

RC5

# Koyukuk River Fish and Game Advisory Committee

## Interior Region Fish and Game Advisory Committees

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Minto-Nenana  
Ruby  
Tanana-Rampart-Manley  
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Yukon Flats

February 5, 2014

Alaska Board of Game,  
Board Support Section  
P.O. Box 115526  
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Comments Regarding: Interior Alaska Region III meeting Feb. 14-23 Fairbanks agenda item I. C&T Use of Game Populations, **Proposal 50 Review of C&T for the Teshekpuk Caribou Herd, and if so setting ANS.**

The Koyukuk River Advisory Committee reviewed the proposals for the BOG 2014 Region III meeting on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013 in Fairbanks.

The AC discussed the importance of caribou to residents of GMU 24. As a long-standing AC member I have tracked caribou herd presence in various portions of GMU 24 through oral discussion with ADF&G and North Slope Borough biologists for many years. Modern telemetry allows the managers to delineate which herds use various areas more precisely. All we know as users is that we take caribou when they migrate near by, from fall until they leave in the spring.

The Koyukuk River AC unanimously adopted a position for Customary and Traditional Use of Teshekpuk Caribou as positive. We also feel that adequate ANS should be allocated for the several communities that have been using Teshekpuk caribou in GMU 24. The ADF&G telemetry data presented at your January 10-13, 2014 meeting in Kotzebue, RC002 for Teshekpuk caribou slide #7, validates the AC's position. Harvest Registration permits used by residents in Northern GMUs do not capture precise harvest amounts. But Subsistence Div. household surveys do capture an idea of caribou use in GMU 24 communities of Huslia, Hughes, Allakaket, Alatna, Bettles, Evansville, Wiseman, Coldfoot, and Anaktuvuk Pass.

The Teshekpuk is but one of three herds that use GMU 24 as primarily winter range. Western Arctic (WACH), and also Central Arctic Caribou Herds use GMU 24 at consistent and various times. Apparently the 1992 BOG addressed the C&T for the Western Arctic Herd, to include GMU 24, and included it in the ANS. The current regulations for WACH C&T use has dropped GMU 24 as one of the recognized units that have a positive C&T and ANS inclusion. The 2014 Board should clarify for the record that WACH has always used GMU 24, and reaffirm a positive C&T for all residents of GMU 24.

Therefore the Koyukuk River AC requests a **positive C&T finding for Teshekpuk caribou for GMU 24 when addressing Proposal 50**. I as chair also feel the BOG needs to clarify the record for the WACH, a reaffirmed positive C&T for GMU 24 residents. If the Board of Game so finds a positive use for both Teshekpuk and WACH caribou herds: set appropriate ANS use for caribou by the GMU24 communities.

The Koyukuk River AC appreciates all of the long hours and dedication it takes as BOG members, Thanks so much!

Jack Reakoff  
Koyukuk River Fish and Game Advisory Committee Chairman

11-13-92

Alaska Board of Game  
Subsistence Regulation Review Sheet  
Customary and Traditional Use Regulations  
Seasons and Bag Limits  
November 1992

Worksheet # 36 B  
Game Species Western Arctic Caribou Herd ↓  
Population (Unit/Subunit) GMUs 21D, 22, 23, 24, 26

- 1. Is this population in a nonsubsistence area?
  - A. BOARD DECISION: No  X
  - Yes
  - Other

If yes, subsistence hunting is not allowed in regulation (skip to Section 5). If no, proceed to Section 2.

- 2. Is this population customarily and traditionally taken or used for subsistence?
  - A. CUSTOMARY AND TRADITIONAL USE DATA SUMMARY

Previous Board Findings:

The Board of Game has found that there is a C&T use of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd in GMUs 21, 22, 23, and 26 (5AAC 99.025).

Use pattern summary:

Caribou have historically been a staple food in many communities throughout the WACH's range. This remains true today. Caribou are essentially hunted year-round with the timing of each community's hunt dependent on its location in the herd's range. Most hunting occurs by boat in ice-free months and by snowmachine in winter. In the past, caribou were snared or driven and speared whereas today large- and small-caliber rifles are used. Caribou meat is typically dried or stored frozen with the fat a particularly desirable item. Widespread sharing of caribou is common.

Source Material Reference: CTUW 3:86-98.

- B. ADF&G RECOMMENDATION: No                      Yes  X                      See Proposal

- C. BOARD DECISION:  Yes  No  Other *plus Unit 24*

If no, subsistence hunting is not allowed in regulation (skip to Section 8). If yes, proceed to Section 3.

- 3. Can a portion of the population be harvested consistent with sustained yield?
  - A. BIOLOGICAL DATA SUMMARY

**Population Status:**

The Western Arctic Herd (WAH) is currently the largest caribou herd in Alaska, and one of the largest in North America. The most recent post-calving census conducted during July 1990 indicated that a minimum of 415,692 caribou were present on the calving grounds in Unit 26A. The herd currently ranges over approximately 140,000 mi<sup>2</sup> of habitat in Units 21D, 22, 23, 24, and 26A. Historically, the WAH has fluctuated greatly in size. Population size was estimated at 240,000 in 1971, and had declined to approximately 75,000 in 1976. Results of biennial post-calving censuses conducted since 1976 indicated that the WAH has grown steadily in size at rates varying from 7 to 22% annually.

Relative Density: High  Medium                      Low  
Trend: Decreasing                      Stable                      Increasing   
Closures in last 10 years: None

**Management Objectives/Strategies:**

During 1984, a Strategic Management Plan for the WAH was developed by the Department in cooperation with the public and other agencies, and approved by the Alaska Board of Game. The overall population management goal for the WAH as stated in the plan is to maintain a minimum herd size of at least 200,000 caribou.

**Other Management Considerations:**

At its current size of 400,000+ animals, the size and productivity of the WAH is affected primarily by predation, weather, and range conditions rather than by hunting mortality. Harvest regulations are currently very liberal. Although the herd can currently sustain more harvest, additional liberalization of the regulations would probably result in little increase in harvest because of the remoteness of the herd.

Source Material Reference: DFG Survey-Inventory Management

B. ADF&G RECOMMENDATION: Yes  No                      Analysis

C. BOARD DECISION: No  
                                    Yes  
                                    Other

If no, hunting is not allowed in regulation (skip to Section 8). If yes, proceed to Section 4.

4. What amount is reasonably necessary for subsistence use?

A. HISTORIC HARVEST AND USER DATA SUMMARY

Because harvest reporting rates for hunters residing in the range of the WAH are frequently poor, available harvest data are useful for evaluating only harvest trends rather than measuring

the magnitude of actual harvests. This is especially true for most data collected prior to 1984 because we did not have an adequate reporting system in place. During the 1991-92 season, 1707 caribou were reported harvested. Reported harvests since 1984 have ranged from 1,485 to 4,407 caribou. The size of the annual reported harvest during this period was related more to caribou distribution rather population size. When caribou wintered close to communities, reported harvests increased. This was especially noticeable for the larger communities and regional centers. Knowledgeable staff estimate that reported harvests may only account for as little as 12 to 20% of the actual annual harvest which may range to 10,000 to 12,000 caribou or higher.

During the 1991-92 season, 11% of the reporting hunters were nonresidents, 18% were non-local Alaska residents, and 71% were local residents residing in the range of the WAH. Although the size of the reported harvest has fluctuated since 1984, the residency of reporting hunters has remained fairly consistent. Because reporting rates among local hunters is frequently poor, we believe the proportion of the harvest attributable to local residents is larger than our data indicate. Normally, approximately half of the reported harvest is taken during the fall (August-October), and the remainder during late winter (February-April).

We do not have adequate data available concerning success rates, transportation, and days afield. We believe, however, that success rates are very high, and most hunters are able to harvest caribou. Most local hunters use boats and snowmobiles as transportation, and most non-local hunters use aircraft as transportation.

**Other Harvest and Use Information (Mean harvest per household; Harvest Range per household; etc.):**

Another source of harvest information comes from face-to-face household surveys in selected communities for single years.

Total numbers of caribou taken by community and by year include: Kotzebue, 1,916 caribou (1986); Kivalina, 564 (1983); Golovin, 40 (1989); Shishmaref, 197 (1989); Barrow, 1,643 (1987) and 1,403 (1988); Point Lay, 157 (1987); Wainwright, 505 (1988); Nuiqsut, 513 (1985); Hualia, 53 (1983); Galena, 40 (1985); Anaktuvuk Pass, 592 (1991); Allakaket/Alatna, 6 (1982); and Bettles/Evansville, 14 (1982). The mean number of caribou per successful household ranged from 2.70 caribou in Allakaket/Alatna to 15.2 in Anaktuvuk Pass. Household harvests in Kotzebue ranged from 0-25 caribou. A single year of harvest data are not necessarily representative of a community's resource use.

Source Material Reference: DFG Survey-Inventory Reports, 1985-1991. ADF&G Community Profile Database; CTUW 3:-; Braund and Associates 1989a, 1989b. WRB2, VI, 12.1-36

ADF&G RECOMMENDATION: 8000 - 12000

BOARD DECISION.

*hunting has a negligible effect*

*Report - concerned about using caribou 5 per day leads to a practice that would exhaust stock*

*Pack herd size historically fluctuates mid 1980s - 1990s 600,000 - 800,000*

*human pop in 23 + 264 = 19,000*

5. Do the proposed regulations provide a reasonable opportunity for subsistence uses?

A. DATA SUMMARY

Regulatory History:

With the exception of several years during the late 1970's, season and bag limits for WAH have remained very liberal. Currently, we have no closed season in place for bulls, and only a 6-week closure for cows during May and June. The current bag limit is 5 caribou per day. Restrictive harvest regulations requiring hunters to obtain a permit for harvesting only bulls were enacted during the 1976-77 season after the herd size declined to 75,000 animals. Harvest restrictions were relaxed within several years after the herd size began to increase.

Information regarding reasonable opportunity:

As mentioned earlier, we do not have available quantitative data documenting hunter success rates, and the amount of time needed to harvest caribou. Among local hunters, success is determined primarily by seasonal caribou distribution. When caribou migrate to areas near villages when hunters are able to use boats and snowmobiles for access, success rates are very high among local hunters, and we believe they may approach 100% in some communities. Existing seasons and bag limits are already very liberal, and we believe they are not a significant factor influencing success among the majority of local hunters.

In regulation review visits by the department to GMU 23 communities in 1989, few hunters objected to current caribou seasons and bag limits.

Source Material Reference: DFG Survey-Inventory Reports, 1985-1991. W R B 2, V1. 12, 1-36

B. ADF&G RECOMMENDATION: No Yes X  
Analysis:

C. BOARD DECISION: No  
Yes  
Other

If no, proceed to Section 6. If yes, then stop.

6. Is it necessary to reduce or eliminate other uses to provide a reasonable opportunity for subsistence uses?

A. ADF&G RECOMMENDATION: No X Yes See Proposal # 136B  
Analysis:

B. BOARD DECISION: No  
Yes  
Other

Handwritten notes: 2008, 600, 1000, 600, 500

Handwritten notes: 3400, 1910, 1490

If yes, then the Board shall adopt regulations to differentiate among consumptive uses that provide a preference for the subsistence uses, or the Board shall adopt regulations that eliminate other consumptive uses in order to provide a reasonable opportunity for subsistence uses. Go to Section 7.

7. Does the adoption of regulations reducing or eliminating consumptive uses other than subsistence uses provide a reasonable opportunity for subsistence uses?

A. ADF&G RECOMMENDATION: No                      Yes                      See Proposal  
Analysis:

B. BOARD DECISION: No  
Yes  
Other

If yes, then stop. If no, the Tier II subsistence regulations must be adopted.

8. Other Regulations Requiring Action

1. Repeal of subsistence regulations in nonsubsistence areas. See proposal
2. Closure on populations without a harvestable surplus. See proposal