



RC005

MEMORANDUM

TO: Alaska Board of Game

FROM: Department of Fish and Game
Division of Wildlife Conservation

SUBJECT: RY18 Nelchina Caribou Harvest
Quotas and plans for RY19

DATE: January 8, 2019

Background: During the March 2018 Board of Game meeting the department presented information to the Board related to the allocation of harvest of Nelchina Caribou. This information summarized the Board's direction as the department understood regarding the allocation of harvest to the various hunts. Following the post-calving survey in July which showed the overall population had declined, the department needed to reduce the harvest beyond what was anticipated. This document summarizes the discussion in March and a further-refined harvest management plan. This plan accounts for herd size relative to management objectives, the harvest objectives of state hunts and the anticipated harvest from federal managed hunts.

The Nelchina caribou herd supports two federal subsistence hunts (FC1302 and FC1202), three state subsistence hunts with unlimited permits available (CC001, RC561 and RC562) and three Drawing permit hunts:

- YC495 – resident youth hunt with up to 200 permits
- DC485 – resident hunt with up to 5,000 permits
- DCxxx – nonresident hunt with up to 200 permits.

In some years animals are harvested incidental to other state hunts and in Canada. The board has determined that the amount reasonably necessary for subsistence (ANS) is 600–1,000 animals (5AAC 99.025); both state and federal harvest are used to determine if the ANS has been met.

Strategies:

- 1) When the Nelchina caribou herd is above the upper end of the population objectives:
 - a) the Community Subsistence Harvest hunt will be held.
 - b) the Tier I registration hunts will be held.
 - c) the youth drawing hunt will occur, the bag limit is one caribou, and up to 200 permits may be issued.
 - d) the resident drawing hunt will occur, the bag limit is one caribou, and up to 5,000 permits may be issued.
 - e) the nonresident drawing hunt will occur, the bag limit is one bull, and up to 200 permits may be issued.
 - f) the full 200 youth drawing permits will be issued each year, and the number of resident and nonresident permits to be issued will be enough to expect to reach the harvestable surplus (also referred to as the quota), but not more than 5,000 and 200 respectively.

- 2) When the Nelchina caribou herd is within the population objectives.
- a) the Community Subsistence Harvest hunt will be held.
 - b) the Tier I registration hunts will be held.
 - c) the full 200 youth drawing permits will be issued, and the number of resident and nonresident permits to be issued will be enough to expect to reach the harvestable surplus (also referred to as the quota), but not more than 5,000 and 50 respectively. The nonresident permits will be issued when all 5,000 permits are issued.

The board will need to determine when to allocate harvest away from the two Tier I registration hunts to the three drawing hunts in an effort to achieve the amount reasonably necessary for subsistence while allocating among all users. A sliding scale may be necessary to achieve this when the population is within objectives, with more harvest being allocated to the drawing hunts when the population is near the upper end of the objectives.

- 3) When the Nelchina caribou herd is below the lower end of the population objectives
- a) a resident only Tier II hunt will be administered in the next application cycle.
 - b) the Community Subsistence Harvest hunt will not be held in the subsequent year but will be held if applications are received and permits announced.
 - c) the Tier I registration hunts will not be held in the subsequent year but will be held if applications are received and permits announced.
 - d) the youth drawing hunt will be held if permit winners have been announced but will not be held if permit winners have not been announced.
 - e) the resident drawing hunt will be held if permit winners have been announced but will not be held if permit winners have not been announced.
 - f) the nonresident drawing hunt will be held if permit winners have been announced but will not be held if permit winners have not been announced.

In an effort to reduce hunter confusion and maintain hunt consistency the department will in some cases allow hunts to run their course and management action will be taken in the following year. For example, issued permits will be allowed to be hunted but quotas or seasons may be reduced, and the number of available permits may be reduced the following year.

The Federal subsistence hunts are managed through the Federal Subsistence program. The department can recommend changes to the federal program but those are not guaranteed. The department will reassess expectations of federal harvest in addition to an expectation to exceed published quotas.

Objectives: The management objectives are to maintain the herd between 35,000 and 40,000 caribou with a harvest of 3,000–6,000 caribou. These are also the intensive management objectives found in 5AAC 92.108. Nelchina caribou have been identified as a population important for providing high levels of human consumptive use. If the population is below the upper end of objectives the herd will be managed for growth but not to exceed the upper objective limit. If the population is above the upper end of objectives the herd will be reduced to within objectives.

Regulatory Year 2018: To allow for herd growth in the Nelchina caribou herd the harvestable surplus for RY18 was determined to be roughly 5% of the summer population estimate of 35,700 animals, which equated to 1,800 animals available for harvest. State bag limits were also restricted to bulls-only to allow for growth. Based on previous years, federal harvest was predicted to be approximately 400 animals. The Community Subsistence harvest program determines the number of hunters pre-season and includes a harvest quota that is in regulation of 400 animals; however, the predicted harvest for RY18 with a bulls-only bag limit was roughly 150

animals. The combined predicted federal harvest of 400 and the regulated quota of 400 for the Community Subsistence Harvest hunt left 1,000 bulls to be allocated between the remaining three hunts, but even if the 800 was achieved in the federal and community hunt, that left 200 animals left needing to be harvested to reach the upper end of the ANS. Those 200 animals were split evenly between the two Tier I registration hunts (RC561 and RC562), and the remaining 800 animals were divided evenly between RC561, RC562, and the drawing hunt (DC485) – which was approximately 250 for each of the three. Recognizing CC001 harvest has remained consistent around 150 animals, the predicted remaining 250 animals were also divided between RC561 and RC562. The allocation was conveyed to the public in a news release dated 8/3/2018 and emergency order No. 04-04-18. In order to be able to close the hunts more quickly the reporting period for all hunts was shortened to three days. This resulted in a quota of 500 bulls to RC561 and RC562 each, and 250 to DC485. One thousand four hundred animals were allocated to state hunters in the bulls-only hunts of RC561 and RC562 (Tier I registration), CC001 (Tier I Community Subsistence), and DC485 (Draw hunt) while accounting for a predicted federal subsistence harvest of approximately 400 animals. The combined harvest from all subsistence hunts demonstrated that reasonable opportunity was provided to meet the ANS of 600–1,000 animals.

The quotas described above produced manageable hunts. As of 12/18/2018, the majority of the Nelchina herd has left Unit 13 and very little additional harvest is expected from state or federal hunters in Unit 13 for FY18. CC001 opened on August 10 and harvest occurred as predicted, with 146 animals harvested as of 12/18/2018. CC001 remains open at this time. RC561 opened on August 10; hunters harvested 530 animals and the hunt was closed by emergency order on August 18. DC485 opened on August 20, hunters harvested 260 animals and the hunt was closed by emergency order on August 26. RC562 opened on September 1; hunters harvested 527 animals and the hunt closed as scheduled on September 20. The winter seasons for both RC561 and RC562 were closed by emergency order on September 27.

Regulatory Year 2019: In RY2019 the department will continue to manage the Nelchina Caribou herd for growth, given the projected population will be near the lower end of the management objective with a harvestable surplus of 1,400 animals. There are two additional draw hunts available – a youth hunt (YC495) and a nonresident hunt drawing hunt. Drawing permit numbers will be calculated based on the remaining harvestable surplus after subsistence priorities have been predicted (achieved). The youth hunt will remain highest priority of draw permits with all 200 permits issued and the nonresident draw will not be held. Four hundred permits will be issued for DC485.