

INTERAGENCY STAFF COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

The Interagency Staff Committee recommendation is to **Support** Temporary Special Action Request WSA19-02.

Justification

Past management of wolves in Unit 2 focused on harvest through the setting of harvest quotas based on a population estimate and not on how many wolves should remain in the population. This strategy had varying degrees of success.

In January of 2019, The Alaska Board of Game removed regulatory language regarding the percentage of wolves to be harvested in Unit 2 and replaced the quota management system with a strategy that maintains a population objective of 150-200 wolves via setting annual season lengths. This new strategy, which was developed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Forest Service, Southeast Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council and local users, was designed to ensure a sustainable population and encourage better harvest reporting.

Adoption of this request will not align State and Federal hunting season dates or sealing requirements; however, the trapping season dates and sealing requirement would be aligned. The vast majority of wolves are taken by Federally qualified users during trapping season.

The Federal in-season manager (Craig District Ranger) currently has delegated authority to close, reopen, or adjust the Federal hunting and trapping seasons for wolves in Unit 2. If this request is approved, the in-season manager would determine season lengths annually in cooperation with State managers based on population estimates. Early closures of seasons would likely not happen as harvest reports would not be known until post season.

Wolf populations in Unit 2 are primarily influenced by harvest. The success of this new management strategy will depend upon coordination of State and Federal management, regular communication between State and Federal managers, active involvement of user groups, accurate harvest reporting, and regular monitoring of wolf populations.

Managing for a population objective and announcing pre-determined season lengths ahead of time provides predictability, which allows trappers to plan and prepare for the season and may improve harvest reporting. While managing harvest through season length may initially result in more or less wolves harvested than expected, State and Federal managers can fine tune season lengths over time once relationships between season length, harvest and population estimates are better established. Shifting the strategy of managing by harvest quotas to predetermined season lengths based on a population objective makes the requirement for in-season sealing unnecessary.