



NEWS RELEASE

National Park Service

Western Arctic National Parklands, Kotzebue, Alaska

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Federal Seasons for Subsistence Dall's Sheep Hunts to Remain Closed in Portions of GMUs 23 and in 26A

The Superintendent of Western Arctic National Parklands announced today that the seasons for the Federal Subsistence Dall's Sheep hunts within portions of Game Management Units (GMUs) 23 and 26A will remain closed for the regulatory year beginning July 1, 2017 and ending on June 30, 2018. The specific hunt areas affected by this closure are the DeLong Mountains hunt area of Game Management Units 23 and 26A, the Baird Mountains hunt area of Game Management Unit 23, and Unit 23 Remainder (Schwotka Mountains) except for that portion within Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve (GAAR). Closing the Federal sheep seasons in these areas is necessary to assure the continued viability of the population as mandated under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

Sheep populations in the areas affected by this closure declined by up to 70 percent between 2011 and 2014. Results from the 2015 and 2016 surveys indicate continued decline in the number of adult sheep. Lamb ratios in 2016 were higher than in 2014 and 2015, but recruitment was likely low. Results from the July 2017 survey are pending, however, observations from the survey indicate sheep numbers have not increased to the point where harvest is advisable.

The State and Federal sheep hunts were closed in 2014 by Emergency Order and Special Action in response to the conservation concerns for the sheep population. The State adopted regulations in 2015 closing all resident and nonresident sheep hunting under their regulations in GMUs 23 and 26A west of the Etivluk River drainage until such time as the sheep population has sufficiently recovered and new regulations are adopted. The Federal hunts in these areas were again closed by Special Action in 2015.

The Federal Subsistence Board adopted new regulations in April 2016 allowing more flexibility in managing the Federal hunts by "A season may be announced" in these areas as the sheep population recovers. The NPS plans on conducting annual sheep surveys in the western Baird Mountains but expects the recovery of the sheep population will require several more years to reach a point where harvest can resume.

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