slowing moose population recovery.

The Board approved a program in which Department of Fish and Game staff will attempt to reduce the black and grizzly bear population in a small portion of Unit 19A as low as possible for two consecutive Spring periods. The entire subunit encompasses about 10,000 square miles, but bears would be killed only within the 540 square mile management area. Department staff will shoot all bears from helicopters.

The Unit 19A program is modeled after a successful program near McGrath in 19D, where reduction in both wolf predation and bear predation resulted in timely and measurable growth in the moose population. As a result, a moose hunting season has been re-established in the area after a five year closure.

A research program conducted in the McGrath area of Unit 19D in 2001-2007 showed that bear predation was the primary mortality factor on moose calves. Department staff reduced bear predation by capturing black and grizzly bears and moving them to other parts of Alaska. A similar situation exists in the approved Unit 19A bear control area, which is less than 100 miles from the McGrath research area.

Moving bears was not approved in the Unit 19A program due to concerns from residents of other parts of the state who voiced opposition to translocating bears to their locale and the high cost.

Reducing bear predation on moose in the proposed control area is expected to substantially increase the rate of recovery in the moose population. Without a bear control program, the moose population would likely take more than a decade to grow back to the level needed for local moose harvest.

Department staff will salvage as many bear carcasses as possible and distribute bear meat to local communities.

The program will be in effect during spring of 2013 and 2014.

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