

**Results of the 2020-2021
sheep hunter survey for
Game Management Zone 7
East Permit Hunt
Authorization Area**

February 2022



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Results of the 2020-2021 sheep hunter survey for Game Management Zone 7 East Permit Hunt Authorization Area

Government of Yukon
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SR-22-04

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Summary

- Regulatory changes in the allocation and administration of sheep hunting in Game Management Zone (GMZ) 7 East in 2020 prompted the Department of Environment to consider the hunters' experience in this area during the 2020 and 2021 seasons.
- The survey provided sheep hunters with an opportunity to share information regarding their effort, observations, and views on the effectiveness of regulatory change for sheep hunting in GMZ 7 East.
- The intent of this report is to provide a timely summary of “what we heard” for survey respondents and other interested Yukoners. Results will help to evaluate the effectiveness of changes to the sheep hunting regime for GMZ 7 East and adjust the permit allocation, if necessary.
- Our survey was delivered to 284 hunters who obtained a sheep Permit Hunt Authorization (PHA) for GMZ 7 East for the 2020 and/or 2021 season. We received 202 responses to the survey – a 71% response rate.
- Here, we provide basic results of respondents' answers to our survey questions. No detailed statistical analysis or interpretation of the data was undertaken. Additionally, the survey itself and a summary of comments by respondents are available as appendices.
- Overall, approximately half the respondents (51%) disagreed that the regulatory changes were positive for sheep hunters, and 45% thought it did not benefit sheep populations in GMZ 7 East. Most respondents (67%) said that they will likely apply for a permit in GMZ 7 East in the future.
- Information obtained from this survey is timely with regard to evaluating the implementation of regulatory changes to sheep hunting in GMZ 7 East, and to allow for adjustments prior to the 2022-23 hunting season.

Contents

Summary.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Methods.....	2
Survey design.....	2
Survey delivery.....	3
Results.....	4
Respondents.....	4
Experience	4
Hunter effort	5
Access.....	5
Success rate	6
Results by Sheep Management Unit.....	7
Observations of sheep numbers.....	10
Legal ram numbers	11
Hunting parties	12
Opinions on the New Sheep Management Units approach.....	13
Appendices.....	16
Appendix 1. Summary of comments by respondents	16
Appendix 2. 2020 sheep hunter effort survey.....	169

Introduction

In April 2015, increased hunting pressure in open Game Management Subzones (GMSs) in Game Management Zone (GMZ) 7 East led the Government of Yukon's Department of Environment to propose a regulation change to place five of the remaining open GMSs in GMZ 7 East on Permit Hunt Authorization (PHA).

Concurrently, the Government of Yukon conducted sheep surveys in the area in 2015 and 2016. Survey results and a better understanding of geographical features and sheep movement showed that GMS boundaries were often a poor means of representing discrete sheep populations. This led to the establishment of Sheep Management Units (SMUs), where fluctuations in sheep numbers are primarily driven by births and deaths rather than immigration and emigration. SMUs are a group of GMSs in most cases, and a unique GMS in some cases.

In 2020, as per the recommendations that resulted from the 2015 regulation change proposal, previously-open GMS 7-13, 7-17, 7-20, 7-24 and 7-26 were placed on PHA, and permit numbers were increased from 97 to 142 permits. The Government of Yukon also started allocating PHAs using SMUs instead of GMSs, allowing permit holders to hunt anywhere within a respective SMU (Figure 1). This approach remained the same during the 2021 season.

Understanding the views and behaviour of hunters can help inform harvest management. During the last 40 years, the Department of Environment has periodically conducted surveys of hunters. These surveys are used to gather data on hunting patterns and hunters' perceptions pertaining to harvest management. They help wildlife managers "take the pulse" of the Yukon's hunting community.

To seek hunters perspective on the impact of this new system on both sheep populations and sheep hunters, the Government of Yukon developed, in collaboration with the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board and the Yukon Fish and Game Association, a questionnaire to learn from the experiences of sheep hunters who obtained a sheep PHA for GMZ 7 East in 2020 or 2021. The results of this survey, in conjunction with an analysis of harvest data and GPS collar data will help the Government of Yukon evaluate the effect of managing sheep by SMU and adjust permit allocation.

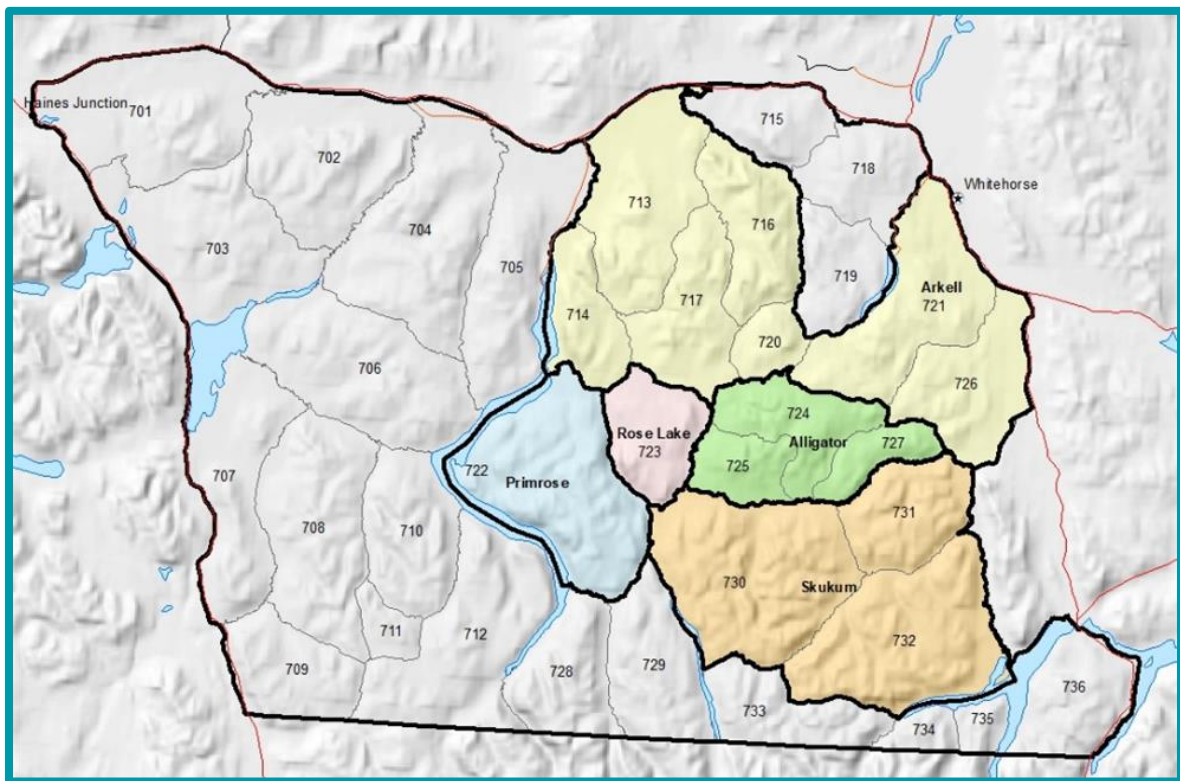


Figure 1. Sheep Management Unit areas open to hunting by Permit Hunt Authorization in Game Management Zone 7 East.

Methods

Survey design

Given that this survey was focussed on the experiences and views of sheep hunters in Game Management Zone 7 East, we limited our survey to those hunters that held a sheep PHA in the area in the 2020 and 2021 seasons.

We designed a survey that could be delivered online and take approximately 10 minutes for participants to complete. The survey had 16 questions that were organized into thematic sections (Appendix 1). Age, gender and town of residence were determined based on the Department of Environment's hunting licence database.

Responses are provided in aggregate, with respondent confidentiality maintained throughout.

Survey delivery

The survey was delivered online by staff from the Yukon Bureau of Statistics. All 284 hunters who obtained a sheep PHA for the 2020 and/or 2021 hunting season in Game Management Zone 7 East were invited to participate in the survey. Each invitee was provided a unique email invitation to participate in the online survey. Respondents were able to use either a computer or other device (e.g., phone, tablet, etc.), and were able to take the survey in English or French. No phone interviews were conducted but hunters without a valid email address were contacted and offered an opportunity to do the survey online at their Department of Environment district office.

For those who obtained a PHA in 2020, the online survey was open from July 21 until September 13, 2021. For those who obtained a PHA in 2021, the survey opened on November 1 and closed on November 30, 2021. Reminders were periodically emailed to invited participants. Completed surveys were managed and compiled by the Yukon Bureau of Statistics.



Results

Respondents

Of the 284 sheep hunters who obtained a PHA for GMZ 7 East in 2020 or 2021, 202 (71%) responded. The vast majority of respondents (91%) were from Whitehorse. The average age of respondents was 43 (Table 1) and most respondents were men (88%).

Table 1. Percentage of respondents by age group.

Age group	Per cent of respondents
15-24	7%
25-34	21%
35-44	34%
45-54	17%
55-64	13%
65 or more	8%

Experience

On average, respondents had been hunting sheep for 3.8 years in GMZ 7 East and 9.8 years in the Yukon as a whole. The most experienced hunters hunted sheep in GMZ 7 East for 32 years and anywhere in the Yukon for 52 years (Table 2).

Table 2. Years of sheep hunting experience - percentage of respondents.

Years	In GMZ 7 East	In the Yukon
0	18%	4%
1-4	61%	33%
5-9	9%	28%
10-14	3%	13%
15 and more	8%	23%

Hunter effort

About one-fifth (21%) of respondents did not hunt in GMZ 7 East in 2020 or 2021, despite having a PHA. The main reasons for not hunting were lack of time (36%), followed by concerns over too many hunters (19%), personal health issues (17%), or because they were already successful harvesting a sheep elsewhere (14%; Figure 2).

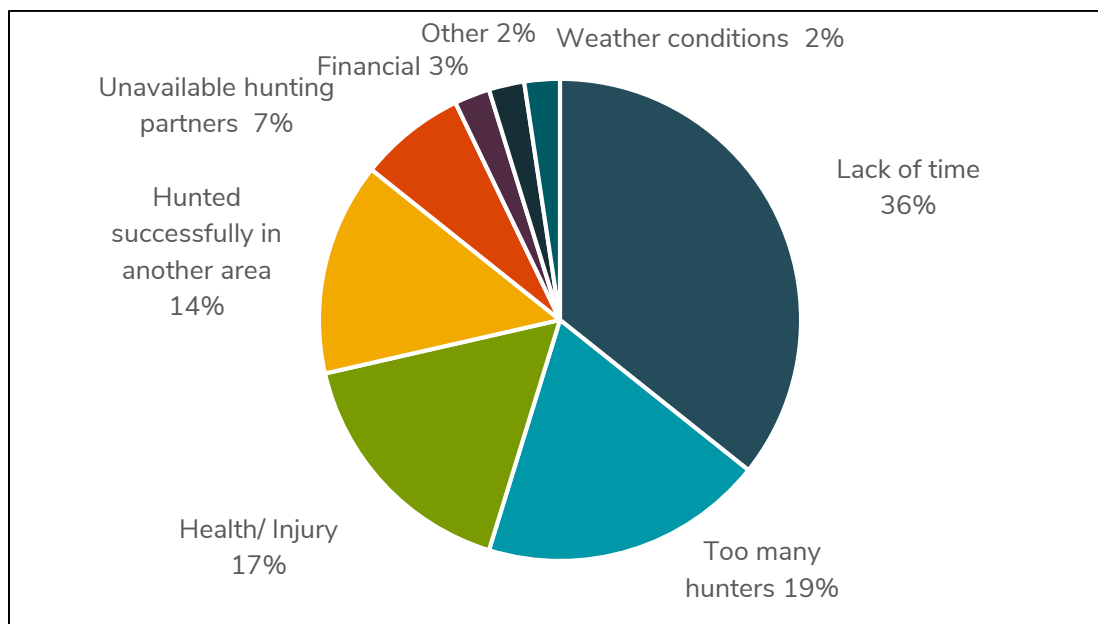


Figure 2. Reason for not hunting in GMZ 7 East.

Of the 160 hunters who hunted in GMZ 7 East, 54% did only one sheep hunting trip, 28% did two trips, and 18% did three trips or more. One hunter reported doing 10 trips.

Access

Overall, the main method of access to the permit hunt area was on foot (65%), followed by ORV/ATV/Argo (41%), boat/canoe/packraft (30%), aircraft (27%) and vehicle (18%; Figure 3). Horseback and biking were used by only a few hunters to access their hunting area.

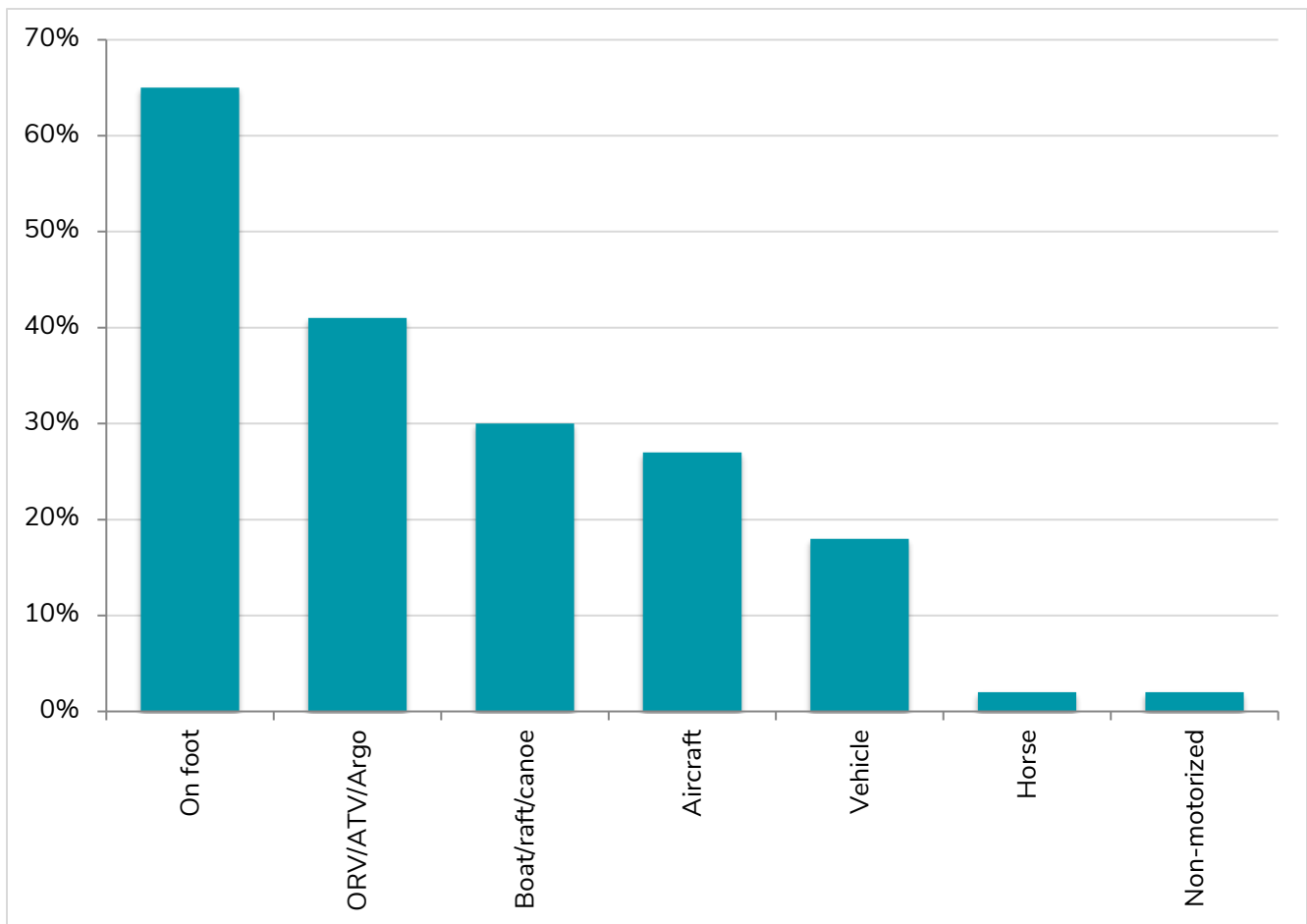


Figure 3. Access method used by sheep hunters to access permit areas.

Success rate

In total, 36% of the respondents who hunted in GMZ 7 East in 2020 or 2021 were successful in harvesting a sheep. Of these, 41% were successful after their first trip. Success rate was highest in the Skukum and Rose Lake SMUs and lowest in the Arkell SMU.

Results by Sheep Management Unit

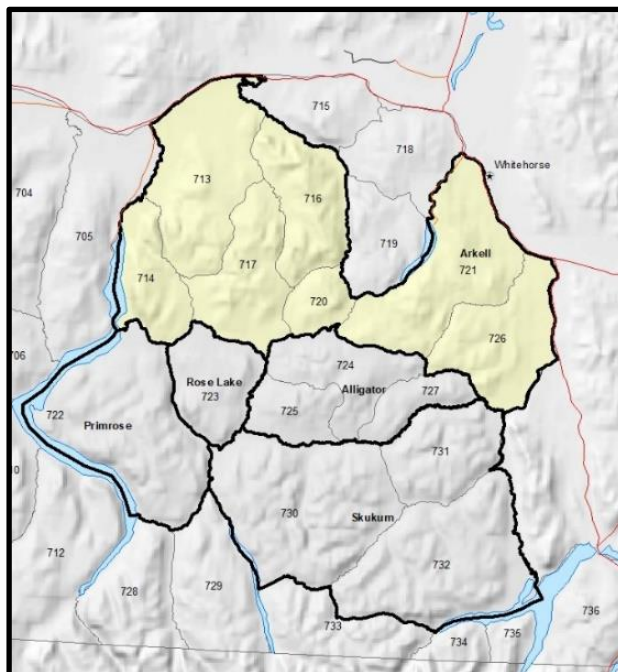
Arkell

Sixty (60) permits were issued for seven GMS included in the Arkell SMU. On average, 72% of respondents that had a permit for the Arkell SMU hunted, and 17% of them were successful.

The main access methods for this SMU were on foot (78%), by ORV/ATV/Argo (49%) and by boat/packraft/canoe (41%).

Most of these respondents (65%) hunted in one GMS, 21% in two GMS, 10% in three GMS, 3% in four GMS, and 2% in five GMS.

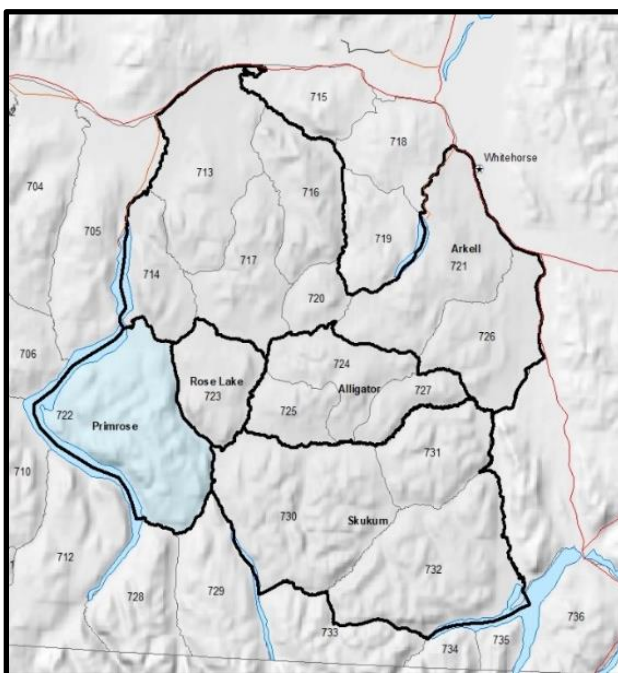
The two GMS most hunted were 716 and 714 (by 40% and 38% of respondents with permits for this SMU, respectively). GMS 717 and 726 were the least accessed GMS (6% and 2% respectively). Success rate was highest in GMS 713 and 720 (23% and 22% respectively).



Primrose

Twenty-five (25) permits were issued for the Primrose SMU, which contains only one GMS. On average, 85% of Primrose permit holders hunted and 45% of them were successful.

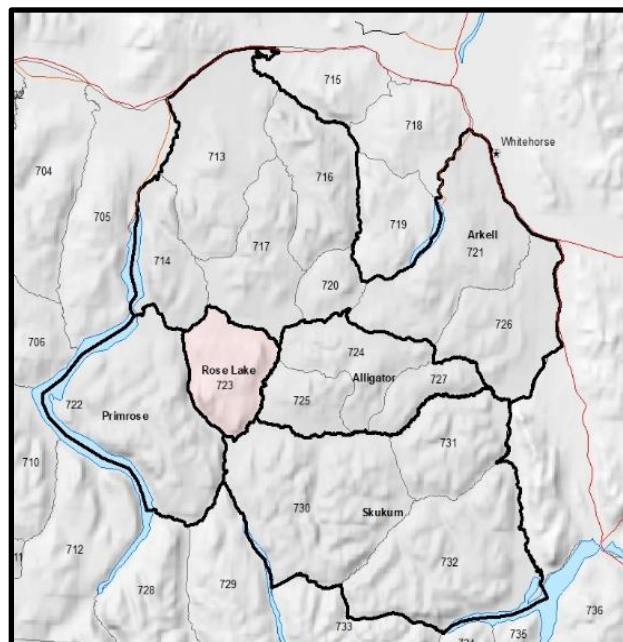
The main access methods for this SMU were on boat/packraft/canoe (72%), by aircraft (41%) and on foot (38%).



Rose Lake

Seven (7) permits were issued for the Rose Lake SMU, which contains only one GMS. On average, 91% of respondents with permits for the Rose Lake SMU hunted, and 50% of them were successful.

The main access method for this SMU was by aircraft (90%). Other methods were on foot (10%) and by boat/packraft/canoe (10%).



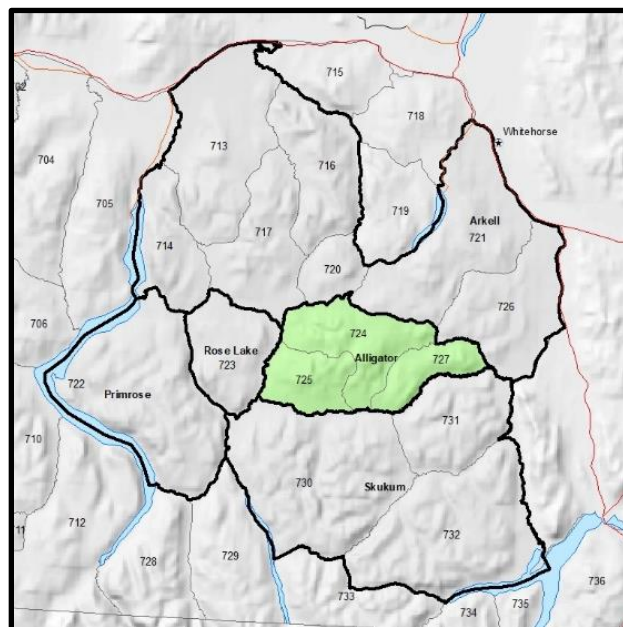
Alligator

Fifteen (15) permits were issued for the three GMS of the Alligator SMU. On average, 77% of Alligator permit holders hunted and 24% of them were successful.

The main access method reported for this SMU were by ORV/ATV/Argo (71%) and on foot (53%).

For this SMU, 41% of hunters only hunted in one GMS, 35% in two GMS and 24% in all three GMS.

The GMS most hunted by respondents was 724 (88% of respondents), followed by 725 (65%). The least accessed GMS was 727(53%). Success rate by respondents was highest in GMS 727 (33%).



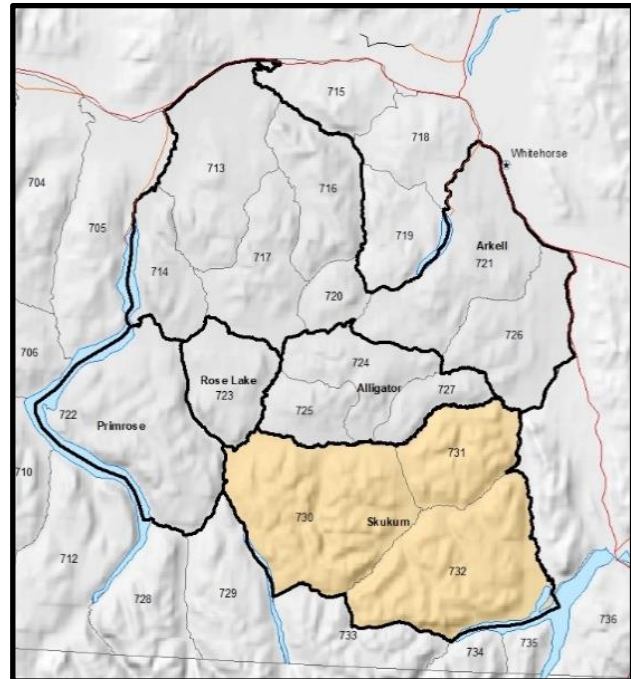
Skukum

Thirty-five (35) permits were issued for three of the GMS included in the Skukum SMU. On average, 85% of Skukum permit holders hunted and 59% of them were successful.

The main access methods for this SMU by respondents were on foot (83%), by ORV/ATV/Argo (56%) and by aircraft or vehicle (37% each).

Most respondents (71%) hunted only in one GMS, 15% in two GMS and 15% in all three GMS.

The GMS most hunted was 730 (by 93% of respondents), followed by 732 (32%). The least accessed GMS was 731 (20%). Success rate was highest in GMS 730 (53%).



Observations of sheep numbers

Hunters who had previously hunted in GMZ 7 East were asked to quantify whether they saw more sheep, fewer sheep or the same number of sheep compared to the last 10 years.

Overall, 53% of respondents did not notice a difference, 6% reported seeing more sheep and 24% reported seeing fewer (Figure 4). The SMU where the greatest proportion of respondents noticed a decline was the Alligator SMU (43%).

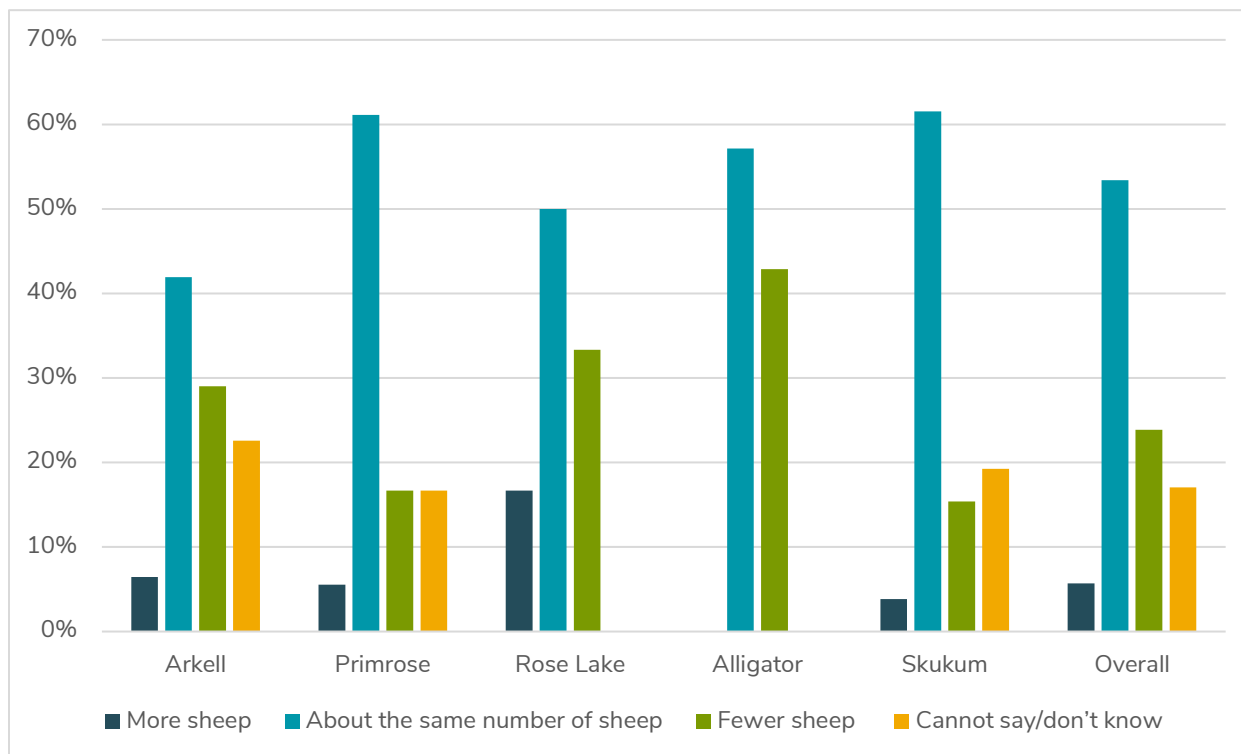


Figure 4. Respondents' perception of the number of sheep in the permit area in 2020 or 2021 compared to 10 years ago.

Legal ram numbers

Hunters who had previously hunted in GMZ 7 East were asked to quantify whether they saw more legal rams, fewer legal rams, or the same number of legal rams compared to what they had observed over the last 10 years (Figure 5).

Overall, 28% of hunters did not notice a difference, 1% saw more legal rams and 49% reported seeing fewer legal rams. The SMU where the greatest proportion of hunters noticed a decline was the Rose Lake SMU (83%).

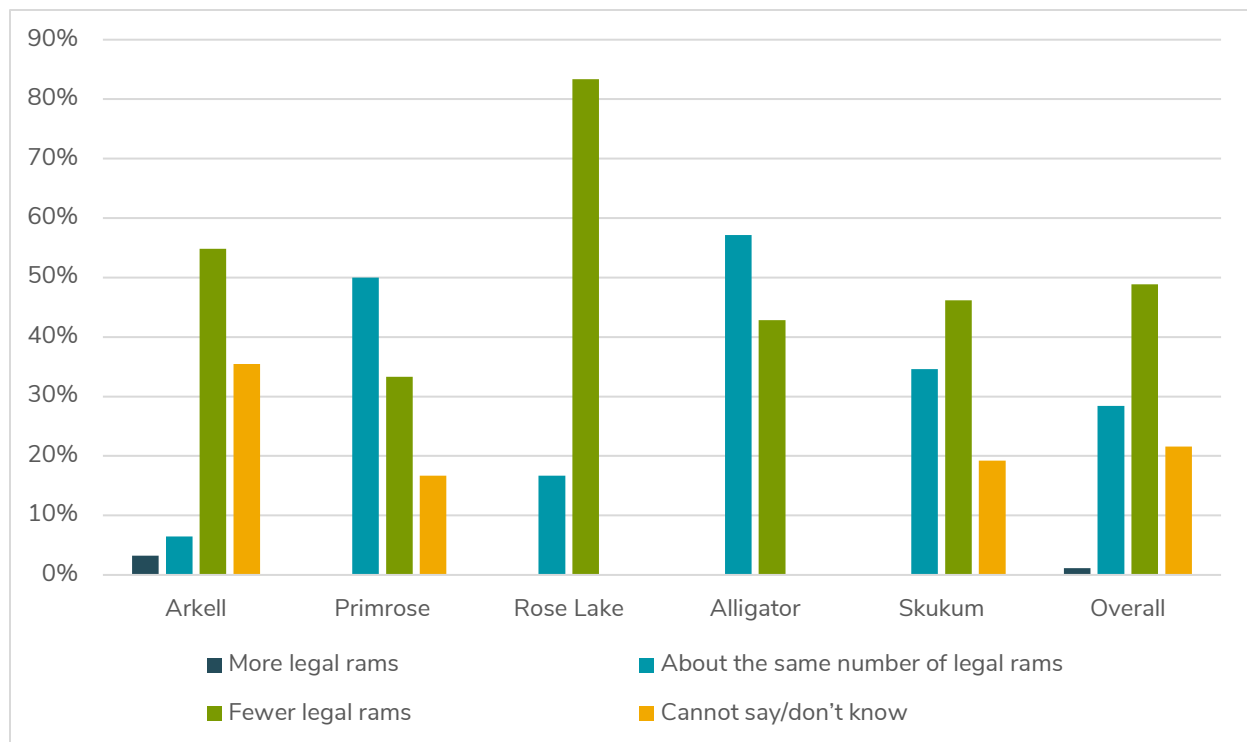


Figure 5. Respondents' perception of the number of legal rams in the permit area in 2020 or 2021 compared to 10 years ago.

Hunting parties

Respondents who had previously hunted in GMZ 7 East were asked to quantify whether they saw more hunting parties, fewer hunting parties or the same number of hunting parties compared to the last 10 years.

Overall, 19% of respondents did not notice a difference, while 47% saw more hunting parties and 10% reported seeing fewer hunting parties (Figure 6). Overall, more than half of the the respondents reported seeing more hunting parties.

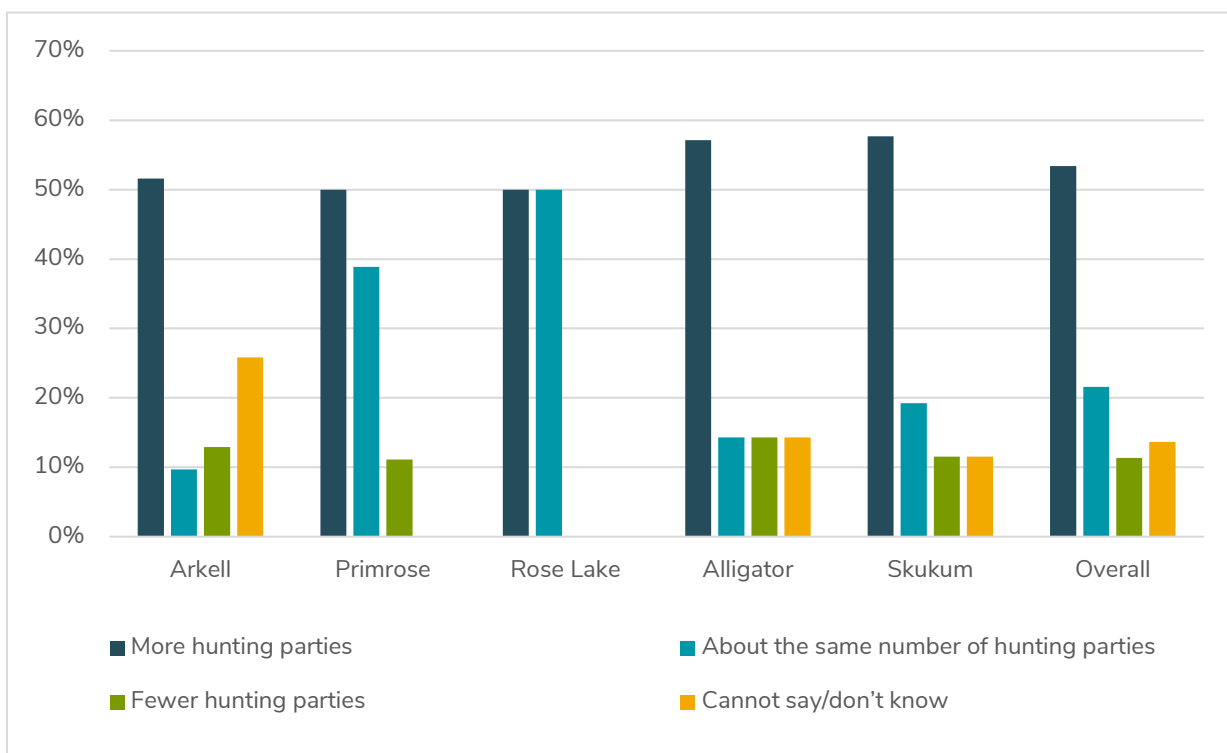


Figure 6. Respondents' perception of the number of hunting parties in the permit area in 2020 or 2021 compared to 10 years ago.

Opinions on the new Sheep Management Units approach

Hunters were asked to assess the new Sheep Management Units approach to allocate hunting permits compared to the previous allocation system which was based on GMS.

Overall, 22% of hunters found the new approach positive for sheep hunters whereas 51% did not agree with it (Table 3; Figure 7). Hunters who hunted in the Alligator SMU seemed more in favour of the new approach for sheep hunters compared to hunters who hunted in other areas. The new system was rated most poorly for sheep hunters by respondents who hunted in the Skukum SMU.

Table 3. Summary of results from questions posed to sheep hunters regarding whether the Sheep Management Unit approach is positive for sheep hunters or sheep, and if they plan to apply for a permit in GM7 East again. Number of respondents was 160 for each question.

Question	Median	Frequency distribution				
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Recognizing that 2020 was the first season where the Sheep Management Unit approach was used, I view this approach to be positive for sheep hunters in the area.	Disagree	6 (4%)	29 (18%)	43 (27%)	40 (25%)	42 (26%)
Recognizing that 2020 was the first season where the Sheep Management Unit approach was used, I view this approach to be positive for sustainability for sheep populations in the area.	Neither	3 (2%)	28 (18%)	57 (36%)	32 (20%)	40 (25%)
All things considered, I would choose to apply for a permit in the GMZ 7 East area again.	Agree	38 (24%)	68 (43%)	24 (15%)	17 (11%)	13 (8%)

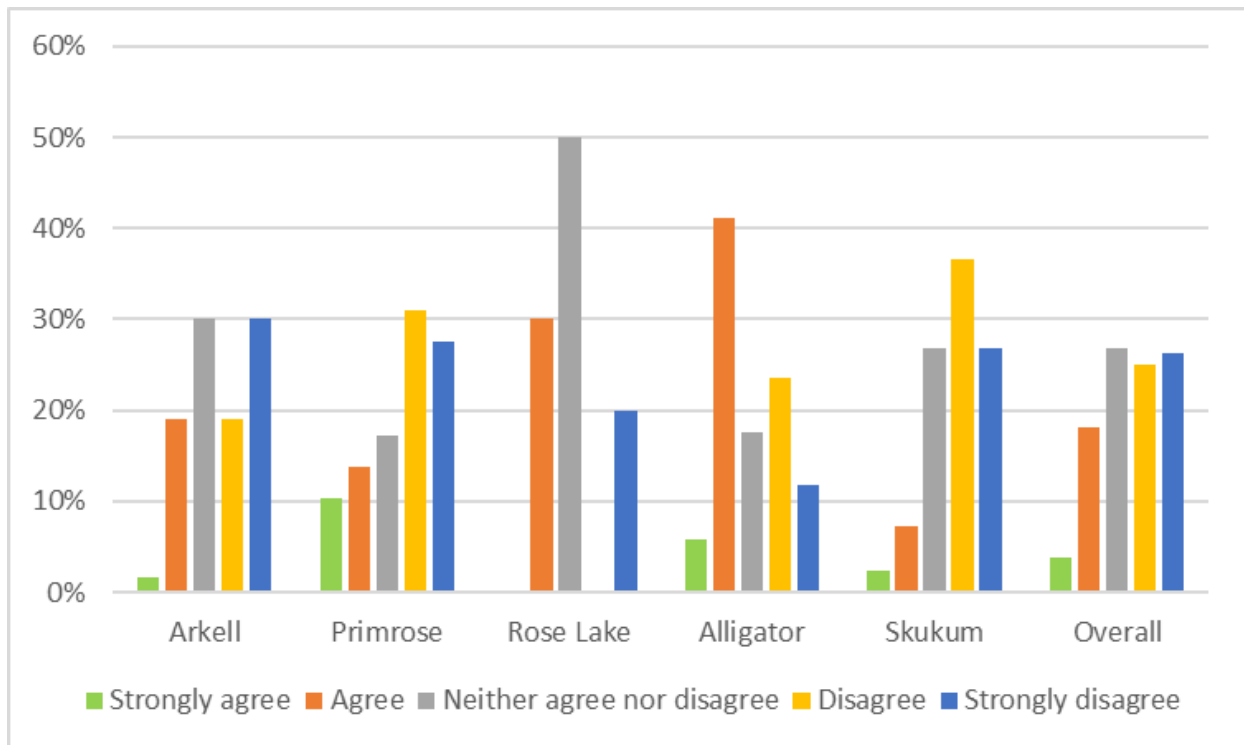


Figure 7. Hunters' view of the new Sheep Management Unit approach for sheep hunters in Game Management Zone 7 East.

Overall, 19% of hunters found the new approach positive for sheep populations whereas 45% did not (Table 3; Figure 8). Hunters who hunted in the Alligator SMU seemed more favorable to the new approach for sheep populations than hunters who hunted in other areas. Again, the Skukum SMU is the area where a greater proportion of hunters disagreed with the new system for sheep management.

All things considered, 64% of hunters who hunted sheep with a PHA in GMZ 7 East in 2020 or 2021 said they would apply again for a permit to hunt in the area. 20% said they would not (Table 3; Figure 9). Hunters who hunted in the Rose Lake, Primrose Lake and Skukum SMUs seemed more likely to apply again. Hunters in the Arkell SMU seem less likely to do so.

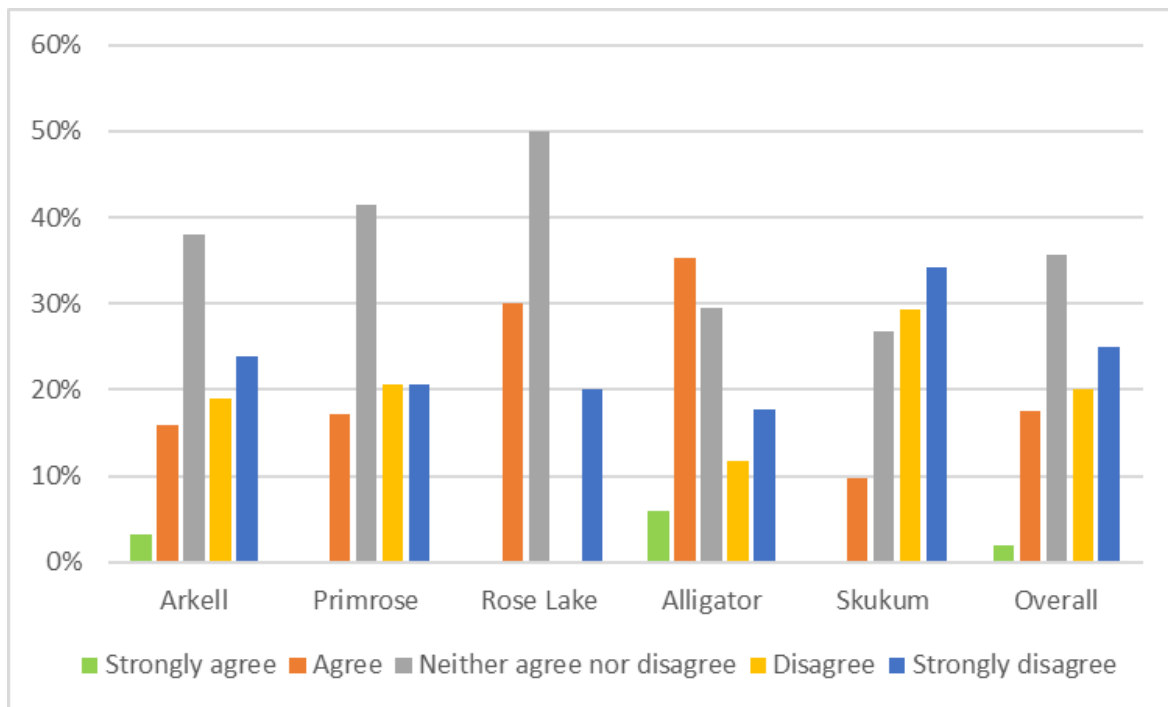


Figure 8. Hunters' view of the new Sheep Management Unit approach for sheep populations in Game Management Zone 7 East.

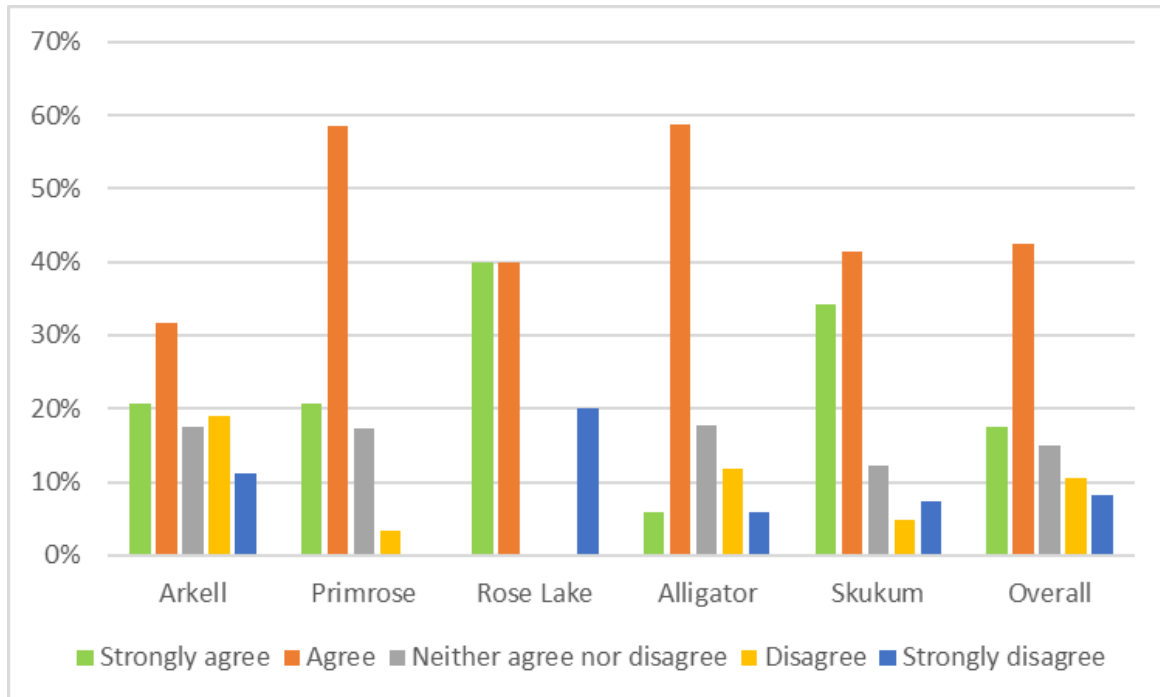


Figure 9. Hunters' intention of applying for a sheep permit in GMZ 7 East in the future.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Summary of comments by respondents

The sheep hunter survey included four open-ended questions that asked hunters to submit comments focused on specific aspects of the Sheep Management Unit (SMU) system, as well as general comments. Respondents submitted a total of 435 comments across all four open-ended questions. Comments were analyzed exactly as they were submitted by hunters to ensure that they retained their original meaning and intent, and were grouped into four main categories representing common themes 1) Management, 2) Sheep populations, 3) Hunting experience, 4) Perceptions of government or personal knowledge.

Management

Comments were generally supportive of the need to manage sheep and sheep hunting, including through a permit system. However, comments from hunters in all PHA areas expressed more negative than positive sentiments about the new permitting system. Specific references expressed a lack of confidence in the Sheep Management Unit (SMU) system and doubts regarding the science used to make management decisions. Respondents identified issues related to too many permits being issued in the new permit structure. The impact of outfitting activities on sheep was also raised as a concern by respondents. In Skukum, respondents mentioned an issue for licensed hunters needing to ask permission to be able to hunt on Settlement Land that overlaps with GMS 7-31, and a concern that this will concentrate too much harvest in areas outside Settlement Land. Respondents also suggested there be new rules put in place to limit access by and use of ATVs to reduce their negative impacts on landscapes.

Representative quotes

"I support the idea of active management versus either wide open or closed zones."

"Every sheep hunter I talked to believed the new grouping of sheep zones was a bad idea. More easily accessed areas would be targeted by more hunters."

"In my opinion the permit hunt in GMZ 7 East now has little difference with that of an open sheep hunting zone."

Sheep populations

While several respondents spoke about issues related to increased pressure on sheep from the grouping of subzones and increase in permits, others view the sheep populations in the GMZ 7 East areas as being healthy. Overall, respondents from all PHA areas, but especially in Arkell and Skukum, where 60 and 35 permits were issued, expressed concerns about hunting pressure on sheep populations and negative impacts on sheep abundance, number of large, legal rams, and behavior such as sheep moving to different areas to avoid hunters. Hunters also expressed that the priority should be on managing in the way that is best for sheep conservation.

Representative quotes

“Even with the highly concentrated pressure, this is still the best (in my opinion) sheep country in the southern Yukon with good genetics for large, old rams.”

“This is what I would consider an ill-conceived change that will harm sheep in the area, not help them and the sheep must come first.”

Hunting experience

In GMZ 7 East, survey respondents expressed that the new management system grouped too many Game Management Subzones (GMSs) into a single SMU, which resulted in hunters being concentrated in easily accessible areas and creating a bottleneck of hunters on the landscape. Respondents who hunted in Arkell or Skukum submitted the most comments about both increased opportunity and concerns about crowding. Comments also identified increased opportunities to hunt in permit areas as a positive aspect of the new SMU system, particularly for residents of Whitehorse and seniors, allowing more people to enjoy a permit hunt. The fact that the list of successful permit holders can no longer be released publicly was also mentioned as an additional challenge since hunters no longer have the opportunity to communicate with each other while planning their hunt.

Representative quotes

“There was more significant hunting pressure and more parties than when they were separate and even when it was open”.

“60 tags seems like a lot considering I did not lay eyes on a legal ram”

“I’m in favour management initiatives that provide more opportunity for more individuals”.

Perceptions of government or personal knowledge

Positive comments expressed trust and confidence in the Government of Yukon to manage sheep sustainably, as well as compliments for trying a new management system in response to changing conditions. Negative sentiments expressed lack of trust in the knowledge used to design the management system, doubt that Government of Yukon managers have an accurate understanding of the reality on the ground, and a lack of confidence in the scientific rigor of data being used to inform management. Comments also expressed that the Government of Yukon has not engaged sufficiently with the public nor provided the rationale behind changes to the management system. Several respondents expressed that they did not have enough personal knowledge or experience to form a strong opinion about sheep management or that there were not yet enough years of data to evaluate the new system.

Representative quotes

“Understanding hunters preferences and choices is the first step in managing hunters.”

“There was a serious lack of consultation with sheep hunters here”.

Overall, a majority of hunters disliked the current permit system and recommended a return to the previous permit allocation and sheep management system. However, comments for all PHA areas suggest that most respondents will apply for a permit in GMZ 7 East again in the future, as represented by the following comment:

“I would of course apply to hunt again. It is an amazing area and the hunting is still very high quality. I am ok with having to wait years between opportunities if it means the health and longevity of the sheep population is maintained.”

Appendix 2. 2020 sheep hunter effort survey

Please note: This survey was distributed in June and November of 2021 to capture the experience of hunters who received a sheep permit for GMZ 7 in the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 hunting seasons. Both groups received the same survey, but with a change in the year, so it is not duplicated.

The Department of Environment is surveying hunters who received a sheep permit for the Game Management Zone 7 (GMZ 7) east sheep Permit Hunt Authorization (PHA) area in the 2020 hunting season (refer to Southern Yukon map at https://open.yukon.ca/sites/default/files/Permit_Hunt_Sheep_ENV.340.003.2021.pdf). This survey was designed in collaboration with the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board and the Yukon Fish and Game Association. It will take approximately 5-7 minutes to complete.

We recognize that allotting permits by sheep management units is a departure from our past management practice of issuing permits by game management subzone. We made this change to connect harvest sustainability with sheep use of the landscape. The Department of Environment wants to learn from the experiences of sheep hunters who hunted under the new system in 2020. We would appreciate your input by completing this brief survey.

Participation in this survey is voluntary and your responses are confidential. Information collected through this survey is protected in accordance with Yukon's Statistics Act. Your individual responses will be shared with the Department of Environment. Your responses will be combined with others for reporting purposes.

Part 1: Hunter Effort

1. Did you hunt for sheep in Game Management Zone 7 (GMZ 7) east in 2020?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (If no, go to question 6)

2. How many sheep hunting trips did you take in GMZ 7 east in 2020?

Number of trips: _____

3. Did you harvest a sheep in Game Management Zone 7 (GMZ 7) east in 2020?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

4. How did you access the GMZ 7 east area to hunt for sheep in 2020? Check all that apply.

- ☐ On foot
- ☐ By ORV/ATV/Argo
- ☐ By aircraft

- ☐ By horseback
- ☐ Mountain bike or non-motorized means
- ☐ By boat/packraft/canoe
- ☐ By vehicle

5. In which Game Management Subzones within GMZ 7 east did you hunt for sheep in 2020?

See map https://open.yukon.ca/sites/default/files/Permit_Hunt_Sheep_ENV.340.003.2021.pdf

- ☐ 713
- ☐ 714
- ☐ 716
- ☐ 717
- ☐ 720
- ☐ 721
- ☐ 722
- ☐ 723
- ☐ 724
- ☐ 725
- ☐ 726
- ☐ 727
- ☐ 730
- ☐ 731
- ☐ 732

6. If you did not hunt in GMZ 7 east in 2020, what was the main reason? Please select only one.

- ☐ Lack of time
- ☐ Health/ Injury
- ☐ Too many hunters
- ☐ Lack of equipment/equipment failure
- ☐ Unavailable hunting partners
- ☐ Weather conditions
- ☐ Hunted successfully in another area
- ☐ Other: _____

7. Have you hunted in GMZ 7 east before 2020?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

8. How many years in total have you hunted sheep in GMZ 7 east?

Number of years: _____

9. How many years in total have you hunted sheep anywhere in the Yukon?

Number of years: _____

Part 2: Hunter Observations

We are interested in your observations of hunting conditions in 2020 compared to your previous experience in the GMZ 7 east area.

10. Compared to the last 10 years, about how many sheep did you observe in 2020 in the GMZ 7 east area?

- ☐ Fewer sheep
- ☐ About the same number of sheep
- ☐ More sheep
- ☐ Cannot say/don't know

11. Compared to the last 10 years, about how many legal rams did you observe in 2020 in the GMZ 7 permit area?

- ☐ Fewer legal rams
- ☐ About the same number of legal rams
- ☐ More legal rams
- ☐ Cannot say/don't know

12. Compared to the last 10 years, about how many sheep hunting parties did you observe in 2020 in the GMZ 7 east area?

- ☐ Fewer hunting parties
- ☐ About the same number of hunting parties
- ☐ More hunting parties
- ☐ Cannot say/don't know

Part 3: Hunter Satisfaction

We are interested in the satisfaction of your hunting experience in the GMZ 7 permit area, particularly after this first year of allocating permits by Sheep Management Unit:

13. Recognizing that 2020 was the first season where the Sheep Management Unit approach was used, I view this approach to be positive for sheep hunters in the area.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

13.1. Please explain your response:

14. Recognizing that 2020 was the first season where the Sheep Management Unit approach was used, I view this approach to be positive for sustainability for sheep populations in the area.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

14.1. Please explain your response:

15. All things considered, I would choose to apply in the GMZ 7 PHA area again.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

15.1. Please explain your response:

Part 5: Final Comments

Please provide any other comments you may have about your sheep hunting experience in GMZ 7 east and the new approach of allocating permits by Sheep Management Unit.

Thank you for your input.