

Unit 23 Working Group Report to Board of Game
July 2, 2008

Mr. Chair and members of the Board: I am Mark Burch, a Planner with the Department of Fish and Game charged with managing the contract for the GMU 23 Working Group.

The Unit 23 Working Group met just once in Kotzebue on April 23-24, 2008, to address conflicts among users in Unit 23 during the fall hunting season. The group consists of Unit 23 Advisory Committee chairs from Lower Kobuk, Upper Kobuk, Noatak/Kivalina, North Seward Peninsula, and Kotzebue; Northwest Regional Advisory Council (RAC) chair; Alaska Professional Hunters Association; the Northwest Arctic Borough; Kotzebue IRA; NANA Corporation; Maniilaq Association; representatives of the Federal Subsistence Board, Board of Game, and Big Game Commercial Services Board; and agency staff (Department of Fish and Game, Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and Bureau of Land Management). The group make up was based on involving the above agencies and organizations rather than specific interest groups. Taken together though, the above organizations represent the interests of guides & outfitters, transporters and local subsistence users. Members of the public also participated in this meeting.

This first meeting was dedicated to developing a charter and gathering information from the agencies involved. Even though issues were identified and some solutions were discussed, little time was dedicated to the group deliberating on recommendations. Two issues particularly relevant to Proposal A became apparent during the April Working Group meeting. First, some local residents were not able to harvest enough caribou in recent years. All participants agreed this was at least partly because caribou have begun migrating south later during the fall than in previous years. Additionally, local residents felt that fall caribou movements may be hindered or deflected by densely placed camps of visiting hunters located within migration corridors used by caribou. Second, the group agreed that increasing the nonresident caribou bag limit to two caribou/year in areas away from important subsistence hunting areas might attract nonresident hunters out of areas of local concern and conflict. This approach would provide areas where commercial operators and nonresident hunters could benefit from a higher bag limit.

At its April meeting, the Working Group felt an urgency to make some progress toward addressing these issues prior to the 2008 hunting season. The group reached a consensus agreement to develop a regulatory proposal that would:

- a) Shift the dates of the closure to the use of aircraft for big game hunting in the Noatak Controlled Use Area (CUA) to September 9-30 (from the current dates of August 25-September 15); and
- b) Increase the non-Alaska-resident caribou bag limit from one to two caribou per year in portions of Unit 23 that are far from important subsistence hunting areas.

The Working Group tasked a smaller sub-group to develop a draft proposal to the Board of Game and circulate that proposal for the full Working Group's consideration.

Proposal A is the draft proposal developed by the sub-group. Over the last month, the Working Group's facilitator, Jan Caulfield, has contacted group members to determine if there is consensus agreement among the full Working Group in support of Proposal A.

Additionally, there is new information that has come to light since the last Working Group meeting. First, ADF&G released the results of the 2007 Western Arctic Caribou Herd census. The 2007 estimate is 377,000 caribou. This compares with 490,000 in July 2003. Second, a number of Working Group members attended meetings in Kiana (May 21) and Noatak (May 22) to discuss Unit 23 user conflicts and possible solutions. During each of these meetings, there was strong support for shifting the dates of the Noatak CUA to September 9-30. However, there was almost no support for increasing the nonresident caribou bag limit in any portion of Unit 23, due to concern that increasing the nonresident bag limit to two caribou would increase waste of meat.

The proposed Noatak CUA date change and nonresident bag limit increase in portions of Unit 23 are linked as a regulatory package in Proposal A and in the Working Group's consideration. There is very near consensus among the full Working Group on Proposal A, but not full consensus. In instances when there is not full consensus, the group's Charter indicates that the differing opinions will be stated.

The following points are notable:

1. At the April Working Group meeting, there was very near consensus on the proposed change to the Noatak Controlled Use Area (CUA) dates. However, proposing the change in the nonresident bag limit in portions of Unit 23 was a necessary part of a regulatory package to obtain full consensus with the Noatak CUA date change.
2. The lack of full concurrence with Proposal A was a response to concerns expressed in Kiana and Noatak about a nonresident bag limit increase and possible increase in meat waste.

The Working Group expects to meet several more times between October 2008 and April 2009. During these meetings, they will discuss the many issues involved in the fall hunting conflicts in more depth, will hear and consider additional public comment, and will work toward consensus recommendations on solutions to the conflicts. In the future, the Working Group expects to make additional proposals to the Board of Game (and recommendations to other entities) that would implement the solutions developed during this cooperative planning process.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and Board Members for taking time at this meeting to consider Unit 23 issues.

**Comments by Ted Spraker, Board of Game member
June 17, 2008**

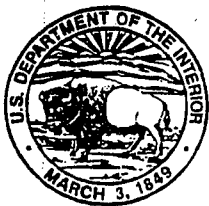
Memberssince I will not be here for the July meeting here are my thoughts:

1). Noatak CUA date change. Although I am concerned about trying to "out guess" the caribou migration, I support the date shift for the Noatak CUA. This was a huge issue with most of the folks attending the committee meeting. Additionally, most hunters using aircraft said they avoided this area anyway since there were better places and fewer hunters off the river. Probably the majority of the conflicts faced by the people in Noatak are the Kotzebue hunters coming into their area to hunt. I had an opportunity to fly with Jim Dau to look at camps used by transporters and none are close to the river.

2). Change bag limit in some Guide Use Areas. I do not support this change. This would make regulations more confusing and present a huge problem to NR hunters that purchase two NR caribou tags then discover the caribou are in a one caribou area and vice versa. I thought this strategy could be used as a possible way to encourage NR resident hunters away from sensitive subsistence areas but now I'm beginning to believe the conflict is not with NR hunters as much as residents and locals from neighboring communities. Since the level of reported conflicts have been minimal the pass two years, I'm hopeful that we can go back to two caribou for NR during the next NW arctic cycle. Although the population appears to have declined from 490K to 377K since the last count in 2003, an increase in NR harvest would only result in a couple hundred additional animals harvested. Residents harvest over 10K compared to 500 to 600 for NR (during the 2 caribou limit). Plus this decline may be a good event for the huge WACH. We have not seen the harvest results from 2007 to determine if the reduced bag limit reduced the number of NR hunters but it clearly reduced the amount of meat donated to locals by NRs. According to the transporters I asked, they said their hunters generally wanted to take at least a portion of one caribou back to America. When they killed two they generally donated the second animal to locals. With the price of fuel the loss of donated meat was concern to locals.

You are probably aware of the recent ruling from the Park Service placing a moratorium on the number of transporters and clients operating on federal preserve lands in Unit 23 . They established the quota to reflect last year's number of 8 transporters taking 357 hunters.

Hopefully you will have the '07 harvest data prior to the July meeting. Ted



United States Department of the Interior

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Office of Subsistence Management
3601 C Street, Suite 1030
Anchorage, Alaska 99503

OSM/8060/BOG Comments

JUN 24 2008

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JUN 25 2008

Mr. Cliff Judkins, Chair
Alaska Board of Game
P.O. Box 115526
Juneau, Alaska 99811-5526

BOARDS

Dear Chairman Judkins:

The Alaska Board of Game is scheduled to meet July 2, 2008, to deliberate "Proposal A: Hunting Seasons and Bag Limits for Caribou and Noatak Controlled Use Area." The proposal would adjust the dates of the Noatak Controlled Use Area and increase the nonresident caribou bag limit from one to two in certain areas of Unit 23.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Subsistence Management, recognizes that there have been user conflicts in Unit 23 and is supportive of the efforts of the Unit 23 Working Group to address this issue. We encourage the involvement of all of the stakeholders in the region to develop alternatives addressing ways to minimize these conflicts.

The primary focus of the Office of Subsistence Management is to ensure the conservation of fish and wildlife resources on Federal public lands and to ensure the continuation of the opportunity for subsistence uses of those resources. We would be supportive of proposals that would benefit the fish and wildlife resources of the region and would continue Federal subsistence uses of those resources.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on these important regulatory matters and look forward to working with your Board and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game on these issues. Please contact Chuck Ardizzone, Wildlife Liaison (907) 786-3871 with any questions you may have concerning this material.

Sincerely,

Peter J. Probasco,
Assistant Regional Director

cc: Denby Lloyd, ADF&G
Mike Fleagle, Chair, FSB
Kristy Tibbles, Board Support Section
Tina Cuning, ADF&G
Nancy V. Hendrickson, ADF&G
Terry Haynes, ADF&G
Interagency Staff Committee

From Gerry Guay
To Christy Tibbles

Re - Sale of Antlers in
GMU 23

It seems unfair to penalize
law abiding residents of the Region
when antlers from Caribou can be sold
in every other GMU of the state.

With gas prices going thru the roof,
sale of antlers maybe the only way
some can subsistence hunt. I realize
that, in the past, some have taken
horns w/o taking the meat. Please
help local residents hunt & survive.

Solution

My offer of a solution:

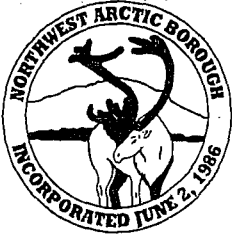
Allow residents of the Gmu to gather antlers from legally taken Caribou (taken for meat & properly salvage of meat) and "register" those antlers with their game board rep or village ADF&G rep. Once "registered" these antlers could be sold or carved or what ever.

Gerry Guay

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NORTHWEST ARCTIC BOROUGH

Ambler Buckland Candle Deering Kiana Kivalina Kobuk
Kotzebue Noatak Noorvik Selawik Shungnak

June 27, 2008

Alaska Board of Game

RE: July 2, 2008 Board of Game Teleconference Meeting
Written comments for Proposal A: 5 AAC 85.025(a)(18) and 5 AAC 92.540(9)(A)(ii)

Dear Board of Game Members:

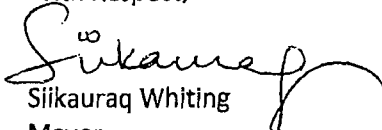
Northwest Arctic Borough works with ten villages in Unit 23 ensuring subsistence activities remain one of our highest priorities. Our residents are dependent on subsistence resources to supplement our diet source. Groceries are getting expensive with a gallon of milk at \$9.59 in Kotzebue and more in the villages. The cost of gas in Kotzebue is \$5.50 a gallon and will increase when the fuel barges arrives. In Noatak the cost of gas is over \$9.00 a gallon and will increase this winter.

The caribou is presently declining in Unit 23. In 2006 there were approximately 477,000 caribou and in 2007 caribou declined to approximately 377,000. With more and more hunters coming to Unit 23 each year, **USER CONFLICT** has become a major issue.

Proposal 5 AAC 85.025(a)(18) Increases the caribou bag limit for non-residents. The increase in bag limit for non-residents was opposed by two villages visited by part of the Unit 23 working group. The reason for the opposition was wanton & waste by user groups. The transporters with this new proposal will have to fly further away from Kotzebue in Unit 23 and return from the camps with an additional caribou. What are weight regulations for transporters to haul hunters, meat and gear? Is this decision valid as more caribou will be harvested and possibly more meat left in the field as wanton & waste?

Proposal 5 AAC 92.540(9)(A)(ii) Changes dates for the Noatak Controlled Use Area. Northwest Arctic Borough **SUPPORTS** the date changes as this help the residents of Noatak harvest more caribou closer to home. We look forward to working with you and thank you for this opportunity to comment on the proposal. If you have further questions, please contact Charlie Gregg, Land Specialist at 907-442-2500.

With Respect,


Siikauraq Whiting
Mayor

Cc: file