

ACR 7 – Establish a targeted hunt for the entire Fortymile caribou season.

SUBMITTED BY: Sarah Behr

CITE THE REGULATION THAT WILL BE CHANGED IF THIS ACR IS HEARD.

5 AAC 85.025.Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM YOU WOULD LIKE THE BOARD TO ADDRESS? STATE IN DETAIL THE NATURE OF THE CURRENT PROBLEM.

The 2020 fall Fortymile caribou hunt along the Steese Highway resulted in an exceedingly high volume of hunters in a short period of time, which had a number of unintended negative consequences, including, detracting from the quality of the hunt, unsafe roadside and field conditions, and defacement of State and Federal lands, and will ultimately limit equal access for all Alaskans in future hunts. Specifically, it is unlikely that next year's fall quota and bag limit will remain the same (5,000 animals and two caribou of any sex respectively), however, there will be continued high levels of hunter interest and participation. As a result, all users will not have equal access or a reasonable expectation of success because of a probable early emergency closure.

WHAT SOLUTION DO YOU PREFER?

We would like to expand ADF&G's ability to utilize the targeted hunt option for the entire fall and winter registration hunts. A targeted hunt would allow ADF&G to stagger the number of hunters in all or a portion of the hunt area in order to better control the harvest, keep the quota from being exceeded, and reduce the need for emergency closure. This would be an important management tool to use if the Fortymile herd size and harvest quota are reduced, which will likely occur in fall 2021, and thousands of hunters who have previously participated in this hunt are likely to return.

A targeted hunt option would also ensure that Alaskans who participate in crowded portions of the hunt area will have a reasonable opportunity to harvest an animal before the hunt closes, allow ADF&G to meet management objectives, as well as spread out hunting pressure, which would reduce dangerous conditions resulting from congestion and minimize negative impacts on the land.

ADF&G already has the ability to administer a targeted hunt and utilizes this tool elsewhere in the state. The structure allows for equal access, as applicants do not have to be among the first to apply or compete with thousands of others in order to harvest an animal before the hunt closes. Additionally, hunters who apply for but do not receive a targeted permit would be allowed to hunt Fortymile caribou in less crowded locations of the hunt area under the normal fall and winter registration permit hunts.

STATE IN DETAIL HOW THIS ACR MEETS THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:

- 1) **To correct an error in regulation.** N/A

2) **To correct an effect of a regulation that was unforeseen when a regulation was adopted.** N/A

3) **Does the request identify a biological concern for the population or a threat to meeting objectives for the population?**

Harvest objectives for the herd could easily be exceeded in one day under the current harvest options if the same number of hunters participate and the harvest quota decreases when the herd size is intentionally reduced.]

4) **Does the request identify an unforeseen, unexpected event or effect that would otherwise restrict or reduce a reasonable opportunity for customary and traditional wildlife uses, as defined in AS 16.05.258(f)?**

Yes. The 2020 fall Fortymile harvest quota of 5,000 animals was larger than expected, as was the two caribou of any sex bag limit. This larger quota and increased bag limit resulted in an exceedingly high volume of hunters along the Steese Highway in a short period of time. It is unlikely that the quota and bag limit will remain at these levels in future years. Interest and participation in the fall 2021 hunt, however, are likely to remain high, which would ultimately limit opportunity for subsistence users if the hunt is closed early under emergency orders.

When the harvest quota returns to normal levels, a targeted hunt would enable ADF&G to better control the harvest and keep the quota from being exceeded when large numbers of caribou congregate near roads and high numbers of hunters respond to these aggregations.

5) **Does the request identify an unforeseen, unexpected resource situation where a biologically allowable resource harvest would be precluded by delayed regulatory action and such delay would be significantly burdensome because the resource would be unavailable in the future?**

Yes. The board will not review Fortymile caribou proposals until spring 2023. Without a targeted hunt option for ADF&G to use in the 2021 fall hunt and early portion of the winter hunt, allowable harvest that is otherwise biologically sustainable would be precluded if the harvest cannot be adequately controlled using only registration hunts.

In fall 2021 and 2022, the Fortymile caribou herd harvest quota will likely be significantly less than the 2020 quota. Hunter participation, however, is likely to remain high because of their experiences harvesting these caribou in recent years. The combination of a reduced harvest quota and increased hunter participation increases the likelihood that the 2021 harvest quota would be exceeded. Additionally, reduced birth rates, newborn survival, and calf survival to 1 year along with high mortality of adults in this herd would make it more difficult for the herd to recover from overharvest.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF THIS PROBLEM IS NOT SOLVED PRIOR TO THE REGULAR CYCLE?

Alaskan's will not have a reasonable expectation of success during the fall 2021 hunt because of a likely early emergency closure. Potential overharvest in fall 2021 could cause the population to be reduced below desired levels and, as a result, impact future harvest quotas.

Additionally, without tools to effectively manage the hunt, continued high levels of participation over short periods of time will lead to continued hunt degradation, persistence of a chaotic and dangerous atmosphere, and additional damage to the land.

STATE WHY YOUR ACR IS NOT PREDOMINANTLY ALLOCATIVE.

This ACR is primarily biological in nature due to concerns of overharvest. Hunters have become increasingly accustomed to high quotas and bag limits, and large congregations of caribou readily accessible from major roadways. While the herd size has been intentionally reduced in 2020, it will become increasingly difficult for ADF&G to manage harvest within hunt quotas in the future. Such overharvest could cause the population to be reduced below desired levels, impacting future harvest quotas.

IF THIS REQUEST IS ALLOCATIVE, STATE THE NEW INFORMATION THAT COMPELS THE BOARD TO CONSIDER AN ALLOCATIVE PROPOSAL OUTSIDE OF THE REGULAR CYCLE.

Although this ACR is primarily biological in nature, we are also asking that the Board consider this proposal outside of the regular cycle to address wide community concern over the 2020 fall Fortymile Caribou hunt, which has set an unfortunate precedent. Residents of Central were deeply troubled by what they observed during the hunt—a chaotic and dangerous atmosphere, unsportsmanlike behavior, and environmental damage. Similar concerns were publicized in the Fairbanks Daily News Miner, have been prolific on social media, and were discussed at a fall Fairbanks AC meeting.

STATE YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE ISSUE THAT IS THE SUBJECT OF THIS ACR.

Subsistence users, Central Advisory Committee members, residents of a rural community negatively impacted by the 2020 fall Fortymile caribou hunt.

STATE WHETHER THIS ACR HAS BEEN CONSIDERED BEFORE, EITHER AS A PROPOSAL OR AS AN ACR, AND IF SO, DURING WHICH BOARD OF GAME MEETING.

A targeted hunt was considered and passed for the winter hunt only, at the spring 2012 Board of Game meeting as part of Proposal 192. This targeted hunt, however, is only an option during the December 1–March 31 portion of the winter hunt and is not available during the winter hunt opening in October or during the fall hunt, when the majority of hunters participate, overharvest is most likely, and safety concerns have been the greatest.